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Source: *MELUS*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Home: Forged or Forged? (Winter, 2005), pp. 129-147

Published by: The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30029638>

Accessed: 08/01/2010 11:15

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# The Global Baggage of Nostalgia in Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban*

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Since its publication and nomination for the National Book Award in 1992, *Dreaming in Cuban* has enjoyed a great deal of critical interest within and outside of the academy. The novel was quickly canonized and incorporated into the fields of Latino/a and ethnic American literature, as evinced by its inclusion in numerous anthologies, such as *Masterpieces of Latino Literature* (1994), *The Brooklyn Reader: Thirty Writers Celebrate America's Favorite Borough* (1994), *Little Havana Blues: A Cuban-American Literature Anthology* (1996), and *The Latino Reader: An American Literary Tradition from 1542 to the Present* (1997). The novel was even adapted for the stage in 1999 at the American Place Theatre in New York City. Cristina Garcia's first novel also soon became the subject of numerous doctoral dissertations, the earliest of which were completed in 1993 and 1995 by David Thomas Mitchell and Ibis del Carmen Gómez-Vega, shortly after the book's publication, indicating the early academic acceptance of Garcia's novel. This essay, however, takes issue with the critical reception of *Dreaming in Cuban*, in particular, the celebratory reading of the migration theme in the novel. By reading against the grain of this discourse, I will highlight the textual ambivalence of nostalgia that has been glossed over by critics and the imaginative limits the novel places on Pilar's act of "dreaming in Cuban" in a globalized context.

The critical discussion surrounding *Dreaming in Cuban* includes a variety of approaches, particularly feminist and postcolonial readings. This body of criticism generally argues that Garcia's

novel challenges the coherence of concepts such as nation, history, and patriarchy. More importantly, these interpretations are guided by a desire to locate travel as beneficial and enabling reconnection. *Dreaming in Cuban's* popularity within academic discourse is closely linked to the representation of exile and migration within the novel. Pilar emerges as the embodiment of a migratory subject; the critics articulate her identity as culturally in-between and, therefore, capable of moving physically and psychically between the locations of Cuba and the US. Underpinning all of these readings of Garcia's novel is the interpretation of Pilar's journey to Cuba as a positive and recuperative move that facilitates communication across generational and geographical lines.<sup>1</sup> "The loss incurred by exile" is linguistic, cultural, and historical (Alvarez-Borland 46). The return consequently provides Pilar with access to a family history as well as Cuban culture that she was previously lacking; she "can now preserve that family history and in the process know her own identity and place in this long and fascinating saga" (Payant 174). More specifically, then, this return is represented as a reclamation of identity, such that when Pilar leaves Cuba behind at the end of the novel, she takes with her a new sense of self: "the journey home to Cuba allows her to translate and define herself" (Gómez-Vega 99).

Indeed, Pilar is described as traversing "the path from exile to ethnicity" (Alvarez-Borland 48). While traveling to Cuba provides her with "full knowledge of her Cuban ancestry, of who she is" (Gómez-Vega 98), the criticism accepts the logic behind Pilar's decision to return to the US. This logic takes the form of a declarative statement: "Although Cuba is home, New York is more so" (Vásquez 24). Despite Pilar's "hyphenated existence," the criticism agrees that Pilar "does not belong in the real Cuba" (Payant 173). Pilar's choice to return to the US is deemed inevitable; she has acquired the knowledge she needed, so it is time to leave. Celia's death at the end of the novel is consequently depicted as a necessary step for Pilar to fully develop her new identity and independence from Cuba. Since Pilar has inherited the mission of recording the family history, Celia's "death represents rebirth and regeneration" rather than "an act of despair" (O'Reilly Herrera 90).

Reconsidering the final image of Celia's "slow extinguishing" (Garcia 244), this essay seeks to reassess the traditional readings of

Pilar's return to and departure from Cuba. Within this body of criticism, Pilar's nostalgia for Cuba is depicted as the product of her family's exile and thus, the sole motivating force for Pilar to initiate her travel that is ultimately satisfied by her reconnection with Celia. Within this essay, I will argue that this nostalgia must be read in relation to the novel's representation of globalization<sup>2</sup> and its workings. As a result, I hope to complicate the currently established reading of *Dreaming in Cuban*, moving beyond the interpretation of the novel's ending in terms of a merely positive recuperation of identity to its implications regarding the possibilities for cultural production and creativity within a global market.

"Shit, I'm only twenty-one years old. How can I be nostalgic for my youth?" (198): Pilar's question serves as the key to understanding Cristina Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* and its labyrinth of journeys and migrations. At her birth, Pilar inherits a mission from her grandmother, that of recording a family history which will serve as an alternative to the dominant historical narrative.<sup>3</sup> The family's exile, however, prevents Pilar from having direct access to Cuba, the origin and subject of this alternate historical project. Nostalgia consequently serves as the route Pilar travels in order to recuperate her family memories as well as a sense of her own identity and space of belonging. While entrance into a journey of nostalgia leads Pilar to complicate her relationship to Cuba, Pilar's negotiation of her identity is nevertheless overshadowed and overdetermined by this nostalgia and its own confused origins. *Dreaming in Cuban* ambivalently positions Pilar's nostalgia as both a product of her creative imagination and a product of globalization.

Within *Dreaming in Cuban*, nostalgia emerges as the desire to reconnect with the original objects of memory's gaze, to possess an alternative history, one that is personal and familial, over the national and public History.<sup>4</sup> The experience of exile accentuates this desire for a return to the past. In *Questions of Travel*, Caren Kaplan notes that, "When the past is displaced, often to another location, the modern subject must travel to it, as it were. History becomes something to be established and managed through. . . forms of cultural production. Displacement, then, mediates the paradoxical relationship between time and space in modernity" (35). Born in Cuba yet raised in New York City, Pilar finds her

mission to record what “really happens” informed by nostalgia and displacement. For example, Pilar asserts:

If it were up to me, I'd record other things. Like the time there was a freak hailstorm in the Congo and the women took it as a sign that they should rule. Or life stories of prostitutes in Bombay. Why don't I know anything about them? Who chooses what we should know or what's important? I know I have to decide these things for myself. Most of what I've learned that's important I've learned on my own or from my grandmother. (28)

Pilar realizes history is a subjective narrative process, one she shapes to include what has not been recognized as official History.<sup>5</sup> She is particularly interested in recovering the events marking women as active in the creation of history as well as personal stories about female experience.

This desire to record the marginal is linked to Pilar's relationship with her grandmother, Celia. What comforts Celia at the beginning of the novel is that “Pilar records everything” (7). When Pilar finally arrives in Cuba to meet her grandmother again, Celia greets her by saying, “I'm glad you remember, Pilar. I always knew you would” (218). The last letter Celia writes, and which completes the novel, reiterates Pilar's inheritance: “The revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. . . I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything” (245). But why is Pilar chosen for this mission? Since Celia's children are either dead (Felicia and Javier) or deaf to her needs (Lourdes), she tells Pilar that as her granddaughter, she is Celia's last hope for salvation: “Women who outlive their daughters are orphans, Abuela tells me. Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire” (222). Pilar certainly excels early at her recording task, claiming that she remembers everything that's happened to her since she was a baby, even word-for-word conversations (26). Nevertheless, as Pilar becomes older, her ability to connect to her grandmother via her dreams fades, and she is disconnected from Cuba, with only her imagination left to fulfill Celia's request.

In the absence of this authentic connection to Cuba, Pilar finds herself attempting to recapture an alternate history via imagination as well as developing a growing dependence upon commodities to

fill this void of memory. Pilar recognizes that there can be no access to "authentic" origins precisely because of commodification, the only access then being to commodities or commodified experience. As a result, Pilar begins to ponder the limitations set on art and other forms of cultural production in such a globalized context. In particular, she cites the mainstreaming of the punk movement as an example of the market's workings. In a record shop, Pilar sees "a Herb Alpert record, the one with the woman in whipped cream on the cover," noting that it now looks so tame to her (197). The once-provocative cover of the record album is revealed to be an illusion since "the woman who posed for it was three months pregnant at the time" and "it was shaving cream, not whipped cream, she was suggestively dipping into her mouth" (197).

Pilar demystifies the role of music as a counter-culture, but why is it no longer invested with the same ability to challenge norms? What has changed? Pilar points to the entrance of punk music into the mainstream market as a moment of loss:

Franco and I commiserate about how St. Mark's Place is a zoo these days with the bridge-and-tunnel crowd wearing fuschia Mohawks and safety pins through their cheeks. Everybody wants to be part of the freak show for a day. Anything halfway interesting gets co-opted, mainstreamed. We'll all be doing car commercials soon. (198)

The markers of punk, the piercings, the hair, are no longer emblems of a fringe movement but have become mainstream fashion, worn in order to fit in. Pilar remarks on the difficulty of being oppositional without having those visual markers commodified, transformed into a market category that is used in car commercials, for instance, to reach a specific audience. However, it is not simply the visual aspects of these movements that have "sold out"; the cultural production, punk music itself, loses its edge via mass marketing. Pilar laments that in the initial stages of punk music "you could see the Ramones for five bucks" but "nowadays you have to pay \$12.50 to see them with five thousand bellowing skinheads who won't even let you hear the music" (199). Resistance is projected into the past, no longer accessible even to Pilar, who realizes that she too has lost her rebellious edge: "How many lifetimes ago was that? I think about all that great early punk and

the raucous paintings I *used* to do” (emphasis added, 198). Indeed, Pilar now regularly joins jam sessions at Columbia University to play “this punky fake jazz everyone’s into” with her bass (198). The punk culture’s oppositionality is now a sad imitation of an original resistance movement; what is left is an illusion.

Although Pilar states that she wants to be “counted out” of this process of commercialization, she is affected by the market shift and depends upon the flow of the marginal into the mainstream to find alternate modes of reconnecting with her Cuban past (199). In the very same record store where she speaks of her disillusion with punk music, Pilar buys an old Beny Moré album.<sup>6</sup> By taking the position of consumer, she simultaneously engages in the commodification of Cuban culture and bonds with a member of the Hispanic community, the record store cashier, Franco. Thus, the mainstreamed market category of Latin music provides Pilar with access to the cultural production of Cuba. In addition, Pilar connects with a community that shares her interest in these objects of Hispanic culture as well as her experience of exile. With Franco, Pilar discusses “Celia Cruz and how she hasn’t changed a hair or a vocal note in forty years. She’s been fiftyish, it seems, since the Spanish-American war” (197-98). Interestingly, the figure of Celia Cruz, like Cuba itself in the novel, retains a certain timelessness and authenticity that the punk music loses after entrance into the mass market.<sup>7</sup> The purity of Celia Cruz’s selfhood appears to defy any and all historical changes brought about by colonialism as well as the Cuban Revolution. Stuck at “fiftyish,” Cruz seems enviable and anomalous in her ability to remain unaffected by time. The representation of Celia Cruz then appears in stark contrast to that of Pilar’s aging grandmother who shares the same name, and therefore serves to foreground the two veins of cultural inheritance Pilar can trace, either via the market or blood relation.<sup>8</sup>

During Pilar’s visit to a *botánica*, Cuban culture continues to be associated with an immunity to the market’s workings, or located outside of them altogether. Inside the *botánica* on Park Avenue, Pilar finds religious objects which are obviously produced for the mass market, but which are markers of Hispanic-Caribbean culture, such as “plastic plug-in Virgins” (199). Nevertheless, Pilar invests a special meaning in these objects, remarking that “the simplest rituals. . . are most profound” (199). It is of central

importance then that the owner of the shop refuses payment for the objects he gives to Pilar, herbs, a white votive candle, and holy water, with the explanation that "This is a gift from our father Changó" (200). The narrative situates Pilar's initiation into the rituals of *santería* outside of the marketplace, such that the exchange is not a business transaction, and therefore uncorrupted by commodification. Pilar appears to be following in the footsteps of Celia herself, who "visited the *botánicas* for untried potions" to deal with the melancholia incurred by Gustavo's departure (36). The difference, however, is that the narrative highlights the *botánica* as a place of commerce for Celia since she actually "bought tiger root from Jamaica" and other herbs (36). Pilar's encounter is specifically enabled by the *botánica*'s function as a store but nevertheless set outside the rules of market exchange since no monetary payment is made.

Although the text positions Pilar's relationship to *santería* and Cuban culture as outside of market influences, the narrative exhibits some discomfort with locating cultural meaning within market commodities. The ambivalent representation of globalization continues throughout the novel, with Celia linking the function of the market to the transformation of memory into a commodity. Celia portrays memory as beyond definition or boundaries, appearing as ambiguous "slate gray, the color of undeveloped film" (47-48). Commodification, by contrast, seeks to concretize. Celia asserts, "it was an atrocity to sell cameras at El Encanto department store, to imprison emotions on squares of glossy paper" (47-48). The processing of the photographs eliminates the freeform of memory in order to create concrete images that can be mass-produced and sold.

Nostalgia is both a product of the market and yet a motivating force within it, necessitating the continual search for cultural roots, and the commodified versions of them. Within the novel, nostalgia functions as an attempt to allay the damage to affect or emotion incurred by the processes of mass commercialization within contemporary capitalism. Certainly, Celia's description of the relationship of photography to memory and emotion serves as a useful metaphor for this process. Nostalgia desires to transform elusive memory into certainty, and yet the object of memory will always escape the grasp of nostalgia; the photograph is a poor

substitute since it must limit the range of creative possibilities that engender nostalgic desire to begin with.

Even while Celia laments the negative effects of the market, Pilar's mother, Lourdes, views capitalism as a site of empowerment. As proprietor of her own bakery, "Lourdes felt a spiritual link to American moguls, to the immortality of men like Irénée du Pont" (171). The immortality which the market provides Lourdes is envisioned through mass consumption, literally: "She envisioned a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries stretching across America to St. Louis, Dallas, Los Angeles, her apple pies and cupcakes on main streets and in suburban shopping malls everywhere" (171).<sup>9</sup> Not only is Lourdes "convinced she can fight Communism from behind her bakery counter," but mass production also allows her to identify herself with an alternate community, one that is not Cuban (136). Lourdes becomes part of a nation-building project, the United States' bicentennial celebration, engaging in the marketing of American patriotism through products such as "tricolor cupcakes and Uncle Sam marzipan" (136).

Pilar stands somewhere in between these two extremes of Lourdes's celebration of capitalism and Celia's rejection of commodification. Commodities offer Pilar the possibility for reconnection to Cuba via the Beny Moré album or the *santería* herbs, yet she remains ambivalent regarding the access these products supposedly provide. Pilar alludes to this conflict when she describes the streets of Miami:

All the streets in Coral Gables have Spanish names. . . as if they'd been expecting all the Cubans who would eventually live there. I read somewhere that the area started off as just another Florida land scheme. Now it's one of the ritzy neighborhoods of Miami. . . I suppose if enough people believe in the hype, anything is possible.

(60)

The problem and the potential of the global market lies in its ability to create meaning out of fiction. This process can confuse origins, or lead to an inability to isolate local positions of resistance. Pilar mentions her frustration with the system of co-optation and her inability to define herself as a result: "I guess I'm not so sure what I should be fighting for anymore. Without confines, I'm

damn near reasonable. That's something I never wanted to become" (198).

Pilar feels she is almost complicit with the market's mainstreaming, yet she also sees potential in the role of commodities. Feeling that "something's dried up" in her, Pilar seeks fulfillment through the *botánica* and its wares, reconnecting to Cuba by means of its cultural representation. These objects, although mass-produced, make more sense to Pilar than more abstract forms of worship (199). In spite of Pilar's valuation of the market's ability to provide access to Cuban culture, there remains a tension over whether this access is to the "really authentic" or an illusion. There is something impossible and unreal about Celia Cruz's timeless voice and face that extends itself to all commodified versions of Cuban culture. Their position within the market is always a tenuous one, fraught with ambivalence. A questionable access to authentic Cuban origins through commodities appears to accentuate Pilar's longing. Not coincidentally, after her use of the *botánica* goods, Pilar decides to initiate her return to Cuba and to the "real" Celia, her grandmother: "On the ninth day of my baths, I call my mother and tell her we're going to Cuba" (203). Pilar then travels to Cuba in hopes of resolving the nostalgia that the Cuban cultural products cannot ultimately satiate.

At thirteen years old, Pilar already felt the desire to journey to Cuba: "Our house is on a cement plot near the East River. At night. . . I hear the low whistles of the ships as they leave New York harbor. . . . They travel south. . . and head out to the Atlantic. . . . When I hear the whistles, I want to go with them" (30-31). Pilar's return to the island of Cuba within the novel carries with it the baggage of her nostalgia and her mission as the family's historical recorder. The US "doesn't feel like home to" Pilar (58), and as a result, she nostalgically identifies Cuba as the space that will localize her and give her the definition she is lacking, the definition of home. Will travel then enable Pilar to also record an alternate version of history by providing her with access to her family and their Cuban memories? Certainly, Pilar begins accumulating the stories of her family members once she arrives on the island, interviewing her cousin Ivanito, her aunt Felicia's friend Herminia, and her grandmother Celia (231). In fact, this is probably why much of the criticism on *Dreaming in Cuban* insists that

Pilar is also the fictional author of the novel.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, there are voices Pilar does not have access to, like those of Luz and Milagro, Felicia's daughters, whose stories Cristina Garcia does include in her novel. The narrative thus emphasizes Pilar's inability to complete the mission Celia bestows upon her.

The incomplete nature of the memories Pilar obtains prompts her to question the relationship between creativity and travel. Listing numerous famous writers such as Flaubert and Emily Dickinson, who stayed within the same area for most of their lives, Pilar wonders "if the farthest distance I have to travel isn't in my own head" (178). Undecided about whether travel is necessary to achieve inspiration, Pilar also cites the migrant lives of Ernest Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, and Gauguin to assert, "I become convinced that you have to live in the world to say anything meaningful about it" (179). Pilar's examination of the evasive connection between migration and cultural production calls into question the truth-value often ascribed to migrancy within the critical discourse on the novel itself.<sup>11</sup> The inability to delineate the relationship between travel and art causes Pilar to question her own identity, defining herself in terms of incompleteness: "I'm still waiting for my life to begin" (179).

While unable to fulfill her role as recorder, the travel to Cuba does transform Pilar: "I wake up feeling different, like something inside of me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There's a magic here working its way through my veins" (236). The mysterious changes at work within Pilar cause her to recognize the obstacles in the way of her recording task: "Until I returned to Cuba, I never realized how many blues exist" (233). The multiplicity of blues mirrors that of the various and often contradicting memories related to Pilar by her family. A newfound awareness of the competing histories and memories complicates Pilar's attempt to formulate an alternate family history that has the coherence of the family tree diagram opening the novel. Pilar's reaction to the mob scene at the Peruvian embassy, the beginning of the Mariel boatlift, challenges her ability to fulfill her grandmother's imperative: "Nothing can record this, I think. Not words, not paintings, not photographs" (241). What is it about Cuba that remains unrecordable? Is Cuba's inability to be transcribed into

cultural production related to Pilar's final exile from, and thus rejection of, the island?

It is precisely the narrative of Cuba's public history and positioning outside of the global market that continually prevents Pilar from having direct access to the family memory, such that the relationship between the Revolution, time, and history drives Pilar's nostalgia for and rejection of Cuba. The narrative associates Cuba, as object of Pilar's nostalgia, with isolation: "Cuba is a peculiar exile, I think, an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (219). Cuba's exile is derived from its geographic isolation as an island, and yet, Pilar hints that there is a further "peculiarity" regarding Cuba's position. Celia similarly depicts Cuba in terms of exile:

What was it he read to her once? About how, long ago, the New World was attached to Europe and Africa? Yes, and the continents pulled away slowly, painfully after millions of years. The Americas were still inching westward and will eventually collide with Japan. Celia wonders if Cuba will be left behind, alone in the Caribbean sea with its faulted and folded mountains, its conquests, its memories.

(48)

The world moves westward in a geographic flow, while Cuba is left alone, apparently the only island in the Caribbean. This image evokes the concerns that Garcia mentions, in an interview with Iraida H. López, regarding the "U.S. policy of continuing to isolate Cuba in a world where everybody else has been accepted and dealt with" (López 105). Cuba is marked by a singularity, its inability to enter into this transcontinental movement.

In effect, the novel's Cuba is isolated because it is not part of the global marketplace; the Revolution severed its ties to the world market, and therefore it is not involved in this westward progress, a globalism reconnecting the world's continents and nations.<sup>12</sup> Celia's description of Cuba's exile is preceded by her hopes for Cuba's reintegration into a global market, via the processing of sugarcane: "She pictures three-hundred-pound sacks of refined sugar deep in the hulls of ships. People in Mexico and Russia and Poland will spoon out her sugar for coffee, or to bake in their birthday cakes. And Cuba will grow prosperous" (45). However,

this dream is not a reality since the narrative emphasizes that Cuba's connections to the global marketplace are a thing of the past. Within the novel, the Revolution not only results in the painful separation of families, but also removes Cuba from the influence of the United States and the sea of global capitalism.<sup>13</sup>

The novel's nostalgia for Cuba, the Cuba that Pilar can never reach, is for a pre-Revolution time, when Cuba was an island-colony of the United States. Celia's letters are all written before the Revolution, and serve as the underlying structure and voice of the novel. In these letters, Celia describes Cuba as "a place where everything and everyone is for sale" (164). The narrative's nostalgic look backwards into the past is particularly obsessed with the seductive presence of US commerce on the island. Interwoven with Celia's narrative are reminders of the already globalizing influence of American culture. The American motion picture industry promotes the dispersion of US products and fashion. Celia notes that although her "Tía Alicia considered the American films naïve and overly optimistic" they were "too much fun to resist" (94). Consequently, Tía Alicia "named her two canaries Clara and Lillian after Clara Bow and Lillian Gish" (94). Celia also recalls how, "My girlfriends and I used to paint our mouths like American starlets, ruby red and heart-shaped. We bobbed our hair and. . . tried to sound like Gloria Swanson. We used to go to Cinelandia every Friday after work. I remember seeing *Mujeres de Fuego* with Bette Davis" (100). Not only is pre-Revolution Cuba marked by the globalization of American culture, but the island is also a site of American tourism and commerce. For example, during her days working at the major department store, el Encanto, Celia's biggest camera sales were to Americans (38).

Upon her arrival in Cuba, Pilar is fascinated by the remains of this influence, seeing the evidence left of this connection between the US and Cuba:

The women on Calle Madrid are bare-armed in tight, sleeveless blouses. They wear stretch pants and pañuelos. . . . A pair of frayed trousers stick out from beneath a '55 Plymouth. Magnificent finned automobiles cruise grandly down the street like parade floats. I feel like we're all back in time, in a kind of Cuban version of an earlier America. (220)

Not only does it appear that this is all that is left of Cuba's connection to American capitalism, but Cuba also appears to be stuck in time, as if history had ceased its progress. The character of Felicia in particular embodies the destructive effects of the Revolution upon the Cuban people. In the novel, there is a recurring memory of Felicia as a child, playing at the beach before the arrival of the tidal wave, which appears in both Felicia's and Celia's narratives. Felicia remembers "The sea's languid retreat into the horizon and the terrible silence of its absence" (11). As a result, the sand lies exposed for Felicia to read. The "archeology of the ocean floor revealed itself" as a narrative of memory and history (213). The sea floor serves as a metaphor for the narrative record of history, while the catastrophic and unpredictable events within history reshape or erase what is written on the sand. The tidal wave, symbolic of the Revolution, breaks with this historical record and blurs the boundaries between the public sand-history and the private homes of the families. Celia's insistence on not bringing the shells into her home is futile—Felicia laughs at how, after the tidal wave, the house was full of them.

Throughout the novel, Felicia functions as a representative subject of Cuba and its relationship to time and history. Felicia's deterioration due to her syphilis is linked to a loss of memory that is framed and contextualized by the Revolution. Waking up from an episode of amnesia, Felicia finds herself in a room she had apparently decorated with history, with outdated calendars, "each month taped neatly to the ceiling" and "in the center of the ceiling, affixed with yellow tape, is January 1959, the first month of the revolution" (151). Felicia's amnesia mirrors a national one, identifying the Revolution as a break within Cuban time. After her initiation as a *santera*, Felicia "lost consciousness, falling into an emptiness without history or future" (187). She wastes away and dies, having fallen into the time(lessness) of the Revolution, a space devoid of historical progress and memory. Due to its isolation from the global market and the progress of capitalism, Cuba figures as a space of unproductiveness, sickness, and death. The novel thus revises Walter Benjamin's formulation of Marxist time within revolution from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History." According to Benjamin, the moment of revolution is meant to halt or break progress and time in a positive way: if time is structured

by class struggle and the revolution creates a classless society, it can by extension create a timeless society, or a shift in the conception of time, investing it with true meaning. By contrast, *Dreaming in Cuban* negatively figures the revolutionary break in time as a form of trauma that puts Cuba in limbo, erasing the possibility for remembrance through cultural production.<sup>14</sup>

The novel suggests that the Revolution's effect upon Cuban time, history, and progress also influences the role of art in Cuban society. Pilar continually classifies art as a space for recording, contestation, and translation. Nevertheless, the narrative implies that art cannot perform these functions within the context of the Cuban Revolution. Celia's last case as judge in the People's Court is of "Simón Córdoba, a boy of fifteen, [who] has written a number of short stories considered to be antirevolutionary. His characters escape from Cuba on rafts of sticks and tires, refuse to harvest grapefruit, dream of singing in a rock and roll band in California" (158). In her sentencing, Celia aims to "reorient [his creativity] toward the revolution," stating that "later, when the system has matured, more liberal policies may be permitted" (158). Since the aim of all art and imagination is focused towards the revolution, there can be no post-revolutionary moment. There is no "later, after the revolution," because the revolution is always present. Indeed, if the revolution halts time, then there can be no past to make sense of either. The revolution is infinitely present: "Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing" (235). If the role of the artist or writer is to make sense of the past, as Pilar suggests, then the artist has no role, no relevance, in Communist Cuba. By rejecting the role of art as both criticism and record, Cuba represents a space of creative stagnancy and death. According to Pilar, "Art. . . is the ultimate revolution," and if art cannot exist within Castro's revolution, then Cuba will not survive (235). It follows then that the major characters who remain in Cuba die: Celia, Felicia, and Javier. The characters who survive—Rufino, Pilar, Lourdes, and Ivanito—are exiles in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Only the dead, like Jorge, Celia's husband, return to Cuba to stay.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cuba is ultimately a dead space due to the island's relationship to history, time, and globalization via the Revolution. Art, defined as critique and memory, is unable to exist in this space. Even more importantly, art as a commodity will find

no market in the novel's Communist Cuba. Although the text exhibits an anxiety regarding commodities, it is evident that within the narrative, the value of art lies in its mass marketing. Ivanito's dreams of being a radio personality reinforce the importance of access to an audience via the market. He walks along the beach with his radio, he says,

until I pick up radio stations in Key West. I'm learning more English this way but it's a lot different from Abuelo Jorge's grammar books. If I'm lucky, I can tune in the Wolfman Jack show on Sunday nights. Sometimes I want to be like the Wolfman and talk to a million people at once. (191)

The Wolfman can speak to a large audience because of the distribution of his show through the medium of radio. In addition, Ivanito pairs the Wolfman's radio success with the acquisition of English, despite the proliferation of Spanish-language radio in the US and especially in South Florida. It is at the Peruvian embassy, en route to beginning his new life in exile, that Ivanito exclaims, "Crraaaazzzy!" and finds himself "talking to a million people at once" (241).

The novel locates the market as a space dominated by English as the global language; success therefore entails learning English and leaving Cuba behind. It is no accident that when Celia drowns herself at the end of *Dreaming in Cuban*, she recites a Lorca poem in English for the first time in the novel (243).<sup>16</sup> This literary translation at the moment of Celia's death signifies the novel's pessimistic prediction of Cuba's future in a global world.<sup>17</sup> Within the novel, translation means death and by extension, if Cuba is translated, it will die. However, the novel's Cuba is also doomed by the language it speaks, Spanish, because it is not the global language, the language in which one can speak to a million at once. While in the United States art is eventually co-opted by the mass market, there nevertheless remains the potential of reaching a global community, or creating a community through art, as is the case with Pilar and Franco in the record store.

In the end, Pilar cannot stay in Cuba, or she will be restricted to being Cuban, which the novel continually associates with sickness, stagnancy, and death. On the other hand, the United States offers

Pilar access to commodified Cuban culture (such as Beny Moré and *santería*) and also to a marginalized American identity (via Lou Reed and punk music). There, Pilar can be Cuban *and* American.<sup>18</sup> Pilar's formulation of this in-between identity via globalization prompts her to help Ivanito escape Cuba on the Mariel boatlift. By telling Celia that she was unable to find Ivanito at the Peruvian embassy, Pilar accepts Lourdes's decision to initiate him into exile and nostalgia. Ultimately, the novel suggests that Ivanito is better off being Cuban somewhere other than in Cuba. In turn, Pilar accepts her own self-conflicted identity and the intrusion of both history and distance onto the family: "I'm afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here" (236). Through Pilar's final betrayal of Celia, and Celia's subsequent drowning, *Dreaming in Cuban* melancholically posits nostalgia as a product of entrance to the global world, and a better fate than never being part of the global marketplace.

### Notes

1. Critics such as Acosta Hess, Lago-Graña, Mitchell, Santiago-Stommes, Viera, and Zubiaurre read Pilar's journey as intersecting with and thereby redefining the concepts of nation, family, and exile. These critical interpretations of the novel predominantly focus on the narration of gender liberation through a "matrilineal chain," to quote Vásquez. Davis's essay, for example, centers on generational mother-daughter relationships.
2. I define globalization and globalism here as an intensified form of capitalism that with the development of new technologies has led to an increased and uneven global flow of products and culture. Obviously an enormous bibliography on globalization exists; my ideas have been particularly influenced by Hardt and Negri.
3. O'Reilly Herrera argues that Pilar's family history parallels that of Cuba as a nation.
4. Socolovsky figures violence as a motivating force behind Pilar's recording mission.
5. O'Reilly Herrera discusses the novel's insertion of women into the narrative of H/history as a move to "dismantle Western colonial History and its discourse" (85).
6. When the group of young boys attack Pilar in the park, one of them "throws my Beny Moré album against the elm" (202). Surprisingly, even violence cannot shatter Pilar's connection to this commodity: "It doesn't break and I'm reassured. I imagine picking up the record, feeling each groove with my fingertips" (202). This attack mirrors that experienced by her mother, Lourdes, at the hands

of the Cuban Revolution's soldiers, but Lourdes's rape literally marks her body. Pilar's sexual attack is performed by New York City children who take turns suckling her breast. The shift from Lourdes to Pilar's experience appears to involve a mitigation of violence. The presence of the market through the record hints at the shift in context that has complicated the terms of exploitation, strangely providing Pilar with a sense of comfort in the face of such victimization. The script will not be the same; history will not repeat itself. For a reading of how the metaphor of grooves in a record can offer an alternate definition of history's progress, see Peterson.

7. In a similar way to *Dreaming in Cuban's* representation of Celia Cruz, the movie *Buena Vista Social Club* also casts Afro-Cuban music as timeless or outside of time. The movie's exoticization presents an interesting example of the intersection of music and global nostalgia as well as its appeal as a cultural product. See de la Campa for further analysis of this phenomenon.

8. I'm grateful to Veronica Makowsky for calling my attention to the "coincidence" of the two Celias. Her remark helped me to further flesh out the significance of Celia Cruz within Garcia's novel.

9. Lourdes's association of capitalist success with immortality echoes Celia Cruz's representation as a mass-marketed figure whose timelessness is assured by her commodification within the music market.

10. See for example, Alvarez Borland, who argues that the novel is Pilar's diary.

11. The essay by Acosta Hess is a good example.

12. While silent regarding the economic and political ties between Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean, the novel also downplays the island's access to a larger global market and in particular, the significance of Cuba's relationship to the USSR. *Dreaming in Cuban* depicts this relationship as having negative consequences on the Cuban people via the characterization of Javier and his death. His broken relationship with his wife and child serves as a reflection of the broken political ties and loss of subsidies after the dismantling of the Soviet bloc. The narrative represents Cuba's ties to the USSR as unsustainable and not compatible with entrance into the global market.

13. In the criticism written on *Dreaming in Cuban*, the narrative's portrayal of the Cuban Revolution's consequences is limited to an analysis of the familial separation or a formulation of a gender counter-revolution. The best examples of these include O'Reilly Herrera's work and López's article on madness and resistance.

14. It is curious to note that the novel represents the timelessness of the Cuban Revolution as a stasis or death while the timelessness of the market, as evinced by Celia Cruz and Lourdes, engenders immortality or perpetuity of being.

15. Luz and Milagro could be claimed as exceptions because they presumably continue to live in Cuba after Ivanito defects. Since the novel never fully develops these characters, their survival in Cuba does not symbolically outweigh the deaths of the more major characters, especially Celia and Felicia. Nevertheless, if one were to consider them further, it is possible that Luz and Milagro become irrelevant within the narrative's symbolic logic because of their opacity.

By refusing to speak with Pilar, the sisters remain inaccessible. Also, they do not display the same fascination with American culture as Ivanito, and therefore cannot assimilate into US culture or the market. Ultimately and according to the logic of the text, their fate is a dubious one if they remain in Cuba.

16. Previously in the novel, Celia recites the poetry in italicized Spanish, accompanied with no translation. For example, see Celia's recitation upon Javier's return, sickness, and eventual death (156-57).

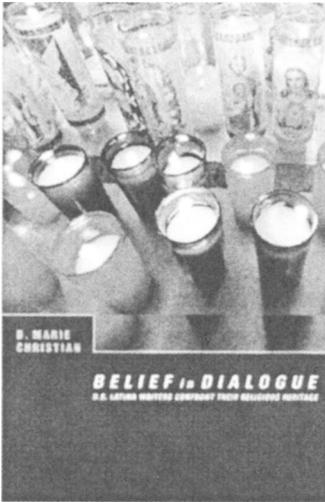
17. Ween provides an interesting analysis of the novel's critical reception as motivated by a desire to un-translate and reframe the text in its "original" language, Spanish.

18. Dalleo argues that the novel also points to *Latinidad* as a third identity that the US provides for Pilar. Drawing upon intertextual references, Dalleo notes that the novel positions itself as inheritor of a US Latino literary lineage and is specifically in conversation with a canon of US Latino writers, primarily Sandra Cisneros.

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