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# Reimagining Cubanidad: Transnational and Alternative Spaces in Contemporary Cuban Cultural Production

Eva Silot Bravo

*University of Miami*, [e.silot@miami.edu](mailto:e.silot@miami.edu)

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

REIMAGINIG CUBANIDAD: TRANSNATIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE SPACES  
IN CONTEMPORARY CUBAN CULTURAL PRODUCTION

By

Eva Silot Bravo

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty  
of the University of Miami  
in partial fulfillment of the requirments for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

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Eva Silot Bravo

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
George Yúdice, Ph.D.  
Professor of Spanish

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lillian Manzor, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Spanish

\_\_\_\_\_  
B. Christine Arce, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of Spanish

\_\_\_\_\_  
Guillermo Prado, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

\_\_\_\_\_  
Susan Thomas, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of Music  
University of Georgia

SILOT BRAVO, EVA

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The dissertation surveys the impact of the 1990s crisis in the de-construction of the revolutionary and exile imaginary in Cuban literature and music respectively, by less politically visible agents and cultural spaces within and outside the island. By conducting close readings of novels written during and about the crisis, a series of thematic coordinates that delineate a post-Soviet literary moment are identified. The analysis of the negotiation of narratives of identity and practices of music production documents a relatively unexplored transnational network of music collaborations among singers, songwriters and academically trained musicians that massively migrated at the time.

The study argues that in light of the nineties' crisis, new Transnational and Alternative narrative spaces emerged, resulting in creative "in-between" spaces that reflect the emergence of a post-national and/or post-socialist aesthetic condition. It identifies generational connections between musicians and writers that propose plural narrative approaches to Cubanness. The dissertation encourages a critical multidisciplinary scholarly conversation about the sustained process of transnationalization of Cuban cultural production in particular since the turn of the 21-century.

For Joao

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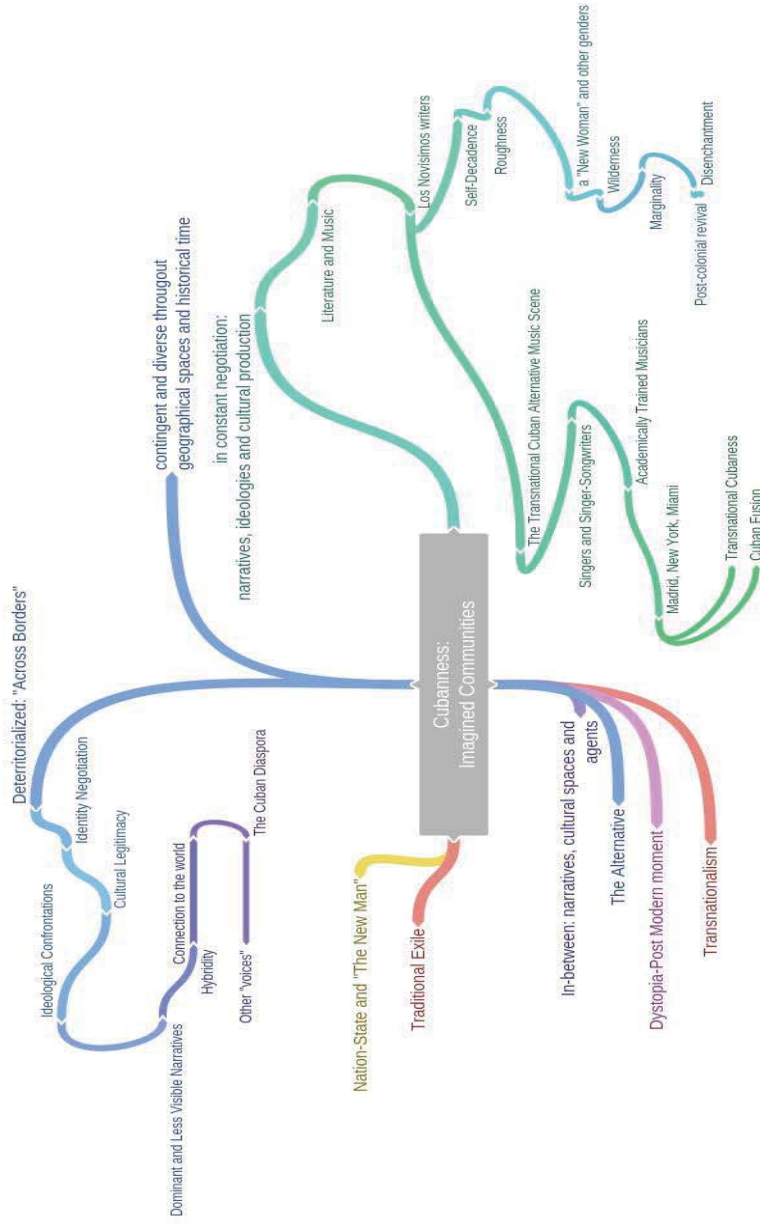
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# Introduction



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Figure 1 Cubanness: Imagined Communities

When I “landed” in Miami back in 2003, after a brief stay in Mexico and several years living in New York, one of the most striking things for me was to realize how little Cuban music made on the island and by recent migrants was heard in public places despite the image of Miami as a Cuban city, as portrayed by many in the news, the media, fiction and non-fiction. The surrounding aesthetics and background music in most Cuban places was basically a reproduction of the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon, as if all of a sudden I traveled back in time to the island in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and the epoch of my grandparents. In addition, I identified a mantra in the texts and conversations among many of my educated and less educated migrant cohorts that strongly believed Cuban culture basically “died” after the late 1980s. For them, the massive dispersion resulting from the nineties crisis was the “coup the grace” for Cuban arts. Migrant artists transitioned from a moment when their careers started to take off on the island to anonymity in an unfamiliar territory. Like many of us, these artists had great expectations but little knowledge about how to operate outside the paternalist and controlled economic context in which they were born and raised.

However, given my studies of music on the island and my subsequent diplomatic experience in the United Nations, I knew firsthand that among the nineties migrants there was an important group of singers, songwriters and jazz musicians spread all over the world with whom I had been in contact. Living abroad, they kept in touch with each other. They continued producing art despite the little attention they received from cultural institutions while they still lived on the island. Long before the announced rapprochement between the governments of Cuba and the U.S. on December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, Cuban artists from both shores have been at the forefront of paving the way for the

“normalization” of personal and cultural contact among Cubans from all over, navigating all sorts of bureaucratic and political obstacles. I myself, as a migrant, have personally witnessed this process for several years. I was also exposed to the work of Cuban writers of the time, some of them still living on the island. They produced an important body of texts that strongly resonate with my generational concerns about the impact of the nineties crisis on our life and identity, and that for years was mainly distributed and consumed outside the island.

Throughout my years in academia, those realizations transformed into a sort of obsession, a permanent inquiry about the effects of the crisis on Cuban arts. The obsession led me to conduct close observations, critical thinking and constant contrasts. Then, I decided to seriously study and write about what seemed to be alternative circuits of music and literature that had a relative lack of visibility or critical attention. I realized that Cuban culture was not “in bad shape” at the turn of the century, but that the conditions for cultural production had changed radically in ways hardly explored by post-1959 scholars on Cuban studies. I recognized the need to be more creative and open minded in studying and thinking about Cuban culture, as impacted by a shifting local context and a more globalized world since the turn of the century. These are the initial existential and motivational coordinates that made this dissertation possible.

The profound economic crisis that took place in Cuba in the 1990s, spurred by the demise of the Soviet Union and the eastern European socialist bloc, led to the most significant exodus to the U.S., Europe and Latin-America of Cuban singers-songwriters and jazz musicians born and raised after the revolution. Living abroad, these musicians formed a transnational network of regular musical collaborations that include the island.

Also in the midst of the crisis a distinct literature emerged on the island produced by a group of authors, also born and raised during the revolution, initially labeled *Los Novísimos*. The ensuing volatility made it possible for some authors to establish their literary careers on the island while publishing abroad despite their critique of the revolution, something unthinkable years before. Their novels openly disengaged from Socialist Realism as the aesthetic that characterized a good part of the literary canon after 1959. Instead, Cuban writers from the nineties produced narratives of escapism, disenchantment, alienation and marginalization.

Studies of the cultural production, migrant experiences and subjectivities of Cuban artists in diaspora are scarce. Although there have been studies on the literature from the nineties, little attention has been given to a possible dialogue with other cultural fields of the period, like music. The impact of the economic crisis translated into a devaluation of aesthetics inherited from Socialist Realism, the shift to pragmatism and engagement with the outside world, the adoption of aesthetics of survival, and the pursuit of access to the market. What does “the significant transterritoriality of Cuban culture” (de la Nuez, 29) mean when more than ever artistic production in various disciplines that is regarded as Cuban is produced, circulated and consumed transnationally in alternative circuits, mainly outside the territorial borders of the island? Despite the massive dispersion of Cuban artists, reinforced by the crisis of the 1990s, is there any dialogue across cultural fields in aesthetic, ideological and generational terms?

In order to address these and other related questions, the dissertation surveys the post-1990s de-construction of the revolutionary and exile imaginary in literature and music by less politically visible agents and cultural spaces within and outside the island.

For that purpose, I examine how narratives about *lo cubano* and *cubanidad* are negotiated in 1990s music and fiction; the narrative analogies across both cultural fields; and the impact of the crisis on the emergence of a post-socialist and/or post-national aesthetic condition.

This study argues that in light of the nineties' crisis new Transnational and Alternative narrative spaces emerged, resulting in creative “in-between” spaces that deconstruct dominant narratives about the nation and *lo cubano* produced by the official discourse on the island and among traditional exiles in Miami. It identifies generational connections between musicians and writers characterized by distinct transnational and dystopian approaches to Cubanness at the turn of the century. Both diasporic alternative music and *Los Novísimos* novels deal with the emergence of distinct and plural cultural spaces and narrative voices across international borders, where there has been a sustained negotiation and deconstruction of the centrality of the revolutionary nation and the “New Man” as the national subject in Cuban imaginaries.<sup>1</sup>

My dissertation aims to contribute to scholarship on Cuban culture by putting into dialogue different cultural fields like music and literature and revealing the common narratives and/or aesthetics of a post-Soviet generation of artists working in transnational networks. Moreover, I interpret this relationship as a deconstruction of the national

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<sup>1</sup> *El Hombre Nuevo* (The “New Man”) was a conceptualization proclaimed by Che Guevara in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965). It became a discursive paradigm for the social construction of a new national subject after the 1959's regime change. The “New Man” embodied a national project of social engineering to transform the masses. It encouraged the adoption of patterns of ideological and male centered social behaviors characterized by highly rhetorical and altruistic values, based on constant personal sacrifices and the creation of a new consciousness. Ultimately the “New Man” was one of the most effective discursive tools for the government to ideologically control the society, creating double standards and hypocrisy, and providing an excuse for ideological and cultural bureaucrats to exercise arbitrariness and censorship in cultural creation and to intervene in everyday life matters.

subject in the context of the 1990s crisis. The dissertation encourages a multidisciplinary scholarly conversation about the sustained process of transnationalization of Cuban cultural production since the turn of the 21st century. In the case of music studies, the research sheds light on the transnational music scene that I identify as the creation of Cuban songwriters, singers and jazz musicians since the 1990s. The history and analysis of this scene expands the scope of research on alternative spaces in the Cuban musical context. The dissertation updates and problematizes inquiries into this diasporic group whose experiences transcend “*balseiro*” (rafter) stereotypes as a monolithic category of representation of Cuban migration at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The research also points out some considerations to promote future scholarly conversations about what constitutes Cuban fusion in musical terms. In the literary field, the dissertation adds to the academic conversation that explored some of the changing aesthetic and thematic coordinates proposed by nineties’ authors on how to narrate the post-revolutionary Cuban nation-state and subject in contrast to previous aesthetic trends like Socialist Realism. From a cultural studies perspective, the dissertation aims to join the academic conversation on the impact of transnational practices and narratives on nations and national identities in a global context, as well as on postmodern inquires about a post-national condition.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters as well as an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter, “Towards a post-national Cuban imaginary,” examines the theoretical debates and historical contextualization of the process of negotiation of narratives of Cubanness in music and literature since the emergence of the Cuban nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The literature review critically examines in detail some of the most relevant theoretical debates about nationalism, Cubanness and transnationalism within

and outside the island, and how these debates have been addressed in the literary and music fields after the Cuban revolution. That review is complemented by an analysis of the historical context through some key moments in the relationship between culture and politics and its impact on the literary and music production after 1959 within and outside the island. The theoretical and historical background developed in Chapter 1 contextualizes the analysis of alternative and transnational narratives of Cubanness in fiction and music at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, through the two case studies examined in Chapters 2 and 3.

In the second chapter, “Decadence and survival: The new “morals” of the revolutionary Cuban subject in *los Novísimos* novels,” I do a close reading of two novels written during and about the nineties crisis: *Cien botellas en una pared* (2003), by Ena Lucía Portela, and *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* (1998), by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. I examine how these texts deconstruct dominant narratives of the national revolutionary project and subject, embodied by the presumably “disinterested” *Hombre Nuevo* myth and the altruistic and undivided collective. I argue that these novels not only deconstruct the centrality of the revolutionary national project (that is, the official discourse of the “New Man” as the national subject) but also that they propose a series of thematic coordinates that delineate a post-soviet moment resulting from the crisis. The novels posit an alternative to the prevalence of the revolutionary cosmology in Cuban literature after 1959. Building on the critical bibliography, I identify some of those narrative features: self-decadence, roughness of the “new nation”, a “New Woman” and other gender identities, wilderness, marginality, the disenchantment of the revolutionary intellectual and the revival of post-colonial attitudes centered on the further marginalization of the

black population and the commodification of the female black body. They constitute a useful framework for identity negotiation and agency regarding Cubanness at the turn of the century. They suggest a post-modern moment in Cuban literature that questions the stability and values of national identity and gender constructions. They deconstruct the socialist national metanarratives or system of trust in order to comprehend the crisis of the revolutionary nation and the emergence of new morals and female voices (particularly in the case of Portela's novel), in these shifting circumstances.

The third chapter: "Cubanidad in-between: The Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene" examines the negotiation of narratives of identity and practices of music production of a relatively unexplored transnational network of music collaborations among Cuban singers, songwriters and academically trained musicians that migrated en masse after the nineties crisis. I propose the term the Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene (TCAMS) to illustrate this open-ended transnational network of music making, which broadens the cosmopolitan character of Cuban music through constant fusion and cultural counterpoints with an array of generational local and global music references beyond genre concerns. The chapter documents how Cuban music is produced, distributed and consumed across urban centers like Miami, New York and Madrid through constant collaborations made possible by the first hand interaction of these musicians in a global context. I argue that these musicians' transnational lives and lyrics assume an apparently depoliticized and middle ground attitude in relation to dominant narratives of discourses on Cubanness both by island authorities and traditional exiles. The research presented in Chapter 3 adds another dimension to academic studies of less visible but important alternative spaces in the current Cuban cultural context, so



far focused on hip-hop, *timba*, The Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon and, more recently, reggeaton.

I take a transdisciplinary approach that explores possible aesthetics and generational connections between nineties' Cuban music and literature resulting from the crisis. I have put together an analytical framework composed of distinct but complementary theoretical approaches grounded in literary studies, sociology, anthropology, migrant studies, musicology and cultural studies. The dissertation is also informed by post-modern inquiries into post-national conditions; these are useful in promoting a critical conversation about the Cuban context of cultural production at the turn of the century within and outside the island.

The primary theoretical inquiry concerns the negotiation of narratives of nation and national identities in cultural spaces across the epistemological borders imposed by nation-states. For that purpose, I work with Benedict Anderson's (1991) idea of nation and nationalism as an imagined community, shaped around certain common historical and cultural referents that promote a strong emotional sense of belonging. This definition helps understand the socially constructed character of notions of *cubanidad* or Cubanness. They are the result of ongoing negotiations among competing narratives across geographical locations and historical time in cultural texts like literature and music.

Derived from the above, I also inquire into how the 1959 revolution in Cuba led to a significant reconfiguration of the national imaginary. It subordinated all aspects of cultural life to the construction of a nation-state and the adoption of the narrative of the "New Man" as the subject of the revolutionary nation. A very centralist bureaucracy and

regime of cultural policies were adopted that prompted on the one hand a massive access to culture and education and, on the other hand, a strict and centralized system of control and censorship put in place by the new cultural establishment, where narratives of dissent and alternatives to the official discourse were silenced and excluded. For example, during several decades the Cuban diaspora was systematically excluded from the cultural life of the revolutionary nation.

In *Una Isla sin fin* (1998), Rafael Rojas identifies one of the dominant narratives, which he calls the “identificatory narrative,” that shaped the teleology of the Cuban nation. After 1959, in particular, this narrative subordinated the myth of national identity to the embodiment of the nation-state as the origin and final destiny; promoted a symbiosis among concepts like *Patria*, Nation, State, Republic, Revolution and Socialism; and subordinated intellectuals and their work to institutional power. The “identificatory” myth has become an obstacle to the performance of plural memories and identities (47-60; 82). On the other hand, Grenier and Pérez in the *Legacy of the Exile* (2003), point out that the traditional Cuban exile has also developed a very ideological and rigid narrative and performance of *cubanidad*, frozen in the republican past before 1959 and intolerant of others’ views within and outside the diaspora that do not jibe with their way of thinking (87). There has been some work on less visible agents and cultural spaces in which the Cuban imaginary is being reconstructed but they are scattered and less visible.

I propose to consider *lo cubano* (Cubanness) as an imaginary and deterritorialized cultural space of representation and identity negotiation that promotes a strong emotional sense of belonging and identity, constructed around certain historical and cultural

narratives. Cubanness is also viewed as a performative site of political confrontation, as well as of trauma, desire, and utopia, between dominant/vocal and less prevalent/silenced discourses on the island and in the diaspora. Historically, what is regarded as *lo cubano* is a cultural hybrid with an intrinsic sense of exteriority and connection to the world; therefore, it's not exclusively associated with territory and fixed cultural roots but also with the cultural production of Cubans living outside the island. *Lo cubano* has been constantly negotiated in cultural texts with different visibility within and outside the island, a negotiation where tensions with politics of the national translated into the adoption of certain aesthetics, cultural policies and narratives.

Cultural studies are an important scholarly interdisciplinary framework to question the process of knowledge production in relation to power relationships that shape it. For Yúdice, the cultural manifests itself as the conflictive and articulatory terrain of legitimate and contestatory knowledge (341). Culture is the negotiation and search for legitimization among discourses, representations, identities, social norms and performances by different agents. Williams considers that cultural studies should analyze how human life is experienced and the forms of signification and representation that circulate socially (91-92). That is the scholarly terrain where this dissertation is located. It focuses on what I perceive to be the ultimate and long-term process of deconstruction of the national imaginary of the Cuban revolution in aesthetic and narrative terms in music and literature at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I examine aesthetic and generational shifts in a period of crisis that give rise to “in-between” spaces of creativity. In those spaces, narratives about the Cuban nation and *cubanidad* are reconfigured in a post socialist and/or post national moment.

In the case of transnationalism, the research is informed by the contributions of scholars like Stuart Hall in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1990), Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996), Aiwa Ong in *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999), Alejandro Portes in *City on Edge* (1998), Damián Fernández, in *Cuba Transnational* (2005) and Adriana O’ Reilly, in *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* (2007), among others. According to the distinct but complementary theoretical contributions from those authors, whose insights I deploy in Chapter 1, the transnational framework enables perceiving social, economic, and ideational exchanges across geopolitical and cultural borders resulting in culturally hybrid identities.

For the purpose of this dissertation, transnationalism is considered a space of re-articulation between the global and the local that takes place in the realm of cultural identity, as a multidimensional positioning of being, belonging, identification and rupture with historical and cultural common narratives from the past. For Thomas, in “Cosmopolitan, Transnational and International: Locating Cuban Music” (2005), the transnational counteracts the increasingly prevalent narratives of purity and authenticity that have been developed both by the nostalgia-seekers of the West and the socialist state apparatus on the island, which has striven to recast Cuban musical heritage as a product of an insular, and increasingly defensive, nationalist project (105). I think that in the transnational context there are possibilities for formulating a more fluid and critical alternative that allows for discrepant histories and discursive practices about the Cuban nation.

The above provides a general description of the main theoretical coordinates that inform this dissertation. An exhaustive literature review on those and other relevant debates is provided in Chapter 1.

To study the impact of the new transnational moment at the turn of the century in connection with the cultural production of Cuban artists living abroad since the 1990s, I conducted participatory observations at studio recordings, concerts, festivals and panels. I supported my observations with open-ended interviews and with the analysis of several albums, videos and documentaries. I also conducted discursive analysis of some of these musicians' lyrics. I have had ongoing interactions with this community of musicians for decades, since we studied classical music in the Manuel Saumel conservatory of music in Cuba in the 1980s. Later on, I interacted with many of these musicians in concerts, studio recordings, music venues and personally in New York, Miami, and Madrid. In Miami, I also produced or co-produced some concerts and music festivals, and organized series and academic panels about the work of some of these musicians. My research led to the creation of a personal blog, [Cubanidadinbetween](#), in which I've published some of the interviews with these musicians, related videos, documentaries, reviews, and information about the events I have organized or people with whom I have collaborated. I have also published a number of texts about this music scene in online magazines about the Cuban diaspora.

This dissertation emphasizes the need to continue the conversation about post-modern narratives, which although not new, are particularly relevant for Cuban studies especially since the crisis at the end of the 20th century. Therefore, I approach this research with a post-modern sensibility that reflects on the need to deconstruct modern

narratives like nationalism, nation-state and national identity, and to study the complex reality of “other” relevant subjects, identities and narratives, such as those of blacks, migrants, women, queers, displaced, marginalized and dissident subjects usually taken for granted or disregarded. In that sense, this approach also looks critically at the constraints posed to human imagination and cultural creation by authoritarian and elitist discursive practices of Cuban national institutions as a norm within and outside the island. In addition, it addresses the challenges posed by the process of globalization to Cuban cultural practices and identity formation in transnational contexts.

## Chapter 1: Towards a post-national Cuban imaginary. Theoretical and historical context

### 1- Nationalism revisited at the turn of the century

National imaginaries have been among the most salient epistemological frameworks to comprehend, organize, and represent the human experience since the onset of Modernity, with the emergence of print media, colonialism and the spread of a Western “rationality” associated with the so-called Enlightenment period. In *Imagined Communities* (1994), Benedict Anderson views nationalism not as a permanent phenomenon of Modernity, but as a historically situated process of social construction made possible by the development of capitalism and in particular print technology since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to this view, national identities are “imagined political communities” in which the majority of individuals and groups probably would never meet each other, however they may develop a strong sense of emotional awareness and belonging coalesced by certain narratives, cultural symbols, texts, and technologies like print media (6; 37-47). Anderson’s view does not underestimate the importance of the attachments and emotions prompted by national myths and symbols. For him, they are not permanent or immutable identity referents, but constitute a socially constructed process of human imagination around certain common narratives contingent to particular historical moments and geographical spaces.

In *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Gellner provides a more instrumental view about nationalisms as organizational and ideological tools through which power subjects and institutions impose the idea of national identity as a force of ideological, political and cultural homogenization. They have been important referents for power institutions and

agents to impose certain values and cultural practices, aesthetic preferences and canons. As a result, narratives of nationalism have also promoted elitism, hierarchies, silences, repression and exclusion of other subjects and narratives that they fail to represent. However, nationalism is not only an instrument of power and ideology, but also a complex narrative space where values, structures of feeling, cultural practices, social contracts and norms are constantly negotiated.

After the collapse of the socialist eastern European bloc at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some academic and public debates optimistically proclaimed “the end of history,” the globalization of the “benefits” of capitalism worldwide and the decline of nations and nationalism with the emergence of “a global village.”<sup>2</sup> The increased pace of technological developments prompted an environment of greater interconnectivity, human mobility and ideational exchange across the globe. Online transactions and electronic media increasingly mediate human interactions and prompt the emergence of faster and instant ways of communicating through a seemingly unlimited virtual space. The modern “anxiety” to categorize, conceptualize, and predict shifted towards an aesthetic and scholarly fashion of greater skepticism, contestation and/or deconstruction of foundational modern narratives of nation and nationalisms.

For Anderson, narratives of national identities were imaginable through print media since the 18<sup>th</sup> century when capitalism consolidated in Europe and later expanded to other regions. In the midst of the process of globalization at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Appadurai perceived a different process of cultural imagination where the global

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed accounts on the relationship between the global condition and narratives of nations and nationalism see Levitt; Fukuyama; Huntington and Appadurai.



is imagined at the local level through increasing flows of mass mediated images aided by electronic technologies and migration. In his view, this new process of imagination creates diasporic public spheres as alternative spaces that represent sites of encounter and contestation to nation-state interests. Stuart Hall situates the process of articulation between the global and the local in the realm of cultural identity, as a multidimensional positioning of being, belonging, identification and rupture with historical and cultural common narratives from the past (“Cultural Identity” 223-225).

For postcolonial scholars like Bhabha in *The Third Space* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994), there was an alternative sense of culture at the turn of the century, based on the articulation of a more transnational sense of hybridity through simultaneous processes of rupture, interactions, promotion, and contestation of normative regimes of modernity. This “third or in-between space” is a site for recognition of more complex cultural and political boundaries than the traditionally opposed modern political spheres and grand binary narratives. In this cultural space the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity, and can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read in new ways, raising new areas of negotiation of meaning and representation; there arise spaces for a contingent and indeterminate articulation of emergent cultural identities. Also, from a post-colonial perspective, Mignolo identifies the emergence of what he calls “border thinking,” or re-articulated forms of subaltern knowledge that are seen as objects of study – and not agents of change – by the overcharged imaginary of the modern/colonial world (ix-x; 13).

This moment of reflection is inscribed in late-20<sup>th</sup> century debates about a postmodern condition that originated in the arts and architecture and broke away from the

predictability and totality of modern narratives, such as nationalism, the main referential framework of this dissertation. Postmodernism has been credited or considered with suspicion. In some versions, postmodernism is considered continuous with modernity, a new moment in the international development of capitalism, as in Jameson's view. For Lyotard, the postmodern condition is a philosophical incredulity towards modern master narratives. Foucault argues for thinking beyond the institutions of power instead of legitimating what is already known. By focusing on the exploration of principles of difference and multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari try to dismantle modern beliefs associated with identity, unity and hierarchy. Derrida disregards the possibility of meaning creation outside the written text. For Habermas, postmodernism is a rhetorical strategy in the arts appropriated from the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> avant-garde movements. Postmodernism is also associated with the end of utopias, an attitude of pessimism, disbelief and skepticism.

Particularly since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, narratives and human interactions are mainly constructed, negotiated and disseminated through social media and mobile communication. The processing of information takes center stage as an important mode of production across the globe. Virtual communities became relevant actors for artistic, intellectual and social agency. Metanarratives, modern values and the historicity of memories are under interrogation, while skepticism and relativism prevails. Self-consciousness and self-analysis undergird the individual and cultural production. Patriarchal orders and traditional gender roles are increasingly put into question, contested and modified (Nemoainu 3-17). I approach this research with a post-modern sensibility that recognizes the need to reflect on the limitations of some modern

narratives like nationalism, national identity and national subject, to represent the diversity and complex reality of “other” relevant subjects, identities and narratives, such as transnationalism, blacks, migrants, women, queers, the displaced, the marginalized and dissidents. This approach also looks critically at the constraints on human imagination and cultural creation by authoritarian and elitist discursive practices of normative national institutions. In addition, it addresses the challenges and opportunities posed by the process of globalization to cultural practices and processes of identity negotiation in transnational contexts.

Another important referential framework for this dissertation are debates on transnational cultural spaces that result from increasing diasporic movements at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Transnationalism is a process through which migrants build and maintain socioeconomic and cultural ties across the borders established by nation-states. The activities and practices carried out within transnational networks imply regular and intense contacts between diasporic subjects living between two or more countries. These transnational practices lead to the creation of hybrid identities that challenge the image of the nation as a source of a homogeneous and well-bounded identity.<sup>3</sup> Transnationalism differs from more traditional patterns of migration like assimilation, which implies a unidirectional process leading to settlement in new societies. In transnational networks, persons literally participate in more than one national society; these networks straddle international borders, leading to transnational social fields (Glick Schiller 96). The social field is a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion about transnationalism from sociological and migrant studies perspectives see Glick Schiller et.al.; Portes and deWind; and Duany (*Reconstructing*).

ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed. National boundaries are not necessarily contiguous with the boundaries of social fields. National social fields are those that stay within national boundaries while transnational social fields connect actors through direct and indirect relations across borders (Glick Schiller et. al. qtd. in Portes and DeWind 188).

The national container view does not entirely capture the complex interconnectedness of contemporary reality (Idem 185-86). Transnationalism poses new questions to the study of national imaginaries by providing a view of the social landscape, of economic and ideational exchanges across borders by non-state actors, individuals, organizations and networks (Fernandez xv). It represents a multidimensional space of adaptation to the challenges of late capitalism where the cultural specificities of global processes take place, a glocal space of re-articulation between the global and the local (Ong 4). From a utopian perspective, Ong recognizes the potential of transnational mobility as a site of encounter among minority claims and subaltern subjects, against global and nation-state power structures. However, simple oppositions between transnational forces and the nation-state cannot be universally sustained. Even under conditions of transnationality, Ong considers that the political rationality and cultural mechanisms of nation-states continue to define, discipline, control, regulate and civilize subjects in place or on the move (14-22).

## 1.2. Cuba as an imagined national community

For the purpose of this research *lo cubano* (Cubanness) is considered as an imaginary deterritorialized cultural space of representation and identity negotiation that

promotes strong emotional sense of belonging and identity, constructed around certain historical and cultural narratives. It's also a performative site of political confrontation, as well as of trauma, desire, and utopia, between dominant/vocal and less prevalent/silenced discourses on the island and in diaspora. What is regarded as *lo cubano* is a cultural hybrid with an intrinsic sense of exteriority and connection to the world; therefore, it's not exclusively associated with territory and fixed cultural roots but also with the cultural production of Cubans all over the world. *Lo cubano* has been constantly negotiated in cultural texts with different visibility within and outside the island, a negotiation in which politics has had a significant presence.

The idea of Cuba as a nation and national identity consolidated after the wars of independence from the colonial Spanish power at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In *Una Isla sin Fin* (1998), Rojas argues that Cuban nationalism forged in the last two centuries has been the result of an "insufficient modernity," characterized by a conciliatory, self-righteous and egalitarian imaginary that has limited liberal representations of the nation. He traces important debates about Cubanness since the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the work of some intellectuals like priest Felix Varela's insular *doctrina de la impiedad* (impiety doctrine) based on a patriotic sentiment of sovereignty opposed to any mercantile thinking. Rojas also discusses the positivist aesthetic of José de la Luz y Caballero and Jose Martí's inclusive political project of *La República para todos y para el bien de todos* (The Republic for all and for the well-being of all). For Rojas, Cuban nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted from opposition to instrumental rationality and resistance to a liberal modernity and capitalism. In his view, the national rationality was accompanied by an ethos based on participation in history as an essence of *cubanidad*. This notion that

associates national identity with political agency translated into a political utopia of national renovation and was part of the 1940 Constitution. However, the demagogic moral emphasis of this utopian nationalism planted the seeds of state corruption, ideological demagogy and revolutionary violence (47-60; 82).

In the first half of the 20th century in some intellectual circles there was also an acknowledgment of the African presence in the emergence of a modern Cuban imaginary. The work of ethnologist Fernando Ortiz— in *Contrapunteo del tabaco y el azúcar* and *Los factores humanos de la cubanidad* in the 1940s— was crucial for the creation of the term transculturation, a neologism that refers to the process of cultural contact and counterpoint between different ethnic groups, cultural forms and material conditions that constituted Cuba as a national cultural space. For Ortiz transculturation was “...the extremely complex transmutation of cultures, the result of a particular appropriation of African and Spanish influences...” (98). Afro-Cuban is one of the main variables, an intervening cultural influence in the formation of the idea of Cuban culture.

But if the meaning of transculturation is reduced to inter-ethnic integration, its content is drastically simplified. The scope of transculturation involves a range of economic, social and cultural processes that go beyond ethnic social relations among different groups. In this regard, transculturation has a foundational meaning, through which it creates new social structures and relations. According to Portuondo, the meaning of transculturation is not reduced to inter-ethnic integration because that would simplify its content. Ortiz’s conceptualization of transculturation exceeds the limits of empirical and scientific description. More than a result, transculturation is the possibility of a new human project- the emergence of a distinct Cuban national culture. Therefore, it’s not a

preconceived idea of a “possible experience,” but the opening up to the unusual and the unexpected realms of possibilities. As a space of dialogue, interpretation, syncretism and interaction among different cultures, transculturation is a useful conceptual framework to study the relational nature of the Cuban subject formation as a process of counterpointing cultural construction. It’s fundamental to understand *cubanidad* in its uniqueness, but also as a fluid and open space of constant dialogue, interpretations and interactions with different cultures. What is regarded as *lo cubano* is a cultural hybrid represented in particular ways throughout different narratives. However, transculturation should be considered in conjunction with critical views that address its limitations in terms of, for example, the social and ethnic tensions that it may obscure.

One of these critical views is developed by Moore in *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997). He argues that the process of cultural encounter that led to identify modern Cuba as a unique Afrohispanic composite – the result of racial mixing, the fusion of distinct systems of language, religion, artistic forms and other expressions like musical production- not only reflected social inequalities, but manifested racial tensions, economic exploitation, and dominant political discourses (1, 219). He considers Afro-Cubanism as an ideology that embraced black expression discursively and points out that although it accepted certain forms of black music, it did not necessarily imply greater social equality or empowerment for Afro-Cubans (5). A critique of Afro-Cubanism demystifies the ways in which transculturation characterizes the encounter of cultures produced in the emergence of the modern Cuban imaginary. Moore highlights the asymmetries of power relationships in the encounter and fusion between cultures that led

to the formation of the modern Cuban nation by focusing on racial inequalities and the subordinate position of Afrocubans.

Cuban nationalism has also been to a large extent constructed and sustained as a narrative construction resulting from a controversial relationship with the U.S. Several accounts have focused on the U.S. as a hegemonic force in the formation of the Cuban nation since the Spanish-American War in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the “Other” against which it has historically defined itself. Louis A. Perez, in *On becoming Cuban* (1999) draws attention to the influence of the neo-colonial relationship between the United States and Cuba as a crucial ingredient in the formation of the modern Cuban nation in the symbolic realm. For Perez, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were many instances of Americanization of the Cuban imaginary as a result of the intense cultural and economic activity between the two countries because of their proximity. On the island, American cultural iconography was captured in films, TV, fashion, sports, the automobile industry, music, economic forms like sugar plantations and the consumption of American products.

The Cuban nation is an imaginary construct to which many other contradictory narratives have contributed: patriotism, annexation, exceptionalism, Latinamericanism, pessimism, pragmatism, lack of ethics, racism, *el choteo* (mockery), patriarchy and sexism. For Cámara and Fernandez a more realistic way to represent (imagine) *lo cubano* is by reference to tension and diversity rather than harmony or monolithic unity. They acknowledge the multiple aspects and agents of Cuban culture, many of which have been misrepresented or ignored (6-8).



### 1.3- Cultural politics of the nation-state

After 1959, the revolutionary government enforced the creation of a monolithic, ideological and populist nationalism that progressively was imposed as the dominant political and cultural project. The Cuban revolution acquired substantive recognition in intellectual circles within and outside the island during the 1960s by combining Martí's utopian ideals with the international leftist antimperialist rhetoric. The official revolutionary discourse generated a national identity tied to the revolution as *cubanidad's* origin and destiny, its essence and existence (Rojas, *Una Isla* 49-50). The government promoted the rewriting of narratives of the Cuban past in all political, cultural and educational institutions. The media and cultural industries were nationalized. Any private initiative was considered illegal and penalized. This top-down political process led to the adoption of a highly ideological, defensive and "messianic" nationalistic discourse, which became rapidly embedded in a "culture of the masses." The revolutionary government undertook a very centralized and ideological construction of a new national project with a wide populist appeal that soon began criminalizing any acts of criticism, dissent and/or opposition. Those who disagreed with state tutelage were ostracized, repressed or fled the island.

All these elements shaped the official discourse after 1959 as a site of bilateral and irreconcilable confrontation with its enemies, "the other" against which the new Cuban revolutionary nation was being constructed. That discourse took the shape of a narrative of isolation and messianic exceptionality that has been constantly exploited by the Cuban government: a small Caribbean developing nation, entrusted with the "historical" mission to "resist" and "oppose" the largest hegemonic power in the world.

To emulate Cuba as the biblical small David fighting against the giant Goliath became a common image used by the Cuban official discourse. The “other” against which the Cuban nation was constructed since 1959 would include a range of actors, from hostile enemies of the revolution, all those who critique and oppose the government’s ideas, to any internal opposition, any intellectual critique enacted in texts or by individuals, the United States governments and especially Cuban exiles. Duany observes that one of the results of this ideological projection has been the exclusion of the diaspora from serious reflection on the Cuban nation (34-35).

The government officials’ discursive practices and cultural politics became an important tool in the articulation of the new national project. One of the first steps taken by the new government was to set the standards and assume the control of artistic and intellectual production in the changing circumstances. An example was the censorship in 1961 of *P.M.*, the documentary about Cuban nightlife by filmmakers Saba Cabrera and Orlando Jiménez. The background of the film was the political tension generated by the imminent invasion of the “Bay of Pigs” by the US military. The documentary was rejected for decades by the cultural bureaucracy as celebratory “...of and easy and free impression of life in Havana” (Quiroga 251). Castro’s well-known speech *Palabras a los Intelectuales* (Words to the Intellectuals) in 1961, defined a hierarchical relationship of political power-wielders over the artists and intellectuals, conveyed by the phrase: “*Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, ningún derecho*” (Within the

Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing).<sup>4</sup> Since then, the artistic and intellectual production on the island has been mediated by state policies, censorship and the arbitrariness of its bureaucracy.

A key discursive paradigm for the construction of a new national subject was the so-called *El Hombre Nuevo* (“New Man”), proclaimed by Che Guevara in *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (1965).<sup>5</sup> For Guevara, it was necessary to eliminate any trace of bourgeois liberal thinking in order to carry out the construction of a socialist society. That endeavor implied the subordination of any individual values and interests for the collective good, incarnated in the “New Man”. The ultimate goal of this notion was for the masses to adopt social behaviors characterized by highly rhetorical altruistic values, based on constant personal sacrifices and the creation of a new consciousness. Ultimately the “New Man” was one of the most effective discursive tools for the government to ideologically control the society, creating double standards and hypocrisy, and providing an excuse for ideological and cultural bureaucrats to exercise arbitrariness and censorship in cultural creation and to intervene in everyday life matters.

The ideologization and centralization of the cultural life in the 70s - the period known as *El Quinquenio* and/or *Decenio Gris* (Gray Quinquennium or Decade) - promoted an environment of blunt censorship, and several documented acts of discrimination, silencing, exclusion and erratic policies aimed at any intellectual agency

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<sup>4</sup> See *Palabras a los Intelectuales*, a statement made by Fidel Castro at a meeting at the National Library between artists, intellectuals and the government in June 1961. Discursively it defined the subordination of cultural production and artistic creation to the government’s control.

<sup>5</sup> See *El Socialismo y el Hombre en Cuba*, an open letter in the form of an essay made by Ernesto Che Guevara in a trip to Africa. It was published first in 1965 by *Marcha*, an uruguayan weekly publication.

beyond the official realm. The most-discussed instance of this crackdown was the so-called Padilla Affair.<sup>6</sup> This was also the period when art was declared “a weapon for the revolution” at the First Congress of Education and Culture. This unfortunate and extreme moment of censorship and repression led to the persecution of homosexuals, religious practitioners and anyone profiled for wearing foreign clothing or listening to American music. Such “infractions” led to confinement in forced labor camps known as UMAP.<sup>7</sup> Intellectual and cultural production became key venues for dissemination of government ideas. The official institutions and bureaucrats tried to impose themselves through cultural policies regarding what they considered to be “properly” Cuban through highly political, selective and arbitrary means. For Duany, the post ‘59 national project is simple, coherent and essentialist, with culture defined as homogeneous and geography as ultimately determinant. Cuba is conceived as a coherent nation without internal divisions except for those who seek exile. However, the essentialist viewpoint is too simplistic to account for the complexity and fluidity of Cuban identities (“*From the Cuban Ajiaco*” 5).

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<sup>6</sup> Poet Heberto Padilla was arrested in 1971 for having critical ideas about the revolution in his writing, right after being awarded the UNEAC Prize (National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) for his book *Fuera de juego* (1998). When he publicly confessed his “mea culpa” for not being a true revolutionary, a confession that seems to have been extracted, many intellectuals from Europe and Latin American criticized the revolutionary government. Padilla’s work was subsequently censored and he left the country. The systematic acts of cultural censorship during the *Quinquenio Gris* in the 1970s were in part prompted by events like the government’s proximity to the USSR, the shuttering of the Philosophy Department at the University of Havana, and of *Pensamiento Crítico* magazine. See Fornes, *El quinquenio gris*; and *Criterios, La política cultural del período revolucionario*.

<sup>7</sup> With the idea to “clean up” society of “anti-social elements,” the revolutionary government created UMAP during the 1960s, which stands for *Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Produccion* (Military Units to Aid Production). They were labor camps in the countryside run by the military. Through round-ups and arbitrary detentions, around 35 000 homosexuals, intellectuals, artists, religious practitioners from several denominations and anyone considered counterrevolutionary and “weak” by government authorities were confined to these places for long periods of time, and were subjected to forced labor and political reeducation. See Joseph Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP” and Abel Sierra Madero “Academias para producir machos en Cuba.”

At the same time, the nationalist project since 1959 promoted important developments in some cultural sectors, within and beyond the margins of the official realm. The massive 1961 literacy campaign was a significant starting point. Moore refers to the proliferation of several cultural institutions for art promotion and public access to education and culture, among them ICAIC (Cuban Film Institute), the Cuban National Theater, Casa de las Américas (House of the Americas), Instituto del Libro (National Book Institute) and Ballet Nacional de Cuba (Cuban National Ballet). The reproduction of universal literature was massive. Artistic production became accessible through the proliferation of cultural events and centers throughout the country. A national system of public schools of the arts was established, with demanding curricula and high standards of artistic education. This system is where many generations of Cuban artists got rigorous training in music, visual arts, theater and dance; such training averaged 15 years of study. Periodic international and national festivals and conferences on a range of art forms took place regularly. However, for many Cuban artists the cultural bureaucracy, government policies and inefficiency continue to interfere with their freedom of expression and artistic empowerment (*Music and Revolution* 80-106).

#### 1.4- The “Special Period”: the deconstruction of the “revolutionary” nation

The eighties marked a turning point for the relationship between the arts and the national project. The massive Mariel exodus of around 125 000 persons, many born and raised during the revolution, to the U.S. was a clear sign that the revolutionary utopia was not working for many. Moreover, Glasnost and Perestroika, which transformed the eastern socialist bloc, resonated in Cuba through magazines and other publications that

where rapidly censored. The government put in place a process of *Rectificación de Errores y Tendencias Negativas* (Rectification of Mistakes and Negative Trends) in an effort to promote a “reflection” on the nation’s destiny, and adopted a series of “corrective” measures to eliminate inefficiencies and institutional corruption as a means to avert the dissolution of socialism as in Eastern Europe. In this context there was a renaissance of artistic production in different cultural fields like music, theater, literature, dance and visual arts: for example, *Volumen 1*, *Arte Calle*, *El Castillo de la Fuerza*, *PURE*, *PADEIA* and *novísima trova*, among others.<sup>8</sup> This new generation of artists espoused alternative critical reflections on the promises of the revolutionary national utopia, and on the need for economic, social and cultural agency outside the state’s initiative and control.

The above-mentioned loss of Soviet aid virtually paralyzed the Cuban economy.<sup>9</sup> The island experienced the most severe crisis since 1959, with significant effects on the sustainability and legitimacy of the Cuban socialist “paradigm” that are still smoldering

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<sup>8</sup> “*Novísima trova*” is a term commonly used to describe a generation of less committed and more critical song-writers that supersede the so called *nueva trova* movement during the 1980s. It included musicians like Carlos Varela, Gerardo Alfonso, Santiago Feliú, Frank Delgado, Donato Poveda, Xiomara Laugart, Pedro Luis Ferrer and Polito Ibañez, among others.

<sup>9</sup> Around 80% of the revolutionary Cuban economy was subsidized by the Soviet Union after the enactment U.S. embargo and the radicalization of the Cuban revolution towards the U.S.S.R. from the 1960s. That special relationship lasted until the demise of the socialist bloc in Eastern European since 1989. The enjoyment of that special economic relationship for several decades allowed the Cuban government to subsidize strategic sectors like education and public health, and to enter into “experiments” of all kinds beyond its real economic capacity, like the war in Angola in the 1970s and the development of the biotechnology industry later on. That relationship also led to the generalization of an economic culture of verticality, paternalism, improvisation, generalized inefficiency and corruption. Therefore, the loss of the Soviet subsidy led to the most dramatic economic crisis post. 1959, known as the Special Period, which no sector or person could escape. The depth of the crisis brought radical transformations and long term severe impact for the Cuban society as a whole still present today. For a more detailed account about the impact of the Special Period, please see González Corzo, Mario A. “Transition or Survival?” and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Cuban’s Aborted Reform*.

today: shortages of basic products shortage like food, water, gasoline, medicines and transportation; a proliferation of preventable illnesses; increased poverty and marginalization; significant drop in employment opportunities; and a bigger presence of criminality and corruption after the dollarization of the economy. The desperate search for foreign currency led the government to focus on the development of the tourism industry and to open up some cultural sectors to the market for the marketing and commercialization of cultural products like publications, music and visual arts. This transformation, known as “*El Período Especial*” (The Special Period), set in motion a new wave of migration to the U.S., Europe and several Latin-American countries. In those dramatic circumstances, the Cuban government adopted a strategy of survival in order to perpetuate itself in power by all possible means.

As part of this more pragmatic approach, Cuban society began to open up as the government put in place mild economic reforms that allowed a measure of foreign private investment, corporate property in joint ventures with the government and a mild process of narrative reconstruction of the official discourse on Cubanness to attract new foreign partners and supporters. Hence, narratives of “reconciliation” with some sectors of the Cuban diaspora were selectively promoted, which privileged the cultural realm as the place of encounters for Cubans.<sup>10</sup> For example, the work of certain former censored Cuban writers and intellectuals like Lezama, Piñera and *El Grupo Orígenes* was “recovered” and “legitimized.”

In such an ideological and controlled society, the negotiation of the national is in permanent tension with the constraints imposed by the official discourse. However, like

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<sup>10</sup> See Abel Prieto.

other nations, Cuba is a multifaceted cultural force field where multiple actors and influences intersect, where contestation takes place in more open or closed spaces and where *cubanidad* is constantly negotiated within and beyond the official space. Despite the overwhelming influence of institutional cultural politics, there have always been alternative and contestatory events that occur within or beyond the Cuban official realm.

Many scholars have documented some of these alternative cultural processes, for example: the spread of Afrocuban religious practices and art expressions, despite ambivalent governmental policies and prejudices against them (Moore *Nationalizing Blackness*); the progressive visibility of rock and hippie underground scenes, despite decades of official censorship against them (Castellanos); the emergence of rap and hip-hop scenes since the end of the 1990s openly voicing racial discontent and critique, despite continuous egalitarian claims by the official discourse (Fernandez *Cuba Represent*); the emergence of very popular dance musical genres— like the so called *timba* in the 90's — with lyrics often criticizing the shortcomings of Cuban daily life, the social impact of the shift towards a tourism oriented economy, and the emergence of increased marginal sectors (Froeliche)<sup>11</sup>; and the renaissance of artistic “social commentators,” like the so called “Eighties Generation” in the visual arts and *novísima trova* in music, as well as *Los Novísimos* writers in the nineties— who through their novels exercised unprecedented open criticism of different aspects of the national socialist

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<sup>11</sup> *Timba* was the most popular dance music genre in the island that was pumped by the tourist industry in the nineties. A local, very eclectic and musically complex evolution of more traditional genres like *son*, *guaracha*, *mambo* and *cha-cha-chá*, heavily influenced by Afrocuban rhythms, chants and instrumental arrangements from American jazz, funk and pop. *Timba* dance is usually frenetic and more freestyle than *salsa*; with lyrics often sexually charged that usually borrow direct calls from street slang.



project.<sup>12</sup> They are spaces of connection with the forbidden, the silenced, and the outside world; cultural practices through which artists and people appropriate marginalized and external cultural influences creating alternative narratives of identity. They are processes in which transnational networks emerge and where connections are forged with the Cuban diaspora and the outside world beyond the official tutelage.

#### 1.5- The transnational space: Por un “*patriotismo abierto*” (For a “soft patriotism”)

Uncertainties, repression, censorship, opposition and economic considerations in regards to the implications of the revolutionary process from 1959 led to successive waves of Cuban migrations, mainly to the U.S. Since then the Cuban diaspora has shifted from being an exile community—with the idea of a quick return—to become part of the wide spectrum of U.S. migrant minorities. Every group of Cuban migrants has created its own politics of memory as a response to the Cuban government’s construction of nationalism (O’ Reilly *Remembering Cuba* 25). Grenier & Pérez point out that the first exile generation of Cubans who migrated to the U.S. in the 1960s developed a very ideological and rigid notion of *cubanidad* frozen in the republican past before 1959 and intolerant of others’ views within and outside the diaspora that do not jibe with their way of thinking, narrating and performing *lo cubano* (87).

According to Max Castro the first exile wave believes that it is a repository and a trustee of what is most authentic in Cuban culture, which, in his view, has been virtually

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<sup>12</sup> *Los Novísimos* was a term coined by literary critic Salvador Redonet in the anthology *Los últimos serán los primeros* (1993), to identify a group of dystopian Cuban writers born and raised within the Revolution, who during the nineties economic crisis openly disengaged from the saga of Socialist Realism, aesthetic and ideology inserted by cultural bureaucrats in the literary canon on the island particularly during *El Quinquenio Gris*.

destroyed on the Island by nearly four decades of communism. M. Castro adds that the unrealized character and enduring hold of the exile project has meant that Cubans have concentrated most of their political energies on the anti-Castro struggle, with little left over for such struggles as bilingual education and cultural diversity, which also have taken a back seat to the pursuit of exiles' economic success (306-307). In Grenier & Pérez's view, the socioeconomic selectivity of the 1960s Cuban migration translated, among other things, into a pervasive and persistent exile ethos and ideology within the Cuban diasporic community (12). For these authors, forging and maintaining the exile ideology have contributed to the creation of a particular Cuban way of looking at the social and political environment. The ideology of the exile has become a critical reference point for the identity of Cuban Americans. Despite that, both authors rightly point out that the Cuban community's political culture is far from being monolithic (87).

The traditional exile notion of *cubanidad* described by Grenier & Perez had been codified into a political and normative system in the U.S. bilateral policy with Cuba, exemplified by the rhetoric of Cuban American representatives in Congress and in the complex system of regulations established by the embargo since 1961, and reinforced by the Torricelli (1992) and Helms Burton Acts (1996). It has also translated into a certain narrative of how Cuban issues are reflected in radio and TV media programs. For O'Reilly, the traditional exile's narrative of *lo cubano* formalized a notion of cultural and national identity that erects a hierarchy of authenticity that is at once authoritative, essentialist and exclusive. It depends on a series of polarized distinctions of what is "authentically" Cuban. The exile discourse privileges the idea of Cuban exceptionalism, and creates the illusion of a homogeneous and univocal community. It expresses a sense

of homeland as a fixed place of attachment, and has imposed a sort of homogenous “imaginary” about the Cuban diasporic experience that has been relatively constant over the years, obscuring diverse histories and alternative voices within that community (18; 181). Both the Cuban official discourse and the traditional exile narratives turned into political agendas that have promoted a problematic and apparently irreconcilable context of bilateral government relationships until recently. Both narratives have attempted to “demarcate” the Cuban nation through essentialist, antagonist and selective discursive practices, rigid emotional and ideological commitments, and certain aesthetic preferences on how to imagine, listen and think about *lo cubano*.

Successive waves of Cuban migrants have contributed to the diversification of the Cuban diaspora in the U.S. and other countries. Grenier and Pérez make reference to the so-called Airlift, which took place between 1965-1973, and brought 260 500 Cuban migrants to the U.S., mostly middle and skilled working classes. They also refer to the Mariel boatlift in the 1980s, and *Los Balseiros* or Rafters in 1994, which brought thousands of Cuban migrants, including many from lower socioeconomic sectors and non-white populations. However, it would be a mistake to associate both waves strictly with those sectors. The class composition of *Marielitos* and *Balseiros* represents the whole spectrum of Cuban society, ranging from convicted felons, children and young students, dissidents (some of them forced to leave the country by Cuban authorities) to professionals, intellectuals and government officials.

Since then Cuban migration has been subject to a more orderly process aimed to discourage illegal immigration following the Cuban and U.S. governments’ agreement under the Clinton administration to admit at least 20 000 Cubans every year legally and

to return any future unauthorized migrants captured by the U.S. Coast Guard before reaching U.S. shores (Grenier and Pérez 25), the so-called “Wet Foot/Dry Foot” policy.<sup>13</sup>

This policy has not impeded Cuban migration but has made it more difficult. It has also contributed to the emergence and diversification of alternative Cuban diasporic discourses, more reflective of the new migratory circumstances and different interests of Cuban migrants in the U.S.— in particular after massive migration since the 1990s crisis—in comparison to previous waves, especially the traditional exile community. In the last six years the polls by the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University show how the opinions of the majority of Cuban-Americans in Florida have shifted in favor of lifting the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba. Recent migrants even favor the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two governments (*Cuba-US Transition Polls 2008-2014*). Several factors influenced this shift towards more moderate positions, among them the aging and relative decline of hard-line Cuban-Americans, the so called traditional exiles; the arrival of younger Cuban emigrant generations who in many cases left family behind and are interested in keeping ties with the island despite political considerations; and the relative prominence of Cuban-Americans who are less emotionally engaged with the rigid ideology of the traditional exile community, more inclusive and in search for alternative strategies in order to create spaces of understanding among Cuban migrants and influence affairs on the Island.

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<sup>13</sup> The Wet Foot/Dry Foot policy comprises a revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, by which anyone who fled Cuba and got into the United States would be allowed to pursue residency a year later. After talks with the Cuban government, the Clinton administration came to an agreement with Cuba that it would stop admitting people found at sea. Since then, in what has become known as the "wet foot, dry foot" policy, a Cuban caught on the waters between the two nations (i.e., with "wet feet") would summarily be sent home or to a third country. One who makes it to shore ("dry feet") gets a chance to remain in the United States, and later would qualify for expedited "legal permanent resident" status and U.S. citizenship.

Studying intellectual and artistic expressions of the Cuban diaspora, in “*Diaspora and Memory*” Rojas argues that each migratory wave arrives with its own memory about the significance of the Cuban past and the revolutionary period, its own record of victimization and guilt, and its own rationality for disengagement with the Cuban regime. Rojas also identifies some of the main narratives that set newer Cuban diasporas apart from the traditional exiles. For example, in the case of intellectuals who migrated in the first two decades after having taken part in the revolution, the motive to break with the Cuban regime was a result of their opposition to the “sovietization” of Cuban socialism, and not so much to the revolution itself. In the case of the Mariel generation, Rojas finds their motivations more linked to a rejection of every form of moral authoritarianism than with political disenchantment with the Castro regime. The Mariel generation was not only the victim of political and social repression on the island, but also subject to discrimination and distrust by traditional exiles. The generation of Cuban migrants from the 1990s on—although essentially also opposed to the Cuban regime—was more reconciled with its revolutionary past, showing a less traumatic and more contemplative experience of the revolution. Also for Rojas, this group of migrants recognized the revolution’s cultural legacy (241-245).

Rojas also identifies narratives of Cuban American scholars in the 1990s that acknowledge pre-revolutionary times in less ideal terms, and that at the same time are critical of the revolution and distance themselves from the traditional exile ideology. In his view, these scholars helped expand the memory of the exile community and favor national reconciliation at least within the intellectual field. For Rojas, one of the main contributions of Cuban-American scholars is their theorization of the concept of Cuban

diaspora as a viable strategy for the articulation of the Cuban cultural experience in the U.S. This idea reflects more accurately the complexity and diversity of experiences and narratives of *cubanidad* among Cuban migrants, mainly but not only in the U.S. To think critically about the cultural experience of the Cuban diaspora recognizes at the same time the exile experience, the impossibility of returning to the homeland and the problematic political and ideological dilemmas with the Cuban regime. In addition, it also emphasizes the narrative continuities and disruptions within that community in terms of how to imagine and perform notions of Cubanness (Idem).

In O' Reilly's view, younger diasporic generations of Cubans adhere to (different) national projects and have created new politics of memory that subvert and criticize both revolutionary and exile nationalism and embrace cosmopolitan and postmodern discourses of hybridity, where Cuba is remembered as a place of poverty and deprivation, but the homeland is envisioned as an affective network of kin, friends, and neighborhood, not the nation or patria (25). According to O' Reilly, there are possibilities at the borders of competing discourses of Cuban national identity in the transnational context. She refers to the possibility of formulating a more fluid, critical alternative that admits multigenerational transmissions of cultural tradition and consciousness, reflects the exchanges that arise as a result of the process of globalization, and allows for discrepant histories and discursive practices that collectively constitute the "traveling nation" that is Cuba (184).

## 1.6- Negotiating *cubanidad* in literature and music as cultural fields

For the purpose of this dissertation, I adopt Rojas' idea of Cuban culture, as the symbolic construction of the national identity metanarrative since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Isla Sin Fin* 105), revealed through the historiography of ideas, narratives and in cultural production. My study approaches literature and music as cultural fields in a Bourdieuan sense of looking at the power relations in which knowledge is produced.<sup>14</sup> I'm particularly interested in the socio-economic, political context and dynamics that have shaped negotiations of Cubanness as a de-territorialized imagined community in literature and music, in particular as a result of the profound changes brought about by the nineties crisis. Therefore, the research adopts a contrasting focus that on the one hand examines literary negotiations of the national in texts produced on the island, and on the other music produced by Cubans in the transnational context.

The following theoretical and socio-historical account provides the background for my discussion of nineties cultural production in subsequent chapters. In the Conclusion, I will integrate the analyses of the respective music and literature chapters to assess possible aesthetic and generational connections across cultural fields and geographies that could talk about a post-soviet and post-national moment.

### 1.6.1- Imagining *lo cubano* in literature

Literature is one of the main cultural fields where narrative representations of the national and national identities as symbolic orders are negotiated. For Bhabha, the nation is a narrative that transforms from being an object of narration to a subject that creates its

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<sup>14</sup> See Bourdieu.

own genealogy through writing (*Nation and Narration* 1-7). Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Cuban nation and national subjects have been imagined in literary texts in such different registers as romanticism, modernism, the avant-gardes, the neo-baroque, among others. Heredia and Avellaneda evoked emotions of *lo cubano* through the romantic contemplation of natural landscapes. In the “foundational fictions” of romantic novels that recreated the distinctiveness of local traditions and the representations of Creole and subaltern subjects, like *Sab* (1841) by Avellaneda and *Cecilia Valdés* (1839) by Villaverde. The rebellious impetus of some cosmopolitan modern intellectuals like José Martí, author of the essay *Nuestra América* (1891), became a symbolic space to project a political program of national and regional independence against the Spanish and North American imperial powers.

Under the influence of the European Avant-garde movement during the 1920s, Cuba was also imagined as an Afrocuban nation in baroque novels by Alejo Carpentier and in poetry by Nicolas Guillen, through onomatopoeia, rhythm, mystic imagery, syncretism and the recreation of the hitherto neglected Afrocuban cosmology. In Sarduy’s *De donde son los cantantes* (1967), there is also use of anthropological and cultural referents to imagine *lo cubano*. However, the Cuban subject and nation is not represented as a cultural synthesis, but instead as a juxtaposition of textual parodies and non-linear characters, where the origins of the nation could not be represented (Mendez Rodena “Erotismo” 58-59). This impulse in Sarduy’s literature to “devalue” the national symbolic order is also attributed to some narratives by Julian del Casals, Virgilio Piñera and Reynaldo Arenas, through their recourse to narratives of nihilism, emptiness and *la nada* (nothingness).



Rojas identifies an emancipatory rationality as a dominant teleology in Cuban literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Isla sin fin* 49). This rationality emanates from the narrative of authors concerned with advancing their ideas for an independent political project of a Cuban nation. In *Isla Sin Fin* and other works, Rojas recognizes this rationality in the aspirations by authors like Félix Varela and Jose Martí with the independence from Spain; the quests about a Cuban condition by Jose Antonio Saco and Jorge Mañach; and in the frustrations of intellectuals like the literary group *Orígenes* (Origins) with what he calls the “*mito de la revolución pospuesta*” (the myth of the postponed revolution or the impossibility of independence) since the war of independence against Spanish colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (87).

More than an essential quality, I agree with Rojas on the transcendence of this emancipatory rationality in Cuban literature, expressed as either a desire, a search for an awareness of national identity or a political utopia. I think Roja’s idea is important for showing how literature has also been a conduit for the advancement of utopias and political agency since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rojas provides an example that illustrates the effects of this rationality in Cuban literature. For him, Martí’s political emancipatory project to invent a national identity has been more widely studied and interpreted by canonical critics than his own and his contemporaries’ literary works (*Un banquete* 54).

As of 1959, the Cuban revolution institutionalized the emancipatory rationality of the nation as the official metanarrative. One of its first manifestations was the proliferation of what is called “a narrative of violence.” There was a proliferation of novels of or about the revolution, like José Soler Puig’s *Bertillon 166* (1960), which examined the previous insurrectionary period against the Batista dictatorship that led to

the Cuban revolution. The focus of this narrative was not so much on literary form or experimentation, but on denouncing the previous political regime as a moral obligation. For Bejel, these novels aspired to become references in political terms, as part of the emancipatory project of the construction of the new national discourse (74).

For critics like Seymour Menton, in *Prose Fiction*, and José Rodríguez Feo in *Notas Críticas*, the sixties was also one of the most prolific in Cuban literature, marked by works that either adopted an existential stance or were pessimistic and/or critical of the early emancipatory promises of the revolution. That was the case of *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) by Cabrera Infante; *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (1975), by Edmundo Desnoes; *Celestino antes del Alba* (1967), by Reynaldo Arenas; *Los años duros* (1966) by Jesús Díaz; *Paradiso* (1966) by José Lezama Lima and *De dónde son los cantantes* (1967) by Severo Sarduy.

*Tres tristes tigres* (1967), for example, shows a formal preoccupation with language and a ludic approach to writing. It renews novelistic conventions by the use of different narrative resources in a frenetic and experimental way, like hipertextuality, parody, mirror writing, orality, punning, the incorporation of marginal language, and the use of satiric pastiche. For González Echeverría, the novel captures a world shaken by differences, race and class conflicts, manifested through brilliant dialectal contrasts (31). Testimonial novels like Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un Cimarrón* (1966) were also functional for the construction of the new narrative of the revolution. This novel narrates the life of a slave character during 100 years (from slavery to the revolution) in progressive and linear historical terms, based on ethnographic methods like the use of informants who were presumably "representative" of the collective psychology of

previously “undeserving” subjects. They claimed a mimetic and non-problematic relationship between subject, representation and history, where the past was important only as precursor of the revolutionary project (Fernandez 89; Bejel 76).

Socialist realism was promoted by cultural policies of the 1970s and took root in many literary texts, especially detective and spy novels, such as the short stories and novels like *La última mujer y el próximo combate* (1971) by Manuel Cofiño and *Y si muero mañana* by Luis Rogelio Noguera (1977).<sup>15</sup> Detective novels usually focus around a revolutionary hero, who was usually an embodiment of the “New Man”. This socialist hero was supported by and worked for the masses in search for delinquents, who presumably were always counterrevolutionaries. The plots and themes of spy novels were similar to those of detective novels, but the conflicts were usually between state security agents and foreign spies and local collaborators, who intended to subvert the revolution (Fernandez 90).

In these novels, the new revolutionary subject was a socialist hero, who embodied the permanent revolutionary utopia of the “New Man”. He was altruistic, disinterested, full of noble convictions and purposes, and always worked for the collective good. The protagonist was usually a male who regardless of his social and educational background always represented the interests of the working classes. He subordinates his individual questions and existential conflicts to the representation and “needs” of the revolution. His

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<sup>15</sup> Socialist Realism was the cultural (aesthetic and political) expression of Stalinism, originated during the 30s in the Soviet Union, influenced by Marxist-Leninism and by Realism in Russian literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By S.R. standards, artists had an instrumental and subordinated role, to reflect reality historically determined by the revolutionary events. Formalism and artistic experimentation were considered reminiscent of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and therefore unnecessary. As a propagandistic tool for the education of the masses, arts required a social purpose, being accessible and ultimately providing an optimistic and idealized view of the future. See Martínez-Heredia, 2008.

actions were basically in line with and validated the discursive “moral superiority” of the revolution as the embodiment of the will of the collective. According to Valle, Cuban narrative from this period is filled up with apology and triumphalism, leading to the preponderance of texts that evoke the revolution, even without mentioning it.

Another strategy to negotiate *lo cubano* in Cuban literature is what Rojas calls “*la desnacionalización del texto*” (the denationalization of the text) (*Un banquete* 55). Camouflaged by criteria like *la excelencia genérica* (57) (generic excellence), this strategy has been used to “silence” or neutralize certain texts and authors based on considerations like the place from where authors write, their diasporic condition, ideological inclinations, race and gender, among others (57). Cintio Vitier applies this strategy in *Lo cubano en la poesía* (1958; 1970), in which he provides an analysis of the evolution of a sense of Cubanness since Spanish colonial times, by reference to the poetry of José María Heredia, José Martí, Julián del Casal, Nicolás Guillén and Lezama Lima. Vitier proclaims his intention to avoid an essentialist understanding of *lo cubano*. However, he identifies a literary essence of *lo cubano* in recurrent literary images, including those that portray natural innocence, the mythical image of the island from a distance, and in baroque style. He identifies *lo cubano* as a metaphor of organic growth that includes the birth, maturation and consolidation of national consciousness (Duany, “From the Cuban Ajiaco” 16).

For Vitier, the poem *El Himno del desterrado* (1825), by José Maria Heredia, traces the origin of an insular myth by the evoking the Cuban landscape from the physical distance imposed by the exilic condition. He recognizes the importance of Heredia’s geographical distance in adopting an intimate view of the island, a privileged point of

view to imagine and construct *lo cubano* discursively. However, when referring to the poetry of Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, he suggests:

Pero lo que descubrimos en ella es una captación íntima, por humilde que sea, de lo cubano en la naturaleza o en el alma...pero ¿cubana de adentro, de los adentros de la sensibilidad, de la magia, el aire, que es lo que andamos buscando? Confieso llanamente mi impresion: no encuentro en ella ese registro..." (130)

What was celebrated as an attribute in the case of Heredia, a gaze of the nation from a distance, works against the poetry of la Avellaneda and invalidates her as part of the narrative construction of *lo cubano*, according to Vitier's view. Other critics have reacted against that canonical arbitrariness, by for example incorporating a feminist perspective in the study of Cuban narrative. Mendez Rodena considers both *Al partir*, by Avellaneda, and *El himno del desterrado*, by Heredia, as foundational texts. They both resort to the perspective of distance in the lyric evocation of national origins, and initiate the tradition of evoking the island of Cuba as an object of desire and mediating absence ("Mujer" 78-79). Avellaneda's gaze of and relationship to the nation in her poetry ensue from a soft and nostalgic lyric, not from a mimetic representation of the nation through a photographic view of its natural attributes.

During *El Quinquenio Gris* of the 1970s, literary texts and critics were censored for different reasons, but all censorship ensued from the environment of dogmatism and arbitrariness in cultural policies. Cintio Vitier's *Ese sol del mundo moral. Para una historia de la eticidad cubana* (1975), an essay about the Cuban condition from a Martí's perspective was not published in the island until 20 years later because it did not have a Marxist frame of reference. (Fornet, "El Quinquenio Gris" 20-21). Moreover, writers who did not hew to the Marxist framework, like Reinaldo Arenas, Cabrera Infante,

Severo Sarduy, Anton Arrufat, Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera, were progressively and openly subject to censorship on the island. The justifications ranged from a rejection of their openly critical positions, characterized as reactionary, to not engaging the priorities of the cultural bureaucrats and official discourse; being too formalist or experimental; not hiding their homosexual preferences; opting for exile; etc. Antón Arrufat describes his experience as a censored writer in the following terms:<sup>16</sup>

La burocracia de la década nos (...)impuso que muriéramos como escritores y continuáramos viviendo como disciplinados ciudadanos (...) Nuestros nombres dejaron de pronunciarse en conferencias y clases universitarias, se borraron de las antologías y de las historias de la literatura cubana compuestas en esa época funesta. No solo estábamos muertos en vida: parecíamos no haber nacido ni escrito nunca. Las nuevas generaciones crecieron en el desprecio a cuanto habíamos hecho o en su ignorancia. (29)

Displacement and dispersion have been other central experiences of Cubanness since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pérez Firmat 16). Narratives of *lo cubano* have also been negotiated in diasporic texts through a series of thematic coordinates. Some of these topics are: the territorial and nostalgic relationship with the island; the level of ideological confrontation or disengagement with the Cuban state ideology; and the language use by diasporic writers (English, Spanglish or Spanish) (Serrano 50; Alvarez Borland *Cuban-American literature*). Other critics look at diasporic narratives of Cubanness in terms of the writer's moment of migration; their preferred genres; and their degree of recognition in the island's canonical historiography (Espinosa Domínguez).

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<sup>16</sup> Antón Arrufat is a writer who collaborated with *Ciclón Magazine*, was later a founder of *Casa de las Américas* magazine and then was ostracized for almost 15 years, for publishing homoreotic poetry and for his awarded theater piece *Los siete contra Tebas*, which was implicated in the Padilla Affair during the 70s (See Tennat "Interview with Anton Arrufat" )

Objecting to cultural assimilation, Pérez-Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen* (1994) claims agency for what he calls the one-and-a-half generation of Cuban-Americans (i.e., Cubans born on the island and raised in the U.S.). One can discern such agency in the work of writers like Cristina García, Achy Obejas, and Pérez-Firmat himself, among others. The changing context of crisis on the island since the end of the 1980s, and the strategic institutional accommodations to “update” the official discourse, also prompted the rehabilitation of formerly ostracized diasporic authors and texts.

In the eighties, the literary field became one of the cultural spaces for critical reflection about the promises of the revolutionary national utopia and for aesthetic exploration of alternative ways to narrate *lo cubano*. For Sotomayor, some of the texts published— like the novel *Las iniciales de la tierra* (1987) by Jesús Díaz and Leonardo Padura's first novel *Fiebre de caballos* (1984)—did not adjust to the regime's ideological and aesthetic parameters. They were histories that distanced themselves from the emancipatory narrative of the Cuban revolution or from the “violent” or realist ways that were considered the only possible revolutionary aesthetic (43-44). In other texts like *Salir al mundo* (1982) by Arturo Arango, short stories by Francisco López Sacha like *Nosotros vivimos en el submarino Amarillo* (1987) and *Los otros héroes* (1983) by Carlos Calcines, history was not as important as ethical and individual questions derived from it. This literature would mark “the end of innocence” with regard to the revolutionary utopia, and would progressively dig into the exploration of hidden topics and internal conflicts in the national project.

There were also ad-hoc initiatives among some writers and essayists like Victor Fowler, Iván de la Nuez, Antonio José Ponte, Reina María Rodríguez and Rafael Rojas,

among others, who gathered around what was known as the *PAIEA* project, inspired by postmodern questions such as Foucault's ideas on power, the state and forms of knowledge. They questioned the presumed commitment of and omnipresent engagement between intellectuals and the state in previous decades (Casamayor *Utopía* 44).

The harsh aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union transformed the terms of general survival, and the modest embrace of some capitalist practices combined with the disjointed rhetoric of official discourse led to a paradigmatic emptiness, enabling the recuperation of formerly ostracized authors like those of the journal *Orígenes* and diaspora writers like Lydia Cabrera, Gastón Baquero, Virgilio Piñera, Enrique Labrador Ruiz, etc.

The beginning of the end of the saga of the “New Man” in the literary field in the eighties and a sort of “tedium with great literature” (Birkenmaier 10) was in effect by the nineties. Given the crisis and the skepticism – and even cynicism – which it generated, writers and readers could no longer accept the presumed altruistic values of the revolutionary collective subject; much less they could imagine the future. *Los Novísimos*, a significant group of young writers born and raised during the revolution under the influence of the narratives of emancipation and de-nationalization referred to above, wrote a literature characterized by irreverence, escapism, apathy, disenchantment and/or questioning of metanarratives and utopias prevalent since 1959. For Valle, *Los Novísimos* were not interested in reflecting or documenting the crisis: “Para ellos la realidad es algo incambiable, inamovible, una especie de fatalidad en la que sus personajes se encuentran atrapados.” The novels of *Los Novísimos* became in some instances a testimonial space for journalism or social chronicles about the hidden topics of the revolutionary



experience that the crisis brought to center stage. These novels commonly reflected on the underside of the unquestionable health and education systems, as well as on the generalization of misery and social differences. They reflected a thematic explosion of more visible and recurrent topics and identities like homosexuality, prostitution, sex, Aids, violence, migration, double morals and marginality. Ethically their characters usually mirrored the loss of collective and socialist values, the urge for individualism, immersion in a culture of survival and low morals. Homosexuals, marginals, migrants, prostitutes, thieves, opportunists, corrupt individuals and the disillusioned became the outspoken antiheroes.

For Casamayor, ethical weightlessness, a cathartic condition of survival but without being defined by the new realities of the post-soviet context, portrays the existential state of the characters of novels by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Ena Lucía Portela, Wendy Guerra, Gerardo Fernandes Fé, Pedro de Jesús, and Yohamna Depestre, etc. They ignore the modern structural norms of the revolutionary discourse like identity, belonging and community. They don't even experience anguish or despair in relation to the circumstances they live in. Instead they have no illusions and their lives are suspended in a state of inaction (*Utopía* 266; 272). These subjects were no longer questioned or discredited as "the other" social scourge against which the "New Man" had to define his moral superiority. Instead, they became the new protagonists that show the inconsistencies and "dark zones" of the revolutionary subject that the "New Man" attempted to silence. De Ferrari finds a postmodern utopian impulse in the novels by Ena Lucía and Pedro Juan, that base their aesthetic force and ethical creativity on the cultivation of various forms of sexual and formal "perversions" that allow postmodern

and/or queer perspectives of the social conditions and structural values of revolutionary masculinity. For Ferrari, these novels suggest emerging models of civil society for an ethical subject that seeks to emancipate itself from the collective moral project in non-conventional sexual and ethical forms of enjoyment and sexual pleasure (66; 71).

*Los Novísimos* novels came into existence when the publishing system weakened due to the reduction in state subsidies and the lack of production materials. At the same time, the Cuban crisis, as the last redoubt of the disintegrating socialist bloc, generated increasing interest in Cuban literature particularly in Europe. The decentering and opening up of literary production to the foreign reading public was accompanied by new Cuban publishing companies founded abroad, such as Verbum, Colibrí and Betania in Spain, and the creation of journals that included art criticism, such as *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* in Madrid and *Temas* in Cuba (Birkenmaier 8).

As a result of the crisis many writers migrated, while others managed to stay on the island and eventually were able to sustain themselves by publishing abroad, which is the case of the Pedro Juan Gutiérrez and Ena Lucía Portela. There was an explosion of stereotypes of representation of Cuba in the nineties as a place of crisis and deprivation, and an emphasis on the marginal as the new subject of narration, which led to a critique of marginal places, characters and topics by these authors as part of a marketing strategy. From another point of view, some cultural bureaucrats on the island also tried to characterize the nineties writers as marginal but with the intent to downplay the reach and depth of their narratives (Rubio Cuevas 40). For Whitfield, *Los Novísimos* were not simply responding to the international and tourism-related market demands; their fiction

was also linked to the contextual changes that made writers enter into a complex exploration of their place in the Special Period (*Cuban Currency* 1-34). For Birkenmaier:

“...Cuban’s hesitant transition towards the post-cold war era has put into question the parameters of what has been considered post’59 “Cuban literature” (...). This transition has entailed a complete turning away from the Cuban master narrative of the revolution and from a national canon of great literature...”

These are some of the main thematic issues that will be considered in the examination of the deconstruction of the revolutionary nation and subject in the close readings of *Cien Botellas* and *Trilogía* in Chapter 2.

#### 1.6.2-Moments of transnationalism in Cuban music

Music is one of the most visible cultural expressions in the construction of the Cuban national “imaginary” since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Carpentier refers to the prevailing presence of music in the national imaginary in the following terms: “Cuba, a country where popular music has always occupied a greater place than the visual arts, produced admirable classical composers long before it could even boast of its first newspaper, a single painter, or one novelist” (21). The works of intellectuals like Carpentier and Ortiz in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were noteworthy for the recognition of the hybrid cultural character and distinctiveness of Cuban music. They highlighted the significant presence of black music and African influences on the development of Cuban nationalism, and theorized about Cuban music as a cultural product resulting from ongoing interactions of diverse cultures in constant dialogue, including African, Spanish, Caribbean, and North American cultures.

Cuban music has a transnational trajectory that informs the construction of Cuban identities and the Cuban nation. Thomas proposes three conceptual frameworks to understand the diverse ways in which Cuban music has historically participated in cross-cultural, ethnic and national exchanges: cosmopolitanism, internationalism and transnationalism. Cosmopolitanism refers to the high level of incorporation of music genres from all over the world into Cuban music. Internationalism regards the opposite process, by which Cuban music influenced other musical and cultural spaces worldwide. Transnationalism refers to a different and more interactive practice of music making that takes place across borders, and which has become especially salient since the 1990s, and which will be examined later on (105; 108-110). I am particularly interested in the transnational dimension of Cuban music and its latest distinctiveness. I understand cosmopolitanism and internationalism as complementary and interrelated categories with which to explore the transnational experience of Cuban music.

In academic texts, the study of the international presence of Cuban music dates back at least to the encounters of Cuban music with jazz in New Orleans after the migration of black Cubans to that U.S. region as a result of the abolition of slavery on the Island in the 19th century. Some would argue that Cuban music appeared on the international scene even earlier, considering the migrant experience of many important Cuban musicians since the 19th century like Ignacio Cervantes, José White and Manuel Pérez. The case of Louis Moreau Gottschalk—an American from New Orleans and frequent traveler to Cuba—is referred to by some authors as being one of the first known American musicians to widely incorporate Cuban music in his compositions. The first half of the 20th century was a fertile period for Cuban music, as a result of the emergence

of several genres that marked a special moment in the construction of the idea of a Cuban nation and identities. Benitez Rojo (“Music and Nation”), Díaz Ayala (*Música Cubana* and *Cuando salí de la Habana*) and Pérez (*On Becoming Cuban*) have documented that music genres like rumba and son in the 1930s, mambo in the 1940s to 1950s and cha-cha-cha in the 1950s became national landmarks that reinforced the existence of a Cuban national and cultural “imaginary.”

The above-mentioned musical genres also had a great influence on U.S. popular music and jazz. Froeliche highlights the successive waves of Cuban popular music forms and musicians to the U.S. between 1939 and 1959, and the exaltation they created among North American listeners (2). The Mambo craze in the 1950s was an important moment of transnationalism in Cuban music. In the midst of the proliferation of jazz bands on the island, composer Pérez Prado experimented with Cuban dance elements in jazz orchestration. Prado divided the band into two registers, “one high register with the trumpets and one low one with the saxes, both in constant counterpoint and contrast, also making the function of the sections more *melodic-rhythmic* than *melodic-harmonic*” (Acosta 88-89). The dance genre that emerged from Prado’s arrangements, which incorporated rumba and son rhythms around a constant clave, was the mambo, which became a huge hit in Mexico and the United States shortly after emerging in Cuba. In fact, mambo’s popularity in the U.S. far outweighed its popularity in Cuba in the early 1950s, as big bands led by musicians like Machito, Tito Rodríguez, and Tito Puente turned it into a national fad (Storhoff 39).

The interactions of Cuban musicians with Puerto-Rican artists established in New York strongly influenced the beginnings of the Latin music market in the U.S. by mid 1950s. Acosta points to the explosion of Cubop or Afrocuban jazz in the U.S. music scene of the 1940s as a result of the evolution and interplay of Cuban and American music styles like bebop, the feeling movement and mambo (115). The contributions of outstanding Cuban musicians living in the U.S. at that time-like Machito, Mario Bauzá and Chano Pozo among others-were important not only in introducing Cuban musical elements to American jazz. They have been recognized among the pioneers in the emergence of the later known Afrocuban jazz, by interactions and experimentations with American musicians like the legendary Dizzie Gillespie. Afrocuban jazz has been very influential in the subsequent history of different genres like Latin jazz, salsa and in the American jazz scene and Cuban popular music. The direct presence and interaction of Cuban musicians in the American Jazz scene in the 1940s is one of the clearest historical antecedents of transnationalism in Cuban music in the 1990s.

The profound changes brought about by the nationalist project enforced by the Cuban Revolution since 1959 were accompanied by successive and massive waves of Cuban migrants, mainly to the U.S. and to a lesser degree to other countries. The Cuban diasporic movement after 1959 influenced the transnational presence of Cuban music in particular ways. Cuba's cultural and migratory policies, the state of the official U.S.-Cuba relationship, and the dominant political narratives in the Cuban diaspora, among others, would become decisive influences in this scenario.

The radical anti-bourgeoisie revolutionary agenda from the early days of the revolution translated into a series of cultural policies and actions that constrained the entertainment and related music scenes. Cuban nightlife was practically suppressed by shutting down cabarets, clubs and many dance places. All cultural matters became extremely centralized by the government—including the control and decisions over performances of Cuban musicians, their travelling opportunities and salaries. That centralization reproduced inefficiency and arbitrariness, like the abolition of copyrights and royalty payments. At the time, even American jazz was forbidden as “music from the enemy” and several jazz venues closed. According to Acosta, this was “the most disastrous moment for Cuban popular music and in general for the country’s social life, because of administrative measures whose negative consequences we are suffering thirty years later” (202).

Those cultural policies prompted the migration of many musicians. Migration became a highly political act in the Cuban context, especially during the first decades after the revolution. Even if those who migrated were renowned national and/or international artists, they were generally considered political “traitors” and illegal subjects by the Cuban establishment. Omissions, silences and prohibitions were common actions against artist migrants in the official historiography of post ‘59 Cuban culture for many decades. As a result, the life and work of many Cuban musicians in the U.S., among them legendary figures like Celia Cruz, La Lupe, Rolando La Serie, Orestes López “Cachao” and Bebo Valdés in Europe, are unknown to many Cubans born and raised after 1959 on the island. However, these musicians strongly contributed to spreading and further developing Cuban music worldwide. They also influenced further

developments in the Latin jazz and salsa scenes with their talent and rich Cuban musical backgrounds.

Cuban musicians and music made on the island post '59 gradually lost presence in U.S. music circuits, with few exceptions. The situation worsened with the U.S. embargo's restrictions on the exchange of cultural materials and artists; visas to enter the U.S. were denied to musicians living on the island. As a result and until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cuban music made on the island post '59 was practically absent on U.S. radio, TV stations, dance venues and clubs, particularly in Miami. Many musicians from the island who managed to get gigs in the U.S. were subject to threats and political turmoil by the traditional exile community. This was the case when Van-Van—the most popular dance band on the island—played at a concert at the American Airlines Arena in 1999.<sup>17</sup> According to Pacini-Hernández that context of threats determined to a large extent the refusal of the U.S. - based Latin music industry to promote music from the island (24).<sup>18</sup>

An important relaxation of the U.S. embargo in the cultural field took place in 1988 with the Berman Amendment, which allowed for the circulation and exchange of Cuban cultural materials including live and recorded music for educational and cultural purposes. That enabled the distribution of original Cuban recordings in the United States as long as they were issued abroad by a non-U.S. party. While this policy only allowed the licensing of already-made recordings and did not permit U.S. companies to create and

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<sup>17</sup> See Cantor-Navas, "Van-Van Plays On" for detailed account of the hostile environment experienced in Miami by several musicians living on the island, such as Van Van in 1999, and of a presentation in Miami by jazz pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba in 1996, among many others.

<sup>18</sup> See Sublette, "The Missing Cuban Musicians," for a detailed analysis of the impact of the U.S. regime of restrictions on cultural exchange with Cuba.



sell new records of Cuban artists, the law facilitated the release of hundreds of albums by Cuban musicians and created new audiences for Cuban artists (Sublette 11). However, for Hernández-Reguant this opening did not help raise the interest of major record labels, relegating Cuban music to small entrepreneurs linked to the new world music scene mostly in college towns and cosmopolitan cities (“World Music” 117).

One of the most important recent transnational moments in Cuban music was the international success of the Buena Vista Social Club (henceforth BVSC) at the end of the 1990s, which was composed of Cuba-based old musicians like singer and guitarist Compay Segundo, singer Ibrahim Ferrer and pianist Ruben González, among others. The music producer of the project was Cuban musician Juan de Marcos, and the general producer was American Musician Ry Cooder. BVSC became a successful trademark and led to a spate of recordings, world tours, collaborations, record sales, awards and a documentary by filmmaker Wim Wenders. The international recognition reached by BVSC rekindled a worldwide interest in traditional Cuban music, which positioned it in the international music industry through the world music scene. The BVSC music reinforced internationally an aesthetic centered in stereotyped narratives of nostalgia for the Cuban past, where musical developments that took place after the 1950s lacked any relevance. Back on the island, the BVSC phenomenon generated an unprecedented replication of traditional music ensembles associated with tourism venues that exploited its international craze to attract foreign currency. However, it did not resonate much in the local popular music scene, dominated by *timba* bands.

After restrictions were relaxed in the early 1990s, Cuban music from the island reentered the U.S. marketplace inducing great interest among American audiences.

Several major bands and artists from the *timba* scene, the major popular Cuban dance music at that moment on the island— like Issac Delgado, Van-Van, Paulo FG, and La Charanga Habanera—, toured regularly in different American cities and their music became available in U.S. stores nationwide. However, Pacini-Hernández indicates that this reentry did not happen via Latin music networks, due in her view to the impact of the restrictive political regime described above, but instead it took place through the world music market (24) as in the case of BVSC. During the George Bush republican administration in the first decade of the 2000s, cultural exchange between Cuba and the U.S. experienced its lowest levels in the past 50 years. The travel ban to Cuba was intensified; the renewal of licenses for cultural and academic exchanges between U.S. and Cuban institutions was suspended; Cuban musicians' visas to enter the U.S. were routinely denied; and the bureaucratic process to bring a Cuban artist to the U.S. was cumbersome and discouraging, even for musicians born in Cuba and residing in other countries (Sublette 13-16). One of the most heated moments was back in 2001, when the Latin Grammys decided to move from Miami to Los Angeles, due to the strong reactions and threats made by several organizations from the traditional exile community against the presence of Cuban musicians from the island. For almost 50 years there were practically no public contacts and musical collaborations between Cuban musicians living in Miami with those on the island.

Another moment of transnationalism in Cuban music took place in the Miami Cuban enclave. In the late 1970s to 1980s a group of Cuban musicians who arrived as children in the 1960s created a style of music known as "Miami Sound," in which Cuban music was the main ingredient but in a very commercial fusion with rock, pop and other

Latin influences from Brazil, Colombia, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. These Miami musicians indistinctively used lyrics in Spanish and/or English. The Miami Sound, in particular singers like Willy Chirino and Gloria Estefan, had commercial success and generated a large audience on the island, despite being officially forbidden by the Cuban state. Authors like Guevara have observed that the traditional Cuban exile community promoted a radical nationalism by explicitly expressing a nostalgic patriotism and longing for an idealized past (42). That basically remained the discursive context encountered by the wave of Cuban migrant musicians in the 1980s that settled in the U.S., Mexico and Spain<sup>19</sup>. In general, the work of this wave of musicians in the transnational context has rarely been acknowledged, except for trumpet player Arturo Sandoval and saxophonist Paquito D’Rivera. These two extremely talented musicians have managed to successfully develop their professional careers outside Cuba, and at the same time have been among the most openly vocal artists of their artistic generation on Cuban issues.

The dominant political narratives on both sides of the Florida straits have significantly prevailed and shaped the transnational trajectory of Cuban music after 1959. Cepeda points to the existence of “hegemonic silences” in popular media representations of Latino music in the U.S (58), referring to the difficult entry into the U.S. of Cuban music made on the island during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exception was the BVSC phenomenon, which put Cuban music made 50 years ago back on the world map.

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<sup>19</sup> Arturo Sandoval, Paquito de Rivera, Ignacio Berroa, Carlos Averhoff, Ahmed Barroso, Albita Rodríguez, Meme Solís, Lucrecia, Donato Poveda, Malena Burque, among many others, are among the generation of Cuban musicians who migrated in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Since the early Obama administration in 2008, cultural exchanges between Cuba and the U.S. in the music sector reached their zenith since '59. President Obama used his executive power prerogatives to loosen travel restrictions for Cuban-Americans to visit their families in Cuba. Though travel for tourism for U.S. citizens was still not permitted as part of the embargo regulations, a system of licenses from the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) from the Treasury Department was put in place, which provided the possibility to visit the island for people to people contact, meaning for educational, religious, cultural and research purposes. Restrictions for Cuban Americans to send remittances to their families in the island were loosened. On the island, the Cuban government rescinded the need for an exit permit for Cuban citizens since 2013. All they need to have to travel from the island is a Cuban passport valid for two years, and the visa from the country they intend to visit. Importantly, they no longer risk losing citizenship privileges (Betancourt 175-86). However, they still need to validate their passports on a regular basis in a relatively short period of time and pay a high price in foreign currency for their travel documents. Musicians can travel abroad for longer periods and have more control over their earnings without losing their rights and property back on the island. However, they are selectively requested to participate and perform in political acts promoted by the government, a tactic used to pressure and compromise their relatively increased independence since the 90's crisis.

Those measures have been part of a gradual and ambivalent system of economic reforms put in place by the government since Raúl Castro came to power in 2006. While the reforms progressively liberalized some sectors like small business, farms, self-employment and real state, they have established a dual economy that deepened income

gaps, life opportunities and social differences based on access to convertible currency, while keeping the state control at all levels on most of the dividends of the economic activity from any sector. The new context of relaxation of bilateral policies and regulations has contributed to a significant flow of travel, regular presence and the normalization of presentations of Cuban musicians from the island in the U.S., in particular in Miami.

Borges Triana adopted the term *Música Cubana Alternativa* (MCA) (Alternative Cuban Music) to refer to the emergence of a particular form of song in the nineties that reflected a generational experience with a more hybrid sound, cosmopolitan and post-national spirit than previous song movements like *nueva trova* (*La luz* 16).<sup>20</sup> He characterized MCA musicians as those who share an “underground” sensibility and generational experience, as well as a symbolic resistance to the hegemonic discourses on the island and stateside, and offer a different discourse (*Concierto* 73; 76-77). The 1990’s massive migration marked a distinct moment in the transnational experience of Cuban music with the significant relocation of many musicians - especially singers and songwriters from MCA as well as academically trained musicians- to Miami, New York, Los Angeles, México, Toronto, Madrid, Barcelona and Paris, among other cities. Most of them left the island at the beginning of their careers and suddenly became migrants with

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<sup>20</sup> *Nueva trova* was an important song movement from the 1960s inspired by the so-called Hispanic “nueva canción” (new song) movement and North American protest songs. They proposed highly poetic and socially conscious lyrics as a norm. They were inspired by traditional Cuban songs and influenced by rock, pop and Brazilian musicians from the Tropicalia movement. By the mid-1970s *nueva trova* became a national institutionalized movement with hundreds of members throughout the island, with the full support of other institutions like ICAIC (Cuban Institute of the Arts and Cinematography Industry). *Nueva trova* also acquired a significant international fan-base that was instrumental to the island’s cultural establishment. See also Giro Radamés, *Diccionario Enciclopédico de la Música en Cuba* (Tomo 4) (212-215).

little knowledge of how to operate in the global music market. They faced a dramatic transition, moving from the paralyzing paternalism of a subsidized socialist economy to the challenges and uncertainties of the capitalist world, especially intense for new migrants. According to Thomas:

The changing perceptions of those living in the diaspora, developments in communications such as the Internet, email and instant messaging, and technological advances in recording and digital mastering have greatly altered the ways Cuban music is imagined, realized, marketed and consumed (109-10).

Chapter 3 will examine in detail this form of transnationalism in Cuban music since the 1990s crisis by reference to case studies in Miami, New York and Madrid.

Last December 2014, the governments of the U.S and Cuba announced their intention to reestablish diplomatic relations for the first time in more than 50 years. Together with the release and exchange of several prisoners, the United States government agreed to further ease restrictions for U.S. citizens on remittances, travel, banking and telecommunication transactions with the island, and to review Cuba's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. The U.S. public has positively received the announcement. Those who visited the island frequently and diverse press venues report a similar positive response by the Cuban population in general. Some sectors of the island's opposition have expressed their concern regarding the announcement, mainly in regards to the repressive government's stance against any form of opposition, the lack of political freedoms and the disregard for human rights. The Cuban American lobby in Congress, representative of the traditional exile community, has openly expressed their frustrations over the negotiations with the island's government. It is expected that they will take

advantage of the Republican majority in Congress to oppose any actions leading to the removal of the embargo and any rapprochement that requires legislative prerogatives on bilateral issues. Subsequently, the Cuban government announced several conditions for the bilateral negotiations to move forward, including historic demands like the end of the U.S. embargo, and the devolution of the Guantanamo Bay military base. This move could either represent a public upping the ante in the negotiating process, or an ambivalent position or real lack of will towards the process of normalization. Although both governments formally restored diplomatic relationships last July 2015, the new bilateral moment seems a promising but difficult path, with a lot of uncertainties and fundamental obstacles.

An early test of the new moment was the censorship of a public performance by internationally recognized Cuban performance artist Tania Bruguera in December 2014. A Cuban resident in the U.S. and Europe, Bruguera intended to carry out an open mike performance on Revolution Square in Havana, where she invited the public to express themselves for a minute about the prospects of the announced changes for the future of the Cuban nation. Bruguera called for this event in an open letter to the governments of the U.S., Cuba, and the Pope, and by the launch of #yotambienexijo, a social network campaign which rapidly acquired many followers. After failed negotiations with the cultural bureaucracy in a visit in December 2014, her performance was censored and she was jailed three times consecutively, together with around 50 followers. According to Bruguera's regular feeds on #yotambienexigo, she was held on the island against her will pending legal charges and her passport was confiscated by the government until July 2015. Bruguera's case shows the prevalence of the government's control and censorship

in cultural affairs, and the narrow and fragile limits of maneuver for Cuban migrant artists who return or visit frequently to perform on the island. Cultural institutions still consider themselves the managers of the cultural and national canon, and try to impose the official discourse as the embodiment of “true Cubanness”. They openly ignore and try to invalidate the agency of alternative voices and cultural agents they can’t control.

It’s still not clear if the reestablishment of bilateral relationships will translate into more presence of Cuban music in the U.S. market. It’s more likely that U.S. musicians could immediately benefit by enjoying fewer restrictions to visit and play on the island. However, it is not clear if restrictions on commercial incentives required for major events will be lifted. According to current regulations, Cuban artists who reside on the island can only collect per-diems when touring in the U.S. To avoid those obstacles, some of these musicians become U.S. residents, like acclaimed reggeaton duo Gente de Zona (Cantor-Navas “What the U.S.-Cuba”), now that they don’t lose their citizen privileges on the island. Increasingly recent Cuban migrants are doing regular presentations back home, where a nostalgic fan base still follows them after they have lived abroad for more than a decade. Despite the ebbs and flows of each U.S. administration’s bilateral policies in regards to Cuba, and of the island’s cultural policies and bureaucratic restrictions, musicians have been pioneers in paving the road to socio-cultural engagement between the two countries by promoting communication, collaboration and exchanges that in practical terms have seeded transnational networks of cultural production.



Chapter 2: Decadence and survival: The “new morals” of the revolutionary” Cuban subject in *los Novísimos* texts

In this chapter I do a close reading of two novels written during and about the nineties crisis: *Cien botellas en una pared* (2003), by Ena Lucía Portela and *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* (1998), by Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. I examine how these texts deconstruct dominant narratives of the national revolutionary project and subject, embodied by the presumably “disinterested” “New Man” myth and the altruistic and undivided collective. I argue that these novels not only deconstruct the centrality of the revolutionary national project (that is, the official discourse of the “New Man” as the national subject) but also that they propose a series of thematic coordinates that delineate a post-soviet moment resulting from the crisis. The novels posit an alternative to the prevalence of the revolutionary cosmology in Cuban literature after 1959. Building on the critical bibliography, I conduct my analysis through the identification of thematic coordinates that help approach the narratives of these authors. They are: self-decadence, roughness of the “new nation,” a “New Woman” and other gender identities in Portela’s novel; wilderness, marginality, the disenchantment of the revolutionary intellectual and the revival of post-colonial attitudes centred on the further marginalization of the black population and the commodification of the female black body, in Gutiérrez’s.

2.1- Nothing to believe in, nothing to change: The “New Woman” in Ena Lucía Portela’s *Cien botellas en una pared* (2002)

From the apparently apathetic and naïve vision of a young habanera and aspiring professional writer named Zeta, the main character and narrator, the novel provides an ironic and harsh perspective on the effects of the 1990’s crisis of post-socialist ways of being and performing Cubanness. Despite decades of systematic discursive indoctrination about the socialist economy’s superiority in “satisfying the always increasing needs of the society as a whole and especially of the working class,” the severity of the economic devastation prompted by the crisis after the fall of the Berlin Wall paradoxically led Cuba’s revolutionary government to resort to capitalist ways to prevent a total collapse. They sought feverishly to attract foreign currency, leading to the legal use of U.S. dollars, an overwhelming expansion of the tourist industry for foreign clients, the deepening of a dual economy and access to services, a shifting socio-cultural landscape based on access to foreign currency and remittances from “los gusanos” (worms) abroad,<sup>21</sup> and the ease of government control over some aspects of the economic activity in selected cultural sectors like the literary field. As a result, writers were allowed to negotiate contracts

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<sup>21</sup> *Gusanos* was a pejorative term coined by the Castro government since the sixties to refer to those that decided or were forced to leave the island. Castro himself and the national propaganda apparatus “exalted” the term through successive statements particularly during the Mariel Exodus in the 1980s. Around 10 000 Cubans sought refuge in the Peruvian Embassy in Havana in 1979, which forced the government to allow a massive migration through the Mariel Harbor in flotillas brought from Florida. The term was widely used in acts of repudiation orchestrated by the government against those Cubans who wanted to leave the country. It was rapidly expanded to an open-ended list of related epithets like *escoria* (scum), *vendepatrias* (sell-outs), *parásitos* (parasites), *mercenarios* (mercenaries), etc. The *gusano* term became part of a whole cosmology orchestrated by the Cuban government, reflected in their systematic attempts to discredit, “animalize” and promote aversion against Cuban migrants in the national revolutionary imaginary. See also Sierra Madero “Memorias del Mariel.”

directly with foreign publishers in hard currency and independently of state organizations.

At the same time, foreign publishers became increasingly interested in uncovering intimate and implicitly dissident dimensions of Cuban life that before the nineties had little exposure abroad. Cuba's shift towards capitalist ways was considered "anachronis[ti]c and paradox[ic]al" (Whitfield "A Literature" 2-3). Publishing abroad became a viable alternative for local authors who, once able to circumvent censorship to a certain extent, were more willing to examine critically in their writing the complex social and affective conditions of their own formation as revolutionary subjects (De Ferrari *Community* 2). In the same period, the media was still heavily controlled by the state apparatus, therefore the literary field rapidly became a sort of journalistic and testimonial site for dealing with the new realities of an emergent vigorous culture of survival, disenchantment and apathy, which translated into new literary characters, shifting values, ethics and moral dilemmas. For De Ferrari, in no other literature produced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the exhaustion of ethics and politics so defining of the ways in which novels were written and consumed. They reflected forms of intellectual engagement alternative to those sanctioned by the revolutionary social contract (*Community* xiii; 3): "(...) the new ethical and aesthetic paradigms expose the flaws of (Cuban socialism as) an essentially modern political project" (3).

The eighties were associated with a literary departure in the work of authors like Senel Paz, Arturo Arango and Rafael Soler who provided a timidly disenchanted image of the official Cuba. However, writers from that period were still concerned with utopian pretensions about the role of the intellectual within society. *Los Novísimos* since the late

1980s were more disruptive in their deconstruction of and bias against the official discourse, a critical stance that did not intend to provide any utopia or alternative (paradigmatic) proposal (Rubio Cuevas “La doble” 39). They were “...los primeros narradores post-revolucionarios, pues el destino y proceso de la revolución no parece preocuparles...” (Fornet J. *Los nuevos* 96).<sup>22</sup> They were “baptized” in Salvador Redonet’s anthology *Los últimos serán los primeros* (1993), where Ena Lucía Portela’s short story “La urna y el hombre” was included. Redonet mapped out some of the work of *Los Novísimos* based on certain thematic and aesthetic coordinates summed up by Rubio Cuevas:

- a critical attitude towards official institutions like the army and education; verbal experimentation akin to Sarduy’s “*derroche verbal*,”<sup>23</sup> like in the work of the group *Diáspora* and author Rolando Sanchez Mejía;<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Other Cuban writers of the nineties who were born between 1959-1972, include: Ronaldo Menéndez, Alberto Guerra Naranjo, Angel Santiestéban Prats, Amir Valle Ojeda, Daniel Díaz Mantilla, Alberto Garrandéz, José Miguel Sánchez (Yoss), Raul Aguiar and Ricardo Arrieta (qtd. in López xvi)

<sup>23</sup> Rubio Cuevas further explains his notion of Sarduy’s *derroche verbal*: “Un deseo de experimentar hasta el límite con la materia verbal tratando de llegar no ya a revelaciones lezamescas, sino a la constatación de su incapacidad para trascender su propia realidad” (“La doble” 41).

<sup>24</sup> *Diásporas* is a literary group and magazine created in 1993 in Havana, by writers Rolando Sánchez Mejías, Carlos Alberto Aguilera, Ismael González Castaner, Rogelio Saunders, José Manuel Prieto, Ricardo Alberto Pérez, Pedro Márquez de Armas and Radamés Molina. Some of its members still live in Cuba, and others in Europe, Mexico and the U.S. According to Sánchez Mejías, in their first magazine, they defined the group as: “(...)una avanzadilla (sin)táctica de guerra. Una vanguardia enfriada durante el proceso” (...) a (syn)tactic approach of war (...) an avant-garde convinced of its poor timing, of its belatedness, of its historical inappropriateness. The critique that *Diásporas* makes includes not only the state of things that facilitates a literature wounded at its core, but also the entire tradition of Cuban literature, attempting a new reading. He provides an example: “...a critical rereading of Lezama Lima’s baroque distances us from the “lyrical and insularizing baroque” for which Lezama is currently praised by the majority of Cuban poets. *Diásporas* engages in a re-reading of the poetic system of Lezama, including the articulation of this system to other more fragmented systems, yielding fragments which are more useful for writing.” See “Exiled in Barcelona”.

- a re-appropriation and deconstruction of the epic treatment of old topics like the war in Angola, in texts by Angel Santiestéban;
- an ethical and philosophical reflection on questions about totalizing discourses where no satisfactory answer is expected;
- questioning of themes like the legitimacy of the revolution's leaders, through the use of allegories from universal topics and classical myths;
- the exploration of reality and fantasy, unconnected to magic realism and closer to a vindication of Virgilio Piñera's *absurd*,<sup>25</sup>
- the recreation of the marginal as subject and object (as in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's novels), and of the underground cultural worlds of hippies and freaks in an open challenge to official attitudes considered obsolete, as in the case of authors Rolando Menéndez and Raúl Aguiar from *El Establo* group;<sup>26</sup> and

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<sup>25</sup> In the introduction to *Teatro completo*, Piñera provides his own views about his literary work: "Nada como mostrar a tiempo la parte clownesca para que la parte seria quede bien a la vista. Ya se ve en mi obra: soy ese que hace más seria la seriedad a través del humor, del absurdo y de lo grotesco" (qtd. in Anderson F. 122). According to Anderson F., Piñera's absurdist dramas tend to emphasize the purposeless and irrational nature of human existence, and his short stories often focus on the protagonist's struggle to find order and meaning in an illogical universe" (122-123).

<sup>26</sup> According to Jorge Brioso: "El corpus textual conocido como literatura freakie o literatura de los freakies, marca la emergencia de un nuevo sujeto y héroe en el espacio literario. Sujeto colectivo que más que mostrar exhibe desenfadada, casi provocativamente, lo diferente de sus modos de vida. Sus prácticas grupales, ritos neotribales urbanos que constituyen toda una subcultura del límite, del margen. Cultura

- the revalorization of social taboos and “other” identities absent from the revolutionary cosmology,<sup>27</sup> like homosexuality, lesbians, *balseros* (rafters), AIDS, (other sexualities beyond heteronormativity) and *jineteras* (prostitutes, as in the case of Ena Lucía Portela) among others. (“La doble” 40-41)

The emergence of a distinct generation of Cuban writers in the nineties was not only the result of the exploration of new topics ensuing from the exhaustion of the socialist paradigm on the island since the end of the eighties after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or from the opportunities and challenges to deal with the market, to publish abroad and to enjoy more spaces for individual creativity and leverage beyond the state. They were also influenced by similar postmodern attitudes adopted by young Hispanic writers from other places, of exploration and distancing from narrative strategies and topics associated with modern metanarratives and with the seventies Latin-American literary

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signada por la no identificación con los principales epistemes que conforman el espacio discursivo reconocido, cultura cuyo principal elemento nucleante es la música rock” (qtd. in Aguiar “Literatura y Rock en Cuba”).

<sup>27</sup> Based on Anderson’s idea of an imagined community discussed in Chapter 1, I use indistinctively the terms Revolutionary cosmology, socialist cosmology or the national cosmology of the revolution, to refer to the group of narratives, cultural symbols/icons, and ideological discourse that shaped the official national imaginary after ’59. This idea is also informed by Casamayor’s conceptualizations of this term in relation with the Cuban literary field that she recognized is also informed by critic, historian and essayist Rafael Rojas’ contributions. Casamayor refers to the revolutionary cosmology as the group of ideas and affections conditioned by the revolutionary experience that logically shape the world that Cubans inhabit since 1959, which rationally and emotionally sustain their existence: “Basada en una concepción épica de la existencia, moldeada por el ideal del sacrificio heroico, la resistencia y el enfrentamiento permanente a enemigos externos e internos, la cosmología de la revolución cubana ha justificado la permanencia del sistema político en vigor, apelando a la liberación del pueblo (...) ha determinado la pertenencia al proyecto político-ideológico prevaleciente en la isla y ha sido utilizada como catalizador oficial de la nacionalidad” (*Utopia* 32-33).

boom. That was the case of *Generación X*, a group of neorealist writers from Spain in the 1990s whose texts expressly questioned the modern family and values, were focused on the urban space and the city life, as well as on homosexuality, drugs, and sexuality, exploited the use of colloquial language and orality, and were full of references to icons from rock culture, TV, films, media and games.<sup>28</sup> Another literary reference was the group of Hispanic authors included in the anthology *McOndo* (1996) by writers Aberto Fuguet and Sergio Gómez. Using literary strategies similar to those of the authors from *Generación X*, they stand against Magical Realism and exoticism as narrative stereotypes “expected” from Latin-American authors after the boom. *McOndo* discarded the exploration of Latin-American identity (who are we?) to focus instead on questions about personal identity (who am I?).

Anglo Dirty Realism from authors like Bukowski and Henry Miller was another important reference for young Hispanic authors at the turn of the century, including for *Los Novísimos* on the island.<sup>29</sup> Portela and Gutiérrez stand out for their appropriation of Dirty Realism, with different tonalities and perspectives, in order to zoom out of focus the redemptive commonplace of the “New Man” hero prevalent in the post ’59 revolutionary police novels. According to López, those (revolutionary noir) novels were the manifestation of Socialist Realism because they were socially redemptive, focused on

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<sup>28</sup> *Historias del Kronen* (1994) from Spanish writer Jose Angel Mañas, was one of the most emblematic novels that characterized the narrative of *Generación X*. For a more detailed account of the novel in Spanish Generation X in the nineties, see Navarro Martínez.

<sup>29</sup> Buford refers to Dirty Realism not as fiction devoted to making the large historical statement, but of a different scope devoted to the local details, the nuances, the little disturbances in language and gesture. They originated primarily as short “strange” stories: unadorned, unfurnished...tragedies about people who watch daytime television, read cheap romances [...] they drink a lot and are often in trouble [...] insistently informed by a discomfiting and sometimes elusive irony...(4).

(re)-generating the “New Man” and noble ideals as part of the revolution’s objectives. In them the police, intelligence agents, and the state institutions always epitomized the collective will of “the people” in power and the restorers of order, in contrast with the criminals whose acts were represented as confronting the nation-state as counterrevolutionaries and CIA agents, and who were always punished as transgressors of the social contract (qtd. in Portela xi). In *Cien Botellas* the murder is not really presented until the end of the novel: the resolution of the crime and the discovery of the “criminal” are not clearly revealed or partially suggested; it could have been committed for different motivations that include but are not limited to redemption, and justice is not necessarily re-established (Idem xiv-xv). Therefore, for López, *Cien Botellas* is a postmodern noir novel because it questions the author’s autonomy and originality to narrate the story, the capacity of the novel to elucidate the mystery- in this case the crime-, and the transcendence of justice and the law (ix).

The novel focuses on the emergence of a different nation and subject as a result of the socialist crisis, through the recreation of “other” identities and raw realities brought to center stage that were basically silenced in the socialist cosmology, and on the exploration of the “dark side” and the existential distress of “ordinary” people in their individual daily lives. Portela is among those authors from *Los Novísimos* whose work started being published in the nineties and continued into the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She was initially given awards by cultural institutions on the island, and successfully managed to publish, be translated and recognized outside the island while living there, as one of the most outstanding writers of her generation in important literary circles. She is praised for the depth and diversity of her topics, style, linguistic registers,



as a pioneer in the introduction of lesbian topics (and a female gaze), for her brilliant use of irony to recreate the absurd and grotesque of commonplace situations, and for her vast referential and self-referential work (Cuesta 213). I subscribe to Cuesta's assessment of Portela as a pioneer of a group of female writers in the nineties. For Cuesta, Portela: "acomete una labor de reescritura del imaginario nacional dando como resultado una documentación de las actuaciones cotidianas de un país invisible en los medios de comunicación monopolizados por el poder" (Idem 27).

### 2.1.1- Self-Decadence

Contrary to Foucault and Derrida's declarations about "the death of the subject,"<sup>30</sup> Lipovetsky considers that nothing is more important than the attention accorded to the self, not only as an individual but in relation to its shifting general social fabric. The postmodern subject focuses on ethics and portrays a loss of courage, an abhorrence of pain and obligations generated by a turn-of-the-century "narcissist jouissance" (qtd. in Thomas J. 111).<sup>31</sup> Instead of discarding or judging firsthand the emergence of this sort of individualism, for De Ferrari authors like Lipovetsky and Bauman "try to understand the ethics of the postmodern subject as a break with regard to its shifting socio-economic and ideological context" (*Community*, 61-62). I agree with her observation that this break relates more to unmasking the traps of modern morality, based on an illusory idea of the

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<sup>30</sup> For Feldman, contrary to the modernist notion of the independent and autonomous self, postmodernists assert that the conceptualization of one's self or identity is generated from cultural practices and societal structures. The self or human consciousness is not some ultimate foundational source of control and social progress (41). For example, Derrida asserts that the self or subject is not "what it says it is." The subject is not that metalinguistic substance or identity, some pure cogito of self-presence, it's always inscribed in language" (qtd. in Feldman 42).

<sup>31</sup> See also Lipovetsky' *Hipermodern Times*.

common good that is neither attainable nor, for that matter, desirable. For her, one of the main goals of postmodern ethics is to denounce the moral traps of utopian thinking, which the postmodern subject in the Cuban narrative since the nineties disdains (Idem).

For the nineties' writers:

“...the revolution as a modern utopia has been brought down to earth by invocations of the ethics of individualism, disenchantment, and disregard, such that it has not only outlasted the validity of its utopian premises but even its own modernity” (Idem 62).

Based on Bauman's idea that the postmodern subject could live or learn to live in the world without illusions, not knowing what the guiding principles are any longer, and convinced that disorder is more permanent than the fragile and arbitrary systems humans create (*Etica* 41), Casamayor suggests that by eliminating modern illusions, the postmodern subject doesn't get rid of the possibility of utopia. For her, this postmodern utopian impulse is recognized in the process of deconstruction of (modern) totalitarian and universal affirmations of nations, nation-states and traditional communities (24-25). This is precisely the “ethical stance” (26) that helps me approach the post-revolutionary subject in Portela's novel. Her characters try to avoid and/or are indifferent to the official nation as the prevalent referential framework for social identity and agency, focusing instead on the recreation of their most personal and existential circumstances, even if or precisely because they don't seem to be inscribed in any project of progress in the short or long term.

According to Casamayor, the name of this novel's protagonist (Zeta or the letter Z in Spanish) is an allegory of her “posición postrimera” (degraded position) on any scale of values oriented towards human progress (“¿Cómo vivir” 95). Zeta is revealed as a

chubby young woman with a low self-esteem who, before getting into a “stable” relationship with Moisés—a frustrated and violent former attorney who regularly mistreats her with all sorts of physical violence and insults—regularly resorted to drugs and sex as part of her existential coping mechanisms in the Havana of the nineties. Her parents were “not very conventional and adventurous,” in her own words (Portela 32-33). Her mother was a French existentialist who died when she was born; her father was a homosexual and movie editor. He was not really interested and didn’t know much about being a paternal figure. Thus he basically didn’t deal with Zeta’s upbringing. She practically raised herself, with the occasional help of some relatives and a priest, abandoned to her own luck, and with no limits or rules to follow. When introducing her family background, Zeta describes herself in the following terms:

soy de las que no se rehúsan, de las que no saben decir « no (...) » De las que se abren como un compás y se riegan como un juego de yaquis. De las que no pierden el tiempo con los preliminares y enseguida se sueltan a bailar y a gozar con la Sinfónica Nacional. Me encanta el *despelote*.<sup>32</sup> Ni siquiera recuerdo haber sido virgen alguna vez (...) no puedo evitarlo, no está en mí. (Portela 34)

From an unprejudiced and wild existence, Zeta provides a very illustrative portrait

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<sup>32</sup> *El despelote* is a very colloquial urban localism that came from the streets and became very popular on the island since the nineties. It generally refers to a situation or a behavior that denotes complete liberation, free from any rules or norms, or even a situation of total chaos. It’s also a term closely associated with the liberation of the body either sexually and in dance. In *timba* music, the term was used to refer to the chorus section where the band suddenly is practically silenced—except the singer, the piano, some drums and the bass— shifting to a rhythm structure that makes a direct music call to the dancers, mainly women. It also refers to a particular form of very sexually explicit dance that is mostly individual, where especially the female dancers make very repetitive and frenetic dance patterns that seem to suggest a state close to a “trance.”

of the decentred character of the national subject in times of crisis. She recreates the rottenness of the physical and human context that, to a certain extent, has shaped her life and where she lives, and that she has to adapt to and coexist with because there is no catching a glimpse of any other option. Like many of her generational cohorts during the nineties, Zeta received a state subsidized college education but didn't have a stable job. She got by stealing cars and selling the parts on the "black market,"<sup>33</sup> getting occasional remittances from her father, and by practicing intermittent *jineterismo*.<sup>34</sup> Her skeptical resolution in dealing with her existence took her from moments of satisfying her sexual appetite with whomever she occasionally ran into as one of her main daily conquests, to getting by with marginal and "antisocial" characters that gave her company, and to submitting to a sadistic relationship. All of which seemed to "help" her endure her sometimes intolerable existence. She constantly reflected on the most pressing existential choices she had to make to deal with her immediate circumstances, choosing detachment over rationality: "A menudo tengo la impresión de que no hay nada que entender, de que las cosas son como son y ya" (Portela 26).

Zeta reflected the existential distress of many young Cubans of the nineties that Casamayor calls "*los ingravidos*" (weightless), characters who are bound to the most

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<sup>33</sup> The black market is known in Cuba as *la bolsa negra*. Especially since the nineties crisis, the black market became indispensable for the island inhabitant's survival—due to the government's overregulation and inefficiency, together with the loss of the absolute economic dependence on Soviet subsidies—in order to get access to basic products needed for daily subsistence. However, the prices in the black market are out of reach for the majority of the population, and it's considered an illegal activity that is at the same time "tolerated" and penalized.

<sup>34</sup> *Jineterismo* is a very widely-used term on the island since the 1990s, especially associated with the dollarization of the economy and the emergence of the tourism industry. It mostly refers to an extended form of female prostitution and related businesses mainly with foreign tourists. Those who practice it are called "jineteras." In the case of male prostitution, it is called "*pinguismo*" and "*pingueros*" respectively.

complete indifference, suspended in a vacuum where no political system seems to completely satisfy them, therefore they don't want to belong anywhere (*Utopia* 257). Moreover, *los ingravidos* like Zeta mark an important difference with the illusions, emotions and engagement of the "New Man" represented in her parent's generation, who they believed were entrusted with building a new society. In contrast, there is no such seriousness or importance in *los ingravidos*' existence, because ideology, morals and even affections are worthless to them (259-260). Zeta doesn't entertain any "modern" pretension or utopian proposal to improve or change the context she lives in. The promises of the revolutionary future "disintegrated" or basically never really counted for her as a modern redemptive or illusory space for correctness to deal with the shortcomings or dissatisfactions of her present life.

The novel could be also read as a story of the unresolved homicide of Moisés, Zeta's abusive boyfriend, written by Linda Roth, an accomplished and irreverent lesbian and feminist writer of Jewish origin who is her best friend. But in some moments is suggested that Zeta is also writing the text from the naïve and perplexed gaze of someone who doesn't seem to understand quite well what is going on. Trying to destabilize the reader in an interplay of fiction within fiction, and a positional exchange between the narrator and some characters, Zeta the author inserts fragments of another homicide novel that Linda is writing, *Nocturno Sebastián*, about the murder of a young gay man whose father is a highly ranked military official obsessed with "converting" his son into a heterosexual man. At the same time, *Cien botellas* is referred to by Zeta the narrator with the name of another novel about a double homicide by Linda the author. I agree with López that the crimes- the mysteries and secondary stories that provide clues to discern

them- are ploys used by Portela in her fictional game. These ploys recreate the decadence of the shifting social context of the crisis at the turn of the century (qtd. in Portela xxiii), which seems to be the novel's main topic

Moisés is an embittered and frustrated former attorney and law professor who doesn't trust anybody, including Zeta; or any feelings, particularly love, which he disdains as unnecessary, unreal and weak. He is presented as a sordid man with a really bad temper and violent history, who used to have a traditional family and life. He is a misogynist who is always complaining about "them" as "the others" against which he is defined in the novel. Those presumable bureaucrats, who pretended to always be convinced about their actions and predicaments, allegedly "destroyed" his life. Moisés pours out all of his frustrations with the revolutionary bureaucrats and his personal life on Zeta, through constant bullying and a repertoire of repeated acts of physical violence. When they met, Moisés was homeless with a sordid appearance wandering in a park, but that didn't impede Zeta to feel instantly attracted to him. Her references to their sexual encounters are always accompanied by graphic narration of his violence towards her, but Zeta said she felt flattered just by being momentarily physically attached to him. She confesses being a sadomasochist in those moments: "Yo sentía miedo, claro está, pero también el placer del miedo" (Portela 171).

As one of the main characters and sometimes as a narrator, Linda openly expresses in different instances her hate for and repudiation of Moisés' attitude to the point of recreating different scenarios to make him disappear, including castration, poisoning or killing him (or that is what she as another narrator wants the reader to believe). According to Linda's militant feminism, Moisés is a depiction of the "evil" she

despises in all males. She criticizes Zeta's lack of courage and inability to put an end to her relationship with Moisés, which increases her determination to deal with him sooner or later: "O le ajustaba las cuentas y lo ponía en su sitio o dejaba de llamarse Linda Roth" (Portela 13). Nonetheless, Zeta repeatedly asserts how much she likes Moisés "...hasta lo más hondo, hasta el vértigo..." (12), to the point of "normalizing" his mistreatment of her:

Creo que Moisés no me odiaba. Es más, creo que en realidad yo no le importaba mucho. No le importaba nada. Su única obsesión eran "ellos", los granujas, los truhanes, los bandoleros. Los enemigos (...) En su combate contra la humanidad, yo le servía de *sparring* (...) En mí, cual desdichada persona interpuesta, se resumía de manera simbólica lo peor de la condición humana. (...) Ahora que lo pienso con calma, es posible que el pobre Moisés estuviese un poco enfermo. (Portela 18-19)

Zeta is more concerned to avoid an encounter between her friend Linda and her boyfriend than to the threat against her own life that Moisés represents and that sometimes she doesn't even seem to comprehend. Contrasting Zeta's personal stance with the resolute and outspoken courage of her friend Linda, it is difficult as a reader to relate to Zeta's masochism. Could it be her low self-esteem as a heterosexual woman that drives her to live with Moisés and manifests itself in the constant denigrating references to her own body and personality, also expressed by Linda and Moisés throughout the text? Or is it the need to fulfill the lack of affection in her life and family history with male company at any cost, even if that company eventually threatens her own existence? Is it possibly a reflection of the values she is entrusted to portray as a heterosexual woman, embedded in a predominantly heteronormative and phallogentric culture that Portela repeatedly tries to explain to the reader?

To approach these questions, I find very useful and subscribe to De Ferrari's analysis about what Zeta as a character could represent in ethical terms. For her, Zeta is a representation of an ethical subject that seeks emancipation from the collective moral project, and therefore defines herself against heroism and altruism to explore unexpected forms of community in non-conventional gender and ethical structures. One of these forms, that De Ferrari calls perversions, is precisely masochism as "a work of the negative" which, by altering the rules of self-formation produces the "violent reformation" of the revolutionary subject ("Community" 71-73). I agree with De Ferrari that Zeta's character is not devoid of agency to seek justice, as her submissive attitude seems to suggest in the first place. Instead, she considers that Portela's emphasis in presenting Zeta as basically a docile character, lacking willpower, eager to please others and incapable of making up her mind (about basically any pressing issue in her life) is a postmodern strategy to create confusion between her character and her acts so that the reader may empathize with her innocence (78).

The novel ends with the death of Moisés, who fell from a large black-curtained window in Zeta's apartment while she was sleeping. At the time Zeta was pregnant by Moisés but didn't want to let him know because she feared a predictable violent reaction from him. Alix, a silent but sinister former girlfriend of Linda, was living temporarily with them in Zeta's apartment, after being dumped by the writer for her obsession and jealousy towards her. The police concluded that Moisés' death was an accident, but Zeta suggests the possibility that Alix could have pushed Moisés through the window and then disappeared. There's no mention of the possibility of calling for "revolutionary justice" and institutions to solve the mystery because they are irrelevant for "*los ingravidos*"



characters. The resolution of the crime/mystery in the novel doesn't depend on the figure of a redemptive male detective who will re-establish the "revolutionary order" and properly punish the perpetrators in the name of the people, a common place in the revolutionary police novels.

When Zeta put together her own version about the events that led to Moisés' murder, she expressed a different view about her relationship with Moisés, probably for the first time in the novel. When she learned about her pregnancy, Zeta realized that if she wanted to have a baby she had to let go of Moisés. She even told him directly about her intentions. But he didn't take her seriously so it was clear Zeta was running out of options. Upon discovering the murder, Zeta felt happy and at the same time was taken aback by her excitement, which she acknowledged "(...) as her most perverse and horrifying confession (...)" (Portela 263).

In that regard, I agree with De Ferrari that the novel provides a solution to male coercion (that could be extended to the national project as the context that shapes power relationships) through the creation of an arrangement of justice based on a community of non-traditional morals like self-degradation and female solidarity, which became redemptive actions that brought justice to Zeta- as an oppressed subject. However, I don't see Zeta's masochism as redemptive regarding patriarchy as De Ferrari does, because her character doesn't have or want a purpose, such as finding a way out of her abusive relationship. She even defends her sadomasochist sexuality: "Aquella onda sadomasoquista, me encantaba. Me enloquecía al punto que llegué a enviarme, a necesitarlo como si fuera una droga" (171). Even when it seems her "perverted" co-dependence on Moisés has reached a peak with her pregnancy, she confesses that she

can't abandon him because her body, which controls her, still "lo adoraba" (272), and years after his death she sometimes feels nostalgic for him.

Nevertheless, I concur with both De Ferrari and López that Portela resolves Zeta's dilemma through literature. As readers, we already know at this point Zeta's limitations as a female character. She either chose or "didn't have any other option" but to submit to the power and patriarchy that Moisés represents. Linda, who seems to be the author in this part of the text, resolves Zeta's "limitations" as a heterosexual female. She provides agency to other lesbian female characters like Linda the writer and the lunatic and "baffling" Alix, who seems to be the perpetrator of Moisés death. The recreation of the lesbian and homosexual worlds is one of the main goals of Portela's post-soviet fictional exploration, which could be read as emancipatory alternative spaces for those subjects that no longer feel part of the revolutionary national project.

#### 2.1.2- "Other" identities and the "New Woman"

The postmodern "invitation" to question the stability and values of national identity as a modern metanarrative extends to the analysis of gender constructions, and is instrumental in reading Portela's female characters. For Butler, identities are not fixed or stable systems of values, ways of being or acting inherent to human beings, but socially constructed through the systematic enactment of discourse and performance. Therefore, femininity (like national identity) is not a predetermined or defined structure, neither a natural, linguistic or cultural essence, but a construction resulting from a repetition of acts that are renewed, revised, consolidated throughout time and regulated by social conventions. These determine that gender take on dichotomous representations and normative regimes, by which the feminine is associated with nature and the private space,

while masculinity is associated with the rational and the public sphere (“Performative” 270-274). Butler suggests questioning the framework that privileges a heterosexual vision as origin and principle (“Imitation” 121). *Cien botellas* depicts a critical stance on modern gender constructions by portraying the symbolic disintegration of the traditional national male subject, the “New Man” represented by the decadent Moisés; and by bringing to centre stage and providing agency to “other” gender identities through textual representations, in particular different kinds of women and lesbians. For Sarabia, Portela does that in the framework of gender representations by providing the lesbian subject with economic self-sufficiency, authorial power and an attitude of indifference with the Cuban project of social emancipation (41), exemplified in Linda’s character.

Linda is Zeta’s best friend and her antithesis. She is an accomplished writer of noir fiction, an agnostic of Jewish origin who, like the novel’s author, has managed to live in Cuba and successfully publish abroad. Zeta describes Linda’s attributes with admiration, in contrast to herself: “Ella es una escritora profesional, una escritora de verdad, viajera, ambiciosa y enérgica, a sus horas feminista y con pensamientos de gran envergadura” (Portela 13). Portela provides the narrative voice with the female gaze of Zeta, who is a heterosexual female character. However, Zeta expresses constant self-doubts about her capacity as a writer in contrast to Linda, who is writing a novel with the same topic and title that Zeta is narrating, and where she is the main character. That interplay between narrator and characters mentioned before suggests the possibility that Linda is the real authorial power of Zeta’s voice as a narrator (Sarabia 191).

Throughout the text Linda criticizes Zeta’s passivity, conservatism and low self-esteem, in particular in her masochist relationship with Moisés. Despite that, they have a

loyal sense of friendship that provides Zeta with an alternative to her decadent life. Linda is for Zeta someone to talk to with a different worldview and personal experience from her own. At the end, Linda even provides Zeta a way out of her submissive life; after Moisés death, pregnant Zeta moves to Linda's apartment. Linda is an active lesbian with a high self-esteem. In her lesbian community, Linda is praised as a tough and accomplished character, independent, educated, an intellectual who speaks several languages. She comfortably performs her gender identity between sophistication and marginal registers. Therefore, she is a disputed object of desire among her lesbian cohorts. When both Linda and Zeta arrived to a birthday party of her lesbian friends, Zeta narrates how they all ran to Linda, trying to say hi and kiss her, and repeatedly shouted: "¡Ahí está el angel! (...) ¡Llegó el angel! (Portela 143; 144).

Unlike Zeta, Linda constantly despises men and openly challenges heterosexuality as the culturally prevailing referent for female gender performance. Complaining about the prohibition of female boxing, she imagines the boxing ring as an ideal space to "knock out" men:

—Que delicia estar en capacidad de noquear a un tipo bien corpulento—, darle sus buenos trompones, aplastarle la nariz, desencajarle la mandíbula, romperle los dientes, crash crash crash (...) Fíjate que me erizo y todo (...). (Portela 23)

Or when referring to games they played as kids in their neighborhood like baseball, marbles and kite flying, which are usually considered for boys, Linda provides another rational analysis of the patriarchal system and gender discrimination behind the assignment of gender roles even evident in kid's games: "Llamarlos así (boys games) es uno de los modos más insidiosos de que se vale el sistema patriarcal para distribuir los

roles a su conveniencia y perpetuar la discriminación genérica” (Portela 35).

Also in contrast to Zeta, Linda represents an autonomous economic subject like some that emerged during the Special Period; her living and personal economy does not depend on state institutions for the most part. She is one of the few individuals who could get clandestine access to the Internet, has a passport from the European Community and a good network of professional and personal contacts; therefore, she constantly travels outside the island and has access to foreign currency. Portela provides Linda with all the contrasting capacities and agency that are lacking in Zeta. But Linda’s agency as a female and lesbian is not deployed in the traditional moral framework of the revolution, as the invocation of a (male) collective and “heroic” consciousness of individual constant “sacrifice” and “restraint,” but in the realm of a strengthening individualism, as “the alternative to the totalitarian logic of the revolution” (Ichikawa 66). This redemptive post-soviet individualism does not mean amorality for Ferrari, but instead is based on “ethics of self-love” as Ichikawa suggests, as well as in a pleasure autonomous from moral values, and a more varied set of ethics and alternative alliances, facilitating the moral emancipation of the individual from a collective project that conflates ethics and ideology along gender lines (*Community* 60-64).

The novel abounds in feminine solidarity as a different sense of emancipatory community, alternative alliances and morals. Not only is the friendship between Zeta and Linda an example of that, but also the gathering of lesbians that takes place at La Gofia and Mari La Roja’s apartment in Centro Habana. They are two of Linda’s best friends. They regularly celebrate parties that turn into “a permissive space where one could freely express those feelings and desires that are repressed elsewhere; a place where one can

meet other women and maybe find a partner. An island within the island.” (De Ferrari *Community* 72). The external pressure coming from the political realm of the national context to “correct” this “gender deviation” was still there. The neighborhood’s chief of police threatened to shut down this space with different political excuses: “...conspiracy, subversion, enemy’s agents...” (Portela 198) although the narrator let us know that he personally was not interested in politics. In order to preserve the continuity of these parties, it was assumed among the participants that everything was permitted except to talk about politics, which reflects how self-censorship still permeates even more permissible spaces for identity negotiation, as a typical strategy of self-preservation embedded among Cubans born and raised after the revolution vis-à-vis the constant threats from state institutions to repress individual agency even in private spaces.

I think Portela’s feminism is evident in the novel for the following reasons: she provides a female gaze to the narrative voice; she focuses on female characters; she endows many of her characters, especially Linda, with feminist discourse; and she recreates lesbian worlds as emancipatory spaces of agency in the midst of the deconstruction of the revolutionary cosmology. For Cuesta, she depicts the emergence of a particular female vision among writers of the nineties:

Para las mujeres y sus representaciones en la ficción, se trata de un imaginario que a fuerza de buscar alternativas de sobrevivencia al hambre y la abulia quedó desplazado desde la figura de la federada-guerrillera hasta la prostituta, la asesina, la balsera o la alcohólica-drogadicta, entre otras, siempre marcadas negativamente bajo la ética socialista... otras iconografías del mundo femenino. (280)

However, Portela’s feminist “idealization of the image of the female writer” (Cuesta 222) should not be taken literally. When answering a question in an interview

about the significance of being a woman writer, she replies that for her it doesn't mean anything, and adds the following:

Hay investigadoras y teóricas feministas- y que conste que para mi “feminismo” no es una mala palabra-que, valiéndose de un aparato teórico impresionante, que incluye filosofía, sociología, psicoanálisis, Lacan, Derrida y una pila de cosas más, y que me perdonen la simplificación, llegan a saber de una más que una misma. Si bien a menudo entiendo más o menos el cinco por ciento de lo que dicen, porque se expresan en una especie de dialecto medio jeroglífico, supongo que se trata de un saber legítimo, pues hay becas, doctorados, congresos, debates, cátedras universitarias, tesis magistrales, publicaciones y hasta mercados. Todo un mundo. Y en ese mundo, pletórico de arrogancia, las simples e inofensivas escritoras no somos más que ratas de laboratorio. No es que me moleste. Para nada. Digamos que me asombra. Que las teorías literarias, feministas o no, se vayan por encima de la literatura, torturando a los textos para obligarlos a decir lo que de ninguna manera dicen, no es nada nuevo... (Portela “No se” 38)

Portela is very aware of the state of literary criticism and academic debates on feminism, and resists any categorizations or vindication based on a (situated) feminist agenda as an advantageous locus of enunciation or visibility that this condition could imply. Portela does not intend to propose new systems of “truths” or metanarratives to “guide” the comprehension of the crisis of Cuban socialism or the place of the female voice in that context. She is more interested in deconstructing those “truths” or metanarratives— like the perdurability and centrality of a collective sense of national identity, the entitlement of the national official discourse, and the “impermeability” of sexual identities attributed to the performance of the “New Man” or Cuban macho— with a self-conscious ironic gaze. For that purpose, she plays with the multiplicity and hybridity of other identities and loci of enunciation. She also challenges the privileged

place of a heterosexual culture embedded in the revolutionary cosmology.

### 2.1.3- The roughness of “the new nation”

For Lyotard, in *The postmodern condition* (1979), one of the principal features of postmodernity is the incredulity in regards to metanarratives, as “transcendental modern categories to interpret and norm reality” (qtd. in Hopenhayn 159), and the ideals of liberation associated with them. In the post-industrial era, the far-reaching roles of metanarratives as epistemological tools that legitimate knowledge, as well as the ideas of directionality, linearity and progress associated with them, are eroded. For Lyotard, the importance of the humanist metanarrative has diminished at the turn of the century because power has become even more central. Power responds to pragmatic values of efficiency disconnected from “the realization of the spirit life and the emancipation of humanity” (96). But he knows this is not a phenomenon exclusive to capitalism but also to Marxism as another modern metanarrative. Although aware of their differences, in “Lessons in Paganism” (1977) Lyotard finds commonalities between both metanarratives such as: being monological, based on a supposed consensus, and having an aura of immutability and stability that sustain them from spatial and temporal factors (145). In the case of the Marxist metanarrative, Lyotard considers that the nation-state is embodied in the authority of the party to provide or take away consent (131-132). Metanarratives are challenged by “little histories” that come from non-authorized or non-legitimized voices, that mark plurality and diversity, and that ensure the renovation of political processes (126; 134). Literature is one of the cultural fields where this challenge takes place.



Like other critics, I see *Cien Botellas* as a postmodern narrative because it eludes and deconstructs the centrality of the revolutionary national imaginary. Instead of an open affront, a quest for causes, or any attempt to look for utopian or systems of truths alternative to the context of decadence represented by the crisis, Portela resorts to a conscious and predominant use of irony and sarcasm. Both impregnate her writing style in the voice and observations of Zeta as a narrator; the sound opinions of Linda as a character and the events she is writing about within the novel; the psychological profiles and interactions of different characters; the recreation of the decadence of the material and existential surroundings and the jargon and language of marginal people. Portela's irony is also present in the abundant use of foot notes through which she tries to explain inscrutable aspects about the novel's social and local context. Her footnotes are also a way for Portela to personally engage with historical inquiries about the construction of the national project—where her ironic critical stance is even clearer—and also plays with a vast register of literary and cultural references. I agree with Casamayor that in the context of alienation, marginality and lack of ideals generated by the crisis in the novel, irony and sarcasm replace social agency (*Utopia* 276).

In the novel, the narrator and “*los ingravidos*” characters constantly recreate their spatial and historical context, which refers to the emergence of a tough nation. They are away from any association with the idea of progress and a better future. In the novel, the historical promise of the state acting in harmony with the interests of individuals, as the socialist metanarrative proclaimed, is vanishing. Portela provides her characters with a deviant position critical of the metanarrative of the national project of the revolution. “Nunca me he preocupado por el futuro” (Portela 36) says Zeta, while narrating how she

learned to steal cars and sell their parts as the only way to avoid starving during the Special Period. Zeta's existence is not an exception. Constantly at the edge of illegality, by trading literally anything in the black market in order to earn a living, became a perpetual among her generational cohort in the Special Period. She describes how the black market has become the new reality for Cubans' daily subsistence:

A cada rato me tocan la puerta para venderme algo, desde una lata con dulce de coco hasta una cuchillita de afeitar, desde un cubo de aluminio hasta un pomo con aceite de hígado de bacalao, desde un par de chancletas plásticas hasta un carretel de hilo color naranja, cualquier cosa. (Portela 39)

The benefactor socialist state could no longer provide the minimal conditions for survival to the general population, and at the same time was still in control of most forms of economic initiative and property. The population was forced to steal from the institutions in order to survive, while the government criminalized most of individuals' resourcefulness in getting products for daily subsistence like food and medicines. “*Resolver*” (to resolve) and “*conseguir*” (to get/find something) displaced the verb “*comprar*” (to sell) in the new circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

Illegality emerged as an important mean of survival in the midst of this general crisis of lack of food and hunger. The new “Cuban diet” of the Special Period is described eloquently in Zeta's words:

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<sup>35</sup> According to Rachel A. Ewy: “The word *resolver* is a Spanish term coined in Cuba to refer to the various means by which one “gets by” with what one has. The term became more prominent during the 90's crisis to describe a primary way of living (...). It encompasses the ability of Cubans both to provide for themselves and their families, and to use their ingenuity to reuse, recycle, and repair the old when the new is unavailable or unattainable (See Ewy).

El día anterior (y el otro y el otro y el otro...) me había acostado en blanco. Un vaso de agua con azúcar, un cacho de pan que parecía fabricado con arena o estropajo de aluminio...Ni arroz ni merluza ni ilusiones. (Portela 74)

That existential distress is recreated more ironically by Portela and, as we will see in the next section, more intensely by the narrator of *Trilogía*. It prompted *los ingravidos* characters of the Special Period to spend most of their daily life trying to find something to eat, as well as getting lost in alcohol, sex and drugs. The crisis' options for "getting lost" also included prostitution of different sorts, to either find a way out of the country or to just to get by. Despite the despair and this context of struggle, the destabilization of the national history in Portela's novel is portrayed without anguish (*Cuesta Cuba Post-soviética*), from a detached locus of enunciation.

The narrator in Portela adroitly recreates the material decadence that inhabits *el Vedado*, one of the most central neighbourhoods in Havana. Despite basically being a residential neighborhood, in the text *El Vedado* does not escape the proliferation of *solares* (tenements) and *cuarterías* (single room occupancy units) in the corner of "*El Martillo Alegre*," the specific literary urban space where the novel takes place. Through recurrent passages throughout the text, the reader becomes familiar with a material environment of blunt decadence, where many of the characters live in overcrowded and dilapidated urban spaces and ruins that may crumble at any moment. The novel's characters coexist with animals for consumption in their living spaces and suffer constant blackouts, etc. The novel recreates Havana as an urban space of the Special Period where new literary figures and images that practically didn't exist or were not that visible before prevail. These figures and images are homeless scavenging in the garbage, and people begging, a re-emergence of racism, the proliferation of prostitution, alcoholism, and

widespread and diverse drug use. The decadence of *El Vedado* as an urban space is a microcosmic representation of the decadence of Havana, and by extension of the revolutionary national project brought about by the 1990's crisis.

## 2.2- Wilderness and Marginality in Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* (1998)

### 2.2.1- The disenchantment of the revolutionary intellectual

*Trilogía* is a novel composed of three sections of short stories and is part of a pentalogy known as “El Ciclo Centrohavana,” published first and more widely recognized outside the island since the 1990s until the first part of the 21-century.<sup>36</sup> For critic Desiderio Navarro, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez is a “tamizdat” writer who depicts a distinctive condition acquired by some writers of the nineties narrative boom, also the case of Ena Lucía Portela).<sup>37</sup> For Whitfield:

“Tamizdat” refers to a writer who resides in Cuba, with little institutional affiliation on the island, whose literary work is published mainly abroad and is basically available to readers and critics through no official channels. (“Un arte” 17)

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<sup>36</sup> In addition to *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* (1998), El Ciclo Centro Habana pentalogy is composed by the following text: *El Rey de La Habana* (The King of Havana) (1999), *Animal tropical* (Tropical Animal) (2000), *El insaciable hombre araña* (The Insatiable Spider-man) (2002) and *Carne de perro* (Dog Meat) (2003). See [www.pedrojuangutierrez.com](http://www.pedrojuangutierrez.com).

<sup>37</sup> According to the online Britannic Encyclopedia, the term tamizdat is use to define: “...Second, unofficial literature written within the Soviet Union that came to include works circulated illegally in typewritten copies (“samizdat”), works smuggled abroad for publication (“tamizdat”), and works written “for the drawer,” or not published until decades after they were written (“delayed” literature).” According to Desiderio Navarro, in “Media res publica” the term tamizdat: “Designa las ediciones norteamericanas, eurooccidentales, etc. de textos de autores soviéticos y de otros países del bloque socialista que, por decisiones gubernamentales, no podían ser publicados en sus respectivos países de origen.”

In Chapter 1, I examined how the institutional framework centralized practically all realms of cultural activity in the revolutionary Cuban context. As a result of the crisis, there was a certain “pragmatic” tolerance towards writers critical of the revolution, like Portela and Gutiérrez. Eventually, several of their works have been published on the island. They have managed to live on the island and sustain themselves outside the institutional realm by their transnational endeavours. I see this as a distinctive form of transnationalism in the post’ 59 Cuban cultural scene—which could be the norm in other countries but until the nineties was hardly an option for artists living on the island (with few exceptions).

As a result of the crisis, publishing was severely affected since it could no longer rely on state subsidies. Hence, the government adopted some regulations that yielded certain control to writers over hard currency benefits derived from their intellectual property rights and contract negotiations (Whitfield *Cuban Currency* 79). The crisis also affected the role of the writer as a revolutionary intellectual who, under the altruistic pressures of the “New Man” rhetoric, “defined its Cuban citizenship in terms of his/her willingness to sacrifice their body for the nation” (De Ferrari *Community* 11). According to De Ferrari, until the nineties the conditions for agency of the socialist revolutionary intellectual were reduced to the enjoyment of certain aesthetic freedoms, while staying away from social and political problems (12). This was also associated with an often-conservative stance of writers and especially critics that Navarro attributes to their fear of government censorship (De Ferrari *Community* 14). Following Bourdieu’s notion that taste and aesthetic judgment are related to the administration of social capital (Idem), I subscribe to De Ferrari’s analysis that the privileging of the aesthetic realm in a good deal

of Cuban socialist literature is also associated with a notion of aesthetic value that conveys a sense of social prestige, because it is considered a superior and differentiated social practice in a society where symbolic power has been highly regarded. Therefore, the Cuban intellectual class has subscribed to its own elitism in the name of making peace with the revolution (13-14), and also for pragmatic reasons of self-preservation, among others. In the shifting and loosened conditions of the Special Period, some intellectuals, writers and artists were able to gain certain economic control over their work, and travel abroad without losing their citizenship privileges, so long as they were able to find someone or an institution abroad to assume full responsibility for their invitation and travel expenses. However, the leverage gained by intellectuals since the Special Period is a fragile and still constrained space, due to the highly ideological character of the national project, where cultural production and the exercise of aesthetic criticism is ultimately legitimated by its acceptance by the institutional framework. For De Ferrari:

(...) intellectual labor as a concrete social practice is persistently restricted in the name of the “health” of the revolutionary project. The dependence on government to sponsorship for the creation and dissemination of intellectual work tends to compromise it. Artists must be accountable for their work vis. a vis. governmental expectations that although not clearly spelled out, are binding and powerfully so. (*Community* 16)

This delicate balance for artistic creation still present in revolutionary cultural practice, together with the sudden generalized deteriorating economic and living conditions of the time of crisis, forced many other intellectuals and writers to migrate sooner or later. That was the case for Guillermo Rosales, Carlos Victoria, Jesus Díaz, Abilio Estévez, Antonio Jose Ponte, Iván de la Nuez, Eliseo Alberto Diego, Rafael Rojas,

among many others. That also happened to a significant number of musicians, who since then have created a transnational network of cultural production across several countries, the topic of Chapter 3.

For those post-soviet writers who decided to stay, one of the greatest challenges since the crisis was their utopian desire to maintain their cultural activity simultaneously free of the pressures of an international market and of the ideological restrictions historically imposed by the government, which led many to maintain the status quo (De Ferrari *Community* 18). Despite that complex context of agency in which Cuban intellectuals, artists and writers had to manoeuvre, the post-crisis opening to tourism, access to foreign markets, and the dollarization of the economy opened up spaces for alternative and more openly disengaged literary voices.

That is the context that shaped *Trilogía* and to which Gutierrez reacts. Pedro Juan, his protagonist and narrator, had a relatively normal life before the crisis: he had a stable job as a journalist, was married, had kids and used to live with his family. The crisis left him without a job and family, living in a crumbling solar (*tenement*) in Centro Habana—one of the most forgotten and marginal neighbourhoods in Havana—and progressively succumbing to a permanent state of alienation. The novel is narrated in the first person with semiautobiographical elements, where fiction and reality intertwine. Pedro Juan, the narrator, recreates in a very detailed and reiterative manner how the crisis hardened him as an individual, and made him abandon all ethics in order to survive. Hence his illustrative sentence in the following claustrophobic monologue: “Tenía tres opciones: o me endurecía, o me volvía loco, o me suicidaba. Así que era fácil decidir: tenía que endurecerme” (Gutiérrez 29). The options for survival were not that many for those not

close enough to government circles, with no access to foreign currency, “not brave or crazy enough” to live on the edge of illegality, or with no family abroad that could help them economically with foreign currency. They either bow to the institutional bureaucracy earning little or not enough money to make ends meet, or migrate or alienate themselves. Alienation was Pedro Juan’s option. Casamayor identifies a modern literary tradition of *el absurdo* (the absurd) in Cuban literature in authors like Reynaldo Arenas. Characters succumbed in anguish and desperation because they are convinced of the impossibility to find any solution to the chaos they live in. They do not intend to escape but embrace that situation as their main ethical project, falling to the bottom of marginality and adopting (a quasi-) animalistic existence (*Utopia* 29; 185-187). Following this logic, Casamayor regards Pedro Juan as an *absurd* subject, dominated by desperation, full of bitterness and whose existential choice is not to take anything seriously. On the contrary, he immerses himself in the most profound cynicism, getting rid of all his previous (moral) convictions (215).

Quiroga explains the bitterness in the revolutionary subject coming from the power of the state. It’s the state that allows the subject to constitute itself. The state classifies and distinguishes citizens from noncitizens, those who belong and those who do not. It provides its own vision for the future and repeatedly motivates citizens to emulate heroic figures in every action. In Quiroga’s opinion, there is no real redemptive power to bitterness because it remains within the temporal framework of a relationship with the state (17-18). In different moments of the novel, Pedro Juan, as narrator and protagonist, repeats a series of phrases to capture the reader’s attention about his existential trajectory



from the revolution into the crisis, where depression, fear of loneliness, stress and wilderness led him to become a bitter character:

“ Estuve encerrado dentro de mí, derrumbándome dentro de mí” (...) (29); “(...) yo seguía desequilibrado y me parecía excesiva mi soledad” (35); “La claustrofobia fue tan horrible que a veces me despertaba sobresaltado de noche y salía corriendo de la cama. Me sentía encerrado dentro de la noche, dentro del cuarto, dentro de mí (...) (29); (...) no percibía que era un gran muerto de hambre. Un digno y romántico muerto de hambre (...) (32-33); “Así, Nada de paz y tranquilidad (...)” (121). (Gutiérrez)

Pedro Juan’s bitterness certainly could be understood as a result of his transition from a subject identity heavily constructed by the ideology, illusions, morals and actions of state-power during the revolutionary period, to a place of emptiness as a result of the distressing effects of the nineties crisis. Despair, loss of faith, bare survival and abandonment of self define his sensibility, thinking and agency as an individual. Pedro Juan's existence is trapped in the absurdity of a chaotic national situation that doesn't seem to have a way-out for most of its former beneficiaries.

For Lechner, the history of the human being in the West has been the story of the rationalization of life (132). A certain disdain and lack of trust in the determinism of science and in the legitimate character of modern metanarratives at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, paved the return to disenchantment and scepticism. Although disenchantment has been a recurrent existential topic, it has gained renewed traction by being associated with postmodern attitudes. If Weber considers disenchantment linked to a modern attitude of disbelief in the rules of religiosity of the world (123-124), for Lechner the idea of a postmodern condition implies disenchantment with modernity. In that regard, disenchantment could be understood not only as the loss of illusions and/or suspicion of

modern metanarratives as ordering frameworks to imagine the future, but also as a reinterpretation of desire, of rethinking politics (Idem). Disenchantment as a postmodern attitude is also associated with the loss of faith in the state, as an apparatus of domination and control that embodies the collective will against the individual. Lechner sees a constructive dimension in postmodern disenchantment, as it offers a possibility of re-signifying reality. This dimension is threatening, because it destroys familiar landscapes, and therefore creates uncertainty and fear of loss. It's also stimulating for its potential for change and for tolerating a plurality of rationalities vs. the false homogenization imposed by modern formal rationality (129-133).

In sum, Pedro Juan is a postmodern disenchanted subject. Through his behaviour as the main character and in his reflections as the novel's narrator, Pedro Juan is constantly conveying his frustration with and disregard for the metanarrative of the revolutionary national project.

Pedro Juan, the author, confirms in an interview the autobiographical elements of his disenchantment in the midst of the Special Period that he transfers to the novel:

...cuando comienzo a escribir Trilogía estaba en medio de una crisis personal muy fuerte, muy aguda, muy violenta, que me probó. Incluso, a veces tuve hasta intenciones suicidas, una cosa terrible, verte sin dinero, sin comida, "embarca'o", solo, la casa sin muebles, una situación terrible para una persona que no estaba acostumbrada a vivir así. Yo había sido un periodista de alto nivel de confianza, siempre con carro, una casa y el refrigerador lleno de comida, con una familia, viajando por todas partes y de pronto me quedé sin nada. El país entrando en una crisis económica, política y social muy aguda que culmina quizás, se supone que termina con la crisis de los balseros en agosto del 94, y en esa situación comienzo a escribir lo que yo nunca había escrito. ("Pedro Juan" Parte 1)

Lechner warns that after a certain point, disenchantment ceases to be a beneficial loss of illusion and transforms into a dangerous loss of meaning (136). Pedro Juan the author reached that nadir when he contemplated suicide in the middle of the crisis. The novel abounds in those “low” moments, like when he got jailed and even put into solitary confinement for working as a male prostitute with foreign female tourists. In the text he converted his disenchantment into a personal and anguishing crusade to forget about everything. His present moment in the novel is a lost time that doesn’t count, where there’s no opportunity for any idea of collective redemption or utopia. During the Special Period, his existential and material degradation is the norm, not only for him but also for most of the characters. The sense of history and/or personal progression he experienced when he was part of the system as a “civilized” revolutionary no longer exists: the present moment is the only time that really counts for him now.

There is a time in the novel in which Pedro Juan still had illusions that as an individual he could change something with his actions. When he was working as a journalist, he became so frustrated with the weight of the state censorship that he decided to write raw and heartbreaking short stories. That explains his option to write as an act of resistance. Pedro Juan, the narrator, says:

En tiempos tan desgarradores no se puede escribir suavemente. Sin delicadezas a nuestro alrededor, imposible fabricar textos exquisitos. Escribo para pinchar un poco y obligar a otros a oler la mierda. Hay que bajar el hocico al piso y oler la mierda. Así aterrorizo a los cobardes y jodo a los que gustan amordazar a quienes podemos hablar. (Gutiérrez 97)

But his act of writing is not aimed at inscribing his work in the Cuban canon of “high literature” through an exploration of forms, styles or a repertoire of references and intertextuality, as Portela does. The rawness of his contextual circumstances seems to impose a need to represent and immerse the readers into the roughest aspects of the Cuban reality of the nineties. At the same time, the fictionality of the novel reveals by the explicit intention of Gutierrez to disturb, provoke and shock the reader. Pedro Juan the narrator tries to convince the reader in several instances that the protagonist got to the point of no return, of ideological disillusionment and no compromise with any modern metanarrative. That is associated with his postmodern disenchantment.

El problema es que en la vida te vas agotando, sencillamente, y a estas alturas de mi vida yo no creo ni en la política ni en los políticos, ni creo en las ideologías de ningún tipo, ni de izquierda, ni de derecha, ni de centro (...) Yo me entregué muchísimo a un proyecto revolucionario humanista, pero llegó un momento en que me agoté, por razones que no voy a analizar ahora, y me dije: "hasta aquí, a partir de ahora me voy a dedicar a la literatura". Desilusión total con la política y con los políticos; con todos y creo que soy coherente: no creo que las ideologías puedan resolver los problemas de este planeta. (“Pedro Juan” Parte 4)

In that same interview, Gutierrez recognized that writing was his choice for coping with his own disenchantment and despair. As in *Cien Botellas*, literature became one of the universal escapes, a fictional space of refuge and agency to deal with the challenges posed by the crisis. In a chapter with a title that speaks for itself, “Yo, revolcador de mierda,” Pedro Juan referred to a short story he is writing, that was forbidden in Spain because there was a strong reference to profanity. He recognized that the story could not be considered good, however what was important for him was reality, as such, as it was depicted on the streets. “You take it with both hands, and if you are

strong enough you let it fall over the white sheet of paper, unaltered, says Pedro Juan. Sometimes reality was so brutal that people don't even believe it" (Gutierrez 119). But in this interplay with the reality of the narrator as a writer, Pedro Juan was trying to provide authenticity to the author's text, and at the same time compelled the reader to believe in his different stories and depictions of reality with no reservations.

The shift to a post-soviet nation for the revolutionary intellectual also implies a certain sense of loss, a transition from the paternalism stimulated by the socialist metanarrative. For Rojas, that metanarrative promoted a precise sense of history and a tangible representation of each individual's personal destiny, "protected" by the notion of state's sovereignty ("Duelo e Ideal"). Could that post-soviet sense of nostalgia be another "marketing" strategy for the writers of the nineties? "As the market threatened to usurp revolutionary dogma as the antagonist of aesthetic integrity..." (Whitfield *Cuban Currency* 87), Whitfield identifies a sense of fear "as both apprehension and excitement" with the changes in the status quo and the new rules of the game (87). The writers of the nineties were born and raised under the paternalistic and controlling cultural policies of the revolutionary national project. All of the sudden, they had to engage with the uncertainties of the outside world and the market demands. The sense of nostalgia for the revolutionary past in *Trilogía* depicts the vacuum created by the collective and individual paradigmatic shift. The crisis unleashes a process of dispossession of the centrality of the revolutionary national project in the identity, agency and cosmology of the Cuban subject. The moral and ethical coordinates of that subject experienced an important shift. The patriarchal and altruistic collective will of the "New Man" was displaced by the most pressing and dark existential circumstances of survival of the individual. The new

moment was marked by absence of illusions, indifference and disbelief in any alternative project of progress in the short or long term.

### 2.2.2- Marginality

Gutiérrez is one of the 90s authors that focuses more openly on marginality as his privileged locus of enunciation to re-imagine the “social body” of the Cuban nation. This push to the limits of representation has been associated with the shift from the writers’ dependence on state institutions and the moral values of the “New Man,” to the demands of the international market in the midst of the crisis. Gutierrez’s narrative could be located in what Whitfield calls “sociological literature,” where there is a primacy of theme over form, a sort of denunciatory realism that features an intense thematic focus on the social failings of Cuba’s national revolutionary project (*Cuban Currency* 88-89). In a sort of persistent “naïve” posture in the extra literary field, Gutiérrez refuses to attribute this label to his literary work.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the novel, Pedro Juan has recurring moments where he is “perfecting” his disaffection and existential stance of avoiding any rationality in the shifting circumstances. However, he has some instances of reflection about the failures of the national project that led to the crisis. Referring to the revolutionary times, Pedro Juan

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<sup>38</sup> There are several interviews made to Pedro Juan Gutiérrez available online, where he repeatedly denies any direct connection between his literary work as a reflection of the economic and social circumstances of the 90s crisis and the Special Period. However, he recognizes the autobiographical elements of his character Pedro Juan with his life in Havana at the time. This apparent incongruence is typical of the constant negotiations that intellectuals who live in the island need to go through as commented on before, in order to preserve their status and at the same time try to avoid a direct confrontation with the cultural apparatus and its censorship.

says that “Cuba en plena construcción del socialismo era de una pureza virginal, de un delicioso estilo Inquisicional (...) (13). However, as he embarks on a historical assessment in times of crisis he realizes that after “treinta y cinco años construyendo el socialismo. Ya se acabó. Ahora hay que cambiar a esto otro. Y rápido” (111). His different short stories throughout the novel intensively recreate a world of no morals other than those that ensure survival. We find a proliferation of marginal characters, especially of black people, who act exclusively to find something to eat and to trade in the black market in search for dollars. Their spare time is spent mostly satisfying the most pressing bodily pleasures and addictions, removed from any sense of collective morals or affections for the other.

This propulsion to a denunciatory realism and testimonial literature makes the study of the narratives of the nineties more complex. The focus on the marginal has also been identified as a marketing strategy related to certain expectations from outside the island on what a Cuban author should write about in times of crisis of the socialist experience. “Marginal” authors of the nineties like Gutiérrez, Portela and Zoe Valdés, among others, acquired a rapid commercial success outside the island. This success also raises the previously mentioned issue of distinction in the literary field, and a certain disdain for a “descent” into the crassness of realist aesthetics. Before the crisis, writers felt compelled to preserve a notion of “true literature” as a mechanism of symbolic hierarchical differentiation, which assumes the possibility of cultural production beyond the context of power relationships. I understand and share this preoccupation for the role of power structures, either cultural institutions or the market, in shaping the content of cultural production in any given socio-historical circumstances. However, I think that the

“marginal” narratives of Gutiérrez and Portela cannot be attributed to a sensationalist interest to please the publishing international market during the nineties. I consider that both authors reflect the need, as intellectuals born and shaped by a socialist cosmology, to engage in their literary work with the unique dramatic circumstances of change they witness. The Special Period was such a devastating moment, not only sociologically but also at the individual level, that it was impossible to avoid. Authors also took advantage of the possibilities that opened up for some writers during the nineties in the international market, which in a way aligned the author’s cultural production with the demands of the market. Their emphasis on the recreation of the marginal could have annoyed those mainly concerned with the preservation of “high” literature. However, as any in other cultural field, I see literary production as part of the socio-historical context where it takes places. This is where I locate the importance of the marginal in Gutiérrez and Portela’s novels.

One of the most incisive manifestations of the marginal has been the important presence of *el solar* in Centro Habana as the novel’s urban setting and symbolic space that portrays the generalization of chaos and decadence, including the lack of life alternatives, the recourse to illegality, the waste of time, the rising violence, crime and prostitution, the proliferation of overcrowded living spaces, the lack of minimal sanitary conditions (including potable water) and the rampant deterioration of buildings that are left to decay, but that are not repaired because they are not part of the touristic circuit. Gutierrez’s description of an old elevator suggests the decadence of a place whose odours the reader can almost imagine:

Es un viejo aparato de los años treinta, quiero decir que tiene rejas y es abierto. Es feo porque es americano, no



como aquellos hermosos ascensores europeos de esa época que todavía trabajan suavemente en los hoteles del boulevard de la Villette y en otros barrios viejos de París. Este es un cacharro más tosco y simple. Muy oscuro porque los vecinos se roban los bombillos y con una peste permanente a orina, porquería y a los vómitos diarios de un borracho del cuarto piso. Uno sube y baja lentamente mirando el paisaje alrededor; cemento, pedazos de escalera, oscuridad, otro pedazo de escalera, las puertas de cada piso, alguien que espera y al fin se decide a seguir por la escalera, porque el ascensor se detiene cuando quiere y donde más le gusta. Muchas veces decide detenerse sin coincidir con las puertas de salida. Frente a uno solo está la pared de cemento áspero del pozo, y la gente grita: «¡Ahh, sáquenme de aquí, coño, que esto se trabó!.» (28)

*El solar* is a representation of a forgiving space, where important sectors of the Cuban population are abandoned to their own fate by the crisis despite the “socialist” state’s sustained rhetoric of collective solidarity and altruism for the common good.<sup>39</sup> Like all this debris, for Casamayor the promises and convictions of the socialist project were also dismantled (*Utopías* 228). I have already pointed out how both novels, *Cien Botellas* and *Trilogía*, emphasize the marginal as the common place of enunciation. However, I think Gutiérrez’s stands out by providing a detailed and closed picture of the process of progressive “dehumanization” suffered by many as a result of the crisis. According to Whitfield, *el solar* was cosmetically cleaned up in post 59 literature, but in the nineties it is reclaimed (*Cuban Currency* 115).

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<sup>39</sup> According to Candía Cáceres, in *Trilogía*, Gutiérrez articulates a process of de-canonization of the monumental city made in the narrative of Alejo Carpentier and Lezama Lima, and complements the demystification of Havana carried out in the works of Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy and Reinaldo Arenas (51-52). *Cien Botellas* does something similar. See also Moulin Civil.

The relationship between Omar and Berta is an example of this return of the *solar*. Omar is a young and attractive jobless *mestizo* who recently moved to *el solar* and who was flirting with Berta. Berta was an old and lonely widow who progressively had locked herself up in her apartment in the next to last floor of her building, where she preserved some old valuables. Her living space was full of debris and, since the elevator did not work, she hardly walked or went outside. As she got older, she was losing her physical strength and was increasingly scared. Berta did not have much to eat because her pension was not enough and she did not have any family to take care of her. Omar... “es la miseria en persona” (Gutiérrez 364) and as he doesn’t have or know any other means to survive, he devotes himself to seducing people in order to get anything from them, which is the case with Berta. After seducing and ultimately having sex with Berta, she decided to include him in her testament as the sole beneficiary, leaving him with her house and all her material possessions. Then he disappears because he was living with a younger albeit mature woman who provides for him. Berta succumbs to sadness and then dies.

For Casamayor:

“la inhumanidad” de los protagonistas de Gutiérrez se reconoce sobre todo en la carencia de proyección futura de sus acciones, marcadas por el hambre y otras pulsaciones irracionales. (Sus) actos se circunscriben al momento en que suceden, provocando una sensación de lentitud existencial. (*Utopías* 219)

That literary choice to deal with the most heartbreaking parts of the shifting realities of the revolutionary national project has raised some controversial critiques. It was dealt with in articles and debates on the island, and parts of it eloquently summed up

by Whitfield in *Cuban Currency*. Some attribute Gutierrez's emphasis on the marginal characters and places in his novels to a selling strategy, a response to the European publishing market's demands of what was expected to be narrated about the crisis in the last stronghold of the socialist bloc in the western hemisphere. Others like Victor Fowler, at the time implicitly criticized *Los Novísimos* writers for what he considered their self-imposed and self-indulgent retreat from society, as countercultural rebels and practitioners of foreign cultural models. Fowler's critique echoed a modernist need to preserve of the notion of "true" literature as a privileged space of symbolic distinction for some Cuban critics and intellectuals, as pointed out by De Ferrari. On the other hand, Portela addressed the distinct exploration of the underground life in Cuban literary production in the 1990s linked to the material conditions during the Special Period, including the insistence of official discourse and journalism to avoid representing these conditions, as well as the foreign market's interest in unveiling them. Although aware of the distinctions between "falsified" and "genuine" marginalities, she saw Gutiérrez's depiction of the marginal as rigorously faithful to details. The journal *Temas* also had a debate on the topic in 2001, referred to by Whitfield, in which some critics connected the increased visibility of marginality to other avoided topics such as racial discrimination and prejudice (*Cuban Currency* 110-112). As I ponder the "marginality" debate, I coincide with Whitfield's assessment that:

The foregrounding by Cuban literary and social critics of subjects whose marginal position is defined by their socioeconomic and racial status intersects with foreign reader's privileging of subjects who are recognizably Cubans for this very same status, and it places Gutierrez's books, mapped out against the margins of Centro Habana, at the vanguard of the period's literature. (*Idem* 112)

The focus of *Trilogía* in the representation of uncensored dimensions of the marginality of the Cuban society prompted by the crisis deconstructs and updates the inconsistencies generated by privileging an altruistic and homologous discourse of the “New Man” in the revolutionary cosmology. The marginal in the nineties literature seems to be at first such “a terrain for discovery,” because it exposes the accumulation of postponed existential and material dilemmas in the Cuban social fabric. Those dilemmas were avoided by the intellectual debate and were ultimately subordinated to the priorities of the nation-state, like the export of the mystifying discourse of “the achievements of the revolution.” The focus on the marginal also sheds light on the historical avoidance and silencing of the individual in the revolutionary national discourse, not subordinated to a collective will but in its unavoidable diversity as women, blacks, homosexuals, migrants, the forgotten, etc. For Quiroga, by the late 1990s the individual is at the centre of aesthetics, and marginality becomes a valid literary theme occupying the space left by the relative demise of the institutional network (140-141). This individual is represented in the novel by the preponderance of a first person narrative voice, which according to Sarabia constitutes an attempt to recuperate the loss of subjectivity in the process of collectivization and homogenization implicit in the utopian revolutionary project (86).

### 2.2.3- Wilderness

*Trilogía* privileges a tradition of realism in novels, more specifically the aesthetics of Dirty Realism, through the use of narrative strategies from the genre like the explicit,

repetitive and detailed recreation of dark and underground contexts of decadence.<sup>40</sup>

Together with marginality, Gutierrez's characters are immersed in a life driven by wilderness, a sort of barbaric existence led by all sorts of addictions and primordial impulses that seem to be the only path left to their liberation as individuals in the midst of the surrounding chaos. For Quiroga, the seduction of Gutierrez's stories lies in a combination of aesthetic realism and freedom from constraint (138).

The lack of options and the sudden and generalized transition to survival mode that the crisis signified for a lot of Cubans led Pedro Juan, who did not contemplate the exile option, to opt for survival strategies that dispensed with the socialist aspirations for high morals and exemplary social behaviour of a "New Man." Pedro Juan and the marginal characters of the novel are the "New Man's" moral antithesis, commonly using alcohol and drugs, making recourse to sexual promiscuity and all sort of violence as mechanisms of evasion, interaction, socialization, and instant gratification. The narrator insists that the reader gets familiar with all the details of the underground and hopeless world they have been subjected to as a result of the crisis. These features of the crisis's existential distress and chaos are more strongly and graphically revealed in *Trilogía* than

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<sup>40</sup> Gutiérrez's Dirty Realism has been referenced as a Caribbean version of Bukowski that pushes the limits of the genre as a "wild" literary trend. It recovers the marginality of North American streets and of themes related with alcoholism, sexuality, wilderness sex, prostitution and homosexuality. Among many critics, Bolaño identifies similitudes between Bukowski and Gutiérrez: "Una vida de múltiples trabajos, la mayoría aparentemente no relacionados con la literatura, un éxito tardío, una escritura sencilla, (...) unos temas comunes, como las mujeres, el alcohol y la lucha por sobrevivir" (213). According to Sierra Madero: "Los términos literatura sucia o "realismo sucio"... tienen que ver con la concepción higiénica y pudorosa ...y con las nociones de alta o baja cultura, lo letrado o lo iletrado; con creencias, códigos o prejuicios institucionalizados sobre lo sucio, lo limpio, lo bueno, lo malo, lo impropio, lo abyecto, lo obsceno, lo marginal; concepción en la que subyacen valoraciones que abarcan no sólo la literatura sino todas las relaciones sociales y que le reduce posibilidades de desarrollo a temáticas culturales alternativas respecto de lo considerado como la verdadera cultura" ("Literatura sucia" 29-30).

in Portela's novel, through a hyperrealist gaze. For De Ferrari, "the strategies used to define hyperrealism as an ethic of representation are a blunt factuality, a sensorial overload, and an exaggerated materiality" (*Community* 165).

The novel's story "Salíamos de las jaulas" begins with a photographic witnessing by Pedro Juan the narrator of the dealings of some marginal black men with a dead horse abandoned in the countryside:

Llegué a la casa de un guajiro y el tipo tenía un caballo muerto tirado en el patio. Ya con la panza medio hinchada. Apenas lograba contener a los negros: un enjambre de negros, con machetes, cuchillos y sacos. Querían descuartizar el animal y llevárselo a pedazos. Era una jauría. Los conté: ocho negros, flacos, hambrientos, sucios, con los ojos desorbitados, vestidos con harapos. El guajiro les explicaba que el animal murió enfermo y se pudría rápidamente. Ellos no le discutían. Solo le pedían sacarle un pedazo y ellos mismos enterrarían la cabeza, los cascos, lo que quedara de aquel animal sarnoso y esquelético, cubierto de moscas verdes. Por el culo le salían gusanos y pus. (Gutiérrez 162)

In this passage there is a detailed and graphic description of the different parts of the horse's putrefaction. The account is not only intensely visual, but is aimed to induce in the reader an experience of the images through visual, olfactory and tactile senses, a strategy that is repeated and successfully achieved in different parts of the text. Not only is the image centred on the horse, additional details are provided about the denigrating material and existential condition of the human characters. The narrator describes meticulously how poorly these characters are dressed and how physically deteriorated they look, which reinforces the grotesque character of the scene. Moreover, the tone used by the narrator to refer to the characters — who happen to be marginal blacks— and to describe their violent intentions, is openly derogative by associating them with a crowd of

animals. The contrast created by the animalization of the characters on one hand, and the denigrating materiality of the scene on the other hand, results in a shocking image consciously composed to create a strong impact around a certain “representation of reality.” The novel is heavily charged with similar grotesque detailed images that are difficult to avoid, and which seem to be aimed at eventually convincing the reader that she is experiencing firsthand a verisimilar context of chaos and human degradation.

The representation of black men and women as bestialized subjects referred to before is not an isolated passage, but a common trope throughout the novel.<sup>41</sup> As a marginal character in Centro Habana, Pedro Juan coexists and interacts with other blacks that are presented as the most marginal and most affected subjects of the crisis. However, in his condition as writer, narrator and ultimately “a detached voyeur” (Whitfield *Cuban Currency* 117) of the marginal, he situates himself at a remove from blacks, for they are the ones occupying the lowest place in the social scale among marginals. This is reinforced by his use of a systematic monolithic and denigrating language to talk about blacks, which reproduces essentialist modern stereotypes of black bodies in terms of otherness, animalization and inferiority.<sup>42</sup> According to Pedro Juan the narrator “los negros son así” (Gutiérrez 17), and throughout the text he recreates different scenes and provides his observations to explain these essentialist views i.e.: they don’t clean themselves often; they are used to live in filthy places with minimal or unsanitary conditions; they are noisy, rude and have a strong smell; they are continually associated

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<sup>41</sup> For additional references about wilderness, see Berlant.

<sup>42</sup> On the animalization of blacks, see also Fanon; Hall, “Introducción” and De la Fuente.

with excremental and eschatological representations (Cornejo Parriego 12); they are eager to eat anything they find, regardless of its quality; and they are not very smart, etc. In addition, the black male bodies are represented as the most phallic ones, confirming Fanon's identification of black males in western culture with their genitals as a social threat (qtd. in Cornejo-Parriego 13). According to Cornejo-Parriego, *Trilogía* ignores AfroCubans' specific history and conditions to offer a decontextualized, superficial and external picture of them, which is compulsively obsessed with the black body and sexuality and that recycles a colonial legacy. This legacy plays a double function of converting the black body into the symbol of the crisis of the Cuban nation and the (revolutionary) utopia, and ensures selling this body – transformed into novel – in the global market (10).<sup>43</sup> In his personal trajectory to alienation in the midst of the crisis, Pedro Juan chooses to live among black marginals as a sort of salvation, because they are bearers of what Casamayor calls “una distopía apocalíptica” (apocalyptic dystopia) (247). He wants to emulate this condition to a certain extent, which is very functional for his *absurd* existence, because in his view black people are not worried about the future. They have fragile links with the society's ethical values and maintain a certain “joy of life” despite the burden of their daily lives (*Utopia* 248).

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<sup>43</sup> Cornejo- Parriego indicates that the revolutionary government couldn't suppress discrimination against black people although it advanced some institutional and normative measures to improve their situation, like better access to education, job opportunities and recreational venues. At the same time, the government centralized and eliminated the debate about the racial question (as part of a notion that subordinates it to “the unity” of the revolutionary nation). As a result, several questions related with racism are pending in the public debate. Despite the improvements racial inequalities persist, especially in terms of political representation, economic opportunities, social stratification and marginality. Those questions were particularly aggravated by the nineties crisis (10-11).



Referring to *las mulatas*, Pedro Juan says that “son muy racistas. Mucho más que las blancas y las negras. No sé que sucede pero no resisten a los negros” (Gutiérrez 175). On other occasions, Pedro Juan seems to believe in the “supremacy” of *mestizos*, as better than pure black and white persons (Gutiérrez 163), a notion so widespread in Cuban culture that classifies blacks on the basis of “how white or black” they are perceived to be. I agree with Cornejo-Parriego’s analysis that the novel reveals the presence in the Cuban revolutionary national project of colonial notions of “pigmentocracy” and of imperatives to “improve” the race, associated with concepts of whitening and *mestizaje* which are still signified with progress (15).

For Casamayor, “el desenfreno posibilita la resistencia del sujeto a la crisis post-soviética cubana. Tal resistencia consiste en abandonarse a sí mismo en el caos, sin preocuparse por el futuro, la trascendencia o la perduración del cuerpo” (“Soñando” 559-60). Pedro Juan’s bodily reaction to the crisis is to abandon himself to a frenetic state of wilderness. One of the most salient manifestations of that wild existence is constantly getting lost in the “excesses” of the body through the consummation, voyeurism or planning of all kinds of graphic and promiscuous acts of sex. “El sexo desenfrenado me ayudaba a escapar de mí mismo (Gutiérrez 28), says Pedro Juan as one of his most prominent ethical statements, and he adds:

El sexo no es para gente escrupulosa. El sexo es un intercambio de líquidos, de fluidos, saliva, aliento y olores fuertes, orina, semen, mierda, sudor, microbios, bacterias. O no es. Si sólo es ternura y espiritualidad etérea entonces se queda en una parodia estéril de lo que pudo ser. Nada. (Gutiérrez 5)

Throughout the novel it seems that sex is one of the most important sources of instant gratification in the Special Period, one of the few “resources” that individuals can still have access to and where they can feel liberated from daily hardships. In the novel the importance of sex is also represented as one of the most visible “commodities” of the crisis that also contributed to the displacement of the morals of the “New Man.” In the midst of the crisis, for an increasing number of Cubans, especially but not exclusively women, sex was used to gain access to foreign currency, services and venues mostly destined for foreign tourists, products for daily subsistence, and opportunities to leave the island. For De Ferrari, Gutiérrez’s texts seem to promote the notion that tropical sex is a repository of Cubanness, an essence of national identity that has not been jeopardized by history (“Abjection” 207). The representation and jargon of “hypersexuality” in *Trilogía* seems to shock or create apprehension because of its transgressive character. This interpretation usually comes from assumptions in the heterosexual and patriarchal revolutionary cosmology of traditionally “ethical” and politically correct heterosexual norms. It also derives from the intellectual tradition that privileges literature as the epitome of “high culture.”

Pedro Juan’s most febrile and graphic sexual desires as a white heterosexual male are idealized and/or performed with the bodies of several blacks and *mulata* women, a choice that for Casamayor represents the protagonist’s decadence (*Utopía* 248). The bodies of black and *mulata* women are portrayed as the most available for a more lustful sex with the strongest desires. They are apparently more sexually liberated and less prejudiced to please his heterosexual male fantasies with minimal regard for affection. The narrator also suggests that black and *mulata* women seem to be more driven to

become prostitutes, and in some cases even enjoy being mistreated. That stereotypical representation of the “readiness” and “availability of the female black body to be possessed could be read as a reinforcement of a traditional trope of tropical exoticism that sells in the international market. In Pedro Juan’s view, black women are also prone to reproduce racial differentiation in the sexual terrain by socially “valorising” lighter skin blacks and white males as their ultimate objects of desire for social and economic mobility. Referring to his relationship with Miriam, a lighter *mestiza* and one of her lovers, he says:

Su falta de pudor llegaba a la grosería. Y eso me gustaba. Yo cada día era más indecente. A ella le gustaban los negros bien negros, para sentirse superior. Siempre me lo decía: ‘son groseros, pero les digo, ¡negro, échate pa’ allá!, y yo estoy por arriba porque soy clarita como la canela’. En realidad era aún más clara que la canela y todo lo valoraba así: los más negros abajo, los más claros arriba. Yo intenté explicarle, pero no quería cambiar de opinión. Me decía que no era así. Bueno, daba igual. Que se quedara con sus ideas. (Gutiérrez 49)

Pedro Juan’s particular “sexual scale of values” is also shaped by widespread colonial stereotypes and myths about *mestizaje*. He associates black women with dirt and the irrational (Casamayor “Negros” 67), while expressing his preference for *mulatas* who are “delusional and insatiable” (Gutiérrez 172). It has been suggested that the loosening of morals of the “New Man” provoked by the crisis are colour-blind. However, it is evident that the kind of liberalization for black people represented in *Trilogía* is in most cases retrograde and degrading, resulting in depictions that show how the shifting context has led to their further marginalization. Pedro Juan as a narrator adopts a view permeated by colonial conceptions about race that consider black people as “un objeto de repulsión,

y al mismo tiempo de atracción y fascinación en el imaginario occidental” (Cornejo-Parriego 20). Although in interviews Gutierrez recognizes being cruel and merciless with the construction of his characters, he refers this literary strategy to the aesthetics of Dark Realism. In his view, he explores the deepest and most antagonistic conflicts of human beings, aggravated by the crisis’ reality, regardless of how morally controversial it may result for some readers.<sup>44</sup> I concur with Casamayor analysis that Pedro Juan’s gaze towards his black characters is stereotypical and projects fatalism and weariness. However, in her opinion, that does not prevent recognition that the hostile world he describes is very real: “Su mirada desolada y cruel permite denunciar las miserables condiciones de vida de los negros marginales en los convulsos 90s” (“Negros” 67).

A side effect of the focus on the ethics of marginality and wilderness as a locus of enunciation is that since the nineties crisis there has been a profusion of exoticism of the marginal as context, subject, theme and prevalent image in Cuban cultural production, especially on the island, not only in literature but in other cultural fields like music and film. For Whitfield, the new orientation of the narrative of the nineties towards the marginal provides a way to see a Cuba that the Cold World had kept off limits. It implies a distrust of the official rhetoric that until the crisis obscured the sensual and personal dimensions under propagandistic optimism (*Cuban Currency* 109).

*Trilogía* is among those literary texts that best capture important shifts in the Cuban literary field since the nineties. Gutiérrez re-signified the use of testimonial and journalistic strategies in the revolutionary literary tradition. Like in *Cien botellas*,

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<sup>44</sup> See “Pedro Juan” Partes 1-4.

*Trilogía* documents the crisis of the socialist metanarrative of the Cuban revolution by moving the spotlight from the collective incarnation of the “New Man” to the voice of the forgotten individual massively converted into marginal beings, and to the generalization of material and existential distress prompted by the crisis. The narrators’ voice and gaze in both texts provides a close up of the disintegration of the promises and illusions of the discursive revolutionary utopia and the new harsh realities, i.e.: generalized hunger, lack of basic services and products for daily subsistence, the urge to procure foreign currency at any cost, the commodification of the body, the expansion of a landscape of material deterioration and ruins, the further marginalization of black people and the generalization of a survival mode, among others. More than a marketing strategy to attract the attention of the international publishing market, Gutierrez’s focus is on the recreation of the marginal and underground world and subjects—through a more scatological and irreverent prose than in Portela’s novel. That is a logical move for post-soviet Cuban writers who gained certain independence from the hegemonic discourse and the tutelage of the institutional framework and who, because of the space gained in the international market, have acquired leverage to negotiate a different literary place in the island’s post-soviet cultural context on their own terms.

In both *Trilogía* and *Cien Botellas*, the fictional game with literature became a liberatory space to counteract the disconnection of the frenetic triumphalism of the official national discourse with the dramatic changes the nineties crisis implied for Cuban society. The post-revolutionary subject that emanates from both novels is transgressive because the national project is no longer the centre of that subject’s imaginary or agency. Instead, there arise more immediate questions pertaining to the individual realm that were

silenced or postponed by revolutionary ideology. Disbelief in metanarratives, ideologies and institutions of power, a permanent pursuit of survival, and the search for immediate sources of gratification are among some of the new ethical coordinates of the post-Soviet subject in these novels. They challenge dominant constructions about the revolutionary national subject in morals, ethics and, in the case of *Cien botellas*, gender terms.

Chapter 3: *Cubanidad* “in-between:” the transnational Cuban alternative music scene

“Yo te bailo un rock and roll, aunque la rumba me llama, con los pies en Nueva York, y el corazón en la Habana, Oh la Habana, Oh la Habana.”

I dance a rock and roll for you, although *rumba* is calling me, standing up in New York, but with my heart in Havana, Oh Havana, Oh Havana.  
(Torrens “Ni de aquí ni de allá”)

Unlike some years ago, collaborations between Cuban musicians from *las dos orillas* (the two shores) is becoming the norm in Miami, where nowadays it is common to find every week several options of mostly live concerts, theater performances, literary presentations and visual art openings in which Cuban artists living inside or outside the island regularly gather to collaborate professionally. How have these collaborations become the norm in places like Miami?

This chapter deals with a particular network of Cuban music production across international borders, focusing on the firsthand encounters of Cuban singers, songwriters and academically trained musicians who migrate to foreign cultures at the turn of the 21st century. I argue that these musicians have formed what I call the Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene (TCAMS), a network of significant music production mostly in nontraditional music industry circuits that transcends national borders and projects a post-national imaginary. This alternative music scene employs fusion as its main musical language, which doesn't fit easily into recognized Cuban music genres in World Music, Latin or mainstream markets. However, the TCAMS has created a transnational independent space of music production, distribution and consumption, supported by access to broadband Internet, new recording technologies, and the increased mobility

acquired by these musicians after migrating (Thomas “Cosmopolitan” 110). These musicians represent a young generation of Cuban expatriates spread across several continents who frequently travel to the island for family and professional reasons (Idem). Their transnational lives and their lyric discourses are in constant negotiation and assume an apparent depoliticized attitude in relation to more visible ideological narratives about *cubanidad* (Cubanness) emanating from the nationalist discourse of the island’s officials and the traditional exiles.

In particular, this network exemplifies longstanding claims about the increasingly transnational character and diversification of the idea of Cuban nation, notions and performance of Cubanness. It could be located beyond “traditional politics of *cubanidad*” and in dialogue with analytical frameworks about post-Soviet and post-national imaginaries. How have these “*hijos de la revolución*” (daughters and sons of the revolution)- raised in a very paternalistic, vertical and ideologically rigid system of morals and values- reinvented themselves and accommodated their art to the realities of the globalized capitalist market and world? Have they really adapted or do they exhibit distinctive diasporic practices in comparison with previous and later waves? What does it mean for the project of the nation-state so overwhelmingly promoted by the revolutionary government that a significant group of these “New Men” (and Women) had to relocate throughout the world when as young as in their twenties? What does “the significant transterritoriality of Cuban culture” (de la Nuez, 29), especially after the nineties crisis, mean for the study of Cuban cultural production, specifically music, when an important volume of music regarded as Cuban is made outside the territorial frontiers of the island?



To answer these questions, I will survey some case studies of the TCAMS, focusing on the singer-songwriters and academically trained musicians and their collaborations throughout New York, Madrid and Miami. The chapter first provides an introductory section followed by a background on alternative music in Cuba after 1959. Then, my analysis delineates this transnational music scene in those cities through the exam of the following thematic coordinates:<sup>45</sup> forms of music production and collaboration across borders; the circuit of local and translocal venues where these musicians perform; audiences and music reception; discursive practices of this diasporic cohort; the “location” of this network in the international music industry and some reflections about Cuban fusion as its musical language.

### 3.1 Habanization: a brief introduction.

In February 2012 a music project called Habanization visited Miami to perform at Manuel Artime Theater.<sup>46</sup> Habanization was an ad-hoc collective formed in Havana by some Cuban songwriters who migrated in the 1990s to Spain, France, Mexico and the U.S. After 15 years living abroad, they returned to live on the island or shuttle between Cuba and other countries.<sup>47</sup> Like the writers studied in Chapter 2, some of these musicians took advantage of a certain lessening over earnings and travel decisions

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<sup>45</sup> For another reference to approach transnational music scenes, see Burkhalter.

<sup>46</sup> See Silot Bravo “Se habaniza Miami”

<sup>47</sup> Singers and songwriters from Habanization were: Raul Paz (Paris-Havana), Descemer Bueno (Miami-New York-Havana), David Torrens (Mexico-Havana) and Kelvis Ochoa (Madrid-Havana). Mr. Haka (Miami) and Diana Fuentes (Puerto Rico-Havana). Singer Haydée Milanés (Havana) was also invited to participate in some presentations.

resulting from the 1990s crisis on the island. They also benefited from the ease of cultural exchanges between Cuba and the United States during the Clinton Administration and of travel regulations enacted by President Obama in 2011. As part of this relatively brief project, these musicians made presentations in France, Havana and the U.S. The American TV public channel P.B.S. made the documentary *Habana, Habana*.

For the Miami concert, Habanization made several promotional appearances on local TV and radio stations, and relied on local musicians for their back-up band. Most of the musicians were former school peers on the island in the 1980s-90s.<sup>48</sup> The audience was comprised mainly of recent Cuban migrants in their thirties to fifties; they enthusiastically sang and danced during the entire concert. Between songs the musicians talked about the significance of this concert in Miami for them, as an opportunity to connect with family and friends and to contribute to the unity of Cubans all over. As a researcher and audience member, I witnessed and at the same time felt part of this community of affection created throughout the world around the music and subjectivities of these Cuban musicians and songwriters from the nineties. The contagious enthusiasm

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<sup>48</sup> In 1999, the Clinton Administration exempted Cuban artists from Reagan Proclamation 5377, making it much simpler for Cuban musicians to perform in the U.S. and for promoters to arrange their visits and concerts. Additionally, it allowed U.S. citizens to visit Cuba for religious, humanitarian, and academic purposes and many musicians were able to justify trips as educational experiences. Legal travel to Cuba by U.S. citizens was made easier by traveling with an organization that possessed a “people-to-people” license from the Office of Foreign Assets Control OFAC. These licenses specifically forbade tourism as an acceptable activity so trips to beaches and resorts were not permitted and travelers were instead required to stick to itineraries of educational experiences and structured interactions with Cuban citizens (Sublette qtd. in Storhoff 57). The George W. Bush Administration dealt these exchanges a severe setback and froze Cuba-U.S. cultural exchange. With the Obama Administration, new OFAC regulations were issued in 2011 that made it possible for religious and academic groups to travel to the island nation with only a general license, meaning that they did not need specific permission from the Department of Treasury or other government agency. They also made it possible for travel providers to organize cultural exchange tours, and permitted more airports to allow charter flights to Cuba (Storhoff 66-67).

of the audience constituted a public in the sense put forth by Warner in “Publics and Counterpublics” that is, as a space of discourse constituted by the discussions of the music and lyrics.

As in the case of literature, changes in the music field at the turn of the century are connected to the effects of the crisis. The new massive wave of Cuban migration that spread throughout the United States, Europe and Latin America included the most significant relocation of Cuban artists and musicians born and raised during the revolution.<sup>49</sup> Many of them were part of what musicologist and journalist Borges Triana calls *Música Cubana Alternativa* (Cuban Alternative Music), a term that refers to the emergence of a particular form of music-making in 1990s Cuba that reflected a generational experience with a more hybrid sound, cosmopolitan and post-national spirit than previous song movements like *nueva trova*<sup>50</sup> (*La luz* 16). Borges Triana also characterized MCA as a cultural scene that included musicians from the rock, pop, rap, hip-hop and jazz scenes on the island. These musicians celebrate a shared “underground” sensibility and generational experience, independent of *el pensamiento oficial* (official discourse). This scene also reveals a discursive strategy—coming from the context of popular culture—reflecting the worldview of a particular Cuban generation as well as a

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<sup>49</sup> According to data from IPUMS USA (Integrated Public Use Microdata Series) from the U.S. Census until 2012, there was a significance increased in the number of Cuban artists, musicians and related workers who migrated to the U.S. since 1980s, and especially since 1995, in the midst of the Cuban economic crisis. See also González Echevarría and Anke Birkenmaier.

<sup>50</sup> Pablo Milanés, Silvio Rodríguez and Noel Nicola were the main exponents of *nueva trova* movement that originated thanks to the support of Haydee Santamaría, Casa de las Américas’ director and revolutionary leader. Progressively other musicians and bands like Sara González, Vicente Feliú, Amaury Pérez, Augusto Blanca, Pedro Luis Ferrer, and bands like Moncada, Manguaré and Mayohuacán, among many others, became prominent within the movement.

framework of symbolic cultural resistance positioned against the hegemonic discourses of their time (*Concierto Cubano* 73; 76-77).

Since the publication of *Concierto Cubano*, Borges Triana has recognized that many of MCA musicians have moved away from the island; they became the focus of his most recent book, *Músicos de Cuba y del mundo. Nadie se va del todo* (2012). After almost two decades of the massive migration of Cuban musicians, Borges Triana published that book as a response to the omissions and censorship still in place with few exceptions regarding several important Cuban migrant musicians, based on either ideological criteria and/or the inertia of cultural politics. In other words, Borges Triana refers to the lack of research on the significance of Cuban diasporic music practice on the island (*Músicos* 16; 59). Historically, Cuban migrants have been key in forging recognizable symbols of Cuban culture in the fields of literature and music. Through a very comprehensive approach, Borges Triana engages in considerations about the lack of a domestic market for Cuban diasporic musicians on the island and provides a review of different moments in the migration of Cuban musicians to the U.S.

My conceptualization of the TCAMS is inspired and at the same time updates Borges-Triana's studies on M. I demarcated my research on two specific music scenes of singers-songwriters and academically trained musicians. I focus on documenting and expanding the study of the diasporic experience of this network of musicians in terms of identity negotiation and music production.

Cuba is among the countries with a high percentage of emigrant population: about 15-20% of a population of 11 million (de la Nuez 28). The steady flow of emigrant artists

and musicians since the 1990s has been the most significant since the revolution. However, few studies could be found about diasporic singers-songwriters and academically trained musicians. On the island, Borges Triana has published more extensively about this 1990s music scene between Havana and Madrid. That has also been the subject of journalistic commentaries mainly in online publications and blogs by Cuban authors.<sup>51</sup> Academic studies outside the island about the 1990's Cuban music scenes have focused mainly on other music scenes, i.e.: more visible popular music made on the island like *timba*; the impact of global trends in the local music context through genres like rap and hip-hop; and the insertion of Cuban music in global circuits through world music as in the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon. There also are more recent studies about *Cubaton*, the local re-signification of the worldwide commercial explosion of reggeaton from authors like Gámez-Torrez and Geoffrey Baker.

One of the few exceptions is Susan Thomas, who has published relevant texts about representations and negotiations of the often invisible and usually disregarded queer (particularly lesbian identities) in the male dominated and homophobic contemporary Cuban singer-songwriter movement; the centrality of Havana in the imaginary or worldview of Cuban singer-songwriters both on and off the island; and the different ways that Cuban music has historically participated in the shaping of a global musical culture, particularly in the transnationalization of Cuban music since the end of

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<sup>51</sup> Journalistic commentaries about this generation of musicians have been made in the past by critics and authors Dennys Matos, Enrique del Risco, Ernesto Fundora, Arsenio Rodríguez, Julio Fowler, Adrian Morales, Santiago “El Chago” Mendez Alpízar, Felix Varela, Borges-Triana, Juan Camacho, Humberto Manduley, Bladimir Zamora, and Rogeio Ramos Domínguez, among others.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> López Cano has written about how the music of some of these artists have played a significant role in the fragmentation of the revolutionary hegemonic subject at the turn of the century; while Weimer and Sánchez have focused on case studies of Cuban diasporic music scenes in Mexico and Barcelona respectively.

I'm interested in the global dispersion of these musicians; their relatively limited visibility in either mainstream or world music markets; and/or their apparent "low profile" political narratives on Cuban issues in comparison with previous diasporic waves.<sup>53</sup> Many of these musicians migrated when their careers started to consolidate and have developed a significant production of music while living outside the island, mostly

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<sup>52</sup> See Thomas, Susan: "Did Nobody", "Musical Cartographies" and "Cosmopolitan." See also López Cano.

<sup>53</sup> The following musicians are a good part of what I considered the Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene. For the purpose of this dissertation, they are clustered by the cities I studied: Madrid, Miami and New York. The group that first settled in Spain includes singers and songwriters Gema Corredera and Pavel Urquiza; current and former members of Habana Abierta (Vanito Brown, Alejandro Gutiérrez, José Luis Medina, Luis Barbería, Pepe del Valle, Andy Villalón, Boris Larramendi and Kelvis Ochoa); Raúl Torres, Alejandro Frómeta, Julio Fowler, Adrián Morales, Athanai Castro, Nilo Castillo, Rubén Aguiar and Magilé Alvarez. Other musicians in Spain in the jazz and commercial scenes are Alain Pérez, Yadam González, Kiki Ferrer, Javier "Caramelo" Masó, Roman Filiú, Iván Melon Lewis, José Ramón Mestre, Alfredo Chacón, Julio Montalvo, Carlos Puig-Hatem, Iván Ruiz Machado, Daján Abad, etc. In and close to New York a group of academically trained musicians who work mainly in the jazz scene are Yosvany and Yunior Terry, Dafnis Prieto, Manuel Varela, Pedrito Martínez, Felipe Lamoglia, José El Gola, Osmany Paredes, Elio Villafranca, Oriente López, Axel Laugart, Glenda del E., and singers Xiomara Laugart and Rovertó Poveda. The group of musicians who reside in Miami is huge and includes singers and songwriters like Amaury Gutiérrez, Descemer Bueno, Mr. Haka, Elain Morales, El Chinodreadlion, Luis Bofill, Leslie Cartaya, Yisel Duque, Mónica Sierra, Lena Burke, Alcides Herrera, Yesler de la Cruz, Michel Peraza, etc. In most cases they are also instrumentalists and composers. The group in Miami is constituted by mostly academically trained musicians. It's pretty extensive, including: Ahmed Barroso, Hilario Bell, Michel Frago, Manuel Orza, Wiliam Paredes, Raimier Olalde, Reinier Guerra, Los Pututi (Alexis and Angel), Braulio Fernández, Angel Nápoles, Danielito López, Jorge Gómez, Leandro González, Raúl and Joel del Sol, Hammadi Bayard, Manuel Orza, Nestor del Prado, Edgar Madariaga, Mikel Olivera, Jorge Arronte, Philbert Armenteros and Mercedes Abal, among many others. Some of these musicians relocated from Spain to the U.S. (mainly to Miami) after the latest Spanish crisis, others from New York to Miami, and a few have returned to reside in Cuba or are living between the island and other countries: this is the case of Equis Alfonso, Raúl Paz, David Torrens, Kelvis Ochoa, Descemer Bueno, Telmary Díaz, Luis Barbería and Nam San Fong, Raúl Torres, etc. Many other musicians from this generation are living in other U.S cities beyond the scope of this research, as well as in Mexico, Canada and Europe.

in nontraditional music industry circuits. Their music could be interpreted as both a break and continuation with previous and established music scenes on the island, mainly *nueva trova*, *novísima trova* and Cuban jazz.

To study the music production and discursive practices of the TCAMS in Miami, New York and Madrid since the 1990s, I've conducted participatory observations at studio recording sessions, concerts, festivals and panels. I supported my observations with open-ended interviews and with the analysis of several albums, videos and documentaries. I also conducted a discursive analysis of some of these musicians' lyrics. I have had ongoing interactions with this community of musicians for decades, since we studied classical music in the school of the arts (a conservatory) in Cuba in the 1980s. Subsequently, I interacted with many of them in concerts, studio-sessions, music venues and personally in New York, Miami, and Madrid. In Miami, I also produced or co-produced concerts and music festivals, and organized academic panels about their work. My research led to the creation of a personal blog [Cubanidadinbetween](#), where I've been publishing interviews with these musicians, related videos, documentaries, reviews, and information about the events I organized or in which I collaborated. I have also published several texts about this music scene in online magazines on the Cuban diaspora.

### 3.2- Alternative music in Cuba after 1959

In *The A to X in Alternative Music* (2004) Taylor provides useful ideas about alternative music in the Western world that are pertinent to think about this topic in the context of Cuban music after 1959. In particular, I found Taylor's ideas helpful to think

about the TCAMS as alternative, in terms of musical language and on discourses about Cubanness. For Taylor, the use of the term alternative has been associated mainly with the Western music scenes across the world, which tends to eschew known music canons and the production of mainstream music as a norm. Alternative musicians are neither guided by commercial imperatives nor attracted to immediate social recognition. Instead, they are oriented by a need to produce their own music and to explore practices that are not necessarily accepted in the popular realm. Alternative music is not intended to connect with mass audiences immediately. It targets more specific groups with shared common experiences, ideas and aesthetics (Idem). I also find useful Burkhalter's study of music scenes in Beirut as transnational cultural spaces. He identifies those as cultural spaces where musicians are considered alternative because "they tried to fight old "eurocentric" Euro-American perceptions of their home countries, by challenging and mixing up ideas about culture, place, locality, tradition and authenticity in music" (12).

In the post 1959 Cuban music field, one of the most salient expressions of alternativity took place among singers-songwriters throughout three generations represented by: *nueva trova* (1960s-1980s); *novísima trova* (1970s-1980s); and MCA (1990s-2000s) as the third generation that later became part of the TCAMS.

*Nueva trova* was a variant of Latin American protest song that emerged in the late 1960s. In *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (2006), Moore points out that *nueva trova* began as an oppositional form of aesthetic and sometimes political expression, incorporating, for example, rock music although it was prohibited by the cultural authorities. It was also characterized by an attitude of non-conformity adopted by some of its leading exponents (135-141). *Nueva trova* became widely popular, especially



in the 1970s and set the standard for many singer-songwriters in terms of its poetic narrative and music contributions. However, its increased popularity and international exposure became instrumental for the revolution's nationalist project. Progressively *nueva trova* transformed itself into a solemn mainstream cultural movement within the purview of the official cultural establishment. There has been no other movement or genre in the Cuban music scene post 1959 with the same level of institutional support enjoyed by *nueva trova*, not only on the island but also internationally because it was associated with "the voice of the revolution" and the anti-imperialist agenda.

By the 1980s young people and even followers of *nueva trova* were looking for new music forms, and as a result a new generation of young singers and songwriters emerged, like Carlos Varela, Gerardo Alfonso, Donato Poveda, Santiago Feliú, Frank Delgado, etc., According to Moore, they:

(...) tended to play songs with an aesthetic distinct from that of earlier times. They recognize their debt to past repertoire but referred to their own music as *novísima trova*, in order to underscore its unique qualities (161) (...) [They] are more cosmopolitan than the music from previous generations (...) they tend to move with ease between styles from diverse locations and ethnic origins (162) (...) and address domestic concerns with a directness and bite that is striking (163). (*Music and Revolution*)

This generation of musicians was not necessarily committed to nor supported by cultural institutions like *nueva trova* members were. *Novísimos* songwriters were part of a cadre of critical voices in various cultural fields, especially in the visual arts and literature, as mentioned in previous chapters. From more or less openly critical positions their art provided an assessment of the promises of the Cuban socialist project 30 years after the onset of the revolution. The legitimacy and continuity of the nation's project

after the crisis of socialism in Eastern Europe became the subject of more open social and cultural critique.<sup>54</sup> Critical cultural forms like *nueva trova* also experienced a decline. Indeed, this period saw the rise in popularity of more danceable repertoires (*Music and Revolution* 158).

The environment of increasing uncertainty and disenchantment made the commitment by members of previous protest song movements to create art “within the revolution” obsolete. The beginning of a post-socialist phase on the island with the dollarization of the economy, the opening to foreign investment and joint ventures, the reliance on the tourism industry, the deepening of socio-economic disparities and marginalization, and the increased disconnection between official discourse and the harsh realities for the majority of the population, set the tone for the emergence of alternative art expressions, as in the case of the novels examined in Chapter 2.

Cuban rap, hip-hop, *timba* and rock have also been associated with alternative scenes in the music context post 1959. I consider them as other important music references for the TCAMS. Self-made musicians began adapting aesthetics and sounds from American rap and hip-hop and combining them with Afrocuban and local sounds, prompting the emergence of Cuban rap and hip-hop in the 1990s. In some of their lyrics, rappers and hip-hop musicians made visible concerns and critical views about the revolutionary project, which intensified in the midst of the crisis. They also gave voice to

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<sup>54</sup> Songwriter Carlos Varela is the most recognizable and immediate antecedent for the new type of song that emerged in the nineties. His live performances in movie theaters like Charles Chaplin, and 23 y 12 in El Vedado neighborhood in Havana, became spaces where young audiences manifested their frustrations with the political manipulations and rhetoric of the revolutionary mythology, in many cases accompanied by police presence.

groups supposedly represented but often overlooked in the “revolutionary” discourse—like the socially marginal and the black population. Furthermore, songs touched upon the dramatic socio-economic context of 1990s Cuba, including the increased visibility of racial discrimination, marginality, corruption, the frustrations provoked by lack of opportunities for young people, and the gap between the government rhetoric and the hardships of daily life. Something similar happened in more popular music genres like *timba*.

All these music scenes did not escape censorship by the cultural autocracy, since they posed alternatives to the authorized narratives of the nation-state. Beneath the apparent concern with the preservation of “the revolutionary morality” such censorship reflected an “anthological” elitism rooted in institutional and intellectual realms. This notion masked embedded prejudices, fears and rejection against black, marginal and popular culture portrayed in those music genres. The long-held discrimination by the official discourse and institutions against rock musicians and fans made this genre alternative in the Cuban context, considered for the longest time as “music of the “enemy.”<sup>55</sup>

In that same period, a third generation of singers, songwriters, students and bohemians began to interact in informal gatherings in places like Teatro Estudio, La Peña de 13 y 8 and El Anfiteatro del Río Almendares. Underground bands such as Lucha Almada, Superávit, Cuatro Gatos, Cachivache, Debajo and En Serie, among others, also emerged in those years. These bands and urban spaces provided another alternative

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<sup>55</sup> For an in-depth study about the history of rock during the revolution, see Manduley.

cultural landscape, mostly for singers and songwriters. From diverse and mostly self-trained musical backgrounds, these musicians began updating the legacy of *nueva* and *novísima trova* with multiple references common to their generational musical universe, such as: Tropicalist Brazilian harmonies and rhythms from musicians like Djavan, Chico Buarque, Gal Costa and Caetano Veloso; Argentinean rock, grunge, pop, funk, reggae and R&B. In addition, this generation of singers and songwriters were more inclined to introduce dance forms based on rap, hip-hop, funk and Afrocuban rhythms.

In “Boomerang: Entre Mitos y Flautas” (2007) Fowler notes that making socially conscious music that can also be danced to represented a fundamental change from the solemnity of *nueva trova* movement, which relied mostly on the intimate image of the songwriter accompanied by his guitar. This change also collapsed boundaries between music for listening and for dancing that elicited different mindsets in the revolutionary Cuban song context. As a result, songs from this generation didn’t rely exclusively on the more established *trova* format of a singer with her guitar and on a focus on lyrics to convey their message, but were more interactive with the audiences by incorporating dance forms (Idem). The repertoire and live presentations by Habana Abierta are an example, which were first received with certain resistance among some musicians who regarded an aesthetic superiority to the format of the singer and the guitar of more traditional *trova* songs. Later on, Habana Abierta’s strategy of *trova*-like messages with danceable rhythms became a common practice among many of the TCAMS singers and songwriters.

This third alternative generation of songwriters and singers starts with Gema y Pavel. Both musicians have clear influences from *nueva trova* and *novísima trova*. They

were primarily devoted to compose and perform meaningful songs, with poetic lyrics and occasionally social concerns. They insisted on producing songs, despite the demands of the rapidly expanding tourist industry, which focused on the commercialization of *timba* and traditional *trova*. These genres made a comeback after the success of Buena Vista Social Club.<sup>56</sup> In 1990s Havana, Gema and Pavel frequented the headquarters of a theater group called *Teatro Estudio*, invited by Marta Valdés, one of the leading composers from the *filing* (feeling) movement.<sup>57</sup> “They also collaborated with actors, painters, and others in ‘multimedia’ happenings held almost nightly in *La Casa del Joven Creador*, an old warehouse converted into a recreational space.” (Moore *Music and Revolution* 164). They rapidly attracted a limited but enthusiastic audience of students, artists, bohemians and others who usually gather in these *peñas*, an important tradition of musical and cultural gatherings in 1990s Havana.

In the midst of the crisis, these songwriters migrated *en masse*. In interviews and conversations with them in the past decade, the oft-mentioned causes were the apparent lack of space and support for the development of their music, as well as the devastating

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<sup>56</sup> *Trova tradicional* refers to a tradition of patriotic and love songs that emerged on the island since the 19th century, influenced by European salon music. At the beginning of the 20th century the existence of a distinct Cuban song or bolero on the island was recognized. *Trova tradicional* denominates this kind of song basically for listening, interpreted by either a singer with a guitar, sextets or septets, and that was shaped by a variety of styles around more traditional genres like son and guaracha. See (Giro Tomo 4 207-209).

<sup>57</sup> *Filing* is a musical genre that emerged in the 1940s in *descargas* (jam sessions) in Havana. It was a new way of interpreting Cuban songs and boleros for both singers and instrumental performers, who adopted complicated harmonic and tonal modulations typical of American jazz in either the way they sang the songs and/or in their accompaniment. *Filing* has been very influential for many subsequent Cuban songwriters, singers and composers. The term derives from the English feeling and refers to the sentimental mood of the genre.

effects of the 1990s crisis. In an interview with Alejandro Gutiérrez (Habana Abierta), he expanded on this topic. Gutiérrez (2009) mentioned that this generation of musicians was looking for an environment where differences in creative needs and expression could be tolerated. Most of the interviewees also referred to the need for expanding their geographical and musical horizons; to mitigate the uncertainties they experienced due to the impact of the economic crisis; but also to search for new economic opportunities, and get access to alternative flows of information.<sup>58</sup>

In general, the music of this group was not recorded in commercial albums while they were living on the island. They were at a disadvantage in gaining access to the incipient local recording industry that for the most part was the result of joint ventures with foreign partners and prioritized musical products with a touristic appeal. The alternative music scene of singer-songwriters did not fit that category and was excluded from local music recording and incipient related marketing business on the island. All of the above prompted the relocation of many of these artists abroad. Until recently, Madrid became the most important center for Cuban singers-songwriters outside the island.

### 3.3- Madrid

Gema y Pavel were among the first migrant singer-songwriters to settle in Madrid. Once in Spain, they recorded three albums as a duo with the World music label

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<sup>58</sup> I also conducted personal interviews with the following musicians: Descemer Buano: New York, 2002 and in Miami, 2009; Athanai Castro: Madrid, 2009; Vanito Brown: Madrid, 2009. Gema Corredera: Madrid, 2009 and Miami 2013. Julio Fowler: Madrid, 2009. Amaury Gutiérrez: Miami, 2009. Dafnis Prieto: New York, 2001 and 2008. Elain Morales: Miami, 2009; Yosvany Terry: New York 2001 & 2009. Pavel Urquiza: Madrid, 2009; Miami, 2014; Jorge Gómez, Miami 2009 and Pepe Montes, Miami 2009. I conducted other interviews for this research with musicians Robertico Carcassés, Equis Alfonso, Alain Pérez, Telmary, Yusa, Mr. Haka, Mariela Suárez (Havana NRG) and Danay Suárez, which have been published in [Cubaencuentro online](#), [Timba.com](#) and in my blog [Cubanidadinbetween](#).

*Nube Negra: Trampas del Tiempo* (1993), *Cosa de Broma* (1996) and *Síntomas de Fe* (1999). In addition, Gema y Pavel produced the albums *Habana Oculta* (1995), *Habana Abierta* (1997) and *24 Horas* (1999) with Cuban songwriters they brought to Spain, resulting in the creation of the music collective Habana Abierta. All these albums gained them a solid and localized reputation in world music circuits and among bohemians and students, and especially their Cuban fans all over the world.

As a duo Gema y Pavel had a prolific independent career reflected in several albums. *Artbembé* (2003) recorded with Peermusic, is a very solid art project that includes poems, visual artwork and texts by different Cuban authors. Recorded between Madrid, New York and Havana, the album is composed of two CDs and features several invited musicians (singers, songwriters and academically trained) from this generation living within and outside the island. *Artbembé* is perhaps one of the most important and comprehensive musical artwork of this network, as a testimony to the trajectory of the Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene after almost 15 years. The latest album produced independently by Gema y Pavel as a duet was *Ofrenda a Borinquen* in 2010, a tribute to the connections between Cuban and Puerto Rican music. After that album the singers separated as a duo, and have been devoted to their independent careers: Gema between Puerto Rico and Miami, and Pavel in Madrid, the Canary Islands and lately in Washington, D.C. For Moore:

Gema y Pavel's music was irreverent (...) in a decisively musical sense. Rather than foregrounding sociopolitical critique, their compositions instead redefine Cuban culture in more inclusive, hybridized terms. (*Music and Revolution* 164)

Although informed by *nueva* and *novísima trova*, Gema y Pavel proposed a new type of song. The song “Bolero filin” from their album *Artbembé* (2003) is an example. The song is a musical tribute to Elena Burque, one of the most acclaimed *filin* singers on the island and a source of musical reference for both. It’s a bolero that talks about the end of love and separation, skillfully sung by Gema. Pavel accompanies on the guitar, providing a constant harmonic progression in the most classic *filin* tradition. The song also includes a moment of spoken sequence from La Burque. Gema y Pavel’s music weaves in references to *trova tradicional* and the bolero tradition. They also incorporated a very creative counterpoint with Brazilian harmonies, Andean sounds, Afrocuban rhythms and jazz improvisations especially from *filin*, resulting in sophisticated vocal and musical arrangements.

For all of the above, I consider the duo Gema y Pavel as foundational in the TCAMS. They transformed Cuban *trova* and became an important reference for many songwriters and musicians in and outside the island. They also helped establish the style of systematic collaboration with academically trained musicians, since they first invited *Estado de Animo*, a band formed by academically trained musicians, to perform in their album *Trampas del Tiempo* in 1993. They had the creative responsibility in the coordination and *mise en oeuvre* of what later became Habana Abierta. Violinist Gladys Silot (2014) points out that the background for this mode of collaboration of academically trained musicians accompanying singer-songwriters, can be traced back to a previous generation of songwriters on the island like Silvio Rodríguez, accompanied by



Afrocuba; Santiago Feliú by *Estado de Animo*; and Pablo Milanés and Carlos Varela by their own respective bands, etc.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the work developed by Gema and Pavel in Spain, Habana Abierta became another important milestone in the TCAMS. They are the most recognized music band within this network and are regarded as the “generational voice” of the 1990s, both inside and outside the island.

Habana Abierta’s first album was *Habana Oculta* (1995). It was recorded by the word music label *Nube Negra* in Havana and produced in Madrid by Gema y Pavel. It was a compilation of what singer-songwriters were doing on the island at the time. After many of them visited Spain for individual presentations, *BMG Ariola* requested Gema y Pavel to produce a panoramic project about the singer-songwriter scene in Havana with the participation of these musicians. The lineup for their second album, *Habana Abierta* (1997), included Luis Barbería, Jose Luis Medina, Boris Larramendi, Vanito Caballero, Alejandro Gutiérrez, Kelvis Ochoa, Andy Villalón and Pepe del Valle, and led to the creation of this music collective and the decision to settle in Spain. The band initially toured Spain and several cities in Europe, and enjoyed attention from the press and important figures in the Spanish music scene. That led to the recording of the album *24 horas* in 1999, also with BMG Ariola and the music production by Gema y Pavel. According to Gonzalez Portal, Habana Abierta was not successful in the Spanish market for a number of reasons, among them, that ultimately the group did not have name

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<sup>59</sup> A previous instance of this modality of collaboration can be found in the work of *El Grupo de Experimentación Sonora* (GES), originally created to produce music for films and sponsored by ICAIC. It became a unique music laboratory of collaboration and experimentation between academically trained musicians and some of the most important *nueva trova* singers and songwriters in the 1970s. See Acosta.

recognition in the mainstream Spanish market due to the nature of the band, composed by several songwriters with their own particular and diverse music identities. She also points out that some members, such as Kelvis Ochoa and Boris Larramendi, were more interested in developing their own independent music careers. Nonetheless, Habana Abierta was invited to record the group album *Boomerang* in 2006 with EMI and *Calle 54*, a label owned by Spanish film director Fernando Trueba, and with the collaboration of Miami-based Cuban American producer Nat Chediak. In 2011, the band produced independently *1234*, the first of a 4 album project.

### 3.3.1- Performing Cubanness in Madrid

The documentary *Voces de un Trayecto* (2009), by filmmaker Alejandra Aguirre, provides a thoughtful account of the 1990s migrant experience of several Cuban singers and songwriters and other artists in Spain.<sup>60</sup> With images of different neighborhoods of Madrid in the background, these musicians convey a positive assessment of their immigration experience in Spain, which they see as an opportunity for personal growth and a means to get a critical perspective about their identities as Cubans outside their “natural” context. After years of residence abroad, both Gema and Pavel have said that their idea of the Cuban nation is illusory. As a result, their sense of connection with their homeland and of their identity as Cubans has become less rooted and more global. Gema illustrates this idea with a poetic image: “Uno es de todas partes, y las raíces de uno

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<sup>60</sup> The interviewees in the documentary were singer and songwriters Gema Corredera, Pavel Urquiza and Vanito Caballero (Habana Abierta); and actors Vladimir Cruz (*Fresa y Chocolate*), Maria Isabel Díaz (“Chica Almodovar”) and Roberto San Martín (*Havana Blues*).

mejor que sean aéreas, para que no se pudran” (We are from all over, and it’s better to have airy roots, so they don’t get rotten). For her, as well as for songwriter Vanito Brown, migration has also been a process of professional and personal enrichment. However, the challenges they encountered as immigrants in Spain were intense and significantly marked their lives and careers. Many referred to the clash between their values as “New Men” (and Women), coming from a paternalist, ideologically rigid society with an inefficient economic model, and those of the capitalist world. For Pavel, this cultural clash was probably the most important challenge they had to overcome: until then they assumed that their life as musicians was their only possible destiny or mission—a common experience among artists of this generation. That perspective translated into an attitude of resistance to either adapt to the rules of the music market or to explore other professional paths to sustain themselves economically.

That is probably one of the reasons that explains why this particular network of aesthetic creation generally took an alternative path to the Latin music market: They wanted to transcend aesthetically with their own art on their own terms, either because they had a high regard for the aesthetic references, education and values they brought with them. Or, alternatively, they didn’t know how to or were not interested in assimilating into the Latino music industry, which tends to simplify and commodify the richness and complexity of the diverse cultural references that inform it.

### 3.3.2- Mapping music reception

After some years, living in Spain became an opportunity for these musicians. Cuba and Miami became the main places where they grew a fan base. The greatest success and recognition experienced by Habana Abierta happened when they returned to

perform in Havana, in 2003 and 2012; and in their Miami performances since 2003. Their albums were hard to find in local music stores on the island, which are basically oriented to the tourist market and that sells for high prices and in convertible currency. These musicians acquired a fan base among students, bohemians, artists, intellectuals, and nostalgic fans who managed to get copies of their CDs and circulate them widely from hand to hand. Fans could also commission Cubans who traveled abroad on a regular basis to bring back CDs, or they could make recourse to the underground market that provided access to music that the majority of the population could not otherwise afford. Thus when Habana Abierta returned to perform in Havana they already had an informed fan base and easily packed important music venues throughout the city like El Teatro Nacional, Casa de las Américas, El Museo de Bellas Artes and El Café Cantante. Despite limited coverage of their return by the official media, especially in 2003, Habana Abierta gathered 7 to 10 thousand fans at El Salón Rosado de la Tropical,<sup>61</sup> an underground venue usually dedicated to the most popular local dance music ensembles.

In Miami, the Miami Dade College and producer Nat Chediak first invited Habana Abierta after Olga Díaz (La Marcha), a Cuban fan and promoter, introduced them. Later on FUNDarte, a local non-profit that regularly produces music acts from this generation of musicians, presented them in Miami to sold-out audiences of nostalgic diasporic Cuban cohorts, at venues like the former Coconut Grove Playhouse, the Miami Dade County Auditorium, La Covacha, as the opening act to Willy Chirino at the American Airlines Arena and at the Sleepless Night Festival in Miami Beach. They also

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<sup>61</sup> See Villa in *Suena Cubano*.

made several presentations individually at local clubs like Hoy como Ayer, the News Lounge and Havana 1957, and the now defunct Kimbaracumbara.

I concur with Thomas' observations with regard to the reception of this music, which I think expands on Gonzalez's remarks about this topic:

The generation's eclectic musical style (neither *trova* nor rock nor salsa) has made it difficult for them to attract the attention of major record labels (...) the craze for Cuban music that swept Europe and the United States in the late 1990s showed a distinct preference for perceived "authentic" Cuban sounds, preferably those from before 1950s, as exemplified by the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon. The musicians also found that the vernacular quality of their work—their references to Cuban social reality—went over the heads of non-Cuban listeners, and that the harmonic and rhythmic intricacy they prized overwhelmed audiences who preferred a cleaner—and more pop-like palette. ("Cosmopolitan" 116-117)

Like Habana Abierta, other songwriters from this generation living in Spain—like Athanai Castro, Julio Fowler, Alejandro Frómeta and Adrián Morales— at an early stage initially attracted the attention of labels oriented towards the world music circuit and some major music labels, and were occasionally invited to collaborate with established musicians in the Hispanic music market. Later on, those who have been able to keep their music careers have managed to create their own labels and produce their music independently most often. Others have returned to live and produce in Cuba—the case of Equis Alfonso, Raúl Torres, Kelvis Ochoa and more recently Luis Barbería, among others.

### 3.3.3- Negotiating post-soviet narratives

In an interview with Fowler (2009), he pointed out that, while living in Cuba during the nineties, these songwriters voiced more or less explicitly an increasing discontent with the effects of the economic crisis. They also resisted and refused to accede to the political manipulations of the nationalist project, which proved little space for divergent voices.

Polito Ibañez' song "Cada día" from his album *Recuentos* (1998), reflects on his generation's disenchantment with the rhetoric of the revolutionary nation, which led many of his colleagues to leave the country:

Cada día veo que el cariño se nos va apagando  
siento que un gran sueño se nos va apagando  
como el hombre mismo se nos va apagando  
sin inconvenientes te irás apagando  
con todo al alcance, los demás colgando  
con las ambiciones te irás apagando  
y todas las ganas se nos van.

Each day I see that love is fading  
I feel like a great dream is fading  
As if man himself is fading  
With nothing to hold you back, you too will begin to fade  
With everything within your reach, all else dangling by a thread  
Along with your ambitions, you will begin to fade  
and we will lose all motivation. (Ibañez "Cada día")

Singer-songwriters of the nineties share similar existential conditions, which appears in the novels examined in Chapter 2: they are disenchanting and alienated "New Man" who experienced firsthand the collapse of the socialist utopia in times of crisis. They increasingly disconnected from the official discourse, and their circumstances forced them to adopt a culture of survival. A post-revolutionary posture prevails in the work of writers and singer-songwriters for the 90s: writers focused openly on

deconstructing the marginal and on unraveling the hidden worlds of the revolutionary reality; songwriters disengaged or selectively focused on a bohemian style and a subtle irreverence as a practice of resistance. These singer-songwriters took an apparently apolitical posture, less interested in dealing with Cuban topics in their lyrics, because they are exhausted by the excessive burden of politics they have personally experienced in their lives as Cubans. They seem more interested in exploring existential concerns related to their personal condition and migrant experiences. This contrasts with the more monolithic position of previous generations of Cuban singers in exile, or with the militant solemnity of some members of *nueva trova* on the island. However, when they deal with more social and political Cuban concerns, they do it with a sharp, sometimes subtle and/or unprejudiced attitude.

In an interview with Vanito Brown (2009) —whose smart, poetic lyrics tend to touch on universal topics and occasional social concerns —he expressed that his primary interest when he writes is the human condition, without any preconceived ideological or political agenda. However, he is aware that his intention is not simply to distract audiences. Others, like Boris Larramendi, express their political views more bluntly in their lyrics. Larramendi's song "Asere que volá," recorded by Habana Abierta in the album *Boomerang*, has been acclaimed among his cohorts as a sort of roadmap of the concerns of many Cubans from this generation, together with other Habana Abierta' hits' "La Vida es un Divino Guión" (Vanito Brown, *Boomerang*) and "Cuando Salí de la Habana" (Kelvis Ochoa, *24 horas*).

A mi socio Alberto, lo metieron cana  
 Por vender una yerbita que no estaba mala  
 Le cayeron unos años pero menos que a Raúl,<sup>62</sup>  
 Que por decir lo que piensa le metieron 20, tú,  
 La cosa esta en candela en la Habana y en todos la'os  
 Me acuerdo que yo fumaba y vivía arrebatá'o  
 Para aguantar el teque, teque<sup>63</sup>

My buddy Alberto was locked up  
 For selling some weed that wasn't that bad  
 He got a few years, but less than Raul  
 Who was sentenced to 20 just for speaking his mind  
 It's rough in Habana and everywhere else  
 I remember I would smoke and lived high  
 Just to deal with the nonsense

Larramendi provides one of the most critical views among the TCAMS about the Cuban dilemma. The song combines concerns about the situation of political prisoners on the island, the lack of political freedom and the difficulties of daily living.

Porque mi gente se sigue yendo, o se fabrican una balsa o jinetean un viejo  
 Mi gente sigue sufriendo la miseria y el capricho del gobernante perpetuo  
 y vigilante, siempre adelante  
 Manicheando todo el dinero que mandan los emigrantes a sus familias  
 Que por deber, tienen que llenar la plaza cuando quiere él

Because my people continue to flee; either they build a raft or they sell  
 (prostitute) themselves to some old (foreign) man  
 My people continue to suffer the misery and selfishness of the perpetual  
 and vigilant leader who is always ahead  
 Controlling all the money the migrants send to their families,  
 Whose duty it is to fill the stadium whenever he sees fit

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<sup>62</sup> He refers to Raúl Rivero, an awarded poet who, together with other 75 dissidents, was originally condemned to 20 years in prison during the events known as "La Primavera Negra" in 2003, due to his opposing views to the Cuban government. A year and a half later he was released from prison, thanks to pressures from the international public opinion. He became an exile in Spain where he actually works as a journalist and writer.

<sup>63</sup> Teque, teque is an slang expression to refer to the semiotic universe comprised of ideological events of all kinds, slogans, never-ending political statements and propaganda that Cubans born and raised after the revolution who live in the island have been exposed to on a systematic basis throughout all of their lives.



Like Gutiérrez and Portela's novels, the song chronicles the important changes of the nineties as a gradual moral deterioration, and focuses on the expansion of the marginal as a material and existential condition for many Cubans after the crisis. Larramendi also reflects on the lack of alternatives and the evasiveness adopted by young people to deal with the shifting situation, including an increasing recourse to drugs, prostitution and migration of friends and family.

Pero desde que me fui el stress ya no me deja  
 Ya eso no me hace feliz  
 Hay que vivir apura'o, y siempre estar conectado  
 Correr atrás del dinero, p'a terminar endeuda'o  
 Pagándote una casita, y en Miami y en Madrid ya todo estaba inventa'o  
 Nadie esperaba por ti

.....  
 Me lo contó mi mama que cada vez que la llamo me dice  
 Mijito quédate allá  
 .....

But ever since I left I can't handle the stress  
 That doesn't make me happy anymore  
 We're forced to live such hurried lives and be on top of everything  
 Always chasing cash, only to end up in debt  
 Paying for a house, and in Miami and Madrid there was no work for the  
 average Joe  
 Nobody was waiting for you

.....  
 Every time I call my mother she tells me:  
 "Son, you 're better off over there."

He also laments the challenges resulting from the migrant experience and the separation of Cuban families.

Y nadie sabe nunca lo que va a pasar  
 En este mundo loco donde fuimos a parar  
 A mi me duele el alma y quisiera regresar a guarachar en la Habana  
 Con los de aquí y los de allá  
 Formar un carnaval para olvidar los disfraces  
 Perdonarnos las mierdas y que no corra la sangre

Pero no me hagas caso, yo solo soy un payaso (...). (Larramendi “Asere que Bola”)

No one ever knows what’s going to happen  
 In this crazy world we’ve ended up in  
 It hurts my soul and I’d love to go back and party in Havana  
 With everyone from here and from there  
 Have a festival to set aside all the facades  
 Forgive and forget all the bullshit without any bloodshed  
 But pay me no mind; I’m just a clown (...).

At the end, the song calls for a peaceful solution to the Cuban dilemma through the promotion of venues of understanding among Cubans from all over beyond their differences, the need for tolerance and a sincere dialogue among all parties involved.

Migration as a geographical but also radical existential displacement adds other discursive layers to the narratives of these post-socialist songwriters, who once outside Cuba are concerned not only with the causes but also with “the symptoms of exile” (Alvarez Borland 255). They reflect on their lives as migrants and on the local and global challenges they experience firsthand. An example is Julio Fowler’s song “Huyendo,” *Buscando mi Lugar* (2006), which provides a chronicle of a rafter’s life.<sup>64</sup> He talks about the double frustration of migrants: forced to leave their homelands in many instances and faced with profound uncertainties in the receiver countries. Athanai Castro’s song “Trabajar,” *Creando Milicia* (2012), talks about the difficulties of making a living and the despair of searching for jobs in the current global economic condition in places like

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<sup>64</sup> Balseiros (rafters) is a term used to talk about those Cubans who sail to Miami on makeshift rafts, those self-constructed, rudimentary and totally unsafe vessels made out of inner tube tires and other precarious materials. That was especially the case of many Cubans who massively migrated from the island during the 90s crisis, whose images have persisted in media representations of the time. Although many Cuban migrants during the Special Period used other ways to leave the island, like air travel, touristic visits and crossing borders on foot, rafters is the general term to refer to this massive wave of migration.

Spain. In “No te vayas,” *Art Bembe* (2012) Gema y Pavel discuss how their experience as migrants has expanded their sense of identity beyond the frontiers of the nation: they acknowledge the commonality of the human condition, which is separated by discriminatory rules, racialization and ideologies.

### 3.4- New York

New York is another important urban center where many of the TCAMS musicians settled since the nineties and have been developing their professional careers in the diverse and eclectic jazz music scene. Cuban musicians in New York are mostly academically trained, having spent an average of 15 years in the art school system on the island.

#### 3.4.1- Cuban jazz: From the conservatory to New York

That academic training system was established mainly in urban centers across the island since the seventies, inspired by a former Soviet model of music education. In the case of music, it includes conservatories for the elementary level (3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades), specialized boarding art high schools like *la Escuela Nacional de Arte (ENA)* (National School of the Arts) for intermediate and professional levels (10<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> grades), and *el Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA)* (the High Arts Institute) for a 5-year college degree. In many of these schools students from different art specializations, like visual arts, ballet, performance, drama and modern dance, regularly interact. Students perfect their competence in one instrument: piano or violin starts in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, guitar, drums, winds, etc. starting the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. These schools follow a very comprehensive and rigorous curriculum focused on classical music, that includes regular one on one classes

of the core instrument, piano as a second instrument and group classes of music history, theory, voice or band ensemble, pedagogy, harmony and composition in the upper levels.

Until the nineties, the study of Cuban music within the curriculum was restricted to what was considered classical music (including liturgical, baroque, classical, romantic and vanguard styles) and 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuban music of composers like José White, Ignacio Cervantes, Ernesto Lecuona, Harold Gramatches and Leo Brower, among others. Despite the significance of Cuban popular music, for an important period of time it was not included in the curriculum, and often students were forbidden to perform it. That was due to the prevalence of strong elitist notions mentioned before, which disregarded popular culture in favor of “symbols of high culture” that somehow privileged classical music, the soviet curriculum, etc. While the main goal of this school was to form classical musicians, many students upon graduating devoted their professional lives later on to jazz, fusion and/or popular music. That was the case with several academically trained musicians that migrated to New York in the nineties, like drummer Dafnis Prieto, saxophonist Yosvany Terry and Roman Filiú, pianists Manuel Varela, Osmany Paredes, Elio Villafranca and Axel Tosca, bassist Junior Terry and Armando “El Gola,” among many others. They have not only become part of the NY jazz scene, but have established solid international careers as jazz musicians on their own terms.

Since their studies in *la ENA* in Havana and right after their graduation, Prieto and Terry co-founded bands like Yemajazz, Columna B, and Estado de Animo with school buddies Robertico Carcassés, Descemer Bueno, Elmer Ferrer and Ahmed Barroso. In those bands they began experimenting with fusions between their own academic

background and other music genres with a marked jazz base. These musicians were particularly inspired by the important tradition of fusion of Cuban music and jazz on the island in the 1970s, pioneered by musicians like Chucho Valdés and his band Irakere. The origins of this fusion go back to the explosion of Afrocuban jazz in New York in the 1940s, and even earlier with the proliferation of local jazz bands in the nightlife of Havana in the 1920s.<sup>65</sup>

The tradition of Cuban jazz that proliferated after Irakere, which informed academically trained musicians of the 1990s, was subsequently developed by other musicians like prominent pianist and composer Emiliano Salvador; el Grupo de Experimentación Sonora del ICAIC; trumpeter, composer and showman Bobby Carcassés; virtuoso pianist and composer Gonzalo Rubalcaba; drummer and composer Horacio “El Negro” Hernández; pianist, arranger and composer Oriente López and his band Afrocuba; pianist and composer Ernán Lopez Nussa, and bands like Opus 13 and Cuarto Espacio, among others. Brazilian, Afrocuban and funk rhythms were prevalent references for the TCAMS musicians, as well as popular music on the island from bands like Van Van and NG La Banda. I consider Gonzalo Rubalcaba to be the most influential and inspirational for the TCAMS academically trained musicians in terms of his praise and focus on the development of jazz in all forms in an intelligent dialogue with Cuban music, the importance he gives to the constant perfection of his musicianship, and his indefatigable search for his own identity as a musician beyond generic frontiers and market trends.

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<sup>65</sup> See Acosta.

Through copies and hand-to-hand circulation of recordings brought by those who travel abroad, these musicians intensively listened to a wide range of American jazz,<sup>66</sup> from more traditional to experimental. Like many beginning artists, they imitated what they listened to, but progressively incorporated all those influences in the development of their own music language. Later, they began playing at the annual international Havana Jazz Plaza Festival and local music venues, and were invited to presentations in the U.S. and Europe, where many of them decided to relocate. Progressively these musicians have contributed to an unprecedented path of growth and expansion of Cuban jazz both on the island and globally. Moreover, these academically trained musicians have influenced the jazz scene in New York, where they settled in the 1990s. New York based musicians like Dafnis Prieto and Yosvany Terry, are among the protagonists of a renaissance of Cuban musicianship in the American jazz scene, perhaps even more significant than when AfroCuban jazz emerged in New York in the 1940s.

#### 3.4.1.1- Dafnis Prieto: intertextuality in Cuban jazz

Prieto established himself in New York in 1999, after living in Spain for a while. Since then, he has developed an impressive individual career as an international jazz drummer, composer and educator. After settling in New York, he rapidly became a regular sideman in the jazz club scene, on recordings and tours with a diversity of ensembles, ranging from avant-gardists Henry Threadgill and Steve Coleman, to more

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<sup>66</sup> The range of jazz recordings that informed Cuban jazz musicians of the nineties includes but is not limited to American modern jazz legends like: John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Sara Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Keith Jarrett, Branford and Winton Marsalis, Dizzie Gillespie, Weather Report, Jaco Pastorius, John Patitucci, Jack De Johnette, Chick Corea, Yellow Jacket, Path Metheny, Marcus Miller, Steve Coleman, Roy Hargrove and Herbie Hancock, among many others.

Latin jazz musicians like Eddie Palmieri, Chico O'Farril, Michel Camilo and more American jazziest like Roy Hargrove. Since 2005, Dafnis started producing his own albums, featuring his own compositions in different formats from sextets to trios, collaborating with the likes of saxophonists Yosvany Terry and Peter Apfelbaum, pianists Luis Perdomo and Manuel Varela, bassist Charles Flores, trumpets Brian Lynch and Avishai Cohen, and keyboardist Jason Lindner, among others. His two first albums: *About the Monks* (2005) and *Absolut Quintet* (2011) were released with Zoho, at the time a recently established label in New York whose initial orientation was to produce mainly local jazz artists. By his third album, *Taking the Soul for a Walk* (2008), Prieto created Dafnison music, his own independent recording label. Under Dafnison music, Prieto has been responsible for the production of his own albums and of some Cuban colleagues, like bassist Charles Flores, saxophonist Roman Filiú and Havana based Interactivo band. Prieto's career has been awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2011, Grammy nominations, several commissions and many other awards and distinctions.

Dafnis is not only recognized as a very skillful and versatile drummer, but also as a notable composer. In media reviews, there was an initial tendency to situate him first as a Latin jazz performer and composer. After the release of six albums under his own authorship, and several other collaborations, Prieto's music has been regarded as visionary and forward thinking, playful and rational, emotionally charged and contained at the same time. It opens up jazz as an infinite space of intertextuality and dialogue, seemingly effortlessly blurring the lines between several jazz sub-genres like Latin, Afro Cuban, bebop, avant-garde and traditional, folkloric and popular Cuban music and world music as well.

“Magic Danzonete”, from his album *Dafnis Prieto Proverb Trio* (2012), is an example. The first eight bars are presented by a rhythmic and onomatopoeic vocal improvisation by singer Koyaki, suggesting that we will be treated to a scat singing-funky groove. Then Prieto joins in with a drumbeat that creates a subtle atmosphere by alternating soft beats between the tom shells and a peculiar cymbal. Sixteen bars later—when the keyboardist Lindner enters with a very electronic and low-pitched groove and Prieto plays a roll—it is clearly established rhythmically that the song is an unexpected *danzonete*.<sup>67</sup> Although in this particular piece there’s a specific intertextual relation to that traditional Cuban dance rhythm, *danzonete* is only one among the diverse music references he plays with. The resulting piece is generically fluid and the sound decisively universal. The harmonic and relaxed interaction among the musicians contributes to a fluid interplay of funky vocal improvisations, adorned by a range of electronic effects produced by the keyboards and a freestyle jazz improvisation by Prieto. In conversations I’ve had with Dafnis throughout the years, he deliberately doesn’t portray himself as a Latin jazz player musician but rather as one who updates and opens up the frontiers of what is usually regarded as Latin jazz or even Cuban music, although the industry sometimes labels his music as such. His musical language proves the ultimately universal character of music, and in particular of jazz, as a cultural space of endless dialogue, counterpoint and fusion among cultures, traditions, information and life experiences.

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<sup>67</sup> *Danzonete* is a Cuban traditional salon European inspired dance form that emerged at the end of the 1920s in the Matanzas region. It’s based on the *Danzón* genre but introduced the use of the voice, rhythm from *Son* that was a new genre at the time, and a call part to stimulate the dancers. See (Giró Tomo 2 11-13).



### 3.4.1.2- Yosvany Terry: redefining Afrouban jazz

Yosvany Terry is another protagonist of this moment of renaissance of Cuban musicianship in the New York and international jazz scene. Terry inherited from his family a solid knowledge of Afrouban traditions, among other influences, which he combined with classical music and later on with fusions in ensembles like Columna B and Estado de Animo. He also moved to New York at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and like Prieto rapidly became a regular sideman in the New York jazz club scene. Since then Terry has developed an impressive and versatile career as a saxophonist, performer of Afrouban instruments, composer and educator. He has made innumerable collaborations in recordings, presentations and tours with world-renowned jazzists like Steve Coleman, Roy Hargrove, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Eddie Palmieri, Brandford Marsalis, Paquito D’Rivera, Avishai Cohen, Dafnis Prieto, Horacio “El Negro” Hernandez and Pedrito Martinez, among others. As a leading saxophonist and composer he has translated his versatile work into different formats like quintet and sextet. He released two albums with the Columna B project and three albums as a soloist: *Metamorphosis* (2006) with Ewe Records; *Today’s Opinion* (2012) with Chris Cross Jazz, and *New Throned King* (2014) with 5 Passion. Terry has also received several commissions, awards and nominations to the Grammys and Latin Grammys. In his multifaceted musical language several distinguishing features are evident: he is a virtuoso tenor and alto jazz saxophonist; a solid composer and arranger of complex jazz pieces for either orchestra, opera, big bands or smaller formats; a researcher and performer of Afrouban music and chants that he easily integrates into his compositions and performances; and a music producer.

In a review of his album *Today's Opinion*, Sublette nicely sums up some of the main strengths of Terry's music:

“[He] combines the instrumentation and ground rules of the classic hard-bop quintet with the rhythmic savvy of Afro-Cuban music and long-arc compositional ambition (...)” a music ultimately “(...) physical, cerebral, and spiritual, with a lot of stories to tell.” (Downbeat Magazine)

Terry's *New Throned King* (5 Passion, 2014) is another example of those claims.

The album is the result of sound research that documents Arara music, a lesser-known Afro-Cuban tradition practiced in regions of the island like Matanzas and in other Caribbean islands, inherited from the former West African kingdom of Dahomey. In Terry's own words the piece, under the same name, is:

(...) an arrangement of chants and drums toques for Agosajon (...) the Arara equivalent of Babalu... (a much cherished and well known divinity from the Yoruba tradition), “(...) envisioning the Pataki (deity's stories) of his coronation. (“The story of the New Throned King”)

The piece's highlights are the lead celebratory and sacred chants by world renowned Afro-Cuban chanter and drummer Pedrito Martínez. Pedrito transitions towards a delightful dialogue between different and consecutive sections of calls and responses with a glowing ensemble chorus. Pedrito's polyrhythmic Arara drumming together with the master drumming by Roman Díaz and Sandy Perez, the added jazz texture of Justin Brown's drum set sound, as well as the rhythmic chord progression by pianist Osmany Paredes, flesh out the “long-arc compositional ambition” to which Sublette refers. Additionally, there is a succession of improvisations by Terry on alto sax and by Paredes on piano that climax in a celebratory dialogue among the sacred vocals, chants, drumbeats and jazz harmonies. *New Throned King* is a comprehensive archeological

research that carefully retrieves and puts in dialogue an ancient archive Afro-Cuban tradition with the global jazz soundscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The album brilliantly updates the tradition and lineage of cross-cultural dialogue between be-bop and Afro-Cuban rhythms that became so prominent in the 1940s in New York, and subsequently on the island.

### 3.5- Miami

As the second largest Cuban city after Havana, Miami has become a hub for musicians of all kinds. Yet there are no distinguishable *trovador* scenes as in Madrid, or of jazz as in New York. Instead, together with academically trained musicians, singers and songwriters have created a locally recognizable and itinerant scene of Cuban fusion music that circulates across different venues with the support of promoters and presenters. They have also gained an increasing presence in local TV and Radio stations and online media outlets like Mega TV, America TV, MiraTV that have proliferated in the last 20 years. In Miami, alternative Cuban music is much larger than the *trovador* tradition; the fusions involve dialogue with an array of genres including but not limited to funk, pop, grunge, jazz, rock, Brazilian, Argentinian rock, bolero, *timba*, cumbia, hip-hop, reggae and Afro-Cuban rhythms. That to a certain extent describe the Madrid's scene, just that the Miami's fusion happens at a larger and yet still recognizable scale

#### 3.5.1- Mapping Cuban fusion in Miami

My frequent conversations with audiences throughout the years in these different venues have allowed me to understand them as participatory spaces for listeners who are also strong dancers. In these venues it's assumed that at some point the concerts will turn into *descargas* (jam sessions) where musicians and their fans move from venue to venue

seeking to stretch out the night. The level of musicianship at these jams, which was a well-kept secret, is extraordinary. And as they get greater exposure in the mainstream media, the fan base expands and the musicians are nominated for or receive awards at the Latin Grammys and the Grammys, as well as and on the island.<sup>68</sup>

The first traceable venue of this kind was Café Nostalgia in Miami Beach in the late 1990s, owned by cultural promoter Pepe Horta, former director of the Havana Film Festival. Nostalgia moved to Little Havana, and in 2000 transformed into Hoy como Ayer owned by Fabio Diaz and his partner. Other clubs on the emblematic Little Havana Calle 8 that hosted this scene, at least temporarily, were *Kimbaracumbara* (also owned by Díaz), *La Casa de Tula* and PAX. The latter provided a wider set of interactions with the Miami urban music scene and attracted musicians from all over.<sup>69</sup>

More recently, this Cuban fusion scene has relocated to a different area circumscribed by Havana 1957 in Brickell, and produced by Rum and Coffee Event Production, JJ Productions (a group of Cuban musicians and promoters) and DNeme Productions (a Puerto Rican businessman and music producer and Vedado Social Club);

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<sup>68</sup> Some of these musicians from the TCAMS in Miami also are producers and multi-instrumentalist performers: Amaury Gutiérrez, Descemer Bueno (producer of SieteRayo and Cubiche), Leslie Cartaya, Mr. Haka, El Chino Dreadlion, Sol, Lena Burque, Philbert Armenteros (Afrocuban drummer, dancer, singer and producer of Los Herederos), Picadillo band; pianists Orlando Guanche, Michelle Fragoso, Pepe Montes, Raúl del Sol and Tony Pérez; bassists Manuel Orza, Nestor del Prado, Eduard Madariaga, Braulio Fernandez, Loisel Machin and Daniel Stable; drummers Raymer Olaide, Reinier Guerra, The Pututi Brothers (Alexis, Angel and Armando Arce), Hilario Bell, Joel del Sol and Daniel López; trombonist William Paredes; trumpeter Carlos Puig; flutist Mercedes Abal; guitarists Ahmed Barroso, Lázaro Rodríguez and Heriberto Rey, among many others. I include local bands like Palo! And Spam All Stars within this transnationalized Miami Cuban fusion. Although led by North-American musicians, musicians from the TCAMS are an important part of these bands' line-up, and their music is highly informed by Afrocuban rhythms and Cuban music in general. At the same time, these fusions, which include house beats and other U.S. and Latin American genres, have enriched the development of Afrocuban funk and contributed to a local urban underground sound, which in turn influences other local bands and the TCAMS.

<sup>69</sup> See Silot Bravo "PAX."

and to The News Lounge in Midtown, produced on Friday nights by a group of DJs and promoters called Vedado Social Club. Other venues that are part of this circuit are The Place, and gallery-bars Cuba 8 and Habana 305 on Calle 8, and occasionally other venues in the areas of Brickell, Miami Beach and Southwest Miami.

Recently the Cuban government removed “exit permits” as a requirement for Cubans to travel outside, which laid to rest the restrictions enforced during decades. Consequently, cultural exchanges between Cuba and the U.S. increased and have impacted the Miami Cuban alternative music circuit, resulting in an increase in showcasing Cuban musicians from the island in clubs and theaters throughout Miami with little or no protest from the traditional exile community. The changing demographics among Cuban migrants and the progressive internationalization of Miami have shaped a different political atmosphere in areas where migration from the island has burgeoned, such that dominant narratives of *cubanidad* and the official political discourse of the Cuban government and the traditional exile community have waned. The new migrants favor the normalization of relationships with their cohorts on the island. As a result, over the past year Miami’s club scene has had regular presentations of musicians from the TCAMS who had returned to Havana and that are in demand by their Miamian peers. In these local and transnational concerts, these musicians bring some of their accompanying musicians from Havana but mostly they put their bands together with local musicians. In the past year, however, such presentations have been put on hold because island-based musicians have been warned that they can’t work in the U.S. with tourist visas.

Another space that has contributed to the development of Cuban fusion music in Miami is Global Cuba Fest, a yearly festival devoted to the presentation of performing art projects by musicians from the TCAMS. It was created and managed by local non-profit organizations FUNDarte and Miami Light Project. The festival has taken place over the last 8 years throughout Miami Beach and the Wynwood area, and has become another forum for the dissemination of the work of the TCAMS to local and international audiences. It also has become an important space of encounter, exchange and collaboration between these diasporic musicians and their generational cohorts on the island. For example, in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the Global Cuba Fest in 2012, Havana-based band Interactivo performed for the first time to a sold out house at the North Band Shell in Miami Beach, an open space by the beach where local and international festivals of all kinds are usually presented. The concert became a spontaneous space for an island-diasporic generational encounter. The night ended in a jam session at a nearby Miami Beach hotel, accompanied by pictures, toasts, laughter and hugs to celebrate the encounter.

This is not an isolated case, but is repeated at every edition of the festival and other events, like the recent encounter between Interactivo, Habana Abierta and other musicians from the TCAMS like Gema Corredera and David Torrens at a concert at the Miami Dade County Auditorium in March 2014, also produced by FUNDarte.

The local audience that sustains this music is comprised of nostalgic cohorts and those interested in alternative music circuits and world music.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.5.2- *Cubanidad* in-between

This Cuban transnational music scene in Miami has become an important space where alternative narratives of *cubanidad* are constantly negotiated, through what Bourdieu has identified as a conflict between the orthodoxy of established traditions and the heretical challenge of new modes of cultural practice (16-17). Musicians who migrated in the 1990s have been negotiating their Cubanness in their music and identity as transnational subjects, living in-between dominant national imaginaries framed by the rigid nationalism of both official island and traditional exile discourses. They are migrants that unlike previous cohorts regularly maintain links and visit the island regularly and at the same time endeavor to carve out their own paths and reinvent themselves throughout the world.

In his review of diasporic texts that reconstruct Cuban historical memory post-1959, Rojas offers a series of insights applicable to the narrative of Cubanness in lyrics of the TCAMS in Miami. Although, for Rojas, the 1990s Cuban diaspora broke with the Cuban regime, just as previous cohorts had done, they have a less traumatic, more contemplative experience of the revolution and its cultural legacy. They acknowledge pre-revolutionary times in less ideal terms, are critical of the revolution but at the same

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<sup>70</sup> Lately this scene has been embraced by recent Cuban migrants who were former regulars at venues in Havana that hosted counterparts of this alternative scene, like Don Cangrejo, El Café Teatro Bertolt Brecht, El Sauce and FAC (Fábrica de Arte Cubano), among others.

time favor national reconciliation, which sets them apart from previous diasporic waves, especially from traditional exiles (“Diaspora and Memory” 261).

Mr. Haka’s song “Ponte p’a la Música,” first recorded by Cubiche and later released in Mr. Haka’s CD *Crónicas de un Escribano* (2011), is an example that confirms Rojas analysis:

Deja la política, deja el perico y deja la retórica  
Y ponte pa’ la música, ponte pa’ la música

.....  
Son las 11 de la mañana, Chamo  
No sé que me anima a levantarme tan temprano  
No hay na’a pa’ luchar un baro<sup>71</sup>  
Los billes te desayunan  
No hay ni pa’ la fuma, el país está malo  
Tengo una palmera que llega a Sarasota  
Y una depresión que no me quiero ni lavar la boca

.....  
La pincha, pariente, me pagan un descarito, y entre renta, y gasolina...

.....  
Miami está rico, rico  
La gente no quiere música, es política y perico.

Forget the politics, forget drugs, and forget the rhetoric  
And go to the music, to the music...

.....  
It’s 11 in the morning, man  
I don’t know what’s making me wake up this early  
There’s no way to make money  
Bills are like a slap in the face  
Can’t even afford a smoke, the country’s in bad shape  
I’ve got pointless Cuban pride from here to Sarasota  
And I’m so depressed I don’t even want to brush my teeth

.....

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<sup>71</sup> Baro is a term use in Cuban slang to refer to money.



I'm working for my friends, getting paid pennies under the table  
 and between rent and gas...  
 Miami is loaded (with cash)  
 But people don't want music, all they want is politics and drugs. (Mr. Haka  
*Crónicas*)

A rap song with explosive vocal improvisations by Haka in dialogue with *timba* piano *tumbaos* and funk rhythms, it provides a very comprehensive panorama of Miami's social landscape from the perspective of subaltern migrants. It tells what it's like to live in Miami for recent immigrant musicians who struggle to break into the music market. The song's critiques range from what these musicians perceive as lack of opportunity and support for Cuban musicians in the local and mainstream market, highly visible corruption and drugs, and the difficulty to find a job. The song proposes a conciliatory approach to deal with these challenges, calling for the celebration of music and culture as a form of empowerment for all Cubans.<sup>72</sup> This type of song illustrates one of the most prevalent discourses of this network of musicians, who in several conversations and interviews with me insisted on their need to make songs that reflect their own views on social and existential concerns about their generation's realities as recent migrants and about the Cuban dilemma, in a way they think is not reflected in previous diasporic accounts on Cubanness.

In June 2008, Cubiche's director Descemer Bueno and singer Mr. Haka appeared in "A mano limpia," a TV show devoted to Cuban politics on Miami's local channel America TV (Canal 41).<sup>73</sup> They were invited to dialogue about Cuban music with artists

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<sup>72</sup> See also Silot Bravo "Mr. Haka."

<sup>73</sup> See "Cubiche en Miami."

who migrated in the 1960s, but the conversation quickly moved to politics. The program's host insisted on getting the invitees' opinion about a recent performance by locally acclaimed Spanish singer Dyango in Cuba. The debate could have gotten heated due to the assumed difference of opinions across generations of Cubans migrants, but that was not the case. The older artist lamented the lack of freedom of her generation's musicians to perform on the island. Bueno explicitly shared her concern and advocated moving beyond the politics that affect Cuban culture, and the normalization of travel exchanges without restrictions for Cuban artists in both directions. In interviews and in some of their lyrics, this generation of musicians seems less interested in defining their identity in strictly political and nationalistic terms like the traditional exiles did. As a result, in some cases they feel disconnected to diasporic narratives of *cubanidad* that do not reflect their own experiences as transnational migrants.

Discursively, lyrics from these musicians seems to have a "low profile" with regard to the traditional politicization of Cuban issues in the diaspora. Instead, they embrace depoliticized and open notions of *cubanidad* as a deterritorialized space of tolerance, reconciliation and mobility across borders for all Cubans, beyond geographical and political distances. Their lyrics are not concerned with Cuban politics as in previous diasporic groups; instead they reflect critically on their migrant condition as well as on local and global challenges. Those musicians who have returned to live on the island or who regularly travel back and forth have gained greater mobility and certain leverage over their lives and work.

Unlike most of the earlier diaspora, for the TCAMS musicians residing in Miami, Cuba has become a place to visit where some have managed to connect with an important

fan base, record promotional materials, collaborate with recognized musicians, etc. I think this has provided them with more leeway in progressively advancing not only their careers as in the case of Bueno, but creating a space of encounter among Cubans outside of traditional politics, as is advocated in many Habana Abierta's songs. However, they are not exempt from the vicissitudes of government control and censorship over cultural matters on the island, which leads them to negotiate a delicate balance in more open or discreet ways. Despite these constraints, musicians from the TCAMS are opening spaces for themselves and others within and beyond their generational cohort, through their inclusive and "low prolife" attitudes in terms of Cuban politics. In practical terms, they are sorting out the political obstacles that had separated Cubans from both shores for half a century.

According to an old exile who helped organize a protest in Miami against songwriter Pablo Milanés in 2011, the Cuban community (which he believes he represents) doesn't get irritated by younger Cuban musicians from the island playing in Miami because "no one knows who they are" as opposed to the high-profile Cuban artists that still send tempers rising in the Cuban exile community (Gratereaux). On the other hand, younger Cuban-Americans like Pedro Vidal, president of the Cuban Soul Foundation— a cultural non-profit that promotes in the U.S. the art of newer generations of alternative music from the island like Escuadrón Patriota, Los Aldeanos, Silvito El Libre and Omni Zona Franca, among others — thinks that younger Cuban-Americans want to learn more about Cuban artists, and are more open-minded about these artists performing in the United States (Idem).

Discursively, the TCAMS has become a narrative space where, as O' Reilly points out, there are possibilities for formulating more fluid, discrepant and critical discursive practices at the border of competing discourses on Cuban national identity in the transnational context (*Cuba* 187).

### 3.6- The TCAMS and the music industry

Musicians from the TCAMS experienced important challenges with respect to the world and Latin music industries at the time of their migration. When it originated in the eighties, world music was mostly devoted to non-western music—such as folk and the so called and controversial term ethnic music—presented to the western world under a single denomination, in many cases through producers acting as mediators that “adapt” this world of music to “the western ear.” In the current Internet-based global music market, where there is increasing immediate access to music from all over the world through social networks and music streaming websites, world music has become a more encompassing and to a certain extent diluted category. For example, Buena Vista Social Club became a global success at the end of the 1990s not through the Latin but through the world music industry. BVSC rekindled an interest in the U.S. and worldwide in traditional Cuban music, and led to the impression that Cuban music made after 59 lacked any relevance. In this environment, some of the TCAMS musicians initially attracted the attention of labels oriented to the World music circuit. However, most of these musicians created their own labels and self-produced especially in Miami. In this changing context, self-production and promotion has become the norm for many. They basically distribute their music through social networks and music streaming websites, i.e.: YouTube, Facebook, Rhapsody, Reverbnation, Spotify, SoundCloud and iTunes.

In Cuba people get access to their recordings through informal markets and person-to-person exchanges.

On the other hand, post-1959 music made on the island is not well known because of its limited presence in the U.S. The concomitant informational gap led to a precarious labeling system that does not reflect the evolution of Cuban music over the last 50 years. That has also contributed to a stereotyped representation of sounds and narratives that until recently projected *lo cubano* in the Latin music market dating back to more than 50 years ago. With some exceptions, musicians from the TCAMS in Miami and other cities in this alternative music circuit do not replicate what are thought to be “successful” patterns of Cuban music outside the island, like the Buena Vista Social Club, in order to gain access to the Latin and mainstream music markets. Instead, they have progressively established their own local music scenes that have connected spontaneously among themselves in the U.S. and across the globe. In the U.S., they have gravitated more towards the Alternative Latin Music Scene and are progressively opening up their own spaces, reflected in the increased recognition of these musicians in conventional music circuits like the Grammys and Latin Grammys.<sup>74</sup>

Bueno is perhaps the most interesting exception to this trend of distance from the Latin and mainstream music market among many of the TCAMS musicians. He was a pioneer in adopting a transnational mode of life and music making. Skillfully navigating

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<sup>74</sup> Dafnis Prieto, Yosvany Terry, Elio Villafranca, Omar Sosa, Pedrito Martinez, Manuel Varela, Lulo Vázquez, Elain Morales, Leslie Cartaya, Palo, Lena Burke, Descemer Bueno, Alain Pérez, Tiempo Libre, Yusa and Alex Cuba are among the growing number of musicians from the TCAMS that have either being nominated and awarded with the Grammys, Latin Grammys and other awards.

all sorts of political, migratory and bureaucratic obstacles, Bueno managed to live, work and tour the world first from Havana, then Spain, New York, and later shuttling between Miami and Havana. Together with Pavel Urquiza and Robertico Carcassés, Descemer is one of the main music producers of the musical legacy of the TCAMS registered in several recordings over the last 20 years. To a large extent Urquiza, Carcassés and Descemer helped craft, promote and influence the music language of several musicians in this network.<sup>75</sup>

Trained in classical music, Descemer's inclination towards jazz, fusion and songwriting took shape first as a bass player, vocal, arranger and composer in Estado de Animo and Columna B bands in 1990's Havana. Once in the U.S., Bueno's transcultural fusion of Cuban (traditional and more contemporary) music registers in a flawless and appealing dialogue with afro, Caribbean, jazz, hip-hop and funk styles materialized in the successful debut album *President Alien* (2003) by New York-based band Yerbabuena, and in his own project *Sieterayo* (2005), produced in Miami by Universal Latino. During this period Bueno's career as a music producer took off, taking charge of several award-winning music projects for films and albums by his Cuban cohorts in cities on three continents, including the island. One of his most remarkable and less distributed productions of this period is his album *Sé Feliz*, recorded and released in Havana in 2008 by Egrem. The album features an astounding compilation of original boleros, all

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<sup>75</sup> Urquiza, Bueno and Carcassés have produced and collaborated on albums for musicians from the TCAMS like Gema and Pavel, Habana Abierta, Telmarys, Kelvis Ochoa, Haydee Milanés, Boris Larramendi, Gema Corredera, Interactivo, Francis del Río and William Vivanco, among many others.

composed by Bueno. Instrumentally arranged in the most minimalist and sublime tradition of the genre, the songs are masterfully performed by legendary singer Fernando Alvarez.

From Bueno's more alternative Miami incursions at the time, his brief project Cubiche was musically perhaps his most interesting. In this collective Descemer convened several of the best artists from the TCAMS living in Miami.<sup>76</sup> Since its inception in 2008, Cubiche left an important mark on the local underground music scene. They took root in local circuit venues like Hoy Como Ayer, Kimbaracubara, La Casa de Tula, Los Viernes Culturales de la Calle 8. As a band concept Cubiche was a laboratory of music creation similar to Interactivo and Habana Abierta. They prioritized a format of open collaborations where musicians from diverse backgrounds with their own independent careers constantly interacted, giving each other feedback that enriched their collective and individual musical endeavours and generated further individual or group projects. Although initially Cubiche's project attracted attention, that didn't translate into a record deal and the musicians, especially Bueno, decided to continue with their own independent careers. The result of this project was documented in an EPK directed by Cuban filmmaker Ernesto Díaz, and on demo for an album of 9 songs still to be

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<sup>76</sup> Cubiche was an ad-hoc collective leading by Bueno who put together a remarkable group of Cuban migrant musicians living in Miami since the 1990s, who at the same time were trying to launch their independent carriers. They were: Mr. Haka, an underground Cuban MC; versatile jazz pianist Michelle Frago; percussionist, dancer, rumbero and singer Philbert Armenteros, director of the leading Afro-Cuban group "Los Herederos"; Leslie Cartaya, nominated soloist and leading singer of Palo! Band; El Chino DreadLion, dancer, reggae singer and former member of Yerbabuena band; Elain Morales, a great *timba* and pop singer; Jorge Almarales, a veteran rock guitarist and Hilario Bell, a solid Latin jazz percussionist. Many other musicians from the TCAMS living in Miami used to collaborate with Cubiche on a regular basis.

published. Cubiche's music has been characterized as the "New Miami's stage funky sound." It's a continuation of Descemer's music language in Yerbabuena and Siete Rayo, enriched with the contributions of each member: a heavily funky and urban fusion of traveling Cuban music with flavors from Havana, New York and Miami. Cubiche's music represents a good example of the music legacy of the TCAMS. It's made in Miami with a global appeal in dialogue with reggae, *timba*, cumbia, Hispanic and Anglo rock, pop, and Brazilian rhythms and harmonies.<sup>77</sup>

As a producer and singer, Descemer Bueno is the first musician from the TCAMS currently establishing a significant mainstream presence in the Latin and international pop music market with the global success of his song "Bailando" in 2014, after Hispanic pop icon Enrique Iglesias launched it featuring Bueno and island reggaeton duo Gente de Zona. The hit rapidly situated Bueno in the Billboard charts and nominations, giving him substantial recognition in social media channels like YouTube with around 1000 million views, as well as in international music venues either as an opening act with his own band members from the island, as well as in stage collaboration with Iglesias and many other Cuban, Latin and Hispanic artists. It will be interesting to see if Bueno's commercial transition towards the mainstream Latin music market might have an impact on the future productions and aesthetic musical preferences of other musicians from the TCAMS.

Although for several decades Cuban migrants have been completely excluded from reaching their natural audience back on the island, the diasporic careers and the

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<sup>77</sup> See: Silot Bravo "Cubiche"



shifting political contexts are giving these musicians from the TCAMS increasing recognition among island audiences and cultural institutions like Cubadisco (music awards) and Los Premios Luca (video awards), among others. Yusa, Elain, Mr. Haka, Descemer Bueno, Alain Pérez, Yosvany Terry, Roman Filiú, Telmary, Gema Corredera and Elmer Ferrer, among many others, have been nominated and/or awarded by both institutions for their music productions made outside Cuba. They are the first post revolutionary Cuban diasporic musicians opening up spaces for themselves on the island within and/or beyond the official realm.

### 3.7- Cuban Fusion across boundaries

Several labels have been indistinctively and progressively adopted to describe the music made by these musicians throughout different cities: conga-funk, bolero-feeling, *timba-rock*, *timba-funk*, bolero-hop, rockasón, cha-cha-chá- blues, progressive feeling, Cuban alternative music, contemporary Cuban music, world Cuban music, Miami bohème, among others. These terms have been collectively constructed throughout the years by these musicians in some of their lyrics, in interaction with their audiences in live presentations, in interviews and conversations, in online videos that circulate over the Internet either posted by fans or for promotional purposes and in documentaries. Presenters and producers, journalists and commentators have also been part of this semiotic construction about the music made by in the TCAMS through their marketing materials.

What I think all these different labels try to grasp is the open-ended reach combinations and dialogues that shape the music made in the TCAMS. I call it Cuban fusion, and I consider it a transcultural music product that is located globally and is

shaped throughout the different cities where musicians from the TCAMS interact. It's a music that portrays a combination of different types of fusions that transcends generic borders. In the different cities studied, musicians from the TCAMS are not part of the mainstream but are closer to a bohemian scene distributed throughout local circuits that in general support live music and as Andrew Yeomanson, the director of Spam All Stars, says: "are far from exclusionary velvet ropes."<sup>78</sup> In that sense, this Cuban fusion music is for the most part underground or alternative, and relies on improvisation more than on rehearsals as one of its defining features. It's sustained by a fluid conversation among the musicians from the TCAMS across the globe in collaborations, recordings and on stage. At the same time, a high level of musicianship is a common feature of this network throughout all the different urban centers where it has been shaped.

This Cuban fusion is also informed by the generational and individual subjectivities, education, references, frustrations, illusions and aesthetics of a significant group of singers, singer-songwriters and academically trained musicians who suddenly and massively became migrants and are dispersed throughout the world. As in the 1990's novels examined in Chapter 2, this Cuban fusion portrayed in the TCAMS is another cultural product resulting from that context of crisis and profound societal change. Later it morphed into a trans-territorial cultural product made by traveling subjects that have surpassed geographic, ideological and political barriers, establishing as an organic and fluid network of music creativity, collaboration and interaction.

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<sup>78</sup> See *Miami Boheme*.

The Cuban fusion from the TCAMS has bridged spaces of communication and understanding among different generation of Cubans and cultural communities. At the same time, it's enriching and diversifying the urban cultural life of the different cities it encompasses. It's a significant component of the transnational vocation of Cuban culture at the turn of the century that is yet to be fully acknowledged both inside and outside the island.

## Conclusion

The fall of the Berlin Wall marked a vital moment of rupture for Cuban society. As a result, the deconstruction of the promises of the revolutionary nation and of the narratives of the “New Man” in the arts that emerged since the 1980s gained momentum. Alternative and transnational narrative imaginaries emerged in the cultural production of the massive diasporic network of Cuban singer-songwriters and academically trained musicians, and in the novels by a group of disenchanted writers who managed to stay on the island and successfully publish abroad. The musicians and writers of these two circuits of cultural production proposed alternative, dystopian and transnational approaches to imagine, represent and put into sound Cubanness in a post-Soviet context, transcending the two dominant discourses: the official discourse on the island and those of the traditional exiles.

In the literary field, the crisis prompted the proliferation of novels among authors born and raised during the revolution yet who posited alternative voices to those of revolutionary rhetoric. These writers openly disengaged from the saga of Socialist Realism, the aesthetic and ideology imposed on the island’s literary canon by the longstanding cultural bureaucracy. They were able to access more openly a sector of the international publishing market increasingly interested in the changes that were taking place on the island. On the other hand, the chaotic economic situation forced the establishment to loosen its control over certain aspects of cultural production.

Ena Lucía Portela and Pedro Juan Gutiérrez stand out among the nineties’ writers due to their particular raw and quasi-journalistic aesthetic of Dirty Realism that critically documented the crumbling nation in their novels. From different narrative gazes and

gender perspectives, both authors zoom out of focus the redemptive commonplace of the heroic “New Man” prevalent in the post ’59 imaginary of the nation-state. The centrality of the national is displaced by the dissolution of the morals, utopia and stereotypes of the revolutionary Cuban subject. Instead they recreated the triviality of daily subsistence in their portrayal of censorship, misery, ruins, illegalities and underground markets. They also brought to center stage the increased visibility of other ethics, marginal subjects and identities like homosexuals, lesbians, prostitutes, marginal people and blacks, obscured by the official ideology.

In *Cien Botellas en una Pared* (2003), Portela provides an ironic female gaze on the narrative voices to explore the “dark side” and the existential distress of “ordinary” people in their individual daily lives in the midst of the crisis. Her characters depict the redemptive agency of feminist and lesbian subjects as alternatives to the decadent male-centered and collective ethos of the “New Man”. However, Portela does not intend to propose a new system of “truths” or a metanarrative to navigate the crisis of Cuban socialism or the place of the female voice within that context. She is more interested in deconstructing extant “truths” or metanarratives— like the lasting centrality of a collective sense of national identity, the entitlement of the national official discourse, and the “impermeability” of sexual identities attributed to the performance of the “New Man” or Cuban macho. Instead, Portela plays with the multiplicity and hybridity of other identities and loci of enunciation and challenges the privileged place of a heterosexual culture embedded in the revolutionary imaginary.

The novel also recreates Havana as an urban space of the Special Period where new literary figures and images that practically didn’t exist or were not that visible before

are uncovered, like homeless people scavenging in the garbage, beggars, black market dealers, the re-emergence of racism, the proliferation of prostitution, alcoholism and drug use. The decadence of *El Vedado* as an urban space in Portela's novel is a microcosmic representation of the decadence of the capital of the nation, and by extension of the revolutionary national project, as a result of the 1990's crisis.

For Portela's characters, the promises of the revolutionary utopia and the redemptive ethos of the "New Man" were useless in dealing with the shortcomings and dissatisfactions prompted by the harsh context of crisis. Instead, they sought "liberation" by focusing on their most pressing individual needs of daily survival and immediate satisfaction. They delineated alternative moral coordinates of the island's post-soviet context, where there was no more possibility to postpone the present and the dilemmas of the self for the socialist promises of a glorious tomorrow that for these characters would never arrive. Portela's characters also deal with the decadent moral and social environment prompted by the crisis by evoking different notions of community and alliance based on feminine solidarity and the search for permissive spaces for the enactment of gender agency of different sorts like queer and lesbian ethics.

Irony is another important literary resource in the post-soviet context, frequently used by Portela for her narrators and characters to "liberate" the post-soviet subject from the ideological constraints of political correctness implied in the revolutionary nation. Irony also helps the novel's female characters to mock and on occasion avoid the patriarchal standards of the revolutionary subject embodied in the "New Man". Ultimately, irony makes the decadent environment of the crisis more bearable.

In *Trilogía sucia de la Habana* (1998), Pedro Juan Gutiérrez re-signifies the use of testimonial and journalistic strategies in the revolutionary literary tradition. The novel documents the crisis of the socialist metanarrative of the Cuban revolution by giving voice to forgotten individuals massively converted into marginal beings, and portraying the generalization of material and existential distress prompted by the crisis. The voice and gaze of the narrator provides a close-up of the disintegration of the assurances of revolutionary utopia and the generalization of the new harsh realities in a similar yet more dramatic way than in Portela's novel, i.e.: generalized hunger, lack of basic services and products for daily subsistence, the urge to procure foreign currency at any cost, the commodification of the body, the expansion of a landscape of material deterioration and ruins, the further marginalization of black people and the generalization of a survival mode.

As the narrator and main character, Gutiérrez focuses on the recreation of the marginal and underground world and subjects through a scatological and irreverent prose. More than a marketing strategy to attract the attention of the international publishing market, the emphasis on the marginal in both Gutiérrez's and Portela's novels is a logical move for post-soviet Cuban writers who gained a certain independence from the hegemonic discourse and the tutelage of the institutional framework and therefore were able to engage through their fiction with the dramatic change that they witnessed. The Special Period was such a devastating moment, not only sociologically but also at the individual level, that it was impossible to avoid in the cultural field. Because of the space gained in the international market, Gutiérrez and Portela acquired leverage to negotiate a different literary place in the island's post-soviet cultural context, more on their own

terms, and kept greater distance from the predicaments of the establishment than other writers. That was a significant move for writers in the post-revolutionary literary field.

The post-Soviet narrative that characterizes Gutiérrez' novel also implies a certain sense of loss due to the transition from the paternalism inscribed in the socialist metanarrative to the freedom of the individual that enhances uncertainty, loneliness and a sense of isolation. This transition from the collective alienation of the self, represented in the "New Man", to the realm of the individual forced by the crisis is depicted in Gutiérrez' characters by their indifference and disbelief in any alternative project of progress in the short or long term. In other words, the novel as a cultural text represents and at the same time contributes to make irrelevant the national imaginary of the revolution.

If Portela's novel makes visible alternative social arrangements – such as female solidarity and alternative spaces for gender experimentation – to the disappearing revolutionary morals of the nineties, Gutiérrez focuses instead on a hyperrealist male and individualistic gaze, providing a firsthand detailed and sensorial recreation of the dark and underground context of decadence resulting from the crisis. The exoticism of marginality, a wild and barbaric existence defined by all sorts of addictions, the prominence of violence, the recurrent visibility of primal sexual impulses, the objectification of the female body and the "animalization" of the female black body are among the most recurrent literary images of Gutiérrez' characters in the midst of the surrounding chaos.



In both *Trilogía* and *Cien Botellas*, the fictional game with literature becomes a space of redemption. The post-revolutionary subject that emanates from both novels is transgressive because the national project is no longer the center of its imaginary or agency. Instead, these novels pose immediate questions pertaining to the individual realms that were silenced or postponed by the revolutionary ideology. Disbelief in metanarratives, ideologies and institutions of power, a permanent pursuit of survival, and the search for immediate sources of gratification are among some of the new ethical coordinates that challenge dominant constructions about the revolutionary national subject in terms of morals, ethics and gender.

In the music field, the 1990s massive wave of migration to the United States, Europe and Latin America marked an important transnational moment for Cuban music, with the most significant relocation of Cuban singer-songwriters like Gema Corredera, Pavel Urquiza and the members of Habana Abierta; and academically trained musicians like Dafnis Prieto, Yosvany Terry, Alain Perez and Descemer Bueno, also born and raised during the revolution. Those musicians have formed what I call the Transnational Cuban Alternative Music Scene (TCAMS), a network of collaborations, production and consumption of Cuban music across different world cities like Miami, New York and Madrid. Located in mainly local and international non-mainstream music circuits, this transnational network emerged to reap the advantages these musicians could enjoy as migrants in a globalized context, such as greater mobility, access to technological developments (Thomas, “Cosmopolitan” 110) and instant socialization and marketing opportunities provided by social networks.

These musicians opened up the aesthetic boundaries of Cuban diasporic music production beyond the dramatic nostalgia for the homeland or traditional commercial stereotypes of Cuban music that still prevailed internationally. An eclectic fusion with world sonorities is their main musical method of music creation and resulting language, where the archive of Cuban traditional songs and more eclectic popular Cuban music is open to a contrapuntal dialogue with world sonorities. This fusion doesn't fit easily into traditionally recognized Cuban music genres in World Music, Latin or international mainstream markets.

The music of the duo Gema y Pavel is an example. They were among the first singers-songwriters from this generation who migrated to Madrid, and their prolific career as musicians and producers became an important reference for many Cuban musicians inside and outside the island. Although informed by *nueva* and *novísima trova*, Gema y Pavel proposed a new type of Cuban song. They recreated the tradition of *filin* boleros in a very creative counterpoint with Brazilian harmonies, Andean sounds, Afro-Cuban rhythms, jazz improvisations and flamenco, resulting in sophisticated vocal and musical arrangements.

The music of nineties Cuban jazz musicians residing in New York like Dafnis Prieto and Yosvany Terry is another example of the aesthetic coordinates of innovation that the TCAMS has pushed forward. They are among the protagonists of a renaissance of Cuban musicianship in the American jazz scene, potentially more significant than when Afro-Cuban jazz emerged in New York in the 1940s. They have established their individual careers and at the same time are influencing the New York and international jazz scenes on their own terms. They are opening up jazz as an infinite space of

intertextuality and dialogue with their Cuban music background in traditional, Afrocuban and popular music. They share with their singer-songwriter cohorts of the nineties an aesthetic interest in establishing intercultural dialogues and pushing forward generic boundaries with their music. They blur the lines between jazz and Cuban music as a cosmopolitan cultural endeavor.

Discursively, the lyrics of diasporic singers-songwriters from the nineties like Gema y Pavel, Vanito Brown, Alejandro Gutierrez and Leslie Cartaya are not as explicitly critical as the novels by nineties writers. They assume an apparent depoliticized, middle ground or distant position in relation to dominant and ideologically charged imaginaries about Cubanness projected by the island's official discourse and the traditional exiles. They are less interested in dealing with traditional Cuban topics as the center of their concerns, either because they are alienated by the excessive burden of politics they have personally experienced both within and outside the island due to their Cuban origins, or because they seem more interested in exploring their current existential concerns regarding their migrant experiences and the global condition. However, when they deal with more social and political Cuban concerns, they do so with a sharp, sometimes subtle and/or unprejudiced attitude as occurs, for example, in Habana Abierta's song, "Asere que Volá" from the album *Boomerang* (2003). Like Gutiérrez and Portela's novels, the song chronicles the significant moral deterioration experienced by Cuban society, and reflects on the expansion of the marginal as a material and existential condition for many Cubans after the crisis. It also reflects upon the lack of alternatives and the attitudes of evasiveness adopted by young people to deal with the shifting

situation, which include an increasing recourse to drugs, prostitution and the massive migration of friends and dispersion of families.

As a result of the crisis, Cuban cultural production in the literary and music field from the 1990s is fragmentary and dispersed. Cuban music has also transnationalized, a phenomenon that has progressively expanded to other cultural fields, and which merits further study. A significant number of musicians from that period relocated and are producing music they regard as Cuban across the world, beyond the traditional “territorial” location of *lo cubano*. Many writers from that period also migrated. That was not the case for Portela and Gutiérrez, however they were among the nineties’ writers that established a modality of transnational cultural production from the island. They were able to stay and gain a certain independence from the cultural establishment, with regard to their earnings and the content of their cultural products, by taking advantage of the shifting normative context and by successfully publishing outside the island.

The narratives of both the diasporic alternative music network and the novels by Portela and Pedro Juan embody the deconstruction of the “New Man” into a disenchanted, apolitical and pragmatic subject. This post-Soviet subject experienced first hand and became the protagonist of the collapse of the socialist utopia and practice in times of crisis, and became increasingly disconnected from the official discourse. The new circumstances forced this subject to adopt a culture of survival or to reinvent herself as a migrant. As a result, in the narratives of both cultural fields of the nineties there’s a post-revolutionary and dystopian posture that mitigates the determinism of the national subject in cultural texts. In the case of the novels studied, the narrative is openly irreverent and explicitly focuses on unraveling the marginal and the hidden worlds

beyond the revolutionary discourse. In their lyrics, diasporic singers-songwriters of the nineties selectively engaged with Cuban topics and are more open to other imaginaries about local and universal issues beyond national politics. Instead, they uphold a bohemian posture as a subtly irreverent space of resistance to the predicaments that arise from dominant narratives of Cubanness or the mainstream music market.

The distinct process of transnationalization of the Cuban society that is taking place since the 1990's crisis demands opening up traditional forms of inquiry in Cuban studies. For that purpose, it's necessary to design interdisciplinary approaches that promote a dialogue across cultural fields. Like never before in the post-revolutionary period, there's a massive wave of Cuban artists born and raised during the revolution who have spread throughout the world. Despite that dispersion, the cultural production by 1990s creators shares certain common characteristics from that generation in terms of background, education and life experiences that should not be overlooked.

In particular, there's a need to pay greater attention to the cultural production of recent diasporic subjects in cultural fields like literature, music, film and others. In the case of music studies, future areas of inquiry should differentiate and explore Cuban artistic diasporic scenes throughout the world, for example: academically trained musicians that pursue classical music professionally; networks of *timba* bands, venues and dancers; communities of *rumberos* and other Afrocuban music forms; and jazz networks in other U.S. cities and countries. In the literary field, it could be useful to explore other post-soviet narrative spaces at the turn of the century. For example, by exploring connections between the aesthetics of the nineties' writers with subsequent

authors like the so called "Generation O;" or between writers still living on the island and those that migrated.

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