Encoded Bodies: An Analysis of Women of the Hispanic Caribbean Diaspora Performing Identity

by

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Abstract

The body houses knowledge of lived experiences and functions as an apparatus of storytelling. As women have long been associated in Western culture with the body, this study discusses performances that consider the concrete daily and quotidian experience as reference points. This project explores the representations of ciswomen that inhabit the Hispanic Caribbean diaspora and have had contact with North America who discuss what it means to create, to live and to survive in a culture with hierarchical understandings of identity. I inquire the ways they use their bodies to re/animate and re/insert stories into the collective consciousness, stories ranging from diaspora and migration, abuses of power by regimes and/or governments, racial hierarchies, and simply everyday life.

This thesis features works from: María I. Fornés, Alina Troyano, Josefina Báez, Elizabeth Ovalle, Carmen Rivera, Coco Fusco, and Carmen Peláez and considers the following questions: 1) What is performance? 2) How does the body communicate? 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of an ephemeral medium? 4) What is the role of the audience in these scripted enactments? Targeting liminality, identity, and community, I inquire how performance interacts with the hybrid space of its subjects, exploring embodied language and its contributions to the textual significance of lived experiences of dramatists who belong to countries with distinct

colonial histories.

I probe the mechanisms which performance uses to shape, parody or interrogate societal norms with examples of opposing subjectivity. This investigation discovers how these texts represent and create community by analyzing the role of the spectator, family, and the wider collective of which these productions are in dialogue. As orality has existed in the Caribbean as a form of intelligence creating countercultures, I outline how these performances and the bodies of these artists exist in direct opposition to homogenous and monolithic understandings of identity. Although they perform fictionalized and constructed narratives, the dramatists of this study often represent autobiographical accounts and thus their body has often lived through the script. The analysis of these narratives is crucial as everyday lived conditions of diaspora and exile are often perceived as unworthy of research.

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Introduction

> "I regard theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being."
> — Oscar Wilde

While the more formal aspects of performance studies are relatively new to me, I have always been interested in the ways in which authors give life to their texts. Many choose to do this through wordplay, figures of speech, lively descriptions, or intertextual references, but I find that the most captivating way of hooking my attention has consistently been through oral and physical renditions of the works themselves. Even as a little girl, my younger brother would insist that I read to him "doing the voices" for each character and refused to accept a straightforward narration without a little gusto. Much later throughout my undergraduate studies my experiences with "out loud renditions" of Spanish texts were mostly limited to poetry until I enrolled in a course about Spanish Golden Age theatre. The class quickly became one of my favourites as our professor insisted that we not read but instead, act out fragments of the plays. Her patience with our less than spectacular undergraduate third-year Spanish skills and subpar enactments will always be fondly remembered. Not much of an actress myself, I still found delight in "enjoying the plays as they were intended" as claimed my then instructor.

Unlike novels and other forms of art, theatre has an added layer of intentionality and an immediate relationship with its audience. Where novels and short stories are not usually produced by their authors with verbal dictation in mind, theatre and performance exist in the space of the visceral and tangible. As the widely known Oscar Wilde quote in the epigraph claims, theatre is the most immediate art form with the ability to blur the distance between creator and receptor. For me, the immediacy of this artistic medium has always had a very

andromorphic dimension. Using the body itself as means to express, declare, and narrate is indeed the very essence of humanity as claims Wilde and, like human life, so too is theatre ephemeral, impermanent and fleeting.

Performance is reliant on oral discourse and inversely is often born from the personification and bodily portrayal itself, leaving the script as a by-product or afterthought of this enactment. This paradigm shift of the *body first* and the *narration second* was not something to which I was accustomed to and piqued my curiosity. In a seminar with Dr. Néstor Rodríguez a video clip of Josefina Báez's *Dominicanish* was my inaugural example of performance artists who operate with the understanding that the body is a text used to inscribe meaning and a means of communication. Previously I had not given much thought to the considerations of body and staging. With Báez it becomes clear that each detail of her performance style is not only intentional but executed with passion. I still find myself captivated by her ability to stretch words, play with intonation (to say so much by simultaneously saying so little) and force her audience to come to their own conclusions by analyzing the peculiarities of how she contorts her speech and body. During that seminar that exposed me to Báez's *Dominicanish* I sat there fixated and aware that I did not entirely understand the scope of what I was viewing, but eager to know more. It was then that I mustered the familiar "I like this," found a direction worthy of research and started to do some digging.

To understand language is to grasp that words are building blocks in a system of meaning. Beyond the meaning we ascribe to the units of language we call words, we must understand the context in which they are uttered. To better explain the significance of context and why the body matters, I put forward the example of Báez's *Dominicanish* and her opening line riddled with repetition of the words in juxtaposition with the absurdity of her movements and intonation. Báez enters the dimly lit stage alongside the shadow of a man playing saxophone.

The audience's focus shifts to Báez's hands together above her head she moves by lifting her knees to her torso to draw out her steps. The saxophone continues as she takes centre stage. A single spotlight puts her into the frame, and she begins to move toward the audience with her hands together, the same pronounced steps she used to enter the stage, and performs Kuchipudi movements,[1] before becoming still and placing her right hand in a Kuchipudi gesture by her right ear as though she is listening intently. The saxophone ceases and Báez begins to speak. Báez states that "everything is" then repeats the words "vegetable," "refrigerator," and "comfortable" a series of times. Each utterance is slightly different and impactful. Paired with the positioning of her hands and tone, Báez presents the audience with a parallel experience of learning a new language.

As evident in the example of Báez's *Dominicanish*, language and communication transgress the limits of speech. She does not communicate in complete sentences, there is no linear narrative and unless the audience is well-versed in classical Indian dance and expecting a Dominican woman to perform this quick footwork and expressive eye movement, it will appear that Báez performs nonsensically. Yet, as the performance continues, and the audience becomes immersed, it just simply makes sense. Through the struggles of learning the English language, we the audience too begin to understand the migrant protagonist, but this is only possible as her speech is paired with her body. My belief is that the body matters and the body's textual abilities do not start or stop with the limits of phonetics. There is more to communication than simply words. Intonation, gestures, and eye contact can dramatically change the way we ascribe meaning to language, we must not omit its performative nature. The context of utterances matters, and this context is generally understood as *performance.* Performance is not limited to

[1] Kuchipudi is a classical Indian dance style.

constructed theatrical pieces, rather it is a system of communication describing the various ways which we communicate, operate, and simply exist.

Peggy Phelan's 1993 book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* has become foundational to our understanding of performance. Phelan writes that "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance. […] Performance […] becomes itself through disappearance" (146). To better explain the relevance of Phelan to considerations of the body, I turn to Dorota Sajewksa and Dorota Sosnowska's essay "Body as Medium. Between Theory and Technology of Theatre". Referring to Phelan, Sajewska and Sosnowska argue "What she is saying here also is that body itself cannot be saved, recorded, or documented; it becomes itself only through unmediated presence that can be experienced by other bodies. The performing body is singular and ephemeral, present and real." (Sajewksa and Sosnowska). Performance may become itself through disappearance, but performance only exists by way of the body. This same body will eventually disappear but must at some point be present and witnessed by the body of others. Thus, when speaking of performance, the body becomes the textual canvas to be observed by others and consequently inserted into the collective.

The premise of this dissertation is that the body is a performance text. The body tells and therefore operates as an epistemology and system of knowledge. Yet as theatricality and scripting of encounters demonstrate, one must understand the codes to understand the message. The codes inscribed on the body are imbued with ideologies, complex histories, and human emotion. I explore the way performance artists encode their bodies and the ways they use them to re/animate and re/insert stories into the collective consciousness, stories ranging from diaspora and migration, abuses of power by regimes and/or governments, racial hierarchies, and simply everyday life. In the introduction to the anthology *Performative Body Spaces: Corporeal*

Topographies in Literature, Theatre, Dance and the visual Arts Markus Hallensleben contends that

> The human body as cultural object thus always *has* and *is* a performing subject, which combines the political with the theatrical, transgresses race and gender, shows the construction of matricide and ethnicity, unveils the male gaze of private and public corporeal topographies and finally becomes, as a meta body, a medium that overcomes the borders of artificiality and technology. The innovative impulse of these approaches is the belief that there is no distinction between a creative and a scientific approach when performing, discussing and theorizing the human body. (10-11)

With respect to the term "meta body," Hallensleben references Robert Pritchard's performance work in which Pritchard merges the imaged body, the real body, and the virtual body. Employing the body as object in his oeuvre, Pritchard explains "In each of these discussions I relate how the placement of the virtual or real body in the presentation space affects our perception of the performance and the artistic messages" (203). Although technology is used throughout the performances in my project, it will become particularly apparent how the body is used as an object to manipulate perception and illicit empathy in the mediatization of capsizing rafts in Chapter 1. The body as cultural object is a host of messages, nuances, and contradictions. Invoking posthumanism as model of contemplation gestures to future discussions and implications of the meta body as we continue, in the 21st century, to explore artificial intelligence, virtual spaces, and newfound tactics of embodiment.

In this project, I explore how the body permeates memory and history, both on the individual level of the performance artist and the collective consciousness of the societies with which they engage. The body serves as a tool to remember, a mode of keeping stories alive. I am interested in the histories the artists choose to interrogate; in the ways they use the body as a text

to breathe life into stories that have been previously excluded from the collective consciousness. These histories include ones the state has attempted to censor or ignore such as sexual tourism, racial bias, and slavery. Operating from the hypothesis that the body is a performance text, this dissertation considers the following questions: 1) What is performance? Since the term is widely used in the field of women, gender, and sexuality studies, I also interrogate how the concept of gender performance/performativity differs from theatrical performance. 2) What is a text? If the body is a text, what does it say? How does it communicate? Are we agents of this communication or does it happen passively? 3) Why do these performance artists choose an ephemeral medium? What advantages and disadvantages does this form of storytelling have? 4) If performance is about presence, who is the witness? What is the role of the audience in these scripted enactments? Are audience members active participants or passive viewers?

Early in my doctoral investigation I came across Peter Hulme's notion that in the Caribbean, writing has been consistently adjacent to performance and orality (43). Sharing aspects of culture, orality makes it possible for a society to pass knowledge across generations without writing. Embodied knowledge, like written knowledge, thus has also transcended centuries. In their article "In Praise of Creoleness" Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, and Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar explain that the privileged mode of Creole culture is orality, a by-product of the plantation system. For Bernabé et al.:

> Creoleness is the *interactional or transactional aggregate* of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history. For three centuries the islands and parts of continents affected by this phenomenon proved to be real forges of a new humanity, where languages, races, religions, customs, ways of being from all over the world were brutally uprooted and transplanted in an environment where they had to reinvent life. (891-892)

The above definition is fundamental to understand the landscape from which the performances discussed in this project have emerged. The authors further assert that in the Caribbean "Our history is a braid of histories" (892). As Creoles themselves, they contend that orality is their intelligence, "[…] Creole orality, even repressed in its aesthetic expression, contains a whole system of countervalues, a counterculture; it witnesses ordinary genius applied to resistance, devoted in survival" (895). Whereas the European canon has favoured more conventional methods of writing and art, oral tradition allows messages to be passed from one generation to the next and encompasses narrations, proverbs, folktales, fables, and song.

As orality and other such forms of performance have been and continue to be central forms of transmitting meaning in the Caribbean, I was curious about the implications and transformations of these methods of knowledge sharing with respect to the Hispanic diaspora in urban North American spaces. As our understanding of diaspora is no longer limited to simply mapping the movement of the Greeks in the Hellenic world or the Jewish peoples after the fall of Jerusalem, it makes sense that our considerations of how information, traditions and dogmas are stored, passed, and understood in diaspora should also be both questioned and transmuted. Since diaspora represents the dispersion of something that was once localized (be that people, language, or culture), which then interacts with a new space (be that the host country and society), it is apparent that the diaspora and space of dispersion interact and thus inform each other. In these series of interactions, performance and orality in a host country become a by-product of this synergy and reciprocally create new systems of meaning echoing Bernabé et al.'s sentiment that orality is a system of intelligence which incorporates countervalues and can operate as counterculture.

For the scope of this study, I have limited my parameters to constructed performances by ciswomen in the Caribbean Hispanic diaspora with particular focus on works that include or

signal immigration from Cuba and the Dominican Republic[2]. Gendered responsibilities like homemaking often result in women having very different experiences in the diaspora. The home is considered in this study as a process in migration rather than a status. The kitchen is the most gendered space within domestic boundaries. Scholars such as Mastoureh Fathi outline the ways that the growing body of literature in migration and home studies is shifting from the notion of homeland as an identifier of home for migrants, to a focus on the practices of home-making in migration (Fathi 980). The home is a threshold between public and private life: "Much of what is happening at national level in relation to home, can be traced back to the domestic space, as many feminist geographers have argued" (Fathi 985). This project then considers women's work as nation builders and the methods and means by which they instill value, countervalues and shape identity in diaspora. This dissertation contemplates the body a text and explores what happens when an artist uses the body as a mode of communication. Thus, so too is it important to decipher what makes something art, a definition that is subjective and varied within this project. Women have long been associated with the body while men are associated with the mind. As women are associated with the concrete daily and quotidian experience, what follows is an assortment of productions that consider these themes as a reference point for producing knowledge via the body.

Bernabé et al. call for a return to orality to restore cultural continuity, enrich it and go beyond to create a literature which they argue will obey all the demands of modern writing while taking roots in the traditional configurations of orality (896). Performance thus can serve as an example of this literature. Of special importance to me are the ways performance has been used to insert excluded histories and abject bodies into official narratives. I thus undertook the task of

[2] While the Puerto Rican diaspora is vast and has provided many examples of diasporic performance texts, for the purpose of this study I have limited myself to representations from the Dominican Republic and Cuba.

curating a corpus of performance texts that revolve around what are ostracized and problematic identities in the space of the Hispanic Caribbean diaspora. I soon discovered that by virtue of occupying the diaspora itself, any identity considered hybrid or bilateral is understood as inherently problematic by political organizations or systems of power and order that benefit from monolithic unity.

I interpret a performance as a live theatrical event where the body is the central tool utilized to project meaning to an audience. Video and script are purely a representation of the event itself. In her 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor also argues that performance must be taken seriously as a method of sharing and storing knowledge and explains that performances can be understood as a two-sided event where the live performance belongs to the realm of the repertoire, whereas photographs and recordings reside in the archive, since they are but minor reproductions of the event. Furthermore, this repertoire of embodied memory transcends time itself and continues to inhabit the concrete world through movement, song, dance, gestures, and other bodily processes. This transcendental nature allows performance to offer divergent opportunities from those solely accessible in the written archive. Taylor's 2003 study proves that this embodied knowledge presents effective perspectives to reconsider historical processes and transnational contact in the Americas and thus serves as a critical reference point for my project.

Unlike traditional theatre, I have elected to study works in which the body of the actor is just as imperative as the words they speak. The life experiences of actors and their bodies are central to these performances. In most cases, the author of the work is the performer herself in lieu of hired professionals, reflective of notions of traditional oral storytelling practices. Although they perform fictionalized and constructed narratives, the dramatists of my study often represent autobiographical accounts and thus their bodies have often lived through the script. The

analysis of these accounts is crucial as quotidian lived conditions of diaspora and exile are often perceived as unworthy of research. Consequently, my goal is to understand what these performances can teach us about the lives of migrant women who reject oppressive norms and institutions while navigating their hybridity.

I have devoted this project specifically to the voices of ciswomen that inhabit the Hispanic Caribbean diaspora and have had contact with North America. My corpus is composed of artists who identify as migrants, exiles or first-generation U.S. born women from Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Though some cannot return to their country of origin for political reasons, most participate in transnational movement between the Caribbean and North American urban space. This thesis features a selection of works from: María I. Fornés, Alina Troyano, Josefina Báez, Elizabeth Ovalle, Carmen Rivera, Coco Fusco, and Carmen Peláez. As hybrid subjects, these women inhabit diverse communities in which they experience ambivalent attachments to two nations, a dual sense of identity, and a network of kinship ties that cross official borders (Ricourt 14). Milagros Ricourt borrows Jorge Duany's notion of the transmigrant to describe migrants who participate in transnational practices, "In other words, transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns within a field of social relations that link together their country of origin and their country or countries of settlement. Transnationalism is also a multifaceted, multi-local process" (Ricourt 14). In the case of Coco Fusco, Carmen Peláez, María I. Fornés, and Alina Troyano, this network of kinship is conditioned by exile, and it would be inadequate to fully categorize them as transmigrants. Due to the limits of exile, Cuban emigrants cannot fully participate in transnational movement between the homeland and the host country.

Unlike the Dominican dramatists in this study, who present their respective motives for migration and move with more flexibility through the borders of the host country and homeland,

Cuban exiles and their families were rejected from their homeland and thus cannot move freely through Cuba's borders. Of course, not all Dominican migrants have experienced the same liberties. As Silvio Torres-Saillant describes in *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* all migration from the Caribbean—in one way or another—has been forced. There is a well-documented history of Dominican migrants leaving their homeland due to political persecution and other factors which impede their return. Torres-Saillant thus describes emigration as a strategy of survival, "[…] the contemporary Caribbean, often the site of economic injustice, political oppression, and corruption, has large portions of the population reduced to poverty and helpless neglect. No wonder that emigration has become the strategy par excellence for people to wrestle with the demands of survival. Leaving the Antillean world has become a norm" (228). Following the massive exodus of Dominican's that began in the 1960s, compulsory exile continues to shape Dominican visions of tomorrow (Torres-Saillant 230).

Each chapter of this study targets three central points: liminality, identity, and community. First, each chapter interrogates how performance interacts with the hybrid space of its subjects. As the artists of my study belong to countries with distinct colonial histories, it is necessary to explore how embodied language adds textual significance to their lived experiences. Secondly, these chapters explore how each dramatist uses performance to shape, parody or interrogate societal norms with examples of opposing subjectivity. The last objective of each chapter is to discover how these texts represent and create community by analyzing the role of the spectator, family, and the wider community of which these productions are in dialogue.

This project features performance theory and the work of theorists such as Diana Taylor (2003, 2012, 2016), Richard Schechner (1988), bell hooks[3] (1995), Marco De Marinis (2007),

[3] bell hooks is an author, feminist and social activist. hooks choose not to capitalize her name to put focus on her works rather than her name.

Peggy Phelan (1993), Sidonie Smith (1995), Umberto Eco (1977), and Jacques Rancière (2011). Since Linda Hutcheon writes on parody in art (2000), I find her definition helpful to explain the ways the performance artists of my study present parodic visions of identity. I have also mentioned that it is necessary to use mobility theory to analyze diaspora and exile and propose to use the work of theorists such as Antonio Benítez Rojo (1998), Ato Quayson (2013), Irene Gedalof (2003), Datta Ayona (2013), Takeyuki Tsuda (2013) and Pnina Webner (2013). To speak of gender performance and possibilities for transgressive subjectivity, I do so through the gender and identity theories of Rosi Braidotti (2011) and Judith Butler (2011). Lastly, I engage with resistance theory since the performance texts of my study deal with everyday modes of resistance. Specifically, the model put forth by Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2013) is suitable as it stems from both James C. Scott and Michel de Certeau's everyday resistance that goes on between or in conjunction with dramatic resistance.

Although it has recently gained favourable popularity in intellectual circles, performance studies emerged in the 1970s as a product of the social and disciplinary battles in academe of the decades prior, to bridge the disciplinary divide between theatre and anthropology. It achieved this by analyzing social dramas, liminality, and enactment as a way out of the structuralist notions of normativity (Taylor, "Acts of Transfer" 6). Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim suggested that previously norms were simply applied and understood to be enacted by bodies without being contested omitting the agency of subjects. In contrast, Performance Studies scholars agree that rather it is humans who shape and morph systems instead of simply adapting to them ("Acts of Transfer" 7). Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Brooks McNamara, and Michael Kirby are considered the fathers of the institutional Performance Studies program at New York University and Northwestern University (Miller 221). Despite the overwhelming efforts of these scholars of the 1970s to break from the colonialist traditions and language of

writing the Other, such communication maintained its uni-directionality as meaning making stemmed from centuries-old privilege of written-over embodied knowledge (Taylor "Acts of Transfer" 8). In hopes of contesting this unidirectional flow and stimulating the conversation in a reciprocal form, I have chosen a selection of performance texts that have never been studied in a comparative manner and about which not many academic critiques are available.

Theatrical pieces that do not conform to traditional norms are often labelled "Performance Art." Emerging in the 1960s, performance art usually has four elements: time, space, the body of the artist and a relationship between the audience and the artist ("Conceptual Art"). In contrast, in what may be categorized as traditional theatrical performances, the life experiences of actors and their bodies are irrelevant to the performance itself. More broadly, the term performance is used to talk about social dramas and embodied practices. Taylor argues that since civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere, to understand these events as performance, proposes that performance also operates as an epistemology ("Acts of Transfer" 3). Feminist scholar and activist bell hooks also connects orality to African lineage. She posits that performance has been an act central to decolonization in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. hooks contends that performance allows African-Americans to claim voice, challenge domestic oppression and transgress the boundaries of accepted speech (212). Furthermore, performance is presented as a means to resist indoctrination from Eurocentric biases within the education system.

In this project I also discuss intersectionality as a mode of responding to the previous exclusion of women of colour in contemporary feminist thought. This stream of feminism has been exemplified by scholars like Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis and Patricia Hill-Collins who utilize this framework to better account for women's multifaceted identities and the myriad of their lived experiences. I suggest that this theoretical apparatus serves as a pragmatic

tool with which to understand how inequalities of gender, class, race, sexuality and ethnicity serve to inform the performance. Intersectionality as a framework itself has gained space in the field particularly among black feminists. The term was first developed in 1989 as Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lawyer, professor and specialist in the area of issues of African-American gender, created the term as a tool that allows us to see the collision of structures. When Crenshaw coined the term, it was a relatively vague legal theory. Intersectionality is a way of understanding how race, gender, class as well as other individual characteristics intersect and overlap with each other. This tool is thus useful to explain how mundane and lived experiences of discrimination of a black woman will be different from those of a white woman or black man. Crenshaw's aim was not to build a hierarchy that positions black women at the peak but rather to dismantle racial hierarchies completely.

Considering the essence of my research, it is necessary to understand the sociohistorical background that shapes the current circumstances of the Caribbean diaspora. Peter Hulme argues that we live increasingly in a world that is shaped by US imperialism which began at the turn of the twentieth century with the occupation of Guantánamo Bay and the building of the Panamá canal (42-43). These developments help define the conditions that frame transnational movement between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States. Such movement is not just of products and goods but also of people, ideologies, religions, and morals. Therefore, the diaspora is a matrix of economic, political, and cultural interrelations that create an area of commonality between a group of dispersed people (Brah 196). Although Cuba has a peculiar relation with the United States than that of the Dominican Republic. In most cases, Cuban migrants in the United States self-identify as political exiles and not diasporic subjects like those who belong to the Dominican diaspora in the United States.

In their book *Diaspora & Hybridity,* Virinder Kalra, Raminder K Kalhon and John

Hutnyk (2005) offer a timeline that maps the increasing momentum of language used to discuss migration. They assert that before the 1990's there was little academic interest in the term "diaspora." Instead, academic literature that discussed the term was primarily concerned with the Jewish or African context. Kalra, Kalhon and Hutnyk maintain that the classical understanding of "diaspora" encompasses forced movement, exile, and a loss from the inability to return. These authors credit Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993) and Ronald Segal's *The Black Diaspora* (1995) for delving into the cultural outcome of slavery as previous considerations of diaspora only outlined the history of the terminology. The hyphenated, hybrid identification allows us to move beyond the static notion of immigrant. Migration is not a one-off event with one-way consequences but rather an "ongoing process of building links and relationships at the material and cultural level (Kalra et al.)." Nonetheless the hyphenated, hybrid identity is inherently problematic as it challenges the notions of pure clear-cut markers demonstrating that identity itself is multifaceted and a dynamic process.

Like Kalra, Kalhon and Hutnyk, many Mobility scholars agree that a reoccurring theme central to the understanding of diaspora is its multi-locational qualities, where the relationship between homes and abroads cannot be reduced to one place or another. As William Safran argues there is a "triadic relationship" (1991) at the centre of diasporic debates: 1) the dispersed group who have some form of collective identity or process of identification; 2) the contexts and nation-states in which these various groups reside; and 3) the nation-states to which an affiliation is maintained, through a series of social, economic and cultural ties. I agree with Kalra, Kalhon, and Hutnyk that it is not sufficient to talk about categories of diaspora without paying attention to how movement differently influences the lives of men and women. Diasporic groups are indeed subject to two sets of gender relations (that of home and abroad) and in addition, women often become the carriers of cultural symbolism. As Bronwyn Winter argues in her article, paper

"Women as Cultural Markers/Bearers," women have been mobilized as cultural markers/bearers in relation to nationalist discourse and subnational identity politics. Women can represent the nation or culture and transmit these dogmas and ideologies to their children and other women whether as participants (willing or not), defenders, educators through maternal transmission of values, or resistors who attempt to create new cultural values (Winter 2016). In anti-colonial and racial minority contexts, women have been utilized as both cultural emblems and as cultural police. Conjointly I view these discussions to be significant enough to begin my study with a chapter which focuses on family and the collective. In the first chapter, "Diaspora and the Collective: Displays of Family in the Performance Texts of María Irene Fornés, Carmen Peláez and Elizabeth Ovalle," I analyze five plays concerned with migration and its effects on homelands and host communities. This section explores theatrical productions of migrants and their families as they assimilate into Miami and New York City, reflecting the experience of Cuban exiles and Dominican migrants. The focus of this chapter is therefore on family, kin, and community as the work of Fornés, Peláez and Ovalle is in dialogue with family relations, distance, and the collective experience. The characters in these performances are grieving the loss of their family structures that James Clifford defines as "a defining tension" ("Diasporas" 312).

Chapter 1 begins with the investigation of María Irene Fornés' *Letters from Cuba* and *Manual for a Desperate Crossing*, since many scholars point to her significance in the canon. She is the oldest performance artist cited in this project, with years of experience generating theatrical productions regarding themes of Caribbean migration and exile. While *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* outlines the physical challenges of unregulated migrations as the audience is immersed in the stream of consciousness of migrants on a raft, *Letters from Cuba* is a chronicle of a brother and sister's parallel struggles separated by distance and time as they use letters to

communicate. It is worthwhile to study Fornés' pieces in relation to the that of Carmen Peláez's *El Postre de Estrada Palma* and *My Cuba* and Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-work*. Although Ovalle, unlike Peláez and Fornés, is not of Cuban descent and does not identify as a political exile, the performance pieces of these three women deal with family and community and the challenges that distance imposes upon the family unit. In *El Postre de Estrada Palma* Peláez utilizes dessert as a reference point for connection, while *My Cuba* is the narrative of return and discovery for a young Cuban-American protagonist. Fornés' *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* produces a visceral occurrence of physical migration as several Cuban migrants are lost at sea, and Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-work* is the anecdote of an undocumented Dominican factory worker trying to make a simple living while avoiding deportation. This chapter is centred around Camila Stevens' assumption that theatre is a surrogate space where invisible social groups can practice and form community. Like Stevens, I argue that theatre is an act of home-making and connectivity for diasporic communities.

While homemaking refers to the domestic chores associated with the management of a home, home-making encompasses the spatial practices, temporal narratives, embodied sensorial functions and materialities of the process of negotiation that migrants experience when developing a conception of belonging. As evidenced in Fathi's article "Home-in-migration: Some Critical Reflections on Temporal, Spatial and Sensorial Perspectives," the home is not a physical or geographical location, it is not a house. Home is rather an unfinished accomplishment and a process of negotiation (Fathi 981). Chapter 1 explores how theatre is both a way to re-enact memory, as argued in the case of autobiographical performances, but also a method of home-making for migrant communities in urban spaces of their host nation. To explain the peculiarities of this imagined community, I use James Clifford and Antonio Benítez Rojo's writings on diaspora and the Caribbean to explore U.S. hegemony and Caribbean migration along with

Alejandro Portes and Ramón Grosfoguel's work that outlines the sociohistorical context of the cultural productions explored in this chapter. The work of mobility scholars Pnina Werbner and Ato Quayson is also relevant to explore the concept of home and the elements of the diasporic imaginary. This chapter also briefly explores *santería* and its negative associations with religion and race before posing a concise introduction of U.S.-Dominican relations to better understand the sociohistorical setting for the performance pieces cited in this project.

Letters from Cuba is one of Fornés's most notable and recent plays. Using "gentle humour" as argued by Bruce Weber, this play demonstrates the process of separating familiar lives but maintaining togetherness regardless of spatial constraints. The sibling relationship at the heart of the play is used to justify the staging that treats a NYC apartment rooftop as if it were Cuba while the act of letter writing is used to merge the physical distance. The symbolism of letters is not lost on Fornés or on a displaced Cuban audience who understand this was a common mode of communication to bridge the gap between the homeland and host country. Epistolary communication serves not only a means of staying in touch with family in *Letters from Cuba* but also demonstrates the characters' inclination to art as the narration proceeds with vocal renditions in lieu of phone calls. It is thus a performance capable of crossing geographical barriers and transcending time. This discussion of this play is accompanied with the analysis of techniques Fornés uses to engage with the audience before examining how Fornés utilizes fictionalized autobiography in her playwriting and notions of *cubanidad* and identity in diaspora.

Unlike *Letters from Cuba*, *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* does not opt for a humorous narrative. It is an opera based on real life accounts of *balseros* (rafters) attempting to cross the strait from Cuba to Florida. The focus is on community, both that of the audience, and that of the *balseros* on the boat struggling to survive. To understand the audience's role in this play, I view the interdisciplinary nature of this piece through the use of technology and the pseudo-reality

created on stage explained by Umberto Eco's "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance." I find it important to question the uses of sound in order to trigger audience emotion and amplify this point with further discussions of technology using Marshal McLuhan's 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* and Donna Haraway's 1984 "A Cyborg Manifesto."

Carmen Peláez is a first-generation Cuban-American and *El Postre de Estrada Palma* and *My Cuba* are one-woman shows heavily based on autobiographical aspects. Inspired by the dishes she used to cook with her grandmother Peláez's *El Postre de Estrada Palma* is the story of a dessert and the building of a friendship between a grandmother and unorthodox neighbour who practices *santería*. At the heart of this narrative is the Alzheimer's-induced memory loss experienced by the main character Cami's grandmother and I use Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" to parallel the grieving Cami is experiencing from the loss of her grandmother as she deteriorates, and the mourning experienced by the Cuban exile upon leaving their homeland.

In Peláez's play *My Cuba* the main character Cami returns but her grandparents have passed away and Cami is left to explore Cuba through the memories relayed to her by her family. Arriving in Cuba for the first time she attempts to reconcile the notions of identity and country relayed to her by her exiled family in Miami. Overcome with emotion when she finally lays eyes on the Cuban landscape, she is soon confronted with the realities of economic crisis and struggles with how her hybrid identity is read by a country she expected to call home. In this play, beauty functions as a marker of difference as Cuban women comment on Cami's appearance to other her. I interpret this process of "othering" with Natalie Havlin and Jillian M. Báez's "Introduction: Revisiting Beauty" and Feminist scholar Luce Irigagay (1985) who unpack how normative western beauty standards are intertwined with imperialist and gendered notions often internalized by women themselves.

After delving into Dominican-U.S. Relations and the subsequent U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, Chapter 1 ends with the study of Ovalle's *Por hora and a Piece-work.* Since Camila Stevens argues that Dominican theatre problematizes the concept of home by questioning unilateral migration and narratives of assimilation, I dispute this through the rejection of NYC by the main character's daughter and her desire to return home. Written after Ovalle's years living in New York City and her personal struggles to hold low-income jobs in factories, *Por hora y a Piece-work* tells the story of Juana, an undocumented Dominican woman working in a textile factory. Language is used in this play as a marker of identity and to demonstrate the class difference in the Dominican Republic as the other factory workers make fun of Juana for being from the countryside. The caricaturesque names given to characters (Pura (the pure one), Amado (the loved one), and Dolores (pain, sorrow), Capitaleña (native of Santo Domingo)) serves as allegory and parody. If we unpack the way Ovalle uses satire, it is evident that stereotypical archetypes are not present as a demonstration that Ovalle agrees with them, but rather an indication that their use makes interrogations about their existence.

The second chapter of my project is primarily dedicated to Alina Troyano (Carmelita Tropicana is Troyano's stage name) and Coco Fusco's performances. Like chapter 1, this chapter explores theatre as a place and practice to re-enact memory for diasporic communities. Chapter 1 deals with the memories and realities of the migratory experience while chapter 2 introduces humour as a mode of re-enacting collective memory. Troyano and Fusco's work stem from collaborative exercises with their peers while Troyano often opts to perform solo. Although Troyano and Fusco belong to the class of more studied dramatists of my project, their productions put significant focus on the complex history of colonialism that inform the identities of the Other. Not only is Troyano exiled, but her autobiographical performance reinserts the LGBTQ community into the narrative of Cuban history while the work of Fusco demonstrates

that the personal is political. In these performances, humour is used to re-tell fiction whilst the body of the performer disobeys chronology.

This second chapter moves from the family as a collective unit to focus more narrowly on the body itself as a point of textual reference that connects the body to time, memory, and practices of resistance. Colonialism and consumption of the body of the Other are thus inherent in the productions explored in Chapter 2. Although Troyano and Fusco engage in scrutinizing painful and cruel histories of the exploitation of colonized subjects, they do so with their own brand of humour to condemn and question both these problematic practices and regimes that ascribe subordinate meaning to otherness. Taylor argues that performance exists in a temporal lineage, this chapter observes how the body can preserve knowledge and serve as a basis to question ideologies that ascribe meaning to identity since the body of the performer is in dialogue simultaneously with the past and the present.

Humour plays a significant role in chapter 2, here I delve into the relevance of *relajo* and *choteo* as forms of collective practices of resistance to probe the painful past of colonialism and other forms of segregation of the Other. Fusco and Gómez-Peña's *The couple in the Cage*, and Fusco and Nao Bustamante's *STUFF* outline the tradition of Fusco's presentation of counter-narratives. *The couple in the Cage* is an installation based on Fusco and Gómez-Peña's literal caging of themselves and subsequent performance of indigeneity. The central themes in Fusco's *STUFF* are Latin American women, food, and sex. Both works demonstrate Fusco's fascination with regimes of power and the exploitation and consumption of the Other, their identity and their culture. To better contextualize their performance *The couple in the Cage* I outline the history of human zoos and the practices of caging the Other before searching into Linda Hutcheon's theorizations on parody. Following this is Troyano's *Milk of Amnesia*, a one-woman show that plays with the bounds of identity, memory and what it means to remember, whereas Troyano's

Memorias de la revolución is an action-filled allegorical chronology of the defeat of Castro's communist regime. Chapter 2 also considers what it means to perform a queer identity in relation to Troyano's performance texts. This chapter posits the body as a performance text that *tells* and serves to present narratives of abject voices from the Caribbean diaspora by connecting the painful past to the present. The body is understood as a marker of cultural memory and collective practices of resistance. Both Troyano and Fusco's work scrutinizes parallels among colonial and contemporary perceptions of "non-western bodies." Departing from Taylor's premise that performance exists in a temporal lineage, this chapter argues that performance can accomplish the task of memorializing or preserving knowledge.

The couple in the Cage uses humour to parody the tradition of caging and displaying the body of the other, based upon a practice known as *human zoos*, popular in the late colonial period of the 1800s. A timeline of this history is first established before deliberating the problematic reception of *The couple in the Cage*. I then draw a distinction between the theatre and the space of the museums in western culture as it is hailed as a space of authenticity in charge of housing historical artifacts. I consider the challenges of overcoming what Jim Drobnick calls the *colonizing* gaze and the implications of looking and being seen as "implicated" connotes notions of complicity, of ethic and physical involvement. The review of this piece concludes with an explanation of *relajo* (the collective prank) and *choteo*. My considerations of *The couple in the Cage* are followed by a brief section on the body as property and service in Nao Bustamante and Fusco's 1998 performance *STUFF*. Teresa Marrero's "Scripting Sexual Tourism: Fusco and Bustamante's *STUFF*, Prostitution and Cuba's Special Period" is used alongside Fusco and Bustamante's article discussing their performance.

Moving on from Fusco's performances, chapter 2 interrogates Troyano's queer identity and her alter ego to discover what it means to queer performance, both in reference to her

sexuality and in the theatrical sense as Troyano's works are heavily informed by autobiography. She prides herself on displacing identity and demonstrating the fragility of identity markers by portraying multiple characters. Contemplating the reception of her stage character, in the introduction of *I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing Between Cultures* Troyano notes

> And there was that other incident that caused me to ponder how the persona is received. It happened riding in a limo with an upper-class Cuban couple after a gala I had entertained at. Even though I said I was Cuban in my routine, the Cuban couple still could not believe it and asked: "You are Puerto Rican, aren't you?" They did not see the fruits, the accent, the loud behavior reflected in their own Cuban mirror (XXV).

While Troyano, resides within the same parameters of Cuban nationality as the upper-class couple, they cannot see themselves reflected in her multifaceted performance of excess. The fact that the vision of *cubanidad* simply does not make sense to them highlights the heterogenous nature of identity.

In the analysis of *Memorias de la revolución* I use Esther Whitfield to describe the economic ramifications of the Special Period in Cuba before interpreting the racial and ethnic hierarchies presented by the character Pingalito, by reflecting on Jorge Mañach's canonical text on *choteo* which focuses on his elitist rejections of any social practices connected to African roots and his Eurocentric notions of *cubanidad*. In Troyano's performances Pingalito is a reoccurring character again central in *Milk of Amnesia*. This performance features a cross-dressing Troyano who performs as Pingalito. Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson argues that Pingalito is drastically different from the notion of male *cubanidad* perpetuated by Martí and the male Cuban presented in Pingalito's poetic rendition "Ode to the Cuban Man," that depicts an eroticized Cuba based on the 1950'. To dive deeper into how Troyano uses the stage as a microcosm of larger society, I cite Lynda Hall who argues that Tropicana embodies the fluidity

of her subjectivity.

José Muñoz helps us understand Tropicana's sexual identity of excess with his term *chusma* depicting the process of reclaiming and positively managing a depreciative term. Muñoz's attention to the manner in which Troyano's performances de-reify camp and *choteo* (that have traditionally been male practices) is presented to expand this conversation. In this chapter I plant the idea that Tropicana is not only a queer woman, but that she subversively "queers" identity and history by reinserting a multifaceted voice into a temporal past that sought to eradicate the abject. To illustrate this exclusive history, I use the 1984 documentary entitled *Conducta impropia* sharing the examples of Cuban intellectuals and artists and how they were treated during the Castro regime.

The final chapter focuses on Josefina Báez's *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*, *Dominicanish, Levente no. Yoladominicanyork*. This chapter further pushes the limits of what it means to produce alternative autobiographical theatre. Just as the previous chapters posit, theatre is a form of home-making for migrant communities and a way to re-enact memory as the body of the performer engages with a temporal lineage. As traditional theatre consists of a performance of a fictionalized narrative performed by actors who are not enacting their life experiences, Báez's performance pieces bend the barriers between reality and fiction since she performs her memory with her own body. Báez better delineates this type of theatre as "performance autology" deriving her creative process from her own experiences. This chapter pays particular attention to identity construction where parody and humour are again utilized in performance to question the notions of what is normal and naturalized. Identity for Báez is a construction and a process, multifaceted and hybrid.

Báez alienates her audience with fragmented speech and code-switching, making them cognizant that what she is doing is performing identity. A proper analysis of Báez's work

requires an understanding of performance theory itself. I draw upon Sidonie Smith, Marco de Marinis and Peggy Phelan's writing on performance and autobiography to best interpret her productions. The body is the central focus of this chapter because Báez uses her speech and body language with intention. *Dominicanish* is the coming-of-age story of a Dominicanyork woman, it is necessary to employ Anton Allahar's understanding of diaspora along with Rosi Braidotti and Judith Butler's gender theories. In this chapter bell hooks' writings on performance serve to further understand how Báez uses her work to decolonize the mind. The role of the spectator and community is relevant in considerations of her performance texts and is discussed alongside Jacques Rancière's theories of the role of the spectator with respect to *Dominicanish* while in *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* and *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork*, the collective and community are also vital functions. Where *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork* is set in the communal space of an apartment complex, *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* demonstrates an identity that relies on the collective to become itself hyper-individual. Each of these pieces differ in their forms of textuality but all contain performatic aspects. *Dominicanish* is a performance text whose script was conceived from embodied performance itself, whereas *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* can be considered perfomatic when viewed through its poetic aspects. *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork* is the only one of the three texts that emerged first as a written text, not from an embodied performance, but is still encoded with performatic symbolism.

This last chapter argues that the performance texts of Báez transmit meaning encoded in her body, and not just in the written word. Performance permits an embodied language that the written document alone does not. As Emilia Durán Almarza maintains, the body of the performer is a discursive text. *Dominicanish* is a compilation of several of Báez poetic pieces with a thread of a young Dominican girl arriving to New York City and learning the English language. Though it explores mundane themes, Jade Power calls Báez's performance "[…] a fragmented poem-

dance-story, [that] shuttles between identities, geographies and temporality." (92). Central to chapter 3 is the ideology of the *El Ni e'*. A place that is neither here nor there, that resides in the middle, brings liminality to the forefront. In my analysis, I focus on the "in-between", the hyphen that works to join two identities in hybridity, pulling into question monolithic assumptions. I define diaspora as a living and changing body made up of migrants (both involuntary and willing), who form communities away from their homeland as they "share a set of common experiences, feelings, myths, beliefs, and even values and memories of home." (Clifford 9). Like Lorgia García-Peña I suggest that Báez employs the Brechtian alienation effect in *Dominicanish* to distance the audience and encourage critical detachment. I offer Linda Hutcheon's concept of parody (2000), to declare that Báez uses the tactic of alienation for a parodic vision of identity. This type of identity demonstrates what Rosi Braidotti refers to as "a multifaceted plural identity" (2011). In chapter 3 I present bell hooks' argument that music, like performance, can serve as a remedy to decolonize the mind. Autobiography and autobiographic notions of theatricality are also acquainted with the assistance of Lynda Hall's theories of self-writing. The investigation of *Dominicanish* concludes with a pairing of Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson's term "everyday resistance," which is a framework for the ways that people act in the quotidian to undermine power that is typically disguised and not politically articulated (2).

This dissertation considers the body as tool of storytelling and examines the ways the body can be used to communicate during scripted performances. It traces how migration shapes homelands and communities through fictionalized autobiography presented in scripted narratives or other forms of theatricality. In the Caribbean writing has been consistently adjacent to performance and orality (Hulme, 43), while more conventional methods of writing have been favoured in the European canon. Audre Lorde's distinguished essay "The Master's Tools Will

Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979) reminds us that books, and spaces of higher knowledge, like the ivory towers of universities and museums, are fortresses riddled with complicated pasts of white supremacy and representative of the master's house. If artifacts in museums and orthodox systems of writing and knowledge sharing have colonial bias, they constitute the master's tools. Like bell hooks who proposes performance to decolonize the mind, this investigation aims to study the works of María I. Fornés, Alina Troyano, Josefina Báez, Elizabeth Ovalle, Carmen Rivera, Coco Fusco, and Carmen Peláez who have never been researched in a comparative manner to do just that.

Chapter 1
Diaspora and the Collective: Displays of Family in the Performance Texts of María Irene Fornés, Carmen Peláez and Elizabeth Ovalle

> "[…] the performance event offers a unique setting where new styles and ideologies are "rehearsed" in front of a collective body of people who may identify or disidentify with them."[4]
>
> - Camila Stevens (31)

In the 21st century, migration is a transnational process that greatly affects and shapes both homelands and host communities. Although globalization has played a strong role in shifting models of migration, not all migrants leave their homes willingly as is the case for the Cuban refugees residing in the U.S.. Migrants and their families have not only had to adapt but have also altered the host nation by integrating themselves into the culture of urban spaces like Miami and New York City. This chapter explores the way theatre becomes a practice of home-making in diaspora and a space to re-enact individual and collective memory of migration, presuming that embodied expression depicts the family unit in ways written text cannot. Focusing on the Dominican and Cuban diasporas, I question the ways performance artists dialogue and represent personal and communal histories of movement and exile.

To understand the concept of home-making as a collection of practices which a migrant experiences, one must note that a home is not a physical location.[5] As understood by Fathi

[4] Quote from Camila Stevens' article "Home is where theatre is": Performing Dominican Transnationalism" (2010). See the fourth chapter in Stevens 2019 book *Aquí y Alla: Transnational Dominican Theater* for Steven's discussions of Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-work* (1993) and Josefina Báez's *Dominicanish* (2000).

[5] See Mastoureh Fathi's article "Home-in-migration: Some Critical Reflections on Temporal, Spatial and Sensorial Perspectives." In this paper Fathi reviews contemporary scholarship on the topic of home in migration and explores the complexities in debates thematically divided by defining home-in-migration, examining spatial home-making practices (domestic materialities), discussing temporal narratives (memories, the future), and analyzing forms of embodied home-making.

"Migrants experiences of mobility and settlement are often accompanied with feelings of ambiguity about being simultaneously here and there, causing complex emotional entanglements in relation to places, people, objects and relationships. Emotional attachments and feelings of belonging are at the heart of any place that is called home" (980). I agree with Fathi that a home cannot be reduced to a spatial location and am interested in the notion of home that "[…] helps to illuminate how understandings about the 'reality' of a home and the aspirations and 'imaginations' associated with it, are in fact *situated* understandings" (Fathi 980). Our interpretation of home is entrenched in the intersection of our identity, be that our ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability etc. as listed by Fathi. Homing is a dynamic process and time-dependent in relation to making intergeneration roots (Fathi 986). Our relationship to our environment is also sensorial (smell, taste, seeing and feeling) and evokes nostalgia and memories of homes in other places and times. Senses can elicit memories and nostalgia to assist in connecting and creating a sense of inclusion in post-migration life (Fathi 989).

Camila Stevens posits that theatre can become an alternative space where groups made invisible in the public sphere can be seen, heard and imagined as a collectivity (12). Yet as my epigraph states, not all migrants may identify with the experiences portrayed in the performance event. This is due to the distinct nature of migration as it relates to personal and sociohistorical factors. I have chosen to analyze the plays of three female artists whose works dialogue with family relations as the focus of this study is the way bodily knowledge is produced in theatrical performance or rather performance art. Instead of traditional prose, these artists have chosen an ephemeral medium. Thus, I ask why artists choose performance to present issues of migration? What do these artists wish to convey with bodily knowledge to readers/spectators of their performance texts as it relates to family, community, distance and separation?

I agree with James Clifford who articulates that "Diaspora consciousness lives loss and

hope as a defining tension" ("Diasporas" 312), and argue that the works I analyze in this chapter live the particular loss that occurs when family is divided by migration. This chapter begins with the analysis of the work of Cuban playwright María I. Fornés (1930-), a major figure within the Hispanic theatre renaissance that has taken place in North America. It is worthwhile to study her pieces in relation to that of Cuban-American Carmen Peláez and Dominican-born Elizabeth Ovalle. Unlike Peláez and Fornés, Ovalle is not of Cuban descent and does not identify herself as a political exile. However, the performance pieces of the three women grapple with family and community and the challenges that distance imposes upon the family unit. It is my contention that Fornés and Peláez produce a canon reflective of the condition of the Cuban exile in the U.S., thus I believe it is beneficial to discuss their works consecutively. Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-work* (1993)[6] is a window into the experience of the Dominican diaspora in New York City, and thus functions as a valuable counterpoint to my readings of Fornés and Peláez.

U.S. Hegemony and Caribbean Migration

James Clifford describes diasporic cultures as those that are produced by regimes of politician domination and economic inequality (319). Thus, before the textual analyses of this chapter, it is necessary to enter into a brief overview of the sociohistorical events that inform these productions since Spanish Caribbean diasporas have strongly been shaped by U.S. relations. Antonio Benítez Rojo discusses the role the U.S. has played in shaping the Caribbean imagination in the introduction of his celebrated book *La isla que se repite* (1989). Benítez Rojo argues that although the islands that make up the Caribbean are distinct, often they are labeled

[6] Ovalle's play was originally published in 1993 but reprinted in Howard L. Quackenbush's anthology *La mujer frente al espejo: Antología anotada de dramaturgas dominicanas contemporáneas* (2007). Note: Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-work* is not to be confused with her 2016 play *Por hora*, a comedy about migration and gender violence presented on International Women's Day at the The Ravelo Hall at the National Theater in Santo Domingo.

under the same category. For this reason, during the course of this project, I consciously map the inbound U.S. migrations from Cuba and the Dominican Republic to demonstrate the differentiating factors that have shaped their diasporas. Benítez Rojo believes the Caribbean to be one of the least known regions of the continent, what he calls "a meta-archipelago." Benítez Rojo proceeds to connect the history of the Caribbean to the fabric of world capitalism. What he refers to as "the machine of plantation" is culpable for producing a capital system, underdevelopment in Africa, the Caribbean population, imperial wars, rebellions, repression, sugar islands, dictatorships, military occupation and revolutions (*La isla que se repite* 24). For the purpose of this project, I am interested in the factors that have led to U.S.-Caribbean transnational diasporas from the Spanish speaking world, those which Silvio Torres-Saillant meticulously maps out in his 2006 book *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean*.[7] Torres-Saillant is considered to be a top scholar in the field of Caribbean studies and preceding discussions of U.S. imperialism in this book of particular interest are his discussions of literature, music and Caribbean cultural creations.

In their 1994 article "Caribbean Diasporas: Migration and Ethnic Communities," Alejandro Portes and Ramón Grosfoguel center their analysis on five major insular migrations to the United States. Respectively, these are migrations from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Haiti.[8] Portes and Grosfoguel argue that Caribbean societies themselves are

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[7] Torres-Saillant posits that Caribbean thought has a history of its own and argues that *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2006) should be read as " […] an effort to articulate a new "theory" of Caribbean history, culture, and destiny." though Torres-Saillant is cautious of the notion of what is implied by *theoretical discourse*, " […] on account of the problematic rapport the theoretical has had with the Caribbean region and its people." and attempts to present a polylithic chronicle of Caribbean theoretical thought (7).

[8] Portes and Grosfoguel's work adds to the volumes of previous literature written about the Caribbean. See the prologue of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (2017), Intellectual and former Dominican president Juan Bosch's *De Cristóbal Colón a Fidel Castro: El Caribe, Frontera Imperial* (1970), Antonio Benítez Rojo's *La Isla Que Se Repite* (1998) or Silvio Torres-Saillant's *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2006). Also see Frantz Fanon's psychological account of the effects of colonization in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967).

products of external migration (50). This is because their colonization has destroyed native island populations with foreign illness and treacherous work regimes. After the near extinction of native peoples, colonizers chose to populate the Caribbean with European settlers and servants from Asia and Africa. Although languages have varied, the economic system of plantation was uniform. Such a system is to blame for social and economic disparities that remain reflected in today's post-industrial society. However, until the abolition of slavery in the 19th century, commodities flowed out of the Caribbean while the bodies of humans who made up the labor force stayed put (Portes & Grosfouguel 51).

What followed the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, was an implantation of U.S. hegemony in which the Caribbean's resources were used and exploited for the benefit of North American companies. This shift that began in the 1900's was practiced through economic arrangements, while U.S. military only intervened when deemed necessary. Thus, the U.S. occupied Cuba in 1898-1902 after the Spanish-American war when Spain relinquished sovereignty over Cuba and Puerto Rico. Cuba was again occupied from 1908 to 1909 because of a provision in the Cuban constitution that gave the U.S. the right to intervene in their affairs (Portes & Grosgufel 52).

It was only in the 1940's after WWII that rates of Caribbean to U.S. migration increased mostly from Puerto Rico due to the necessity of contract labor in the Northeast (Portes & Grosgufel 54). The 1960s marked the end of dominance of Puerto Rican migration to the Northeast. Although Cubans had already been arriving in the U.S. as exiles and immigrants since the 19th century, the migration movements of the 1960s differed due to the Cuban Revolution. U.S. hegemony over Cuba had shaped a bourgeoisie that was dependent on the U.S., accustomed as they were to American ways of doing business and patterns of consumption. The Cuban bourgeoisie relied heavily on the U.S. to reconquer their island. Therefore, exiles of the

communist regime experienced favorable government reception than other migrants, as evident through the 1961 Kennedy Immigration Act that increased funding to Cuban refugees after the Bay of Pigs. However, such favorable reception was not mirrored in the attitudes of the Cuban government who villainized migrants escaping their homeland. Instead, the Cuban government continued to impede communication between divided families, as is apparent in Fornés' *Letters from Cuba*, in which a brother and sister, torn apart by distance, must correspond solely via mail.

María Irene Fornés

In "The Search for Identity in the Theatre of Three Cuban American Female Dramatists" (1991) Maida Watson argues that Cuban exiles are the third ethnic group behind Mexicans and Puerto Ricans that have added unique and individual perspectives in the Renaissance of Hispanic theatre in the U.S. (188). Cuban-American theatre encompasses a variety of techniques from realistic theatre to the absurd. Often written in English and Spanish, Cuban playwrights utilize different forms of bilingualism but generally follow similar themes, which have to with a preoccupation with identities: national, individual, focused on *cubanidad* or sexual identity (Watson 188). Unlike Chicano and Nuyorican theatre, Cuban theatre is more individualistic since it is not the product of a group movement, but rather a production of themes that respond to a shared experience, like the 1959 Revolution. Unlike other Latino theatre movements, Cuban theatre reflects the varied nature of exiles and may be more varied (Watson 189), as exiles are not merely intellectuals but span many class brackets.

The playwright María Irene Fornés belongs to a hyphenated Cuban-American identity, comfortable in English or Spanish. Fornés has trained in American theatre but is conscious of Cuban value systems. Her theatre analyzes the contradictions of cultural identity that emerge from liminal identities for migrants of the diaspora that belong neither here nor there. Fornés'

plays also portray women's issues by simply presenting the everyday on stage. Though Fornés is highly acclaimed, her works have not reached mass audience. While many scholars and critics categorize her performances as feminist, Fornés is adamantly anti-ideological and is more focused on bodies as repositories of wisdom. Fornés insists that she does not write feminist theatre but agrees that she does create strong female characters who parody society. Written in the 1970s during a time that feminism was a central topic of discussion, one of her most successful plays is "Fefu and Her Friends" (1977) and even though it does not advocate for feminism, by modern standards, the play is often considered to be feminist. In a 1985 interview with Jan Stuart for *American Theatre*, Fornés shared, "As a writer, I am in an off position in relation to feminism: radical feminists don't consider me a feminist, but a great many people who are sympathetic consider me a feminist and see my characterizations of men as a harsh criticism" (Stuart 1985). In the same interview Fornés explains that her hesitation with labeling her plays as feminist is due to a refusal to take a tyrant position and box herself into this ideological framework. At the center of her plays are themes of self-examination and self-discovery. Despite Mostly written in English, her use of Spanish reflects exile theatre. By writing in the language of the host nation, Fornés is able to demonstrate distance and exclusion through the use of prose. Certainly, writing her plays in English is another way to share her work with a diverse audience to whom she can appeal with the universal themes of her work. Furthermore, Fornés' use of musical theatre is an echo of her urban surroundings of New York City, one of the most well-known musical hubs of the world.

Fornés is the oldest of the three artists to be studied in this chapter. Although age may be irrelevant, it is worthwhile to explore her work first since many credit her with paving the path for other women in the New York City theatre scene. For more than four decades, Fornés has written, produced, directed and held several theatre workshops. Born in Havana in 1930, and

arriving in the U.S. in 1945 at the age of 15, Fornés has lived and experienced vital historical moments in U.S.-Cuban relations. Though Fornés first play, *The Widow*, was written in 1961, it is considered as more of a precursor as she never produced and presented it herself. Her first production was *There! You Died* (1963), however, her most well-known play is *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977). *Fefu and Her Friends* deals with female relationships, normative femininity and loneliness. Presented originally with an all-female cast, *Fefu and Her Friends* is part of the collection of Off-Broadway dramas emerging in the 1960's. Fornés wasn't always a playwright. Her journey to theatre is compelling as she wrote her first play at 31. Previous to her life as a playwright, Fornés briefly lived in Paris with her lover Harriet Sohmers to study painting but moved back to New York in 1957 after discovering her love of theatre. Fornés maintains that she took up writing on a whim to show her partner, Susan Sontag,[9] how easy it was. Although it may have come easily to her, Fornés' work is one of quality, and her talent has been widely recognized, as is evidenced by her being a nine-time Obie Award-winner credited with writing more than 40 plays.

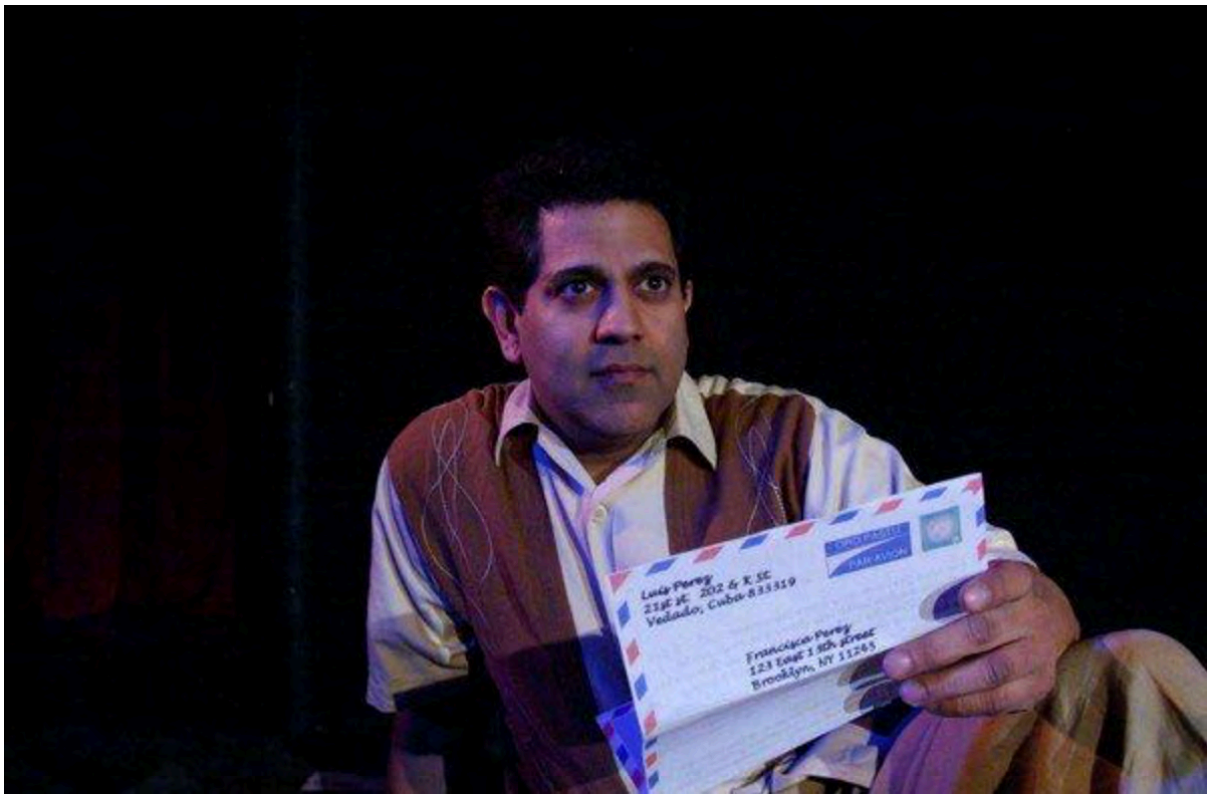
Letters from Cuba

Letters from Cuba (2000) is one of Fornés's notable works and her most recent, which is why I have chosen it for this study. The New York Times theatre critic Bruce Weber affirms, "[…] the play conveys, with a gentle humour that is occasionally exquisite, the procession of separate lives being led in spiritual togetherness but spatial disconnect" ("THEATER REVIEW;

[9] Susan Sontag was an American writer, filmmaker, philosopher, teacher, and political activist and one of Fornés' former lovers. In his book on Fornés, Scott Cummings shares that Fornés took up writing one night after Sontag's frustrations about finishing a book led them both to go home and write. See: Cummings, Scott T.,. *Maria Irene Fornes*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Print.

Dancing In New York, Dreaming Still of Home"). *Letters from Cuba* is centered around the relationship between Fran and her brother Luis. The play is a 95-minute window into the lives of two siblings leading ordinary lives. Fran is a Cuban-American dancer who lives in New York with her roommates Marc and Joseph; both believe that they are in love with Fran but do not act on their feelings for fear of ruining their friendship. Her brother Luis resides in Cuba with his wife and son Enrique. Two apartments divide the stage horizontally, New York City on the bottom and Cuba on the rooftop of the New York apartment. Although Luis and Fran never communicate directly, their relationship is presented via letters that Luis writes to his sister from Cuba. One should note that some of Fornés first experiences with playwriting come from letters she translated for her great-grandfather which she later turned into her first play *The Widow* (1961).

In the play, epistolary communication serves not only a means of staying in touch with family but also demonstrates an inclination to art. Instead of communicating through phone calls or perhaps other technological means, Luis chooses to write. However, this means of communication could also be a choice reflective of the Cuban embargo put in place by the American government in 1961. While studying the script, I noticed that Fran does not read the letters, but rather her brother Luis reads them to her. In the photograph below, Luis appears seated on stage reading to his sister Fran. In the moments when Fran does read these penned expressions sent to her by her brother, she does so in unison with his voice. This audible reading of the written word, accompanied with body language, transforms a written text into a dramatic performance.



(Figure 1.) Luis reads a letter from his sister Fran.

Jones, Steve. "*Letters from Cuba* Production Photos." *Halcyon Theatre*, 2010, https://halcyontheatre.org/productions/alcyone10.

Letters from Cuba thus is a performance that crosses geographical barriers and transcends time as the letters are read at once both in Cuba and New York City. Conscious that Fornés has experimented with different theatrical techniques, this performance within a performance serves as a Brechtian form of alienation. The *V-effekt*, or defamiliarization effect, serves to make the everyday appear surprising so that the spectator does not identify the action as part of natural order. By reading the letters at the same time, Fran and Luis are able to cross physical and spatial barriers that make the spectator interrogate the dramatic event. Fran's inclination toward performance over writing to be reflective of her nature as a dancer who understands the world through song and movement, while Luis operates in the realm of the written word. Fran says, "Well some people understand words better than anything else. Other people understand color,

other people understand sounds, I understand movement when I see things that I think other people understand. Music and movement." (*Letters from Cuba* 22).

Fran's roommates Joseph and Marc also write poetry. The Cuban-American diaspora is often synonymous with Miami yet Fornés chooses to set her play in New York. I believe that this is partly due to the nature of New York as an art hub, but this choice is deliberate and perhaps an autobiographical acknowledgement of Fornés' own experiences as an artist living in N.Y.C.. The first scene opens with a discussion of how to write a poem and Joseph quotes "Sahara Dies" of Emily Dickinson. In line with themes of death, Marc writes a poem that focuses on the carnal experience of being alive, presenting death as a fact and life as tender as an infant. Fornés' characters are acutely aware of their mortality and thus demonstrate respect for life, a theme that is equally evident in her opera *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* (2000). Perhaps this a wider reflection of the post-Revolutionary Cuban spirit, where hope remains despite actual hardships.

Marc's attitude toward writing requires interpretation. Marc believes that if one has the ability to write one poem, one has the ability to write many. This is consistent with Fornés's approach toward writing. Fornés took up writing on a whim, and to this day, Fornés maintains this philosophy in her workshops at INTAR,[10] where she conducts a playwriting lab. In the article "The Legacy of María Fornés: A Collection of Impressions and Exercises," Caridad Svich has compiled experiences from various playwrights who have attended the lab. Alina Troyano, the subject of the 3rd chapter of this study, is also a former student of Fornés'. In Svich's article, Alina Solomon states that Fornés proposes the body as a machine where theatre is an embodied art (Svich 26). The workshops hosted by Fornés were not only about writing exercises, but also about re-seeing the world and the possibilities that theatre has for dramatists working with text

[10] INTAR theatre was developed in 1966 by Max Ferrá and has been producing Latino voices in English since 1966. See https://www.intartheatre.org/about-intar/

and image. In the same article, Oliver Mayer also shares that Fornés' technique focuses on teaching her students how to play and remind playwrights about the *play* in playwrighting (Svich 21). Such an outlook is typically Cuban, speculative of a fun temperament that one maintains through hardships. Caridad Svich describes the play as tender and whimsical against a bleak New York winter light (72). Svich's argument is clearly demonstrated with the parallel vision of Fran's nephew Enrique playing the ukulele and dancing against the backdrop of poverty in Cuba. The carefree attitude of a young man leisurely enjoying music stands in contrast to the scenery of hardship.

The New York apartment in *Letters from Cuba* serves as a microcosm of the artists' world. Fran is a dancer and her roommates are poets who have stumbled across the medium and found their talent. The representation of poetry in this play is intentional, as can be seen when Fran dances around her apartment to "Guantanamera". "Guantanamera" is conceivably the most recognized Cuban song and contains stanzas from Modernist poet and Cuban hero José Martí's *Versos sencillos*. However, the patriotic "Guantanamera" stands in contrast to American big band music in Scene 17. While these two genres of music may be interpreted as purposeful patriotic clashes, this nuance enriches the play. Of course, lyrics of music may be reproduced in text, but live music adds an embodied experience not available to readers. Music has an infectious ability to insert itself in the ear of an audience member, unlike the written word. Like the moment we catch ourselves tapping our foot to beat, music not only engages our entire brain but also utilizes our memory centers as certain songs are tied to specific memories.

The infectious notion of music playing on loop inside one's head leads me to the following question: What does it means to be an audience member? Dennis Kennedy engages with this question in his book *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity.* Like Kennedy, I agree that the audience is not homogeneous or a universal unit.

Kennedy argues that what is universal is the group gathering itself. In this way, individuals make the group, but the group does not make them. An individual becomes part of an audience by virtue of their cooperative attendance and nothing more (Kennedy 14).

What unites an audience is voluntary presence at a disappearing act (15). This claim is at the center of performance theory as scholars agree that theatrical performance is an impermanent medium. In her *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), Diana Taylor utilizes the concept of archive and repertoire to distinguish between embodied performance and archival representations such as scripts, videos and photographs. The repertoire is the embodied live theatrical performance, where the body as text produces and emits meaning. Therefore, in the live performance, the body as text can enact embodied knowledge. A script or video recording instead belongs to the archive, where representations of the live event itself can be stored but are understood to be merely accounts of the performance event. Perhaps Fornés opts for dramatic performance knowing it is a disappearing act because of its likeness to the autobiographic moment that creates memory. In order to explain what I mean by this, it is necessary to view her work with a sociohistorical lens.

As a woman born in 1930, Fornés lived through the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista and left Cuba after the death of her father in 1945, coinciding with the end of WWII. This allowed Fornés to live outside of Cuba, in both the U.S. and France before the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The play *Letters from Cuba* has autobiographical aspects, since the letters written by the character Luis are based on the letters Fornés received from her brother during the 1960's, an era which marked the commencement of a strained relationship between Cuba and the U.S. Cuba initially allied itself with the communist Soviet Union, however after its fall, and the start of

what Fidel Castro named "Special Period,"[11] Cubans experienced difficult economic times and were forced to survive through food shortages and scramble for consumer goods as demonstrated in *Letters from Cuba* by the upcycling of cans and other materials.

Fornés chooses fictionalized autobiographical theatre instead of writing autobiographical prose. I reiterate that theatre is a disappearing act, just like the moments that create memory. Writing thus becomes a way of re-enacting memory and also rewriting it. Sidonie Smith writes that the autobiography is born of a history of constituting bourgeois subjects and the self (19). Yet transgression occurs when the autobiographical subject inevitably fails to present a universal identity, or in the words of Judith Butler, fails to be an intelligible subject.[12] As the autobiographical subject cannot hide all of their identities and present a homogenous subject, this failure signals a variation of repetition of the rules that govern intelligibility (Smith 20). Fornés' autobiographical theatre is thus transgressive on two fronts: it is both impermanent and presents heterogeneous subjects. An example of this heterogeneous subject is Luis' friend Gerardo.

Gerardo is a friend of the family who shows up dressed in a militia uniform saluting Luis with "Patria o muerte!" and Luis tells Gerardo that he does not know what this means. This utterance not only appears in contrast to the English entirely of the play, but the moment of comedic relief should make audience members examine the root of such commentary. The official slogan of revolutionary Cuba is "¡Patria o muerte, venceremos!" (Homeland or death, we will overcome), institutionalized by figures such as Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Fidel Castro.

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[11] Scholars such as Velia Cecilia Bobes, Esther Whitefield, Jose Quiroga and Rafael Rojas have written extensively on "The Special Period in Time of Peace," a time of economic crisis in Cuba that began in the early 1990s. See Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005), Rojas' *Essays in Cuban Intellectual History* (2008), Anke Birkenmaier and Esther K. Whitfield's anthology *Havana Beyond the Ruins: Cultural Mappings After 1989* (2011) or Esther Whitefield's *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and "Special Period" Fiction* (2008). The "Special Period" will be discussed in greater length in conjunction with the work of Alina Troyano in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[12] According to Judith Butler, an intelligible subject is someone who perpetually adheres to societal norms.

Gerardo utters this after a personal injury, signaling the undefeatable Cuban spirit. However, this militia man isn't a blind follower of the state. Gerardo admits that he has prepared his application to leave Cuba several times but has never put it through. It is quite ironic that a military man who salutes his friend continuously with "Patria o muerte!" has often contemplated abandoning his homeland.

Gerardo's reasons for staying in Cuba are legitimate and in line with authentic historical evidence. He explains that once he puts his application in, he will lose his job, his rations and his family will be burdened with feeding him. Yet the real reason he has not left is his fear of change. Gerardo says, "But I still feel if I left here, I would die. Because I belong here, and if I went elsewhere, I wouldn't recognize anything around me and I would die" (29). So, for Gerardo, quite literally he must choose between his homeland, where he suffers daily, or death.

Gerardo can be read as a reflection of José Quiroga's Cuban palimpsest. In the "Preface" of *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005), Quiroga explains that "the palimpsest does not reproduce the original, but it dismantles it, writes on top of it, allows it to be seen. It is a queer form of reproduction, one where two texts, two sites, two lives, blend into one continuous time." (ix). The defining moments of Cuban history: its colonial past, the republic and the Revolution; allow for the reproduction of Cuba in tandem with its dismantling.[13] These moments blend together to produce a contradictory *cubanidad* that is in conflict with itself. Gerardo, the militia man shouting narratives of the communist regime, also contemplates the abandonment of his homeland. He thus serves as a motif of the sociohistorical and political contradictions inherent in

[13] "The Special Period in Times of Peace" served as a break between linear history in Cuba as the country was forced to adopt capitalist business models in times of severe economic crisis. Cuban literature is recognized for its themes of nostalgia and longing, for both *the republic past* and *the utopian future* (a future which was promised but never achieved after the Revolution of 1959). A physical manifestation of the theory of the palimpsest occurred after the Revolution when the regime chose to adopt and repurpose existing architecture so that Castro could convert symbols of privilege into symbols of access (of particular interest to the regime was education and the remodeling of existent government and military buildings into schools).

the Cuban narrative as a character who *queers* the notion of Cuban identity.

Returning to the incident in which Gerardo injures his back, Luis tells Enrique to get *Bengay*. Though it may not seem significant, *Bengay* is an analgesic heat rub made by the American company *Johnson & Johnson*. During the 1960's, presumably during the setting of *Letters from Cuba* (based on letters Fornés received from her brother during the 1960's), American products were not being shipped to Cuba. Most likely, *Bengay* was sent to Luis or brought to him during Fran's visit. During a previous visit, recounted by Luis in a letter, Fran brought various canned and dry food. Luis recounts the creative ways they used the cans and tins, demonstrating their necessity.

Fornés, like others, may have various reasons for choosing to write her plays in English instead of Spanish. Instead of code-switching, *Letters from Cuba* is entirely written in English. This can be viewed as a reflection of Fornés' linguistic exile. Unlike some playwrights, the process of writing for Fornés is intrinsically connected to the process of direction as she often directs her own work. This means that Fornés is extremely conscious of how her words will connect with the movement of the actors she instructs. Caridad Svich[14] shares that Fran's body is a text through which the audience can see a whole life and a history of pain (73). Fran's movement makes a statement about exile and the Cuban experience. By dancing through memory and her present life, the protagonist demonstrates a sense of longing that is ever present in migration.

In his 1994 paper "Diasporas," while focusing particularly on the diasporism of contemporary black Britain and anti-Zionist Judaism, James Clifford discusses the complications of defining a traveling term (302). Clifford notes that the term "diaspora" which originates from

[14] Caridad Svich is a performance scholar and a former student of Fornés.

descriptions of Jewish, Greek and Armenian dispersion, is now more generally used and adds that, "This is the domain of shared and discrepant meanings, adjacent maps and histories, that we need to sort out and specify as we work our way into a comparative, intercultural studies." (303). Clifford utilizes the 1991 definition of diaspora proposed by William Safran in "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," which posits that diasporic communities share six common factors. Such factors include: (1) the dispersion from the homeland to two or more periphery territories; (2) a shared memory, myth or vision of the point of origin; (3) an assumption that one cannot be fully accepted by the host community; (4) the homeland is seen as a place of eventual return; (5) a promise to the preservation or restoration of the homeland; and (6) consciousness and unification is defined by the continuing relationship with the point of origin (Clifford 304-305). Clifford demonstrates that Safran does not rigorously administer his definitional checklist and cautions against an "ideal type of diaspora" as there are no pure diasporas.

As Pnina Werbner and other Mobility scholars have argued, the migrant can never truly return home (106).[15] The home becomes a place longed for but never a real space. This is because the migrant is filled with illusion and nostalgia of what home used to be. Werbner argues that this sense of illusion extends to what she calls an illusion of simultaneity. In other words, the migrant perceives their life in the homeland continuing without them. In the moments that they realize they commit what Werbner calls "social treason," they must overcome this momentarily through gestures of intensification that convey a desire for proximity (116). Such displays of proximity are accomplished through *remittance*, or rather through the physical articles that Fran sends to her brother Luis. In "Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary"

[15] See her article "Migration and Transnational Studies Between Simultaneity and Rupture" (2013).

(2013) Ato Quayson explains this by demonstrating that in the literature of the diasporic imaginary there are three elements that remain central. Quayson argues that these are: place, nostalgia and genealogical accounting[16] (151). In *Letters from Cuba* Quayson's three elements are thus tied together as place is what creates nostalgia because Fran misses her brother. To overcome this longing, Fornés sends remittance and Luis returns such tokens with letters.

The staircase on set serves as an important element in the play. Placed between the two apartments, the staircase serves as an intermediary between Cuba and New York. The liminal space of the staircase is significant as it implies the possibility to include and accept as it goes beyond binary colonial thinking. To end the last scene Fran and Luis embrace in New York City making audience members question if this is part of a dream-like sequence or if Luis migrated. Instead of leaving the staircase as the only intermediary element, the dream-like sequences where Enrique is able to explore Fran's apartment unseen or the ending of the play where Luis and Fran dance together, serves to blur boundaries of time and space and create a liminal space where family can be reunited.

Manual for a Desperate Crossing

Unlike *Letters from Cuba* which takes a more lighthearted approach to the conditions of Cuban exile, *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* is an opera based on real life accounts of rafters attempting to cross the strait from Cuba to Florida. The year 1994 was significant because Cuban lifted restrictions on *balseros* making flood gates of people who wanted to leave, leading to the

[16] According to Ato Quayson, genealogical accounting refers to the questioning of past ancestry, ethnicity, tradition, which usually involves stories of how we got here, so it produces a nexus of affiliations, and provides links between the individual and entire community. See "Postcolonialism and the Diasporic Imaginary" *A Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism*. Ed. Ato Quayson. 1st edition. ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013. Print.

U.S. wet foot/dry foot policy of 1995.[17] *Balseros* or rafters face numerous challenges when they attempt to leave Cuba. The first one is the 12 nautical miles owned by Cuba and patrolled by its navy. If they are able to escape Cuban forces, *balseros* must take on the Florida Strait, where an estimated 70,000 to 80,000 have perished since 1961 (Beyer "What Is It Like To Escape Cuba By Raft?"). These deaths are due to difficult weather conditions, sunburn, hypothermia, high waves and shark fatalities where some have reported seeing bloody water and body parts floating in the ocean while crossing through. The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 has allowed such *balseros* to be viewed as political exiles. However, the mid 1990's saw a large number of Cuban refugees claiming U.S. citizenship and thus the wet foot/dry foot policy was passed. Such policy dictates that if *balseros* are found at sea, they are to be returned to Cuba or their homeland, but if they make it to U.S. territory, they are eligible for U.S. citizenship. This has caused the coast guard to treat *balseros* in abusive ways as they are now seen as intruders instead of refugees.

(Figure 2.) Balseros on a raft.

Jones, Steve. "*Manual for a Desperate Crossing* Production Photos." *Halcyon Theatre*, 2010, https://halcyontheatre.org/productions/alcyone10.

[17] See Holly Ackerman's "The Balsero Phenomenon, 1991–1994" (1996).

(Figure 3.) Balseros on a raft at sea.

Jones, Steve. "*Manual for a Desperate Crossing* Production Photos." *Halcyon Theatre*, 2010, https://halcyontheatre.org/productions/alcyone10.

Manual for a Desperate Crossing is a tale of community. Screens are used throughout the play to project both prose and images. The performance contrasts virtual embodiment with the staging of the physical body of actors, which is especially relevant during the moment the raft capsizes. It is vital to consider the interdisciplinary nature of the opera and to better understand the significance of technology in this play. I propose the analysis of what Hallensleben and Pritchard refer to as the "meta body" and the use of the body as object in performance to understand how the pairing of the virtual body with the real and the imaged can elicit an empathetic response for spectators. The meta body can be understood as an assemblage of the imaged body, the real body, and the virtual body. Set when tens of thousands of Cubans attempted to flee Cuba and the communist regime, this performance demonstrates the fictionalized building of a raft and crossing of unnamed *balseros* based on interviews with survivors. Screens demonstrate various images of raft-making while the actors hum together in

unison as they conscientiously work to construct a raft.

The increasing use of technology in performance events is reflective of our modern world that has become tied to technology through mediatization. In communication studies, mediatization refers to the theory that media shapes discourse and constructs societies, thus making them dependent on mass media. This is true as news companies often manipulate facts that mold our attitudes toward the stories they present and risk desensitizing us through a plethora of images of suffering. Mediatization encompasses biases in news coverage that may structure public opinion on immigration practices, therefore suffering viewed through a screen makes it more distant and we disassociate ourselves from the images we view and may even have negative feelings about those we see suffering. The process of viewing suffering bodies can be skewed by conservative political commentary on immigration law that removes humanity from immigration rhetoric. However, this performance, dedicated to the memory of those who perished in the Florida Strait attempting to flee, emphasizes humanity. The moment of suffering for *balseros* during the capsizing of a raft can confront spectators with another reality in the space of the theatre. In *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* the imaged body is tied to the virtual body but also enacted with real bodies on stage. So, what does this do? Does it make it more immediate? Does it compel audience members to react differently than they would to just the imaged or virtual body?

I refer to this suffering as a "pseudo-reality" as audience members are aware that what they are witnessing is indeed fiction. This is because spectators have paid for their tickets and willingly entered a theatre where they expect to view a dramatic performance. In "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance" Umberto Eco argues that an actor is a sign that makes two speech acts in dramatic performance. The first speech act is "I am acting." The second is a pseudo-statement where the subject of the statement is already a character not actor (Eco 115). A spectator will not

leap across the stage to rescue a suffering person because an actor recreating a historic moment is playing the character. In this case, audience members know that what they are witnessing is theatre. Yet, I still believe that the immediacy of suffering does emotionally impact the audience. This emotional response stands in contrast to the happenings of *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* where hordes of boats and ships ignore suffering *balseros* and float on by. Community in Fornés' opera is thus forged among the *balseros* themselves. They must depend on each other to survive, "Each person has an opinion./But gradually,/ all their thoughts/become/one." (*Manual for a Desperate Crossing* 130). Perhaps this is a larger statement contemplative of the attitudes taken by political refugees who first refused to integrate themselves into U.S. society believing that the Revolution would soon be overthrown, and they would be able to return to their homeland. After all, why would one attempt to integrate themselves into a community that rejects them?

Because *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* is an opera, questions arise about what significance music adds to this performance. Music can both trigger memory, but it can also trigger emotional reactions in audience members. Fornés deliberately writes a song into her script composed of crying, sobbing, whimpering and wailing (*Manual for a Desperate Crossing* 111). These sounds are all primitive utterances of suffering and illicit sympathy and compassion from those witnessing them. Sound is an important component Fornés is conscious of while writing. Fornés is not only a playwright but follows her plays to fruition as their director and producer. Blending these primitive utterances of suffering, *Manual for a Desperate Crossing* intertwines sound with images and text projected on a screen to diversify the symbols of hardship and torment. These forms of media can operate as prosthetics, or rather as an addition or extension to performance (Marshal McLuhan 191). McLuhan denotes that media is an addendum of ourselves. In *Manual for a Desperate Crossing*, technology precisely serves this

purpose, to add and enrich the embodiment of the script. Our present-day relationship with technology is a complicated one because it has become so entangled with the body. Alina Solomon describes how Fornés proposes the body as a machine. Therefore, using media as an extension of ourselves in this instance, blurs the line between humans and technology, and alters the confined notions of traditional theatre.

(Figure 4.) Jones, Steve. "*Manual for a Desperate Crossing* Production Photos." *Halcyon Theatre*, 2010, https://halcyontheatre.org/productions/alcyone10.

Carmen Peláez

Unlike Fornés, Carmen Peláez. was born in the U.S. and is of Cuban descent, making her a first-generation Cuban-American. Her plays are centered on exiles that lived in Miami during the Castro era. Peláez's mother escaped Cuba during the 1960's following the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Her mother was sent to the U.S. on the Pedro Pan (Operation Peter Pan) flights by the

Catholic Church,[18] while Peláez's father was smuggled out of Cuba at the age of 17. Her grandparents stayed but eventually joined the family in Miami after waiting several years assuming that the Castro regime would collapse (Peláez "The Playwright / La Dramaturga" 239).[19] Peláez has strong family ties as evident in the two plays that will be studied in this chapter: *El Postre de Estrada Palma* (1998) and *My Cuba* (1998). She credits her grandparents with her Cuban upbringing and instilling a nostalgic notion of Cuba within her. Peláez is grandniece to the famous Cuban painter Amelia Peláez and family of radio personality Ernesto Galindo. Peláez is a writer, actor, director and has worked with HBO and NBC.

(Figure 5.) Photograph of Carmen Pelaez and her late grandmother, Alicia Oyarzun, in Miami in 2003.

Peláez, Carmen. "Voices: Baseball, Abuela and Me." *NBC News,* 1 Nov. 2015,

https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/voices-baseball-abuela-me-n455046.

In a short video on the NBC news website, Peláez declares that Cuba is not a communist

[18] The Peter Pan flights were created by Father Bryan O. Walsh after minors began emigrating to the U.S. after fears that youth would be sent to work in soviet camps.

[19] See: Peláez's biography in Elizabeth Ramírez and Catherine Casiano's *La Voz Latina: Contemporary Plays and Performance Pieces by Latinas* (2011).

theme park (*Writer, Actor Carmen Peláez: 'Cuba Is Not A Communist Theme Park'*). She refers to Rául and Fidel Castro as “old guys” who have led a system of oppression and abuse. Peláez has been criticized because as a first-generation Cuban-American she is not directly an exile. However, this gives her work a significant nuance. Peláez recounts that it was her grandparents who shared their memories of a democratic Cuba that made her so passionate when she finally was able to go to Cuba. Peláez states that Cuba has never been a black and white issue but always grey (*Writer, Actor Carmen Peláez: 'Cuba Is Not A Communist Theme Park'*). Being a Cuban-American gives her the benefit of living once-removed. For Peláez, her first trip was life changing because she was finally able to see the country she had been told so much about but never able to visit. She shares that while there, many of the citizens she encountered voiced displeasure, saying that the Revolution was a sham. Peláez argues that the only way of change is an economic channel as the people dependent on government were living in fear.

El Postre de Estrada Palma

Both *El Postre de Estrada Palma* and *My Cuba* are one woman shows heavily based on autobiographical aspects. Peláez uses the Bretchian technique of one actor playing several roles. By playing several roles, Peláez makes the spectator of her play question the events that are being presented to them. *El Postre de Estrada Palma* is a work inspired by the strong relationship Peláez had with her grandparents and her grandmother’s friendship with her neighbor in Cuba. The main character of the play is Cami who travels to Cuba where her aunt Ninita meets her at the airport. The play, named after a dessert, serves as an element of connection and community making. Cami’s grandfather tells her that he learned to cook from exile and cooking together allows him to hold on to the life they had in Cuba. Cooking is almost a solemn event that took place between the two grandparents before their lives changed because

of illness. As Cami's grandmother's Alzheimer's continues to progress, her grandfather prefers to now cook alone in the kitchen.

Just as the title of the play, every dessert has its own memory. The play is not only a retelling of creating a dessert but the beginning of a friendship between a desperate neighbor and a *santera*. Cami's grandmother retells the story about when she learned how to make the dessert from her neighbor. When Cami's grandmother first meets her neighbor Cachita, she is distrusting and throws the gifted dessert from her *santera* neighbor into the garbage. Cami's grandmother keeps her distance from the strange neighbor until her husband falls violently ill and Cami's grandmother desperately tries to cure him. Hearing her up late at night, the neighbor Cachita calls out from her kitchen window to ask her neighbor what is wrong. Out of desperation, Cami's grandmother lets Cachita help and the two pray to Elegua as Cachita practices her spiritual healing. Cami's grandfather recovers and a strong friendship blossoms between the two women. When Cami returns to Cuba, she meets Cachita and asks her to teach her to make the dessert, since her grandmother never did.

The central character Cami is a granddaughter saddened that her grandmother was never able to share the recipe for this memorable dessert. There is a stark contrast between memory and age in *El Postre de Estrada Palma.* Cami cannot remember the stories her grandmother told her when she was a little girl, and now her grandmother is dying of Alzheimer's and no longer able to tell her the recipe. Cami's grandmother has lucid moments as part of her disease, which allows the spectators to hear the story of Cami's grandmother and Cachita's friendship. In "Paradise Lost: Older Cuban American Exiles' Ambiguous Loss of Leaving the Homeland" Rose Perez describes two types of ambiguous loss as based on Pauline Boss' 1999 definition. The first type of ambiguous loss is associated with physical loss, such as that of homeland, property or family member. The second type is when a loved one is physically present but

psychologically absent, as seen in cases of coma or Alzheimer's disease (Perez 597). Cami's grandmother experiences both types of ambiguous loss; she is both in exile and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. The memory loss due to Alzheimer's mirrors the loss and longing of Cuban exiles. Alzheimer's replicates ambiguous loss because it becomes a type of exile from the body itself. Perez states that themes of nostalgia, loss and ambivalence are common in Cuban literature due to the ambiguous loss experienced by Cuban exiles. Yet this is magnified in the case of Cami's grandmother, whose memories are erased as her brain deteriorates. As the loss of exiles is ambivalent, it can continue for many years without resolution, as those who experience it do not know when to grieve (596). A similar scenario occurs with Cami's grandmother, who becomes psychologically distant from her family despite being physically present.

The tensions produced by the ambiguous loss described by Perez can also be read in Freudian terms since Cami's grandmother suffers from melancholy. In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Sigmund Freud compares mourning after the loss of a loved one with the phenomenon of melancholia. For Freud, melancholia is a dangerous pathology and medical intervention is necessary as melancholia can lead to depression and suicide. In contrast, mourning is a natural process that is necessary for recovery after loss. Specifically, Freud points to three differences that divide mourning from melancholia. Those who experience melancholia: (1) cannot identify the "object-loss" or when they can, are unable to specify what is particularly disturbing to them (245); (2) experience melancholia as an unconscious process, (while mourning is conscious) (245); (3) suffer a loss of self-regard (244). The ambiguous loss produced by exile (for example the loss represented in the play via Cami's grandmother) can become a pathology if one subconsciously suffers melancholy instead of consciously mourning as a means of recovery. Cami's grandmother is stuck in a state of suffering, her inability to mourn keeps her in a stagnant state which is later amplified by her diagnosis of Alzheimer's.

This condition solidifies her suffering and places her in a permanent position of trauma. She becomes powerless to move forward from the ambiguous loss of exile.

In her study on the effects of long-term ambiguous loss from the homeland among older Cuban exiles, Perez found five common themes among her participants. These include: leaving as inevitable (602), hopes of return (605), feelings of deceit and displacement by Fidel Castro (606), gratitude and betrayal towards the U.S. (608), and idealizing a pre-Revolutionary Cuba (610). I contend that such themes are evident in both the plays of Carmen Peláez and María Irene Fornés, however *El Postre de Estrada Palma* specifically highlights the importance of older generations in the Cuban-American diaspora. Miguel Gonzalez-Pando argues that Cuban grandparents pushed their young to maintain language and culture, stemming from a fear of acculturation and preserving a narrative of going back or return as Perez puts it (*The Cuban Americans* 94). Although political exiles first maintained a distance from the U.S. community on purpose, this decreased over time as hopes of return became thinner and thinner. Yet older Cuban generations were insistent on cultivating their language and culture and integrated themselves by sharing their own customs with American society. This is evident in the strong relationship both Peláez had with her grandparents and the relationship her character Cami experiences with her grandmother and grandfather.

The Caribbean has been shaped by an economic history which has derived from its colonial roots. Humans arrived in the Caribbean both voluntarily and forcibly, both European settlers and slaves have composed its population. Settler communities have brought their own traditions as evident by the spiritual practices present in the Caribbean today. Such practices are not limited to Catholicism as imposed by early Spanish settlers but have rather become a blend of African religions and Christianity. Since slaves were only to serve as units of labor and were to abandon their beliefs and submit themselves to the religious order of Spanish colonizers,

African religions have survived by being practiced covertly. Yet such religious expressions are now integrating themselves openly and play an important role in Cuban society. Such religion is referred to as *santería* translated into English meaning "worship of saints."

Santería was born from the mixture of Catholicism and African religions that were practiced clandestinely in the 18th century by African slaves who worked on Caribbean sugar plantations (Cros Sandoval 2006; Murphy 2010)[20]. Many *santería* worshippers have paralleled the identities of their deities with saints. It has thus become a religion that is inherently Cuban because it belongs neither to the oppressed or the oppressor. English explorers who came up from the Bight of Benin during the nineteenth century passed through what is today known as Yorubaland. The English learned that the people they came across were called the *Yarriba* by the Hausa people of the north and choose to adopt the designation when missionaries created the first dictionary of the language and worked to format a standard dialect which they came to call *Yoruba* (Murphy 400). Joseph M. Murphy (2010) and Mercedes Cros Sandoval (2006) are among the scholars who explain that Yoruba has become the preferred term for the language and culture across the Niger River to the north and east and into Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Following the disintegration of the Oyo empire and the expansion of the sugar cane industry, more enslaved Yoruba were carried to two principal countries: Brazil and Cuba (Murphy 401). Cuba developed its own phrase for the Yoruba who thus were known as *Lucumi*. The *Lucumi* could gather in *cabildos* and aid each other in the struggle to survive, where they could speak their mother tongue, sing old hymns and apotheosize their *orishas* through ritual.

What is today known as *santería* survived underground since it was not allowed to be practiced first in front of slave owners, or in the imperial society that followed. More recently,

[20] For an extensive history of *Santería*, see Mercedes Cros Sandoval's book *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santeria Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (2006).

santería was not tolerated by Castro's government. Although Castro attempted to follow in the footsteps of countries such as communist China, his efforts proved unsuccessful in converting Cuba into a secular state. By the end of the Cold War, the atheist guidelines in the Cuban constitution were removed. Thus, it became the task of practitioners to pass *santería* on by oral tradition through many generations. Today *santería* has increased in popularity and is now practiced overtly. During its early days, *santería* was simply a slave practice as a rejection of Catholicism. However, with time, in slave social centers called *calbidos*, practitioners of *santería* congregated weekly to worship the spirit gods *Oloddumare* and the *Orishas*[21] (Murphy 401). Today, *Santeros* summon the Orisha through music, dance, and ceremonial performances in which offerings of food, rum, and animal blood are made to the present spirit. The intermingling of *santería* with Catholicism has resulted in the association of each Orisha with a designated Christian saint.

Due to the rejection of *santería* in Cuba, negative associations and misconceptions have been correlated with the religion. Some remain fearful and see it in opposition to Catholic teachings. For this reason, Cami's grandmother's original rejection and suspicion of her neighbour is understandable. However, the renunciation of *santería* is also reflective of a racial divide. Cami's grandmother says, "When Cachita and her family moved in next door I was afraid of them. Cachita was a Santera. I thought that *santería* was witchcraft and I was afraid that if I made her mad, she would put a spell on me. Santería belonged to *los Africanos*, and I was Catholic" (*El Postre de Estrada Palma* 246). Cami's grandmother unknowingly points to a contradiction that race is incompatible with religion as *santería* has become associated with blackness.

[21] The Yoruba believe that Oloddumare is omnipotent and responsible for all life. The Orishas are *santería* deities.

If the state imposes or disallows a particular religion, divisions will develop inevitably in the community. Despite the previous role of the state in the prohibition of *santería*, it is now becoming an open practice in Cuba:

> This form of worship demonstrates the equal faith that many of Santeria's adherents have placed in both the Orishas and the Catholic saints. By accepting and adopting the beliefs of both Cuba's historic oppressor and oppressed, they have formed a religion that can neither be labeled as truly Christian nor Yoruba, but instead inherently Cuban. As with other syncretic religions practiced in Latin America, Santeria offers an outlet through which modern Cubans can fuse together a ruptured past. (Hill 2014)

It is only the sharing of a religious practice which is inherently Cuban that allows for friendship to grow between Cami's grandmother and Cachita. *Santería* represents a shared identity stemming from a cultural inheritance and is considered one of the many Creole religions of the Caribbean. Not only are syncretic religions a by-product of the braided history Bernabé et al. refer to, they are furthermore a Creolization. Creoleness encompasses a double process: "[…] *the adaptation of Europeans, Africans, and Asians to the New world; and the cultural confrontation of these peoples within the same space, resulting in a mixed culture called Creole*" (894, italics in original). In their definition of Creolization Bernabé et al. clarify that a distinction must be made, "Generally resting upon a plantation economy, *these populations are called to invent the new cultural designs allowing for a relative cohabitation between them.* These designs are the result of a nonharmonious (and unfinished therefore nonreductionist) mix of linguistic, religious, cultural, culinary, architectural, medical etc. practices of the different people in question" (893, italics in original). Bernabé et al. argue "Creoleness is *"the world diffracted but recomposed,"* a maelstrom of signifieds in a single signifier: a Totality" (892). S*antería* thus transpired as a by-product of the effects of uprooting and transplanting languages, races, religions, customs, and

ways of being. As rituals help heal and bring the community together, *santería* not only brings the two neighbours closer in the performance but can also exist as "[…] an outlet through which modern Cubans can fuse together a ruptured past" (Hill 2014).

In *El Postre de Estrada Palma*, Peláez is able to comment on Cuba's economic system through the representation of dessert. At the end of the play, when Cami finally arrives in Cuba and asks Cachita to teach her how to make the dessert, she smiles, lowers her head and says: "But I can't buy any eggs." (248). Cami of course says that she will get her whatever she wants. We presume that Cami is able to purchase food without restrictions because she is a foreigner and supposedly has enough money to pay for groceries. I turn to Mélanie Davidson and Catherine Krull's ideas to explain this point. They dispute that "The Cuban government has been facing the formidable challenge of how to initiate substantial economic reforms during a global crisis without compromising revolutionary gains in education, health, equity, and social welfare, and without further increasing food insecurity" (74). Davidson and Krull argue that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Special Period that followed in the 1990s, women were forced to learn how to deal with reoccurring food shortages in a way that would not deteriorate gains women had made post-revolution. These gains include education, health, workforce participation, and gender equality (60). Food shortages made daily life increasingly more challenging for women because of their position as household managers. The food shortages during and following the Special Period were exacerbated by the U.S. embargo, which became stricter in 1992 by the Torricelli Law[22] and in 1996 by Helmsburton Act,[23] which made the Cuban economy approach collapse (60). Post-hurricane food shortages and accessibility issues

[22] Congressman Robert Torricelli passed a law prohibiting foreign subsidiaries from trading with Cuba during the Special Period.

[23] The Helmsburton Act continued and strengthen the U.S. embargo with Cuba.

reflect other barriers to the Cuban food system that occurred since beginning of Special Period.

Krull and Davidson conducted interviews to highlight strategies of resistance used by women during food shortages. Such strategies include: women lowering their food intake, moving in with relatives, communal cooking, and sharing of queuing duties for food (71-72). During the Revolution, Fidel was conscious that it was necessary to free women from domestic slavery and include them in production to create a functional communist society. Economic issues resulting from previous gendered practices shadowed women's gains post-Revolution. Krull and Davidson explain, "It has been primarily women who have stood in long queues for food, cared for children and the elderly, volunteered for community work, strategized about making ends meet, and ministered to sick family at home or in the hospital" (62). Therefore, Cuban women experience a triple burden, composed of public work, domestic life and community participation.

Although Cami's grandmother left Cuba following the Revolution, her neighbor Cachita stayed and had to juggle this triple burden as well as contend with what Krull and Davidson describe as the "ideal revolutionary woman." They argue that such a model was conflated with the idea of being a good mother by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) due to their 1960s ad portraying a Cuban woman in military garb carrying a gun and child (62). Cognizant of the material conditions in Cuban society during Batista's dictatorship, in 1959 Castro's regime attempted to lower food prices and create and maintain food distribution programs. Yet the idea of the "Special Period" merely serves as an empty label, as several food shortages continue due to severe weather conditions such as hurricanes and drought.

Since women are viewed as domestic experts, Cuban men usually have not developed cooking skills as women fear them going to market and paying too much for bad ingredients or wasting in kitchen (70). I agree with Krull and Davidson that this is not always the case, as

Cami's grandfather is an exception to this rule. However, one could argue that Cami's grandfather's condition of Cuban-American is what results in his love and solemnity for cooking. Instead of being pushed out of the kitchen for lack of skills or fear of wasting food, Cami's grandfather is an excellent chef. Cami says, "My grandparents were incredible cooks. Both of them. They worked in the kitchen for hours, carefully making sure that every dish was perfect. I was surprised that my grandfather was such a good cook because in Cuba he was a businessman. When I asked him who taught him to cook he answered, "Exile, Cami, the exile" (*El Postre de Estrada Palma* 244-245). In this way exile has become Cami's grandfather's ultimate instructor. Food, an element parallel to culture and language, has thus become an element of proximity that Cuban grandparents were able to share with their Cuban-American family and maintain a connection with their homeland.

My Cuba

It is clear that *El Postre de Estrada Palma* is filled with autobiographical elements representing the connection between Peláez and her grandparents. Peláez's play *My Cuba* serves as an extension of this connection, however, in this second play Cami's grandparents have passed away and Cami is left to explore Cuba through the memories relayed to her by her family. Miami was often thought of as a temporary residence when exiles migrated to escape the Castro regime but following the Bay of Pigs incident of 1961 it became clear that Castro would not be overthrown easily. *My Cuba* tells the story of Cami returning to visit Cuba after only having images of what it was and never being able to see it. For her it is like smoke, an object that quickly vanishes, an existence only tangible for a few seconds. Cami says, "Even when it filled me, it disappeared as quickly as it came. I could never completely catch it. And now I was going and even though I had a very strong idea of what my Cuba was—I was on my way to discover

what it actually is" (249). *My Cuba* unlike *El Postre de Estrada Palma* is an individualistic account of Cami reconciling an imaginary Cuba instilled in her through familiar descriptions with her firsthand experiences. Now that her grandparents have passed away and relations have opened up between the communist state and the U.S., Cami is finally able to travel to the homeland and fulfil the perpetuated narrative of return. Yet her experiences are far from the nostalgic view narrated to her.

My Cuba begins with Cami arriving at the airport to depart for Cuba and notices that she is the only one with one piece of luggage. Everyone else is overloaded with luggage they are taking back home to their family. This leads her to meet Daisy, a woman taking the same flight with what she calls *contraband*. Daisy is so heavily packed that she even smuggles food in her underwear. On her way to Cuba, Cami also encounters a man who left on a raft and has never met his son. She is then able to witness the moment when the man reunites with his family and they first embrace. Cami painfully notices that the man's young son is apprehensive as his mother explains to him that this is his father. Just as emotional an event, Cami observes his departure at the airport a week later when she leaves. As she goes through customs, Cuban authorities take her copy of the New York Times away because it is considered subversive. As she exits, Cami realizes that Cubans are not allowed in the airport so she must be greeted by her aunt outside of a fence lined with relatives of those arriving. After her Great-aunt Ninita picks her up, they arrive and Cami enters the home of her deceased famous great-aunt Amelia. Ninita now lives in Amelia's home and due to Amelia's fame as a painter, the Cuban government already considers Amelia's home a national patrimony and will convert it into a museum when Ninita dies.

Cami is overcome with emotion and has trouble breathing when she first glances at the Cuban landscape, yet she is shortly confronted with many realities during her week-long stay in

Cuba. During her visit she becomes conscious of how her identity is read by others. Though Cami feels that she is Cuban, she is reminded that her identity resides on the hyphen between Cuban and American due to her opinion about beauty products. Cami is labelled a Cuban-American when she naively asks: "What about maybe not wearing mascara?" (*My Cuba* 250). The women break out in laughter and her aunt Ninita is left to explain that Cami is from the U.S., sharing that Cami is from "over there" which upsets Cami. She proceeds to share:

> […] this makes me crazy 'cause in the U.S., when people ask me where I'm from, I always say "Cuba!" But here I say the same thing and it means something completely different.
>
> "But you are a Cuban-Americanita, right?" And I don't want to answer yes, but I have to. (*My Cuba* 250).

By using the diminutive *-ita* at the end of Cuban-American, the woman speaking to Cami demonstrates tenderness instead of the way Cami negatively views her comment. However, Cami encounters the phenomenon migrants often experience when they return to the homeland. No matter where Cami resides, she will always occupy a liminal space, she will always be from *over there*. For this reason, Cami is faced to recognize a hyphenated identity, as her peers neither view her as purely American or Cuban.

It bears discussion that Cami is read as *other* because of beauty standards or what she refers to as *Cuban vanity*. The way that Cuban women deal with poverty is a present theme in both *El Postre de Estrada Palma* and *My Cuba*. In *El Postre* Cachita cannot buy eggs to teach Cami how to make the special dessert, yet because Cuban women are considered household experts, they are forced to become creative, make do and use whatever they can for their material needs. Just as comically as it is tragic, the women in *My Cuba* turn to shoe polish for mascara in times of hardship. Instead of going without, they use their creativity to uphold Cuban beauty

standards. In “Introduction: Revisiting Beauty” Natalie Havlin and Jillian M. Báez argue that beauty is “Inherently relational, beauty as metaphor, aesthetic, and product emerges from nexus of land, capital and consumption, nation-building, ideological currents, colonialisms and imperialisms, natural resources, and built environment.” (18). Thus, the politics of beauty have been heavily debated, and some feminists critique beauty as an extension of patriarchal gender regimes, while others celebrate it as an action of play and identity expression (Havlin and Báez 14). bell hooks serves as an example of a feminist who sees beauty standards as a mode of survival not just adornment. Havlin and Báez add that “Nonnormative expressions of beauty are a common strategy marginalized groups use to counter white, Eurocentric, patriarchal, and homophobic norms” (15). By complying with normative beauty standards, beauty can become a site of agency for women of the periphery.

Yet what the Western world considers to be normative beauty standards are intertwined with imperialist notions and deeply gendered. Feminist scholar Luce Irigagay (1985) unpacks this sentiment by analyzing patriarchal order, which she argues is a latent form of slavery as it turns women into property. Throughout several periods in history women have been kept from the public sphere and secluded in the home. Irigaray suggests that woman is thus an object of consumption and exchange (“Women on the Market” 170). This becomes evident in the desperation that drives women in *My Cuba* to think of creative ways to upkeep their standards of beauty. Consumption is tied into beauty that is inevitably intertwined with the way Cuban women read each other and ultimately the way they read themselves. This appropriation of beauty could serve as an anti-capitalist view and also an act of transgression. Although the women in the play appropriate products in their own ways to align themselves with normative beauty, by misappropriating products they no longer consume in the traditional fashion. By marking their bodies with consumer products in unorthodox ways in order to meet normative

beauty standards, they covertly and perhaps unconsciously question such standards.

Due to the autobiographical nature of her work, Peláez's characters often serve as archetypes of real people. In *My Cuba* Cami encounters a tourist she calls a capitalist communist who buys a Che Guevara T-shirt with American currency. The irony is completely lost on the man. To make matters worse, he overhears her speaking English and thrilled he informs her, "Oh your Cuba is a wonderful place. The music! So sexual. I'm being consumed by this old-world charm. Thank God Castro has saved it from us." (250). The man in *My Cuba* serves as an archetype of an ignorant tourist with an exoticized vision of what Cuba is. He represents an entitled figure that indulges in purchases without questioning history and believes Cuba to be his consumerist paradise. Particularly bothersome is the idea this male character considers Fidel Castro to be a historical savior, as if Castro is an art curator so that Cuba may exist as a Western museum for American indulgence. Cami explores this conflicting view further through her contemplation of cigars. She ponders, "I start to think about the way cigars have made Cubans a brand and not a people" (251). Returning to the discussion of U.S. hegemony in the Caribbean, it is evident that this imperial history has made people think of the Caribe as brand, particularly evident for Cami in the case of the cigar. A Cuban is not necessarily a person originating from Cuba but rather a cigar fabricated and sold in the country of origin.[24]

At the end of the play, it is hard for Cami to leave Cuba and return to America. She recognizes that she, unlike those who live in Cuba, is able to leave and feels guilty for being able to be surrounded by *Cuba* in Miami while not being affected by the difficult material conditions Cubans face in the homeland. Though sad to leave, Cami demonstrated that memory is linked to

[24] In her chapter "Selling Like Hot Bread: New Money, New Markets," (2008) Esther Whitfield describes the process of Cuba's re-indoctrination as a service economy during the "Special Period." Whitfield writes, " […] Cuba became less a site *of* consumption---that is, a place where consumers were themselves located---than a site *for* consumption." (18).

objects by her desire to take an old paint brush as a souvenir from her great-aunt Amelia. Although it is dry and unusable, Cami wants a physical token of connection. This token serves as a connection to her family lineage but is important because as exiles, her family left and needed to leave most of their belongings behind.

Dominican-U.S. Relations

Dixa Ramírez argues that Dominicans have expressed their dissatisfaction with the forms that represent and describe them in modern literature, music, and speech acts (*Colonial Phantoms* 4). Instead of interpreting Dominican history and expressive culture as "fragmented," Ramírez opts for the term "ghosting" to better represent the repetition of haunting evident in rehearsals of national and imperial projects. Ramírez names forms of ghosting within broader Western imaginaries that include the actions and repercussions of cultural producers, policymakers, Western discourses, associations with Haiti, and by the late twentieth century, the persistence of U.S. involvement in Dominican politics and economy (8-9). Like Cuba and the U.S., the Dominican Republic has a long history of complex diplomatic relations with the U.S.. Frank Moya Pons maintains that although the Dominican Republic is the longest European-inhabited territory, it is the least studied in Latin American and the Caribbean (*The Dominican Republic* 9).[25] The last play to be analyzed in this chapter is *Por hora y a Piece-work* written by the Dominican playwright Elizabeth Ovalle. In order to understand the backdrop of this play, we must first delve into U.S.-Dominican relations. After declaring its independence in 1844, the Dominican Republic experienced a period of political instability that indebted the Dominican Republic to the U.S.. Narciso Isa Conde describes the relationship between the U.S. and the

[25] See Moya Pons's historical text *The Dominican Republic* (1998) for a comprehensive narration of Dominican history.

Dominican Republic as one of empire and colony as the U.S. effectively replaced the previous relationship with Spain as colonizer (*America's Backyard: The Dominican Republic*). In the year 1916, then U.S. president Wilson sent marines to invade. The purpose of this occupation was to appropriate territory, build railways, construct mines and sugar plantations. Moya Pons writes, "[…] with all major Dominican officials dismissed and with the U.S. State Department deeply involved with events in Europe, the administration of the Dominican Republic was virtually in the hands of the U.S. Department of the Navy." (321-322). This invasion lasted until the year 1924, when U.S. troops retreated from Dominican soil but not before establishing the National Guard and selecting Rafael Trujillo as to be the Dominican Republic's new president.[26] The U.S. managed to cement their choice with the assistance of a coup d'état that allowed Trujillo to prevail as Dominican president from 1930 onwards.

Trujillo began his reign by renaming Dominican cities and landmarks after himself and required all churches to post the slogan "God in heaven, Trujillo on earth." Despite his embezzlement and well documented human rights abuses, he enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the U.S. because of his anti-communist views and maintained his favor with the U.S. by encouraging close ties. However, the U.S. could only turn a blind eye to such atrocities for so long. Eventually mass imprisonments and murder eroded his support and sitting U.S. president Eisenhower approved his assassination. Though Trujillo appeared as an international embarrassment, the succeeding Kennedy administration did not follow through with the assassination orders put through by the previous Eisenhower administration. Instead, Trujillo was assassinated in 1961 (Moya Pons 381).

After two years of political instability, in the year 1963, Juan Bosch was the first

[26] See "The Rise of Trujillo" (351-356) in *The Dominican Republic.*

Dominican president elected democratically. The Constitution that followed his election declared workers had share in company's profits and began to recognize human rights abuses. Unfortunately, Bosch's regime only lasted seven months and was overthrown by another coup d'état and assassination. Two years later, a civil war broke out between Bosch supporters and right-wing former supporters of Trujillo. U.S. president Lyndon Johnson feared the beginning of a *second Cuba* and provided support to right wing Trujillo supporters. Although Bosch was considered a leftist because of his political views, he was not a Marxist. Yet the U.S. chose to again invade the Dominican Republic in 1965. This intervention made the Dominican more dependent on the U.S. as international companies began to control the Dominican economy.

On April 28th, 1965, the day after the U.S. invasion, the Dominican democratic revolution turned into a war against the motherland and invaders. The U.S. support led to a loyalist victory and with obvious intervention by the U.S. embassy, the following elections were won by president Joaquín Balaguer who dominated Dominican politics for 22 years. Balaguer served under Trujillo, and his anti-communist stance pleased the U.S. Balaguer subscribed to what Narciso Isa Conde calls *geographic fatalism*. In other words, as the Dominican Republic is geographically located in the Caribbean, it is in America's backyard, and therefore cannot have any independence or disagreement with the U.S.. Although Dominican migrants were not treated as favorably by the U.S. government as Cuban exiles, the 1960s saw an influx of Dominican migration, particularly in New York City which happens to be the setting of the last play in this study. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández explain that New York became the principal destination for inbound Dominican immigration due to the city's role as in the later half of the nineteenth century as a connecting port between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic

during times of U.S. involvement in the Caribbean (224).[27]

Elizabeth Ovalle

Elizabeth Ovalle is a writer, a famous actress and has instructed theatre classes for several years. She has written short stories, children's theatre and eleven plays. Born in the Dominican Republic, Ovalle moved to the capital Santo Domingo at the age of fourteen (Quackenbush 266). After briefly living in the U.S. in 1990s, Ovalle now resides permanently in the Dominican Republic. Ovalle emigrated to the U.S. to study acting but was unfortunately obliged to abandon her studies and chose to return to the Dominican Republic in 1993. Fortunately, her brief stay in New York City gave her firsthand stories and anecdotes that informed the factory backdrop of *Por hora y a Piece-work*. Most of her plays focus on social aspects, specifically Dominican identity and women's issues. Ovalle's theatre centers on everyday issues and personal experiences. She has denounced violence against women and in 2016, the Fundación Absoluto Teatro (of which Ovalle directed), coordinated the Festival Internacional Teatro Mujeres sobre las tablas to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women ("Theater on Women Anti-Violence Day." dr1.com).

Though Ovalle's *Por hora and a Piece-work* belongs to the canon of Dominican theatre, scholars such as Juan Flores and Camila Stevens have argued that the Dominican theatre movement was never associated around one person but many writers and actors in New York City[28]. Stevens in particular argues that Dominican theatre problematizes the concept of home by

[27] See their chapter "Dominicans: Community, Culture, and Collective Identity," in *One Out of Three: Immigrant New York in the Twenty-first Century* (2013).

[28] See Juan Flores's chapter "Open Mic: Poetry, Performance, Emerging Identities" in his book *The Diaspora Strikes Back: Caribeño Tales of Learning and Turning* (2009) and Camila Stevens's article entitled "Home is where theatre is": Performing Dominican Transnationalism" (2013).

questioning unilateral migration and narratives of assimilation. This is evident in *Por hora and a piece-work* through the rejection of N.Y.C. by the main character's daughter. This rejection plays out once they arrive in the U.S. and strongly express their desire to return home. For transnational migrants, home is both multiple and movable and results in Dominican theatre being a multi-sited transnational practice. Stevens believes that Dominican playwrights stage new ways to represent Dominican identity in flux. For Stevens, Dominican theatre shows how to intervene in cultural politics by crossing borders. Stevens states, "Just as diasporas have always been transnational, the theater has always moved across local, regional, and national borders." (31). Circular and counter-streams of migration have transformed Dominican migrants into transnational subjects that participate in both U.S. and Dominican societies, therefore Dominican playwrights experiment with different ways of staging complex and fluid identities. Yet unfortunately, even as Dominican theatre is transnational, it is often excluded in the homeland and in U.S. Latino theatre (Stevens 32). Ovalle herself recognizes that her plays do not catch the attention of producers, but, in her view, this has more to do with their content and less with the fact that she produces theatre that could be classified as Dominican.

Ovalle wrote *Por hora y a Piece-work* four years after living in New York City, and her work is informed by her struggle to hold low-income jobs in supermarkets and factories. Such autobiographical experiences allow Ovalle to paint a vivid picture of the difficult life of an immigrant textile worker in the U.S.. Still, Camila Stevens critiques the ending of Ovalle's play for excluding the events that follow the main character Juana and her daughter's return to the homeland. Stevens believes it is necessary to include this event to analyze how Dominican migrants experience reterritorialization (36). Not to be confused with repatriation (the act of return of an individual to their country of origin), Stevens instead uses the concept of reterritorialization (a term coined by Deleuze and Guattari) to describe the process of

restructuring and the ways people within a place produce and reinvent culture. With respect to migrants, reterritorialization is a process the migrant experiences after deterritorialization (after departure from the homeland) to re-establish a territorial connection in the host society. Stevens contends that, "Too often transnational identity is invoked to celebrate nomadic and hybrid identities without recognizing the vulnerability of this identity position with respect to the dominant cultures in the sending and receiving nation-states." (37). *Por hora a Piece-work* demonstrates the adversity this subject position encounters instead of simply celebrating liminal identity. The play dismantles the fallacy of America as a welcoming immigrant nation and highlights how migrants are often rejected by the host nation while they attempt to integrate themselves. Nonetheless, I believe it is equally critical to examine the adverse reaction that Juana's young girls have to the U.S.. By staging migration and family relations, *Por hora y a Piece-work* makes the personal public and portrays how policies can affect lives of migrants.

Por hora y a Piece-work

Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-Work* is celebrated for winning first place at Casa de Teatro in 1993. The play opens in a New York City textile factory and the difficulties of immigration are at the center of the play as obvious through mentions of the guagua,[29] welfare, medicare, and section 8.[30] The first scene begins with Juana's search for work. Dominican music echoes in the background as the cast appears together in a factory. Juana first interacts with her soon-to-be boss Señor Recio. Sr. Recio is an uncaring man who quickly makes her prove her skills while she begs for work. From a practical standpoint, Sr. Recio's request makes sense but his brashness

[29] A public bus.

[30] Section 8 refers to the 8th section of the U.S. Housing Act of 1937, which authorizes the payment of rental housing assistance to private landlords.

stands in contrast to traditional sit-down interviews. Sr. Recio asks Juana if she knows how to sew and sits her down at sewing machine where she quickly gets the machine stuck. He reprimands her for not knowing how to operate the machine. After pricking her finger on the needle, it is evident that Juana has no idea how to sew but begs Sr. Recio to give her a chance anyway, "Mire yo aprendo fácil no má me tiene que decir cómo se enhebra la máquina y yo por ahí me voy solita" (*Por hora y a Piece-Work* 247). When Juana notices that Sr. Recio walks away without paying attention to her request, Juana begs him to employ her as a cleaner. Sr. Recio brushes Juana off to a 68-year-old woman named Doña Pura who has been working at the factory since her youth. He instructs the old woman to teach Juana the ropes, "doña Pura, enséñele a limpiar, y si tampoco da para eso me lo dice de una vez para que se vaya" (247). Doña Pura is a short-tempered woman who is told to show Juana how to clean yet Juana manages to slowly gain the trust of others in the factory.

As the factory women discuss economic difficulties, money and express desires to return home to the Dominican Republic, Dominican music and the sounds of stitching are intertwined as the play's soundtrack. One of Juana's coworkers Aída begins a conversation with talk about those abusing social assistance to which two other factory workers Dolores and Yeya respond:

> DOLORES: Ay no, pues yo dejo el trabajo, porque imagínate yo vengo de Brooklyn pagando 4 pasajes diarios más lonch, no hombre, se me van to lo chelito.
>
> YEYA: Yo cogeré los tres golpes porque Petra, la de Ciro, vive como una reina cogiendo todo lo que le dan (Cuenta con los dedos.) Esa mujer coge *Welfare, medicare,* cupones y ahora va a aplicar para sección 8 y tiene tanta suerte que da para salirle ese apartamento al poco tiempo de aplicar y uno aquí de pendejo jodido dale que te dale a esta fuñenda. (*Por hora y a Piece-Work* 247).

In stark contrast to the difficult lives lead by the factory women, Dolores expresses that she is

asked to send everything back by family members who dress better than her in Dominican Republic, even female hygiene products.

Notably Juana's vernacular pegs her as a countrywoman and others immediately make class judgements based on this, especially her co-worker Capitaleña. Capitaleña is a classist woman who spends her shifts at the factory reminding Juana that she is socially beneath her. Capitaleña uses the way she and Juana entered the country as a point of contrast to emphasize her social status as a city woman. Juana's arrival in New York City was difficult and she first arrived through Mexico and did odd jobs. In contrast, Capitaleña claims she arrived in New York City on a plane with immigration papers in hand. The epitome of this clash of classes occurs when Capitaleña makes a commotion after mistakenly drinking out of Juana's glass. Capitaleña calls Juana dirty, assuming that Juana because she of lower social rank, has poor hygiene. Juana retaliates by grabbing Capitaleña's hair which turns into a fight in the factory, however, when Sr. Recio intervenes to break up the altercation, he is barely bothered by safety standards and co-worker dynamics, as his main concern is production and he is upset that the exchange is halting their daily duties.

In the factory space, English words are seldom used, but if they are they are given a Hispanic intonation such as *lonch* for the word lunch. The language used in the factory space is dominantly Spanish as it is populated with immigrants and undocumented workers. Another example of the appropriation of English terms is *La miga*, the term used to refer to immigration. Aída warns Juana that if immigration officers come to the factory, she must hide because she doesn't have any papers. Even though Juana is an undocumented worker, she plans to bring her daughters Rosi and Miguelina to learn English and have better lives. Unfortunately, Sr. Recio does not let Juana off the day her daughters arrive. Although her daughter Rosi wants to study, Miguelina expresses a strong desire to return home. The play ends after a silent moment when

immigration arrives and even the superior classist Capitaleña is set to be deported. The factory boss Sr. Recio is charged for not paying wages for overtime work and paid work on weekends and having *illegal aliens* working at the American factory.

In the anthology in which *Por hora y a Piece-work* is published[31], editor Howard L. Quackenbush argues that the production of Ovalle's play is a reflection of a wave of female dramaturgs that began writing theatre after the death of Dominican dictator Trujillo. In his critical take on the play, like Camila Stevens, Quackenbush maintains that it concentrates on the misconceived notions of the American dream. Instead of doors opening for the newly arrived migrants, the reality of Juana's struggle to bring her daughters to the U.S. is highlighted. When Juana explains to her boss that she is attempting to save money quickly so that she can pay to have her daughters brought to her in the U.S., Sr. Recio takes the opportunity to further exploit her and gives her more hours instead of the raise she requested.

Ovalle has carefully crafted the world within her play as evidenced by the caricatured names she gives her characters. Sr. Recio is a robust and harsh boss as his name suggests. This cartoon vision extends to other characters like: Pura (the pure one), Amado (the loved one), and Dolores (pain, sorrow), Capitaleña (native of Santo Domingo). The parody is also evident by Ovalle's construction of the world of the outside versus the inner positive space of the factory. Although the factory space represents difficult work, within it, community exists as outside space stands in contrast. The outside signals danger as clear by the portrayal of the man who is shot dead because of association with drugs. Camila Stevens critiques *Por hora y a Piece-work* for being too stereotypical and leaving little place for discussion. Stevens is particularly bothered by the play's ending which fails to give a glimpse into the moment of return of the migrant, what

[31] See Howard L. Quackenbush's *La mujer frente al espejo: Antología anotada de dramaturgas dominicanas contemporáneas* (2007).

Stevens refers to as reterritorialization. However, instead of dwelling on what the play does not accomplish, I opt to focus on the discussions the play prompts. If we unpack the way Ovalle uses satire, it is evident that stereotypical archetypes are not present because Ovalle agrees with them, but rather because she seeks to interrogate them.

To ignore the nuances of this play runs the risk of dismissing the work for merely reproducing stereotypical archetypes. Linda Hutcheon warns against this superficial reading in her book *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (2000). She explains that it is necessary that the decoder notice and identify parody otherwise they run the risk of naturalizing the work, which would eliminate a significant part of form and content. The nuances of this play are evident in the space of the factory and contribute to its ambiguity. Although the inside setting is considerably more positive when compared with the exterior urban space of the city, the inner represents the locus of both community building and injustice. In this manner, the text can present an alternative narrative of migration that is not simply celebratory or bleak, but rather exists in the space of the *in-between* just as the migrant exists in the liminal.

In their article entitled "The Effects of Parental Undocumented Status on the Developmental Contexts of Young Children in Immigrant Families" Hirokazu Yoshikawa and Ariel Kalil discuss the effects of undocumented migration on children. Yoshikawa and Kalil argue that the fears of undocumented parents are transmitted to their children. The anxiety experienced by the undocumented parent causes anxiety among their kin and may also be attributed to a change of parenting style (293). For example, if undocumented parents owe money to smugglers, they must work long hours, which causes stress, and are thus less invested in their children's daily lives by virtue of being absent or unable to dedicate relaxed focus to their children. Often it is the case that undocumented workers, and their families must reside in low-income neighborhoods, which means fewer community resources, and crowded housing

results in lower grades, stress, and higher blood pressure for children (Yoshikawa and Kalil 294). In this way, the material conditions of undocumented migration cause unhappiness in both the play and in the real-life conditions of migration as expressed by Juana's daughters desire to return home. The unhappy Dominican migrant presents what Sarah Ahmed would refer to as a *multicultural failure*. In her chapter "Melancholic Migrant" Sarah Ahmed declares: "Unhappiness is read as caused not simply by diversity but by the failure of people who embody such diversity to "touch and interact" (122). Like Cami's grandmother in *Letters from Cuba* who experiences melancholy due to the ambiguous loss of exile, the ambiguous losses of migration conceive the state of unhappiness and melancholy of Juana's daughters in *Por hora y a Piece-work*. Their inability to understand this loss is compounded by the poor reception of the host country who reads them as foreigners unwilling to assimilate. Instead of unpacking the factors that make migration difficult, and thus create the melancholic migrant, the migrants in *Por hora y a Piece-work* are shamed by the host nation for their inability and unwillingness to intermingle and integrate themselves. This shame can become internalized and migrants often find themselves self-policing their dialogue and interactions to further assimilate and meet the expectations of the host nation. Ahmed refers to this conundrum as the *happiness duty*: "Migrants as would-be citizens are thus increasingly bound by the happiness duty not to speak about racism in the present, not to speak of the unhappiness of colonial histories, or of attachments that cannot be reconciled into the colorful diversity of the multicultural nation." (158) Therefore, the migrant is burdened with the myth of multiculturalism.

Clifford explains that diasporas are not quite immigrant communities. In immigrant communities, immigrants can experience loss and nostalgia, but these narratives are designed to integrate immigrants (307). People in diaspora cannot be assimilated since the host nation "[…] cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a

homeland or a disperse community located elsewhere" (Clifford 307). Furthermore, Clifford maintains that migrants are often kept in subordinate positions by established structures of exclusion (311). I agree with Clifford and note that in *Por hora y a piece-work* it is evident that such structures of exclusion are both racialized and gendered. In their chapter "Dominicans: Community, Culture, and Collective Identity," Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández explain that Dominican migrants arrive to the US not because they are lured by "notions of the American dream" but rather in the search of basic economic stability (225). This irruption of migration which began in the 1960's (particularly to New York City), continues still.
The notion that Dominicans migrate to the U.S. in search of economic stability is compatible with Clifford's argument that diasporas are produced by regimes of politician domination and economic inequality.

Torres-Saillant and Hernández assert that Dominican women have outnumbered men in migrating to New York and though they generally appear to have enhanced their position in the family unit because of migration to the U.S., it does not appear that this move has enhanced their material position (224). Of the gendered nature of migration, Clifford agrees that when men are cut off from traditional roles as women earn an independent income, new areas of independence and control can immerge (314). However, the means of earning this income is often exploitative and despite such hardships, women may refuse the opportunity of return. In terms of *Por hora y a piece-work* the spectator is presented with a vision of the "failed immigrant." Juana is deported and forced to return home to the Dominican Republic. Despite her will to stay and her search for what Torres-Saillant and Hernández call her "search for basic economic stability," Juana must leave, and her free will is voided as the *option of return* is selected for her by border agents. Juana's deportation is reflective of Clifford's contention that the immigrant process never worked very well for particular populations in the New World,

> And the so-called new immigrations of non-European peoples of color similarly disrupt linear assimilation narratives. […] Large sections of New York City, it is sometimes said, are "parts of the Caribbean," and vice versa […]. Diasporist discourses reflect the sense of being part of an ongoing transnational network that included the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity. (311)

By virtue of being transnational, migrants of the Dominican diaspora are deprived of the opportunity to fully become US citizens. If certain migrants are considered "undesirable" by the host-nation and such migrants choose to maintain network and kinship connections to the homeland, then the immigrant process cannot be a *transitioning* period to assimilation. Therefore, even the Dominican immigrant who migrates legally to the U.S. can never fully participate in American society due to their subordinate position in the host country, produced by systemic exclusion.

Conclusion

Although each of the five plays analyzed in this chapter deals with the dynamics of the migrant and family in distinct forms, the collection serves to thrust the private narrative into the public sphere. Camila Stevens argues that "The artistic endeavor of theater is an act of home-making. The collective speech and action of the theater forges a site of visibility and constitutes an exercise in participating in a multilocal public sphere" (Stevens 43). Thus, the act of theatre is not only a way to re-enact memory as I have previously argued in the case of autobiographical theatre, but the act of theatre making is also a way to build home in the host nation. Although Fornés's *Letters from Cuba* along with Elizabeth Ovalle's *Por hora y a Piece-Work* are portrayals of migrants in the diaspora dealing with the strained relationships with the collective

in the country of origin, Carmen Peláez's plays *My Cuba* and *El Postre de Estrada Palma* accomplish a different task. These plays are rather the narratives of the first-generation American born Cuban-American who is given the chance to reconcile the myth of the homeland with firsthand experience. By choosing theatre, the dramatists of this chapter demonstrate alternative modes of home-making and force their voices into the public sphere.

Chapter 2
The Colonized Body as Textual Memory in Alina Troyano's *Memorias de la revolución* (1986), *Milk of Amnesia* (1994), Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The Couple in the Cage* (1993) and Fusco and Nao Bustamante's *STUFF* (1998)

> "The past moves in and through the present, like a ghost, or a memory, or a sense of tradition, and it does so because living people selectively animate particular pasts, choosing what will be remembered as history, what kinds of things will serve as signs of that history, what will be forgotten and what relationship those signs defined as "past" will have with the present moment."[32]
>
> - Kristina Wirtz (4)

While much has been studied about the colonial period of the Caribbean and the impact of colonial rule on the Caribbean people and their respective societies, much less has been written on theatrical pieces that represent said period, especially as it relates to the works of abject voices from the Caribbean diaspora. While the first chapter of my project concentrates on the diasporic family and the collective unit, the current chapter focuses on the body itself as a point of reference. The body of the performer is a text that *tells* and in the case of this chapter, a text which connects the past to the present as a marker of cultural memory and collective practices of resistance. Colonialism thus becomes a theme inherent in the work of both Coco Fusco and Alina Troyano, two Cuban-American women who navigate the tension between the past and present within their performance pieces through the use of humour and farce. Troyano and Fusco's work scrutinize parallels among colonial and contemporary perceptions of "non-western bodies". With colonialism as the framework, I will examine the body's contact with

[32] Wirtz, Kristina. *Performing Afro-Cuba: Image, Voice, Spectacle in the Making of Race and History*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2014. Print.

systems of power and control. In Troyano's *Milk of Amnesia* (1994) and Fusco and her collaborator, Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *The Couple in the Cage* (1993), I investigate how the body has been distinguished as property of the nation in the colonial encounter. In Troyano's *Memorias de la revolución* (1986) the role of the body of the citizen is outlined during Cuba's Special period, while Fusco explores the body as product of sexual tourism in her collaborative performance *STUFF* (1998) with Nao Bustamante.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*: *Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Diana Taylor argues that performance exists in a temporal lineage. Thus, performance can accomplish the task of memorializing or preserving knowledge. This is because what the actor does is always in conversation with a temporal past. Departing from this premise, it could be argued that performance also dialogues with the future. Commenting on Taylor, Lucia Herrmann explains that,

> What the performer does or enacts through their behavior is not only in conversation with the origin source of the behavior, but also with those who have done it before, do it currently, or will continue to do in the future. Behaviors represented through performance are not only transnational in nature, congealing to create the understanding of a singular bi- or multi-cultural identity, but also transgenerational, spanning history, memory and that which has yet to be written (Herrmann 51).

Consequently, as performance is transnational and transtemporal, Coco Fusco and Alina Troyano choose it as their medium to express the sentiment that the colonial past has and will continue to inform the present and future.

Coco Fusco is a Cuban-born interdisciplinary artist and critical writer. Troyano is a queer Cuban-American stage and film actress. This chapter first analyzes Paula Heredia's 1993 film entitled *The Couple in the Cage* based on Coco Fusco's collaboration with Guillermo Gómez-

Peña's traveling performance piece *Two Amerindians Visit…,*[33]. This performance was originally part of the '92 Biennial at Columbus Plaza in Madrid. The artists then decided to repeat the performance at other museums such as the Smithsonian in Washington and the Field Museum in Chicago. My analysis of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's work is followed by brief considerations of Fusco's *STUFF* (1998) with Nao Bustamante. The second part of the chapter examines Alina Troyano's *Memorias de la revolución* (1986) and *Milk of Amnesia* (1994). While Troyano is a member of what Gustavo Pérez Firmat calls the 1.5 generation, a term used to describe immigrants who arrived to the host country during their childhood or adolescence, Fusco was born in New York City to a mother fleeing the Cuban Revolution prior to her birth in 1960. Fusco and Troyano's projects both consider colonialism, yet the two differ in purpose despite the similar use of parodic tactics. Fusco utilizes the colonial moment as a starting point to focus on the severe mistreatment and dehumanization of indigenous peoples. In contrast, Troyano uses the Spanish colonial era and the juncture of conquest as a point of reference that enables her to speak about the Cuban Revolution through allegory. In this chapter explore how each uses performance to create oppositional subjects to colonialism as it relates to colonialism and the Cuban North-American diasporic context.

The Uncivilized Critic: Fusco and Gómez-Peña's Use of "Relajo" and "Choteo" in the Museum

The year 1992 was of particular interest in framing the collaborative performance *Two Amerindians Visit…,* as it marked 500 years after Christopher Columbus' landing in the Americas. The moment of arrival is often portrayed in a mythical manner and continues to be

[33] The performance toured five countries and was presented in nine cities from 1992-1993.

celebrated around the world with lavish events.[34] Through parody, Fusco and Gómez-Peña challenge this colonial history that privileges the colonizer's gaze over that of the colonized. By choosing to perform inside of a cage, Fusco and Gómez-Peña parody the tradition of caging and displaying the body of the other. The practice of caging and displaying Indigenous and African bodies, otherwise known as *human zoos*, were popular in the late colonial period of the 1800s.[35] These spaces allowed the Westerner to view the bodies of the exotic foreigner. Gómez-Peña and Fusco knowingly brought their performance to North American museums to respond to the geographical location where these practices took place. However, the artists themselves recognized that their decision to take the performance to Latin America would result in a different reception. To better understand the critical and playful nature of their performance, I suggest parody, *relajo* and *choteo* as collective practices of resistance to engage with the painful past of colonialism.

Fusco is both artist and scholar. Among her books are *Dangerous Moves: Performance and Politics in Cuba* (2015), in which Fusco focuses on the work of experimental artists whose works have been shaped by the influence of the regime. She has also published *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (1995), a commentary on her collaboration with Gómez-Peña. Some of Fusco's solo performances include *Bare Life Study #1* (2005), *A Room of One's Own* (2005) and *Operation Atropos* (2006), which all comment on the

[34] It is worth noting that some U.S. states no longer celebrate the holiday while the celebration is controversial in several other states along with other parts of the world who observe the holiday. Maine and Vermont in particular observe Indigenous Peoples' Day in lieu of Columbus Day. The debate over the necessity for Columbus Day has been active since the 70s in the U.S. as critics identify the Columbus' brutality toward indigenous peoples of the New World.

[35] The practice of caging and displaying bodies was not limited to Indigenous and African peoples in the United States. Asian bodies have also been subjected to practices of caging as chronicled in Claire Prentice's book *The Lost Tribe of Coney Island: Headhunters, Luna Park, and the Man Who Pulled Off the Spectacle of the Century* which describes the exploitation of Filipinos/as in human zoos.

U.S. military's use of torture.[36] Fusco has also collaborated with Nao Bustamante for their performance piece *STUFF*, which tackles the social phenomenon of tourism in post-Soviet Cuba as a staged event.[37]

Gómez-Peña's role as a border artist was instrumental in shaping what border art has become today. Describing his work, Signe Klopper and Yanko González write: "sus performances cuestionan las construcciones de identidad unívocas, interpelando las categorías de nación y mexicanidad y al mismo tiempo, se oponen a la exotización, fetichitación y folclorización de latinos y artistas latinoamericanos, lo que interpreta como la prolongación de estratégicas colonial de apropiación del otro" (127). Gómez-Peña is a former member of the binational art collective Border art Workshop/taller de arte fronteriza (BAW/TAF) before departing the collective in 1990 following numerous internal conflicts. More recently Gómez-Peña is a member of La Poncha Nostra. As Ila N. Sheren argues, in the 1980s border art had been mainly confined to the U.S.-Mexico border region and the BAW/TAF became a political artist commentary group dedicated to addressing the social conditions of said region (59). Sheren attributes two events with the expansion of border art during the 1990s: the 1992 Columbus Quincentennial and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Departing from Smithson's understanding of the non-site, that art can be both portable and site-specific, Sheren argues that Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance serves as the first example of border art that demonstrates a physical embodiment of the political border (68). To better explain the concept of border art, one must consider Sheren, who asks:

What does it mean to view the world as borders, and how is this manifested in the visual?

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[36] See Karen Beckman's "Gender, Power, and Pedagogy in Coco Fusco's Bare Life Study #1 (2005), A Room of One's Own (2005), and Operation Atropos (2006)."
[37] See Teresa Marrero's "Scripting Sexual Tourism: Fusco and Bustamante's *STUFF*, Prostitution and Cuba's Special Period" (2003).

> Rather than dividing the world into discrete periods and cultures, the border dweller visualizes the boundaries within these established categories. Eventually the previous categories dissolve, allowing new connections to be made among previously disparate subjects. By viewing the world as a series of borders, the artist is now able to make a commentary on subjects originally considered beyond the scope of border art. (62)

Two Amerindians Visit... does not specifically deal with geographically assigned borders, still it is clear that Gómez-Peña and Fusco's performance employs both a visual boundary of the cage as a physical separation from their spectators, and a figurative boundary that questions the moral and ethical implications previously ignored in the practice of displaying humans. Therefore, one could argue that their performance does indeed fall within the scope of border art as it is a commentary on the forced transportation of humans from their native lands. Human zoos stemmed from the interest in racial classification. Walter Putnam explains that

> Colonialization led Westerners beyond idle curiosity and speculation about the Other to a phase where foreign lands and peoples had to be dominated through a range of commercial, religious, administrative and military practices. The human zoo phenomenon, placed within the triumphant visual rhetoric of the colonial exhibition, participated significantly in that process (61).

As Barbora Putova argues, in the 19th century the Caucasian race was proclaimed the superior race due to its alleged beauty and corporal harmony as a consequence of the developing colonial expansion of Europeans. In searching for evolutionary traces between apes and men, some racial scientists confirmed that the link was Native Americans or blacks (Putova 92). Thus, freak shows allowed the subject to come to the researcher, which included presentations of non-Europeans whose physical differences caused amazement. These shows exoticized bodies by accentuating their bodily otherness (93). Freakshows became especially popular in the 19th century due to the

display of an African woman in 1810 by English doctor William Dunlop. The woman was named Saartjie Baartman, who was later nicknamed the Hottentot Venus. Her buttocks and genitals were considered large and abnormal and she was shown in marketplaces until her death in 1815. She was exhibited in France in 1814, where her body remained after her death for the purpose of further research. Indigenous people were also displayed at other exhibits: Philadelphia (1876) and Paris (1878, 1889) (Putova 94). Phineas Taylor Barnum is particularly culpable for presenting indigenous people at The Great Congress of Nations in 1884. As Putova argues, what formed freakshows was imperial colonialism (Putova 100). It was only in late February 2002 that a law was passed in France to return the Hottentot Venus's remains to Africa (Henderson 947).

In her article "Objects of Curiosity and Subjects of Discovery: Humans on Show" Jane Goodall cites Susan Stewart who argues that those displayed as freaks are not freaks of nature, but rather freaks of culture, whose purpose of performance serves to normalize the viewer (123). Goodall continues

> Where the visitors are defined by their knowledge, the natives are defined by their behaviour; their relationship to the things around them is, accordingly, not cognitive but behavioural. The objects are playthings which, in their illogical profusion, tell about naive ways of life in which things are not systematised, in which objects are yet to be analysed, categorised or invented and are simply found, adopted and adapted to serve child-like whims (125).

With respect to Gómez-Peña and Fusco's performance, Goodall believes that the spectators who fail to recognize the spectacle as a farce are somewhat let off the hook by the displacement of the event, but she maintains that it is through the infantilising of the human exhibits that the objects placed in the cage become toys (127). Goodall proceeds to draw the parallel that the natives

played by Gómez-Peña and Fusco are thus in the early stages of learning how to be consumers in the New World Order of commodity culture (128). In “Humans on show: performance, race and representation,” written by Lenore Manderson, it is explained that whilst humans were originally confined in cages in human zoos, as time progressed and such zoos became more prevalent, the Other may have been housed in “traditional” dwellings within a confined area where they would participate in their daily activities under the gaze of paying spectators (259). These conditions of display highlighted the alleged distinctions between the modern and the primitive in order to valorize colonial rule and its practices of civilizing and conversion.

Putnam also writes on human zoos in ““Please Don’t Feed the Natives”: Human Zoos, Colonial Desire, and Bodies on Display,” in which he argues that in these displays, nature appears as timeless and not historical or cultural. By framing these dwellings and displays as timeless, the subjects on display thus become “stuck in time” (57). Putnam believes that these zoos were successful as they portrayed the possibility of a seemingly unmediated witnessing of the Other (58). During a time in which hierarchies were elaborated on the basis of physical attributes, the juxtaposition of displaying species and ethnic types blurred racial boundaries between human and non-human animals. Putnam argues that instead of replicating facts of the animal’s authentic surroundings, the main concern of the exhibit is to stage the animals for the gaze of the human observer instead of promoting the animal’s connection with the flora and fauna it would encounter in its natural environment (61). Just like Putova and Goodall, Putnam exposes the ways in which human zoos have contributed to notions of racial superiority:

> Their transformation from “objects of curiosity” to “subjects on display” followed the itinerary of racialization that informed public beliefs in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Situated at the juncture between science and show biz, these “living museums,” as they were sometimes called, contributed profoundly to Western perceptions and

> stereotypes of the exotic Other. These spectacles were a fundamentally vicarious and voyeuristic phenomenon. They involved the erasure of context and the recreation of a simulacrum of authenticity whereby natives were recontextualized, removed from their original environments and plopped down in a foreign setting with the expectation that they would act "naturally" (56-57).

This voyeuristic spectacle, as Putnam calls it, was a mode of creating distance to valorize colonial rule by staging "the savage" in "traditional" dwellings. Distance and fallacy were tools used to justify difference, racial hierarchy, and the severe mistreatment of indigenous people.

In "Freakifying history: remixing royalty" Lia T. Bascomb highlights how the shift from static object to moving subject symbolizes the many ways in which objectified peoples have used artistry to assert their human subjectivity (58). Bascomb contends that the blurring between history and the dramatic enactment in Fusco and Gómez Peña's performance is an entangled relation that places the modern "freak show" within the context of real exhibits, forcing us to ask the question of whose fantasy and reality is really on display? (59). Perhaps it is this question itself that so angered those spectators who failed to recognize the performance piece as a critical staging of the past.

Fusco and Gómez-Peña were expecting a different reception from their Latin American audience and were surprised by the level of condemnation they experienced for their North American performances. As Mary Kate Kelly explains:

> […] Fusco and Gómez-Peña tapped into a history and their own creativity to produce live art which sought, very self-consciously, to critique and interrogate the fascination with primitivism and authenticity that continue to exist in Western culture. However, the processes of cultural production and reception and the interplay between the two are always complex, and emerging forms of black artist culture that engage ideologically

> charged and contested subject matter are not necessarily accepted or appreciated. Or at least, they are not necessarily accepted as "art" or appreciated as their artists had hoped or intended (114).

As Kelly argues, when self-consciously critiquing and choosing to initiate their performance piece, Fusco and Gómez-Peña assumed their audience would in fact understand the exhibit to be a performance. While many audience members were offended by the ruse, Goodall reminds us that the ethics of ethnological performance cannot be defined through an either/or debate. Where there is exploitation, there is also agency, as those coerced into participating in the performance also managed to procure some sort of advantage, at the very least, their enjoyment of the spectacle itself. The counter-exploitation of the spectator is then perhaps a commentary on the flip in the gaze of normality and superiority (Goodall 138), proposing the question: who is really on display in this performance?

Fusco and Gómez-Peña were presented as found Amerindians from the newly encountered island Guatinau, off the coast of Mexico. While shuttled inside of a cage, the Guatinaui couple performed what were claimed to be traditional tasks like lifting weights, making voodoo dolls, working on a computer, and watching television, all ridiculous habitual tasks which were meant to be observed as parody. A fabricated map of Guatinau from Encyclopedia Britannica was even displayed outside of their cage. Lenore Manderson argues that the range of traditional activities performed by the duo, which included watching television paired with the timeline of the history of human exhibits of non-Western peoples, should have alerted the audience that the performance was a critical parody (261). However, following this 1992 performance, in 2005 humans were displayed for four days at the London Zoo to demonstrate the evolutionary links between primates and humans, and in 2007 humans were again displayed at the Adelaide Zoo in Australia to bring attention to conservation of the ape

population. Neither of these exhibits bared any recognition of the inhumane history of displays of humans in zoos (261). In "Humans on Show: Performance, Race and Representation," Manderson proceeds to outline museum interventions which did in fact reference this history of displaying the Other such as *L'Invention du Sauvage* in Paris, *The Artifact Piece* performed by James Luna and *'The Whole Truth…everything you always wanted to know about Jews' from the Jewish Museum in Berlin* (261-262).

(Figure 6.) Photograph taken during performance of Two Amerindians Visit….

Fusco, Coco. "The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West." https://www.thing.net/~cocofusco/performance.htm.

(Figure 7.) Fake Enquirer Produced for the Performance of Two Amerindians Visit….

Fusco, Coco. "The Year of the White Bear and Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West." https://www.thing.net/~cocofusco/subpages/videos/subpages/couple/couple.html.

During the event, visitors could engage with Fusco and Gómez-Peña by feeding them bananas or even paying Gómez-Peña to reveal his genitalia. If they had questions about the exhibit, they could ask zoo guards stationed outside of the cage, who were also in charge of escorting the two artists to the bathroom. In their interview with Anna Johnson of BOMB Magazine Coco Fusco discloses, "[t]here were several instances where people crossed the boundaries of expected sexual behavior. I think that was provoked by us being presented as

objects, by their sense of having power over us …" Gómez-Peña adds, "[w]hen we appear in the cage I am the cannibal, I am the warrior, this threatening masculine Other who causes fear to the viewer. Coco performs the noble savage, you know the quiet, subdued innocent. The response people have towards her is either one of compassion or one of sexual aggression." (Johnson 1993).

Each choice made by Fusco and Gómez-Peña was premeditated and intended to produce a parodic vision of the historical human zoo, from their running shoes to their choice of music or interest in Western technology. Coco Fusco reports,

> [i]n any case, we introduced into the cage some elements that shocked and bothered many people and became the focus of a lot of questions put to the zoo guards. People said, "How could we be authentic if he smokes Dunhills? How could she really know how to use a computer if she is from this undiscovered island? Why is she wearing Converse high tops?" (Johnson 1993)

These items would presumably be foreign to the undiscovered indigenous subject, and as Goodall points out, markers of capitalism and consumerism. These "toys" would require a learning process if this indigenous couple were truly in the process of integration from a tribal society into the urban Western world. Fusco and Gómez-Peña's intentional use of parody was supposed to produce a critical spacing from the Western gaze but in many cases, failed to do so.

I speculate that by entering the space of the museum and not the theatre, the receiver of the performance understands themselves as a visitor and not a spectator, accordingly the ruse often failed to produce comedic distance as the museum in Western culture is hailed as a space of authenticity in charge of housing historical artifacts. This failure of comedic distance was cause for great upset for the critics who did not understand the exhibit to be a hoax. While the museum is often hailed as a space of truth, and however incomprehensible it now may seem that

spectators did not understand this to be a performance, I would imagine the critics' naiveté was due to the meaning ascribed to the building in which the exhibit took place. Beyond the betrayal of falling for the gimmick, the duped onlookers were forced to confront the ways in which they participated in the exoticization of caged bodies causing them further discomfort. Shifting the spatial dynamic associated with housing and displaying artifacts is cause for foundational shifts in ideology and raises future questions about the histories of those privileged and erased. For this reason, I return to Linda Hutcheon's theorizations on parody, specifically her idea on how it is necessary that the decoder notice and identify parody, otherwise they run the risk of naturalizing the work, which would eliminate a significant part of form and content. Since its inception the museum has existed as the space of reason and legitimacy. Therefore, the audience must choose to accept the space of the museum as truth itself or take a critical distance from the artifact, which in this case is the performance of *Two Amerindians Visit…*

To ponder the significance of the museum space, we must again consider Goodall's argument that museums extricate objects from the circuits of exchange and cycles of life, making them immobile and fixed. Thus, museums are spaces filled with dead objects, figuratively and literally, as some have been killed to fill collections (136). In "Playing to the Gallery: Masks, Masquerade, and Museums" Polly Savage also engages in the contemplation of the museum space. Savage, like Goodall, questions the role of the museum in contemporary life and the knowledge it promotes (74). For Savage, the museum object works as a contact point, where the body is eliminated from the museum discourse. The object stands in relation to an absent whole. Savage cites what Diana Taylor refers to as the "theatricality of the colonial encounter" to explain that the staging of masquerade performance as an *authentic experience* leaves the event "redolent of the nineteenth century European practice of exhibiting the bodies of colonized peoples" (76). Finally, Savage also cites Foucault's notion of the panopticon, as the act of

observing creates a relationship of power. She expands this point by citing bell hooks' concept of the "oppositional gaze" which is left absent when the living body is removed from the object (76). I contend that by re-positioning the oppositional gaze of Fusco and Gómez-Peña in the cage, as they observe the spectator with agency, Fusco and Gómez-Peña play with the boundaries and traditional notions of the museum exhibit. To better expand this point, I turn to Jim Drobnick's article "Body Events and Implicated Gazes."

Drobnick claims that the term performance itself implies a philosophical and psychanalytic quagmire since the ontology of performance is representation without reproduction (64). Specifically referencing the gaze, Drobnick demonstrates that even when it is openly invited, difficulties manifest when it is directed toward breathing humans (65). To differentiate from the aesthetic, Drobnick uses the term *implicated* gaze as it is a looking that is embodied and interested. In his view, "implicated" connotes notions of complicity, of ethic and physical involvement. Artworks that fall under the category of performance of the implicated gaze are designated as body events (65). For Fusco and Gómez-Peña's piece he refers to the act of looking and being seen as the *colonizing* gaze. Furthermore, Drobnick sustains that, "In a culture where the objectification of others is normal and accepted, even profitable, the act of self-objectification, which many of the above works actively engage, is a powerful technique for interrogating and transgressing convention" (66). Thus, by objectifying themselves, Fusco and Gómez-Peña subvert the dichotomy of looking.

When contemplating the colonial encounter proposed by Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance piece, Taylor locates it within what she refers to as *theatricality*, not to be confused with *performativity*[38]. Of the colonial encounter between Columbus and the indigenous peoples

[38] Taylor refers to performativity in the Butlerian sense, that is, as a practice whose naturalness produces the effects it names.

of the Americas, Taylor maintains that

> Theatrical encounters, certainly, are captured in these scenarios. The theatricality of the colonial encounter allows, perhaps even makes inevitable, the countless iterations. By "theatricality" I refer to the aesthetic, political, and perspectival structures within which the characters are positioned and perform their prescribed roles. The use of the passive voice is perhaps indicative: theatricality, as I have argued elsewhere, "is a noun with no verb and therefore no possibility of a subject position" (1994:199). It's more about artistic framing or political bracketing than about political agency (161).

For these reasons, Taylor points out that the display of native bodies serves multiple functions. The indigenous bodies allow for what she refers to as a "truth" to be performed. In other words, the body of the colonized allows the authentication of the gaze and adventure of the explorer. The encounter allows for the production and reproduction of the *savage* body. In this dichotomy the spectacle is the indigenous person, and the *civilized* person becomes the privileged spectator. The narratives of such encounters and, more broadly, human zoos themselves, have only allowed for the recording of a unidirectional gaze. By utilizing parodic tactics along with the decision to cage themselves, I believe it is evident that Fusco and Gómez-Peña flip this unidirectional gaze so that the artists themselves can critically analyze the reactions of their spectator.

Fusco and Gómez-Peña strategically chose to take their performance piece to countries with intrinsic colonial histories characterized by the severe abuse of indigenous peoples. As I have previously mentioned, the space of the museum is synonymous with fact and the preservation of history. However, such spaces privilege certain histories and not others. As Taylor puts it, "[b]y staging their show in historic sites and institutions, they situated the dehumanizing practice in the very heart of these societies' most revered legitimating structures" ("A Savage Performance" 163). The performance allows for the questioning of the dominant

values chosen to be preserved as well as those chosen to be forgotten. Fusco and Gómez-Peña invoke the savage body constructed by the gaze of the ethnographer. As Taylor puts it, "[t]heir enactment shows the violence of the ethnographic performance that tries to pass as real---violent because its performative strings are hidden from the spectator's view" (171). It is by utilizing parody, instead of denying the theatricality of the colonial event, that Fusco and Gómez-Peña explicitly denounce a performance that has passed unquestioned and allowed for the mistreatment of the colonial other.

Returning to the questions of reception, Taylor admits her enjoyment of the performance event and analyzes her reasoning. It must be noted that this performance event exists in a double sense. In Taylor's terms, the performance is both repertoire and archive. *Two Amerindians Visit…* belongs to the repertoire that engages with the temporal past. Heredia's film *The Couple in the Cage* belongs to the archive. The performance is first the intangible embodied theatrical piece existing in the past and at the same time imprinted in the archive as part of the film. Hence, the reception of the performance event and the film themselves differ. I suggest that the poor reception occurs not only because of the polemic nature of representing the indigenous other as a savage, but also due to what Taylor calls *relajo.* In the Latin American sense of the word, *relajo* becomes a collective prank. The performance becomes a collective prank or *relajo* that occurs as by-product of the use of parody when the spoof is lost on the viewer who fails to critically distance themselves from the performance event. Another probable reason for its poor reception is that the double-staging of this performance event is not unproblematic itself. Kelly explains:

> However, despite the artists' intent for critical satire, the fascination with Otherness that they had hoped to critique and counter was to some extent perpetuated by the installation of this contemporary staging of human spectacle. Fusco and Gómez-Peña were taken, by many observers, to be "real" Guatinauis, rather than critical performance artists. Their

> efforts at critique within a variety of public forums actually reproduced the Eurocentric "fascination with Otherness" to which their work was responding" (Kelly 126).

Like Hutcheon argues the parody must be decoded by the observer. If this does not occur, the lack of critical distance continues the reproduction of the problematic unidirectional gaze of the privileged looker.[39] This performance takes on the form of *relajo*, a prank which again begs the question posed by Bascomb: whose fantasy and reality is really on display?

Kelly notes that allowing audience members to pay to see Gómez-Peña's genitalia can become a counterproductive task when the gaze is that of the museum visitor and not the critical spectator well-informed of the parodic nature of the caged event.

> It is of particular significance to my analysis that Fusco and Gómez-Peña themselves built this particular form of voyeurism into their performative project. By offering observers the chance to view a socially taboo sight---that of male genitalia---Fusco and Gómez-Peña participated in the commodification of (in this case) Gómez-Peña's body as sexual object. They granted observers the opportunity to engage with their performance in a particular way and thereby perpetuated the sexist and racist culture that they were actually critically satirizing. (128)

The artists are cognizant of the problematic nature of the Eurocentric gaze, however the essence of the performance and practice of exchanging money for voyeurism can pollute the message if not viewed with critical distance by the audience. This occurred with the museum visitors who marvelled at the body of the Other, instead of questioning the caging of the savage body. If the parody of a performance that responds to the lineage of freakshows and human zoos is lost on the observer, in that the spectator perceives it to be real and not a spectacle, the spectator cannot

[39] See John Berger's 1972 book *Ways of Seeing* based on the four-part BBC television series in which Berger discusses how we view paintings and the implications of the gaze of the spectator.

achieve critical distance. In her article "Consuming Aztecs, Producing Workers: Economies of Indigeneity and Ambivalence in the Chicano/a and Latina/a imagination" Kristy L. Ulibarri comments on Gómez-Peña and Fusco's work: "Their performance, based on the World Fairs' exhibitionism of indigenous people, intended to critique how these exhibits still inundate our consumer culture, excite our colonialisms and expose our continued acceptance of racialized, sexualized and primitivized bodies" (222). Other scholars have criticized the problematic nature of the caged performance, though few have commented on its ending. Ulibarri points to the significance of its ending as Gómez-Peña and Fusco leave the cage quite freely and place dog collars on their handlers and walk them away from the staging area: "This ending in the performance humorously disrupts our preconceived notions about social hierarchies, but its critique is lost on many audience members who appear confused or indifferent in the documentary. Thus, the subversion of these hierarchies remains in the realm of spectacle" (Ulibarri 223). When asked what the ideal spectator would do, Gómez-Peña shares that they would open the cage and release the artists (Johnson). However, as Kelly recognizes, at no point does this performance invoke the intervention of the audience. Spectators can engage in the performance by feeding the participants, exchanging money for voyeurism, and asking their zoo guards questions. Fusco and Gómez-Peña intended their performance event to be understood as a caricature of the colonial encounter. The spectator who fails to critically distance leads the performance to take on the tone of *relajo*, which in turn reveals an uncomfortable truth of how freely accepting some viewers were of the human exhibit, and the lack of consideration for the ethical ramifications of participating in this performance event.

Now that we have discussed the reception and implications of the performance event *Two Amerindians Visit…,* it is necessary to engage in a discussion of the consequences of the film archive. In "The Performative Nature of Filmed Reproductions of Live Performance" (2011),

Nathan Stith contrasts both Heredia's *The Couple in the Cage* and Sacha Baron Cohen's parodic mockumentary film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,* two films that portray *relajo* as a means of making a commentary on societally accepted and normative behaviour. As it relates to both films, Stith argues that

> The audiences of the live performances interact with these characters under the false pretense that they are relating to real people. However, in the mediatized reproductions, the audience is aware that the artists have created false personas; they view the documented reproductions with knowledge that the live audience does not have and thus are able to experience the filmed reproductions in ways not available to the live audience. (82)

Like Stith suggests, it is rare that the audience is documented with as much attention as the performance or performers themselves. Yet *The Couple in the Cage* serves as an example where the spectators becomes performers themselves by virtue of the recording of their reaction to the performance. Gómez-Peña and Fusco were thus critiqued for fooling their audience and allowing the spectator of the film critical distance to then get a laugh at those audience members who did not take the performance as parody. The act of parodying the fictitious culture of the Guatinaui is the central aspect of the performance. Yet the intent is not to poke fun or debase their audience but rather

> […] the purpose of recording the live performance is not to provide opportunity to ridicule the Others; in fact, it's the exact opposite. It is the revelatory audience reactions to the parodies created by the artists in the live performances that are the purpose behind their art. The most significant aspect of their performances is not the live "art action," but in the reaction of the live audiences as captures for our view by the film or video camera. (Stith 85-86)

Therefore, the importance of the caged performance event of Fusco and Gómez-Peña is not the performance itself but rather the reaction of audience members to their *relajo* or rather collective prank.

Since I have argued the importance of parody and *relajo* as it relates to Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance, which deals with the inhumane treatment of the Other and themes of colonialism and racialization, it only makes sense to explain how *choteo* relates to their performance event. In "Choteo, identidad y cultura cubana" Narciso Hidalgo explains that there are two models of *choteo*: a racist one that discriminates against, caricaturizes and ridicules the black Other, while the other is subversive and anti-hierarchical, produced instead by the black subject themselves which serves to make fun of the colonizer to their face (57).[40] In his paper Hidalgo outlines how *choteo* has most notably been viewed negatively in Cuban thought. Hidalgo cites Jorge Mañach's 1925 essay "La crisis de la alta cultura en Cuba" where Mañach claims that *choteo* is "asociado a la indisciplina, el desorden y la irresponsabilidad, llegando a ser una manifestación amoral y colectiva que se erige en rasgo típico de la población cubana" (57). Three years later in his essay "Indagación del choteo" Mañach states that *choteo* is something inherent to Cubans, as if it were tied to their psyches to save or condemn them. This is what Hidalgo refers to as a genetic-social perspective, since *choteo* is the result of a collective experience but ontologically part of the Cuban identity (58). In 1944 Mañach publishes *Historia y estilo* where he refers to *choteo* as a consequence of the undoing of Cuban society, since, for him, it represented the social and political deterioration of the Republic. Hidalgo concisely highlights the root of Mañach's frustrations with *choteo* as it is a cultural manifestation with

[40] Hidalgo's 2013 article "Choteo, identidad y cultura cubana." For a more comprehensive study of choteo in Cuban culture, see his 2012 book *Choteo. Irreverencia Y Humor En La Cultura Cubana.*

African roots. Mañach's work as a young intellectual attempted to create a theoretical platform that rejected any cultural ties to African roots in favour a Cuban identity based on Eurocentric ideology (59). Therefore, any cultural manifestation with African roots was incompatible with his vision of *cubanidad* and seen as a symptom of savagery and the uncultured.

Furthermore in "El Caribe: integración, identidad y choteo" Félix Valdés García defines *choteo* as being a relaxed attitude toward life. This personality trait is also referred to as *choteo criollo*, which can be a sickness and a virtue at the same time (57). Ortiz, Figueras, Mañach and many others saw *choteo* as an exaggerated defect and a sickness which many assumed would be cured with the 1959 Cuban Revolution (58). Valdés García then utilizes Althusser's concept of interpellation to explain how individuals can become subjects, in turn leading to familiarity amongst Cubans. This familiarity was seen as a danger by Mañach of which he referred to as *parejería* as it blurred the lines between the private and public spheres (59). Where *relajo* is the heavy joke, the collective prank pulled on the naïve spectator, *choteo* is the mode of parody Fusco and Gómez-Peña utilize to caricature and make fun of the visitor's *implicated* gaze. Thus, we could understand *relajo*, *choteo* and parody as practices of collective resistance that enact cultural memory. To further understand the ways Fusco presents the interaction of the body with systems of power, it is necessary to review her and Nao Bustamante's 1998 performance *STUFF*. While these projects differ in scope, like Fusco and Gómez-Peña's *The Couple in the Cage* (1993), the body remains the central theme of consideration in these pieces.

The Body: Property and Service

Nao Bustamante and Fusco's 1998 performance *STUFF* analyzes food, sex and how these themes relate to Latin American women. Bustamante is from an immigrant Mexican family and grew up in an agricultural setting during the Chicano political struggles of the 1960s and

1970s (Bustamante & Fusco 221), whereas Fusco is from "Cuba, a country that gained a reputation in the 1950s as an international whorehouse and which, in response to its present economic crisis, has reverted to sex tourism as a strategy of survival" (221). To prepare themselves for this performance, Fusco and Bustamante traveled to Cuba to interview women in the sex tourism industry before travelling to Chiapas to interview women and children in one of the most popular indigenist cultural tourism sites in Mexico. Chiapas is also the district of the 1994 Zapatista coup and location so adversely shaped by the tourist industry that the livelihoods of its citizens depend on their daily contact with foreigners. Fusco and Bustamante explain that in *STUFF* "We are dealing with how cultural consumption in our current moment involves the trafficking of that which is most dear to us all---our identities, our myths, and our bodies." (221).

To better understand the significance of the type of tourism and consumption presented in *STUFF* it is essential that the audience/reader of the performance or script have a familiarity with the climate of sexual tourism that has been pervasive in Cuba. Cuban scholar Amir Valle has devoted an entire book to this type of sexual commerce in a country in which it thrives despite the government's prohibition. *Jineteras* (2006) is a production of Valle's almost decade long research in archives and testimonials by prostitutes themselves, taxi drivers, tour guides, brothel owners and corrupt police. Valle is far from the only intellectual to discuss the sexual economy of desire in Cuba. Cynthia Pope also writes about the increasing global linkages of sexual tourism with particular focus on the sex work of girls and women in Havana as a means of economic survival. Her 2005 case study presents interviews with sex workers, locally known as *jineteras*, and examines the spaces in which this work takes place while discussing the power relations which create and maintain the physical, social, and moral spaces in which this sex work exists. Her study further highlights class and race issues assumed to be eradicated by the ideologies of the Cuban Revolution, demonstrating how women's bodies have been

commodified for personal and often national economic gain. bell hooks explains that the commodification of the other has been so successful because in commodity culture, “ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (“Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” 21). For hooks, this revival in contemporary culture is a revival of interest in the primitive resulting from an “imperialist nostalgia” (25).

STUFF is an hour-long performance piece that relies on audience participation. Before beginning, audience members receive with their entry tickets coloured slips of paper: red, blue, yellow, and green. The first scene of the performance begins with Fusco and Bustamante carefully lit in casual clothing reading from post-cards written by women in New York, Copenhagen, Toronto, Hamburg and Chiapas. The post-cards read by Bustamante and Fusco range in topics but all deal with unpleasant sexual encounters between men and women. The lights fade and a character named Elizardo Eduardo Encarnación Jones (EEE), who introduces himself as the director of the Institute for Southern Hemispheric Wholeness, appears on a projected screen speaking to the audience while Fusco changes into costume and becomes Blanca. EEE asks the audience if they have thought about what they are going to do on their next vacation and would like to try something different. He then introduces Blanca as his agency representative Blanca proceeds to escort people with different coloured tickets onto the stage. The male with the red ticket is told his name is François, an economist searching for authentic pre-Colombian food and music. The woman with a yellow ticket is told she is orphaned at birth, Cher’s cousin and training as a medicine woman named Wanda Desert Flower. The male with a blue ticket is told he is Burt and trying anything to quit smoking. Lastly, the woman with a green ticket becomes Tippy O’Toole, a consultant for the Body Shop and a eavesdropper of EEE’s seminar.

The play continues as the audience members turned performers are told they have books

in front of them which they will occasionally be asked to read from, and from now on are known as “travel tasters”. Blanca becomes the narrator and begins to read from a comically large hardcover book to guide the audience through a story about a goddess/priestess named Cuxtamali portrayed by Bustamante now known as the character Rosa. While wearing chef hats, François, Wanda, Burt and Tippy are seated at a table being adorned with different types of food as Blanca reads from the large book and Rosa dressed as the goddess Cuxtamali with a hairnet on her braids, places fruits and vegetables on the table in a rather comedic and aggressive fashion. Once Rosa and Blanca finish the rendering of the legend of Cuxtamali, audience members exit the stage and Rosa and Blanca proceed to fight over their disagreement of the impromptu changes to the scripting of the legend.

After Blanca exits, Rosa removes the goddess costume and introduces herself as Nao stating that she needs to get feedback about their experience of their travel tasting service. Instead of asking for actual feedback she adds that she also works as a sex educator and sales associate for a women-owned sex toy co-operative and continues to ask the audience very personal questions about their sex toy preferences comparing the sizes of dildos to produce in the supermarket for reference. Coco then appears on stage in a robe reading from a postcard that explains to the audience why they are so interested in Latin American women and that the performance is about consumption. *STUFF* is riddled with graphic dialogue literally outlining the consumption of the body and its metaphorical connection to food

> I am eating her and she tastes so tangy, a bit like a rusty papaya, unlike any other person I’ve tasted. Women taste strong, not like men. Men don’t taste like anything if they are properly washed. Women always have a taste even if they are freshly bathed. When you consume a woman there is a taste and a smell left in your mouth and in your nose, which are connected by the way, as are your asshole and your mouth. But a woman’s flavor

> changes depending on what she has eaten, how aroused she is, where she is in her cycle and who is in her vicinity. (Bustamante and Fusco 230)

This very explicit and striking rendition by one of the voiceovers in the performance precisely outlines the connection Bustamante and Fusco want their audience to make between tourism and the consumption of the body of the Other, in particular the bodies of women who participate in these systems. The rest of the performance is composed of voiceovers from people who have used this travel testing service, both testimonies and employees intermingled with Rosa and Blanca speaking to their supervisor EEE who only appears on screen in the form of a projection. Audience members are again asked to participate in a rumba dance lesson, a scripted conversation between a male traveler and prostitute and karaoke to a song from Rosa and Blanca singing about their interactions with gringos as prostitutes working for the travel taster's service.

In her article "Scripting Sexual Tourism: Fusco and Bustamante's *STUFF*, Prostitution and Cuba's Special Period" Teresa Marrero illustrates that tourism can be thought of as staged (235) and that *STUFF* is an effective parody critiquing the model of neoliberal global consumerism (236). *STUFF* could also be seen a theatrical rendering and staging of the encounter between the western tourist and the Hispanic Other akin to Fusco and Gómez-Peña's staging of the colonial moment in *The Couple in the Cage* (1993). Tourism is a scripted experience with codes to be deciphered, understood, negotiated, and enacted and thus corresponds to the analogy of a theatrical text (Marrero 239). Marrero rationalizes that "this performance piece by Fusco and Bustamante parodies the notion of casual, tourist consumption of the Latina, exotic Other by First World consumers (implicitly males)" (236). To this point I would add that the analogy of food and consumption is also evident in this performance to discuss Western consumption.

In her article Marrero analyzes the root of the word *jinetera/o* (the prostitute/agent) and

jineterismo (the activity) outlining that the word presents a worldview that rearranges standard notions of the nature of (sexual) consumerism.[41] In this model, the *jinetera/o* is more of an agent, not prostitute, whose actions are seen as a means to an end usually resulting in an economic exchange. Therefore, for the *jinetero/a,* the body of the western tourist can also be seen as a mode of consumption when understood as a metaphorical meal ticket as explained by the *jinetera* Judy: "Mi familia? Ya están acostumbrados. Cuando traigo un gallego a la casa, mi familia no lo ve a él---ven un pollo, arroz, frijoles, y platanos, ven un refri lleno" (Bustamante and Fusco 230). While tourism itself is not scripted it is predictable behaviour in prescribed situations. Fusco and Bustamante enact the role of two señoritas Blanca and Rosa as the backdrop of the play consists of vignettes of travel and consumption of culture. Not limited to just sexual encounters, in addition to the legend of Cuxtamali I outlined previously, the consumption of the culture of the Other also includes references to the women of Chiapas who make Zapatista dolls to sell to tourists. Unlike *The Couple in the Cage* (1993) the audience members of *STUFF* are cognizant that they inhabit the play space of the theatre which paired with the audience participation, humorous tone, costume, and props, grants the space necessary to view the performance as a critical parody of the encounter between tourist and consumer. The parody becomes intelligible to the audience through the mode of their participation (Marrero 243), as they understand these interactions to be a form of role-playing.

Performing Queer Identity

Cuban-American artists must grapple with their bicultural identities and strained

[41] The root of the word *jinetera/o* is *jinete* in Spanish, the English equivalent of an equestrian jockey. Marrero argues that "riding on the back of others" subverts the nature of the exchange as it is the *jinetero* who mounts and controls the animal being ridden (the sexual tourist), thus placing the *jinetero* in the position of agency (Marrero 238).

relationships between their adopted community and homeland. Some artists choose to demonstrate this conflict through performance. Alina Troyano, a lesbian Cuban-American performance artist who goes by the stage name Carmelita Tropicana, creates performance texts shaped by autobiographical events. In both *Memorias de la revolución* (1986) and *Milk of Amnesia* (1994), Tropicana manages to demonstrate the fragility of identity markers. Tropicana singlehandedly portrays multiple characters and carries out costume changes in full view of her audience. By re-writing the past, or rather "re-performing it," Tropicana queers Cuban history by inserting shunned identities into a narrative that previously excluded them. She uses performance to parody both identity and history by employing methods of alternative theatre. In "Queering Latina/o Literature" Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes contends that there are multiple challenges to understanding what it means to "queer Latina/o literature" (178). He makes clear that "gay and lesbian" are not the equivalent of queer or queering or reading like a queer (182). After delineating a set of practices to understand what it means to queer Latina/o writing, La Fountain-Stokes explains that such practices will benefit from:

> the revalorization of the term "queer," which has come to represent a political, cultural, and academic stand that actively works toward the recognition, destigmatization, and decriminalization of marginalized genders and sexualities, on the one hand but that also seeks to offer a broader analysis of the workings of power and sexuality in society, offering readings and theorizations that go beyond identitarian concerns, on the other. (179)

Applying this understanding of what it means to queer Latina writing, I explore Tropicana's ways of inserting her abject identity into collective discourse through her playmaking.

Whereas queer or gay identities may be considered abject in Cuba, they have been present in various ways and by no means invisible. Queerness has not necessarily been openly

named by government regimes and in national sentiments, but has existed as warning, threat and a symbol of contamination. In *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001), Emilio Bejel posits that Cuban nationalism has been interwoven with homophobic discourse since the late nineteenth century and points to José Martí's rejection of effeminate men and manly women as disruptive of the family unit which stands as the metaphor of the nation. He describes how the anxiety about sexual transgression served to solidify a notion of nationhood that sought to purge the homosexual from a legitimate place within the nation. The most relevant section of his book is devoted to the place of the homosexual in the Cuban Revolution, outlining repressive practices of the Castro regime. Such practices included putting restrictions on gay writers critical of the government like José Lezama Lima and Reinaldo Arenas, in addition to sending queer men and women to Military Units to aid production.

In "Performing Hybrid Identities, Corporeal Style" Mónica Bradley traces the work of Jesús Rodríguez, Teresa Hernández and Carmelita Tropicana. Bradley cites Elin Diamond, who states that by questioning and pushing their identities, these three artists reembody, reconfigure, reinscribe and resignify them (370). Bradley puts significant emphasis on the prefix "re" as a mode of acknowledging the pre-existing discursive field. Bhabha refers to this performative "re" as a subversive mimicry. For Tropicana, the process of coming out as a Latina lesbian involves accepting an identity that is simultaneously ethnic and sexual (Bradley 371). Furthermore, Bradley cites Alicia Arrizón, who describes the tendency of Latinos to marginalize their African and indigenous roots while celebrating their Hispanic heritage. As the colonized subject, they abolish their identity by invalidating the multiple variables that intersect categories of race or nation (Bradley 376). Yet instead of assimilation and erasure of identity, Tropicana's performances question these very processes by using *choteo* as a practice of resistance.

Memorias de la revolución: Nostalgia, Parody and the Cuban Revolution

Memorias de la revolución was originally presented at WOW theatre café in 1986. WOW is a collectively run performance space that was originally a festival for women's theatre in 1980. The setting of *Memorias de la revolución* is split into three acts, each of which occur in different spaces: Havana, a boat lost at sea, and New York City. In the last act, the Tropicana nightclub that appears in Act 1 is transplanted to NYC in 1967. The central characters in *Memorias de la revolución* are the villain Maldito, and the brother and sister duo composed of Machito and Tropicana, two revolutionary siblings who conspire to kill Maldito. The play ends in the year 1967, a time defined by sexual liberation and spiritual awakening, when Maldito appears in NYC as a janitor trying to get into the CIA. Yet, in order to do so, Maldito must get some inside intelligence on Carmelita. Unfortunately for Maldito, after finding Tropicana in the new nightclub of the same name, Tropicana drugs Maldito and hypnotizes him into a chicken, and the play ends with Tropicana singing a verse of Guantanamera.

Tropicana is both performer and the space of performance. Tropicana is indicative of the character performed by Troyano but is also a place of performance since it is the name of the night club. Perhaps Troyano is cunningly suggesting that her body be read as a text as the body becomes the space of performance in tandem with the performer. Just as the cage performance of Fusco and Gómez-Peña demonstrates the imbedded notions on the body of the non-Caucasian Other, so too is Troyano's body othered. Some curious characters in *Memorias de la revolución* whose names could be read as allegories are: Machito, Maldito, Marimacha, and Pingalito.[42] The play also features two American women Brendah and Brendaa, as representations of reproduction of the same, indistinguishable characters who treat Cuba and *cubanidad* as goods

[42] Pingalito's name is composed of "pinga" referencing male genitalia and "-ito" is used as a diminutive to jokingly mock the size of his manhood.

for their consumption.

Troyano subtly questions *cubanidad* with the use of technology. By opening *Memorias de la revolución* with a projection of a postcard from the 1940s, Troyano demonstrates the nostalgia for a pre-revolutionary Cuba that is consistent first among the political refugees who fled Cuba directly after the revolution, and among those economic refugees who fled before the Special Period. The characters Brendah and Brendaa serve as a background nudge to American consumerism and the touristic exoticization of Cuba, as Cuba has repeatedly and most notably during the Special Period existed as a product for consumption. Esther Whitfield describes the official inauguration of the Special Period in 1993 with decriminalization of the use of the US dollar and unofficial close in 2004 with its withdrawal from circulation (2). Troyano's characters Brendaa and Brendah are not particularly interested in Cuba itself and, disappointed with the quickand abrupt tour of Havana given to them by Machito, Brendaa states: "I told you we should have gone to the Dominican Republic."

The subject of analysis of Esther Whitfield's 2008 book *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and Special Period Fiction* is what she calls the troublesome commodification of Cuban identity, which she argues is due to the tourist and publishing industries that have transformed the Cuban Revolution into commercial capital (2-3). From a place of desperation Castro's government was forced to open their borders to the dollar, "[s]alaries continued to be paid in pesos while material goods were sold in dollars so that labor hierarchies were distorted and service work that could earn dollars (waiting tables, guiding tours, driving taxis, prostitution) was valued over specialist professions" (5). Thus, the tourist boom opened the doors to creative and unofficial service providers, of which Whitfield lists self-styled tour guides, tobacco resellers and *jineteros* (8), while Cuba become the site for consumption. Whitfield declares, "[i]t is this notion of something newly exposed but nevertheless about to expire, and about to do so precisely because it is an

unsustainable anachronism in a post-Soviet, almost postsocialist world, that the nostalgic dimension of tourism to Cuba lies (27). In the documentary film *Conducta impropia*, Elaine del Castillo explains that post-revolutionary Havana was in ruins and the glorious vision presented to tourists was merely a façade controlled by tour guides. Tour guides went so far as to take tourists to meet "real locals," which turned out to be fake peasants. The guides would bring tourists to the homes of "authentic Cubans" without disclosing that this was a staged performance. The interaction between Brendaa, Brendah and Machito can thus be read as a parody of this performance event utilized by the Castro regime to maintain appearances of opulence. Machito serves as an unofficial tour guide that profits from the tourist market. As an unsanctioned state representative, Machito represents a threat to the regime not only because of the profits he is making for himself, but, if we correctly read the allegory Tropicana prepares for us, also because Machito's sworn enemy is Maldito, who stands in as a representative for Castro himself.

Memorias de la revolución reminds the spectator of the problematic notion of race in Cuba with the anecdote of Pingalito's grandmother. When asked where his grandmother is Pingalito responds: "mulata y a mucha honra," (Tropicana 55) tying his grandmother's racial composition to her geographical location. This statement is charged with racial and historical significance and stands in complete opposition to the memory Pingalito shares of his grandmother throwing away the dishes of black patrons who dined in her restaurant. It is very cunning that Troyano uses these two statements to make an implicit comment on racial politics in Cuba. While considering the nature of *choteo* itself and Jorge Mañach's canonical text that plants his opposition to it, it is important to highlight that Mañach was an elitist who rejected any social practices connected to African roots. Mañach's visions for *cubanidad* were in line with racially exclusive Eurocentric understandings of identity, completely denying Cuba's past and actual ethnic constructions. To add to what I said above about racial hierarchy, it is relevant to

mention Félix Valdés García's paper "El discurso de Calibán, o de la filosofía en el Caribe," in which he mentions that canonical Caribbean scholar Frantz Fanon learned from his mentor Aimée Césaire that black skin is beautiful, and that white as a racial category was invented to mark the Other in a colonial system. The black Other became the inferior, savage, and everything opposite of the white (202). Valdés García explains that Fanon understood that the colonized subject was dominated but never domesticated, this is to say that the colonized subject inhabited a position of inferiority, but they were never convinced of it themselves (206). So, when Pingalito states that his grandmother was "mulata y a mucha honra" or rather dark and proud, he marks the recognition of his racial past as a point of pride, a generational change from his grandmother herself and proudly referencing what Bernabé et al. understand to be his Creole identity. As previously mentioned, Arrizón describes the tendency of Latinos to marginalize their African and indigenous roots while celebrating Hispanic heritage. Pingalito's grandmother experiences cognitive dissonance and rejects her own racial composition by throwing away the dishes of black patrons who are pigmented darker than herself. As the colonized subject, she does what Bradley describes as "abolishing her identity" by invalidating the multiple racial variables that intersect in the Cuban nation.

Milk of Amnesia: Memory, Delirium and Critique

In contrast to *Memorias de la revolución*, *Milk of Amnesia* is a one-woman show in which Troyano performs the roles of both human and animal characters. Central to the plot of *Milk of Amnesia* is the memory loss experienced by Tropicana after an accident that causes her amnesia. *Milk of Amnesia* begins with the audiotape playing of a writer who mentions having to give up their green card for US citizenship, and the ways in which taste and food are intertwined with identity. The writer describes their experience as a child at school punished for not finishing

their carton of milk. The text reads, “If I closed my eyes and held my breath I could supress a lot of the flavor I didn’t like. This is how I learned to drink milk. It was the resolve to embrace America as I chewed on my peanut butter and jelly sandwich and gulped down my milk. This new milk that had replaced the sweet condensed milk of Cuba. My amnesia had begun.” (53). In addition to the contrast between American and condensed milk, mango is used to describe the flavor of *cubanidad* in contrast to the less flavorful and less desirable American apple. Herrmann argues that the mango as a prop in Tropicana’s performance becomes associated with her sexual awakening and queer sexuality because it is described as the moment when Tropicana experiences her first sexual encounter.

Tropicana herself mentions the importance of taste and images of food in the Latin American imaginary in her interview with David Román. Troyano makes it clear that food is an important factor because Tropicana wants to give you a taste of Cuba: despite the fact that there are food shortages there, food images are pervasive in Latin culture (Román 93). [43] Troyano undeniably has knowledge of Antonio José Ponte’s *Las comidas profundas*, a text that describes the associations of food with *cubanidad*. Ponte is particularly culpable of implicitly critiquing the Castro regime during the Special Period. Such an implicit method of writing and performing makes sense for Ponte due to the sociohistorical moment of the publication of the text. In contrast Troyano favors a critique of the Spanish colonial conquest rather than an explicit one of the post-revolutionary Castro regime. In this way, Troyano demonstrates that the past is always pertinent to the future. The Cuban Revolution is often critiqued by scholars and performers as it is most recent in collective memory, but Cuba’s colonial past is heavily embedded in the fabric of its’ society and not to be ignored. Just as the actor is always in conversation with the temporal

[43] See Antonio José Ponte‘s *Las comidas profundas* (1997) in which Ponte the narrative voice uses imagination to describe both the taste and knowledge of important foods in Cuban culture.

past, Troyano chooses to blatantly work the past narrative into her modern performance.

In "Carmelita Tropicana Unplugged: An Interview" Tropicana gives David Román vital insight to understanding her performance. She begins by stating that, "the idea of a lesbian stereotype is a paradox given that lesbians have been historically invisible" (87). In this chapter I have adopted the names Troyano and Tropicana to reference the author as Troyano represents the writer and Tropicana represents the actor. Troyano better explains in this interview that there is a need for an alter ego since she could not go on stage and tell jokes as herself. The magic of theatre affords her a mask, but Troyano makes clear that Tropicana was a collective effort in terms of costume design (87). For Troyano, there is a power struggle between herself the writer and Tropicana the performer. She struggles to know if she is speaking or performing her character as it has become so intrinsic to her nature. Troyano shares that the first opportunity to return to Cuba occurred when she was asked to participate in a dialogue between Cuban and Cuban American artists in 1993 sponsored by Dance Theatre Workshop with their Suitcase fund that sponsors intercultural exchange (90). Tropicana wanted to return to Cuba, but Troyano was hesitant. Troyano explains that she is dealing with different issues in *Milk of Amnesia*. She shares with Román, "It's about a parallel journey, Carmelita and Alina go back to Cuba. One is more theatrical and more humorous; Carmelita lost her memory when she hurt her head while chocolate pudding wrestling. That's why she has to go back. Alina goes back to Cuba to cure her cultural amnesia. Basically, both of them are telling a story from two different points of view" (Román 91). Troyano attempts to make clear that in *Milk of Amnesia* the character of the writer is Alina while Carmelita is the performer as herself and her sister and director Ela Troyano wanted to explore different forms of writing, performing, and staging. Troyano ends the interview by arguing that it is the staging of this play that forced the spectator to confront the issue of multiple identities and perspectives.

The character of the bus driver Pingalito returns in *Milk of Amnesia* and is again played by Tropicana herself during a costume change that takes place in full view of the audience. As he did during a performance in the Tropicana nightclub during Act 1 of *Memorias de la revolución*, Pingalito attempts to list facts about Cuba to jog Tropicana's memory.

> I have here audiovisual aid number one, a placemat I pick up in Las Lilas restaurant of Miami titled "Facts about Cuba." Ladies and gentlemen, upon further examination of the placemat, you can see that the island of Cuba is shaped like a Hoover vacuum cleaner with Pinar del Río as the handle. How many of you know Cuba is known as the "pearl of the Antilles" because of its natural wealth and beauty? And the first thing we learn as little children is that when Christopher Columbus landed in our island, kneeling down, he said: "Ésta es la tierra más hermosa que ojos humanos han visto." This is the most beautiful land that human eyes have seen. (54)

Troyano uses humour to make a critical statement about Cubans living outside of the island. Tension inevitably arises when those who left the homeland and formed new communities in Miami are able to critique the regime from afar while maintaining an idealized notion of pre-revolutionary Cuba. Pingalito serves as an excellent example of this machista archetype. Through the humoristic comparison of Cuba to a vacuum and to the intermingling of historical fact with the demonstration of the placemat, Troyano presents the fragility of such notions and archetypes. Coco Fusco openly comments on the dangerous nature of the stereotypical Other in her interview with BOMB magazine. Fusco argues that "[t]he situation is even more grave among Latinos in the U.S., many of whom lose direct contact with their culture of origin after one or two generations. Their primary experience of cultural identity becomes the reductive stereotype broadcast via mainstream United States culture. Which, in many cases, they assimilate as "real." (Johnson 1993).

Nohemy Solórzano-Thompson argues that Pingalito is drastically different from the notion of male *cubanidad* perpetuated by Martí and the male Cuban presented in Pingalito's poetic rendition "Ode to the Cuban Man," that depicts a Cuba based on the 1950's, an eroticization of Cubans. Below I have included the first and last stanza of his poem. Pingalito reads:

Spielberg forget your Assic Park

Some say the Cuban man is disappearing

Like the dinosaur

I say que no

The Cuban man

This specimen

Will never go away

We are here to stay

[…]

But when you tally up

The good, the bad

You too will decide

He is like a fine Havana cigar

The one you gotta have

After a big heavy meal with an after-dinner drink and

Coffee on the side

Because he is the one that truly, truly satisfies. (55-57)

Pingalito uses his "Ode to the Cuban Man" to describe the Cuban man as a permanent entity. As Butler and other gender scholars point out, it is the very insistence that gender is inflexible that

proves its fragile nature. Pingalito's notion of the Cuban man conflicts with itself. He insists that the Cuban is persistent and stubborn, while sensitive and sentimental, along with permanent and desirable. Like Solórzano-Thompson, I agree that Pingalito's function is to present different forms of Cuban identity simultaneously with a schizophrenic attitude to demystify them. As the first line of the poem refers to Spielberg, Pingalito implicitly alerts the reader from the first word of his Ode to beware of fictitious notions.

In "Lesbian Solo Performance Artists Perform Gender Binds: De(Con)Structing Patriarchal Classical Lines" Lynda Hall explains that

> The stage becomes a microcosm of the larger society; performing alone on the stage, solo performance artis highlight the impact of sociopolitical and economic oppressions on the individual in a most salient and immediate way. Employing the rhetoric of body display, they take agency and productively "construct" their parts. Slides, photographs, and videos projected along with/layered onto the performer's body bring together past and present, time and space (156).

Hall argues that Tropicana's performance embodies the fluidity and multifaceted nature of subjectivity through her male/female gender identifications, real life/her dreams and hallucinations, and focus on race/lesbian/ethnicity issues (156). The body is performed as a container of history and memory (161). Troyano also manages to incorporate animals to demonstrate the problematic notion of Cuban nostalgia. To demonstrate this false nostalgia, Troyano utilizes a horse and a pig. First, we are introduced to the Horse, Arriero, who lived through the Spanish conquest, followed by the pig who lived in Cuba during the Special Period. The Special Period served as a break in the linear history of the Revolution as the country was forced to adopt capitalist measures in times of severe economic crisis. Cuban literature is known for its themes of nostalgia and longing, for both *the republican past* and *the utopian future* (a

future which was promised but never achieved after the Revolution of 1959). By utilizing the memories of Arriero the horse and the unnamed pig of the Special Period, Troyano is able to expose the fragility of the mythical past and question the purpose of a false nostalgia.

Arriero's tone quickly changes to demonstrate the dangerous mystification of the colonial encounter. He starts by saying "I was born in Badajoz, España. Todo era tranquilidad. Un sueño dulce. The sky clear, not a cloud in the sky for miles except for the clouds of dust me and Dulcinea made as we galloped across the day fields." (62). The Spanish verb "era" signals the narration of a past event, "it was." It *was* calm, it *was* a sweet dream. Therefore, the geographic shift also signals an affective shift. Arriero adds that in those days Havana was teeming with life before describing witnessing the atrocities committed by the Spaniards. He shares

> There was a crowd gathered, so much commotion we couldn't hear but I rotated my left ear and heard a priest say to Hatuey, "Repent, repent and if you will---you will go to heaven, If not, hell." Hatuey looked at the priest and said, "If heaven is where the Spanish Christians go, I'll take hell." And the flames took Hatuey, right there, I saw it. And so much more. I saw so many Indians die, so many. (63)

By critiquing the Spanish conquest, Troyano does not explicitly critique the Castro regime. Tropicana uses foreshadowing to warns of the murder committed by a colonial regime in the name of false prophets. Hatuey's death in the play serves as an allegory, a warning of what would occur during the mistreatment of Cubans evidenced in the rehabilitation camps during the Castro regime. The presentation of the unnamed pig accomplishes a similar implicit task criticizing the collapse of the regime. To be a pet pig during the Special Period undoubtably leads to a predictable fate. Inevitably, the family pet pig is fattened and eaten out of desperation.

Alina Troyano: The Multifaceted Performer

Alina Troyano is a Cuban-American feminist performer who has been working in NYC since the 1980's. On her personal website Carmelita Tropicana writes:

> As a writer and performer, I have straddled the worlds of performance art and theater. I use irreverent humor and fantasy as subversive tools to challenge cultural stereotypes and rewrite history from multiple perspectives. By performing hyperbolic feminine and masculine personas, as well as numerous animals, insects, and fantasy creatures, I challenge historical and narrative authority. ("About Intar")

Lynda Hall argues that Tropicana stages her life in words and acts of survival. Tropicana literally and symbolically puts her body on the line in a performatively embodied autobiographical "tell-ing" of her life story (96). Perhaps this form of utilizing the body as a physical text is a common tactic used by exilic subjects. Similarly, in "El Caribe on the Horizon: José Esteban Muñoz and the Commitment to Futurity" Sandra Ruiz writes on Muñoz's critical work of the Cuban performance artist Ana Mendieta: "[it] forces us to consider an exilic subjectivity bound to a powerful expression of what Muñoz dubs *brownness*---both a singular and communal way of being released, performed, and traced onto the earth" (Ruiz 98).[44] One of the practices Tropicana uses to employ multiple identities is by playing with clothing, specifically cross-dressing to play with the boundaries of gender. In Libera Pisano's "El Carnaval de los cuerpos. El desafío simbólico y politico del *trans-vestismo"* cross-dressing is presented as a form of symbolic and political challenge that fosters the possibility of reading the body as a site inscribed with meaning (719). Pisano adds that this topic has not been studied in depth as it is often viewed as

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[44] See the 2004 book *Ana Mendieta: Earth Body: Sculpture and Performance, 1972-1985* on the work of Ana Mendieta, a Cuban American performance artist known for her land art. In Mendieta's work the use of her body encourages the spectator to view her body as text.

an individual phenomenon while in reality the act of cross-dressing invokes cultural taboo and processes removing cultural meaning (720). During the 20th century cross-dressing has been a form of experimenting with new forms of subjectivity as it provides a symbolic challenge to authority and dominant models. Pisano suggests that cross-dressing can be analysed using three factors: the aesthetic, the performative and the semantic. In terms of the aesthetic, clothing represents a displacement that threatens gender iconography. To describe the performative, Pisano invokes the work of Butler to demarcate how cross-dressing eliminates the idea that gender is an integral essence but rather a ritual of repetition of acts and meaning already established and legitimized (722). Lastly, in terms of semantics, the body represents a synecdoche of the social system just as Barthes argued that the body is a system of rhetoric of meaning and dysfunction (725). While Tropicana openly plays with gender norms via the use of clothing, she goes a step further to push the accepted boundaries of normativity with her subversive ways of presenting her sexual identity.

In "Migratory Sexualities, Diasporic Histories, and Memory in Queer Cuban-American Cultural Production" Katherine Sugg discusses the centrality of sexual identity in the constructions of nation, community and self and how Tropicana's work queers the understanding of immigrant belonging and Cuban diasporic consciousness. Sugg places particular emphasis on the spatial imaginary of diaspora to question heteropatriarchal or rather nationalist underpinnings of dominant models of diaspora. She explores disruptive links of sexual and national identities in *Milk of Amnesia* and Achy Obejas's 1996 novel *Memory Mambo.* Sugg argues that in Tropicana's play representations of place are what shape identity, community and selfhood, and can be understood as a statement that sexuality, space, cultural memory and national histories are intrinsically part of Cuban-American imaginaries (462).

By recovering personal and collective memory in *Milk of Amnesia*, Tropicana pushes against the forced forgetfulness of immigrant assimilation. Through its participation in the genre of 'camp', Sugg deciphers the play's irony and parody as a political resonance which is more difficult to portray using traditional conventions of narrative (464). Due to the unorthodox narrative form and conventions of parody, in Tropicana's *Milk of Amnesia* the assimilation of immigrant populations can be linked to the metaphorical "pasteurization" of milk. Tropicana must negotiate the forced assimilation or "pasteurization" because her character is seen as suspicious by the dominant culture in which she resides. As an immigrant, it is her double residency that represents a threat to national unity (465). Sugg argues that Tropicana plays with the barriers of time and space by using the forgetting of self (via the amnesia the protagonist experiences) as a means to time travel as Tropicana will cross an ocean of years to tell her story and further links a pig in Castro's Havana to Cortez's horse at the time of the Conquest (466).

Notably, Alina Troyano/Carmelita Tropicana developed a strong friendship and working relationship with scholar José Esteban Muñoz, who wrote much on her work. After his passing, Tropicana reflected on their friendship in the short piece entitled "A Queer Friendship." In this paper Tropicana describes her friendship with José Esteban Muñoz, of whom she says: "He elevated humour, which is often denigrated in the academy, validating the work, making it visible." (139) The WOW Café and the strong friendship with Muñoz were integral to Tropicana's formation as an artist, "In the '80s I had the WOW Café---a community, a place to create lifelong friendships, a think tank. In the '90s and until 2012 I had José and his apartment" (140).

In "El Caribe on the Horizon: José Esteban Muñoz and the Commitment to Futurity" Sandra Ruiz, a former student of Muñoz, refers to Tropicana as a Cuban *chusma* artist. To better explain this point, Ruiz clarifies that her understanding of *chusma* is derivative of her mentor

Muñoz. Muñoz explained *chusmería* as a Latin sexuality and demeanour that refuses to assimilate to standards of bourgeois comportment (Ruiz 98). *Chusma* in Latin America is regarded as a pejorative term referring to a someone who takes pride in being a vulgar individual of low class whose wardrobe parallels with their uneducated mannerisms. Muñoz argued that Tropicana gives into *chusma* and becomes an agent of excess. He referred to this as *disidentifications*, a process of a toxic identity remade and thus owned by the subjects given these labels (98). Instead of assimilating to U.S. or Cuban normative models of identity, Tropicana enacts them all at once via humour and fantasy to insert rejected and abject voices into a temporal history that has attempted to ignore them, specifically doing this by manipulating collective practices of resistance like *choteo* and narrative genre.

In "Choteo/Camp Style Politics: Carmelita Tropicana's Performance of Self-Enactment" José Esteban Muñoz explores how Tropicana de-reifies camp and *choteo* which have traditionally existed as male practices. These disidentificatory practices are especially relevant considering the specificity of Tropicana (39). Such practices undermine dominant culture in a more implicit fashion. Muñoz disagrees with Kate Davy's formulations of camp and claims that they undervalue lesbian camp as a disidentificatory strategy of enacting identity through parody and pastiche. Camp as a political tactic of visibility is indispensable for all queer people (Nielsen 132). Certain expressions of camp have been privileged recognition in scholarship (131) and camp has been reduced to simply a gay male phenomenon. It can be understood as a queer reading strategy and the use of "lesbian camp" is a strategic effort to uncover a marginalized queer mode (121). While queer theory can forge solidarity across gender identities, Elly-Jean Nielsen argues that lesbian women have been made invisible in our culture as a threat to patriarchal power and experience a "double oppression" when considering the invisibility of women as political subjects (121). Nielsen contends that "Lesbian camp, like most queer praxis,

has evidenced a long and rich history buried under heteronormative readings. Whether it is considered something entirely new, a rarity, "less" than that of gay men, or an appropriation of gay male culture, the existence of lesbian camp has been minimized and, often, denied" (131). I propose that Tropicana's use of drag in her performance in addition to *choteo* as a strategy (both of which are traditionally male concepts), engages in what Nielsen describes as "unghosting" and it is this unghosting that reinserts identities that have been sequestered away from public consciousness and dominant heterosexual culture, thereby functioning as practices of resistance.

Muñoz further argues that Tropicana's performance contests bourgeois conventions in the inner workings of the Cuban exile community while simultaneously undermining the patriarchal character of most representations of Cuban and Cuban-American identity (42). "Carmelita's' mimicry of the Cuban national character---and her decision to personify it as a *machista*---is a funny, yet nonetheless serious, examination and exploration of *cubanidad*" (44). Muñoz continues

> I want to propose *choteo* as a critical optic---one that is perhaps aligned with camp reading and, at other times, perhaps out of sync with such a hermeneutic---in order to decipher Carmelita's performances and production. *Choteo* is like camp in that it can be a fierce send-up of dominant cultural formations. *Choteo*, again, like camp, can be a style of colonial mimicry that is simultaneously a form of resemblance *and* menace. Both strategies possess a disidentifactory potential insofar as they mediate between a space of identification with, and total disavowal of, the dominant culture's normative identificatory nodes." (45)

Choteo and camp then serve as representatives of subversive tactics that transgress both accepted boundaries of being and of time and space. By employing *choteo* and camp in her performance, Tropicana is in conversation with both the present and the past as these tactics are riddled with

discursive meanings and histories in their existence as collective practices of resistance. To further expand on the disobedient manner in which Tropicana utilizes performative genre (in both the theatrical and Butlerian sense), I suggest we analyze the autobiographical aspects of Tropicana's performances.

Lynda Hall suggests we read the autobiographical moments presented by Tropicana in order to understand her performance as autobiography. What, however, is meant by autobiography? By borrowing a Butlerian lens, Sidonie Smith comments that the autobiographical speaker becomes a performative subject (17). To unpack this statement, one must look to the history of autobiography. Smith informs us that, "[…] autobiographical storytelling emerged as one powerful means of constituting the bourgeois subject and thereby regulating both bodies and selves (19). Smith adds that, "Such discourses might well be understood, a la Michel de Certeau, as hegemonic "strategies" for the cultural reproduction of normative selves" (18). Judith Butler argues that gender is not inherent but rather a set of compulsive norms that one must accomplish to be read as an intelligible subject. If autobiography exists as a form of constituting the bourgeois subject, the autobiographical self must comply with such norms or "strategies" as describes de Certeau. Smith declares that, "There is no essential, original, coherent autobiographical self before the moment of self-narrating" (17). In *Milk of Amnesia*, Tropicana proceeds from the metaphorical moment of amnesia from which the autobiographical self emerges and like the autobiographical subject, gets closer to her identity as she performs herself. Yet Tropicana's performance is nowhere near the normative subject Butler describes. However, what Butler reads as the failure to perform and what Smith sees as the failure to present an autonomous autobiographical self, presents the possibility of variation of the rules that govern intelligible identities (Smith 20). It is the ruptures that allow Tropicana to tactically dis/identify: "the autobiographical subject adjusts, redeploys,

resists, transforms discourse of autobiographical identity" (Smith 21). I therefore suggest an exploration of queer sexuality as a mode of disidentification with this autobiographical self outlined by Hall.

Tropicana is not only a queer woman but she subversively "queers" identity and history by reinserting a multifaceted voice into a temporal past that sought to eradicate the abject. To understand what it means to queer Cuban identity, it is necessary to first examine what is implied by the term queer. Queer is, of course, a reference to the LGBTQ community as Alina Troyano is both a lesbian woman and her alter-ego or staged character Carmelita Tropicana is also queer. In contrast to the closeted nature of the revolutionary regime in Cuba, the characters in her plays are gay and unapologetic. This is evident in the third Act of *Memorias de la revolución*, which takes place in the Tropicana night club in NYC during 1967 as the characters proudly boast about the sexual revolution. As Troyano's plays are fictionalized autobiographical accounts, it is necessary to understand the treatment of the gay community during the Cuban Revolution and afterwards. Reinaldo Arenas serves as an important example. Arenas, like other gay intellectuals in Cuba, supported the Revolution but later became a critic due to the exalting of heteronormative masculinity the regime promoted. The LGBTQ community in Cuba was even put into work camps. Arenas himself was later imprisoned and fled Cuba in 1980.

A well-known example of this prosecution Cuban intellectuals endured during the Castro regime is the 1984 documentary entitled *Conducta impropia*. The documentary delves into the inhumane mistreatment of homosexuals in Post-revolutionary Cuba and is written by Néstor Almendros, directed by Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal. The documentary features interviews of intellectuals and exiles who recount their experiences during this era. Screenplay writer and co-director Almendros was originally a Spanish native and moved to Cuba to join his exiled anti-Franco father. Jiménez Leal is a Cuban cinema director who currently resides in

Miami. Both Almendros and Jiménez Leal experienced censorship by the Castro regime and joined forces to create a documentary about repression in Cuba against those who behaved outside of the norms of the Castro regime. *Conducta impropia* was awarded first place at the festival for the International Institute for Humans Rights in Stratsbourg and the prize for best documentary at the Barcelona Film Festival.

The documentary follows Castro's seat in power and demonstrates that Cubans began to experience what were referred to as "moral purges". Particularly it was the communist youth who were pressured into carrying out these purges by giving insults and morally persecuting others who partook in what the state ambiguously called misconduct. Writers were associated with such inappropriate conduct as they were assumed to partake in homosexual behaviors. Thus, the state created what they called rehabilitation "camps" used for production through unskilled labor. The official doctrine argued that the purpose of these camps was to make communists, and thus utilized official Marxist manuals to indoctrinate prisoners. Unofficially these camps were seen as concentration camps where prisoners experienced harsh work conditions and were treated inhumanely. The rehabilitation camps were first called U.M.A.P. short for Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units to Aid Productions). Eventually came the closure of UMAP camps after petitions from outside Cuba. This resulted in a shift and creations of the most severe criminal code Cuba had ever had, while other work camps opened under new guises where workers were used to harvest tobacco and cut sugar cane. The problematic notion of improper conduct could apply to anyone and allowed the state to imprison many based on ambiguous suspicion.

The documentary further explains the Mariel boat lifts which were used by Cuba instructing America to come get its defectors and take away them from Cuba. Eventually the two countries silently halted the exodus. Arenas was one of these "defectors" and featured in the

documentary. Arenas fortunately was able to escape during the Mariel boat lifts of the ‘80s. In 1974 he was sentenced to prison because he was caught for smuggling a controversial manuscript and having it published abroad. Arenas took advantage and left Cuba during the Mariel confusion. While interviewed for the documentary, Arenas explains that the “rehabilitation” which followed after jail terms in post-revolutionary Cuba was a tactic used to make convicts promise not to participate in improper conduct again. Like Arenas many others released from prison experienced homelessness since the state seized possessions and sealed the entrance to his home following his imprisonment. When released, Arenas discovered that even the manuscripts that he had hidden on the roof of his home were taken. The treatment of Arenas and other homosexual intellectuals stood in complete contrast to their prestige abroad. In his own words, in Cuba he was considered a nonperson, while in the exterior, he was a famous author whose work was and continues to be translated into many languages. Referring to the disappearances which occurred during the post-revolution, Castro argued that they were merely imprisoned for anti-revolutionary crimes. The documentary makes clear that in this vision of revolutionary Cuba *machismo* was honored and manly mannerisms were used to hide sexuality especially among state officials. Homosexuality was seen as a grave problem. So much so that minors were thrown into their own jails and camps but were sometimes placed into adult jails where they were tortured and made to live in solitary inhumane conditions. During the interview portion of the documentary, Susan Sontag explains this militarization of culture that is often associated with male virility, especially in communist countries. Almendros and Jiménez Leal’s documentary thus chronicles the inhumane state treatment of those which operated outside of the normative modes of being of the Castro regime, in particular that of the LGBTQ community. The documentary serves as a reference point from those censured by the regime. It is evident that the great promise of change quickly became a farce and anything that was viewed as outside of

the realm of the acceptable and posed a threat to the regime, was ticketed as inappropriate conduct in order to punish and abolish it. I use this documentary to demonstrate the importance of Tropicana's work in reinserting abject identities in a temporal past that previously excluded them in such a vile manner.

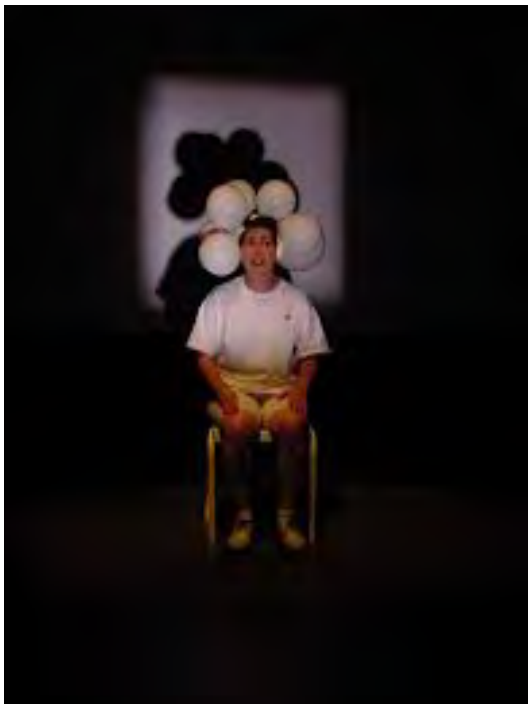
Scholars like Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz and I. Carolina Caballero also use the term "queer" as a reference for queer temporality and the effects which queering produces.[45] Of particular significance José Esteban Muñoz in his chapter "Queerness as Horizon" argued that multiple forms of belonging-in-difference and more in-depth critiques of social difference are absent in mainstream LGBT leaderships and queer critique (20) and thus argued for what he called utopian possibility. Queerness for Muñoz is a possibility, something that is not quite yet arrived as queerness must step out of the linearity of straight time (25), but nonetheless is intensely relational with the past. He adds that we must pull from the past to push past the impasse of the present (31). With respect to queering as an effect in the theatre, Caballero borrows from David Savran to argue that, in the theatrical spectacle, queering is produced by the performance and the relationship between the actors on stage and those in the audience (28). Therefore, for Caballero, the queering of an object, situation, or person becomes an act of power in that it subverts dominant ideologies and normative representations. Like Caballero, I argue that Troyano queers performance by blurring the expected notions of what theatre should be, playing multiple characters with drag on drag meta-performances, speaking directly to audience, and playing with notions of expected linear narratives.

Critics of Troyano's work often praise her absurd usage of autobiographic relics. Some

[45] See Jack Halberstam's *Queer Time and Place* (2005) and José Esteban Muñoz's chapter "Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism" in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009).

examples include her character Pingalito's rants on Cuba, the use of historical fact and Troyano's use of animals such as the conquistador horse Arriero, who lives through the horrors of the Spanish conquest and "moment of discovery". This is what she refers to as "horsestory." The most obvious use of autobiography relates to Troyano's identity as a queer woman. Not only does Troyano reinsert queer identity into the post-revolutionary narrative that has excluded it, her on-site costume changes produce a symbolic drag identity that problematizes gender as the one-woman show allows Troyano to embody multiple identities and alter-egos.

Lynda Hall declares that self-writing is a method used by oppressed subjects to challenge experiences of identity and claims as performative acts of self-agency (96). By re-writing the past, Troyano makes it textually present. The manner in which Troyano queers history can be examined through José Quiroga's theory of the palimpsest. In the "Preface" of *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005), Quiroga explains that "the palimpsest does not reproduce the original, but it dismantles it, writes on top of it, allows it to be seen. It is a queer form of reproduction, one where two texts, two sites, two lives, blend into one continuous time." (ix). The defining moments of Cuban history—its colonial past, the republic and the Revolution— allow for the reproduction of Cuba in tandem with its dismantling. These moments blend together to produce a contradictory *cubanidad* that is in conflict with itself. Therefore, by using autobiography, Troyano is capable of writing over the exclusionary narrative of the heteronormative communist regime and reinserting the abject homosexual body. The queer body is no longer absent but rather the centre of the historical narrative as Tropicana becomes the hero in the plot of *Memorias de la revolución* while in *Milk of Amnesia* the characters come together to help the queer Tropicana get her memory back.



(Figure 8.) Troyano wearing balloon hat during performance of *Milk of Amnesia*.

Novak, Lorie. "Milk of Amnesia (2001)." Hemispheric Institute, https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-collections/item/2552-carmelita-amnesia.html.

Troyano's use of parody is present through dialogue, props and her portrayal of costume changes on stage. This spectrum of humour spans the use of a helium balloon hat to represent the different parts of the human brain to the comical promise Tropicana makes to the virgin Mary that she will never have sex with a man as the audience is well aware that Tropicana is a lesbian. As mentioned in the case of Fusco and Gómez-Peña, in Troyano's performances the decoder must notice and identify parody, otherwise they run the risk of naturalizing the work, which in turn would eliminate a significant part of form and content as explained by Hutcheon. Unlike the unintended *relajo* put forth by Taylor to contextualize Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance event as a collective prank, Tropicana wants her audience to be in on the joke. In order to understand the allegories that reference the Castro regime, the spectator must be able to decode Tropicana's performance. Therefore, I suggest *choteo* as a more comprehensive understanding of

using humour as a practice of resistance. While traditionally a masculine practice, *Choteo* helps us understand that Tropicana's performance is a caricature of the Cuban state from the abject voice. Furthermore, the use of parody and humour allow Troyano to subvert stereotypes we associate with gender and ethnic groups and transform routinely male conventions like *choteo* and camp. Fortunately for Troyano, the act of performing within the theatre allows the spectator to prepare to view a fictional narrative.

The space of the theatre, unlike the museum, prepares the spectator for fiction. To better explain this assumption, I invoke Umberto Eco's understanding of semiotics of performance. Borrowing Charles Sanders Peirce's example of a drunkard, in "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance" Eco describes the drunk as an actor that becomes a semiotic device (110). Eco argues, "As soon as he has been put on the platform and shown to the audience, the drunken man has lost his original nature of "real" body among real bodies." (110). Eco contends that "[i]t is not theatre that is able to imitate life; it is social life that is designed as a continuous performance and, because of this, there is a link between theatre and life." (113). However, the physical staging within the presence of the theatre alerts the spectator that what they are witnessing is an enactment. Eco adds, "[i]n a certain sense every dramatic performance (be it on the stage or on the screen) is composed by two speech acts. The first one is performed by the actor who is making a performative statement---"I am acting." By this implicit statement the actor tells the truth since he accounts that *from that moment on* he will lie. The second one is represented by a pseudo-statement where the subject of the statement is already the character not the actor" (115). Of particular importance is the use of the spectacle in the Tropicana nightclub within the performance of the play itself, this event acts as a reminder that what the audience is viewing is indeed fabricated. By performing gender and ethnicity, Troyano reminds the audience that identity is truly a construction. Thus, this portrayal of identity in memory, allows the audience

member to question the construction of *cubanidad*. As Butler maintains that transgender performance can signal a failure of intelligibility, the failure signaled by the inability to perform a homogenous identity, signals the possibility for variation. It is within this variation of the norm that heterogenous identities can be presented.

Cuban-Americans inhabit a particular exilic condition that often leads to hyperbolic renditions and memories of the past by those older generations suffering from nostalgia. In "No es fácil: Notes on the Negotiation of Cubanidad and Exilic Memory in Carmelita Tropicana's "Milk of Amnesia,"" José Esteban Muñoz shares that, for him, Cuba was a collection of disembodied voices over the telephone, photographs and exilic memories (76). Tropicana's character Pingalito is a representative of this truth as he warns the audience not to believe everything that they read, as this second generation has never been on the island and have had to rely on hyperbolic renditions of the lost homeland ("Choteo/Camp Style Politics" 43). Muñoz argues that *Milk of Amnesia* is Tropicana's most in-depth analysis of *cubanidad* and the comedic aspects of exile (77). He contends that:

> The amnesia that befalls Carmelita is analogous to the larger exilic project of staving off a mode of assimilationist forgetting that plagues exiles. Dominant culture is suspicious of the exile's double residency both inside and outside the nation. The safehouse of exilic memory is often raided by this mode of forgetting. Nations, especially the U.S., require that the pledge of allegiance constantly be recited. As a rule, the nation understands the ambivalence, indeterminacy of exile and hybridity as a threat to the fiction of national unity and cohesion. (77)

Thus the U.S. proceeds to use assimilation tactics to ensure that the Cuban exile does not present a menace to its fallacy of national unity. The nature of the hybrid subject presents a peril by virtue of their existence. By refusing these assimilation practices, Tropicana's performance

presents a breaking point that forces its spectators to reflect on this fallacy. In "No es fácil," Muñoz references Freud's dream-time to mark an analogy between exilic memory and dream symbol. For Muñoz, exile was like a dream as it is condensed and tightly wound. Thus, when the exilic subject occupies a space which is not home and writes or produces performance after experiencing exile, these works will unravel cohabitation and dual temporality (78). Muñoz argued that exilic memory is the unraveling then of the phenomenon of exile. He explained that the collective memory Tropicana recovers is a system of political beliefs that resists the state sanctioned versions of history; therefore, memory is a political project be it individual or collective (81).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I position the body as a text that *tells.* The body is a discursive text that engages with the past and the present as performance exists in a temporal lineage. I focus on the work of performance artists who utilize humour and fantasy as subversive tools to invoke cultural memory. These artists use parody and humour, in particular *choteo*, a form of caricature they appropriate from the colonizer as a collective practice of resistance to invoke cultural memory of polemic pasts, be that colonialism itself or the Castro regime. I introduce *Memorias de la revolución* and *Milk of Amnesia* as evidence of Alina Troyano's ability to queer the past by re-writing it with the insertion of excluded identities. By using the narrative of the colonial encounter like Fusco and Gómez-Peña, Troyano is able to comment on the mistreatment of past regimes of power to specifically reflect on Cuba's colonial past, that which has often been ignored and whitewashed.

As Spanish colonizers and later governments in Latin American countries have traditionally exercised power on the bodies of its citizens in a physical manner, it is Coco

Fusco's mission to make the personal political via the textuality of her body (Bradley 373). Thus, I have put particular emphasis on the body as a point of reference in this chapter. By physically putting themselves on display, Gómez-Peña and Fusco question the reading of the Other's body and the hierarchies of superiority associated with race and imperialism. Here we have considered the gaze itself upon the bodily text and what it means to look and be seen. Just as Drobnick points out, to self-objectify is to interrogate and transgress convention. Both Gómez-Peña and Troyano are queer subjects and thus produce art that responds to the rejection of their abject bodies. Where *Milk of Amnesia* is the recounting of the process of Tropicana re-gaining her memory, *Memorias de la revolución* is an allegorical fight against the assimilation tactics and vile treatment of the Castro regime. By intertwining her personal experience with parody, Troyano manages to establish her existence within a Cuban canon which has previously officially excluded the narratives of queer bodies. While Troyano is able to establish a queer temporality by inserting the abject, it can be argued that Fusco and Gómez-Peña also queer the space of the museum. By placing their fictious performance inside of a space associated with fact and reverence, Fusco and Gómez-Peña play with the boundaries decorum and manage to demonstrate that that objects within the museum are part of a larger performance event.

This chapter has considered theatrical pieces emerging from the abject voices of the Caribbean diaspora. The performance texts examined represent the impact of colonial rule and systems of power on Caribbean people and their respective societies, with particular emphasis on the materiality of their bodies. As the body of the performer is a text, it connects the past to the presents and exists as a marker of cultural memory and collective practices of resistance. While *Milk of Amnesia* (1994), *Memorias de la revolución* (1986), *The Couple in the Cage* (1993), and *STUFF* (1998) use humour and farce to navigate the tension between the past and present. Pertaining to the body's contact with systems of power and control, during the colonial

encounter and Cuba's Special Period, this chapter has analyzed the body as property of the nation, a product of sexual tourism and as a site to commit violence by highlighting the differences between "the savage" and European body and by mapping the histories of brutality, consumption and forced labour of the Other.

Chapter 3
Parodying Identity from the Ni e': A Discussion of three of Josefina Báez's Performance Texts

> "In the theatre you can cut with a knife and there is blood, the knife is not real, and the blood is not real. In performance the blood and the knife and the body of the performer is real."[46]
> — Marina Abramovic, *Marina Abramovic: What Is Performance Art?*

Since the 1990s, a trend has formed of artists contesting national identities with performance by demonstrating transnational migration on stage. Many employ methods of alternative theatre to dispute antiquated nationalistic ideas of who someone is and where they belong identity. A product of this trend is *Dominicanish* (2000), the most well-known and studied performance text in Josefina Báez's canon. In the written prologue, Claudio Mir, the director of the piece, describes it as "[…] alternative theatre that became our alternative to theatre." (*Dominicanish* 11). The subject of this chapter is Josefina Báez, a solo performer whose body, language, location, and relationship with her audience are crucial to her work. Her script and performance are based on fictionalized fragments of her life story. Báez's works are modelled through a method she entitles "performance autology," a term she created to explain her creative process that is a result of generating ideas and writing from one's autobiography ("Performance Autology").

In this chapter, I analyze the identities Báez constructs using her own body in performance. Her performances are live theatrical moments where her body is the central tool utilized to project meaning to her audience. By using the body to transmit meaning to her spectators, Báez's body can be read as a text where she presents and parodies various identities.

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[46] *Marina Abramovic: What Is Performance Art?* Perf. Marina Abramovic. *Museum of Modern Art | MoMA*. N.p., 2010. Web. 01 May 2018.

Báez's demand to transform her works from the written to the realm of the repertoire attacks the centuries long privileged and superior position of archival knowledge. Through parodic performance, she interrogates societal norms and questions fixed identities. Báez uses the Bretchian alienation effect to distance the audience from her performance, making them cognizant that what she is indeed doing is performing identity. The spectator does not lose sight of their role as spectator, a fact that creates collectivity between the audience members and the performer. One of the main techniques of Báez's performance is code-switching and a fragmentation of text, which is more clearly seen in the written text. In the performance, more than in the written text, the full extent of Báez's embodied language is experienced since she uses her body to transmit meaning and message. Báez is an actress, writer, director, and educator. She is the director and founder of the theatre company *Ay Ombe* founded in the year 1986. Though born in La Romana, Dominican Republic, she currently lives in New York City,. Arriving in New York during the 1970's, Báez encountered the ongoing activism of women, African Americans, and other marginal groups, and identified and allied herself with the American Civil Rights Movement. This has resulted in a multifaceted diasporic identity that Báez proudly presents in her texts. Some of her publications include: *As is É* (2015), *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* (2008), *Como la Una/Como Uma* (2013), *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork* (2012), *De Levente. 4 textos para teatro performance* (2013), *Canto de Plenitud* (2013), *and Latina In* (2013). Báez has also written a children's book entitled *Why is my name Marysol?* (1993). In this chapter, I will focus on *Dominicanish* (2000), *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*, and *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork.*

Josefina Báez's performance texts not only challenge the gaze of her audience, but their fragmented form poses a challenge when it comes to discussing them. It is difficult to even begin to classify such a corpus. Jade Power calls *her performance* "[…] a fragmented poem-dance-

story, [that] shuttles between identities, geographies and temporality." (92). The use of hyphens in particular render it in no strict sense purely poem, dance or story, but rather a fusion of all three. It would be incorrect to label the works of Báez under a monolithic category because their structural form is intangible. Sophie Maríñez, another critic, asks if the term "Dominicanish" is either a language or an identity (150). I argue that it is both. Just as the suffix –ish suggests the incompleteness or rather the in-betweeness of identity, in addition to the geography and temporality that the protagonist occupies in *Dominicanish,* it can be said more generally of Báez's performance texts that they inhabit the in-between space of the mediums that they employ.

In speaking of mediums, I refer to the dual existence of *Dominicanish*. Her performance texts have both a written text and a performatic aspect[47], or in the words of Diana Taylor, they are both archive and repertoire. A video of *Dominicanish* is not the performance itself, but rather a representation of the repertoire. The embodied live theatrical performance can enact embodied knowledge. Sidonie Smith argues that to write the un-documentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself (148). However, it is my belief that Báez is not afraid of having her performance text altered or misunderstood by her readers/spectators as this idea is consistent with Báez's view of her own work. At a presentation given by Báez at the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University, she was asked to explain a reference about "site specific behavior" in her text *Comrade, bliss ain't playing*. Her response, "lo que tú quiera es." ("Instituto Cervantes"). Báez believes that your responsibility as reader/spectator is to understand what you want from the text. From there, the writer/performer

[47] Diana Taylor suggests the term "performatic" instead of "performative" to speak of the theatrical performance (*Performance* 2nd ed. 120). The term "Performative" belongs to Performativity theory that emerged after Performance theory and is a hybrid that combines speech act theory, Foucault and performance studies (J. Hillis Miller 222).

and reader/spectator will encounter meaning in the liminal space which Báez calls el Ni e'. In her corpus, the Ni e' appears as the marginal space inhabited by the Dominican migrant that is neither New York City nor the Dominican Republic, neither here nor there. Of this liminal location, Lorgia García-Peña states that, "El Ni e' exists as an imagined space inhabited by the immigrant where memories and the present are intertwined with the experience of oppression." (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 194). As a subject of diaspora, Báez belongs neither here nor there and must reside in the liminal. By manipulating and parodying the rejection she experiences from monolithic identity categories, Báez can demonstrate the fragility of these identity markers. Báez herself admits that her notions of the Ni e' is heavily informed based on her understanding of Gloria Anzaldúa's writing. In an interview with Joshua Deckman, Báez expresses, "Migration is not a burden, I am a builder. So my home, then, is *el ni'e*. My home is "the neither" that I know, that I have built" (Báez and Deckman 2018). The Ni e' is for her home and this home resides in the border where she can construct and deconstruct what it means to be.

Due to the ambiguous position of theatre and drama in academia, I believe it is necessary to study why Josefina Báez chooses performance as her creative medium. To be discussed, the performance event must be witnessed. Furthermore, performance is inherently ambiguous as it is open to interpretation by those who witness it. Smith argues that, "Performance in a strict ontological sense is nonreproductive. It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art" (148).[48] The inability to reproduce the performance event or the variables that result from its reproductions, causes the inability for its dissemination among scholars and therefore, performance sits at the bottom of the hierarchy of contemporary art as per Smith. It is the archival remnant of the performance event that facilitates its study for those who

[48] See Sidonie Smith's paper "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" (1995).

do not bear witness to the event itself. Not all performance events are recorded, of course, thus risking being lost forever due to their impermanence. Instead of adhering to established theatrical norms, Báez pushes the boundaries of traditional theatre, poetry and dance which in turn make it difficult to classify her work. She meticulously uses performance as her tool of choice despite its "runt" status. Like Báez herself stated in an interview with Cristiane Lira, "what I have to say doesn't sell, but I am not in the business for that." ("Josefina Báez Não Está de Brincadeira"). As performance is only available in the present and cannot be reproduced without entering the realm of the archive, it is evident why it is a difficult good to sell. Nonetheless, this anti-consumerist view is consistent with Báez' ideology.

Báez self-publishes her texts and even owns her own theatre company. She writes from the margins and has not been studied extensively by critics. Danny Méndez positions *Dominicanish* under "minor literature," a concept constructed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari ("The Intricacies of Bliss").[49] Writing in the language of the colonizer (what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the major language), Báez is read as a deterritorialized subject who writes from the margin;[50] her assemblage of enunciations or rather articulations of collections,[51] acquire the possibility to construct a collective narrative voice. However, García-Peña disagrees with Méndez and contends that *Dominicanish* exists at the margins of minor literature, since Báez is a subject already at the margins of the United States and the Dominican Republic (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 201).

To read a performance as a text implies the semiotics of theatre in terms of textual

[49] The term minor is used here with a positive connotation. This type of literature is written by minority subjects within a major language. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari demonstrate this idea in their book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.
[50] A deterritorialized subject is one who has severed social, political, or cultural practices from their homeland. See *Anti-Oedipus* written by Deleuze and Guattari.
[51] Assemblage is a framework Deleuze and Guattari originally presented in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In art, assemblage is a work created by grouping objects together.

analysis. Marco de Marinis argues that any performance can be considered a text when the interpretive cooperation of the addressee inclines it to be so and is able to establish it as such (281).[52] Although *Dominicanish* exists as both repertoire and archive (performance and published book), the live performance can be read as a text. For de Marinis, the term text designates not only a coherent and complete series of linguistics statements, whether they be oral or written, but also every entity of discourse, whether verbal, nonverbal or mixed that results from the concurrence of a considerable amount of codes (280). Performance, a term that encompasses the whole event, only exists in the present, therefore, it can only exist in the realm of the live. Like de Marinis, Peggy Phelan argues that performance requires live bodies because performance can only exist in the present moment. I agree with Phelan's argument that "performance becomes itself through disappearance" (146).[53] The performance texts of Báez exist in the realm of the archive and the repertoire. The archive represents what can be saved, while the repertoire pertains to the ephemeral nature of the work. They may differ in scope, but we must read and experience these elements in tandem to truly understand how the body is represented in both. Báez's texts require a level of embodiment via verbal production. For her, penned expressions are meant to evolve and be performed on a stage, in a classroom, on the street or even in the living rooms of those who welcome her in their homes.

The Dominicanyork Coming of Age in *Dominicanish*

Although the concept of diaspora is usually associated with the feeling of unification among a dispersed people, the first trauma the migrant experiences when they arrive to a new land is often the encounter a foreign language that perpetuates a feeling of alienation. This

[52] See Marco de Marinis' chapter "The Performance Text" in *The Performance Studies Reader (2007).*

[53] See her chapter "The Ontology of Performance: Representation Without Reproduction" (1993).

trauma and alienation experienced by the migrant is central to the plot of Josefina Báez's performance text entitled *Dominicanish.* Báez is the sole performer of her text and achieves a performance of multiple identities: the child who encounters English for the first time, Josefina: the actress, and Josefina: the Dominicanyork, or rather Josefina: the black Caribbean who is also Hindu. The body and movement of the performer is integral to the work of Báez as it is the encoded body that transmits meaning to the audience. Due to its unorthodox language and movement, *Dominicanish* exemplifies the way embodied knowledge can transmit meaning by forcing the audience to critically distance themselves from the performance. Báez uses fragmented speech juxtaposed with the movements of Kuchipudi[54] to distance herself from the audience. Báez employs the Brechtian alienation effect[55] to distance the audience so that they may retain critical detachment from a play (García Peña,30). By adapting this dramatic procedure to the reality of learning a new language, the audience is reminded that what they are witnessing is a dramatic representation. Báez uses the tactic of alienation to create a parodic vision of identity that demonstrates what Rosi Braidotti refers to as "a multifaceted plural identity" (2011). In her refusal to be a legible unified subject, Báez demonstrates transgression.

Báez's depictions of transnational subjectivities like that of the young girl in *Dominicanish* is a common theme in her work as evidenced in her poem "A 123 Portrait of a Legend". When discussing this poem, Emilia Durán Almarza describes how Báez uses the figure of the Ciguapa to explain how the subjectivities of transnational migrants change in the process of adapting to different sociocultural environments ("Chewing English" 141). According to

[54] As explained in the introduction of this dissertation, Kuchipudi is a Hindu dance-performance which Báez utilizes in juxtaposition of her fragmented speech patterns.

[55] The Brechtian alienation effect is central to the dramatic theory of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht was a German dramatist who believed it was necessary for audience members to become conscious observers by maintaining distance from theatre instead of losing themselves in the narrative.

Nancy Kang, “The ciguapa, hailing from the island of Hispaniola’s precolonial legends, typically appears as a long-haired nocturnal being resembling a woman but with uniquely backward feet” (372). Kang clarifies that this diety is illustrated as

> Dangerous yet desirable, the enigmatic ciguapa predictably beckons a multiplicity of readings, including meditations on national identity and sexual marginalization as well as race, colonial history, and the imperative for feminist scholars to trace/chase women’s often elusive stories, including those experiences deemed “backward” or too obscure to be collected or remembered. (375)

In Báez’s poem “A 123 Portrait of a Legend” this mythical figure becomes a transnational migrant herself and undergoes a sociocultural metamorphosis upon her arrival to New York City. These changes are physical and spiritual, not dramatic but gradual, represented in her looks and divinity, and complementary to the transfiguration presented by the young girl in *Dominicanish.* These progressive and slow conversions of the nature of the migrant are characteristic of Báez performance texts.

Dominicanish is a compilation of several of Báez’s poetic pieces organized with the help of her director Claudio Mir. He states, “Todos los trabajos tenían siempre cierto sabor a performance, al decirlos en voz alta con movimiento” (*Dominicanish* 9). Though the written text functions as a depiction of the performance event, its unique structure warrants particular attention. Alongside the actual spacing and placement of words upon the page that are reflective of the fragmented language used by the performer in *Dominicanish*, the corner of each page of the book has a picture of Báez dancing Kuchipudi, a traditional Hindu dance. Working with the visual artist Alexis Guerrero, Báez filmed her movements and choose a sequence that coincided exactly with the number of pages to achieve the effect of animation when the pages are flipped. Báez plays with the conventions of traditional print and uses the tool of animation to give her

words movement. In this way, even her print book serves what Diana Taylor would call a performatic function.[56]

From the moment the performance of *Dominicanish* begins, the audience is thrown into the narrative of a young Dominican girl who arrives to New York City. The child encounters the English language as her first trauma which immerses the spectator in a non-defined immediacy where a young Dominican girl expresses her frustrations and unwillingness to learn the language of the Other. She states, "Yo no voy a poner la boca así como un guante" (*Dominicanish* 22). For this young girl, the English language is an awkward restriction that inhibits her personal expression. *Dominicanish* is a performance text that grapples with the everyday realities of a Dominican migrant attempting to create a new life in a foreign land. It is from the first trauma of language that the experiences of a Dominican migrant become central to the piece. The young girl not only encounters a new language, but she must also learn to navigate new laws and figure out how to engage with a new culture. It is through the experiences of the young girl that the spectator can witness the conversion of a Dominican into a Dominicanyork.[57] This identity represents the constant state of in-betweeness that proves thematic to Báez's works, with their focus on the everyday experiences that shape diasporic life.

While navigating the city, the young girl uses the New York City landscape to learn this new language so foreign to her mouth. New York is portrayed as a crooked "**City glorifying the finest brutality in blue"** (*Dominicanish* 42, bold in original), yet it prevails as the venue of possibility (García-Peña *The Borders of Dominicanidad* 194). She reads every sign she comes across, making the city her instructor. In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel

[56] In *Performance* 2nd ed. (2016) Taylor states that "performative" is an incorrect adjective used to speak of performance (120). If something is performatic, it is theatrical.

[57] The term Dominicanyork is being reclaimed by artists who stray from its many negative connotations. It originated in the Dominican Republic as a derogatory reference to those migrating to New York.

De Certeau dedicates a chapter to walking the streets of New York as a pedestrian. For De Certeau, walking the city has its own rhetoric. The city is an objective space inhabited by subjects who give it meaning by applying their imagination to the ways they interact with its landscape. Although the voice of *Domincianish* identifies the violence perpetuated by police in the urban space, especially against those minority groups who are most targeted, New York exists as a signifier of possibility. The young girl interacts with the urban space in her own manner, giving city spaces new meanings that were not originally appointed.

Instead of restricting her learning to an ESL classroom, the young girl of *Dominicanish* also uses music to learn English: "In that cover I found my teachers/ Los hermanos Tonga Isley/ Los hermanos Isley/ The Isley Brothers" (*Dominicanish* 26-27). Although music may require instruments, to sing a song, one simply needs to utilize their voice. For the protagonist, music works as a language acquisition tool. She states, "Repeat after them/ my teachers the Isley Brothers/ Repeated a whisper/ whispered a little louder/ Sing a song sang a song" (*Dominicanish* 27). It is the Isley brothers that serve as her teachers, an all-black group known today as rock and soul musical icons. Reminiscent of grammar drills, she first repeats what she hears, then whispers it louder and louder until she is singing with confidence. Serving as her teachers, the reader/spectator of *Dominicanish* begins to realize that the young girl not only identifies with the Isley brothers but also openly uses them as her influence. In an interview with Emilia Durán Almarza, Báez describes how her brothers used to listen to the Beatles in the Dominican Republic when she was a young girl ("Apéndice" 129). Báez finds beauty in the image of a non-English speaker singing a song that is foreign. Even as the young girl sings the songs of the Isley brothers, though she may not understand every word, music serves as a tool of play in which she can replicate the lyrics in her own way.

As bell hooks says of performance, music can also serve as a remedy to decolonize the

mind, especially considering the history of jazz and blues music.[58] hooks states that in all-black schools and churches, performance and music served as tools not only for celebration but also as ritual play where one announced a liberatory subjectivity (211). Since it does not require materials demanded by other art forms, performance has been imperative in the fight for liberation (hooks 211). The young girl internalizes the Isley Brothers as her teachers and performs the act of translating their name. Although she feels identified in their music, her language learning process is in its beginning stages and like most second language speakers, she attempts to filter their name through her first language. Not only does Báez consciously name the Isley Brothers as instructors, but her performance allows her to present the Dominicanyork identity in a liberatory manner. Instead of allowing Dominicanyork to remain a pejorative vision of what García-Peña calls "el dominicano ausente," Báez takes back the term and uses it as a signifier of her co-existing plural identities (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 173). As the act of learning a language is a fragmented experience, the voice of the protagonist must locate itself between here and there and confuses the reader as it attempts to find their own space between English and Spanish.

The young girl says: "Last Saturday my teachers sang in Soul Train/ Now I don't care how my mouth look I like / what I'm saying/ Boy girl loves you she does she doesn't/ A mor And more" (*Dominicanish* 28). She no longer rejects the restrictive movement the English language imposes on her mouth. Instead of covering her mouth like a glove, English is now not only used as a means of expression, but the protagonist even enjoys the physical result of speaking it. Now, the young girl expresses herself using a vernacular composed of Dominican

[58] bell hooks is a feminist author. The themes central to her writing are intersectionality of race, capitalism and gender and their capability to produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and class domination. See *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (1995).

Spanish, New York and African American English. However, to view the language of *Dominicanish* on a page is not enough to grasp the embodied experience of voicing it.

My first encounter with Josefina Báez's *Dominicanish* was the published version. The text grasped my attention because of the layout on the page. The spacing of the words creates a fragmented narrative meant to decentralize the experience of the reader. Such an experience is mirrored when one views the actual performance event of *Dominicanish*. In the prologue of the written text Silvio Torres-Saillant writes, "Should the reader or interlocutor feel he or she has missed something, no discouragement ought to ensue" (*Dominicanish* 14). I believe that Báez's goal is to make the reader confront the written fragmentation to mirror the fragmented experience of learning a language and the movement imposed on the migrant body, "We swing creating our tale" (*Dominicanish* 41). Code-switching and specific registers of English and Spanish are present to confuse the audience. The experience of reading leaves the reader decentralized so that they may join the fragmented trajectory of the written voice. Performance text is used as an alternative medium so that Báez can reject popular forms of literature and traditional theatre. It is the encoded body in tandem with the fragmented language of *Dominicanish* that alienates the reader. Both the decentered experience of the diaspora and the structure of the work destabilize the reader. At first, the fragmentation makes it possible that the reader feel uncomfortable instead of "comfortable comfortable comfortable" (*Dominicanish* 21).[59] We are suspended in the world of Josefina, between English and Spanish, between there and here, between belonging and not belonging thus the reader follows the movement of the written voice.

Just like Black Speak, Báez has developed her own conscious language that is reflective

[59] See his book *Routes Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997).

of the history and experiences of the Dominican migrant in New York. *Dominicanish* serves as both language and identity in her work. Evident in various of the titles Báez has published is the term Dominicanyork. As I have mentioned, Báez reclaims this pejorative denomination as it demonstrates that Báez is a hybrid of Dominican and New York culture. As a subject of the Dominican diaspora living in New York City, Báez makes it clear that her identity is bicultural. According to Néstor Rodríguez, the title of her work *Dominicanish* evokes the heterogeneity that is present throughout the performance text. The suffix "ish" demonstrates the incomplete state of Dominican identity of the main character (Rodríguez 71). Identity categories are usually inscribed upon us to mark our otherness, however, Báez indulges in this otherness and uses "Dominicanyork" consciously as a marker of her diverse and multifaceted identity. Unlike other terms which restrict and represent unidimensional subjectivity, Báez breaks with the register of identity markers and uses a term that demonstrates her liminal and shifting subjectivity.

Dissimilar to "Dominicanyork" adopted by Báez, "Hispanic" serves as an example of a unilateral identity umbrella that ignores intra-group differences. In the United States the word Hispanic is a marker of otherness between Anglophone Americans and descendants of Spanish speaking countries. In her short article entitled "Why I am not Hispanic: An Argument with Jorge Gracia" Paula Moya engages with the definition Gracia provides. According to Gracia, Hispanics are a group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian Peninsula after the year 1492 and what became the colonies of these countries after the infamous encounter with Christopher Columbus. Like Moya, I find issue with Gracia's attempt to claim identity due to a historical event. As Moya argues, this description provides no hints of place of birth, nationality, economic or social status, sexuality, language, religion, political perspective or what century this "Hispanic" belongs to (Moya 101). Dominicanyork may be a pejorative label, yet when recovered by Báez, it signals her subjective experiences of identity, not just her

historical ethnic status. Gracia downplays the subjective and experiential components of identity. Such a way of categorizing identity is completely at odds with Báez's ideology of self-identification.

Instead of resisting being read as an African-American woman, Báez identifies with black counterculture in the United States. Dominicanish as a language bears testament to that notion, after all it is a product of Dominican Spanish and New York English. The young girl says, "Frequent flying to the dictionary grooving it/ diggin'it/ Fight the power fight the power fight it" (*Dominicanish* 30). The use of the civil rights exhortation "fight the power" demonstrates how heavily identified the voice of the performance text is with black counterculture in New York City. Like the non-Latino African-American citizens who come from a lineage with experiences related to slavery, subjugation and discrimination, the young girl finds solace in Black Speak. Black speech acts convey a truth to others who are conversant in the vernacular and have a shared cultural history. They are powerful statements about identity, community and connection to the counterculture when purposefully invocated by individuals whose daily demands require the use of standardized speech (Brown 214).

I borrow the theory of Black Speak from Antonio Brown who states that it was cultivated due to the unique history that Americans of African descent share with Western culture (213).[60] The denial of freedom and discriminatory applications of rights and privileges created a type of Black consciousness, and alongside it a Black Speak, the American dialect that evolved among Black people of the diaspora. For Brown, this type of countercultural language use is deliberate and thoughtful, as can be said for the literary use in *Dominicanish*. Admittedly, Brown's concept of Black Speak is limited to an Anglo-centric mainland African American context, however I see

[60] See Brown's article "Performing "Truth": Black Speech Acts" (2002).

the potential for a more expansive function of this terminology. I believe the notion of Black Speak can accommodate Spanish speakers both in the Caribbean and in North America especially for transnational subjects, since Black Speak is a language outside of mainstream societal norms for Black people of the diaspora which developed as a reaction to the experiences related to slavery, discrimination, and subjugation. If Black Speak can be more extensive and applied to this context, it could also be understood as an enunciation of Bernabé et al.'s considerations of Creoleness. Brown describes Black Speech as a form of communication,

> That is, Black speak is invoked to communicated clearly and concisely a "truth" to *another* or *others* who have shared the cultural history and who are conversant in the vernacular form. The purposeful invocation of the dialect and manipulation of standardized English suggest that the orator is in command of the *languages* involved. For those individuals whose daily demands require a reliance on "mainstream," standardized speech acts, the purposeful invocation of Black Speak can be a powerful statement about identity, community, connectedness to the counter/alternative culture, and the oration as well as the perception of a "truth." (Brown 214)

As the orator attempts to convey their experience to the listener, the orator invokes Black Speak to communicate and illuminate a truth (Brown 215). This is not to say that Black Speak *is* truth, but rather a truth about American experiences as lived by African-descent peoples (Brown 216). Black Speak is a speech act through which the orator purposefully positions herself in the counter-culture (Brown 217). García-Peña would agree with Antonio Brown. Of Báez's performance in *Dominicanish* she states, "The language of her body, juxtaposed with the rhetoric of her speech, creates a space for manipulating the official discourse and stating a new "truth" in a nonofficial language." (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 195). As a result of migrating to New York during the start of the 1970's, Báez encountered and identified with the Civil Rights

movements taking place in America. This means that for Báez her Dominicanyork identity incorporates the Anglo-centric African American counter-culture Brown references. By invoking Black Speak, the young voice of *Dominicanish* effects truth about Dominicanyork experiences as lived by African-descent peoples.

The young girl in *Dominicanish* chants civil rights slogans and her connection to black counterculture extends to her embrace of her hair. Cheryl Thompson argues that for young girls, hair is essential as it has to do with how others treat you and how you view yourself ("Black Women and Identity"). In the 1970s hair spoke to racial identity politics and bonding between African American women. Today, wearing black hair naturally is a career-limiting move because of the corporate culture of fashion. Thompson argues that wearing your hair naturally has less to do with black power and more to do with self-acceptance, yet in the performance corpus of Báez, I would argue it is reflective of both. For the little girl, black is beautiful because it is her colour and she is cognizant of what it means to choose the Isley Brothers as her teachers.

In her book *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* Ginetta Candelario argues that hair is the principle body signifier of race for Dominicans (223).[61] By conducting a study with hair style books and beauty salon clientele, Candelario concludes that facial features, skin color and ancestry are all trumped by hair as markers of race. When Dominicans migrate to America, their self-perceptions clash with the host society that classify them as black. Some migrants therefore chose to identify themselves as Latinos or Hispanics to reject blackness. The participants in Candelario's study demonstrated a preference for straight limp hair which they call *pelo bueno* (237). Hair is not only a marker of race but also of class. Curly hair is equated with sports, recreation and dirty work, while straight hair equated

[61] See her chapter ""Black Women Are Confusing but the Hair Lets You Know" Perceiving the Boundaries of Dominicanidad" (2007).

with upper-class activities (238). When Báez performs, she specifically chooses hairstyles that the participants of Candelario's study would regard as "un-Hispanic" or "Black." Her hair is natural and unprocessed, and sometimes braided. Báez is conscious of her *pelo malo* that makes her readable as a black woman, a label she fully embraces.

The fragmented and unorthodox form of *Dominicanish* mirrors the decentered experience of the diaspora. Although the narrative is still fragmented in the performance of *Dominicanish*, the reader becomes the spectator and gains access to Josefina's body language as performance. Here the reader gains auditory and visual stimulation of the voice and body of Báez. From the moment she steps on to the stage alone and illuminated, in a simple black dress, she is the single focus of the audience's gaze. When she begins to speak and move, her fragmented narrative and foreign movements destabilize the spectators as they attempt to reconstruct the narrative and memory of the protagonist.

According to Jonathan Culler, one must be able to distinguish between the voice of the author, and the poetic voice (75). Since Báez's work has autobiographical aspects and she is performing the coming of age story of a young girl using her body encoded with conscious meaning, the audience has a difficult time distinguishing between her story and Josefina's. As, Umberto Eco explains there are two implicit speech acts that actors make on the stage which signal this distinction. The first speech act is: "I am acting", while the second is the pseudo-statement where the subject of the statement is already the character and not the actor ("Semotics of Theatrical Performance" 115). The task of differentiating between character and actress becomes complicated for the spectator who must differentiate the physical body of Báez from the declarations of her character. Although we hear and see Báez the actress, through her speaks the character, and we do not hear the voice of Báez the author. This process of distinction is complicated for the spectator and though the spectator gains the auditory and visual senses that

the reader lacks, their minds are still destabilized. Although they are given these elements and their gaze is controlled, there is no linear narrative and the spectators remain lost.

Alexandra Gonzenbach studies the instances of code-swtiching in *Dominicanish* that result in the disorientation of the reader/spectator. She argues that by blending two or more languages, it is in the interstices of languages that one can uncouple identity from fixed categories and consider the multiple elements of the creation of an individual. Báez maintains that certain ideas cannot be translated and thus they must remain in the original tongue ("Instituto Cervantes"). By utilizing code-switching, Báez riddles *Dominicanish* with specific references for an audience familiar with the New York and Dominican vernacular. Gonzenbach is preoccupied with how language, particularly code-switching, posits possibilities not present in monolingual expression. As I have previously argued, in *Dominicanish*, register and code-switching create tension for both the reader of the text and viewer of its performance since the formalities of genre are disrupted. Báez realizes that code-switching possesses the ability to dismantle identity as singular and rooted, and that this notion may extend to the constrictions of written genres.

Gonzenbach adopts Judith Butler's terminology to scrutinize the code-switching occurring in *Dominicanish.* In Butlerian terms, she interprets the switch of registers as a reiterative and citational practice.[62] By drawing on two language codes, Báez effectively produces a new discourse that uses and transforms existing language structures as it creates a new set of linguistic norms. The instances of performativity in *Dominicanish* are evident in terms of language where the performance allows for perceptibility in the subjects' construction of self through language-breaks. When Gozenbach speaks of performativity, she is articulating a

[62] What Butler calls performativity is a reiterative and citational practice or rather repetition and compulsion that lead discourse to produce the effects that it names.

specific discourse and not simply describing the theatricality of Báez's texts. Often the term "performance" and "performativity"[63] are conflated, yet they are two very distinct concepts. This reference to the term performative emerged from the concept of the performative utterance by J.L. Austin, who suggested that we can do things with words. Austin argues that performatives only function in circumstances that abide by certain conventions and used a marriage ceremony to demonstrate this. The words "I do" act as performatives because they bind the couple together with legal authority (*Performance* 120). It is Judith Butler who complicates matters as she also uses the term performativity to describe gender performance and the compulsion to perform gender in normative ways.

When Báez dances the Indian dance Kuchipudi on stage, it is a literal embodiment of code-switching. Whereas in the written text, it is the phonetic representations that demonstrate the breach between formal and informal registers. In *Dominicanish*, the coded references of Báez are directed at a specific Dominican, American and Indian audience, evident in the use of words such as morisoñando[64], 107[65] and Namaste. When Báez uses her finger to illustrate the placement of the bindi on the forehead she is performing a transgressive act. As García-Peña discusses, the bindi is demonstrative of a marriage to the self, this is a refusal of what Butler perceives as normative performativity that compels subjects to act in heterocompulsive ways. By refusing to be a heteronormative subject, Báez becomes a liminal unintelligible subject.

The use of a bindi usually marks a woman's marriage, her binding to man through a

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[63] J. Hillis Miller suggests that Performativity theory emerged after Performance theory and is a hybrid that combines speech act theory, Foucault and Performance studies (222). Miller states that Judith Butler appropriated Derrida's modification of Austin's speech act theory and married it with feminism and queer theory to something alien to it, Foucault (224).

[64] Morir Soñando is a popular beverage in the Dominican Republic usually made of orange juice, milk, cane sugar and ice. I have spelled it as it appears in *Dominicanish* (2000).

[65] 107 signifies 107th Street of Washington Heights in Manhattan, New York City, known for having a large concentration of Dominican migrants.

> state-sanctioned performance. For Báez, who has chosen not to marry, the bindi performs both her bodily ownership— being married to herself—as well as a political act of feminist contradiction: the refusal to be controlled by hegemonic forces, whether they be the state, a language, or a man. (García-Peña *The Borders of Dominicanidad* 197)

The marrying of oneself is essentially an asexual or perhaps autosexual act, by refusing to perform heteronormativity and rendering herself an unintelligible subject, Báez demonstrates what Butler calls the variation in repetition. For Butler, it is in this variation the subject acquires the possibility to resist normative ways of being. This playing Indian also decentralizes the spectator and allows identity to exist as a plural category. The act of a black woman dancing a traditional Indian dance meant only for male practitioners, while code-switching between English, Spanish, formal and informal registers, is an act of resistance. Here transgression is the act of Báez as performer intentionally resisting the matrix of intelligibility.[66]

Moya Lloyd speaks of the idea of internal essence that precedes social and linguistic coding (196). She argues that ontologies of gender that establish intelligible sex determine the kinds of identity that are permitted to exist and those that are not. Gender performativity is gender not as expression of what is, but rather gender as something that one does, it is thus the repetition of acts. It is not a single act but a repetition that makes the subject into being (Lloyd 197), this results in compulsory heterosexuality. For this reason, a drag performance denaturalizes gender (Lloyd 198) As Sidonie Smith writes of autobiography, the practices where gendered subjects are produced can also become sites of critical agency (200), due to the failure to repeat. This variation of repetition is previously demonstrated by Báez with the symbolic nature of the bindi signifying a self-marriage.

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[66] The matrix of intelligibility is a concept that Judith Butler uses to refer to the systems of power that compel us to act in normative ways in order to be "legible" subjects.

Performance serves as a form of theatricality because performance is a bounded act, unlike what Judith Butler refers to as performativity. Performativity is the compulsion to repeat an act over time. Performance can draw on the conventions of gender but the performer is who decides which gender s/he wishes to act out, however, if gender is already an imitation, how does one distinguish between performativity and a single performance? Moya Lloyd sustains that all genders bear traces of the scripts of the normative system, as they are variations of the normative structure (204). Therefore, I agree that performance is itself performative because it is an imitation of an imitation (Lloyd 209). By parodying identity, Báez is imitating an imitation. Then, how can Báez transgress gender codes without reifying them?

To transgress normative structures, playwrights have employed Brechtian performance tactics, alienation, and denaturalization, and often draw upon parodic narrative strategies to facilitate the on-stage performance of gender transgression (Claycomb 105). Ryan Claycomb argues that feminist parody inherently positions its audience in opposition to the dominant systems of sex and gender, in terms of both cultural illustrations and of individual narratives (106).[67] Like Claycomb, Hutcheon sustains that postmodern parody is politicized. Feminist parody uses the alienation effect to produce the same effect it demonstrates in epic theatre. Alienation occurs when the actor distances themselves from the character instead of identifying with it. The spectator realizes the otherness of the character and actor but does not suspend belief in the character itself. One must denaturalize the performance to produce the alienation effect. The audience is thus necessary because they produce witness (Claycomb 109).

Returning to the way Báez uses language, one may argue that a duality exists between the literary form and performance of *Dominicanish*, or rather, there are aspects of the text that are

[67] See his article "Staging Psychic Excess: Parodic Narrative and Transgressive Performance" (2007).

not read in its performance and facets of the performance not visible in the text. Language-breaks are present in text though spelling and in the performance through pronunciation which reveals the young girls' multiplicity of identities. *Dominicanish* engages with various languages, registers, alternative spellings, onomatopoeia, coded references and narrative structure, constructing a non-linear narrative space that fits Kimberle Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (Gonzenbach)[68]. This means that the character experiences a multitude of oppressions due to the multiple factors that constitute her identity as a subject. By fracturing language, Báez is able to use diverse identity categories to construct a non-traditional narrative/performance that responds to her reality as a black, female, Dominican-American actress, writer and educator.

The dramatists of my project often present autobiographical accounts, even if they present them through a fictionalized lens. Unlike traditional professional actors, the body of such performers has lived through the script, as in the case of Josefina Báez. Báez has coined the term "performance autology" to recognize the creative process that is born of the autobiography of what she calls the doer. To perform for Báez is to realize an act intrinsic in autobiography. This practice is based on her own learning and teaching and to realize it, "The physical, mental and spiritual/conscience realms are researched and nurtured." (Báez "Performance Autology"). Autobiography reflects life written from a specific moment in time. For Sidonie Smith the autobiographical speaker becomes a performative subject. Before the moment of narrating there is no autobiographical self. She reframes Butlers' performativity in terms of autobiographical performativity, where the autobiographical writer must enter the matrix of legibility.

[68] In her article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," Crenshaw uses the term intersectionality to refer to the overlying systems of oppression and privilege that women experience based on their gender, sexuality, economic status and a multitude of other factors.

Historically, the autobiography served as a hegemonic strategy for cultural reproductions of normative selves. It was the way to constitute the bourgeois subject and regulate bodies and selves. However, the autobiographical writer will always fail because the autobiographical subject cannot hide all their identities and show themselves as a homogenous being. Instead of attempting to hide what appear to be opposing identities, Báez indulges each of her identities. Even though the autobiographical subjects do not produce a homogenization of the subject, failure for Judith Butler signals a variation of repetition of the rules that govern intelligibility. I concur with Smith who argues that it is here where the possibility for transgression lies as the autobiographical writer can transgress by creating variation outside of norms ("Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" 20).

Lynda Hall views autobiography as a performance with emphasis on the autobiographical gesture. For Hall, the writer creates and reinvents the self through writing.[69] The ideal autobiographical writer should interrogate racism, sexism, homophobia and classism with an expressed desire for social transformation which can create new realities for the experiences that may have been dismissed, silenced or denied, and celebrate the differences and create community by providing witness for others (96). Writing serves as a powerful mode of self-agency and community building. Self-writing works to challenge experiences of identity and claims often oppressed identities as performative acts of self-agency.

As a Dominicanyork subject writing from a position of doer with respect to their autobiography, Báez incorporates a sociohistorical perspective of the Dominican diaspora. Dominican women face distinct challenges as migrants in New York City. Milagros Ricourt suggests that as Dominican women who attempt to adapt to their new homeland often become

[69] See Lynda Hall's "Lorde, Anzaldúa, and Tropicana Performatively Embody the Written Self" (2000).

the sole breadwinner (87). In addition to having to survive their existence in the margins, they must take care of the home and childrearing. With respect to the professions available to them, Dominican women are often beauticians, retail workers or bakers. In contrast to other women of Hispanic diasporas in New York City, Dominican women are usually divorced, separated or have never married (Ricourt 91). Thus, they often suffer due to the political ideologies that favor nuclear families. Dominican migrants also suffer from sexism and live a precarious life due to structural limitations, language barriers, and immigration status. They lead difficult lives, as the written voice of *Dominicanish* states, "Not even with your guiri guiri papers," not even legal documents declaring their legal status and highlighting their citizenship are keys to the integration in American society (*Dominicanish* 48). Nadine Holdsworth maintains that "citizen" is a charged term as it is intertwined with sentiments of identity, power, access, exclusion and social participation (134). Even for those who can ignore the history of economic relations between the US and the Dominican, they can never fully realize citizenship since their belonging is conditioned based on national origin, class, culture and, race (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 188).

Since the middle of the 1990s the process of structural adjustment and neoliberal reform has been subsumed into a broader boom in international trade, communications, and financial transactions known as globalization. The process has several interlocking forces which have resulted in new migration dynamics (Wise et al. 431). Wise et al. argue that globalization has entailed profound restructuring of the world's economy under the influence of large corporations, powerful governments, and international bodies like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization (431). Cheapening labor is the main driver behind this new capitalist machine. The growing participation of women through industrial and domestic labor in addition to massive labor supplies from Africa, Latin America,

Asian and the former Soviet Union, has led to the precariousness of labor markets (Wise et al. 432). For this reason, migration has undergone a dramatic transformation and is now characterized by a strong pressure to emigrate, given the lack of job opportunities, growing vulnerability and the exploitation of migrant workers in origin, transit and destination countries.

Even as the little girl engages and learns her host language she must battle with the idea of the good migrant. The worst stigmas attached to foreigners are those of illegality and criminality, especially in periods of economic depression migrants are held responsible for economic decline. She declares, "Now I'm another person/ Mouth twisted/ Guiri guiri on dreams/ Guiri guiri business" (*Dominicanish* 47). Wise et al. sustain that migrants will encounter a paradigm of hero vs. criminal in their host country (434). Even if the migrant behaves in an exceptional manner and realizes the neoliberal "American" dream, the young protagonist will be discriminated against by those relishing in privilege.

We live increasingly in a world that is shaped by US imperialism which began at the turn of the twentieth century with the occupation of Guantánamo Bay and the building of the Panamá canal (Hulme 42-43). Since then, there has been notable transnational movement between the Caribbean and North American urban space. Hoffnung-Garskof says that as the Dominican state withdrew from spending on education, healthcare, and price supports, Dominicans turned to the informal sector and international migration (269). Although migrants left their homeland to survive, Sophie Maríñez argues that in the Dominican Republic, the local intellectual debate excludes diaspora except when it demonizes it (151). Those who leave are deemed "dominicanos ausentes" and criticized for abandoning their homeland.

Unlike men, female migrants often face different challenges by virtue of living in patriarchal societies that pressure them to behave within accepted societal norms so that they may be read as intelligible subjects. Carole Davies states that to think of space and Caribbean

identities means to also deal with a series of movements (748). As Stuart Hall argues, migration has been a constant theme in the history of the Caribbean, and it is due to this movement in the space of the diaspora, that identities become multiple (Hall 1-2). Even while migrants attempt to keep their old identities, due to the process of migration, they will create new ideas of selfhood. For this reason, many hybrid identities have been created in the Caribbean diaspora as evident in *Dominicanish*.

Ricourt affirms that the Dominican migrant community finds itself between two islands: La Hispaniola and Manhattan (Ricourt 13). For the voice of *Dominicanish* things become even more complicated because she finds herself in "A chosen geography, La Romana, New York, and India" (*Dominicanish* 6). The young girl is located both there and here. One must note that such transnationality denotes different meanings for different types of migrants. For Báez, "esta condición me otorga una infinidad de estímulos constantes y variados. Enriqueciendo mi cultura personal en formas inesperadas. El texto, al igual que la puesta en escena de *Dominicanish* ilustra la creación y estado de mi universo personal" (*Dominicanish* 7). Since Báez, as both performer and creator, expresses an intersectional identity, it is useful to view her work from a nomadic lens.

In contemplating the challenges of a dualistic identity model, Rosi Braidotti provides ground for opposing feminist views by introducing a nomadic position that allows for different representations to coexist (Braidotti 157). Encouraged as a strategy to overcome impasses in feminism discourse, the concept of nomadism is conferred by Braidotti to convince us that a sustainable modern subjectivity is one in flux. For Braidotti nomadic subjectivity is not a rejection of identity, because identity can transition and is an ongoing process. The model of nomadism regards identity to be an assemblage. Stemming from posthumanism, nomadism blurs the boundaries between human, animal, technology, and our environment.

If a nomadic lens is applied, perhaps Báez's identities can coexist instead of conflicting with each other. By cause of identifying and practicing a Hindu Dominicanyork condition, Báez's identity is incompatible with a dualistic model that positions the minority Other as opposite to "the ideal". Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity works as a corrective to the conflicting binary system of identity. She argues that we inhabit a phallocentric society where we are constructed as either men or women by certain symbolic, semiotic, and material conditions (143). Inspired by, but not confined to Deleuze, Braidotti suggests that modern subjectivity is a fluid one averse to hierarchies but still intrinsically other. In her words, this model of modern subjectivity is a new figuration of subjectivity in a multidifferentiated nonhierarchal way (137).

Like the nomadic subject Braidotti imagines, Báez is a multifaceted subject for whom it is necessary to allow her different identities to coexist. She disrupts the hierarchy of power relations that ties difference to inferiority by accepting and performing the labels placed upon her, "Discos del alma con afro. Con afro black is/ beautiful. Black is a color./ Black is my color." (*Dominicanish* 26). By citing a popular saying, Báez demonstrates that her Dominicanyork identity is not only a product of her personal faith and ethnicity, but highly influenced by the civil rights movement. Anton Allahar writes about the process of racial consciousness that migrants experience in several Caribbean diasporas. He describes this process through the mention of black Hispanics who reject their blackness and alternatively decide to emphasize language and cultural difference that minimizes their slave past (5). Similarly Durán Almarza declares that by incorporating herself into the African American community, Báez moves away from the dominant Dominican discourse on race that omits the African roots of the majority of the country's population and perpetuates a fabricated mixed ethnicity between white Spanish colonizers and Taíno natives ("Chewing English" 86). She argues that Báez seeks to de-essentialize notions of coherent ethnic identity by incorporating elements from multiple cultural

backgrounds.

As a result of being exposed to different racial categorization in the diaspora, the narrative voices reconfigure their racial identities, challenging the assumptions of hegemonic racial discourses both in their Dominican and host North American societies (Durán Almarza "Chewing English" 149). Instead of pushing away, she embraces and identifies herself with African heritage and part of the broader African American community. The more Latinos become immersed in the racial ideology of the United States, the sharper and more unyielding the black/white dichotomy becomes and the more powerful their need to free themselves from their African ancestry.

With regards to the performance of *Dominicanish,* Josefina Báez's mouth speaks the linguistic trauma, her words become embodied, and her body demonstrates the dislocation of her experience. Her black garb reflects a process of mourning as she experiences the loss of identity, and her words emerge as a by-product of this trauma. Báez achieves a performance of multiple identities: the girl who encounters English, Josefina the actress and Josefina the Dominicanyork, the Caribbean black woman who is also Hindu. Báez performs multiple identities to demonstrate the multiple contradictions inside of the body of an immigrant, especially that of the Dominicanyork. García-Peña argues that "her performance seeks to reconcile the tensions produced by the hybridity of the Caribbean regions through the simultaneous performance of African and Indian race/cultures and the use of English, Spanish and Hindu languages" ("Performing Identity" 34). In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) Michel de Certeau examines the ways in which humans individualize and alter objects. I have already analyzed the rhetoric of the pedestrian who alters the urban space of New York by engaging with the landscape in their own way. Since both English and Spanish are riddled with tangled histories of oppression, Báez's transformations and transmutations of them performs an act of everyday resistance. The

movements of her body juxtaposed with her speech creates a new reality inside an unofficial language.

Here I invoke the term "everyday resistance" from Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson who have developed a framework for everyday resistance to articulate the ways that people act in everyday ways to undermine power that is typically disguised and not politically articulated (2).[70] Various examples of everyday resistance are evident in Báez's work. Her code-switching and hairstyles are two examples which I have presented in this chapter. Although they seem like mundane acts, they undermine systems of power. Instead of speaking what Delueze and Guattari call the "major language," Báez produces a rhetoric from her liminal position that encompasses both English, Spanish and their vernacular. By consciously wearing her hair in cornrows, Báez embraces her black identity and combats oppression by embodying otherness as a choice. Albeit bell hooks' understanding of everyday resistance is embedded in an African American nucleus, one which asserts that the bottom line of race and racism is white supremacy, I am interested in the way hooks ponders the meaning of resistance and a broader application (inclusive of but not just limited to race) to a Latina feminist perspective. As hooks argues, resistance is an activity connected to subjectivity and it can illustrate itself in fleeting acts of rebellion or uprisings. Resistance for hooks is a space of possibility. Further, hooks contends that performance can either be an act of complicity or an act of intervention if it operates as a site of resistance (211). Since Báez is conscious of her acts of everyday resistance, these mundane acts are of intervention and transgression. Báez is not only a resistor, but the argument can be made that she is an activist; the performance of resistance in public space is by default a political undertaking. As previously mentioned, hooks argues that performance has been an act central to

[70] See their article ""Everyday Resistance": Exploration of a Concept and its Theories" (2013).

decolonization in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. It allows African-Americans to claim voice, challenge domestic oppression and transgress the boundaries of accepted speech (hooks 212). Performance allows the resistance of indoctrination from Eurocentric biases within the education system and works to decolonize the mind. This is exactly what Báez aims to do with *Dominicanish.*

Douglas Hundley states that the use of Kuchipudi in *Dominicanish* raised concerns with purists and traditional teachers who think it is inappropriate for a western woman to borrow from their practice (110). By doing this, Báez challenges the traditional division between western and eastern practices. Beyond the performance event, Kuchipudi is a marker of Báez's personal brand of spirituality, which is a blend of her Dominican origins and Hinduism. Báez studied the dance technique in the South of India from where it originated and her choice to employ the dance is not one of religious reverence but rather a devotion where the Dominican identity is the celebrated deity (Rivera-Servera 154). Rivera-Servera argues that Baez's use of Kuchipudi honors the cultural origins of the dance form and the history of migration (153). In this way, the performance engages with other diasporic communities while simultaneously exploring Dominican identity (Rivera-Servera 154). I agree with Rivera-Servera as the use of Kuchipudi, paired with the fragmented speech of Báez, reminds us that the performance is about exploring Dominican identity in an urban space among various communities. Rivera-Servera suggests that

> The adoption of Indian classical dance drama is thus a move toward enunciating an encounter between cultures in the metropolis and an active participation in the changing geographies of the city. These dynamics point toward a practice of coalition among peoples of color, and thus mark a significant difference in approach from the more problematic Eurocentric appropriations of culture by American and European theatre practitioners. (155)

Báez's affinity for the dance stemmed from her contact with a spiritual teacher she met in New York City, and after being initiated in Mantra Yoga meditation school of practice, she travelled to India. For Báez, human identity is inclusive, and she refuses to be trapped within essentialist titles. Reflective of her personal journey, her performance of Kuchipudi is both a celebration of her roots and a reminder that in urban space identity is always in negotiation because of contact with other cultures. It is due to the alien movement of Kuchipudi that Báez can capture the attention of her audience. However, Hundley disputes that because Báez's work is so individualized, it risks becoming too foreign to a Dominican audience who might find the work too culturally distinct as it will leave them little opportunity for self-reflection. I think it is worthwhile exploring Hundley's argument by discussing how parody can apply to Báez's work.

Hutcheon's warning that the decoder must be able to identify parody in order to avoid naturalizing the work is risk that Hundley alludes to in his discussion of *Dominicanish.* Parody operates through a series of codes and the audience must overcome and interpret these codes to transgress the Brechtian alienation effect produced in *Dominicanish*. If a receiver does not understand a text as parody, he or she will neutralize both its pragmatic ethos and its doubled structure (Hutcheon 27). Though it risks being too individualized or too foreign, if the audience can understand the coded language and embodiment of the piece, then they are able to understand it as parody of identity. Through the performance of multiple opposing identities, Báez demonstrates that identity is fluid and varied making her vision of identity compatible with the nomadic subject proposed by Rosi Braidotti.

The Brechtian alienation effect depends upon both performers and the audience's critical detachment from a performance. It is intended to maintain the consciousness that the audience is witnessing theatre so that spectators may respond in a distanced, unbiased manner ("Performing Identity" 41-42). Code-switching is a tool used to alienate the reader/spectator and uncouple

identity from its fixed categories. By referencing the ganga, ganges, and ganja, Báez uses wordplay in three languages. According to Sophie Maríñez, this wordplay marks the sexual process of becoming woman in three registers (Maríñez 156). The use of the Dominican/New York/Hindi trio breaks with the normative notions of binary opposites opening the possibilities of plural and fluid identity.

Hundley is correct in conveying that Báez is not just someone who performs for an audience but rather someone who views themselves as performing *with* a community (111). Therefore, with respect to Báez's canon, I belive the alienation effect works in Brecht's desired manner and allows the Dominican diasporic community to not only view performances in their homes but involves them in the process of the production of performance text. The spectators who indulge in the fragmented language and movements of *Dominicanish* can realize that distance is necessary to decode the meaning produced by Báez's body. The process of deciphering such codes allows the spectator to understand that *Dominicanish* presents a parodic vision of socially deemed "incompatible" identities as a means of transgressing entrapping societal norms in everyday life. *Dominicanish* is the external performance of internalized identities. It is the demonstration that identity categories can be bizarre when we view them in unexpected ways. This parodying of identity makes us question our own biases.

Camila Stevens writes about theatre's relationship with collectivity and argues that since the 1990s, artists have relied on counteracting homogenous and territorially bounded visions of national identity with performance by staging of transnational migration. As the object of human rights, the act of making theatre is an exercise of assembly, free speech, and the sharing of cultural life (180). Stevens states that theatre is inherently political because its main subject is man (sic) in relation with another, it is theatre where human life is transcribed as a collective and the participatory nature of its making and reception make it a microcosm of the public sphere

(181). It is an alternative space where groups made invisible in the public sphere of politics can be seen and heard and imagined as a collectivity. Performance as an everyday life practice, transgresses the borders that nation-states try to erect. Unlike other art forms, theatre is immediate and confronts spectators with issues. It intervenes politically by offering a forum that links perception to experience. In the works of Báez, community and the collective are necessary to build and negotiate identity.

In *Dominicanish* the audience is necessary to bear witness. As Emilia Durán Almarza asserts of Báez's *Dominicanish,* "[…] the body of the performer becomes a discursive text in itself whose symbolic meanings need to be decoded by the audience as part of the show." ("Chewing English" 81). Báez's performance pieces differ from traditional theatre in several ways: she performs a narrative influenced by autobiographical events, her body is the central medium where meaning is encoded, she performs her works in both public and unconventional spaces, she is unfaithful to her script, and she challenges the traditional dichotomy of audience/performer. Báez describes her work as "Monologue dialogue conversation" (*Dominicanish* 6) demonstrating the necessity of the relationship with her audience. Although Hundley argues that her audience is mostly educational elite who are less concerned with diaspora and more with her intercultural experiment, one must note that Báez performs her works in alternative settings unlike conventional theatre. She performs in the streets, in schools and in the homes of those who invite her in (Hundley 109). She refuses to perform until the audience has had the opportunity to socialize. This not only allows her to test out her work, but it allows her to share her performance texts with her community. By doing this, Báez plays with the boundaries of the passive spectator.

In his book *Postdramatic Theatre*, German theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann summarized several tendencies happening during the end of the 1960s. He argued that new

theatre was marked by the use and blending of heterogeneous styles that situates itself beyond dialogue and incorporates the notion of the performer as both theme and protagonist (4). Instead of attempting to stay true to script, postdramatic theatre strives to produce an effect amongst the spectators. Traditional theatre perpetuates the spectator as silent observer but Báez often repurposes the role of her audience.

With regards to the traditional notions of theatre, Jacques Rancière calls for a different theatre without spectators, not empty seats but rather a theatre with a different relationship between spectators and performance.[71] He believes that audience members should become active participants instead of passive voyeurs (4). Rancière argues that modern attempts to change theatre have vacillated between two poles: distanced investigation or vital participation (5). Theatre betrays itself by making the spectator passive, therefore there is no community action. *Dominicanish* may sustain the form of passive voyeur to alienate the spectator, but Báez is conscious that she not only performs for her community but with them. Therefore, she tests her work with her community. For Rancière, emancipation occurs through the blurring of the lines between those who look and those who do. It is in this way that individual audience members can become part of a collective body (19). By performing in the private setting, Báez is not only making a statement about access and art, but blurring the line between performance by socializing with her community in their homes while performing. The audience is no longer passive observer and is integrated into the performance in a nontraditional way, establishing what Rancière deems as emancipation.

Diaspora for Báez represents the space of the in-between which she entitled the Ni e'. At

[71] Rancière is a French philosopher who studied under Louis Althusser but later disassociated from his former teacher. At the center of Rancière's philosophy is radical equality. Particularly Rancière holds that humans are adept to understand and emancipate themselves from their own oppression without direction from elite theoreticians.

a presentation at the Instituto Cervantes at Harvard University, Báez explains that this space represents the neither. Though the Ni e' is also a vulgar term for the space between the vulva and the anus, Báez uses it to define the space that is neither here nor there. It is not a border but rather a space of liminality. In the Caribbean tradition, performance has been and continues to be a central form of transmitting meaning used to insert excluded histories into popular historical narrative (Hulme, 43). It could be argued that Báez uses performance to insert the narrative of Dominican diaspora. As a marginalized subject, she is inserting her liminal subjectivity into popular discourse.

Liminality has particular importance in Post-colonial theory. Like the Ni e', the term liminality defines the interstitial environment where cultural transformation can take place and new discursive forms are produced (Arup Chakraborty 146). The term liminal comes from the writing of Arnold van Gennep who used it in *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) to describe such rituals as coming of age. Yet it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that this term took popularity due to the anthropological writing of Victor Turner. In Post-colonial studies Homi Bhabha uses it as a transitory stage characterized by ambiguity and hybridity (Chakraborty 146).[72] In his text *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha celebrates hybridity as a superior type of cultural in-betweeness. Liminality is the location, where one negotiates between cultures. This constant negotiation of self is why Báez believes that she is always in the process of "becoming." Although hybridity became part of the colonialist history of racism, Bhabha states that this type of identity challenges any notions of essentialist cultural identity (Chakraborty 149). The liminal space has the possibility to include and accept as it goes beyond binary colonial thinking. It is

[72] Homi Bhabha is a critical theorist and one of the most significant theorists of post-colonial studies. One of his central concepts is hybridity. Bhabha posits that hybridity describes new forms of multiculturalism where colonial cultures and histories inform the present.

from this liminal space that Báez creates her texts. The feeling of alienation in diaspora serves as opportunity to re-evaluate the identity of the migrant. This renegotiation of identity is evident in the coming-of-age story for the young girl in *Dominicanish.* Although they are still hybrid Dominicanyorks, the poetic voices of both *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* (*Comrade*) and *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork* (*Levente*) are more confident and comfortable with their liminal identities. As liminal subjects, they find themselves negotiating between identities and cultures.

Báez's way of playing with the formalities of published texts continue in both *Levente* and *Comrade*, however, in these two titles unlike *Dominicanish*, she takes it a step further and purposefully omits page numbers. This creates a challenge when it comes to the standardized rules of writing in academia and giving authors credit for their work. For this reason, the quotes below appear without reference numbers. This is reflective of the transgressive nature of her work. *Comrade* exists as a stream of inner dialogue to which the reader is given access and has often had its performatic function discussed as poetry, while *Levente* is a collection of anecdotes about neighbours living in an apartment complex and is the only one of these performance texts to first emerge from a written script. Since they have no clear linear narratives, the reader can read these texts in the traditional manner or open them to any page they desire and create their own narrative order.

Cristiane Lira's reading of *Comrade* presents the text as new type of literature, which she calls "post-post-modernism" where the poetic voice engages in dialogue while avoiding brutal descriptions of reality.[73] Lira argues that instead this voice favours lightness and encounters mystical forms of resistance to violence ("Josefina Báez Não Está de Brincadeira")[74]. I agree

[73] See Lira's paper "Josefina Báez Não Está de Brincadeira: Negociando o Seu Espaço Através do Sagrado e da Delicadeza."

[74] Lira's paper does not have page numbers.

with Lira when she states that the experience of reading *Comrade* is like encountering a naked dialogue where you walk beside Báez. It very much feels as though you have been immersed in the personal world of the poetic voice who invites you to participate in their stream of consciousness. *Comrade* is a text that moves you through the mind of the poetic voice, by stating such declarations as "The tour continues…", "The trip continues." and that the voice is "Migrating every day." We must listen and learn from marginalized subjects, or as Báez would put it, to listen to the subjects of the Ni e'. With respect to *Comrade, bliss ain't playing*, Báez states that she preferred the use of bliss since happiness is too "coca-cola," or rather the term happiness is attached to consumerist ideologies. The idea of happiness is intrinsic to the romanticized notion of the migrant realizing the American dream. In contrast, Báez's corpus is filled with realistic everyday experiences of the Dominicanyork, thus she opts for the use of "bliss" as a marker of inner expression. Lira argues that *Comrade* is the space of inner, where its geography is the middle, and identity exists on a hyphen between the mundane and the sacred. For Lira, the text represents a negotiation between the internal and external, and between scream and silence.

It is important to remember that Báez identifies as a Hindu woman and practices Hinduism, as evident in her incorporation of the traditional Kuchipudi dance in her performance of *Dominicanish*. So then if bliss is a marker of inner expression for Báez, her understanding of bliss is in line with that of Hindu thought. In Hinduism, happiness and bliss are two distinct concepts. Happiness is a carnal experience while bliss is a spiritual state that one achieves when they focus on existence itself. Sara Ahmed has an interesting take on happiness and argues that it is constantly referenced as the object of human desire (31).[75] She posits that happiness as a

[75] See Ahmed's chapter "Creating disturbance Feminism, happiness and affective differences" in the anthology *Working with Affect in Feminist Readings: Disturbing Differences* (2010).

feeling may not belong to subjects but rather to objects which in turn gives them value (32). This explains the association consumerism has with the construct of happiness. Ahmed suggests that if we do not have a certain reaction to objects that are attributed as being "good," we can experience alienation from an affective community (34). To best explain this alienation, I once again examine the way Báez chooses to style her hair.

In Candelario's study of beauty shop catalogues she determined that hair is seen as a form of social capital.[76] Candelario states that hair is

> […] a form of social capital that Latina and African American women use to improve their life chances. For these women, engaging in beauty culture is therefore one strategy among others for capital accumulation in the face of systemic barriers to their individual and collective access to well-being. (255)

As I have already mentioned, Cheryl Thompson argues that wearing black hair naturally is a career limiting move because of the corporate culture of fashion. In order to access such corporate culture, one must have *pelo bueno*. Candelario's participants are thus correct in their associations with straight limp hair and class. If unprocessed black hair is *pelo malo* then it limits black women's access to certain sectors of society. *Pelo bueno* becomes a good to which happiness is attributed as this hair is expensive to maintain. To use hair as social capital, women must engage with beauty culture. However, *pelo bueno* is an expensive good to achieve and requires substantial upkeep. By wearing her hair unprocessed, Báez accepts her natural biological existence and like Ahmed suggests, alienates herself from the affective community that associates happiness with *pelo bueno* as a good. This rejection of consumerism is why the

[76] See her chapter ""Black Women Are Confusing but the Hair Lets You Know" Perceiving the Boundaries of Dominicanidad" in her book *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (2007).

poetic voice of *Comrade* alludes to bliss and not happiness. Again, bliss is an inner state of being that isachieved through immersion in existence itself. Despite bliss being an inner spiritual experience and therefore an individual one, the title *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* demonstrates the negotiation between the inner and exterior, between the individual and the collective. Báez's title appears as a collective call to self-spiritual exploration that rejects mainstream notions of happiness, pleasure, and its associations with consumerism.

Although Danny Méndez has a slightly different reading of *Comrade* than Cristiane Lira, their readings are compatible if one understands that bliss is a spiritual construct and happiness is more attached to pleasure and therefore associated with consumerism. Méndez states that *Comrade* was born of the 1990s' tendency to generate theatrical experiences of Dominican identities from the point of diaspora. He argues that Báez frames identity as more of an interrogation not a definition. Méndez uses Sara Ahmed's critique of the ideology of the pursuit of happiness, where Ahmed argues that critics of migration push the idea of the migrant who needs repair and believe that multiculturalism is ungluing society. Liberal political thought in the United States during the mid-twentieth century advocated for immigrant assimilation (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 187-188). Thus, Méndez states that *Comrade* is written in standard English to signal a moment where hybridity is not easily processed within the linguistic, cultural, and political binaries that they parody and play.

In *Comrade*, the mother tongue has become English. This process is both metaphorical and literal as the text opens with a quote in English from Josefina's mother. Bliss appears as a mask worn over a deeper mourning, which is evident in the use of standard English instead of the code-switching evident in *Dominicanish*. With respect to its title: *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*, Méndez suggests that it may have two meanings. First, the title of the text may signal that bliss and play are two different things or, secondly, that bliss has come to stay as serious instead of

playing. Báez manages to reconcile such paradoxes of bliss/mourning, internal/external, individual/collective and scream/silence by negotiating such concepts in the liminal space of the Ni e' that blurs binary contradictions. Méndez opts for the understanding of Báez's bliss as a serious state in which she codes current themes of multiculturalism, hybridity, utopic and dystopic views of immigration. In *Comrade*, diaspora appears as the moment when mobility becomes loss. The text plays with the desire for bliss as a lifestyle and promise of a better life that many migrants search for. It is a reflection of the melancholy experienced by the migrant who refuses to give up bliss.

The persona in *Comrade* is recognized as an archive of materials, "I see myself/ in my many life's stops./ My many desires/ Fears/ Pleasures/ Pains." Instead of demonstrating an emotional attachment to material objects, the poetic voice is affixed to her experiences. Such a notion is more accurately reflective of the reality of the migrant who often must make the difficult choice in leaving material resources in their homeland. Even her feelings appear as a collection and she appears to be in control of them, "There is a map./ There's a map within." Although *Comrade* is a narrative about interiority, the voice uses her fingerprints to serve as their signature pressed on world, "And in between dream and reality:/ Fingerprints./ Yours/ or mine." Between the realm of dream and waking life are the fingerprints, the identity of both narrative voice and reader are to be negotiated in the in-between liminality of el Ni e'. Here the poetic voice expresses the need for the reader, because to realize itself it must depend on collective living, "This island do has bridges,/ Shores, common and international waters/ and countless other contact gadgets, cyber/ talks, lines and postal festivities./ But my hyper-individualism started from my/ collective living./ And so my wars/ from sacred teachings." Like the negotiation of the crooked city that holds possibility in *Dominicanish*, the geography of *Comrade* exists between the binaries of geography and technology. As Lira argues that Báez invokes the spiritual

in her discussion of violence, the wars provoked by collective living are those of her inner dialogue attempting to negotiate her identity when encountering sacred teachings. Without others, her world is a prison. It is the poetic voice's experiences with others that result in her hyper-individualism. From the experiences developed through collective living, the poetic voice learns that identity can be plural, and she must negotiate such cultural identities from the place of the liminal or they cannot be reconciled if treated as opposing ideologies.

Sophie Maríñez suggests that Báez does not want to change the world but to simply captivate it (Maríñez 152). I do agree that the poetic voice in *Comrade* is intrigued by the ability to captivate, but I do not view captivation and change as contradictions. The ability to captivate and to encourage change are not mutually exclusive. Identity is represented by the poetic voice in *Comrade* as an interior process that derives from contact with others. Báez has made it repeatedly clear that she does not want her identity to be reduced to prescribed categories that are often understood to be in opposition. Identity for Báez is inclusive, not exclusive, and it is in this sense that the word "captivate" is meant to hold the attention of others. The poetic voice desires the receptor to listen to the message but also expresses the desire to captivate the world and merge the exterior with the interior as her contact with the exterior is what develops a state of hyper-individualism. Hyper in this context represents an excessive individuality but is not an exclusionary notion. Hyper-individualism is a by-product of contact with the outside world and other diasporic communities that leads to an interior negotiation of identity, and this individuality is dependent upon the collective.

Hyper- used as a suffix can also denote an existence in a space of more than three dimensions. Observing the importance of spirituality for the poetic voice, we can further understand this hyper-individualistic subject to exist beyond the realms of the tangible, concrete, and monolithic identity markers. It may seem paradoxical that a hyper-individual develops from

a connection with the community, however, this performance text is a call for coalition because it is in community that one can share and negotiate identity deriving from contact with others. The term "comrade" is associated with community and mobilization. This usage of concept is not necessarily a push for political action, but simply a gesture toward internal reflection. Another example of the hyper-individual materializing from the contact and connection with the community is Báez's use of Kuchipudi in *Dominicanish* paired with her own brand of spirituality that is heavily based on Hindu and meditation practices. As previously discussed, Kuchipudi is incorporated to represent and celebrate a Dominican divinity in conjunction and contact with other diasporic communities in the metropolis.

Stuart Hall defines identities as names we give to different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within (225).[77] His definition conflicts with Gracia's definition of the term Hispanic I have previously discussed in this chapter. Paula Moya disagrees with Gracia's historical definition that neglects subjective and experiential components of identity. If as Gracia suggests, Hispanics are a group of people comprised by the inhabitants of the countries of the Iberian Peninsula after 1492 and what were to become the colonies of these countries after the encounter with Columbus, this description provides no hints of the place of birth, nationality, economic or social status, sexuality, language, religion, political perspective, or what century this person belongs to. Gracia completely forgets that physical appearance affects how we see each other and how we are treated ourselves. He inappropriately describes the arrival of Columbus as a union of marriage, instead of a project of rape, pillage, and exploitation.

I bring up this article because Moya makes a point of explaining that we define ourselves

[77] Stuart Hall was both a cultural theorist and Marxist sociologist. He opposed reception theory and argued that people were both producers and consumers of culture. For Hall, culture is a vital site where power relations could be created and disrupted.

in relation to whom we are speaking (102). We use ethnic identity markers to locate our geographical lineage to those who may not be familiar. Where Moya may describe herself as a Latina to someone unfamiliar with Latin America, she may tell someone of Spanish speaking descent that she is Mexican. If she wishes to make a political statement, she can name herself as Chicana. Moya makes an interesting point that umbrella identity markers can erase the concerns, interests and perspectives of the less powerful members of the group while privileging concerns of the more powerful (103). The voice of *Comrade* refuses monolithic identity categories and understands that identity is subjective and plural,

> Of the many feelings/ felt in this life,/ identity,/ and its plural, identities,/ is the most complex./ So they say./ So their theories say./ So./ Imagine./ A prioritized feeling/ that photographs a nation./ Flagless nation./ A nation with no flag./ A feeling that shows and tells how and why I/ constantly dance/ loving my black body/ and my natural crown of hair.

For the poetic voice, identity is internal, the inner experience that results from subjective experiences of interacting with the world and others. Identity is not imposed by a flag, it is not marked by history as Gracia defines it, but by subjective feelings of how one interacts with normative systems of governance. In the above quote, the voice embraces her hair and skin. She is conscious that these are physical markers of otherness but welcomes them. She also employs the photograph, which is a still art form. It is impossible to capture the whole nation as a photograph as it is a unidimensional tool that cannot show the subjective experience of identity, it is only a vision of the external.

In addition to a plural identity, the poetic voice understands that mainstream culture considers certain types of identities as commodities: “What I call my work now,/ will later be treated as some sort of a/ commodity./ Commodity from the margin,/ or the phrase politically

correct at the time./ A product valued only after my death." Like the push against the idea of consumerist happiness, those in the margins produce commodities for those in the center. The artists of the margins only acquire value after their death; their experiences are not valuable in life.

Báez migrated to New York in 1972 during which time the Caribbean Latino participation in culture was prominently Puerto Rican and had a strong influence on the Dominican diaspora (Flores 175). Pedro Pietri was a young writer at the time and in 1973 published his poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" which deals with the difficult realities of Puerto Ricans in New York. This poem serves as an influence to Báez's *Comrade*. In "Puerto Rican Obituary" Pietri takes an anti-consumerist approach and portrays a divided Puerto Rican community envious of their neighbours' goods, "Juan/ Miguel / Milagros/ Olga/ Manuel/ All died yesterday today/ and will die again tomorrow/ Hating fighting and stealing/ broken window from each other" (Pietri 8). For Pietri, Puerto Ricans are the means for production of goods in American society and it is the lack of dialogue and blind obsession with material wealth that makes them complacent in their own circle of death. Working in factories, they literally produce commodities from the margins. They participate in mindless work and take no time to contemplate history. This desolate vision portrays Puerto Ricans as objects who have no value in American society after death because they no longer serve production. In Pietri's poem Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga and Manuel are generic names and represent the cycle of life and death. They are objects who only serve society in life, however, the poetic voice of *Comrade* describes the value the marginal artist can achieve after death if their work is worthy of acceptance in mainstream society and can be converted into a commodity.

In Báez's *Comrade* the poetic voice is conscious of the way that those in the center use the culture of those at the edge of society,

> In few places I found amazing, unbelievable,/ too good to be true order, defined social/ structures, cleanness, higher taxes/ and greater social returns/ nature highly respected,/ impressive cultural agendas,/ global warming mindful,/ civic-civil citizens./ But migrants were not welcomed./ And when I say migrant, this time,/ I mean working class/colored conscious/ migrants.

Migrants are not welcome, even in a place where those in the center claim to have impressive cultural agendas. They appear to be culturally aware, but only at face value. They fear the migrant who may disrupt their order, those who claim to be culturally aware are really part of a racist society not willing to be allies to those in the margins or recognize their own privilege. The poetic voice's critique extends to groups who claim to be conscious of human rights, "A humane performance for the world stage." Here the poetic voice critiques the United Nations, and says they want inward prestige and galas instead of doing change. She is critical of large humanitarian organizations who only wish to achieve inner peace with their philanthropy and instead use the aid given to them in irresponsible ways. Perhaps Báez borrowed from Pietri's critique of religion in "Puerto Rican Obituary." Both Báez and Pietri find irony in groups that claim respect for human life yet are riddled with corruption and concerned with material gains. These systems exploit the vulnerable and thus Báez and Pietri suggest a return to collective living and dialogue.

Instead of a quick lifestyle, the poetic voice of *Comrade* feels identified with slower moving creatures, "As snails and turtles we carry our homes./ We are our home./ And vice-versa./ We are our own country./ My country is a home. I am my home." Here we see the idea of home in diaspora, home is inside of the poetic voice, home is not a physical place but a construction of the mind, it is subjective to feeling. This idea of home as a subjective place is also in *Dominicanish* when Báez states that "home is where theatre is" (*Dominicanish* 37).

I return to the idea of a turtle who takes time, the poetic voice prefers to live life slowly,

"Like them, my steps take their sweet time./ Head out. I go./ Head in. I depart./ And continue my flight. Economy class./ At all times, putting on me the oxygen mask/ first./ Seat belt at all times." The spiritual aspect is present and the necessity to address personal mental health. The poetic voice is aware of the need to take care of oneself before we take care of others. Unlike the voices in *Levente*, the poetic voice in *Comrade* presents itself as more poetic and uses a formal register. In *Levente*, the voices are crude and vulgar and indulge in the informal.

The Obscene Dominicanyork Women of el Ni e'

Dominicanish is the coming-of-age story of a young Dominicanyork, in contrast, the apartment complex in *Levente* is inhabited by sexually awakened characters. With respect to its structure, *Levente* is "Microrelatos del macro cosmo que es el Ni e'." As present in the negotiation of self in both *Dominicanish* and *Comrade,* El Ni e' is a place of liminality where identities can be embraced and redefined. If it were a movie, *Levente* would be a "Película diaria./ Documental de todos los días." Báez is concerned with the mundane everyday experiences of the Dominican migrant since their narratives have often been excluded from popular discourse. If, as Hulme suggests that in the Caribbean tradition, performance has been, and continues to be, a central way that excluded histories are inserted into popular historical narrative, by writing micro-tales and inserting them in the macrocosm, Báez manages to insert the liminal narrative into a Dominican world that refuses to acknowledge diaspora unless it is to demonize it. Playing with the conventions of narration and language, Báez presents different forms of embodying textuality and eliciting permanence. For her, performance transmits meaning through textualities that emerge from the body, which is then required to disseminate its knowledge.

Báez chooses to identify herself as a Dominicanyork, however, García-Peña opts for the

identity marker “dominicano ausente”. The term Dominicanyork originated in the homeland as a derogatory form to refer to those migrating to New York. This term has several negative connotations as migrants are often viewed as betrayers and abandoners, thus when Dominican academics speak of the diaspora, it is demonized. Of Báez, García-Peña states that:

> The richness of her artistic and literary production is a perfect example of the poetics of dominicanidad ausente because it rejects all essentialist forms of nationalism while embracing a multiplicity of experiences, locales, and languages as the true nation-self. Staging the complex negotiation dominicanos ausentes must endure, Báez’s corpus presents us with three sites from which dominicanidad can be (re)imagined and embraced in the United States: (1) body, (2) location, and (3) language. (*The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* 199)

Like García-Peña, I have argued that Báez encodes meaning in her body, language, and space. Specifically using De Certeau’s theory of the rhetoric of walking the city landscape, I have demonstrated how the poetic voice of *Dominicanish* repurposes New York and instead of interacting with New York as an object, the landscape becomes her English teacher. The city acts as her instructor, exposing her to various vernaculars of English and initiating her into Black Speak (from Americans of African descent in the diaspora as per Antonio Brown). In *Levente* the vision of the city is no longer an external one, but an internal one since the poetic voice takes the reader on an imaginary tour of an apartment complex.

De Certeau analyzes the ways that people individualize and alter utilitarian objects in order to make them their own. By doing this, the intended objective function of something is ascribed a subjective meaning, as the poetic voice of *Dominicanish* does with street signs. De Certeau suggests that places are not the orientation of objects, but spaces are determined by the

stories that represents them.[78] Since space is necessary to formulate stories, all stories are inherently spatial, *Levente* is thus a spatial story. Although the *place* is an apartment complex; the *space* is transformed and ascribed subjective meaning by the poetic voice. De Certeau argues that despite the repressive elements of modern society, the art of dwelling can have creative resistance enacted on the *place* by ordinary people. It is not the physical building (place) that should be analyzed but the ways in which the characters of *Levente* attribute meaning to it and transform it into De Certeau's understanding of *space.*

Báez uses *Levente* to make a statement about the constricting view of Dominican femininity. In an interview with Durán Almarza, Báez states that the women of the Ni e' say the things that she has heard Dominican men say. In this crude apartment building, women speak like men (*Performeras Del Dominicanyork* 126). Read in Butlerian terms of gender performance,[79] what is outside of the norm is seen as crude because it is a variation of the normative practice of speech and behaviour. The women of the Ni e' transgress the norm of behaved woman rendering themselves intelligible subjects. By parodying the words of men, they make such misogynistic behaviour appear ridiculous and manage to create a variation of the rules of repetition where the women of the Ni e' opt to be read as intelligible subjects. For Butler, drag performances of gender are imitations of an imitation since gender is a construction of discourse. By imitating hyper-masculinity, the women of the Ni e' parody it allowing the reader to unpack the meaning encoded in their language. By encoding their speech in such a manner, their intent

[78] See Michel de Certeau's chapter "Spatial Stories" in *The Practice of Everyday Life.*

[79] Judith Butler maintains that gender is a repeated construction and a compulsion to act in a way that society deems appropriate. If you act outside of this norm of being, you become illegible.

to perform outside of the matrix of intelligibly makes them transgressive[80].

The Ni e' exists as a liminal space in which the women of this apartment building can choose how to self-govern themselves. While not free of modern society's repression and pressure to be what Butler calls legible subjects, in the confines of their dwellings, the women of the Ni e' experience the opportunity to be themselves. The identities that they present are parodies of hyper-masculinity. By imposing this hyper-identity on their bodies, Báez shows that identity is a construction. According to Linda Hutcheon, parody can de-doxify or rather unsettle all accepted beliefs and ideologies (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 95). Hutcheon states that "through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (93). So then by presenting hyper-masculinity to make fun of it, the reader of *Levente* is forced to unpack the contradictions inherent in gender.

In addition to transgressing gender norms, Báez uses technological platforms of communication and disrupts the confines of published text. She uses chat, blog, text message, and creates her own abbreviations that you must use to find meaning in the pages that proceed her shorthand legend. Not surprisingly, Báez is highly interested in the way we use language, especially the way words sound. This is evident in the highly corporal movements her spoken words produce in *Dominicanish.* Similarly to the traumatic act of learning English that we have seen in *Dominicanish*, the neighbours humorously talk about teaching Spanish to the gringos who move to the barrio, "Vamos a comenzar a enseñarles el idioma./ Comenzamos-we start-with a very important/ sound Phonics for you rubio./ Read in English Tea To A (as in apple)/ Repeat

[80] Butler argues that those who operate in "abnormal" manners become illegible. The matrix of power is a concept Butler uses to describe this process of becoming a legible subject. To be a legible subject, one must ascribe to normative ways of being as defined by society's ideologies or rather the matrix of power.

after me Tea To A TITUA!!!!" Titua is a Dominican onomatopoeia usually used when someone is hit. This is reflective of Báez's interest in the musicality of words. Not just her words but the images she imposes on the mind of the reader become musical invocations, "Suena siempre una sirena aqui." The sirens of emergency vehicles serve as the soundtrack of el Ni e'.

Instead of attempting to blend in, the characters of *Levente* bask in their Dominicanyork identity, "[…] I know. I could blend-in/ telling the group how brownies, home-made/ apple-pie and Mom's soup makes me feel." Here the poetic voice uses standard English to signify the act of assimilation, but she refuses to forget her heritage and her comfort food she tells the white Americans to "Get your dictionary to translate my comfort/ zone." In addition to food, physical appearance serves as an identity marker, "Pero recuérdate que aquí hay negros/ como nosotros, pero son a me ri canos. Yo no/ he visto a ningun Moreno llamandose African/ American. They are black. Y punto." The voice understands African American to be a political term used by Americans, for her, it's not that her "morena" identity is more important but she is aware of the historical and ethnic descent the term "moreno" implies. She even makes the reader contemplate their own identity, "¿Y tú, cómo dices quién eres?" This question to the reader serves to provoke us to think, it is a mode of making the reader feel involved.

Like in *Comrade*, the women of *Levente* understand that identity is multiple and subjective, "Es este building-isla-barrio-pueblo/ está el mundo y muchísimos universos./ Cada cabeza es un mundo./ Hay muchos mundos en cada cabeza./ Made and in the making./ Made in Ni E'./ Ni E' making." Each brain is a world filled with subjective experiences. This apartment building that houses mental universes is in NYC. As Dominicanyorks, they must interact with American society and find their individual ways to negotiate it. This is evident when one of the voices speaks of the political landscape in the US. Although they are conscious of the difference between an African American and a Dominicanyork, they opt to vote for Obama simply because

he looks like them. Physical identity markers make Obama a part of their community. Lira argues that *Dominicanish* exists in a post-nationalist world where one may be different but can find parallels in the world despite their difference, this is true too of *Levente* ("Josefina Báez Não Está de Brincadeira"). The women of the Ni e' feel identified with Obama although they know he is an African-American and not a Dominicanyork. Pedro Noguera comments that in a society where black is equated with inferiority and savagery, it is better to be anything other than black ("Anything but Black: Bringing Politics Back to the Study of Race" 194). This is why upon migration many Caribbean Latinos choose to highlight their Latino identity to distance themselves from blackness. Yet the women of the Ni e' knowingly choose Obama as a political symbol. One could argue that Obama's skin colour is not as dark as other African Americans and could be read as a "moreno" thus the poetic voice of *Levente* feels identified with him, but I take this a step further and read it under what Sara Ahmed calls the "feminist killjoy."

Addressing questions of happiness in her chapter "Creating disturbance: Feminism, happiness and affective differences," Ahmed makes a significant point that could be applied to the context of *Levente*. Ahmed states that Audre Lorde and bell hooks have placed the figure of the feminist killjoy alongside the figure of the angry black woman, but in some cases, one becomes a feminist killjoy by simply entering a room (36). One can be what Ahmed calls "affectively alien" because your proximity gets in the way of people's enjoyment. One's presence may simply be enough to kill joy by forcing people to remember and confront difficult histories. In this way, a black woman can become a feminist killjoy by simply being present and reminding those in the room of past histories associated with the colour of her skin. I bring this up because unlike the outer space of the city, the inner space of the Ni e' exists as a liminal space for the liminal identities of those who reside in it. The Ni e' becomes a safe space where the women of the in-between can simply exist without fear of impeding the joy of others. While the

interior of the Ni e' becomes their space of comfort, they can also feel identified with the outside world through Obama. By virtue of having a black president, blackness becomes slightly less undesirable in mainstream culture and the women of the Ni e' feel slightly less rejected.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed *Dominicanish* (2000), *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*, and *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork.* Although *Dominicanish* is her most famous text, Báez still remains highly understudied. She insists that her written texts require performance and thus they belong to what Diana Taylor defines as the realms of the archive and the repertoire. Báez constructs multiple identities in her performance using her body. She utilizes performance to parody and question societal norms and create examples of opposing identities. With respect to the performance of *Dominicanish* and the fragmented form of her written texts, I have proposed that Báez uses the Bretchian alienation effect to distance her audience from her performance to make them cognizant that what she is indeed doing is performing identity. This parodic vision of identity demonstrates what Rosi Braidotti refers to as "a multifaceted plural identity" (2011).

In *Dominicanish* we are introduced to the young Dominicanyork coming of age, who code-switches and exists between the liminal space of Dominican/Yankee/Hindu. Báez realizes that code-switching possesses the ability to dismantle identity as singular and rooted, and that this notion may extend to the constrictions of written genres. By insisting on a triple identity that appears to conflict with itself, Báez parodies the binary system of classification, in which we view identities as opposing entities. Such an attack on identity, produces what Judith Butler deems a variation of repetition of the normative (2011). It is by variating from the normative structure and refusing to be a legible subject, that Báez demonstrates transgression. In the works of Báez, community and the collective are necessary to build and negotiate identity. In

Dominicanish the audience is necessary to bear witness. In *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* the collective is vital as it is from collective living the written voice becomes hyper-individual. In *Levente no. Yolayork-dominicanyork*, it is the communal apartment complex that serves as the actual Ni e'. Although the women of the apartment complex in *Levente* are crude and refuse to perform femininity in expected ways, Báez's project is slightly different in *Comrade*. Still insisting on the necessity of the collectivity to form one's own subjectivity, Báez uses *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing* to attack consumerist notions and false ideologies of migration.

Tania Modleski states that feminist critical writing is performative and utopian, it is an enactment of belief in a better future and the act of writing that brings this future closer ("Some Functions" 15). Through her autobiographical writing, or rather her performance autology, Báez brings her future closer. Due to what Butler deems "the failure to repeat," Báez as the autobiographical subject can transgress. This is so as Smith argues that the practices where gendered subjects are produced may become sites of critical agency (Smith 200). Allahar suggests the diaspora is a living and changing body made up of migrants (involuntary or willing), who form communities away from their homeland as they "share a set of common experiences, feelings, myths, beliefs, and even values and memories of home." (9). Thus the figure of the body in Báez's corpus appears as an encoded diaspora that forces her spectators to navigate its movement and speech despite their alienation. Performance for Báez is an act of resistance, it is a way to resist power and decolonize the mind. Her body exists as space for resistance where Báez negotiates as a way of being.

Conclusion

Recently, I found myself sitting next to a co-worker at a work dinner. He shared his distaste for the great outdoors, bewildered that anyone would find joy in camping. He proceeded to tell us that he had a lifetime of memories of power outages and insect bites working in the fields of Cuba and would never understand why people drive into the wilderness and choose to experience what for him are clearly conditions of poverty and not leisure. Hearing him go on about his aversion to sleeping outdoors and his abhorrence to willingly exposing oneself to the elements, highlighted just how different our childhoods were. Being a first-generation Canadian myself, my Portuguese immigrant parents have always taken pride in integrating us into Canadian culture the best they could while still proudly celebrating our roots. Ironically enough, my mother, who grew up in a village without electricity and indoor plumbing, is a big proponent of camping and outdoor cooking (perhaps due to a misplaced sense of nostalgia for the simpler life and return to communal living pervasive in her childhood). At that dinner, I did not dare tell my Cuban co-worker that some of my fondest memories are of my family huddled around a campfire. I knew that this was instead a moment to actively listen to his stories of his homeland.

He continued to tell us more about his childhood and the mandatory agricultural labour that accompanied his education as a pubescent Cuban boy. He made it clear that this work was not paid, but if he wanted to receive an education, it was the trade-off. In Cuba, education was public, and government funded. To go to school was a privilege, and the state made sure you worked in return for said privilege. While he left Cuba at a point that did not allow the flexibility for return, his niece has never left the island and will be coming to Canada shortly to visit him. We all remarked upon the imminent culture shock this young woman is about to experience. At

the same time, my co-worker shared that his parents have had the opportunity to visit family in Miami many times but have never showed an interest in permanently leaving their homeland. Each visit is predictably the same: after a few weeks pass, his elderly father declares that he needs to go back to Cuba. Asked what it is that he needs to do so urgently, he responds, "nothing, I just *need* to be there."

I share this anecdote as a reflection on the complicated relationships between host country and homeland. Some migrants hold nostalgic visions of the homeland; others enjoy the flexibility of the movement between borders; and for some, the homeland is a ghost that will continually negatively haunt their past. In my thesis, I have insisted that the mundane and everyday stories of migration are not only relevant but indispensable, yet it never occurred to me to ask my colleague about his own experience as a Cuban migrant. While some workplaces are more conducive to opening up about our personal lives, it is not something that is encouraged in professional office environments in North America, and in many cases is quite frowned upon. Had we not shared a dinner outside of the workplace, I would have never been privy to these accounts and firsthand testimony of migration that I discuss in this project.

This story persists as a reminder that we need to open more spaces for sharing and storytelling and this is why I am an ardent defender of performance. While the office may not be apt territory to disclose our intimate workings and paint in-depth visions of autobiography (I am sure the Human Resources departments in most organizations would agree), the locations and spaces where this continues to be permissible should be held with reverence as our workplace concern with productivity and impersonality poses a threat to their dissemination.

The central argument of this project is that the body is a performance text itself and manifests its own symbolic forms of language. If the body exists as text, it is a source of meaning that can easily transmit context and substance. It houses knowledge of a person's lived

experiences and functions as an apparatus of storytelling. What it *tells* is of the utmost importance. Thus, the interpretation of how bodies are used in performance is vital. This project explores the representations of artists that discuss what it means to create, to live and to survive in a culture with hierarchical understandings of identity. These texts and artists question identity categories and refuse monolithic identities by calling into question singular understandings of identity with their hybrid migrant bodies that show the fallacy of this narrative. These dramatists also question the hierarchies of meaning and value by highlighting difficult histories of colonization, slavery, and genocide. These violent histories are put into focus but are also explored in parallel with more modern regimes of power like that of the Cuban landscape in the Special Period along with other systemic forms of oppression that affect women living in the Hispanic speaking diaspora that inhabit North American urban spaces. This dissertation also maps the sociohistorical background that shapes the current circumstances of the Caribbean diaspora to help define the conditions that frame transnational movement between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States. Such movement is not just of products and goods, but also of people, ideologies, religions, and morals. Therefore, the diaspora is a matrix of economic, political, and cultural interrelations that create an area of commonality between a group of dispersed people (Brah 196).

Due to the limited scope of this project, the focus has been on performance pieces from the Dominican Republic and Cuban diasporic space, but a more comprehensive study would benefit from an analysis of Puerto Rican diasporic texts such as those of Teresa Hernández, Sylvia Bofill, and Carmen Rivera. I would also have liked to include analysis of the ways that performance artists and playwrights adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, negotiating the limitations of presence, spatial concerns, and audience participation. Initiatives such as the Hemispheric Institute, with their digital archives, public gatherings, residences, and publications

that exist to brings together artists, scholars, and activists from the Americas as a location to engage in social justice and research politically engaged culture and performance, were champions of adjusting to the constraints implemented by public policy and social distancing rules which would normally postpone performance projects all together. In a Zoom interview with the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña Sylvia Bofill herself, whose work is concerned with questions of space and embodiment, discusses the concerns and accommodations that she had to make in her playwrighting during the pandemic.

I believe that the performance text is not just a mode of storytelling, but it is a political project that can engage an audience and foster transgressive modes of thinking. Like Camila Stevens argues, theatre is inherently political because it is based on a collective relationality that intertwines the viewed and the viewer, the performer and the spectator, the artist, and the audience. Performance, a term that encompasses the whole event, only exists in the present, which makes it slippery and elusive for power to respond. This project explores how can power be wielded over something that disappears.

Operating from the hypothesis that the body is a performance text, this dissertation considers the following questions: 1) What is performance? 2) How does the body communicate? 3) What are the advantages and disadvantages of an ephemeral medium? 4) What is the role of the audience in these scripted enactments? Targeting liminality, identity, and community, I inquire how performance interacts with the hybrid space of its subjects, exploring embodied language and its contributions to the textual significance of lived experiences of dramatists who belong to countries with distinct colonial histories. These chapters probe the mechanisms which performance uses to shape, parody or interrogate societal norms with examples of opposing subjectivity. This investigation also discovers how these texts represent and create community by analyzing the role of the spectator, family, and the wider collective of

which these productions are in dialogue.

While more broadly, the term performance is used to talk about social dramas and embodied practices (Taylor "Acts of Transfer" 3), I agree with Diana Taylor that performance operates as an epistemology. Since the body is a discursive text, this project examines how María I. Fornés, Alina Troyano, Josefina Báez, Elizabeth Ovalle, Carmen Rivera, Coco Fusco, and Carmen Peláez use their bodies to *tell* and disseminate knowledge while navigating their hybridity as migrants and exiles. Their performances explore what it means to inhabit the Hispanic speaking diaspora as subjects with multifaceted identities. Liminality, identity, and community thus become central frameworks in understanding these performances. In this project I also discuss intersectionality as a mode of responding to the previous exclusion of women of colour in contemporary feminist thought. Intersectionality is a way of understanding how race, gender, and class as well as other individual characteristics intersect and overlap with each other and inform women's lived experiences. As women are associated with the concrete daily and quotidian experience, this dissertation is comprised of an assortment of productions that consider these themes as a reference point for producing knowledge via the body.

The body in this study is presented as a form of knowledge sharing since women have always been associated with the body and men with intellectual pursuits. Furthermore, as orality has existed in the Caribbean as a form of intelligence creating countercultures according to Jean Bernabé et al., I have outlined how these performances and the bodies of these artists exist in direct opposition to homogenous and monolithic understandings of identity. Although they perform fictionalized and constructed narratives, the dramatists of my study often represent autobiographical accounts and thus their body has often lived through the script. The analysis of these accounts is crucial as quotidian lived conditions of diaspora and exile are often perceived as unworthy of research.

Performance and orality are forms of transmitting meaning. Embodied knowledge, like written knowledge, has transcended centuries. Oral traditions such as narrations, song and folktales are forms that have been used across generations to share culture. Thus, my dissertation considers the body a text and is concerned with the process of using the body as a mode of communication. Because women have long been associated in Western culture with the body, this study discusses a collection of performances that consider the concrete daily and quotidian experience as reference points, especially where diaspora is concerned. As performance is a fleeting medium due to its ephemeral nature, I question why an artist would opt for this medium by exploring what advantages an embodied textuality can provide. As communication maintained its uni-directionality as meaning-making stemming from centuries old privilege of written over embodied knowledge (Taylor "Acts of Transfer" 8), in hopes of contesting this uni-directional flow and stimulating the conversation in a reciprocal form, I have chosen a selection of performance texts that have never been studied in a comparative manner and of which not many academic critiques are available.

In this project performance is understood as a live theatrical event where the body is the apparatus which transmits meaning to an audience while scripts and videos are representations of said event. This notion is based on Diana Taylor's 2003 book *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* where Taylor references the live event as part of the repertoire and the representations (video, script, photographs, recordings) as belonging to the archive. The repertoire of embodied memory can transcend time and continually exist through movement, gestures and other bodily processes and it is this possibility that allows performance to propose various opportunities from those forms of representation and writing only accessible in the archive.

I have curated a corpus of works in which the body of the actor is as influential as the

narration. In many of the performance texts that have been explored in this project, the quotidian experienced of actors and their bodies are paramount to the performance event. In these plays the author is the performer herself as a substitute to a hired cast. This self-performance is deliberate and representative of oral forms of storytelling that have been preferred in the Caribbean. One of the incentives of this research was to understand what these artists and performance texts could demonstrate about the lives of migrant women who inhabit the diasporic space of the Hispanic Caribbean and have had contact with North America. Performance is ephemeral and has thus been understudied in academia. My analysis of these autobiographical accounts seeks to make an important contribution to the field of Caribbean studies because it focuses on the everyday conditions of diaspora and exile often deemed unworthy of research.

In my close examination of liminality, identity, and community, I have sought to understand how performance relates to the hybrid space of its subjects. My readings of the performances have explored how each artist uses performance to construct, question or parody societal norms through the construction of an oppositional subjectivity. These performances, powerful even if ephemeral, have had the power to create community, to depict and indeed create a world in which the spectator is incorporated into the embodied community that the performers create.

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