

# **No Little Havana: Recreating Cubanness in Sydney Australia**

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Euridice Charón Cardona, May 2008.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which Cuban identity is expressed, understood, maintained and recreated by Cuban migrants in Sydney and the wider Australian society. Initially, the analysis focuses on some of the most visible ethnic markers used by people outside the Cuban community to recreate Cubanness: politics, through the promotion of Cuba as a 'socialist paradise' by leftist Australian organizations and solidarity groups with Cuba; and music and dance, taking as an example the salsa boom in Sydney, and the advertising of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination in Australia.

Throughout the work an argument is developed that the very different demographic configuration of Cubans in Australia has fostered a singular praxis of maintaining their identity. In doing so the study examines why politics does not play a primary role in the recreation of Cubanness in Australia, in contrast to numerically larger and higher profile Cuban settlements. Rather, Cubanness in Sydney has centred more in preserving eating habits, memories of Cuba as a place, listening and dancing to Cuban music, and other practices kept in the domestic space. This is achieved through the Cuban migrants' strategic borrowings from other migrant communities, from food products to people and institutions, such as the Catholic Church being used to maintain the traditional worship of the Virgin of Charity. Finally, the study explores how migrants and outsiders understand the identity of Cubanness in Sydney, and considers the contribution of some major theories of ethnicity and identity to understanding this phenomenon.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### **How everything started**

Anthropologists have always defined their research in different ways. Two expressions of this underlying my research are Ruth Behar's description of anthropology as "a voyage through a long tunnel" and Victor Turner's introduction to Myerhoff's book *Number our days* who, when following the advice of an Indian anthropologist, noted that to research and do fieldwork in your own culture after immersion in others is to be born for the third time (Behar 1996: 2; Turner 1980: xii- xiv). This research involves a long journey and a gained confidence to work in a topic that a previously trained Cuban social researcher will almost always try to avoid due to its highly politicised nature: Cuban migrants/exiles.

Although early in my career I spent some years researching Middle Eastern migration to Cuba, in many ways it was like researching a dead culture. Only a few very elderly migrants of Lebanese descent were alive, their vibrant neighbourhood had disappeared, their church was empty and my research extended only until the 1960s, the first years of the Revolution. In 1994, I agreed to help an Australian friend pick up an art exhibition of another Australian in the outskirts of Havana. The exhibition recreated Julia Menayer's reminiscences of Cuba, a Lebanese girl whose family migrated to Cuba first and then re-migrated in the 1910s to Australia to join their relatives. Her long journey and her expressed love for Cuba were fascinating. Little did I know then that two years later I would embark on the same journey and become a migrant myself. I did not have any relatives or Cuban acquaintances, only my new Australian family. I had no knowledge of a community of Cubans living here in Australia. Back in Cuba, and up to

the beginnings of this research, like many Cubans inside the country I thought that Cuban migrants and exiles lived only in the United States (Miami), some neighbouring countries and Spain. In my mind, Cuban migrants and exiles were always associated with Miami, its famous Cuban neighbourhood Little Havana, with its main street *Calle Ocho* full of corner stores (bodegas) and restaurants bearing the same names of places whose faded inscriptions in the footpath and shop fronts of Havana I had grown up looking at.

Many of these perceptions, or misperceptions, changed when I began to research Caribbean migration to Australia, with a focus on the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia. At the beginning this project I planned to examine the way migrants from the Caribbean states of Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Cuba maintain their ethnicity in NSW. Because their population was highly dispersed around Sydney, three main ethnographic sites were chosen for the research: the Caribbean Hideaway restaurant in Glebe, the Casa Latina situated in the Marrickville Community Centre, and the Club Havana in Maroubra. Within six months of starting this research the Caribbean Hideaway closed and moved to Parramatta because of the neighbours' complaints about the noise from the live steel-drum music. The move affected the already poor attendance of Caribbean patrons. The restaurant closed and the potential participants of the research went with it. Similarly, less than six months after its opening in January 2000 the Club Havana needed to move to town in search of more customers, but in the process lost many of its Latin American and Cuban patrons, due to distance and cost as the prices to enter ballooned with the Salsa boom in Sydney. This only left the Casa Latina, which does not have a strong Cuban following, but rather a strong Latin

American group of supporters of the Cuban Revolution who regularly raised money for Cuban institutions.

### **The initial findings: Changing from Caribbeans (West Indians) to Cubans**

There have been Caribbean migrants in Australia since the early period of European settlement because of the links of both regions with the British Empire. In the early years of this connection, the Caribbean migrant contingent ranged from administrative personnel to slaves, but the majority seemed to be white West Indians. Since the elimination of the White Australia policy in the 1970s, Caribbean migrants became a more diverse group by race and language (Jupp 1988: 847–8). However, their numbers in NSW have remained below 2,000 people (The Commission 1994: 7). From these, Trinidadians, Jamaicans and Cubans are the most numerous groups with nearly 200 people or more per group in 1991 (The Commission 1994: 2–5). However, by 2001, the number of Trinidadians reduced to more than a half (95), the Cubans also decreased slightly, but the Jamaicans increased by half (381) (Community Relations Commission 2003: 92–95).

The significant reduction in the number of Trinidadians seems to confirm the response of the restaurant owner to my queries about a small group of Caribbean people recorded in the Australian Census as living in the local area of Warringah between 1976 and 1986 (see Australian Govt. Pub. Service 1991: 3). He affirmed that there had been such a group, but that many of those people had moved from there or left the country to return either to the islands or to England.

Their experience has scarcely been researched or documented, and that which is available is mainly devoted to the history of the West Indian migration in Australia (Jupp 1988: 847–48). From the Caribbean groups, at first sight the West Indian migrants were more visible, with their own association (the West Indian Association of Australia, WIAA) listed in the phone book and the Caribbean Hideaway restaurant in Glebe where the board of the association used to occasionally meet, and some West Indians used to gather to watch the cricket test matches between Australia and the West Indies. Furthermore, the WIAA published a news magazine three times a year, organised regular cruises around Sydney Harbour, steel drum workshops, and held parties like the ‘Calypso Away in the month of May.’ The Cuban migrant community did not and still does not have anything like that level of organisation – no Cuban association, no dedicated Cuban restaurant, and only a small and infrequent newsletter *El Mambi* with a very small readership, which mainly reproduces news published in Miami rather than reporting news or events related to the Cuban community in Australia. These Cubans were invisible, just small numbers from the census. Neither the West Indian nor Cuban community has a spatially distinct neighbourhood, unlike the clearly defined communities in the United States and Britain, or other migrant communities in Australia.

Based on this preliminary research, I considered that the West Indian community would be more accessible, and spent the first months of 2000 visiting the Caribbean Hideaway restaurant and two of the public functions run by the WIAA doing participant observation. The restaurant was a good recreation of the Caribbean imagery. Located in a quiet street off the busy Glebe Road in Sydney, its façade resembled the Caribbean atmosphere with blue being the most predominant colour evoking the islands’ beaches.

Its windows were painted in vivid red, yellow and green, reinforcing a festive ambience. The windows were decorated with two light skinned mulatto women in carnival dresses and two coconut palms with the written message: "Follow me, enjoy the Caribbean." The internal decoration of the restaurant was in line with the images described above: posters of Caribbean beaches, colourful walls and tablecloths. The restaurant had been there for nearly seven years, but the majority of its patrons were Australians. The owner, a Barbadian told me that while this was a good place to start my research, "identity is a very personal issue, very intimate and everyone does something to keep it, but you'd better talk to the others." He recommended I continue to visit the monthly Sunday brunch sessions and participate in the WIAA's activities. However, it soon became apparent that no West Indians attended the Sunday brunch, and I had already missed the summer cricket test matches.

So, while the recommendation was good, somehow it closed the door to the rest of the group. At the first activity, when I arrived at Ryde Town Hall and paid for the tickets, the women on the door asked who had told me about the event. When I explained that I had heard from the President of the WIAA, via the restaurant owner, the women smiled politely, suggesting disbelief, and quickly responded that here I was going to enjoy a "real Caribbean dinner." In terms of food it certainly was enjoyable, and the rhythms of calypso and reggae got the 100 or so people dancing in nice unison. I went to two such parties and met the WIAA President at both of them. He referred me to the secretary both times and promised to introduce me to others members of the Association who would be interested in talking to me. The secretary promised the same.

The first thing I learned, however, was the importance of carefully selecting the person who has good connections with the network of future informants, as has been emphasised by many anthropologists (for example, see Kurotani 2004: 209). The second thing I learned was the need to be more aware of the racial and social idiosyncrasies at play through the Caribbean societies. The WIAA seemed to be made up of two major groups: a group of West Indians of African heritage, and a group of Trinidadians of Indian heritage. In both of the activities I attended, they sat apart from each other, and limited their exchanges to short greetings. I am a Cuban of African descent, which quickly emerged as a significant factor in any potential interaction with these groups. Furthermore, the activities were clearly something of an overt show of wealth, via expensive clothing, jewellery and cars, which I was not at all prepared for. While these barriers perhaps could have been overcome, my lack of acquaintances, the move of the restaurant and its closure, helped me to decide to focus my research on the Cubans, my compatriots, the numbers without a face, in Sydney.

The redirection in the main topic of the research did not automatically resolve the challenge of finding people willing to share their migration experience, and finding places where I could observe Cubans interacting with one another and with non-Cubans. Finding people wasn't as difficult as I had imagined, given the small numbers of Cubans in Sydney, but initiating discussion with them was a bit problematic. After several visits to La Casa Latina, the Club Havana and the South American Festival in Bondi, I was able to establish some initial contacts. However, as soon as I explained what I was doing, it had the effect of 'pouring a glass of cold water,' on the whole idea, as the old Cuban saying goes. Not surprisingly, people became interested in double-checking who I was, where I came from, where I used to work, and other aspects of my

past. On several occasions, such as one described in Chapter 5, I was called, in a light-hearted way, a *trumpet*, *bagpipe* and *gossiper*. In the Cuban popular vernacular, these terms are slang for people who denounce others to the government authorities. I was shocked, because I had barely begun working or conducting my fieldwork per se and already these ‘jokes’ were emerging.

This experience was confirmed by other researchers analysing the Cuban diaspora who have found similar problems of mistrust. The initial mistrust is not necessarily directly related to them, but more frequently to other Cubans from different migrational waves (see Bettinger-López 2000: 194). Indeed, behind overt shows of gregariousness and joviality, Cubans living overseas sometimes manifest high levels of mistrust and paranoia with respect to their own compatriots. This is due mainly to political reasons and is more evident amongst the older generation of exiles and migrants. As Marta (not her real name), one of the Cuban participants, reminded me when I complained about these hurdles:

“You need to plough with the bulls that you have [an old Cuban proverb]. I will talk to one of my friends to see if we can visit him. They [his family] are good ones, not the crazy ones [not furiously anti-Castro].”<sup>1</sup>

Passing through these types of initial obstacles, the fieldwork became a very gratifying experience. Somehow and quite unexpectedly, I ended up doing a substantial amount of fieldwork amongst a group of Cuban migrants who arrived in Australia in the 1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> As noted below, the fieldwork for this research involved participant observation and open-ended, informal discussions and interviews. None of these were audiotaped, but instead I took extensive fieldnotes during and after visits. Quotations of informants used in this thesis are taken directly from fieldnotes in which I transcribed many quotes in full, and have been formatted accordingly in this text as direct quotations. My fieldnote observations have been incorporated into the main text.

For the people who agreed to talk to me, I became something like a “lost link” to their homeland. Even though they are aware of many of the things that are happening in Cuba, through the media and occasional family contacts, I still needed to respond to what at first seemed to be odd questions about whether you could still find or buy particular goods or how much they cost, or where a particular street in Central Havana was located and how you could get there. At the same time, my inexperience of Australian life meant that I was able to learn how things were thirty years ago in Australia as well, with the consistent message: “You are lucky, everything is better now here, but when we arrived...” In short, I experienced what other anthropologists doing fieldwork have highlighted about the dynamics of such relationships. As Behar (1996) and Turner (2000) have argued about the terminology of observer – informant, in fieldwork these roles are fluid. Many times the observer becomes an informant, and he/she is always a participant.

Several times during the fieldwork, and when writing up fieldwork notes, I also experienced a lot of contradictory personal feelings. From one side, I was happy to find people who are so jealously attached to their past, and to its maintenance. A past that sometimes I had experienced or seen myself through walking on the streets of Havana and provincial towns in Cuba, and through all aspects of social life in Cuba – its movies, music, food, religion, etc. However, to share memories of the past with people who, as a result of my education in Cuba and the Soviet Union, I was taught to dislike and mistrust, was at times difficult to reconcile. Similarly, it was distressing to hear about their experiences in Cuba’s forced labour camps (UMAP – Military Units for Agricultural Production) in the late 1960s. I found myself speechless, and at times apologizing for things that happened when I was a child. Furthermore, I started to re-

visit my memories of neighbours who had left for the US and Spain, and even ask my mother to clear up some of those faded memories. This is not to say that I became an opponent of the Cuban Revolution, but began to look more critically at some aspects of its history. Feelings of guilt and awkwardness by researchers are not uncommon during fieldwork. Some well known examples of this can be found in Bourgois's book *In search of respect*, when he felt guilty for befriending informants who admitted to raping young girls a few years earlier (1999 [1995]: 207), and Myerhoff's reflections about how contemporary Western society treats and looks at the elderly (1980: 19).

### **Studying Cubans: Methodology and rationale of this research**

Scholarship on Cuban migration around the world has been mainly produced in the United States, with a strong focus on the Cuban community in Miami and its economic success (see Portes and Basch 1985, Portes and Stepick 1993). This has contributed to a monolithic image of the Cuban diaspora in all of its aspects: socio-economic, cultural, racial, religious, ethnic identity, etc. Only a dozen or so studies have been completed describing other experiences of Cuban migration outside Miami, and on topics beyond their economic insertion in the receiving society. Some of those studies are Boone's (1989) study on Cuban women in Washington, Cobas and Duany's (1997) analysis of the Cuban community in Puerto Rico, and Wimmer's (1998) work on Cubans in Switzerland. There is clearly room for, and a need for, other analyses of the Cuban migration, which look at other localities where Cubans have settled, as well as other topics beyond "the Miami economic success" to consider questions of identity, religion, memories and politics acquired in those locales.

The study of the Cuban migrants in Sydney, Australia, offers such an opportunity. Indeed, Cuban migration to Australia is relatively new and numerically small, with a community of less than 500 people dispersed around the different capital cities of the continent. Its size, spatial distribution, and the ways in which its members, in part as a consequence of this, negotiate and construct a social identity are in sharp contrast with the experiences of other Cuban migrant communities around the world which have produced distinctive neighbourhoods, clubs, churches and house temples, and perhaps most well publicised, exercise considerable political power, to the point of tipping national elections. This research aims to look at the ways Cuban migrants in Sydney, Australia, conceptualise and maintain their ethnic identity when their numbers are small, their economic imprint is unknown, and their politics as a group insignificant in both local elections and in external constructions of their identity. Specifically, this research will study the forms that Cubanness (*Cubanía*) takes in this context, how the migrants themselves recreate and contest this through music, dance, food, religion and memories about Cuba. Just as importantly, this research will also examine how the wider Australian society perceives or understands the Cuban migrants, through the enthusiastic embrace of the salsa boom and the promotion of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination. Finally, this research will consider the relevance of some of the major theories on ethnicity and identity in relation to the notions and expressions of Cubanness as seen and constructed by the Cubans, Latin American migrants and Australians.

The history and experience of Cuban migration in Australia has been hardly researched at all. Therefore, this research draws on diverse sources and disciplines, like historical studies of the Cuban diaspora which helped to identify some of the main features of the

community, like its numbers, the years and causes of arrivals in Australia. However, this study drew mainly on conventional ethnographic methodology of cultural anthropology to source its data. Participant observation in public festivals, like the Bacardi Festival, the South American Festival in Bondi, in nightclubs like the Harbourside Brasserie, serve as the main ethnographic sites to observe how Cubanness is interpreted and recreated by outsiders – in these cases the musicians, dance instructors and dancers in general. Some analysis of media, newspaper clips and television programs complemented this data. The richest data, however, came from in-depth interviews with seven people, one of them a dedicated salsa dancer learner, the others working as musicians, DJs, and dance instructors in the Salsa industry in Sydney, or members of the Australian solidarity groups with Cuba, and from ongoing fieldwork with some members of the Cuban community.

The fieldwork amongst the Cuban migrants took place in the years 2000 and 2001, in the form of weekend visits, with a brief follow-up visit in 2002 and 2003. As I noted above, I first contacted some Cuban migrants by attending social activities of the Latin American community in Sydney. This approach was taken in part due to the small size of the community and the consideration of informant privacy, issues that made it impossible to contact them through official channels such as Migrant Resource Centres or even the Registry of Cuban migrants held at the Cuban Consulate in Sydney. The initial contacts involved two loose groups of Cuban migrants, one from the Eastern suburbs, whose people did not necessarily live there but used to visit the Club Havana located there, and another group from the Western Suburbs of Sydney who sometimes visit the Ashcroft Parish in Liverpool. These loose ‘groups’ are not organised entities in any sense of the word. They consist of people who arrived in Australia around the same

time between the 1970s and 90s, with personal or family links to other people within them. Therefore, informants in the study ranged from a three-generation family who had migrated at different times, to a lone individual who migrated on his/her own.

Although this research does not include any highly sensitive information – due to the suspicion noted above, and the small size of the community – all the names have been changed and details that could identify any individual have been altered in order to protect their identity. I need to note that even under these conditions, some of the people contacted in these initial sites did not agree to be even mentioned anonymously in these pages. The main methods to collect data for the study were participant observation and open-ended, informal interviews. I conducted ten long informal interviews, with males and females mainly from the 1970s and 80s migrational groups. Interviews and participant observations were not audio taped, but I took notes during interviews, transcribing some quotes in full, and then writing up additional notes soon after an interview or a visit took place. Given the circumstances of suspicion and paranoia, audio taping interviews or visits was not seen as appropriate.

All the fieldwork was conducted in Spanish, although some of the informants are fluent in English. All of the informants preferred to talk and express themselves in Spanish. For some, myself included, it was a joy to not only speak Spanish, but to talk the ‘Cuban way’, using terms, words and jokes that made sense to the other speaker. This enriched considerably the discussions and to a certain extent, gave a better insight into how identity is interpreted and recreated. In this case, my condition as a ‘halfie’ benefited this work, because I had some background cultural knowledge to identify actions or particular behaviours, but at the same time I have enough detachment to

analyse it.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the ten individuals that agreed to meet for more detailed conversations had been living in Australia for twenty years or more, and their reasons for leaving Cuba were very different. Although we came from the same place our life experiences in both Cuba and Australia differed greatly. Finally, one of the biggest challenges faced by anthropologists when they are presenting their work is how much voice to give themselves. In cases like this the question is even more critical. In this study, whenever it was possible I sought to exclude myself from the dialogue in order to allow a coherent flow free of the observer's intervention.

### **Structure of this study**

The subsequent chapters of this study are set out thematically. The first two review the existing literature related to this research in the fields of anthropology and Cuban studies. Chapter 2 gives a general overview of the post-1959 migrational waves out of Cuba and addresses their influence on the arrival of Cubans in Australia.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the chapter identifies the years and some of the causes that led Cubans to begin this nascent Australian migrant community. This chapter also reviews the literature on Cuban migration and identifies some of the main points of debate in it, like the controversy over labelling Cubans as exiles or migrants, the 'golden exile myth' and the creation of a more heterogeneous view of the Cuban migrant communities worldwide. The fieldwork data is used to assess the relevance of these ideas in the case of the Cuban migration to Australia.

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<sup>2</sup> Term used by Colic-Peisker to describe the researcher who does fieldwork in her/his own ethnic community (2004: 93).

<sup>3</sup> 1959 being the year of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, led by Fidel Castro.

Chapter 3 reviews the theoretical literature on ethnicity and identity. Analyses of the ethnic identity of Cuban migrants have tended to mainly use the concept of *Cubanidad* or variations of the assimilation theory developed in the United States. This chapter seeks to broaden this analysis by reviewing the literature about ethnicity and identity created outside of the US and the concept of Cubanidad. This chapter tries to draw on elements from both bodies of work that can be applied to the analysis of the expressions of Cuban identity found during the fieldwork.

The next three chapters examine the fieldwork data. Each of these chapters analyses a set of specific markers that represent or serve as a way of recreating the meanings of Cuba and Cubanness in Sydney Australia. Chapter 4 examines the imagined Cuba from the outside, taking politics, music, dance and tourism as the basis of this analysis. In the case of politics, it reviews the promotion of the image of Cuba as the ‘socialist paradise’ by Australian and Latin American left-wing organisations and the responses of Cuban migrants to it. It also focuses on the Salsa boom in Sydney and how music and dance are used to construct a sometimes distorted image of Cubanness through its commercialisation. Moreover, it analyses the media images of the promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination.

Chapter 5 continues with the analysis of the fieldwork notes, immersed in questions of how Cuban migrants themselves relate to some of the most visible markers of their identity in Sydney. Politics, music and dance serve again as the framework of the analysis. This chapter analyses the role that politics (i.e. whether one is for or against the Cuban Revolution) plays in the expressions of Cubanness. Given that Cuban migrants use politics as a parameter to include or exclude people from their groups, it

influences their behaviour in diverse circumstances, but it hasn't become a defining feature of the community or militant organised response against the Cuban Government. Chapter 5 goes on to illustrate how music and dance are used to identify someone's Cubanness, but in the process it uncovers the rich diversity of music enjoyed and collected by the Cuban migrants, far beyond that commercialised and offered as Cuban music in Sydney. Finally, this chapter also describes how Cuban migrants use music and dance as a device to adapt to their new environment or overcome personal problems.

Chapter 6 looks at some more intimate expressions of Cubanness, those maintained within the community itself and in the households of the Cuban migrants. These are religion, cuisine and memories of places in Cuba. In the cases of religion and memories of Cuba, the chapter considers how both are used to cope with the stresses of living in a different country. This extends into the examination of how food, or the recreation of Cuban culinary habits, plays a very important role in the identification, maintenance, and indeed the contestation of Cuban identity. Relatedly, Chapter 6 explores how numerically small ethnic communities, like the Cubans in Sydney, use a process of external borrowing from the existing multicultural food markets, and link themselves to other Latin American religious worshippers, as conscious strategies to maintain and recreate their own ethnic identity in multicultural Australia.

The concluding chapter brings together the findings reported above to draw a general picture of how Cuban migrants themselves define, contest, recreate and maintain a sense of Cubanness in the context of Sydney Australia. These definitions range from physical and behavioural characteristics to more subtle examples like ways of sharing

food or just memories of smell and places in Cuba. Representations of Cubanness by others, in this same context, are contrasted with these. Following this, the chapter compares these understandings and processes with the theories of ethnicity and identity reviewed in Chapter 3, to highlight some of the major theoretical approaches that help to make sense of the Cuban experience in Sydney. Based on this, some future topics of research in the area of Cuban migration, and the strategies of small communities' adaptation to a new place of settlement, are foreshadowed. But first we need a look at how the Cuban nation was formed by successive immigrational waves and the experience of Cuban emigration post-1959 more broadly, to get a sense of how Cubans came to be found in the streets of Sydney, so it is to this that I now turn.

## Chapter 2. Cuban migrants around the world and in Australia

April 10<sup>th</sup> 1911, Dunedin

“Today I awoke with a very sad heart, black and bad thoughts are going through my mind and are angering my soul. I am thinking of all the successes in my life and it seems strange that after crossing great expanses of waters and deep seas, to arrive here. I am thinking of the stupidity of this world having spent all our money during our trip to arrive here without a dime. To think we shall have to work to the death to live and what for? Only for the whim of one woman that after 18 years remembered that she had a daughter when she was 18 years old. She left her at the tender age of three in the care of her uncles and grandfather. Her daughters *had felt at home in Cuba with our feelings and our friends and everything that was ours is in Cuba ...* (From Julia Elias Menayer’s diary)

Julia Elias Menayer was a girl of Lebanese descent, born in Egypt on route to Havana around 1897. After living in the outskirts of Havana for more than a decade, her parents re-migrated to Australia and New Zealand. Julia’s experience highlights two major themes in the history of Cuban migration. Firstly, Cuba is a Caribbean island, colonised by the Spanish, and populated by successive waves of forced and voluntary migrants from nearly all continents of the world. Secondly, as in Julia’s case, many migrants became attached to this island. Her diary constitutes one of the earliest accounts of people linked to Cuba migrating to Australia, exemplifying the fluidity of human movement into and out of Cuba. Indeed the history of Cuba has always been strongly linked to the movement of people. The Elias family was not alone, with archival documents showing other cases of people of Middle Eastern descent, who were born or had grown up in Cuba, who also migrated to Australia during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>4</sup>

To understand why people like the Elias family ended up in Cuba and considered themselves a part of it, this chapter will briefly describe the history, ethnic make-up and

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, in the Western Australian Archive, Ptak Aizik arrived in 1954, series K1331 and in the NSW Archive, Rosa Daly arrived in 1962, series SP1732/5.

culture of Cuba which will provide some background to cultural traditions and political events referred in Chapters 5 and 6. This history is focused on migration because it played an important role in the formation of the Cuban nation and its culture. In its first part I will describe the immigration trends to Cuba from the 15<sup>th</sup> century till the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second part of this chapter will be devoted to the literature on the emigrational waves out of Cuba in the last fifty years after the coming to power of the revolutionary Government, led by Fidel Castro in 1959.

### **Cuba in the colonial times from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Cuba is the biggest island of the Greater Antilles located in the Caribbean Sea, in the middle of the American continent. Cuba's fauna and flora were lush and colourful. Archaeological evidence suggests that the island's first inhabitants had arrived by boat around the 8,000 B.C. in successive migrational waves from, North America through the Florida Strait, Central America and Venezuela, which conformed Cuban indigenous groups called *Guanahatabeyes*, *Siboneyes* and *Tainos*. The *Guanahatabeyes* populated the western part of the country, lived in caves, made very rudimentary tools and hunted and gathered their food. The *Siboneyes* lived mainly in the coast, fished for living, but also hunted and gathered their food. They made stone tools for hunting and cutting the trees to construct canoes. This group arrived in Cuba about 4,500 years ago from Central America and settled in the south coast in the centre of the Cuba. The last migrational waves of *Amerindians* arrived between 500 B.C. and the 15<sup>th</sup> century. These groups were in the Mesolithic and Neolithic stages of social development. Amongst them were the *Tainos*, a subgroup of the *Arawakan* of northeastern South America.

The *Tainos* constituted the majority of the 200,000 Ameridians living in Cuba, in 1492 when Christopher Columbus arrived (Domínguez et al 1994: 50). They cultivated the land, but also hunted and fished. The *Tainos* introduced *maize* (corn), bitter cassava and tobacco to Cuba. Although they did not have a written language, they had a highly ceremonial culture, made jewellery, pottery and weaving. Their social structure was a three-tier system divided into a chief, noblemen and servants. They also had a division of labour by gender and age. *Taino* men used to hunt, fish, and clear the jungle for the cultivation of crops; while women and children gathered fruit, look after the crops, made cassava bread, pottery and weaved materials from cotton and other vegetable fibres (Domínguez et al 1994: 44–48).

The arrival of the Europeans in the fifteenth century ended the relatively peaceful existence of Cuba's indigenous inhabitants. The Cuban Amerindians resisted the European invasion by running away into the mountains and committing suicide in the gold fields. Some, like the famous chief *Hatuey*, fought with fire and spears the forced conversion into Catholicism and slavery that the Spanish conquerors had imposed on them. By the mid sixteenth century, only 893 indigenous Cubans had survived the Spanish genocide, the European diseases and the suppression of their culture (Dominguez et al 1994: 91).

The introduction of sugar plantations in the sixteenth century shaped Cuba's economy, history and society from that point onwards. The labour intensive sugar industry needed large numbers of workers. With the indigenous population extinct, the Spanish began to introduce African slaves to work in the sugar fields. The real boom in the introduction of African slaves to Cuba, however, began with the ten-month occupation of the island by the British in 1762. This led to more open trade with the North American markets,

and therefore to an increase in the production of sugar and, in turn, an increase in the slave labour force required by the sugar industry. In 1820 Spain and Great Britain signed a treaty prohibiting the slave trade, but it was not strictly implemented and the trade continued on a minor scale. In 1844 an uprising of the slave and free African population erupted in the western provinces of Cuba, invoking fears in both the Spanish authorities, and the Cuban white population in general, of a repetition of the 1791 events in Haiti that overthrew the French colonial power. As a result, the Cuban *sacarocratas* (the elite sugar barons) and merchants began to look for other sources of labour, which in turn stimulated immigration, in the first instance primarily from Spain.

The difficulties of obtaining a slave force, the fear of a black uprising, and the permanent desire of the local Creole elite for the so-called ‘whitening’ of the Cuban population, led to the establishment of discriminatory, white immigration programs. As early as 1839 the first ‘colonisation programs’ were set up in the central provinces of Cuba –Las Villas and Puerto Principe– where the landowners preferred white labourers from the Spanish Canary Islands (Le Riverend 1981: 327). These programs targeted males, mainly from the Spanish provinces of Catalonia, Galicia and the Canary Islands. In many cases, however, these programs were unsuccessful as the harsh working conditions, poor payment and bad treatment from overseers led many to abandon their contracts with the sugar plantations (Le Riverend 1981: 341).

The failure of these programs promoted the search for non-white labour from Mexico and China, in the hope that they would accept the pay and conditions in the sugar plantations. An agreement between Cuban slave traders and Mexican authorities in *Yucatan* in 1849 brought Indian inmates from *Yucatan* prisons to the island. These were subsequently treated as slaves. Protests from the Mexican consul in Havana at the time

stopped the trade, but it was renewed in the 1850s until the Mexican president, Benito Juarez, prohibited such practices in 1861 (Le Riverend 1981: 344–345). The Chinese project began in 1847, but the majority of entries were recorded after 1853. Once again, the labourers were transported against their will, and effectively treated as slaves after their arrival in Cuba. The conditions of the Chinese contract labourers were disastrous, such that they too began to flee the plantations, or to commit suicide. Many even joined the Rebel armies in the two major independence wars of 1868 and 1895 that would shake and finally overthrow the Spanish colonial rule on the island (Wakeman Jr. 1993: 7).

The crisis of slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century and the economic instability of the island provoked the ‘Ten Years War’ (1868-1878), led initially by the landowner Carlos Manuel de Cespedes. The independence war destroyed the sugar industry in the eastern part of Cuba. The interwar period, between 1878 and 1895, did not bring any prosperity to the island. Commodity prices for sugar fell with the appearance of beet sugar in Europe, while prices for other commodities like tobacco and coffee were also unfavourable. The formal abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886 left a shortage of workers in the countryside as freed slaves moved to the cities seeking better work and conditions (see Le Riverend 1981: 482). This context explains the promotion of the immigration programs for Spain, Mexico and China.

At the same time, Perez Jr. emphasises that these migration programs were a part of the Spanish colonial policy of “racial equilibrium”, that was seeking to ‘whiten’ the population, which had the unintended effect of worsening the already critical employment situation in the Cuban cities (1983: 23). In 1895 the war for independence

from Spanish rule erupted again, but this time spread over the whole Cuban territory.<sup>5</sup> The newly appointed Spanish Captain-General Weyler differed from his predecessor's policy of seeking a peace treaty with the Cuban liberation army. Instead, Weyler decided to answer the "war with war" (see Perez Jr. 1983: 15). Weyler also placed the rural population in concentration camps within fortified towns and cities, to prevent the peasants from helping the insurgent *mambises* (soldiers of the Cuban rebel army). This policy had a devastating effect on the rural civil population, such that its numbers actually reduced by some 29,000 over 1887-1899 (Le Riverend 1981: 563).

Another outcome of the wars of independence against the Spanish colonialist power was the emigration of a part of Cuba's urban population due to the economic difficulties and political persecutions experienced at the time. Over the last three decades of the nineteenth century thousands of Cubans emigrated to the US, other Latin American countries, and Europe. By 1896, 36,000 Cubans lived in Florida, concentrated in Tampa and Cayo Hueso, while another substantial community could be found in New York (Suárez 1997: 55, Masud-Piloto 1996: 7–11).

In sum, three centuries of Spanish colonial rule of Cuba radically transformed the ethnic, economic and political makeup of the island. The continuous voluntary migration of different ethnic groups from the Iberian Peninsula and the forced immigration of African slaves, Chinese, Mexican indentured workers became the embryo of the Cuban nation. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the children of those immigrants started to call themselves *criollos* (creoles) to differentiate themselves from their

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<sup>5</sup> This war, 'the Spanish-Cuban War', is often referred to in literature as the 'Spanish-American War', given the intervention by the United States in 1898 as the war drew to a close. It was, however, an independence war fought largely by Cubans for independence from the Spanish colonial powers.

ancestors as a way of identification with their new land and nation. From the mixture of all those cultures a notion of Cuban culture evolved, with its music, its religion and its cuisine part Spanish, part African and part Chinese. Politically, the new *criollos* also moved towards independence from the Spanish crown and expelled the Spanish rulers, after years of annexionist movements supporting either the Spanish ruling of Cuba or the United States dominance of the region. Economically, Cuba became an important exporter of sugar, coffee and tobacco which would continue to rule the Cuban economy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Cuba in the republican era, 1902-1959**

In 1902 the first Cuban national government was established, after a short period of American occupation following the end of the Spanish-Cuban war. One of the most urgent tasks of the newly appointed government was to populate the island, which had lost up to 200,000 inhabitants during the 1895-1898 war (see Le Riverend 1981:563). Once again, the sugar barons or *sacarocratas*, and the other powerful groups in the Cuban economy, began to set up associations and companies to promote labour migration to the island. The economic elite continued to promote a white migration program, giving preference to European migrants. After several years of debate about the immigration policy, Cuban government declared the 'Law of Immigration and Colonisation' in 1906. Under this law, a special fund of one million Cuban *pesos* was created to promote the migration of mainly European families, while 20% of the total fund was devoted to the introduction of single, male labourers.

However the family migration scheme failed and the government introduced several decrees allowing the seasonal migration of labourers from nearby Haiti, Jamaica and

other Caribbean islands to work in the sugar plantations. An immigration boom period ensued, into the late 1920s, in which the majority of immigrants were Spanish, Haitian and Jamaican. This is seen in a new edition of the 1931 census memoirs which notes that during the first years of 1920s, some 152 687 Spaniards entered Cuba at a rate of over 30 000 persons a year (Cuba 1978: 59). In the 1920s the immigration of Italians, French, Russian, Polish and Arabs (Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians) also increased, linked to a restriction put on their entry to the United States by the 'North American Quota Limit Act of 1921', and the 'Immigration Act' of 1924.

The Great Depression of 1929-1932 affected Cuban sugar exports, leading to the closure of several sugar mills throughout the country. Once again, economic crisis in Cuba combined with a domestic political crisis, in this case the government of Machado becoming a dictatorship as he forced his own re-appointment for a second term of government. The lack of jobs and low wages for workers promoted large-scale strikes throughout the country in 1933. This movement, however, known as the Revolution of 1933, had its aims deflected and reoriented by the new president of a provisional government, Ramon Grau San Martin, after the defeat of the Machado dictatorship. Grau blamed the migrants for the country's economic problems, dictating decree No. 2232 in October 1933 that promoted the deportation of illegal immigrant labourers. The law affected thousands of Haitian sugar workers who had arrived in Cuba under seasonal contracts, and subsequently remained in the country. Under the decree some 8000 Haitians were expelled between 1933-34, and in excess of 25,000 more in 1937 (McLeod 1988: 605).

Furthermore, by the end of 1933 Grau implemented the "fifty-percent law" which required that half of the employees in every workplace be Cuban born. This law

affected many businesses run by and employing Spanish, Jewish and Chinese immigrants (see Levine 1933: 52-59). These events ended the official open door migrational policy of the Cuban government at the time, and the immigration intakes during the next to decades decreased. Although many migrants were prompted to adopt Cuban citizenship in 1933, the 1953 Census data recorded substantial reduction in foreign-born nationals living in Cuba: 230,431, compared with 339,082 foreign born people registered in the 1931 Census (cited in Thomas 1971: 1100).

Fulgencio Batista, an army stenographer who became a sergeant and ended up as a General, became one of the most important figures of the Cuban politics between 1934 and 1959. After political manipulation in the mid 1930s, he got himself elected in 1940 and ruled Cuba till 1944. World War II brought high prices for sugar and an economic bonanza for the country, but not for the working people. Batista made a pact with the Cuban communist party and the labour movement ensured an era of social stability after the 1930s turmoil.

In 1944 the party of the *Autenticos*, with Grau on its leadership, returned to power by appealing to their strong and 'honest' handling of the economy in the 1930s. In fact, Grau and his successor Prío Socarras crushed any group who dared to criticise their corrupt behaviours. In the light of the Cold War, the Cuban Communist Party and the leadership of the labour movement were disbanded and some trade unionists were killed. A group of disaffected university students and intellectual formed the *Partido Ortodoxo*, hoping to defeat the corrupt *Autenticos* in the 1948 election. The corrupt election campaign blocked the win of the *Partido Ortodoxo* and three years later its leader, lawyer Eduardo Chibas committed suicide publicly out of frustration while denouncing the corruption of Prio's government (see Gott 2004: 145). This opened the

door for a new leadership in the anti-corruption movement. Fidel Castro, a law student and active member of the *Partido Ortodoxo* came into the limelight.

At the end of 1951 sugar prices fell on the world market and Cuban economy went into depression. Batista seized power in March 1952, using as a pretext the economic mishandling and the political corruption of the *Autentico* ruling party. However, his government became a replica of its predecessors, unable to solve the economic problems and violently repressing the protests of workers and the students' revolutionary movement. The repression was exacerbated following armed attack of the Moncada barrack on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1953, led by Fidel Castro. This marked the beginning of the new 'July 26 Movement' and associated popular uprising that swept the whole island with general workers' strikes and student' protests during five years. On December 1956, accompanied by a group of young revolutionaries including Ernesto Che Guevara, landed from Mexico in the Oriente region of Cuba, and from there began a guerrilla campaign that culminated with entry of the Rebels' army to Havana on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1959, marking the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

Cuba's political instability and economic chaos in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the search for the meaning of Cubanness, as a protest against the excessive foreign (first Spanish, and then United States) domination of Cuban life. It was during this time that many of well-known Cuban intellectuals emerged, including: the ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, whose work is analysed in Chapter 3; the historian Ramiro Guerra and Emilio Roig; the poets Regino Boti and Nicolas Guillen; the writer Alejo Carpentier; and musicians Amadeo Roldan and Garcia Caturla. Their endeavours were deeply immersed in researching all the social and cultural foundations of the

modern Cuban nation, acknowledging the contributions of the African cultures to the Cuban nation and culture.

The 1960s in Cuban history were an era of broad social, economic and political reforms marked by the nationalisation of foreign and private businesses, far-reaching land reform, the literacy campaign and the urban reform law. These reforms directly addressed some of the major inequalities that had plagued the Cuban nation for centuries, precipitating the breaking of diplomatic and economic relations with the United States in 1961, leaving Cuba without a market for its primary commodity: sugar. In the Cold-War context the Soviet Union and other socialist countries came to the aid of Cuba, buying its sugar harvest at preferential prices, and offering technological and military support. For the next three decades, Cuba was a close ally of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, driven by the real-politic alternatives of economic isolation, and also by the developing political convictions of the Revolutionary Cuban government and population.

The collapse of Soviet Union and Socialist Bloc in 1991 tested the Cuban revolution dramatically, particularly given the impact on the island's economic foundations following the loss of some 85% of its international trade. Accompanying the loss of market partners, the international price of sugar on the open market fell dramatically. For the first time in many years the Cuban economy could not survive on its sugar production. Tourism and the health industry have become the main earners of foreign currencies for restructured Cuban economy. Perhaps most significantly, Cuba has found a way out of this storm on its own terms, without a superpower in its rear mirror.

## **Review of literature on Cuban migration**

Although politically Cuba has been quite stable during the last fifty years, not all Cubans have embraced the Revolution, for a myriad of motives. During these five decades many Cubans have gone to exile, like many of their compatriots did in the nineteenth century, or during the 1930 revolution and the repressives 1950s. Five major migrational waves of the Cuban population have taken place during the last fifty years. Some analysts argue that the causes of these migrational waves lie not only in the politics of the Cuban Government, but also the migrational policies of the US towards Cuba, combined with the complex mix of economic factors and family reunion processes (Portes and Basch 1985; Hernández 1997b). One result of this history is that Cuban migrants have settled in more than 30 countries around the world. The majority live in the US (just above a million), but there are also thousands of Cubans living in Spain, Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Small groups of Cubans have migrated to the Middle East, Eastern Europe, Canada and Australia (Martin 1995: 55).

It is now the turn to review some of the literature on Cuban migration to identify the main arguments that account for these waves of migration and its causes. Studies on Cuban migrants have been mainly dedicated to the Cuban community in Miami, so the literature reviewed here has been selected in part to broaden the spectrum of these studies through the analysis of other Cuban groups around the world. Following this, the central purpose of this analysis is to identify the main stages of Cuban migrational waves so as to consider their impact on the arrival of Cubans in Australia.

The review of the literature on Cuban migration identifies three major themes in the field: 1) debate and shifts in the characterisation of Cuban migrants with respect to the

role of political and economic factors leading to migration; 2) the myth of Cuban migrants as golden exiles; and 3) debate about the heterogeneity of the Cuban migrant communities. Consideration of these themes provides a general overview of several aspects of the migration and settlement of Cubans worldwide. Moreover, this analysis provides the background to the major research questions of this study: to identify and understand how Cuban ethnicity and identity are expressed and interpreted in Australia, how this differs from and/or aligns with studies of other Cuban migrant communities and, finally, how it can be understood in terms of current theory on ethnicity and identity.

Studies about Cuban migrants flourished in the 1960s, in response to migration provoked by the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. As noted above, the majority of the work focused on the Cuban community in Miami. However, in the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, an emerging trend for diversity of topics and focus in the analysis of the Cuban migrational phenomenon was strengthened. New works in the general field of Cuban studies on both sides of the Florida Straits and beyond appeared to be less polarised and less polemical in relation to politics of Cuba and the personal experiences of the authors. This fresh climate produced new studies, including *Havana-USA* by Maria Cristina García (1996), *City on the edge* by Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick (1993), Thomas Tweed's study *Our Lady of the Exile* (1997) and *From welcomed exile to illegal immigrants* by Felix Masud-Piloto (1996). In addition, more studies emerged that were devoted to Cuban migrants outside the US, for example, *Cubans in Puerto Rico* by José A. Cobas and Jorge Duany (1997), *La emigración cubana en España (Cuban emigration in Spain)* by Consuelo Martín and Vicente Romano (1994), and *Zurich's Miami* by Andreas Wimmer (1998).

Since the early 1980s the number of researchers in Cuba working on the theme of Cuban migration also began to increase steadily. Several Cuban Government institutions, such as the Havana University, the Centre for the Study of the United States (CESEU), and the Centre for the Study of the Americas (CEA), offered postgraduate courses, conferences and funds in the area (Hernández 1997a: 58; Rodríguez 1995: 80). The first stage of this work focused on the analysis and critique of studies about Cuban society and its migrants produced outside Cuba, primarily those from the US. Given the political sensitivity of these studies, however, even the works critiquing them were not widely available within Cuba (Rodríguez 1995: 80).

This situation changed considerably in 1994, particularly after the state sponsored a conference called *The Nation and Emigration* held in Havana in that year. As a result of this, for the first time since 1959, articles by Cuban intellectuals living overseas were published in leading theoretical and cultural journals within Cuba, like the special issue dedicated to Cuban poetry overseas in *La Gaceta de Cuba* in 1995. Additionally, several articles about the Cuban diaspora were published in the journals of social studies *Temas* (Themes) and *Contracorriente* (Counter-current). For example, *Temas* published several articles analysing the history of the Cuban migration to the US, the Cuban American literature, and theoretical revisions about the development of Cuban studies on the island and in the US (Suárez 1997; Fornet 1997; Hernández 1997a).

Some of the studies published in Cuba, in the 1990s were critical of the overwhelming focus on the Cuban exodus to the US, neglecting Cuban settlements in other countries (Martin 1995: 50; Hernández et al. 2002). Although the work of Cuban specialists before the 1990s explored diverse topics such as economics, sociology and psychology, these studies were heavily influenced by the ideological framework of the Cuban

Revolution and the political tensions between Cuba and the US. Consuelo Martin argued that ideology was used as a substitute for theory and methodology in the studies of Cuban migration (1995: 53). As a consequence, she highlighted how Cuban analysts seemed to assume that social processes took over or subsumed the psychological actions of the individuals (1995: 53). Finally, Martin suggested that future studies on migration would need “to sieve through the ideological focus of the statistical data and look at how family structures, cultural, economic and political causes influence the emigration process” (1995: 53).

A comprehensive review of the vast body of literature on Cuban migration is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, given that most Cuban migrants in Australia arrived after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, some selected works are reviewed here to illustrate the major themes with respect to the analysis of Cuban migration and its development since the Cuban Revolution.

*Economic, social and political accounts of Cuban migration post-1959*

Debate about the appropriate classification of Cuban migrants since 1959 as economic migrants, political exiles, family reunion, or some combination of these factors, constitutes a recurring theme in the literature. Cubans who left the island soon after the Revolution were largely characterised as political exiles. The Cold War political climate of the 1960s was instrumental in this consideration, such that Masud-Piloto notes that the Eisenhower government offered immediate political asylum to 7,000 Cubans in 1959 (1996: 32). United States migrational policy favoured people said to be ‘escaping’ leftist governments or ‘communist oppression’, but, as Masud-Piloto highlights, this policy was not always uniformly applied to other political refugees from Central

America and the Caribbean region, such as those seeking political asylum from Nicaragua under the Sandinista government (1996: 149; Portes and Stepick 1993: 60).

Cuba was thus well established as a special case in United States policy, promoting and politicising migration from revolutionary Cuba. American presidents, from Eisenhower to Carter, maintained an open door policy towards Cuban migrants coming to their shores and provided political asylum. However, after the Mariel boatlift of 1980, the American Government began to publicly acknowledge that some Cubans seeking to live in the US were motivated primarily by economic reasons, and so were not automatically treated as political refugees. In 1994, the so-called 'rafter crisis' led the Clinton Administration to sign a migration agreement with the Cuban Government, including a provision to deport illegal entrants to the US back to Cuba.

This trend away from the ideologically-driven classification of all Cuban migrants post-1959 as political refugees fleeing from communist oppression can be seen in the work of analysts in the field, both inside and outside Cuba. Portes and Bach, for example, in *Latin Journey*, hinted that Cuban migration to the US had an increasing economic motive (1985: 84). The authors interviewed a group of 590 Cubans who arrived in Miami via third countries in the 1970s, and found that nearly a third of the respondents had intended to leave Cuba before the Revolution. Nevertheless, the majority of them alleged political causes for their migration, while only a small number cited economic difficulties and family reasons (1985: 154–55). Based on these results, Portes and Bach emphasise that unemployment and their unhappiness with their economic situation in Cuba, plus political causes marked this migrational group of the 1970s (1985: 159). The 'open door' policies of the US Government for political exiles clearly complicates the issue in that it effectively made the citing of political asylum a requirement for attaining

US citizenship. Underlying this policy and subsequent public characterisation of Cuban migrants, economic difficulties and other personal motives were also manifest causes of the departure of this group.

Martin and Romano arrived at similar conclusions after analysing interview data collected in Spain in 1987 and 1992. Firstly, the authors noted that in this study only those who emigrated in the 1960s cited political reasons for migration. Those who arrived later cited economic and family reunion reasons. Additionally, Martin and Romano argue that Cubans who married Spanish citizens migrated also because of economic reasons, although these motivations were effectively concealed “under personal love motivations” (1994: 93). Martin and Romano acknowledge a political element to the Cuban migration to Spain, but they too argue that for the group studied it was primarily about economics, as interviewees gave more importance to “their individual rather than social needs, which is characteristic of economic migration” (1994: 94). In the case of Spain, without an ideologically-inspired immigration policy favouring political refugees, Cuban migrants appear to be more open in stating the economic basis of their migration.

Even researchers working in Cuba have adopted a less polarised approach in their analyses of Cuban emigration. For example, Jorge Hernández, a leading researcher on the topic residing in Cuba, notes that the pattern of Cuban emigration has changed over the years (1997b). He argues that economic and family reunion motives have increased in relevance, such that political causes are not the only, nor the major, reason for migration as they were in the 1960s. Indeed, Hernández considers that family reunion has played an important role in the migrational flows that have occurred since 1965 and the Mariel boatlift in 1980 (1997b: 66).

The literature on Cuban migration shows a clear shift in the classification of migrants. In the 1960s, in the heat of the Cold War, the radical social changes introduced by the revolutionary government and consequent open door policy of the United States towards Cuban political migrants meant that analysts on both sides of the Florida Straits tended to present Cuban migrants as political exiles or dissidents by default. Since the early 1970s, with the political changes in Cuba well established, new waves of migration were considered in terms of the socio-economic impacts of the revolutionary reforms and their impact on the population since 1959. At the same time, following the earlier substantial waves of migration, family reunion became an increasingly significant factor. This was more fully appreciated with the Mariel exodus of the 1980s, and the more recent 'rafters crisis' of 1994, after the collapse of the former socialist block. This is not to suggest that politics ceased to be a motivating factor for some migrants, but that this over-arching classification of post-1959 Cuban migration has given way to more comprehensive studies and understandings. As will be seen in the overview of the Cuban migration in Australia below, this trend underscores the Australian experience.

#### *Golden exiles and gusanos*

On the question of the integration of Cuban migrants, the characterisation of Cuban political refugees as golden exiles was promoted by the media in the United States, praising the rapid and successful insertion of the first wave of Cuban exiles in US society. Cuban exiles were presented as the model minority of the Hispanic group in the US in those times, said to have a good capitalist work ethic and a love for US-style freedom because they had fled communism (Cobas and Duany 1997: 22). The academic literature examining the adaptation process of Cuban migrants contributed to this myth.

For example, Portes portrayed the US experience of Cuban refugees in terms of the “golden exile” (1969: 508). He cited their rapid rise to the high socioeconomic level that the migrants held previously in Cuba, and the strength of their middle and upper- class ethics that encouraged individual economic improvement (1969: 517). Later, however, Portes acknowledged that the causes of Cuban migration had become very “complex and heterogeneous”, like the group itself, such that the myth of the golden exile began to fall away (1985: 140).

While United States governments sought to present all Cuban migrants as political refugees, and encouraged the golden exile myth as part of this political strategy, the revolutionary government in Cuba was quick to classify early exiles as *gusanos* (worms) and *vende patrias* (traitors) in the 1960s. In the 1970s the Cuban Government began to officially refer to the exiles as the *comunidad* or Cuban community abroad. However, the more inclusive term was short-lived, and during the Mariel boatlift of the 1980s the new exiles were labelled even more harshly as *escoria* or scum. At this time the United States media borrowed the term *gusano* to refer to the Mariel arrivals (Cobas and Duany 1997: 22).

Although for years these highly politicised terms were widely used in the literature about Cuban migration, particularly in that produced inside the island, current researchers working in Cuba have critiqued characterisations of Cuban migrants as golden exiles or worms. For example, Hernández argues that both images are inadequate stereotypes which fail to reflect the complexity of Cuban migration (1997b: 66). Furthermore, he acknowledges that these images reflect the ideological basis of both the US and Cuba’s migrational policies. As noted above, Hernández also emphasises that the Cuban approach to dissidents, which fuelled the ‘worm’

classification, worked to deny economic and personal causes as being involved in people's decision to leave the country (1997b: 66).

Interestingly, researchers examining Cuban migrant groups outside the US, or even black Cubans in the US, found it difficult to apply these categories of golden exiles or worms to their results (Croucher 1996). Skop, for example, demonstrated that black Cubans tended to settle in other areas like Tampa, New York and Los Angeles, because they did not have the family networks of their white compatriots in Miami (Skop 2001: 462). It is important to note here that the majority of initial post-revolutionary migration to the US was white, this trend changing with the Mariel boatlift of 1980 in which nearly twenty percent of the Cuban newcomers were non-white. After analysing some census data about black Cuban migrants from the Mariel wave, Skop argues that they were clearly disadvantaged in relation to white Cuban migrants, finding that black Cubans held less managerial positions, had less income per household, and had a greater percentage of people living below the poverty line than their white compatriots (2001: 466–67). In her critique of the golden exile or myth of the “successful Cuban migrant”, she argues that the “Cuban success story” of adaptation needs to be supplemented with “other versions of the tale” (2001: 468).

In their detailed analysis of Cubans in Puerto Rico, Cobas and Duany contest the classifications of golden exiles and worms, highlighting that Cuban migrants are a very heterogeneous group (1997: 24). In the case of Puerto Rico, Cubans had reached a comfortable economic status, but lacked the political power of their counterparts in Miami (1997: 50). The authors argued that the socioeconomic model of insertion of Cubans in Puerto Rico “fits the middleman group pattern”, and not the ethnic enclave model (1997: 65). However, they considered this pattern as transitory, due to the high

level of exogamous marriages, the lack of considerable discrimination against Cubans by the host society, and the low level of arrival of new Cuban migrants to Puerto Rico (1997: 65-6). The critical point again is that while the simple labels of golden exile or worm tell us something about the politics of Cuban migration post-1959, they fail to adequately describe the Cuban, or indeed any, migrant community.

Authors like Martin and Romano point out that the path of insertion into host societies differs from one situation to the next, noting that, in the case of Spain, Cuban migrants did not receive any special treatment, and that, unlike their compatriots in the US, Cuban migrants in Spain were not presented as heroes. In fact, the authors found that Cuban migrants in Spain experienced considerable downgrading of their skills and qualifications, resulting in social and employment uncertainty (Martin and Romano 1994: 95). As can be appreciated in the work of Martin and Romano, the politics of the context for migrants arriving in Spain carved a different path for this group, contributing to a radically different outcome to that of Cubans in Miami.

While the idea of a homogenous Cuban exile community was also promoted inside the island, Hernández highlights how the exiles have never been a homogenous entity (1997a). Interestingly, he writes of a highly symbolic group of leftist Cubans in the Miami Cuban community as early as the late 1960s and early 1970s who promoted a more progressive and tolerant attitude towards the Cuban Revolution (1997a: 68).

While some of the most outspoken people in this group were indeed harassed and killed by members of extreme right-wing Cuban organisations, Hernández highlights this early public demonstration of alternative political agendas amongst Cubans in Miami (1997a: 68). These acts may have temporarily silenced these public alternative voices, but they

could not impose on or restore to the Cuban community a homogeneity that had never existed.

These examples highlight the reality of the heterogeneous nature of Cuban migrants and their experience, subject to the specific historical social and political contexts of their settlement in different parts of the world. Once again, the evidence was in the reality that of course not all Cuban migrants had become successful entrepreneurs as the golden exile myth proclaims, and that their patterns of settlement and insertion in the host societies were very diverse. Similarly, the close analysis of the causes of émigrés' departure, and their experience, quickly highlighted the inadequacy of the 'gusano' label.

While this is hardly a surprising finding, the polarised and highly politicised nature of the literature on post-revolutionary Cuba generally, and Cuban migration in particular, makes this an important point to establish as part of the backdrop to analysing the experience of Cuban migrants in Australia.

### **Cuban migrational waves**

The periodisation of the migrational waves has been defined mainly by the ups and downs of diplomatic and political relations between Cuba and the US over the last forty years. Here again, although Cubans have migrated to other countries – for example in the 1970s when, due to migratory restrictions of entry to the US, Cubans went mainly to other countries – the periodisation has tended to be defined in terms of the flows of Cubans to the US. With this qualification in mind, analysts have divided Cuban post-revolutionary migrational waves in five or six main periods (see García 1996; Masud-Piloto 1996; Portes and Bach 1985).

The first period commenced in 1959, with the coming to power of the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement that provoked the immediate exodus of people associated with the Batista government. They were followed by wealthy landowners, industrialists and highly qualified professionals, prompted or pushed by the nationalisation of their properties in the early 1960s. As was noted above, Eisenhower's government set up a special assistance fund for the resettlement of Cubans (García 1996: 21–22). Masud-Piloto claims that the US adopted this position based on humanitarian reasons, the “desire to overcome the Revolution with the exiles' forces” and that this was orchestrated to construct some sort of public embarrassment for the new Cuban Government (1996: 35). Furthermore, the US cut all diplomatic relationships with Cuba in 1961, but Cubans still were able to emigrate there via third countries such as Spain, or directly if they had a visa waiver from the US Government and dollars to pay for their airfare.

The missile crisis of October 1962 initiated the second migrational wave. Direct commercial flights between Havana and Miami were suspended, but Cubans continued to arrive in the US illegally by boats, or legally via third countries. This situation continued until 1965 when the Cuban Government allowed the first massive boatlift from the Camarioca port.

This act pushed the American administration to re-establish commercial flights, that in turn came to be known as the ‘freedom flights’, and marked the third period of Cuban post-revolutionary migrational waves. Several researchers note that women, children and elderly people represented the majority of this group (García 1996: 43; Romano 1994: 15). Indeed, although the Cuban government announced that anyone who wanted to migrate could leave, professionals were confronted with some obstacles as the government tried to avoid the traditional ‘brain drain’ from the ‘Third’ to ‘First’ World

countries. As such, at this point there was a significant change in the migrational group from the first wave. García notes that this group was more working class, and more ethnically and economically diverse, adding that a substantial part of the Jewish and Chinese population that had settled in Cuba left the country during this period (1996: 43-5). Finally, during the time of the ‘freedom flights’ people continued to enter the United States via third countries. In the case of Spain, nearly 80,000 Cubans found themselves trapped there because the US Government gave preference to migrants arriving directly from Cuba (Martín and Romano 1994: 15). As will be seen below, this policy influenced the future settlement of Cubans in Australia.

The fourth period is marked by the events of April 1980, when the Cuban Government opened the port of Mariel to the Cubans residing in the US to pick up their relatives in the island. Known as the ‘Mariel boatlift’, one of the triggers of this situation was the assault on the Peruvian embassy in Havana by a group of Cubans seeking political asylum. The embassy refused to hand over the attackers to the Cuban authorities, leading them to remove the local security officers from the embassy; this in turn allowing thousands of Cubans to enter and seek asylum in the embassy. The Mariel Port was opened to facilitate the exodus of this group, and other people wanting to leave.

The Cuban government sought to manipulate the situation, loading boats with people who were not relatives or families of the exiles at all. A small percentage of the nearly 125,000 exiles that arrived in the US by September 1980 had been released from jails and psychiatric institutions in Cuba and allowed to leave from Mariel. While the ex-prisoners had largely been convicted of minor offences (García 1996: 64), the American media overplayed those features and drew on the negative Cuban characterisation of migrants as *gusanos* to label the Mariel arrivals as “scum, prostitutes, etc.” (García

1996: 65). Two aspects of this migrational wave need to be emphasised. Firstly, the majority of the people in this group were male, with a section of these being black or mulatto Cubans (Cobas and Duany 1997: 29). Secondly, in the heat of the Mariel boatlift crisis, some offers came from other countries to take a number of these refugees. As a consequence, small groups of Cubans migrated to Canada, Spain, Venezuela, Argentina and Australia at this time (García 1996: 73).

The fifth migrational wave started in the early 1990s and reached its peak during August 1994. The collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist bloc, accounting for some 70% of all of the country's trade, had a devastating effect on the Cuban economy (Eckstein 1994: 88–96). Indeed, these events led many to speculate on the 'inevitable' collapse of the Cuban Revolution and transition to capitalism as was occurring in Eastern Europe. In this context, and seeking to apply further pressure to the Cuban government, the United States vigorously pursued its policy of impeding official migration while accepting, and implicitly encouraging, Cubans that arrived on Florida's shores by boat or raft. The number of *balseros* or rafters increased rapidly. Ackerman notes that the US Coast Guard rescued 45,574 Cuban *balseros* between 1991 and 1994 (1996: 169). In August 1994, after the hijacking of some local Havana ferry boats and other disturbances, Fidel Castro responded as he had done in earlier waves by announcing that the Cuban coast guards would no longer prevent any person wanting to leave Cuba. Fearing a repeat of the Mariel boatlift, the US Government reacted by transferring the new Cuban arrivals to the US military base in Guantanamo, Cuba, for processing, rather than allowing them direct entry to Miami. Subsequent negotiations led to an agreement between the US and Cuban governments in which the former agreed to accept up to 20,000 Cuban migrants a year, to stop the illegal entries and

deport all illegal arrivals back to Cuba. On its part, the Cuban government agreed to discourage the illegal immigrants by arresting any suspicious boat in Cuban national waters (García 1996: 80; Masud-Piloto 1996: 139–40).

Despite the signing of this migration accord in September 1994, the illegal departure of Cubans has continued. The US Government arbitrarily denies visas for family reunions and periodically deports some, but not all, illegal entrants. In 2000, world attention focused on the case of Elian Gonzalez, a six-year old child who was the only survivor of a group of twelve people who sought to enter the US by a raft (Blackburn 2000).

Although the economic situation in Cuba had improved substantially since the collapse of the socialist bloc, conditions remained far from the best levels enjoyed in earlier times. The Cuban Government regularly cites the US, Cuban Adjustment Act and accuses illegal people-smugglers of promoting the ongoing and dangerous departures, while the Cuban media often publishes articles about the costs of people smuggling and consequences for Cubans caught and deported by the US Coast Guard (López 1997).

Within these waves of migration, Cuba has experienced an increase in legal migration to countries other than the US since the mid 1980s. Ernesto Rodríguez notes that 50,300 Cubans migrated legally to other countries between 1985 and 1992, noting that a significant part of this group used third countries such Panama or Jamaica as “bridges” to enter the US (1999: 50). At the same time, however, legal migration also increased to Spain, Venezuela, Mexico, Italy, Canada, and former socialist countries like Russia, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. In the case of Spain and Venezuela, this was due to the existence of substantial Cuban communities there (1999: 54). Rodríguez argues that former socialist countries in Europe have become new sites of migration for Cubans, due to Cuban students and workers living there who decided to stay or migrate to other

countries after the collapse of the Eastern European socialist bloc (1999: 56). In relation to newer migrational destinations like Germany, Canada and Italy, Rodríguez cites Cuba's post-Soviet development and promotion of international tourism as the main cause, with these countries being the principal providers of tourists to Cuba since the 1980s.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Cuban Government eased migrational procedures for artists and other professionals who secured work contracts outside Cuba. Many of these professionals, especially painters and musicians, have found work contracts around Latin American and Europe. Rodríguez sees this as a continuation of a similar trend that occurred before the Revolution, when Cuban artists travelled around the world in search of better opportunities (1999: 57). Rodríguez also notes that some of these professionals defected to the US, once their contracts expired (1999: 58).

Others like Cámara argue that the legal migration out of Cuba, via professional work contracts to Latin American countries, effectively became a "third option" for Cuban artists who may have been confronting problems of artistic freedom within the island, but were unwilling to migrate to the extreme right-wing climate of the exile community in Miami (1994: 725). She points out those who did end up in Miami found themselves caught in another political climate that limited their artistic expression (1994: 727). Cámara explains that the "third option" has never been popular with a section of the Cuban exile community in the US, because their compatriots living in other countries had easier access to Cuba (1994: 728). While noting that the differentiation is ideologically motivated, Cámara argues, however, that both forms of ruptures with Cuba are structurally similar (1999: 728).

Cuban migrational waves have been shaped mainly by internal political and economic conditions and events, and external factors such as the relationship between the US and Cuba and the nature of US policy towards Cuba. A characteristic of the Cuban migrational flow has been one of a fairly constant stream, with sporadic bursts of mass exodus out of the island. The number of illegal migrants out of Cuba has decreased since 1994; however, the US policy towards Cuban migrants is still ambivalent, such that it continues to implicitly encourage illegal departures. On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in legal migration out of Cuba since the mid 1980s as a result of the rise in international tourism in Cuba, and a more flexible approach of the government towards overseas work contracts of Cuban nationals.

### **The settlement of Cuban migrants in Australia**

The review of Cuban emigrational waves above provides a general framework for considering the timing, level and composition of Cuban migration to Australia. This, along with a review of available literature on Cubans in Australia, establishes the context for the subsequent analysis of how Cuban identity has been expressed and constructed in Australia.

The literature about Cuban migrants in Australia is limited, linked to the relatively small number of people of Cuban descent living in Australia and the short period of time that has elapsed since their settlement. Publications about Cubans in Australia tend to be newspaper articles, but their accounts are not well detailed (see, for example, Kurosowa 1990). Two Cuban-born writers living in Australia have published books about their migrant experiences. In 1996, Olga Lorenzo published a novel describing the experiences of a Cuban family who fled Cuba, settled in Miami, in which one of the

women decided later to settle in Australia (Lorenzo 1996). Most recently, well-known journalist Luis Garcia, who left Cuba with his parents in 1972 at the age of thirteen, published an autobiographical account of “growing up in Castro’s Cuba” (Garcia, 2006). His book reflects on life in early revolutionary Cuba, with many of these recollections connecting with the experiences of other Cuban migrants that arrived in Australia in the 1970s. From this point of view, it is a useful source. However, as I highlighted above, the causes of the Cuban migration have diversified over time such that politics is no longer the dominant factor behind decisions to leave Cuba as it was in this earlier period. Furthermore, Garcia finishes his book with the arrival of his family in Spain, limiting its value for our focus on Cuban migrant experience in Australia.

Only a handful of academic studies have directly or indirectly addressed the presence of Cubans in Australia, but none of these have focused on this migrant group in depth. A study of small ethnic groups in Australia offers some information about the Caribbean people in Australia, based on the data collected for the 1986 census. This census counted 3,231 Caribbean people living in Australia (Jupp et al. 1991). The Australian Bureau of Statistics includes Cuba as a part of the Caribbean region; however, in the case of this study, it was not specified if the data analysed there includes Cubans. The study conducted by James Jupp and others found that nearly a half of the Caribbean group was younger than 34 years of age. In relation to gender, the data showed that males outnumbered females in a ratio of 105 males per 100 females (Jupp et al. 1991: 26). Additionally, this study found out that 26.2% of the working-aged Caribbean people were either managers or professionals, and 20.3% of the group worked as contractors or labourers. Hence, the authors state that Caribbeans are a “group with a large middle class” (Jupp et al. 1991: 29–30). The study also highlights the existence of

two Caribbean associations, one in Queensland and the other in Western Australia (Jupp et al. 1991: 39). Although, this work does not offer specific information about Cubans, it gives a general idea about the gender and work composition of the Caribbean migrants in Australia of which the Cubans are a part. Indeed, detailed statistical data about the group are not accessible, and apart from the general number of persons, further details about their occupation or even age groups are not available in the census information given the small numbers of Cuban people living in Australia.

An article by Charles Wilcox offers more specific information about Cubans, although this comes through the study of the religious and ethnic identity of Spanish-speaking people around Australia, with a particular focus on Victoria (1989: 72). Wilcox notes that the large-scale arrival of Latin Americans to Australia occurred mainly after the 1960s, and that the Cubans interviewed in his study were mainly refugees from “the Castro regime” (1989: 72). The Cubans surveyed by the author were part of the Melbournian Baptist congregation *Luz y Vida*, where they made up eight percent of that congregation, the second largest group after the Salvadorians (1989: 81).

Wilcox’s study is one of the exceptions that provide some data about Cubans living in Australia. However, the study focused on Cuban Baptists whereas the dominant religious beliefs of the contemporary Cuban population are clearly Roman Catholic and Afro-Cuban spiritist. Another finding of the study was that all Cuban respondents had taken up Australian citizenship, contrasting with the majority of early Cuban migrants in the US and Spain who resisted taking up the citizenship of those countries, and hence relinquished their Cuban citizenship, for some time, based on a sense of personal pride and commitment to the Cuban nation (Wilcox 1989: 83; García 1996; Martin and Romano 1994).

From another perspective, Read provides a detailed cultural study of a Cuban scholar, Marivic Wyndham, who left Cuba at a very young age after the triumph of the Revolution, was brought up in the US, married an Australian diplomat, lived in Germany for some time, and ultimately chose Australia as the place to live (2000). The work deals with issues of belonging, personal identity and the impact of the return to Cuba in her life. For example, Read records that Marivic started to feel a real connection to Australia after she gave birth to her daughter in a Canberra hospital (Read 2000: 140). At the same time, she considered herself Cuban because she was born there, and “her blood” is Cuban. In a phrase Marivic captures these mixed feelings as: “Australia is home. But my people are Cubans” (Read 2000: 142).

Read’s study goes on to describe how Marivic’s return to Cuba made her grow closer to Australia, the return to Cuba helping her to better embrace the process of reconciliation with Australia’s Indigenous people at a personal level (Read 2000: 147). In turn, she reached a higher level of connection to this land through her friendship with an Indigenous student, and a closer understanding of their lives, spirituality and sufferings.

In sum, Marivic’s experience of continuing change of residence, from Cuba to the US, Germany and finally Australia, reflects a journey shared by several of her compatriots living now in Australia. Australia has rarely been the first place of migration for the Cubans living here, but through different paths it has become a place where some decide to *echar raices* (to lay down roots or establish themselves) as expressed by an informant in this study (see Chapter 6).

As can be appreciated from this brief survey, the academic literature on Cuban migrants in Australia is very scarce. Indeed the available literature about Cubans in Australia is

insufficient in terms of examining the main points identified with respect to the experience of other Cuban migrant communities. Some census data, and newspaper articles reporting on particular events, provide some further but still limited background about the entry and settlement of Cubans in NSW.

It seems that some links have existed between Cuba and Australia since the late nineteenth century, related to a handful of Australians who travelled to Cuba, with some of these settling there for an extended period. The 1899 census of the Cuban population recorded nine Australian nationals living in Cuba at the time, these being mainly male, professionals and labourers (Cuba Census 1899: 220, 472–73). In relation to the presence of Cubans in Australia, there is evidence of small numbers who made work-related visits to this continent. For example, Alberto Alonso, one of the founders of the Cuban Ballet Company, visited Australia for several months as a member of the Russian Ballet in 1937.<sup>6</sup> The Cuban Republican Government maintained a consular office in Melbourne from 1914 until 1922, suggesting some Cuban presence in this period.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Cuban migration to Australia*

In broad alignment with migration patterns in other parts of the world, the number of Cubans arriving in Australia increased after 1959. Indeed archival material shows the beginning of this flow. A small group of Cubans entered Australia as migrants in July 1964.<sup>8</sup> While I haven't been able to find any detailed information about this group from

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<sup>6</sup> National Archive of Australia. Series cp181/1, Bundle 54/7.

<sup>7</sup> National Archive of Australia. Consuls -Cuba in Australia General A981/4.

<sup>8</sup> National Archive of Australia. NSW. Five Cubans migrated and arrived in Sydney on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1964 Series SP829/1.

the Cubans that I had contacted as part of this research, Marta, one of my informants, noted that:

“There used to be three or four Cubans who arrived in the sixties and lived in the city, but they never mixed with the group who arrived in the 70s.”

Furthermore, newly declassified materials from the National Archives of Australia show that several Cubans applied to migrate to Australia in the 1960s and early 1970s. These individuals were either married to Brazilian, Chilean and Peruvian citizens. They migrated there after 1959, or else had sought refuge themselves in other Latin American countries. These individuals sought to come to Australia either as refugees or as a part of the family migration scheme.

Interestingly, the Australian Department of Immigration expressed interest in attracting some of the Cuban refugees in the United States to Australia in the late 1960s. In October/November 1968, the Australian Consul in New York, D. S. Wadell, sent a consulate officer to Florida in an “exploratory secret visit” to see how many Cubans were interested in resettling in Australia, and to note their race and occupational details. The official correspondence emphasises that the number of Cubans in the US, especially in Florida, was reaching its limits and that the US Government was offering financial assistance, through the UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency) or other international organisations, to assist with their resettlement. The Australian Minister for Immigration reiterated the need to exclude all people of mixed race from any assisted passage program, in line with the White Australia immigration policy still in operation at the time. However, the Australian Government did not want to be seen publicly as a

country “interested in Cuban Refugees.”<sup>9</sup> In the last letter on this issue, an Australian diplomatic officer concluded that Cubans were not good prospective migrants for Australia due to their lack of money, difficulties in having their professional qualifications recognised in Australia, and the fact that most of them had been sponsored to migrate by a relative living in the United States. He recommended looking for other group of prospective migrants.<sup>10</sup>

Enquiries to attract prospective migrants amongst the Cubans living in Spain were more productive. Cuban migrants interviewed for this research frequently cited that they had heard that Australia wanted migrants, including Cubans, but were not aware of any specific policies to encourage Cuban migrants to Australia. Here, too, archival material shows that in 1968 the Australian consulate in Geneva undertook some research, their initial enquires yielding similar findings to those of the Australian consulate in New York. The Australian consulate found that the majority of Cubans in Spain were white-collar workers, but that they wanted to be geographically close to Cuba, and hence were seeking later settlement in the United States. However, the US government was only issuing approximately 50 visas a month to Cuban nationals in Spain to enter the US, compared with the arrival of almost 1,000 Cubans a month in Spain. The result was a large number of Cuban migrants who had seen Spain as a short-term transition point, but had their prospects of secondary migration to the United States deferred to an

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<sup>9</sup> National Archive of Australia Barcode 7117099, letter from December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1968 from Armstrong to Wadell, Australian Consul.

<sup>10</sup> National Archive of Australia Barcode 7117099, letter from December 9<sup>th</sup> (ibid).

indefinite future. In this context the document recommended “spreading the knowledge of opportunities in Australia to Cubans for whom migration is feasible.”<sup>11</sup>

After these initial discussions and talks in 1968, sometime during 1969 or 1970, the Australian Government gave the green light to the entry of the Cuban migrants located in Spain into Australia under the government assisted passage scheme. Some of the 80,000 Cuban migrants who were in Spain seeking visas to enter the United States took this opportunity. With the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, the White Australia policy formally ended, giving way to a more open and diverse migration and refugee policy. The arrival of Cubans from Spain aligned well with the existing assisted passage program to recruit workers from Spain, Greece, the Netherlands and other European countries at the time (Waxman 2000: 58). For example, it is estimated that of the 28,000 Spanish migrants who arrived in Australia between 1959 and 1982, 76 per cent of them came through the assisted passage program (York 2001: 691).

Finally, in the context of economic difficulties in Spain at the time, Australia was no doubt seen by some as a better place to settle while waiting for a relaxation of the entry restrictions to the US, and ultimately as an attractive final destination in and of itself, contributing to further migration of Cubans to Australia. For example, Marta explained the decision of herself and her husband to leave Spain for Australia:

“We lived in Spain for nearly two years. When I heard that Australia was taking Cubans I went quickly and lodged our papers. There was no future for us [in Spain]. Juan was working the whole day in the business of a friend. It was hard work for very little [financial reward]. I remember that in our first

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

winter he got sick. He was carrying all these big bags into the cooling room, back and forth. I still believe that he caught pneumonia because of the change of temperature [between rooms].”

Juan added:

“Spain then was a different story altogether! You couldn’t earn much. Everything used to shut down early. I remember that, in the bar, sometimes we used to mock the drunkards by telling them, *los gendarmes vienen por ahi*, (the police are about to arrive). Then they tidied themselves up and stand *derechitos* (straight) trying to look sober! These were the times of Franco.”

Similar stories about economic difficulties encountered in Spain, and/or problems adapting to the weather, are very common in the accounts about the decision to migrate to Australia.

As with migrational patterns more generally, marriage also led Cubans living in Spain and other countries to migrate to Australia. Indeed there are some cases of Cuban migrants settling in Australia after having first migrated to the United States.

Conversely, and characteristic of Cuban migration post-1959, a number of Cubans have left Australia for the United States. Statistics on this group are not publicly available, due to the relatively small numbers. However, anecdotal accounts about their departure are vivid in the collective memory of the 1970s group.

Another characteristic that this 1970s group shares with many of the people who left Cuba during the third migrational wave is that they had experienced working in Cuba’s compulsory labour camps of that period (Lewis et al. 1977: 496; Leiner 1994: 28–33; Garcia 2006: 158–62). Some of them, mainly males, spent up to one year in the labour

camps before their departure from Cuba. This experience reinforced a sense amongst this group that they were political exiles or refugees.

Some Cubans from this group also identified themselves as economic migrants, linked to the nationalisation of small businesses undertaken in Cuba in the early 1970s. One informant noted that he could no longer support his family and decided to leave the country, and that as a consequence he and his family automatically became *gusanos*. That meant their decision became a ‘political one’, although in their view it was largely an economic one. In these cases there is clearly an element of both motivations in their decisions – their economic motivation a response to the policies of nationalisation and socialisation of private businesses by the Cuban Government.

Cubans that arrived in the 1970s from Spain mainly travelled in cargo planes, such that the trip from Spain to Australia took up to two and a half days. There are some very humorous accounts of these experiences. For example, Carlos describes his experiences of the trip with some humour:

“I arrived in 1970. The trip was very long – nearly three days – and the plane stopped in five different countries. I travelled here with five other Cubans. One of the stops was in an Arab country. We were not allowed to go out, so we stayed sitting on the plane. I don’t remember well the name of the country ... It was funny, when we looked through the windows we saw some dark bearded militiamen. They were wearing green uniforms and small green military caps, like in Cuba. Some of the Cubans said: “*Dios mio* (My God), we are back [to Cuba], are you sure that this is going to Australia?” I was a bit scared, too, but when I saw a poster in Arabic I felt relieved! Ah, and when we arrived in Sydney we were sprayed with a very smelly substance!”

In summary, the first significant group (in terms of numbers) of Cuban migrants arrived in Australia in the 1970s, and settled mainly in Sydney and Melbourne. In the case of Sydney they tended to settle in the Fairfield region, in which Spanish and other Latin American migrants from Uruguay, Chile, Salvador and Peru were located. Although many of these Cuban migrants arrived with the idea of re-migrating to the US at a later date, only some continued the journey while others settled and remained in Australia.

The next migrational intake took place in the 1980s, directly related to the 'Mariel boatlift' of 1980. The Australian Government accepted some Cubans after interviewing them in Peru and the US (García 1996: 73). While exact numbers are not clear, it seems the group was relatively small. For example, Masud-Piloto remarks that Australia took fifteen Cuban refugees from Peru in 1982 (1996: 99). Like their counterparts in the United States, the group of *Marielitos* that arrived in Australia was mainly composed of mulatto and black males. In an article published after a disturbance in the Villawood Detention Centre in Sydney, the local media presented the Cubans as "delinquents, blacks and people who didn't intend to stay in Australia and were planning to leave for the US" (Horin 1980). Additionally, Horin noted that there were very few Cuban families living in Sydney at the time, concluding therefore that there was not a community as such to support this group. Although the Cuban families in Sydney offered some support, it seems that while on a different scale to the experience in the United States, articles like this and another very well published case of the deportation of a Cuban male from the Mariel group (Fife-Yeomans 1989; Curtin 1991), promoted some prejudice towards this group.

This prejudice appears to have extended to other Cubans already settled in Australia, underscored by a transfer of race and/or class codes found in Cuba to Australia. Indeed,

in my discussions with some members of the 1970s arrivals I explicitly asked why there was so little communication amongst the 1970s group and the *Marielitos*, but was not able to get a straight-forward response. Instead, informants responded incompletely or evasively, noting, for example, that some of the *Marielitos* are ‘all right’, but others are *chusma* (bad mannered, poorly educated), have been jailed here in Australia, and that even the Cuban Government does not want them, alluding to a famous deportation case. It was noticeable that both groups rarely got together in social activities, the exception being those who came in the 1980s to join families already in Australia.

Personally, I had an experience with one of the *Marielitos* during a Latin American Festival, which highlighted their sensitivity to perceived prejudice from other members of the Cuban migrant community. I was introduced to him by a Latin American man who is married to a Cuban. I thought that he was Cuban himself, because of his appearance and way of talking. He said to me: “*Manita, este es compadre tuyo*” (Sister, he is your pal), in reference to someone from the *Oriente* region of Cuba. He said this in a typical accent from the *Oriente* region of Cuba. I responded by saying, “Nice meeting you, but I was born in Havana.” The Cuban man was very upset and replied:

“Because of this, I don’t talk to any of you. *Todos son iguales se creen mejores.* (You are all the same, you think you are better). The old ones and some of the young ones.”

I apologised, telling him that I thought that they were referring to the fact that I was born in *Oriente*. I also told him that part of my family was in fact from *Oriente*, and that some time during the holidays I went there. Only later I did understand how he felt and why he reacted that way. I found out that he was from the Mariel group. Moreover,

when I started this research and looked at how the media and some of their own compatriots rejected them, I found his reaction all the more understandable.

Following these intakes of Cuban migrants sponsored by the Australian Government, others entered through the family reunion component of Australia's immigration policy. Some of these migrants are married to other Latin Americans, or to people from the Middle East and Southeast Asia who studied or worked in Cuba, or in some Eastern European countries. Other Cubans are married to people of Australian background, who also visited Cuba in study or work tours. This group is a part of the legal migration wave of the 1990s. Amongst this group are professional Cubans with higher education or technical education who arrived here during the last fifteen years. Due to their background, born during the Revolution, following different patterns of immigration, more commonly (compared to earlier arrivals) with diverse and even sympathetic political attitudes towards Cuba, this group is quite distinct, particularly from the 1970s group. The numbers here continue to be small, with only nine new Cuban migrants settling in NSW between 1991 and 1996. These nine added to the grand total of just 231 Cuban-born people recorded as living in NSW in 1996 (Ethnic Affairs Commission 1998: 2). However, the Census of 2001 found that the number of Cuban migrants in NSW decreased by seven. Unfortunately, this shows a new reality. The Cuban population in NSW is ageing (Community Relations Commission 2003: 92). During the course of this research I found out that two of those seven Cubans of the 1970s group have passed away.

## **Conclusion**

The data shows that there was at least some Cuban presence in Australia since the beginning of the twentieth century, made up of people working and living temporarily in the country. In line with broader patterns, the majority of Cuban migration to Australia followed the 1959 Cuban Revolution. From the available evidence it appears that the bulk of Cubans arrived as part of the assisted work scheme of the 1970s and the Mariel-related refugee programs in the 1980s, both sponsored by the Australian Government. As a consequence, a characteristic of this migratory group is that Australia was not the first place of migration for many of its members, and for some Australia was a transition point on their way to the United States. In more recent contexts, Cubans arriving via family reunion processes have been more common.

Scholarship on Cuban migration continues to be oriented towards study of the large, organised and politically powerful Cuban community in Miami. Work on communities in other parts of the United States, and other countries, has increased more recently, dealing with the acknowledged increasing diversity of the Cuban migrant experience and their reasons for leaving Cuba. The nature of any study involving Cuba post-1959 carries with it polarised responses to the politics of the Cuban Revolution and its development over the last 45 years, and there is general consensus that migration in the early years following the Cuban Revolution was dominated by those opposing the politics of the revolutionary government. Since then, politics continues to play a part, alongside economic and family reunion motivations.

In this politically charged context, classifications of Cuban migrants from both the United States Government (golden exiles) and the Cuban Government (gusanos)

contributed to popular constructions of migrant communities as a homogenous entity. The strength of political motivations in the early years were thus used by both sides to create a simplified identity of all Cuban migrants, centred on their quick adaptation to capitalist America or their counter-revolutionary attitude. What these characterisations failed to address was the diverse social, economic, class and ethnic backgrounds of Cuban migrants in the early 1960s and subsequently across the waves of migration from the island. Similarly, they politicised the process of adaptation to the host society, which varied from one community to the next.

The relatively small numbers of Cuban migrants in Australia, and associated lack of scholarship about them and their experience, generated my interest in conducting the fieldwork reported in this thesis that seeks to explore how identity is expressed in this case. The arrival of Cuban migrants in Australia is related to the general waves of post-1959 migration, the most significant of these being the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> waves of the 1970s and 1980s respectively, both involving the Australian Government's sponsored programs bringing Cubans from third countries to Australia.

The link to these general waves of migration can provide some insights into the make-up of the Cuban community in NSW, Australia. But, as with the bigger picture, there is a need to consider the diversity of this community, in terms of motivations for migration and their expression of identity. Like other migrant communities, even the relatively small number of Cubans brought some divisions with them with respect to each other and their homeland.

The major aim of this research is to use fieldwork data about Cuban migrants in NSW to begin to better locate this community within the broader context of post-1959 Cuban

migration, and move towards an understanding of how Cuban identity is understood and expressed by Cuban migrants in Australia, and in turn how this is understood and interpreted more broadly in Australian society. The background covered in this chapter provides some context from which this study can proceed. A review of literature on ethnicity and identity within anthropology follows, with a particular focus on studies exploring Cuban identity within Cuba and amongst Cuban migrant communities.

### Chapter 3. Review of the literature on identity and *Cubanidad*

The previous chapter analysed some general features of Cuban migration around the world and how they relate to Cuban migration to Australia. That review provides a general background on Cuban migration from the historical and sociological points of view. It was pointed out that Cuba was both a nation of immigrants and, since the mid nineteenth century, a nation of émigrés, with the major emigrational waves taking place after the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

It should be noted, however, that the literature on Cuban migration has paid little attention to analysing how Cuban identity has developed outside Miami; that is, in other Cuban migrant settlements, where for various reasons ethnic politics has not been such a defining feature of these communities. Furthermore, because studies about Cuban migrants have mainly been conducted in the US, with a strong focus on the Cuban community in Miami, many studies have used an assimilation theory of ethnicity, or the concept of *Cubanidad*, to explain different aspects of Cuban identity and the adaptation of Cuban immigrants to their new environment. Therefore, with some exceptions (Croucher 1996), nearly all these studies have overlooked the mainstream anthropological literature on ethnicity and identity. This chapter will argue that the anthropological literature on ethnicity and identity provides an essential basis for understanding how Cuban identity is expressed and interpreted in Australia; a country where the Cuban community is numerically small and where ethnic politics, while still a factor in the formation of identity, has not been a decisive characteristic of self-identity for the community.

This chapter will firstly analyse some approaches to ethnicity and identity in the mainstream anthropological literature, which have proved useful for analysing the fieldwork findings. This analysis will cover a range of approaches, from Barth's theory on ethnic groups and boundaries to contemporary studies on the impact of globalisation in the formation of identity. The second part of the chapter will examine the literature on Cuban identity, paying particular attention to the creation and interpretations of the concept of *Cubanidad* and how it has been analysed in the literature on Cuban migrants around the world.

### **From boundaries to transnational identity and creolisation**

One of the first aspects of identity revealed by my fieldwork with the Cuban migrants in Sydney is how volatile are the parameters used to classify at a first glance someone as Cuban or to contest the degree of Cubanness of any person or thing related to Cuba, from dance to politics. Being born in Cuba myself, I have noticed that when I meet people from Cuba, none of them classify me at first glance as Cuban. In response to my query as to why this was so, I was given different explanations: e.g. I had lost the "Cuban distinguishing tone of voice" or "your skin is faded brown and yellowish, not a nice firm mulatto skin." In other situations, however, different markers of Cubanness or otherwise have emerged: e.g. the ways people serve or prepare food; the way they move when dancing; or whether they support or oppose the Cuban Revolution. The anthropological literature on ethnicity and identity provides some useful insights for understanding and explaining these different means for identifying Cubanness.

Over the last fifty years anthropologists, sociologists and other specialists in humanities have been using terms like ethnicity and identity to describe differences (otherness), as

well as sameness, on the basis of culture, politics, biological ancestry, shared ideas, etc. As in the examples mentioned above, people use different categories such as race, language, religion and other characteristics to identify themselves and others. Social identity, Verkuyten has suggested, is the process of finding similarities within a group, which make it different from other groups (Verkuyten 2005: 42–3). Ethnicity is closely related to social identity because it has also been used to classify people.

Until very recently, anthropology has focused more on ethnicity than identity, as is evident from changes in the use of the term ‘ethnicity’ itself. Ethnicity started as a replacement for the word tribe in the 1970s (Cohen, R 1978: 384). Later, the term ethnic was also used to describe immigrant communities in developed countries. In the 1980s and 1990s, the term became popular outside academia as the media used it to describe inter-group conflicts. Some anthropologists and social analysts have called for a replacement of the term “ethnicity” or for a better definition of it (Eriksen 1993: 162; Appadurai 2000: 324). Indeed, during the last decade of the twentieth century, with the rise of post-structuralism, globalisation and transnational studies, anthropologists shifted to using identity (Banks 1996). Ethnicity was sidelined (Levine 1999: 178).

Additionally, one of the first studies of identity in the anthropological field, Epstein’s *Ethos and identity* (1978), sought to address the shortcomings of the term ethnicity when analysing the nature of people’s interactions, especially the role of individuals in the shaping of group image and imagery. As a result, both concepts of identity and ethnicity are closely linked, although analysts differ about which embraces which. For example, Eriksen sees social identity and ethnicity as similar processes (1993: 13); Banks, however, considers identity to be an offspring of ethnicity due to the historical development of the latter (1996: 142). Other analysts consider ethnicity to be a part of

social identity on its own or alongside other categories such as race and language (Rew and Campbell 1999: 9–13; Verkuyten 2005: 44). Therefore, this literature review will examine different studies in both areas that have relevance for the analysis of the fieldwork findings.

For years, anthropologists and other social scientists have debated whether ethnicity is primordial, circumstantial or socially constructed. The first stream, primordialism, argues that biological factors such as kinship bonds (Van den Berghe 1979), place of origin (Shils 1957), and other ‘givens’ like language, religion, social customs and sentiments (Geertz 1973, Bromley 1986) play a primary role in the formation and articulation of a group’s ethnic identity and attachments. Up to the early 1990s, many anthropologists criticised primordialism for its poor definition, its reification of biological factors in the creation of ethnicity, its fixity (Eller and Coughlan 1993: 45) and its poor explanation of the causes of ethnic conflicts based on primordial sentiments (Appadurai 1996: 142).

It is evident from my fieldwork findings that some Cuban migrants do classify other people as Cuban or non-Cuban on the basis of biological factors (‘race’ and physical appearance), social customs, and/or the way they speak, etc. At first sight this fits well with the primordialist approach of ethnicity because of the importance that it gives to these factors in the formation of identity. However, the fieldwork also showed that when Cuban migrants had their pre-established views about Cubanness challenged, or when these did not coincide with what they saw or the person they met, a whole new set of explanations of what and who is Cuban emerges. This undermines the use of the primordialist approach as an analytical tool for other findings. Indeed, Banks suggests that there is an ethnicity in people’s heart (primordialists), head (constructivists), and in

the imagination of the observer (1996: 186). According to Banks' approach, Cuban migrants do classify someone or something as Cuban at first sight using their heart, but as the conversation advances and the topics diversify, their system of classification leaves the heart; it transforms and evolves differently, in accordance with the moment in which it was expressed.

Instrumentalism is another approach used in the analysis of ethnic identity, seeing ethnicity as a tool for the political and economic advance of an ethnic group within a society. In this perspective, the focus of ethnicity shifts from culture to politics. As Tilley points out, cultural traditions are used to "legitimize ethnic claims in the public domain" (1997: 507). Abner Cohen is one of the main protagonists of this approach (Banks 1996; Levine 1999). In his study of a close-knit group of Hausa traders in Nigeria, Cohen argues that different "interest groups" based on "kinship, friendship, ritual, ceremonial and other symbolic activities" emerge during competition to earn an income or get an education (1974: xv–xvii). At the same time, Cohen also emphasises that these interest groups are also organised by their social class and ways of socialisation, and that they need to keep their cultural and social customs in order to maintain their economic and political power (1974: xix–xxi). However, he opposes Barth's approach (see below) according to which ethnicity is exclusively a cultural and self-identification phenomenon (1974: xii–xviii). Cohen looks instead to the ways people organise themselves in their struggle for economic and political survival. Some analysts consider that the political and economic factors only influence the way in which ethnicity develops but that these can be only appreciated after the ethnic groups have become socially conspicuous (Levine 1999: 167). Others argue that this approach does not analyse ethnicity itself, but the economic and political factors around it;

therefore, ethnicity is viewed as a secondary product of these major structural elements, which will disappear when people do not need it for political or economic gains (Verkuyten 2005: 85).

Some studies on Cuban migrants' settlement in the US and Puerto Rico have remarked how Cubans in Miami and Puerto Rico use their culture and ethnic baggage to set up businesses and enter the labour market in those places. (Portes 1987; Cobas and Duany 1997). Furthermore, it is also well documented that in Miami, when Cuban migrants realised that they were not returning to Cuba, they started to organise themselves politically, to promote their own ethnic candidates for positions in the US national government, and won seats in the US Senate (Garcia 1996; Croucher 1996). Due to these factors, in the case of the Cuban settlement in Miami the instrumental analysis of ethnicity can be a useful analytical tool. But as was emphasised in the previous chapter, the numbers of Cuban migrants in Sydney are small and fragmented, which made irrelevant mobilising an ethnic vote or political campaigning in Australian politics as well as any lobbying by Australian politicians looking for the support or opposition to the Cuban Government. Therefore, it can be concluded in the case of the Cuban settlement in Sydney there is not an organised use of their ethnicity for political gain, although politics – more specifically, positions adopted in relation to the Cuban government – are used to include or exclude people from immediate networks of friends.

In relation to economics, the situation is quite similar. Cubans in Sydney have not established a distinct ethnic economic enclave. They have integrated into the mainstream economy. It is worth remembering that the majority of Cubans living in Sydney arrived in the 1970s and nearly all ended up as factory workers or small trade

contractors and did not leave that environment. As will be seen in the fieldwork findings, it is only now, with the rise of the salsa dance industry, that a very small group of newly arrived Cubans are using their ethnicity to break into this industry and thereby move beyond their earlier work environment. In short, the instrumentalist approach to ethnicity is not useful in the analysis of the Cuban community in Sydney; my fieldwork did not reveal an organised use of ethnicity for political or economic gain.

A number of scholars began to call for a newer approach to the analysis of ethnicity and identity that would overcome the long debate between the instrumentalists and primordialists. It was clear that a single approach was not always useful to explain the changes in people's definitions of identity. Some experts, like Jenkins, called for the use of the "constructionist assumptions" of the anthropological discipline in analysis of the new challenges to the understanding of ethnicity (Jenkins 1996: 813). The constructivist approach to ethnicity argues that people socially construct ethnicity and identity. However, within this approach there are different trends based on the primordialist-instrumentalist versions, which tend to analyse ethnic identity more through its discourse than through specific cultural features (Tilley 1997: 511–12).

The work of Frederick Barth and a group of Scandinavian anthropologists became one of the most influential forms of constructivist analysis of ethnicity at the time. In 1969 Barth edited the book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* which revolutionised the previous understanding of ethnic groups as a biological self-perpetuating unit, sharing static cultural forms and values that unified a self-identifying membership distinct from other groups (1969: 11). Instead, Barth saw ethnic groups as social entities, rather than static cultural units, shifting the analysis of ethnic groups from the cultural to the social sphere. However, here he also provides an important insight into the ways cultural

differences should be understood. Barth divides the cultural features of an ethnic group into two categories: “diacritical” (language, dress, household and lifestyles), and “value orientation,” the social norms of the analysed community. Barth argues that the social actors will choose from these categories what they consider relevant or what have been made “organisationally relevant” to describe their cultural difference at any moment (1969: 14). Barth’s argument highlights the variable nature of ethnic identity. Therefore, he proposes consideration of the notions of self-ascription or self-definition, and ascription and definition by others, as a primary feature in the definition of identity of the ethnic group. Similarly, Barth emphasises a focus on what have become “socially relevant factors for membership” to the group, not the differences produced by other causes. In his opinion, what matters is that members of a group consider themselves members of it and identify themselves as part of it, even if the external behaviour of the people within an ethnic group differs a lot from the set ideas about the group (1969: 15).

Furthermore, Barth argues that ethnic boundaries or social frontiers delimit the group, rather than the cultural traits enclosed within it (1969: 15). These boundaries are expressed during social interaction between groups and they articulate codes of behaviours based on cultural practices. Barth remarks that interactions between persons of different cultural practices lead to a structuring of these cultural exchanges that protect the cultural differences (1969: 16). The boundaries will persist despite this continuous exchange of people and culture, which makes the culture itself fluid and changeable (1969: 38). Hence boundaries, like the cultural and ethnic units themselves, change over time. Therefore Barth concluded that what we observe today might not have been a characteristic cultural form of that group in the past (1969: 38).

Barth's view on ethnic groups has attracted some criticism. Some experts disagree with the relevance he gives to the ascription aspect of identity, arguing that he downplays the influence or even ignores the role of society in the creation and maintenance of ethnic identity (Cohen 1974: xvii–xviii; Jenkins 1996: 813). However, as will be seen in Chapter 5, Barth's views on the analysis of cultural features, specifically the notion of "value orientation", his concept of ethnic boundaries and views on self-ascription and ascription by others, proved very useful in the analysis of the perceptions of Cubanness made by Cubans and other people outside the communities and in illuminating the way Cubans use politics as a way to include and exclude people from their immediate group.

A later example of the constructionist analysis of ethnicity can be seen in Thomas Eriksen's work. His studies of ethnicity have touched on a wide range of topics including nationalism, critical reviews of the concept 'ethnicity' and the cultural aspects in our understanding of ethnicity. Through his work, Eriksen has repeatedly argued for recognition and analysis of the role of culture in ethnicity (1993; 1995).

Eriksen's analysis of culture in studies of ethnicity acknowledged Barth's contributions in redirecting ethnic studies to the analysis of the social process. At the same time, Eriksen describes Barth's approach as "formalist" and as being "in principle ahistorical" (1991: 128). Eriksen argues that this formalist approach distorts the understanding of ethnicity by presenting it as an "empty vessel," a system of arbitrary signs (Eriksen 1991: 129). Following this critique, Eriksen suggests that ethnicity should be always analysed as a part of a historical process, social formation and an element of interaction. Finally, he emphasises that ethnic differences cause cultural differences and this has a wide impact on all levels of social relations from the personal, through the group, to society as a whole (1991: 131).

Therefore, Eriksen proposes the analysis of cultural differences using a Wittgensteinian language-game approach as a method of grasping cultural differences in the ethnic environment. In this view, language-games become rules under which the world is interpreted, because people internalise these rules and reproduce them in any situation, such as “the inter-ethnic encounters to express cultural differences” (1991: 132). However, he acknowledges that textual models of culture have some limitations, because these are deconstructed pieces of texts that show only a part of the culture (1991: 142). Eriksen saw a solution of this shortcoming through an understanding of a national culture that is not reduced to the actions of individuals. Therefore, Eriksen proposed that the concept of language-games could be used as a tool to analyse cultural differences, because culture offers us some parameters “within which action can be meaningful” and is present in all human exchanges (relationships) (1991: 142). Finally, Eriksen claims that ethnicity is created in a similar manner to culture. Therefore, its meaning and significance are also volatile (1991: 142).

In sum, Eriksen’s approach to ethnicity reinforces the view that ethnicity is a cultural construct, which is most visible during the social exchanges between people. His use of the language-game approach in the study of cultural differences offers another constructivist approach to the analysis of ethnicity. Eriksen’s notion is useful for the analysis of ground-level ethnicity or the expression of cultural differences, because it sieves through people’s words to uncover their understanding of belonging and adherence to an ethnic group. Indeed, the main material for this research comes from my fieldwork notes based on people’s words during their interaction with others. This approach has helped to uncover how Cubans themselves understand and express their identity.

These two aspects of the constructionist approach of ethnicity offer a useful theoretical framework for the analysis of an important part of the fieldwork data, especially those related to the intra-group notions of Cubanness modelled by politics. However, the fieldwork data uncover other views about Cubanness, which cannot be explained using the constructionist approach alone. For example, non-Cuban informants associated Cuba with the salsa dance and the Revolution, while Cuban migrants themselves associated Cubanness with memories of the homeland, the smell and taste of a dish or the devotion to a particular Catholic saint or African deity. Theories of identity, like Epstein's psychological approach to ethnicity, describing the mechanism of maintenance of identity at individual level, and Appadurai's and Hannerz's conceptualisations of the impact of globalisation on personal identity, also serve as a theoretical base for the analysis of these findings describing Cubanness.

Epstein's book *Ethos and Identity* (1978) drew attention to the psychological aspects of ethnicity, which marked a new path in this area and focused the analysis on the creation, changes and transmission of identity. Epstein used data from his fieldwork and personal experience in Africa, Melanesia and the US to explain the phenomenon of identity, arguing that anthropologists studying ethnicity in both 'traditional' and 'modern' societies failed to understand its "cognitive and affective dimensions" (1978: 5).

Epstein's ideas on identity draw on his criticism of Cohen's political interpretation of ethnicity, Glazer and Moynihan's views of ethnicity in terms of interest groups and Barth's concepts of the self-ascription character of ethnicity (1978: 93–96). He suggests analysing the identity of a group outside its traditional environment because in normal, stable conditions it is not prone to change (1978: 97, 99–100). In his analysis, Epstein argues that individuals have multifaceted identities, which interplay with their status

and role within a society. Therefore, for Epstein, identity is a process “by which the person seeks to integrate his various statuses and roles, as well as his diverse experiences, into a coherent image of self” (1978: 101). More importantly, Epstein says that because identity is an expression of the self, it also has a strong link to the notions of affect and the unconscious mind (1978: 101). Finally, he acknowledges the impact of broader social phenomena in shaping people’s identity, but significantly he argues that there is room for individuals to choose their identities in this process (1978: 109).

Epstein’s division of the spheres of identity into ‘public’ and ‘intimate’ and their role in its transmission uncover an important aspect in the analysis of identity. He is aware of the variable nature of the practice of cultural traditions and suggests shifting the analysis from the practice to the meaning people give to it and the way it is passed on to other generations (1978: 110–1). He argues that public culture or attitudes and values shown by an ethnic group in a society are created and transmitted at home in the intimate culture. Therefore, an analysis of intimate ways of transmission will reveal the role of affect in the creation of identity. He considers that a better understanding of ethnic identity could only be reached with new methods that analyse external and internal processes as well as sociological and psychological components of ethnic identity (1978: 112).

In sum, Epstein’s concept of identity adds a new dimension to the analysis of ethnicity. He focuses on the affective element of ethnicity instead of its purely instrumental or primordialist aspects. He calls for a combined analysis of these aspects. Epstein’s conceptualisations of identity are relevant to this study, where a division will be clearly seen between public and intimate symbols of Cuban identity and it will become apparent how Cubans and non-Cubans recreate different aspects of that identity. His

ideas about the role of affect in the creation of identity will be particularly relevant in the analysis of the intimate symbols of Cubanness, such as eating habits, familiar flavours, songs, plants and memories held by the Cuban migrants interviewed for this study.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, terms like ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’ became popular outside academic circles due to the proliferation of so-called ‘ethnic conflicts’ during the 1980s and 1990s. The widespread use of the term ethnicity had an opposite effect in the academic world, where some anthropologists rejected it altogether, alleging that it is badly defined and abused. They proposed the use of other terms like ‘community’ in analysing cultural and political differences between people (Cohen, A. 1984: 104, 107). This has brought identity into the limelight of anthropology and added other perspectives to ethnicity studies such as an increase in the analysis of the role of culture in the creation of ethnicity from a global perspective (Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1991).

The work of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, especially his book *Modernity at Large* (1996), is an example of the 1990s trend in ethnicity and identity studies, which paid more attention to how global economy and politics influence ethnic identity and cultural differences at local and individual levels. To some extent, his concept of ethnicity echoes some of the ideas of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Anthony Cohen’s *The symbolic construction of community* (1985) which argue that nations and communities (i.e. ethnic groups) are mental constructions to which people give imaginary meanings, making them symbolic. For Appadurai, ethnicity, like group identity, is constructed and imagined and not linked to a specific territory (1996: 48). He proposes a new framework and terminology for analysis of

these phenomena: ethnoscaples, mediascaples and ideoscaples (1996: 33). The traditional terms of ethnicity and identity roughly fit it between these three entities. Under the term ethnoscaples, Appadurai groups people on the move, such as guest workers, exiles or tourists, whose activities influence the politics of the nations from which they came (1996: 33). He also includes people from “stable communities” in this category; however, he considers their stability as relative and constantly affected by “the woof of human motion” (1996: 34). Furthermore, Appadurai argues that former mobile groups also form part of a deterritorialised working migrant population (1996: 38).

Appadurai considers that deterritorialisation shapes the production and consumption of culture at global and local levels (1996: 38). Both mediascaples and ideoscaples are spheres in which global media corporations and governments produce and distribute images, news, and political ideas in a mixed concoction for the world population. He argues that mediascaples have a tendency to disassociate stories from their reality, as well as simplify and make them into a ready script of “imagined lives” by which people experience other people’s lives and sometimes try to emulate them (1996: 35–36). By doing this, contemporary media, through its new electronic devices, deterritorialises the images it creates and produces “new kinds of collective expression” (1991: 53–54). Indeed, through the media, anyone has access to personal stories of people that they will never be likely to meet. Appadurai argues that this dynamic of the imagination and the way in which it is shaped by media and migration is what differentiates modernity from earlier periods. However, he suggests the people are not passive consumers of this imagined world and that they do exercise some agency in choosing or not choosing these cultural products (1996: 5–7). Finally, Appadurai states that this process poses new challenges for anthropologists. When analysing ethnicity they need to move

constantly between all these forms of cultural flows from the local to the global or vice versa (1996: 64).

In conclusion, Arjun Appadurai's views on group identity and globalisation are revealing in the way he describes the influence of globalisation in people's lives. His ideas indicate that nowadays it is no longer useful to look at ethnicity, identity and belonging as bounded to a specific territory or nation, because of the high mobility of humans and the technological advances in communication. Appadurai's analysis of how the global media creates and circulates an imaginary of exotic lives through television and other electronic media are relevant for this study, especially during the analysis of the salsa boom in Australia and the promotion of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination.

Closely related to the views of Appadurai is the emerging area of transnational studies that appeared in the 1990s. Transnational studies are more centred in the fields of migration, economics, religion, identity and culture. Some work in the field points to the limitations of the construction of ethnicity, ethnic group and nation (Basch, Glick and Szanton 1994: 290). In tune with this, current anthropological studies on ethnicity are more focused on the dynamics in the creation of identity tied to cultural flows and the impact of globalisation and transnationalism.

Glick, Basch and Szanton's (1995) pioneering study in the area of transnational migration focuses mainly on Caribbean and Filipino migrants in the US. They argue that contemporary migration is transnational, because the immigrants, through their social relations, serve as a bridge between their countries of origin and places of migration, thereby erasing the official boundaries of nation-states (1995: 48).

Furthermore, the result of their studies contradicts the 'melting pot' theory, concluding

that many migrants (in the US) continue to consider their countries of origin as home, regardless of the amount of time spent there (1995: 51). They add that contemporary economic processes and new technology (media, transport, computers, etc) facilitate the maintenance of continuous links with their countries of origin (1995: 52). Importantly, these links promote a sense of belonging to multiple places at the same time. Even more, this also influences the politics of their countries of origin, because some countries consider their citizens living abroad electoral voters (1995: 52). The conclusion, more relevant for this thesis, is the notion that new transnational migrants have a sense of belonging to several places, their former homeland and their place of settlement.

Theories on hybridity, syncretism and creolisation are another important part of this latest literature on globalisation and transnational studies. Nowadays these theories pay attention to the mixed content of identity and cultural products such as music, art, etc. However, the terms creolisation, hybridity and syncretism were previously used in the area of linguistics, racial and ethnic identification, and religion (Palmie 2006; Wade 2004; Steward 1999). The concept of hybridity has become very popular with post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Gayatri Spivak (Papastergiadis 1997: 273). Although their works define hybridity in different ways, they all explore how ethnic identity of diasporic communities (e.g. intellectuals) in the 'First World' is formed and represented. However, since the 1990s, hybridity, as well as the other terms, have been used in anthropology to describe processes of cultural interchange. From these three terms, the concept of creolisation is of special interest, because of its similarity with the concept of transculturation, which has been pivotal in the analysis of

the Cuban national identity since the 1940s. Therefore, it will be useful to analyse the new interpretation of the concept of creolisation.

The new meaning of creolisation is more linked to the analysis of cultural products and meanings, which differs from its previous uses. Indeed, creolisation was used extensively in Caribbean and Latin American studies to describe how different cultures brought by African slaves and European colonisers mingled and formed a new local culture in the so-called New World. It was used to depict people of mixed race, or white people born in the Caribbean and other European colonies in Latin American and the Indian Ocean (Steward 2007: 7–12). Furthermore, creolisation was also used in linguistics to describe some varieties of languages, which emerged in the New World, and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century it has become a research topic itself (Palmie 2006: 443–47). However, during the last decade the term creolisation has become very popular in the area of cultural and anthropological studies. Ulf Hannerz is one of the main advocates of the new use of the concept of creolisation and proposes using it to analyse the cultural exchange and synthesis between the core (developed countries) and the periphery (developing countries) in the contemporary world.

When analysing the work of Glick et al (1995), I highlighted their argument that the contemporary transnational migrant is attached to several geographical places, countries and communities, which reflects on the individual and collective identity of a person or a group. In his work *Transnational Connections*, Hannerz echoes this argument, as well as some of Appadurai's views, but he pays more attention to the cultural flows between both ends: the core and the periphery. In his opinion all people around the world share the same cultural products or "habitat of meanings" (e.g. cable TV) despite living in different countries (1996: 23). Although he considers that globalisation promotes a

homogenous culture, Hannerz argues that this interchange creates in fact a new mixed culture with “some cultural gain” because of its hybrid beginnings. He defines this new culture as a creole and the process of its creation as cultural creolisation (1996: 66). Furthermore, Hannerz considers the term creolisation to be a rich, creative expression highlighting variety in origin and result, therefore he claims that it could be used to describe what is happening currently outside the New World, and outside the linguistic field, too (1996: 66).

Hannerz defines cultural creolisation as a mixture “of diversity, interconnectedness, and innovation, in the context of global centre-periphery relationships” (1996: 67). Under diversity, he groups all the convergences of different cultural traditions from around the world in the new global context. He considers the connection between those cultural traditions as a continuous exchange of meanings between the centre and the periphery which are influenced by economic, political and social processes. In relation to its innovation, Hannerz sees the cultural creolisation process as a very “creative interplay” that takes place everywhere around the world, in the centre and the periphery, although in the former it is less visible (1996: 68).

For this thesis, Hannerz’s idea about the creolisation process in the centre has particular relevance for understanding how Cuban identity or cultural products are perceived in Sydney, Australia. He takes the cities of Amsterdam and Stockholm as examples to explain how the creolisation process occurs in the centre. In both cases Hannerz cites the existence of fast food chains, furniture and clothing outlets available in other world cities, noting that by analysing the experiences of immigrant groups, behind this curtain of homogeneity, we can see cases of cultural creolisation. Hannerz argues that the global homogeneity has fostered and shaped the diversity of ethnic cultural products

offered in the world cities, especially in relation to ethnic food, and other expressions such as music (1996: 156–57). In one word, Hannerz argues that many people in the periphery share the same cultural products, which creates a “continuum model of global [cultural] flows” (Stewart 2007: 2, 6).

To summarise, Hannerz’s views on global culture and creolisation argue that the globalisation process is contributing to a cultural mingling as well as external homogenisation, through the acceleration of the commodification of cultural products and meanings from the periphery to the core and vice versa. Although his views do not address specifically the processes of ethnicity and identities, they are relevant because identities, cultural or ethnic, are always in the making, borrowing from here and there. In sum, Hannerz’s ideas on creolisation help to clarify how some ethnic identities via their cultural meanings or products are represented in the core countries and the periphery.

However, this new meaning of the word creolisation advanced by Hannerz has attracted some criticism, for example from Mintz who argues that this term is “historically, geographically specific,” and that the mass movement of people and feelings of belonging to several places are old phenomena (1998: 118, 131). Others like Palmie have warned anthropologists about the flaws of importing linguistic theories in to their studies because of their “sketchy nature” that sometimes has been created based on previous anthropological studies (2006: 446). Finally, Stewart in the introduction to the latest book on creolisation studies remarks that diverse meanings and uses of creolisation will continue to be debated; however, he urges a focus more on the “restructuring process” and the analysis of why some elements persisted, changed or disappeared (2007: 19–20).

This brief review gives an overview of how ethnicity and identity have been interpreted during the last five decades. The notion of the character of ethnicity has developed during this time. The subsequent concept includes aspects like human self-perception and feelings, culture, politics, economics and the influence of the media and technology in the creation and maintenance of identity. As we will see, the constructionist theories of ethnicity and identity and the psychological approach to the study of identity (e.g. Barth, Eriksen, Epstein) offer the best theoretical framework for the analysis of Cuban migration in NSW, especially at the intimate level, as will be demonstrated in the three last chapters. Indeed, sometimes members of the Cuban community associate their identity with sensorial things: the flavour of a dish, the smell of a flower or the sounds of song, etc. This connects with Epstein's work, which highlighted the role of affect, smell and sense in the creation of identity. Importantly, all the images and ideas about Cubanness and Cuban identity are in a state of constant change, as will be seen in the fieldwork findings. In this case, the views expressed by Barth and Eriksen that culture and ethnicity are changeable can be also seen through people's words and social exchanges.

However, in some instances, the approaches mentioned above were not suitable for the analysis of the fieldwork data – for example, in the cases when Cuban migrants used physical appearance, ways of talking and dancing (as in Geertz 1973) as a way to define Cubanness and contest someone else's Cubanness. Similarly in the analysis of the external imagery of Cuban and Cubanness shown in Australia, the above approaches did sit well. For example, politics, music and the promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination have played an important role in the ways Australians and other Spanish-speaking migrants see – or more exactly, imagine – Cuba, Cubans and their identity. As will be

seen in Chapter 4, the media and international recording companies are the main producers of these images. In this respect, the work of Hannerz and Appadurai is particularly useful because it helps to explain this increasing interaction between the global flows of cultures, ideas, people and the creation and commodification of ethnic identity. Indeed, the fieldwork findings showed that these images differ from how Cubans themselves see those aspects and the role they play in their own understanding of Cubanness.

In conclusion, for this research, the body of literature analysed above has been useful in the understanding of the “us versus them” equation at different levels. Firstly, it has helped in the analysis of the public image of Cuba and Cubanness constructed by outsiders (i.e. the media and people outside of the Cuban community), and the relationship of such constructs to the expressions of identity, ethnicity and Cubanness of the Cuban migrants themselves. Secondly, the analysis of how Cuban migrants use different elements to differentiate themselves from outsiders, and from others within the group of Cuban migrants, connects with multiple strands of this work. However, this last point has also been developed in another body of literature that specifically addresses the concept of Cuban identity (Cubanness). Works in this field will also be useful in the subsequent analysis of the sense of Cubanness expressed and maintained by Cuban migrants in Sydney, and the dynamics within the group.

### **Views about ethnic identity in the Cuban migration literature**

Studies about Cuban national identity or Cubanidad have been done mainly in the areas of literature, history and sociology, inside and outside the island (Perez Firmat 1994; Fornet 1997; Duany 2000). The Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term

*Cubanidad* in 1940. This section commences with an analysis of the terms *Cubanidad* and transculturation. Following that, I will analyse how the meanings of Cuban identity (*Cubanidad*) developed during the Revolution within the areas of social sciences and humanities, with special attention to the topic of the identity of Cuban migrants. This is followed by an examination of how the literature about Cuban migrants produced outside of Cuba has approached the question of identity. As observed in the previous chapter, the studies about Cuban migrants have been centred in the United States, with much of this work adopting the assimilationist approach to ethnicity and overlooking especially the early mainstream anthropological literature on ethnicity and identity. However, the latest research in this area is using different theoretical frameworks as well as topics to analyse the identity of Cuban migrants in the US.

### **Cubanidad: From Ortiz to contemporary times within Cuba**

Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) has been called the ‘third discoverer of Cuba’, preceded by the Spanish explorer Columbus and the German geographer Humboldt; which is seen as contradictory in academic circles outside Cuba. Ortiz earned this label for his voluminous research about Cuba, which ranged from linguistics to archaeology, ethnology, history, criminology, and politics. Ortiz was a prominent public figure in Cuban politics from 1916 till 1927, when he was elected to the Cuban House of Representatives for several terms, after which he devoted himself to research. It was at this time, in the late 1930s, that Ortiz produced his more mature work dedicated to disentangling the Cuban cultural puzzle.

In his early work Ortiz was dedicated to criminal anthropology, where he used biology (studies on race) to explain the “backwardness” of the Cuban nation (Le Riverend 1983

[1978]; Coronil 1995). His later studies, however, moved away from biology, and rejected the existence of a Cuban race. Since that time, Ortiz used culture as a tool to dissect the nature of Cubanness, resulting in his creation of the concepts of *Cubanidad* and transculturation.

Ortiz was the first to explain in detail the word *Cubanidad* (Cubanness), during a public conference at Havana University in 1939, which was later, published under the title *The human factors of Cubanness*. The essay is considered a classic amongst the studies of Cuban culture, analysing four centuries of Cuban history and cultural exchanges in a very accessible manner by using the analogy of the evolution of a traditional Cuban soup or stew: the *ajiaco*. First and foremost, Ortiz argues against categorising Cubanness into residence, citizenship, birthplace and race. He considered the first three to be misleading tools to describe Cubanness, because they inadequately account for migration and people's feelings of attachment or identification with a place (1996 [1940]: 4–6). In relation to race, Ortiz rejects the idea of a “Cuban race” and of a “pure race”, underlining that race is just a “civic status created by the anthropological authorities” (1996 [1940]: 6). Hence, Ortiz conceptualised *Cubanidad* as a cultural expression, in his own words “the peculiar quality of a culture, the one belonging to Cuba.” But it was also a condition of the soul, a collection of sentiments (feelings) and attitudes (1996 [1940]: 6). Furthermore, Ortiz emphasised that Cuban culture like any other culture is fluid, socially constructed and hence undergoing constant change (1996 [1940]: 8).

When describing the cultural exchanges that took place and continue to take place in the formation of Cubanness, Ortiz used the metaphor of *ajiaco*. He argued that nearly every nationality or culture that had arrived on Cuban shores had contributed something to the

‘stew’, from an ingredient to the pot or the method of cooking. For Ortiz, the Amerindians or the Cuban indigenous population contributed the main staples: potatoes, cassava, taro and corn. The Spaniards replaced the traditional meats of turtle, snake and crocodile with fresh and salted beef. Africans contributed plantains, yams and their cooking techniques; meanwhile the Chinese added some dried spices while the Americans replaced the traditional clay pot with a modern, metallic pot (see Ortiz 1996 [1940]: 10–12). However, the most important part of Ortiz’s analogy lies not in the result of the soup, but in its concoction and the possibility of adding other ingredients (i.e. cultures) to the stew, where these ingredients “dissolved and fused.” As he puts it, “always in the Cuban pot there is a renewed entry of roots, fruits and foreign meats, a constant bubbling of heterogeneous substances.” In this sense, the composition of Cuba and Cubanness is changing, it is a stew, but it is not done yet (1996 [1940]: 12).

Ortiz’s concept of transculturation complements his view of *Cubanidad*. In *Cuban counterpoint*, Ortiz uses tobacco and sugar as the main protagonists of this history to explain centuries of cultural exchanges between the world and Cuba, where Cuba offers the world tobacco, a ritual item of Cuban Amerindians, and takes from the world sugar. Both commodities shaped Cuba, from its economy, to the culture and the identity of the humans caught in this process. Transculturation is the term Ortiz developed for this process.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ortiz invited the famous Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski to write the introduction and endorse his newly created term of transculturation. This is the only link of the Cuban school of ethnology with a founder of the modern anthropological school. Ironically, throughout the years Malinowski’s introduction to the book has been highly criticised because of his attempt to align Ortiz with functionalism and downplaying the importance of Ortiz’s vision.

Ortiz proposed the use of the term transculturation, rather than acculturation to describe the process of cultural change. In his view, transculturation is a complex process that includes a partial loss of the previous culture, with the creation of a newer cultural product that still contains some characteristics of its predecessors (Ortiz 1983 [1940]). For Ortiz, the then popular term acculturation meant a terminal result that failed to acknowledge this variation within the cultural process. Furthermore, he emphasised that transculturation better describes the “extremely complex transmutations of culture that have taken place” in Cuba (Ortiz 1995: 98). But these “transmutations of cultures” or “transculturation of human masses” were mainly created by the continuous migrational waves to Cuba, where he highlights the impact of each of them (Amerindians, Spaniards, Africans, Chinese, Jews, French, etc.) in the Cuban culture (Ortiz 1983 [1940]). Ortiz goes on to argue for the application of his concept of transculturation in the analysis not only of Cuban history, but in the history of the whole Americas (Ortiz 1983 [1940]: 90).

Undoubtedly the concepts of *Cubanidad* and transculturation are closely related, but Ortiz envisaged the latter as the theoretical term that could be applied to the analysis of other societies. Although Ortiz developed both terms more than sixty years ago, their ongoing relevance can be seen in the connection between these concepts and some of the works examined previously. For example, Barth’s views on the fluidity of culture within the ethnic groups echo Ortiz’s understanding of Cubanness as a changing, constructed phenomenon. Furthermore, Ortiz also highlighted the importance of the feelings or the “subjective consciousness” of the individual in his/her adherence to “Cubanness.” Here we can see some connection to Epstein’s views about the role of feelings of the individual in the creation of identity.

Ortiz's concepts of *Cubanidad* and transculturation have also been considered advanced for his time because both highlight mixture, hybridity, and foresee culture, or in this case Cuban identity, as constantly changing (Ortiz 1983 [1940]; Rojas 2004). Indeed, the work of Hannerz, cited above, puts forward a very similar approach to describe the cultural interchanges between the centre and the periphery in the contemporary context. Perhaps the most relevant part of Ortiz's work, however, is the impact that it had in Cuban sociological and anthropological studies, especially in relation to Cuban identity, where analysts inside and outside Cuba continue to draw on his work to validate or contest some aspects (Perez Firmat 1994; Duany 2000).

While Ortiz's views on *Cubanidad* are still popular in academia, they have also become a part of the Cuban popular psyche. Furthermore, the Cuban media and propaganda outlets use them to attract tourism to the island by presenting Cubans as so mixed that any person from around the world can feel at home there. This schematic and simplified repetition of Ortiz's ideas has, to a degree, led to the stagnation of the understanding of *Cubanidad*. This is quite contrary to what Ortiz intended; when introducing these terms, he encouraged other scholars to develop the concept and make them relevant to their time. Although in the Cuban social sciences there has been a substantial amount of theoretical work about Ortiz's legacy, the analysis of Cuban cultural identity's development post-1959 has been minimal.

Alongside the transculturation discourse about Cubanness, other interpretations of it have emerged in Cuban intellectual circles after 1959. The triumph of the Revolution

re-introduced again an ideological or political element into the concept of Cubanness.<sup>13</sup> During the next three decades, to a significant extent, one's Cubanness would be measured by one's accordance with the political views of the revolutionary government. Those who disagreed with the new political process were, by definition, considered not truly Cuban. This politicised context influenced the subsequent interpretations about Cubanness formulated within the island's academic circles.

The leading Cuban ethnologist Jesus Guanche's interpretation of Cuban ethnicity, for one, is heavily based on the Soviet concept of *ethnos* (ethnic group), developed by Julian Bromley in the 1970s, and on Ortiz's transculturation concept. Other discourses have appeared as a result of the collapse of the socialist bloc in 1989–91, and the partial reopening of debate about Cuban identity within Cuba. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this led to a broadening of the notion of Cuban identity or Cubanness, in which the place of politics and national borders was reduced, and the experiences of Cubans settled overseas was increasingly taken into account. Additionally, debate about Cuban identity also brought another body of literature analysing how Cubans inside the island perceived themselves and their identity. The results of these works noted a disparity and distance between the official endorsed discourse of Cubanness and the popular views.

Since the beginning of the 1990s a number of ethno-historical works have been published about some of the migrant groups settled in Cuba before 1959, such as Spaniards, Japanese, and Haitians (Álvarez and Guzmán 2002; Vega 2004). In contrast, there are only two studies dedicated to the analysis of contemporary ethnicity in Cuba,

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<sup>13</sup> In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a nationalist ideology amongst other elements was used to unite a sector of the population in the war against the Spanish rule.

as well as an ongoing project about ethnicity and race in contemporary Cuba (Guanche 1996). Here it is important to remember that Cuba's alignment with the socialist bloc intensified from the early 1970s; ever since, this has impacted on the development and trends of anthropological, or more commonly; ethnological research done in Cuba. The Soviet ethnographical school's research methodology and theory strongly influenced Cuban researchers in the humanities field (Hernandez-Reguant 2005). Jesus Guanche is an example of this: educated in the Soviet school of ethnography, he authored the only two published works about ethnicity in contemporary Cuba.

Guanche's ideas on contemporary Cuban ethnicity can be aligned with the primordialist trend in anthropological studies. He follows Bromley's definition of ethnic group, described by Banks as the most primordialist approach to ethnicity (Banks 1996: 18). In Guanche's analysis, Cuban ethnicity is defined by sharing the same territory, language, culture, mode of production and consciousness of being different from others, and the historical stability of the group (Guanche 1996). He therefore argues that Cubans living overseas are a detached entity, because of their different social experiences and daily interaction with the people in their country of settlement. In relation to Cuban identity, he considers the later works (literature, etc.) on cultural identity as an insufficient portrayal of Cuban ethnicity. However, he favours the role of ethnic self-consciousness in the expression of identity and argues that this gives people sufficient intuition to judge the identity of others (1996: 53). In sum, Guanche's explanation of Cuban ethnicity is rigid, excludes those who have left the island and fails to recognise the dynamic nature of its creation in contemporary Cuba and abroad.

The other major trend in the analysis of Cubaness has emerged mainly amongst literary critics, sociologists and psychologists, who have analysed the new meanings of

Cubanness, developed inside and outside the island. Some Cuban analysts present the Cuban diaspora's identity as bicultural. For example, Victor Fowler, a writer and literary critic who has looked at the formulation of identity in the works of Cuban-American writers, argues that many of these writers are constantly choosing, retrieving or negating either their Cuban or American identities throughout their work. However, Fowler accepts their different appreciation of Cubanness, and does not see it as a cause for exclusion from the Cuban literature (Fowler 1996).

A similar approach is seen in the work of Consuelo Martin who has written extensively about Cuban migration, with a special focus on the issue of identity from a socio-psychological point. Martin argues that all Cubans, migrants included, share a model of identity with common cultural roots. For her, cultural identity is a part of national identity and the relationship or personal perceptions of it influence the levels of migrants' identification with Cubanness. Due to this, Martin stressed that the nation could not afford to lose a part of cultural identity, due to political and ideological positions (1995: 54). Martin added that a decrease in this type of intervention from the Cuban authorities would improve migrants' perception of Cuba, and their self-identification as Cubans wherever they were (1995: 54). Cuban authorities have become more flexible with immigration laws in recent years, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, with a corresponding decrease in the negative political propaganda about migration and migrants.

This has contributed to an increase in return visits of second generation Cubans born overseas, and those who left the country at a very young age. Martin argues that, in this process, the reference point of identity is shifting to a real place rather than the imagined Cuba, where this generation goes to find what they consider their place of

origin and a part of their identity (Hernández et al. 2002). She argues that in this way, the individual is playing a bigger role in the recreation of Cuban identity, and although ideology still has some influence, the trend is towards recognition of a shared culture and respect for difference (Hernández et al. 2002). In sum, Martin's view about Cuban identity is more centred on the subjective aspects, giving preference to the role of personal perceptions without disregarding other factors like politics and cultural roots. In her view, the notion of belonging to Cuba has broadened to the point that the category 'place of birth' no longer determines Cubanness; it has been replaced by a self-identification with place.

Cuban scholars within the island have also started to investigate how Cubans perceive themselves and how they understand Cubanness after the mid-1990s. Psychologists have mainly conducted this research based on extensive surveys, in-depth interviews and interpretation of drawings made by informants (young people 15–30 years old) in interviews. The preliminary results of a survey conducted in 1994 showed that Cubans saw or classified themselves as happy, friendly, kind, hard working, modest and courageous, similar to the adjectives given in a previous survey in 1990. However, interviewees were asked to add more adjectives to the list in 1994 as well as drawings that characterise Cubans. The results were revealing, with classifications like double standard, and business-minded or money-oriented, appearing in the list. The drawings also reflected the economic difficulties experienced in Cuba at the time, such that a majority of them illustrated overcrowded public transport and long queues. Politics and Cubanness was relegated to small posters and inscriptions, repeating the state propaganda like: "A 100 per cent Cuban!" "Cuba Yes and Yankees No" (de la Torre 2003). Carolina de la Torre, one of the chief investigators in the project, noted the

dangers of simply representing these political slogans as expressions of Cuban identity. Furthermore, she opposed the closed formula/rhetoric expressed in them, whereby to be Cuban is to be a socialist, or something else, in real contradiction with the dynamics of identity construction and expression (de la Torre 2003). Critically, the results highlight the changing nature of Cuban identity. The symbols of Cubanness for these young people living in Cuba today are very different from those of previous generations both within and outside the island.

While Cuban identity has been seen and understood as a cultural phenomenon, politics and ideology have played an important part in the formulation of what it means to be 'Cuban' within the academic circles inside the island. At times these have overshadowed the cultural component. Revolutionary politics functioned in a way that sought to strip Cuban emigrants of their Cuban identity. This necessarily changed in the 1990s, when the role of politics in the official discourse about Cubanness began to be contested. Newer understandings of Cuban identity have become more broad and inclusive and the Cuban identity of Cuban emigrants acknowledged. Furthermore, recent studies about the expressions of Cuban identity amongst the youth in the island reinforce the new approaches, by recognising that politics has taken a secondary position as Cubanness is understood differently, with a heightened sense of the impact current economic conditions have on the contemporary construction of Cubanness within the island. These trends can be seen in the analysis of the expressions of Cuban identity overseas.

## **Views on Cuban identity among the Cuban migrants**

As pointed out above, the bulk of the research about Cuban migrants has been done in the US; given the size of the US immigrant population, analyses about their ethnic identity are closely linked to the development of different theories of ethnicity within the US social sciences. Sociological analyses of the economic integration of Cuban migrants are common, to the extent that analysis of Cuban ethnicity has been strongly linked to the economic adaptation myth. Keeping this in mind, Cuban ethnicity has been analysed using some of the major sociological frameworks developed within the American social sciences, like the assimilation approach, which sees Cubans becoming Americans. A later development of this theory distinguished two main stages: the acculturation process, whereby migrants acquire a new language and culture; and a structural stage and a subsequent stage, whereby they become fully integrated into the social, political and structural process of the country (Gordon 1964).

The implication of the assimilation paradigm in some of the work on Cubans in the US was that Cuban ethnic identity was eventually going to disappear. Portes's work on the Cuban settlement in Milwaukee is an example of this. He concluded that Cubans would eventually assimilate and disappear as social entities, but in the case of Miami they would leave some "cultural imprints," while any "non-integrated individuals" would become an insignificant minority. Portes also considered that an attachment to the old culture was a drawback for socio-economic advancement in the US (Portes 1969). In a later work, Portes continued to state that Cubans would be fully assimilated into the American society, but the delayed cultural assimilation was seen as a positive factor in their economic insertion in the country (Portes 1987).

One of the main criticisms made against the assimilation model was that it represented a linear process. The incorporation model sought to overcome this by arguing that migrants have different patterns of incorporation into the economy, which do not always start at the bottom of the economic ladder. Some of Portes's studies on Cuban migrants served as a base to develop the incorporation theory, especially the body of literature dedicated to the analysis of the ethnic enclave economy (Portes 1985). However, this work does not clearly define the role of ethnicity in the economic success of Cubans in Miami (Croucher 1996). Instead, Portes and his colleagues highlight the importance of kinship bonds, family help, social networks and ethnic solidarity in the creation and success of small Cuban enterprises in Miami (Portes 1987; Portes and Jensen 1989).

Croucher has pointed to this shortcoming in the works of Portes and his colleagues, observing that the role of ethnicity in the 'Cuban economic success myth' has been poorly researched. Her analysis of Cuban American ethnic identity is unique in that she reviews some of the main theoretical approaches to ethnicity, something rarely done in studies about Cuban American identity. Croucher analyses the public discourse of the Cuban success story in the economic, political and cultural spheres. In her study, she applies the constructivist theory elaborated by Kathleen Conzen and her colleagues, which considers ethnicity always in the making, and adapting to the changes that the host society and the ethnic group undergo over time. Hence, some characteristics of the group, like its boundaries, symbols and identity, are always reinterpreted and recreated through interaction with internal and external conditions. In the case of the Cuban Americans in Miami, Croucher argues that the exiles, together with the US Government and the media, constructed the social, political and ethnic identity of the group, and that the image of Cubans in the US as sharing "a common ancestry, political conservatism

and entrepreneurial drive” does not represent the diversity of this ethnic group (Croucher 1996). Importantly, as I note in my concluding chapter, Cubans interviewed for this research in Sydney use some elements of the Cuban American success image, like entrepreneurial skills, as identity markers for themselves, as well as questioning someone’s identity when they are not daring or “quick minded” like the Cubans in Miami in their effort to earn a living.

There is also a growing body of literature exploring other areas like ethnic identity and the maintenance and recreation of cultural expressions in Cuban migrant communities in the US and other countries. This work has been done mainly in the disciplines of cultural studies, history, religion and anthropology. One example of this trend is the pioneering work of Boone, who studied a community of Cuban migrants settled in Washington (Boone 1981, 1989 [1977]). Boone presented a new view of Cuban migration by exploring the maintenance and adaptation of pre-migrational cultural expressions like participation in the workforce, food habits, religion, race and courtship. Boone argues that Cubans have been quickly assimilated into Washington life, but the outcomes of their success are distinctly different from those of the Cuban settlement in Miami (1989: 209–210).

Furthermore, Boone argues that, despite this rapid adaptation, the most flexible aspects of the Cuban culture have survived, and will continue to do so. Indeed, her study revealed how the Cuban women participants selectively chose and retained some aspects of the Cuban culture in their new situation, and how this selection had helped them to survive as a group (Boone 1989 [1977]). Boone’s work gives a greater importance to the cultural aspects of Cuban experience over economic and political issues, without disregarding the latter. More importantly, Boone argues that some

aspects of the original cultural identity of their informants will survive. In so doing, she departed from the dominant view of a complete cultural assimilation. This marks a new path in the research about Cuban migrants in the US and elsewhere. In the 1990s, a considerable number of studies would explore this in different areas such as literature, history, and identity (e.g. Garcia 1996; Perez Firmat 1994; Duany 1989; Bettinger-López 2000; and Fowler 2002).

Studies dedicated to the analysis of *Cubanidad* amongst Cuban migrants after the fall of the Soviet Union can be encapsulated as displaying two main trends. The first of these is the presentation of Cubanness as a hybrid, recognising that Cuban migrants, and especially their offspring, maintain some aspects of Cuban identity, but that these have been recreated in their new place of settlement. Perez Firmat's *Life on the hyphen* is an example of this interpretation of Cubanness. The book revolves mainly around the lives of three Cuban-born artists that made it in American show business, but by recreating Cubanness for the American public: Desi Arnaz (aka Ricky Ricardo), Gloria Estefan and Willie Chirino. For Firmat, they all represent what he called the one and a half (1.5) generation: Cubans who arrived very young in the US or were born there from Cuban parents. Moreover, Firmat argues that this generation has a bicultural identity, where both cultures are "in equilibrium" (1994: 6). Drawing on Ortiz's ideas of transculturation to show that Cubanidad was already hybrid before arriving in the US, Firmat reclassifies the new Cuban identity into a 'tropical soup,' building on Ortiz's metaphor of the *ajiaco*. Max Castro notes that Firmat's tropical soup lacks some ingredients, like the racial issues or the politics which are always in the background of the Cuban-American discourse (Castro 2000). However, Perez Firmat is seeking to articulate part of the new understanding of *Cubanidad*, one that is constantly created

everywhere and by all who consider themselves Cuban. As such, he concludes Cubanness is determined by “ethnicity rather than nationhood” (1994: 17).

Firmat’s cultural study has greatly influenced later analyses of the Cuban (American) identity in the US like those of García (1996) and Uriarte (1995) which take the biculturalism perspective or Behar (1995) and Bettinger-López (2000) who take on the hybridity element. The anthropological works of Behar (1995) and Bettinger-López (2000) unravel further the hybrid nature of Cubanness. Both authors are of Cuban-Jewish ancestry raised in the US. Their work seeks to simultaneously deconstruct and unify notions of Cubanness and Jewish identity in the US. For Behar, Jewish Cuban Americans have moved beyond a hyphenated identity, because they or their parents had already experienced displacement when settled in Cuba, and the hybridity (or creolisation) of the Cuban culture gave them the opportunity to add their own experience to this phenomenon. Therefore, in her analysis, their identity is presented as a “creative amalgam” (1995: 164–65). A similar idea is elaborated further in the Cuban-Jewish journeys of Bettinger-López (2000), in which she emphasises that the “Juban” case defies the linkages between territory and identity, due to the successive migrations experienced by this group. As a consequence, she argues that their identity is linked to multiple places, from Europe and the Middle East to the American continent (2000: 237). Bettinger-López advocates for a deeper analysis of the seemingly homogenous picture of Cuban culture, migration and identity in order to recognise the diversity that blooms within it (2000: 240).

The second main contemporary trend in the analysis of Cubanness focuses on the deterritorialisation of the concept itself. In the previous chapter, we saw how Cuban migrants of the early migrational waves of the 1960s and 1970s were classified as

*gusanos* (worms) or *vendepatrias* (traitors) by the revolutionary government. These highly politicised characterisations were also extended to their Cubanness or Cuban identity. In contrast, Consuelo Martin's work argues that Cubans who migrate do not stop being Cuban (1995: 54). In respect of the Florida Straits and in other parts of the world as well, scholars have highlighted similar points as Torres (1995; 1998), Fowler (2002) and Duany (2000). The work of Maria de los Angeles Torres has compared the influences of the nation state and politics in the definition of Cuban cultural identity in both Cuba and the US. Torres argues that political, geographical and legal issues bridge the notion of Cubanness on both sides of Florida Straits, because nation promotes an idea of cultural homogeneity even if it does not reflect the diverse identities of their population (1998: 58–59). In the case of immigrants, Torres argues that living outside one's home country intensifies the sense of identity and the finding of different ways to maintain it. Due to this, Torres claims that immigrants can help their home countries in the maintenance of their cultural identity (1998: 59). Finally, Torres encourages a broadening of the notion of identity, beyond states and geographical boundaries; a process that she considers is already taking place slowly in relation to Cuban identity (1998: 60; 1995: 435–36).

Some of the studies on Cuban migrants in the US have used the transnationalist paradigm in their analysis (e.g. Tweed 1997; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; Perera Pintado 2005; Wimmer 1998). The line of argument in these works builds on the idea of a deterritorialisation of the concept of Cubanness, and the importance of continuous everyday links in which Cuban migrants engage with their homeland. Although these works do not specifically address the issue of Cubanness within the framework presented above, they do analyse topics like religious practices, return trips to Cuba, and

nostalgia, and more importantly expose people's views and conversations on such issues. This provides opportunities to see how Cuban migrants themselves recreate and contest these elements of Cuban cultural identity. Equally, it serves as reference point and comparison with the findings of the fieldwork for my own research, where the main aim is to analyse how the Cubans themselves maintain, articulate and express their ethnic identity and how outsiders see and interpret it as well.

This review of the literature on Cubanidad and ethnic identity of Cuban migrants shows that Cuban identity was first understood exclusively as a cultural phenomenon.

However, the triumph of the 1959 Revolution emphasised the political element in the understanding of Cubanness, which in turn led to a fragmentation in the analysis of Cubanness. Inside Cuba analysis stagnated, with the leading discourse of Cuban identity in the social sciences seeking to merge Ortiz's concept of Cubanidad with the Soviet theory of ethnicity. Ironically, this failed to acknowledge the diverse nature of Cubanness by considering Cubans living overseas as a separate entity, contradicting Ortiz's vision of Cubanness, and its hybrid nature, in the process.

The post-Soviet crisis of the 1990s promoted new analyses from within the island of what it means to be Cuban. As a result, Cubanidad has become a more inclusive category, where political views matter, but do not overshadow the cultural elements in the concept. Cubans living overseas are seen as a part of this identity. More relevant is the fact that Cuban analysts are seeing the identity of Cubans living in the island as continuously changing as well.

The analysis of Cuban ethnic identity by researchers living outside Cuba followed a very different path. Firstly, the works about Cuban migration focused more on the

economic and political topics, while identity was only studied in relation to them. As a result, what was seen as relevant was the extent to which identity (culture) helped the rapid assimilation of Cuban immigrants in the US. It also assumed a loss of the original cultural traits over time. However, other analyses emerged, pointing out that this loss of cultural traits, and Cubanness, did not occur. Other theories, such as constructivism, biculturalism, Cubanidad, hybridity, and more recently transnationalism, have thus been put to use to explain the persistence and re-creation of Cuban identity amongst Cuban migrants living in the US and other parts of the world. Here too, politics have taken a secondary role in the understanding of Cubanness as cultural aspects attract more attention in the analysis of Cuban identity.

The literature on Cubanidad and ethnic identity amongst Cuban migrants offers an outline of how Cuban identity has been understood during the last seventy years or so. As noted above, this analysis has been particularly useful in helping us to understand how Cuban themselves articulate and recreate their own ethnic identity within the group. This will be observed in the analysis of my fieldwork findings, especially in chapters 5 and 6. These chapters look at how Cuban migrants re-create their identity in the private realms, such as in their houses and within a close group of friends, paying attention to elements like music, dance, politics, religion, eating habits, etc.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that a substantial part of the work on Cuban ethnic identity has overlooked the mainstream literature on ethnicity and identity, due in part to the localities in which it was produced: Cuba and the United States. In response to this limitation, I have reviewed some of the main works on ethnicity and identity produced

in the mainstream anthropological literature, and pointed to its relevance for the fieldwork that follows. This review traces how the understanding of ethnicity expanded from a primary view linked only to biological factors of ancestry, to include cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors. Furthermore, I have pointed to the salience of identity studies and the influence of globalisation on the creation and maintenance of identity worldwide. On the other side, the review of scholarly work on Cuban identity done inside and outside Cuba took a different pathway, especially in Cuba where the studies and understanding of Cuban identity stagnated after Ortiz's concepts of Cubanidad and transculturation. In the case of the US, the studies focused on the identity of the Cuban migrants in this country paid more attention to how their identity favoured their economic success or insertion in the American society. One might refer to this as an overly instrumental approach to ethnicity. However, the latest research on this topic done on the US has put more attention into the cultural side and how Cuban migrants in the US re-create and maintain their identity in that country.

The review of the mainstream anthropological literature on ethnicity and identity shows that the constructivist theories of ethnicity and identity used by Barth and Eriksen, the psychological approach to the study of identity of Epstein, and Ortiz's conceptualisations of Cubanidad and transculturation are the best theoretical frameworks to analyse and make sense of the fieldwork findings. However, their views on what it means to be Cuban and Cubanness add other elements to these categories beyond the widely held symbols, such as dancing, Revolution and the exotic place. In the private realm, Cubans keep jealously their eating habits and ways to share food, their memories about Cuba as a place, and a capacity to find products and borrow from the outside to reconstruct and maintain their Cubanness.

The conceptualisations of Appadurai and Hannerz about the impact of globalisation in ordinary people's lives and the creation and consumption of cultural products such as music or ethnic cuisine in the developed world were especially useful in the examination of how people outside of the Cuban community perceive and contribute to the recreation of Cubanness in Sydney. This will be the subject of the next chapter, which will review Cubanness from the outside and by the outsiders, taking as its main subjects the salsa dance boom in Sydney, leftist politics and the promotion of Cuba as a main tourist destination in the international market.

## Chapter 4. Imagining Cuba: the role of politics and music in the formation of the Cuban image in Sydney.

### **Introduction**

Geographically, Cuba is distant from Australia, but its name has sporadically appeared in the popular media in relation to politics, and more recently tourism, music and dancing. Over the last decade Australian newspapers and television stations have shown or published a more regular flow of documentaries, articles and current news about Cuba. A notable example is the successful, widespread showing of Wim Wenders' film *Buena Vista Social Club* in cinemas around Australia in 2000. The impact of the film documentary was diverse, with some of the Cuban musicians featured in the film having gone on world tours, including concerts in Sydney, since the film. As we will see in this chapter, the images of Cuba portrayed in the film seemed to contribute to growing interest in Cuba as an 'exotic' tourist destination for Australians. Undoubtedly, these encounters of the Australian public with Cuba have helped to create the images that are the subject of study in this chapter.

This chapter will examine how Australians and local Latin American migrants interpret Cuban identity from the outside. Firstly, it will explore the formation of the political image of Cuba as a 'socialist dream' by some Australian left-wing organisations and the Australian Cuban Friendship Society (ACFS). Special attention will be given to the role or participation of Cuban-born migrants in the activities sponsored by these organisations. The contradictions in the interpretation of the political image of Cuba among these groups will also be analysed. Secondly, this chapter will discuss the role of music and dance in the construction and perception of Cuban ethnic identity by the wider Australian society. Here special attention will be given to the forms that Cuban

identity has taken on through the commercialisation and diffusion of the dance form known as salsa in Sydney. Thirdly, I will explore the promotion of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination in the Australia media, and most importantly as a place that needs to be visited soon, before the putative collapse of the social system resulting from the Cuban Revolution. Finally, I will argue that both the promotion of Cuba as tourist destination, and the revival of Cuban music and dances in Australia, is a part of a world-wide transcultural phenomenon and the tensions between the homogenisation and hybridisation processes taking place during the marketing and consumption of cultural products and forms at a global level. My fieldwork notes and interviews form the groundwork for the analysis of these aspects of Cuban identity as imagined in Australia. It is worth noting in this respect that there seems to have been a lack of serious interpretive study of Cuban identity in Australia for contemporary researchers to draw upon.

### **Politics**

Before I began my fieldwork I thought that politics, especially as reflected in opinions about the Cuban Revolution, would have some influence on the way the fieldwork was conducted because the Cuban migration to Australia occurred mainly after 1959 (i.e. post-Revolution). I also assumed that any difficulties in this respect would only appear during my interaction with Cuban migrants. From the beginning of my fieldwork, these issues proved to be more problematic. Politics, and how I expressed my agreements or disagreements with any aspect of current Cuban life, and by implication the Cuban Revolution, would indeed open or close doors to potential informants. Furthermore, this occurred not only during interaction with Cuban migrants, but also with other Latin American migrants and with Australians.

One of the first major themes that I discovered during fieldwork was that Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution are seen and portrayed as symbols of Cuba by the Australian media and the wider Australian community but, importantly, the interpretation of this symbolism varies. On one hand the Australian media tends to publish articles that are highly critical of what it sees as Cuban social reality. Contrary to this position, Australian left-wing organisations are generally unconditional supporters of the Revolution and react very strongly against any criticism of Cuba, be it from the mainstream or from within the left. It can be argued that the Australian left movement has created and promotes an unproblematic image of Cuba as a 'socialist paradise'.

To explore the creation and promotion of this image, it is useful to analyse some publications of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA, hereafter) and the Australian Cuban Friendship Society (ACFS, hereafter). Undoubtedly, the triumph of the Rebels' Army under the leadership of Fidel Castro in 1959 raised awareness about Cuba around the world, including in Australia. Since then the "revolutionary" stamp would be attached to notions of Cuba everywhere in the world. In the case of Australia, the leftist movement in general, beginning with the CPA, and subsequently the Democratic Socialist Party and the ACFS, was more or less exclusively the sole source of any published information about Cuba.

Indeed, the CPA's newspaper *The Tribune* published numerous articles about Cuba during its existence. In its first issue for 1959, *The Tribune* highlighted that "Castro's rebel movement was supported by the Socialists ..." even if it had not yet accomplished any radical social reform (7 January 1959, p. 4). The newspaper kept regular updates of the social changes taking place in Cuba, like the future land reform (18 February 1959, p. 4), the highly successful literacy campaign in 1961, the October Missile Crisis in

1962 and thereafter, and yearly articles about the different social achievements of the Revolution every 26<sup>th</sup> of July. Furthermore, the CPA also conducted numerous campaigns and public rallies in support of the Cuban cause, like the “Million pencils for Cuba,” when the Eureka Youth League collected pencils to send to Cuba as a help in the eradication of illiteracy (11 July 1961, p. 10) and the “Hands off Cuba” campaign during the Missile Crisis in 1962, when the CPA and the trade union movement promoted different rallies in capital cities around Australia, in front of the US consulates, to raise public awareness about the Cuban situation (e.g. 24 October, 1962 p. 1; 14 November, 1962, p. 1).

Subsequently other types of publication were produced. For example, in 1965 the first visit of an Australian Communist Party delegation to Latin America (Mexico, Chile and Cuba) took place. Soon afterwards, the two delegates, Eric Aaron and Pete Thomas, published a detailed booklet about life in Cuba in those times. Although the book continuously praises the Cuban Revolution, the authors interviewed not only people who supported the Revolution, but also people who were leaving Cuba for the US during the so-called ‘freedom flights’, which included sugar cane cutters, students, housewives, and a former butler (Aaron and Thomas 1966). The authors made a number of comparisons between life in socialist Cuba and life in Australia, expressing admiration for the low prices that the Cuban Government introduced for housing, electricity and other services. By way of conclusion, Aaron and Thomas called on Robert Menzies’ government to recognise the Cuban Government and normalise diplomatic, trade and cultural relationships (Aaron and Thomas 1966: 55).

It is difficult to know to what extent the articles about Cuba published in *The Tribune* or small booklets such as Aaron and Thomas’ *Cuba: beacon of the Americas* influenced the

general perception in Australia of such a geographically distant place. Nevertheless, the descriptions and analyses offered in them have helped to create the image of Cuba as a socialist dream amongst sections of Australian society. At the same time, the interest of the Australian left movement in places like Cuba was also motivated by the fact that it offered an opportunity to fight a common enemy and made their support for international causes a specifically *Australian* issue, as one interviewee explained to me:

“I didn’t care if it was Cuba, East Timor, Sinn Fein or South Africa. We supported and demonstrated for all those causes and, more importantly, we always made the point of how the Australian government and people could help to change that situation. That was the most important thing. I believe that it raised awareness and brought the fight to our doorsteps.”

Interestingly, the Cuban Communist Party has never invited any delegation of the CPA to its congresses, in this way failing to officially acknowledge the long work of its Australian comrades for the Cuban cause.<sup>14</sup> This is almost certainly linked to the fall from grace of the CPA with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the late 1960s, and the closer relationship that was established between Cuba and the USSR around the same time.<sup>15</sup> However, after the celebration of the 11<sup>th</sup> Festival of Youth and Students in 1979 in Havana, the Cuban Government realised the importance of widening its links with the grassroots world solidarity movement outside the communist realm. This new view allowed different Cuban organisations to reach people who held different political views, progressive views, but were not necessarily communist. The normalisation of the diplomatic relationships between both countries and the establishment of the Cuban

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<sup>14</sup> The reviews of several official reports to congresses of the Cuban Communist Party that have been taking place since 1975 do not record the presence of any official delegation or representation of the CPA in their congresses (see, for example, *Memorias del Primer Congreso (PCC)*, 1976, v.3).

<sup>15</sup> The rift between the CPA and CPSU is well documented in Aaron’s autobiography *What’s Left?* in the chapter *Striking out*, p. 155 – 168.

consulate in Sydney in the 1970s (1973–75) opened the way for the creation of a local organisation of solidarity with the Cuban cause in 1981: the Australia Cuba Friendship Society (ACFS).

In 1981, when it was first formed, the ACFS had only a few members in Sydney, but two years later, in 1983, this association had become a national entity with branches in nearly every State capital and some regional cities such as Wollongong and Newcastle (*Cuba Today* 1983, No. 3, p. 7). At the same time, its membership underwent some changes in the late 1980s, by which time the society involved not only people with specifically leftist political views, but people who wanted to find information about Cuba which was first-hand and alternative to popular media representations. For example, in a newsletter of 1989 Dr John Brotherton, one of the society's committee members, called for a broadening in the membership. In his opinion, ACFS's membership needed to be open to "more conservatives than communists", and to everyone who was interested in helping Cuba (ACFS newsletter March 1989, p. 2).

The ACFS began the publication of a small quarterly magazine called *Cuba Today* in 1981. By 1983, the editors of the publication announced that it had reached ten thousand copies. While the information in the magazine emphasised the political aspects of life in Cuba, other topics and points of views were also published. For example, in order to offer a more balanced overview of Cuban reality, each issue was dedicated to a specific topic. Some of the themes dealt with were Cuban people, art and culture; women in Cuba; the structure of the popular legislative power in the island, and the launch of the book *Fidel and Religion*; (*Cuba Today* 1984, 1985).

In addition to this publication the ACFS also promoted and financed the visits of several Cuban government officials to Australia. The Cuban officials used these tours to provide first-hand information about life on the island. Since the collapse of the socialist bloc, the ACFS has run several fundraising projects for Cuban schools, hospitals and different countryside communities. However, the organisation of the annual work brigade constituted one of the most consistent and popular activities coordinated by the ACFS. In February 1984, the first Southern Cross work brigade composed of sixty Australians and New Zealanders visited Cuba for three weeks. The brigade's program included picking oranges with Cuban students, and visits to factories, schools, hospitals and neighbourhood street parties. Some local mainstream newspapers gave coverage of this event, especially when ASIO interviewed some members of the brigade returning to Australia (*Cuba Today* 1984, No. 1, p. 5).

The number of participants in the brigade grew. For example, in 1989 a newsletter of the society claimed that since the establishment of the work brigade more than 350 Australians and New Zealanders "have seen Cuba by themselves" (newsletter July 1989). After the mid 1990s, the number of participants in the brigade decreased due to the low exchange rate of Australian currency against the US dollar, and a greater promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination by major travelling companies and mainstream newspapers.

The ACFS newsletter traditionally published the reports of the participants in the work brigades. In general the participants seemed to be overwhelmed by the achievements of the Cuban Revolution in different social spheres. For instance, Helen Boyh, an indigenous woman who took part in the second brigade, expressed her surprise about the good racial relations amongst Cubans and the role of the government in promoting

them (*Cuba Today* 1985, No. 1, p. 4–5). Talking about Cuban health care, a brigade participant highlighted that in Cuba “doctors are as common as rum, sugar and cigars” (*Cuba Today* 1984, No. 1–2, p. 11). Finally, another participant remarked that in Cuba they walked “freely around the country”; however, upon their arrival in Australia, some of them were interviewed by ASIO (*Cuba Today* 1984, No. 1–2, p. 5). Opinions like these contributed to an unbalanced view of Cuba as a ‘socialist dream country’.

Some achievements of the Revolution are undeniable, but many of the well-intentioned Australian participants fail to acknowledge, in these reports, that their short (three week) apparent immersion in Cuban life provides only a brief overview of Cuban life. Indeed, every year they work with Cuban students, visit schools, factories, and street parties, but their host, the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the People (ICAP) – a government organisation that works with foreign solidarity groups who establish links with Cuba – carefully designs and monitors all these activities. What is shown to participants is, perhaps not surprisingly, only the best of what the country can offer, and the people who they talk to are mainly Cuban citizens who are well integrated into the Cuban Revolution and political life. Under the circumstances it is difficult to offer well-informed judgements on a situation when the whole body of opinions about it cannot be accessed.

The idyllic image of socialist Cuba contributes to an entrenched set of beliefs whereby any criticism of the Cuban Revolution at all is unwelcome among the leftist movement in Australia. An important outcome of this is that no attempt appears to have been made to clarify the difference between ill-intentioned right wing criticism on the one hand, and well-intentioned or more constructive, leftist critical perspectives on the other. A clear example of the latter is the documentary *Fond memories of Cuba* made by the

Australian leftist filmmaker David Bradbury. The documentary was shown in Sydney and Melbourne in mid 2002 and broadcast on the SBS television station in January 2003. The reviews of the documentary in the mainstream Australian newspapers were quite good, but the publication of the Democratic Socialist Party, *Green Left Weekly*, disapproved of it.

*Fond memories of Cuba* is set up as a road music documentary. The project was basically motivated by Bradbury's friendship with two old leftists. One was Harry Reade, a wharf-worker and cartoonist who lived in Cuba during the first ten years of the Revolution, who asked Bradbury to scatter his ashes in Cuba, The other was Jim Mitsos, a supporter of the Cuban Revolution who felt too old to travel to Cuba and asked Bradbury to do it for him. Bradbury explicitly noted that he was seeking to achieve a broader overview of Cuban reality than that offered in the *Buena Vista Social Club* documentary (Wilder 2002).

In this context, Bradbury describes some of the economic hardships confronted by Cubans due to the 40-year US blockade, but he also criticises the Cuban bureaucracy for some of the country's problems. Some of his criticisms, such as comparing the crackdown on the political dissidents in Castro's government with the actions of his predecessor Batista in killing nearly twenty thousand people during the 1950s, are arguably unreasonable. But at the same time Bradbury documents the diversity of opinions within Cuba. There are Cubans who support the government unquestioningly, and others who support the government but question the lack of dialogue about important issues in Cuban society such as racism, migration and the effects of the dollar-economy. He also includes the views of Cubans who are political dissidents, and American businessmen. Finally, Bradbury points out that he is not disillusioned with

socialist ideals, but with the implementation of these in some places. In the case of Cuba he claims that the “power mongers” in the government have contributed to the demise of the socialist dream.

As noted earlier, the film was not well received by some Australian left groups. For instance, *Green Left Weekly* published an article entitled “Bradbury’s bitter memories of Cuba” (Bullimore and Everett 2002). The authors accused Bradbury of bias, citing his selection of interviewees, which included only one government figure. They also accused him of focusing the film on himself and his own disillusionment with socialism. Further, Bullimore and Everett considered that Bradbury only showed the problems of the Revolution, but not the enthusiasm for it such as the “popular” marches in its support.<sup>16</sup> Finally, they accused Bradbury of misunderstanding the “constant struggle” which “has no fixed completion date” (Bullimore and Everett 2002: 24). Bradbury’s documentary is a critical review made from a broadly sympathetic point of view. However, the reaction to it indicates that some on the political left in Australia are not ready to let go of the “Cuban socialist dream” of 40 years. Such reactions fail to recognise that during this time Cuba and its social project have changed, and that inviting people to discuss and interpret those changes does not necessarily amount to a counter-revolutionary project.

It is useful at this point to examine the role of Cuban migrants in the activities promoted by Australian left groups or Latin American groups sympathizing with the Cuban Revolution. Overall, local Cuban migrants scarcely took part in these, but the causes of

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<sup>16</sup> The irony of these marches – from my own experience – is that they are compulsory, and although people support the government sometimes, they wouldn’t go if they have the opportunity, simply because the marches are usually conducted after work hours or during the weekend!

their lack of participation are various. First and most obviously, it needs to be remembered that the majority of Cuban migrants came to Australia as political refugees or on sponsored work scheme visas. In other words, the early Cuban migrants came with an explicit disagreement with the Cuban revolutionary government, and hence are not interested in local activities expressing support for the government. So far as younger Cuban migrants (those born and bred during the revolutionary) are concerned, a lack of interest in local pro-revolutionary activities may account for non-participation, or a sense of confusion provoked by the image that other people have of Cubans as 'committed revolutionaries.' Indeed, I was able to experience and observe some incidents reflecting these attitudes during my fieldwork.

Once, during my first attempts to locate some Cuban migrants in Sydney, I went to La Casa Latino Americana in Marrickville. There, a small group of Uruguayan, Spanish and Chilean migrants had formed a group called Amigos de Cuba (Friends of Cuba). Amigos de Cuba get together every third Sunday in the month to raise money for various Cuban institutions, such as schools or paediatric hospitals. In order to do this, they sell Cuban traditional dishes and play some Cuban music. As soon as I entered the old army barracks, where La Casa Latino Americana is situated, I enquired if there were any Cubans around. However, I received a very unwelcoming response. One of the women (a Chilean) working there looked at me and said:

"There aren't any Cubans, here! Many of them know that we are here doing this for their country, but they never come. I guess that half of them are *gusanos* (worms) and the other half don't care about this. Sanchez is the only Cuban that has been helping us for years. The others don't bother or don't want to know about us."

The tone of her voice was aggressive. I tried to ignore it, but as soon as I was introduced to Sanchez, he started to apologise for her aggressiveness and asked me not to pay much attention to her comments, because “some people are too bitter.”

On another occasion, the organiser (a former left trade unionist leader from Uruguay) of a Latin American group in Western Sydney invited me to a fundraising activity for Cuba. I had some work commitments, so I politely apologised. The organiser (non-Cuban) responded to me, “Come in, come! We are not asking too much of you, the Revolution is not asking too much of you.” I felt outraged by his words, ‘the Revolution is not asking too much of you’. He had only met me a few weeks earlier and I felt as though he was challenging me or demanding something of me, which he had no right to do. Months later, I had the opportunity to meet some Australian members of the ACFS. I recounted the phrase the man had used, during a conversation with them. They responded by explaining that some of the Latin American leftists who support Cuba tend at times to show off their commitment to the Cuban Revolution like that, particularly in the presence of visiting or Cuban officials or the resident Consul-General. The ACFS members emphasised that for some this was about showing themselves to be more committed to the Cuban Revolution than the Cubans themselves.

I was not aware of that sort of tension between some Latin American leftists (mainly Chileans and Uruguayans) and Cubans, but this could be one of the reasons why Cubans who are sympathetic to the revolutionary government rarely attend such activities, whereas their failure to attend or do something is interpreted by Latin American migrants as a lack of interest and support for the Cuban cause.

Another example of the political disagreements arising from the assumptions that some Latin Americans have about 'revolutionary Cubans' can be found in the comments of one informant:

"I notice that when Cubans find out that I play Cuban music, first, they invite me to their houses and activities. However, when they get to know that I am a leftist, sometimes their opinion about me changes. If I start to talk well about Cuba or praise the Revolution, the people don't invite me again. Even Cubans born within the Revolution have that attitude!"

However, sometimes this tension tends to be forgotten. For instance, during the Olympic games, the younger Cuban migrants took part with enthusiasm in the activities organised by the ACFS and the group Amigos de Cuba in Marrickville. Some of these activities included meetings with Cuban sportspeople, the Minister of Sport, etc. At the same time, some Cuban migrants joined with other Latin Americans and organised a Cuban celebration night for the sports delegation in the Cuban Sport Exhibition Centre. The exhibition was mounted especially for this event in the Comet Building in Lidcombe. It is interesting that older Cuban migrants did not view this temporary collaboration very positively. Indeed, around that time one of the young arrivals was invited to a cultural function in Sydney's western suburbs. The young woman asked the Cubans involved in that function if they intended to go to the Cuban celebration night. I observed that the older Cubans politely answer that they did not know about it. Later someone mentioned that they had heard about it and were invited but did not want to be involved with "them, the revolutionary ones".

In sum, these examples show us the complexities of fitting in with the image of the 'revolutionary Cuban' in an expatriate environment such as Australia. Firstly, some

well-intentioned non-Cuban supporters of the Cuban Revolution have a set image of what it means to be a 'committed Cuban'. That image involves assumptions about availability, readiness to do anything for the cause and not making critical comments about the Revolution. The ambiguity between this image and the actual behaviour or responses of the Cuban migrants to it substantiates Barth's ideas on the role of values orientation and ascription in the construction of identity. As remarked in Chapter 3, the value orientation indicates how participants always choose a cultural defining feature over others, which do not necessarily fit with the "known image of the group"; meanwhile the ascription proposes that as far as the participants consider themselves part of a group, the above fluctuations do not determine their sense of belonging but should be a focus of research (1969: 14–15). In this case, we have outsiders assuming the Cuban, especially young Cuban, should be a 'committed revolutionary' and the Cubans themselves fail to meet this assumption.

Similarly, this image also contradicts some of the most recent surveys of Cuba's youth, with respect to their views on politics and Cubanness, analysed in the previous chapter (see de la Torre 2003). Such results reflect the reality that contemporary, younger Cubans relegate politics to a secondary role in their understanding of themselves and their Cubanness. The results also show the surfacing of business-oriented views, and a well-publicised sense of double standard, alongside happiness and a strong work ethic as classificatory tools of Cubanness. It is not surprising then that younger Cuban migrants – even those born and bred during the Revolution – have personal and economic expectations that do not neatly match the 'committed comrade' image favoured by leftist solidarity groups. Meanwhile, there is also another contradiction between how the oldest Cuban migrants view the youngest, myself included, with

suspicion, simply because of our (relatively recent) time of arrival in Australia and the years of our birth and upbringing within the Cuban Revolution. Later, in Chapter 5, I shall return to this topic to explain the dynamics of politics within the Cuban migrants in Sydney.

### **Salsa**

The popularity of Cuban dance and musical expression in Sydney offers a unique opportunity to examine how Cuban ethnic identity is perceived by the wider Australian society. This section analyses the role of music and dance in the ways in which broader society constructs and presents a notion of Cubanness, and the forms that this construction has adopted through the commercialisation and diffusion of the music known as salsa in Sydney.

People and indeed entire countries are often identified or characterised by the music they play and dance to (see Stokes 1994). Cuba and Cubans tend to be portrayed, as well as stereotyped, through their popular music and dance styles. The beginning of my fieldwork coincided with the beginnings of a salsa awakening or boom in Sydney, during the period from 1999 to 2000. The widespread and long running screening of the documentary *Buena Vista Social Club* in Sydney cinemas, to much critical acclaim, as well as the presentation of the Bacardi Festival of Cuba, appears to have fuelled the Australian imagination about Cuban dance and music in the summer of 2000. By 2003, salsa was firmly established as a social and recreational dance form in the Sydney entertainment scene.

My immediate impression, as an outsider to the salsa awakening or boom was to assume that Cuban migrants were playing an active role in Sydney's growing salsa

movement. Indeed, for a time, it seemed to me that salsa music would turn out to be one of the most salient features of the Cuban identity here in Australia. However, my visits to the salsa clubs, dance activities, dance lessons, the Bacardi Festival on Sydney's Darling Harbour and the annual South American Festival at Sydney's Bondi, revealed that the role of Cubans in this process was minimal. In the years since the salsa movement began, only one Cuban singer has been working within this movement, while more recently some young Cuban migrants have created some dance companies and musical groups. Before long I discovered that the majority of musicians, dance instructors and DJs producing or promoting salsa in Sydney were Latin Americans of non-Cuban backgrounds, for example of Uruguayan, Chilean and Colombian origins, as well as non-Latin (Anglo) Australians. The multi-ethnicity of the salsa producers in Sydney is a healthy sign for its development and potential longevity in the Sydney and Australian context. The critical significance of this phenomenon for this thesis is how what can be characterised as distinctive Cuban dance styles have been reinterpreted and commercialised in the Sydney market place, and how this process relates to Cuban migrants' sense of themselves, their Cubanness, and their strategies for maintaining this identity.

First of all, it is useful to say something about the origins and internationalisation of salsa. In the 1970s a group of Latin American musicians from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic, based in New York, created the Fania Records company as part of an attempt to revive interest in Latin American music within their communities, and among the broader American public. The mixture of 1940s and 1950s Cuban rhythms and Puerto Rican classic songs, played by a similar mix of musicians, was commercially launched in the United States under the Spanish word *salsa* (literally

sauce). Since then the use of this term has become somewhat controversial in the music world. Some musicians, like the so-called 'Queen of the salsa' Celia Cruz, have argued that this is "Cuban music under another name" (Steward 1994: 485). Others like the music expert Manuel have acknowledged the Cuban origins of salsa, but define the development of salsa in the United States as a "creative appropriation" by which it became an identity symbol for particular groups like Puerto Rican communities in New York, while adding to the territorial expansion of the original form from Cuba (Manuel 1994).

This internationalisation of salsa influenced salsa-dancing styles, with, for example, the emergence of the linear styles of Los Angeles and New York salsa dancing. The expansion of salsa to other locales as diverse as Colombia, Venezuela and the UK, similarly produced further variations in salsa dance styles, like the Colombian or the British UKA style (Urquia 2005: 392). In sum, salsa itself can be seen as an exemplar of a hybrid, creolised cultural form, to use Hannerz's language, embracing diverse musical and dance styles from its birth to contemporary times. This process is exemplified in the way that the term salsa has emerged as the generic and market term for a wide range of distinctive Cuban rhythms such as *son*, *timba*, *rumba*, *chachacha*, *mambo*; Puerto Rican *plena*, and *bomba*; Dominican *merengue*; Colombian *cumbia* and *vallenato*; and almost any other identifiable Latin American rhythm one might encounter.

At first, Cuban musicians in Cuba itself were also opposed to the term "salsa" (Padura 1997). The lessening of the US restrictions on the sale and distribution of Cuban-produced music in 1988, alongside the increased demand for this music on world markets and the collapse of the Soviet Union that shattered the Cuban economy and with it the government's funding of the arts, all combined to impact on the response of

Cuban musicians in Cuba. In short, market pressures left them little choice but to call themselves *salseros*, their music *salsa*, and seek to capitalise on this area of growing international trade. The entry into the international music market and the exposure to the world has meant that salsa dancers are imposing new challenges for the Cuban musicians who have noted that their domestic audiences within Cuba prefer fast and sharper dancing music, with a stronger African element or character, while foreign audiences prefer quite the opposite, with less percussion. As Pacini Hernandez observes, the rush for world marketability has impacted on Cuban musicians who have adopted slower, 'whiter' salsa styles (1998: 123). In similar fashion, in recent years younger Cuban salsero musicians have adopted the rhythm of *reggaeton*, a mix of hip hop, rap, reggae and more traditional salsa, which evolved in neighbouring Caribbean countries.

The salsa phenomenon around the world has been the subject of significant academic research. The published literature about this phenomenon has been dedicated mainly to the study of salsa in the United States, Puerto Rico and other countries of Latin America (Manuel 1994; Desmond 1997). Some studies have been published addressing the influence of salsa on non-Latino audiences, extending to the growth of salsa music producers and consumers in countries as diverse as Japan, the UK, Germany, France and Australia (Hosokawa 1999; Urquia 2005; Skinner 2007). Some of the findings of these studies, like those addressing struggles over the label of authenticity amongst non-Latino dancers and instructors (Urquia 2005), the impact of globalisation in the local production of salsa classes and their participants (Skinner 2007), and the reception of salsa by non-Latino communities in Japan (Hosokawa 1999), have some connections to the fieldwork and its findings with respect to Cuban migrants in Sydney. However, the

place and the relatively young history of salsa in the Australia context compared with the US or Europe, for example, make the local conditions quite distinctive. The analysis below will explore my fieldwork and its findings in light of this literature, and the broader context of salsa as an international phenomenon and hybridised cultural form, in order to assess how distinctive styles of Cuban dance and music have been reinterpreted and commercialised in Sydney.

In Australia, literature analysing the local salsa phenomenon is very limited. To date, salsa has not attracted the attention of Australian academics, although local journalists have increasingly reported on the salsa boom, noting, for example, the emergence of ‘salsa addicts’ in Sydney. This reporting tends to focus on advertising or reviewing the performances of local and international visiting singers and bands that play salsa music (see, for example, Wilder and Buchanan 2002). These articles offer some general insights into the development of the Latin American music in contemporary Australia, and how music and dance have contributed to the construction of an image of Cuba in Australian society.

Australia, like the rest of the world, acquainted itself with some ‘Westernised versions’ of Cuban musical rhythms in the 1950s. At that time the contagious *rumba*, *chachacha* and *mambo* were readapted and moulded for Western and American dancers through the ballroom dancing styles and some Hollywood movies. However, the introduction of salsa in Sydney is linked to the increased arrival of migrants from countries of Latin America in Australia since the 1970s. These migrants frequently arrived in Australia as political refugees, seeking refuge from military dictatorships in countries like Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Venezuela. From the time of their early settlement, the ensuing migrant communities produced musical groups, which catered,

at least partially, to their recreational needs. Bands playing Andean indigenous rhythms, for example, built on this to attract increased attention from wider audiences in Australia like Justo Diaz's group *Papalote*, that toured extensively in Australia in the 1980s (Markovsky 2003).

At the same time, other musical trends such as the New Song movement, Romantic songs, the Uruguayan *Candomble* and Cuban music were cultivated abroad and in Australia. The lyrics of the New Song movement tell the stories of the political struggle against the various military dictatorships, and the pain and persecution confronted and suffered by many of those migrants back in their countries. Up to the early 1990s several musical groups were regularly playing this political and protest style of music in Sydney (Seneviratne 1989). The predominance of these groups declined considerably, evident in the South American Festival in Bondi, since 2003, being devoted mainly to Salsa, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Uruguayan and Peruvian rhythms and samba.

By the 1980s, some of the musical bands that developed from Latin American communities increasingly included salsa dance music in their repertoires, marking a new era in the broader development of Latin American music in Sydney. The salsa boom meant that by 2000 it had effectively become the dominant form for Latin American bands, including those that were once devoted to the New Song movement. In my interview with Juan Carlos, a musician from Peru who used to play political songs, he expressed deep regret over the disappearance of that music. As a result, Juan Carlos and other musicians have been running an annual commemorative night of the Latin American New Song movement.

At the same time other changes were taking place in the salsa movement. It became more ethnically and racially mixed. The group *Papalote*, created in 1979 by the Argentinean musician Justo Diaz, provides a clear example of these changes. A decade later the group was composed of two Latin Americans (an Argentinean and a Uruguayan), an Australian of Greek descent and Anglo-Australian. This band began playing Latin American folkloric songs, political songs, as well as some salsa songs. Since then, the Latin American music scene in Australia has increasingly included music played and performed by musicians not of Latin American background. This trend has continued, such that it is common to find a very ethnically mixed group of musicians playing in bands devoted to Cuban music. Similarly, the presence of Latin dance instructors from non-Latin American backgrounds is even more pronounced within the salsa industry, where they seem to be capturing the market. Urquia reports a similar trend in London where Colombian and Venezuelan dance instructors were initially the majority, but the increased demand for lessons and the institutionalisation of the dance industry de-ethnicised the workforce, such that British long-time dancers became the holders of authority in this field (2005: 392–93).

In similar fashion, Latin American dance music in Sydney moved beyond its community boundaries and into the wider public arena. In Sydney, the number of nightclubs, restaurants and venues for teaching Latin American dances increased rapidly. In 1997, there were six nightclubs that offered permanent Latin American dance music in Sydney (Kessler 1997). The Latin dancing classes' venues also increased from the initial and continuing Sunday night classes in the Glebe Town Hall. By 2001, Latin bands were increasingly evident, and more than a dozen permanent Latin dance class venues had appeared in Sydney, of which the Latin American Dance

Association in Glebe with the pioneer salsa teacher, the Brazilian Jose Prates, Latin Dance Australia in Castlereagh Street and Club Salsa at the Harbourside Brasserie were the most popular (Wilder 2001). Six years later, there are dozens of salsa dance schools in Sydney going from strength to strength. Some schools like 'La ruedisima' also conduct regular weekly classes and activities in Newcastle and the Blue Mountains. Furthermore, there are also a substantial number of websites promoting and selling salsa-related merchandise including music CDs, DVDs of music and dance courses, and dance clothing (see, for example, <http://www.sydney salsa.com.au>). In addition, a number of Salsa competitions have emerged around Australia, culminating in the Sydney Salsa Congress that has run every summer over the last four years with the clear aim of connecting Sydney to the international salsa circuit. In sum, salsa has become a major recreational and economic industry.

It should be noted that, alongside these developments, since the 1980s some Cuban and Latino salsa singers and bands have performed on a regular, though infrequent, basis in Sydney. Amongst these early artists visiting Australia have been some of the greatest voices of traditional Cuban music such as Celia Cruz and the Cuban band *Sierra Maestra*. Initially their visits were not hugely successful, perhaps as a result of inadequate promotion or advertising. Whatever the reasons, the situation changed considerably after the showing of the *Buena Vista Social Club* documentary and in the context of the salsa boom. Cuban bands and dance groups that have toured Australia since 2000 have attracted substantial coverage in the mainstream media, and corresponding audiences. For example, during the tour of the Afro-Cuban all Stars in 2000, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Australian* interviewed Juan de Marcos, the main organiser of the Buena Vista Social Club band several times (e.g.

Donovan 2000; Holmes 2000). Additionally, Lady Salsa, one of the dance and music shows, which toured Australia and regional NSW in 2002, received wide coverage in the media. These visits are clearly having some impact on the Latin music and dance movement in Sydney. The local music groups playing Cuban music now seek to compare themselves with the Cuban touring groups. Indeed, the director of the band Candela declared to a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist that it was only going to take them three months to bring to the stage a show like “Lady Salsa” or “Havana Night” (Wilder 2002).

## **Findings**

At the beginning of this chapter I restated one of the major aims of this aspect of the research – to analyse the role of music and dance in the construction and perception of Cuban ethnic identity by the wider Australian society, and in turn how these images interact with Cuban migrants’ identification and maintenance of their own sense of Cubanness in Sydney, Australia. One of the major findings of my fieldwork in this regard is that the diffusion and commercialisation of Cuban musical styles and dances in Sydney has evolved in its representation and substance from stereotypical and ill-defined images, to more organic reinterpretations of the music and dance that have added new meanings to the original cultural form. Furthermore, despite the de-ethnicisation of the Sydney salsa industry, it has also favoured economically some of the later Cuban migrants, especially those who were professional dancers and musicians in Cuba, like is the case of Yarima, the only female Cuban professional dancer in Australia (see [www.yarima.com.au](http://www.yarima.com.au)).

A review of newspaper articles on Cuba reveals the predominance of stereotypical, sexualised images – a picture of a couple of dancers, or a half naked mulatto woman, with fruit on their heads in the ‘Carmen Miranda’ style popularised in the Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 50s. This is not a new marketing strategy to sell Cuban or Caribbean products to a non-Latin audience. In Australia and internationally, salsa products are frequently promoted as sexy and hot. In the US, for example, Jane Desmond has analysed how sexual connotations are used as a marketing strategy to promote Latin dances. In her work she argues that these marketing strategies create and reinforce the stereotypes of “Latin Americans as overly emotional, inefficient, unorganised and pleasure seeking” (1997: 50).

The Australian media appears to draw on similar strategies to promote local bands playing Cuban or other Latino music. Women in silvery high-heeled shoes, tight short skirts, and bare backs accompanied by conservatively dressed male partners are common visual images accompanying the articles on salsa. The headlines, like “Hot in the city” or “Dip into salsa” reinforce the sexy image (see Wilder 2000 and 2002). However, the Australian media has added a new cross-cultural symbol to this phenomenon: the chilli. One of the pictures advertising the Bacardi Festival de Cuba in Sydney 2000 showed a woman wearing a vest made entirely of red chillies. Underneath the picture it was explained that she is one of the singers of the All Star Cuban Band. The media’s use of the chilli in this staged photo is clearly drawing on it as a symbol of heat; a sexual statement being made through her low-cut, red hot chilli vest. Interestingly, chilli is rarely use in Cuban cuisine, but in Cuban popular culture there are a lot of superstitions related to the use of chilli in any dance activities, or indeed any activity at all in which people get together. Traditionally, it is believed that to drop or

scatter chilli in a place can provoke problems, arguments, and even the use of a knife or similar instrument – a bad omen indeed. This example shows how, in this case, the promoters of the Bacardi Festival activity and the local media used a symbol that has a particular meaning and conveys a particular, marketable image for the domestic audience, in a way that is quite disconnected from an alternative meaning or reading of the image that the very culture being represented would make.

Another example of these transformations or reinterpretations of Cuban dance styles can be found in the promotion and commercialisation of the salsa dance. Within Cuba, the salsa dance is known by the name *casino* not salsa. Further *casino* is a dance that it is usually learned from relatives, friends, neighbours and schoolmates, with many Cubans beginning to dance *casino* from a very young age. It is in this way that Cubans learn their first *casino* steps, as a spontaneous learning process in which professional, paid instructors are rarely used. Talented dancers who want to become professionals, even in popular Cuban dancing styles in Cuba, undertake three to five year tertiary degree courses (a Bachelor of Arts in Dance), in which they learn a range of traditional and contemporary Cuban and international contemporary dance rhythms.

Usually the most skilful *casino* dancers learn to dance *La Rueda* (the wheel), after becoming comfortable with a dancing partner. The wheel is the test of mastery of *casino*, and involves several couples dancing in a circle or in a line, exchanging partners every second or third beat and making very complicated choreographic movements on the dance floor. The wheel dance form emerged in the late 1950s in the middle class recreational clubs of Havana. However, in 1959 the revolutionary government nationalised the social clubs as well as other cultural institutions in its efforts to

eliminate the promotion of elitist cultural forms. It is at this time that *La Rueda* became a truly popular, social dance form.

The wheel dance is mainly performed in *Fiestas de 15*, a party to celebrate when girls reach their adulthood, and in state-run dancing competitions. Therefore, dancers rehearse it for weeks and sometimes months before they dance publicly. It is still mainly a popularly held knowledge, as well as one of the masterpieces of Cuban companies performing popular dances. Finally, since the 1980s, the casino as a dance together with *La rueda* has reached unprecedented prominence after the creation of the TV program; *Para bailar* (Let's dance) in 1979 and its newer version *Ruedisima* – both ran competitions in rueda choreographies.<sup>17</sup>

Since 1999, as part of the fieldwork for this thesis, I attended regular salsa lessons for two years (1999 and 2000) through the Latin American student association at the University of Newcastle, annual salsa activities in Sydney like the Bacardi Festivals and Latin Fiesta at Darling Harbour, the South American Festival at Bondi, and the 'Latin Nights' sponsored by the Newcastle City Council. All of these activities include free demonstration lessons lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. For many future salseros this is the first encounter with salsa. At this point it is pertinent to refer to my fieldwork notes about an introduction to Cuban salsa dance style. Starting with the teaching of salsa by local dance instructors, I noticed that sometimes they tend to mislead the public in relation to the musical rhythms that they demonstrate. For

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<sup>17</sup> The best references about this form of Cuban dance and music are Bárbara Balbuena (2003) *El casino y la salsa en Cuba (The casino and salsa in Cuba)* and *Los rostros de la salsa (The faces of salsa)* by Leonardo Padura (1997).

example, I recorded extensive observations at the 2000 Bacardi Festival, a self-proclaimed promoter of Cuban culture, as follows.

First the presenter announced the program for the day, which included a free salsa lesson. The dance instructors introduced themselves and asked people to get up and take part in the dance lesson. The public responded very enthusiastically to the lesson, across its diverse age, range of young school age students to older people. Ethnically, it was mostly a white audience, but there were also people from Asian, Latin American, and African backgrounds. This variety of people, and their enthusiasm to learn a new beat, rhythm and dance, in a society with hardly any tradition of street dances, was beautiful. However, while the participants probably thought they were learning Cuban dances, the instructors demonstrated merengue steps as a warm up without explaining that this dance originated in the Dominican Republic.

Furthermore, the instructors asked participants to find a partner, introduce each other and form a big circle around them. The crowd enthusiastically engaged in the dance. Most of them looked at the floor trying not to step over their partners with their mechanical-like dance movements, as they learned a few steps. I noticed that some of the public of Latin American appearance did not engage in the dance. They, like many others, stood at the side looking at the dancers with a smile or surprised look. After some minutes of merengue warm-up, the instructors finally started to explain some salsa steps, again without an explanation of rhythm patterns or the origins of salsa. I also noticed that the music was Puerto Rican salsa from New York. This music is slower and therefore not so hard on the ear or legs of people who are new to salsa dance. In addition to this, the steps used as examples by the instructors were almost impossible to follow (the first time). They were very difficult for a person who hasn't danced before.

This example contains several interesting points. Firstly, sometimes in the rush of those events, dancing instructors tend to borrow rhythms from other countries of Latin America which are perceived to be easier on the outsiders' ears and sense of dance beat, facilitating their progress towards Cuban style salsa. In other lessons, the instructors may go through a series of stretches, or beat out basic rhythms using *claves* (wooden sticks) tamping to familiarise the learners with the Cuban salsa rhythm. In this we can see part of the reinterpretation process that salsa has experienced through its development in the Australian context. As Skinner observed, based on Hannerz's views that heterogeneity is always behind the global homogenisation of cultural products, salsa lessons around the world share the same basic structure as the one I have just described. However, it is the interpretation and the meanings given by the participants in their particular contexts, and the ways dance instructors translate this into the local culture, which gives the forms their simultaneous singularity (2007: 495).

Secondly, in the constant quest for authenticity, driven to a large extent by the desire to sell more, the dances and music given to the salsa dance students as authentically Cuban are already a hybridised product. I can exemplify this point from my own experience as a Cuban who learned to dance Cuban rhythms within Australia. In 1999, during a brief visit to Cuba, I discovered how the casino dance style has been transformed in the process of transmission, and I was somewhat distressed to discover that the salsa steps that I learned overseas were quite different from those practised locally, to the point that it was quite difficult for me to dance with a person who learned in my home country. I was told that my salsa dance style was very Western and slow. Indeed, several authors have pointed out the changes, new creations and/or loss of salsa dance forms during these processes of transmission and institutionalisation of the dance and the reactions of

salsa learners when they have the opportunity to experience first-hand Cuban salsa dancing on the island (Desmond 1997: 39–44, Skinner 2007: 499–500).

Similarly to what occurred in London, the increased popularity of salsa and its establishment as a mainstream recreational dance form in the Sydney night club scene contributed to the race to become the authentic or authoritative representative of a salsa music and dance, so as to become more marketable than other dance schools or salsa bands. In the case of London, Urquia also argues that salsa has become a form of ‘cultural capital’ which is ethnically neutral because the authority of knowledge associated with it has shifted from Latin Americans to dance teachers regardless of their ethnic or cultural background (2005: 391). Subsequently, a well-established ballroom organisation in Britain, the UKA (United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing and Kindred Arts) set up formal accreditation courses and country-wide salsa competitions in order to regulate the industry, which marked the total de-ethnicisation of salsa in England. Interestingly, dancers were not happy with the accredited UKA style and went overseas to learn more about salsa, resulting in three main competing styles of salsa dance in London, this in turn further consolidating the authority of the instructors of the particular styles. Urquia concludes that dance classes have come to constitute the main income-generating vehicle for the commodified cultural capital of salsa in London (2005: 392).

The salsa industry in Sydney has experienced some of the major points addressed by Urquia like the authenticity struggles and de-ethnification of the salsa scene, and its associated establishment as a mainstream form of entertainment. My fieldwork coincided with the beginnings of the authenticity race in Sydney’s emerging salsa industry, which was already creating some resentment between musicians and dance

instructors working in the burgeoning industry. This could be sensed in my interviews with two young Cuban migrants working in the salsa industry, one as DJ and the other as a dancer/instructor; and four musicians who had been in the salsa movement for a long time, two of whom were from Peru and Uruguay, and the other two of Australian origins. The interviews took place between late 1999 and early 2001.

All of these participants expressed their concerns, in separate interviews, about the fact that some of the salsa musical bands and dance groups had started to announce themselves as the ‘only providers of authentic Cuban music’ – seeking to cash in on the salsa boom provoked by the *Buena Vista Social Club* documentary during those years. For one of the Latino musicians, the Cuban authenticity fever was purely a pragmatic marketing exercise.

“Here we are very far from Cuba. Therefore, Cuba is nobody’s land over here. Everyone can pretend to offer anything as ‘authentic Cuban’. They aren’t Cubans themselves or haven’t been to Cuba. But this does not matter, because they forget about that when making money with Cuban dances or music ... I even heard them making some nasty comments about Cuba.”

Furthermore one of the Australian musicians, the host of the radio program, had a similar experience. I told him that during one of my visits to a Sydney dance club, I heard someone announce that their dance instructors had just returned from Cuba, where they had learnt “*La Rueda*, the authentic one!” He smiled politely and told me:

“That is a lie. They learned *La Rueda* here from a Latin American. The Latin American himself learned from a Cuban dance instructor in Sydney. The Cuban was the one to introduce *La Rueda* in Sydney. No one knew it before. However he is not getting any money out of it, not even the recognition!

“People have only dollar signs on their minds and eyes. Don’t pay too much attention to what they say. A year ago [in 1999], they didn’t want to play contemporary Cuban music [Timba] in that club. They told me that it was too fast, and the ‘real’ Cuban music was in New York. Today they pretend to just have returned from Cuba and dance with the same music that was not Cuban a year ago.”

Finally, the group of young Cuban migrants working in the industry, and competing with what one of them called the ‘wanna-be’ Cubans, had mixed emotions about the situation. One of them, the DJ, was quite resentful about it and expressed:

“I don’t want to fight with them, but I don’t agree with the people who are selling themselves as ‘experts’ in Cuban dances or music. One day they are experts, the next, they are Cubanos. The only way out of this is quality and diversity. To teach and show other styles of Cuban dances and music like *mozambique, rumba, conga, etc.*”

The Cuban concluded, “We do have the right to earn some money with our own culture, as ‘they’ are doing.”

However, another young Cuban, a trained professional dancer, was more pragmatic. After touring the world with a musical Cuban show that performed in Australia a year earlier, he settled in Sydney at the end of 2001. He commented:

“I don’t have any problem with them selling themselves as Cubans or calling themselves experts. They are teaching people to dance and lighting the spark [like we say in Cuba]. Salsa is addictive, and when you learn it, you want more and you look everywhere for the latest move – because of this people travel ... and go to Cuban shows when they tour Australia. It is good for everyone in the long term.”

It is clear from these comments that market forces and the willingness to obtain commercial advantage led some dance groups, instructors and musical bands to position themselves as providers of 'authentic Cuban music and dance'. However, over time the Cuban authenticity fever had tended to fade in Sydney, driven by a more educated audience that has created its own criteria against which it judges those claims. As the Cuban professional dancer foresaw, the consumers of salsa dance have also learnt, read, researched and travelled which is shaping the industry and calling for more quality in the teaching.

Music can be used to include, or exclude, people from a group, whether defined by ethnicity or social class for example, with the claim of authenticity being one way to do this (e.g. Mitchell 1956; Reed 1998; Stoke 1994: 6). We have observed above how two of the participants considered that to be born a Cuban or travel to Cuba to undertake dance courses amounted to an authentication mechanism, and with it the right to commercialise Cuban music and dance. However, I have noted above when explaining the evolution of salsa inside and outside Cuba that Cuban music has been reshaped beyond Australia on several occasions by and for the outside market, especially in the United States during the 1940s, 1950s and later in the 1970s (Pérez Firmat 1994). This diversity and continual hybridisation of it makes any claims of authenticity increasingly problematic. As the young professional dancer remarked, the interest in Cuban music is bringing some benefits to the Cuban musicians and dancers, regardless of the validity of different group's and individual's claims to authenticity. Indeed, back in the US, the exiled Latino and Cuban musicians in New York kept this music alive for decades (Padura 1997). It was hybrid and compared with some contexts quite old, but it was always there. Today, Cuban musicians from the island have more opportunities to

perform in the US and Europe, where they receive some benefits from the previous New York salsa movement.

Closer to home, in Sydney Australia, a similar phenomenon is taking place. Since the year 2000, the Australian public have enjoyed a permanent flow of Cuban musicians and dance groups touring the country. For example, in September 2000 the band known as the Afro Cuban All-Stars toured Sydney and Melbourne. In January 2001, another band, Cubanismo, performed in the Opera House. The shows 'Havana Night' and 'Lady Salsa' toured Sydney, Melbourne and other Australian cities in 2002. Since then, Cuban musical shows and bands have been coming periodically to Australia. Consequently, Australian salsa fans are able to get a better idea of the diverse Cuban musical and dance heritage.

The Cuban authentication wave in the Sydney salsa scene was the beginning of the changes to come in the Sydney salsa industry. This was promoted by the rapid increase in demand for salsa classes and transfer of authority of knowledge from the Latin Americans to any dance instructor that could attest her or his dance ability and teaching experience. Many instructors and dancers take regular trips to New York, Los Angeles, London and Havana, to undertake classes, and participate in salsa competitions and congresses of the different styles. Because the salsa teaching industry is not regulated in Australia, the winning of salsa competitions overseas and within Australia and the completions of courses on specific salsa styles have become a self-regulatory tool, adding to authenticity credentials in the salsa teaching industry in Sydney. Therefore, while on the one hand all claims of authenticity are problematic, and almost a moot point, they continue to have an impact in Sydney in evolving ways, linked to audiences' growing knowledge of the broad field, clear differentiation and specialisation into

distinct styles, and through this process reinforced claims of authenticity associated with the different hybridised forms.

Salsa dancers, especially long-term salsa dancers, are exercising their agency by choosing their preferred salsa style. As Appadurai observed, ordinary people do have some say or influence when consuming the cultural products of the imagined global world, through their power of choice in the global market (1996: 5–7).

Indeed, the popularity of *La Rueda* has forced instructors and dancers to choose contemporary or newer Cuban dance music, instead of the New York produced salsa, because the Cuban style needs to be danced with fast salsa music. This has also influenced the music production of the local bands, which have started to include contemporary Cuban music in their playing list. For example, the Sydney band Candela included in its repertoire *Timba* songs – *Timba* being a new style of Cuban music mixed with hip hop (see Wilder 2002).

Other changes can also be seen in the teaching of *La Rueda*. At the beginnings, in 1999, prospective dancers of Latin styles could learn the first steps of *La Rueda* from 12 dollars an hour. At the time, the courses or ‘packages’ to learn *La Rueda* used to be between six to twelve hours long, what was in reality an insufficient time to master that style of dance. A few years later, the structure of the courses had improved but it had also become inflexible with respect to some other aspects. To learn *La Rueda* in a salsa dance school, the dancer will need to wait at least a year and a half to be allowed into that level, because she or he needs to complete a whole set of stages from beginners to advanced level (see, for example, [www.ruedisima.com.au](http://www.ruedisima.com.au)). After successfully finishing

these entry requirements, it will take at least another year and a half to learn the steps of *La rueda*, divided in nine to ten levels.

Undoubtedly, there are significant cultural and contextual differences between the way dancers learn *La Rueda* in Australia compared with Cuba. But interestingly, some Australian dancers have discovered that the best way to master it is to practise a lot and with a group of friends, rather than in classes, in a way that moves back to the origins of this particular form. Some are even steering away from the moneymaking schools to set up more collective, non-profit groups of *Rueda* devotees. One of the Newcastle long-term salsa dance and Rueda practitioner, remarked that:

“*La Rueda*, is like everything, I learnt it through lessons, but I practice it with my friends at least once a week outside the lessons to get the changes [of partners] right. This is how it sunk in. There is no other way ... Sometimes if we don't have enough people we invite someone from the class, who is keen enough and want to learn, it does not matter their level, some have already learnt it like that ... This is how our group started. Now we gather for social dance and practice every week.”

In the words of this Rueda dancer we can observe how the thirst for mastering this style of Cuban dance led him and others to set up an alternative way of practising and self-learning. He has built up a considerable collection of salsa music, dance-instruction Rueda DVDs, travelled overseas to Los Angeles and Cuba to get tuition, and had Spanish language classes in part to facilitate his playing the role of a ‘crier’ – the person who calls the moves in the Rueda. This is an example of the agency of dancers cited above, in this case fostering new ways of learning and passing-on salsa knowledge. This also shows the importance of the contemporary mobility of people through international travel and other mechanisms, and how this speeds up the ‘flow of meanings’ of the

cultural products, by travelling and acquiring information about them through the new technologies (Hannerz 1996: 157).

Although it is out of the scope of this study to analyse how this thirst for knowledge has influenced people's decisions to study Spanish or travel to a Spanish speaking country, it is clear that for some people it was an initial spark. As we observe below, however, the majority enjoy dancing without worrying too much about the meanings of the lyrics that they dance to, or to the appropriate style for the music.

### **Lyrics**

Another aspect of the salsa dances that attracted my attention during fieldwork was the relevance and meaning that non-Spanish speaking people give or attribute to the lyrics of songs they dance to. I was puzzled by the extent to which a non-Spanish speaking audience was increasingly and quite passionately attracted to salsa music, despite missing a significant part of the message of the songs. Although the old repertoire of Cuban songs (from the 1940s and 1950s) played at the time (2000) in Australia is quite limited in its thematic variety, the lyrics of these songs are written as a means of engaging the audience. Salsa singers (called *salseros*) traditionally try to maintain a constant interaction with the dancers and listeners. Even in contemporary times, *salseros* establish a dialogue with their listeners, generating patterns of response from their audience (Quintero 1997: 199). This dialogic aspect of the salsa in Sydney, where the majority of the salsa consumers are non-Spanish speakers, is arguably minimal, highlighting another aspect of the hybridised nature of the salsa form that has developed in Sydney.

Some local salsa singers in Sydney certainly try to engage the dancers or public in their presentations, but they do not always succeed. At first, I thought that their lack of success was simply due to language and cultural idiosyncrasies. However, a Latino musician gave me some additional reasons:

“You need to be aware that live music performances in Australia as well as overseas are decreasing. Besides this, in my opinion, here people don’t pay attention to live music, to the band. They are not interested in it. The techno music and the Latin beat is what the public is really after. If the Aussie public gets a real band playing real fast Cuban music, they can’t dance, they can’t keep up with it. Therefore, they have lost their interest in the Latino shows around. The use of recorded music does not help the public performances, too, because they replace them in a way.

My own experience is that sometimes we play and there are only a few couples or people dancing on the floor. However, as soon as we stop playing and the DJ plays his music, all the people get up and dance!”

I suggested to him that this happens because the public is more familiar with the recorded music. Indeed, all the dance classes are conducted with CDs not live bands, and many of the dance instructors work also as DJs for salsa dance activities! It should be noted here that some of these comments, like those about the increase of recorded music and substitution of live bands by DJs, are ongoing. However, as noted above, salsa dancers in Sydney have learnt to keep up with and even ask for fast salsa music, exemplified by the successful visit of the legendary Cuban band *Los Van Van* to Sydney and Melbourne in August 2006.

Returning to the lyrics themselves, the issue is not one of translation. Sometimes the translation of the lyrics into English, or the explanation of them, does not help the

Australian public to appreciate the meaning of the music. From my fieldnotes comes an example of what can happen when some of the local musicians translate those lyrics in their effort to involve the audience. A local singer in the middle of her favourite song 'Desesperada' (Desperate) started to say, 'Baby, I am here waiting for you, I know that you will return to me'. One woman sitting next to me started to ask, "What is going on? This is awful!" I quickly responded that she (the singer) was simply translating a few phrases of what she was singing. Internally, I told myself she does not know that the woman had been dancing to similar lyrics all night.

Not surprisingly, this person had developed her own ideas of what the salsa lyrics were about which did not match the actual lyrics. The actual translation of the lyrics leads to another common misperception and confusion – the idea that all salsa music shares the same topics of love, despair, and the like. This is not entirely accurate either, because the lyrics of New York salsa, as well as other Latin American salsa songs written after the mid seventies, often deal with the realities of Latino life in the United States and across Latin America, perhaps inspired by that aspect of rap music. In particular, salseros like Willie Colon and Ruben Blades have constantly enunciated the problems confronted by the Puerto Rican community in the United States, as well as other social issues back in Latin America (Sánchez 1999: 240–44). This has also happened in Cuba, where a close study of the salsa songs lyrics written in the 1990s reveals that they reflect, recreate and sometimes criticise the realities of the Cuban life in those decades like prostitution, fuel shortages and racism (Hernandez-Reguant 2004).

In summary, the role of the lyrics in attracting the non-Spanish speaking public to salsa music in Sydney is minimal. It could be argued, however, that the relationship of the non-Spanish speaking salsa dancers with the music also varies as he or she advances

through it. It may remain effectively irrelevant for some throughout their whole experience, while others may become interested in the language. As Urquia points out, this will lead dancers to put more emphasis on their dance skills, and make the dance less intimidating for everyone (2005: 394–95). Others will be more interested in experiencing a foreign rhythm and the “hipness and the feeling of globality that is experienced when you dance”, like the Japanese researcher Hosokawa found out when researching the bland or neutral lyrics selected by the famous Japanese salsa band La orquesta de la Luz (1999: 515). Finally, it should be noticed that salsa dancing can provoke different reactions in the dancers, from awakening personal feelings, to passion, to follow up imagined identities (Skinner 2007: 503). In such cases, language can remain a background feature or component of the music.

### **What to dance?**

Closely related to the language aspect is the selection of what to dance during a public dance. It was noted that salsa includes a variety of rhythms, including *salsa*, *merengue*, *bachata*, and *cumbia*. I noticed in public salsa dances that frequently the audience is visibly trying to determine what to dance – salsa, merengue or rumba – when a song begins. Sometimes I saw people standing for a few seconds, waiting for someone else to start dancing, and subsequently following the style of that person. Curiously, the local salsa bands have resolved this problem: they ‘call’ the dance. They usually let the public know what they are going to play, in the conventional manner of older-style folk dance bands in Australia, marking a quite distinctive Australian feature to salsa in this context.

On the other hand, this lack of knowledge among Australian dancers of appropriate dance styles also has its advantages. As I noted in fieldnotes, the audience likes

merengue, and an interesting thing is that some people dance foxtrot steps with merengue. I noticed some couples of older people dancing the foxtrot, very enthusiastically, with a merengue song! This is one of the charming things with an Anglo-Saxon audience; they seem to dance anything and everything with any Latin rhythm. As a result when you look at the dance floor you see a very disharmonious movement, although the music is supposed to organise people under a specific beat and movement. On the other hand, this helps, because this disharmony allows people who do not know these dances to join the floor and do whatever they can.

In sum, even if the music styles can get a little confused in a public dance floor, there is no real detriment in moments like those above when spontaneity takes over the floor, because many Latinos and Cubans do not know how to dance or have not taken dance classes, but they enjoy dancing and expressing themselves through it. Spontaneous self-expression gave rise to *La Rueda*, and other popular dance forms.

I have sought to show here how the salsa music and dance has in fact been a hybrid or creolised cultural product internationally, beginning with its revival during the 1970s in New York and its subsequent expansion around the world. Salsa has become an exemplar of the global cultural product, and in turn an example of Hannerz's creolisation process that has transcended geographical and national borders, changing along the way as it adapts to its new environments (1996). The diffusion of salsa in Sydney can thus be seen as a part of the globalisation of this recreational form. The creation of the Sydney Salsa Congress in 2005 effectively reinserted the local industry back into the world circuit of Salsa, such that the hybrid Australian salsa would feed back to the global product.

We have noted some of the similarities between the Sydney case and what has taken place in places like London, in terms of the local changes to and appropriation of the salsa dance and music industry at several levels. Whereas people of Latin American origin initially made up the majority of teachers and dancers, the music and dance quickly became very popular recreational forms practised by a wide audience. The increased demand to learn salsa led to the establishment of salsa schools in Sydney, further broadening the spectrum of people dancing salsa and the dance instructors. This is the framework in which the diffusion of the Cuban salsa dance style and music occurred. The early commercialisation invoked stereotyped images of ‘hot’ and ‘sexy’, Latin, Cuban music and dance.

Some dance schools and bands started to use the label of “authentic Cuban” dance and music as a way of securing a share of the growing market. The hybridised music and dance styles being performed and taught in Sydney, as in London, made these claims increasingly problematic. Increased specialisation and competition between dance schools, with accompanying credentials from local and international competitions, became indicators of authenticity, rather than the ethnic or national background of the instructors and musicians. These processes contributed to tensions amongst those working in the industry, particularly between those of Latin American origin – who were predominant in the initial phase – and the new wave of dance instructors and musicians from other ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, the agency of the salsa dancers strengthened the quality of teaching, further supported by the regular touring of Cuban dancers and musicians around Australia. The result has been a hybrid form of Cuban dance and music that has established itself as one of the three leading salsa styles in the Sydney scene. Its representation and teaching had progressed from stereotyped

and ill defined to a coherent reinterpretation adding to and transforming the cultural form.

The diffusion of salsa dance in Sydney can be seen as a part of Appadurai's (1996) "cultural homogenisation" of the world, with this now global product reaching the other side of the world geographically from where it first emerged. As we observed, however, in Sydney salsa developed its own characteristics, like for example the calling of which dance style is going to be played or the teaching of the first salsa steps with a slower rhythm to familiarise learners with the salsa beat. This supports Hannerz's theory of creolisation about the continuous movement of cultural flows, its diversity and capacity to connect different people and countries through product, but at the same time to enrich it with the local cultural traditions and conditions (1996: 67–8). Hannerz also argues that this creates that view of a homogenous world culture, or in the case of world cities, creates standardised ethnic cultural products like music that are available within them (1996: 157). The result is the hybrid and creolised Sydney salsa, reshaped and reinterpreted under and for the local conditions and market. Sydney has its salsa clubs, salsa nights and a salsa congress, like those found in many other capitals of the world, where you can dance Rueda, L.A. or New York styles, but behind the curtain of homogeneity there is the creolisation or heterogeneity created by the continuous cultural interchange that underlies these global processes.

Sydney's salsa boom has also benefited some of the Cuban migrants, especially those who were professional dancers and musicians before their arrival in Australia. However, the major benefit of the salsa boom for the Cuban migrants is that it gives some migrants the opportunity to 'feel back home' for few hours when dancing in a Sydney

club, as a feeling that ease the challenges of adapting to a new place as will be seen in the next chapter.

### **Tourism: Cuba as an exotic place.**

The last issue to be analysed in this chapter is related to the promotion of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination in the Australian media. The advertising of Cuba as a tourist destination offers us another perspective on the general topic of how Cuba and Cubanness is imagined in Australia. Moreover, in this section I will analyse how Cuba and Cubanness is described by foreigners (Australians included), writers, photographers and visitors during and after their visits to the island.

I was not able to find exact figures of how many Australian tourists have visited Cuba during the last five years. But, in the year 2000, I had a brief interview with Jorge Váldes, who was at the time the Cuban vice-consul in Sydney. He pointed out that the Cuban consulate had granted nearly 200 tourist visas from mid 1999 till January 2000 and this was four times the amount of visas that he had issued in 1997, when he started his diplomatic posting in Australia. Furthermore, in 2005 the number of foreigners visiting Cuba reached nearly two and a half million and the majority of them arrived from Canada, Italy and Germany, with a considerable increase from places like the United Kingdom, Japan and China (Miller et al. 2008: 269). Some of these places like Britain and Japan are also favourite destinations for the Australian traveller.

Besides this, there has been a substantial increase in the tourist information about Cuba published in Australian newspapers. Additionally several television programs have illustrated different tourist opportunities in Cuba, such as Michael Palin's series about the novelist Ernest Hemingway which has an episode dedicated to Havana, and the

Australian actor and TV personality Ernie Dingo's adventure in Havana shown in *The Great Outdoors* series early in 2003. Further representations of Cuba have occurred in television drama series such as *Seachange* and *Love is a four-letter word*, which have touched upon the exotic image of Cuba.

However, the new wave of Australian visitors to Cuba differs from the kinds of visitors referred to at the beginning of this chapter. The members of Australian leftist organisations and the participants of the work-study tours organised by the ACFS had mainly a political interest when they visited Cuba, while the new wave of Australian tourists visiting Cuba seems to be more interested in Cuba's exoticism. At least, this is how some of the foreign (Australian and other) journalists and travellers visiting Cuba are describing it. Once again, this new interest in Cuba by Australians is also a part of an internationally constructed image of Cuba, which is clear in Anderson's words:

“From afar the world dreams wildly, extravagantly – the crumbling grandeur, a Caribbean Xanadu where real women wear Lycra and smoke cigars and black men drive shiny red, finned Chryslers, and there's the music, yes, always the music ...” (Anderson 2000, p.14).

The first aspect of this image, which is commonly found in Australia, is the notion of Cuba as an exotic place, or better, as a place where Australian tourists can escape temporally from their own problems and start afresh. This was heavily emphasised in some episodes of the ABC television drama series *Seachange* and *Love is a four-letter word*. Both dramas enjoyed considerable popularity with Australian viewers, and in the case of *Seachange*, reruns on the ABC.

The episode of *Seachange* that attracted my attention was shown initially in 1999, with the subtitle *Vaya con Dios to all that* (Go with God to all that). The central character of

the drama, Laura Gibson, is a lawyer and recently divorced mother of two who left a big city law firm for a magistrate's position in the small coastal town Pearl Bay. After settling down in the new town, Laura fell in love with Diver Dan, a sea lover and traveller who has been living in a rundown boat shed in Pearl Bay. Their love flourished, until Laura's former husband reappeared and other circumstantial changes developed. Dan proposed that he and Laura travel to Havana, Cuba, while in the background some slow tempo Latino music was playing and they were trying to dance a slow salsa song. Dan saw the trip together as a solution to save their relationship. Initially Laura was tempted by the idea, but she did not know that Dan in fact intended to travel for an extended time. Laura didn't leave Pearl Bay, but Dan, a drifter at heart who did not stay attached to a place for long, packed up and went to Havana. The last news from Dan in the episodes is a postcard that he sent to Kevin, the local caravan park owner. When his son asked Kevin where Havana was, he did not know. Instead, Kevin emphasised to the boy that Dan was having a good time there.

The second drama-show, *Love is a four letter word*, was shown on the ABC in the year 2001. In this story, Albee, one of the main characters, had a nervous breakdown after her sister passed away and her boyfriend had an affair with a South American woman. So Paul, a friend of Albee's former boyfriend, proposed that she should leave everything and go to Cuba with him for a fresh start. Paul was a writer and "self proclaimed sexual technician." He fell in love with Albee and bought her a ticket to Cuba. In a similar development to that in *Seachange*, Albee did not go to Cuba, but Paul did.

When taking into account these descriptions, it is clear that both TV dramas or the relevant characters in them (Dan and Paul) present Cuba as a distant, exotic and

romantic place where their couples' love problems and other difficulties could be solved, or at least where they would have the opportunity to rest and recommence their lives back in Australia. Moreover, Cuba is represented as a joyful place and this joyfulness is linked to Cuban music and dance. Indeed, this image is used often in articles about Cuba published in the 'tourism' sections of mainstream Australian newspapers. For instance, an Australian journalist wrote about a visit to *La Bodeguita del Medio*, one of the favourite clubs of Ernest Hemingway. The journalist was disillusioned with how 'touristy' the club had become, to the extent that a local band was mechanically playing the songs from the Buena Vista Social Club CD. Moreover, Cuban nationals were standing outside and could not afford to buy a cocktail in a place known worldwide for its 'Cubanity'. However, somehow the big division between locals and outsiders was overcome, and Smith (the journalist) remarks:

"The room is suddenly full of Cubans and they've pulled us up onto the floor, infectious and smiling trying to educate our hopeless white hips and drawing us into their love affair between African drum and Spanish guitar.

"For an hour or so there is no us and them, no Fidel and yanqui, just a sweaty bunch of people dancing, drinking and laughing on a small island in the middle of the Caribbean. La Bodeguita del Medio changes magically from a tourist trap into the place we came to visit" (Smith 2002, p. 7).

The image of Cuba as a joyful place is evident in the way Smith describes the atmosphere in this club. However, these comments also highlight the preconceived idea that foreign travellers have about Cuba as a place full of spontaneous music, dance and happiness.

Indeed, large recording companies prefer to record and promote Cuban songs composed fifty years ago, as a way of reinforcing the sounds of old Cuban music, ignoring to a certain degree younger Cuban musicians and their songs. The image of ancientness is also used in the promotion of Cuban as a tourist place. The label of antiquity is now attached to material aspects such as its buildings, American cars and museums. For example, one of the visiting Australian journalists describes Cuba as a country “caught in a time capsule” (Masters 2000) and an American photographer portrays it as “an architectural Galápagos” (Moore 2002). Indeed, Cuba is known not only for its architecture but also for other artistic expressions such as painting or literature. However, buildings are more visible and the other aesthetic expressions tend to be overlooked by the tourist gaze. An interesting fact is that nearly all the articles touching on these topics tend to draw attention to the dilapidation of the old buildings in Havana, attributed to the economic problems and scarce government assistance. However, none of them speak about the plans and construction works aimed at the restoration of many old buildings in Havana and other cities of the country and further, pictures of the elegant suburbs in Havana are usually absent. A clear example of this is found in the comments of Marion Deuchars, a reporter for *The Independent Magazine*, who says of Havana:

“Walking around the streets of Havana, it’s hard to believe it’s not 1959. Buicks, Chevrolets and classic old Fords cruise the streets, colonial grandeur and magnificent sea walls throw one’s sense of time and place into confusion. But much of it is crumbling” (Deuchars 2000, p. 27).

The enhancement of the Cuban past, prior to 1959 can be seen in her comments, as well as the notion that this past is also fading away through disrepair. This idea of antiquity is linked to the belief that it needs to be preserved. Moreover, the world tourists need to

rush and see it before it is gone – the sentiments carry an unspoken sentiment about what could happen with the eventual passing away of Fidel Castro and the demise of the Cuban Revolution. This is in fact another promotional tool often employed, implicit or otherwise, in such articles to attract tourists to Cuba.

In a review of the book *Cuba* published in *The Australian Review of Books*, the reviewer Helen Anderson remarks:

“Cuba is again the world’s hottest piece of skirt; this time the girls and booze and music are rendered twice as sexy by the surety that soon, who knows how soon, this paradise will vanish.

“For a seeming moment, there is a place in the world uninhabited by McDonald’s, Microsoft, four-wheel drives; untouched by the homogenous cultural trash that piles up and makes every corner of the global village smell the same” (Anderson 2000, p. 15).

Another journalist discussing an increase in the number of American tourists visiting Cuba used a similar argument. Carl argues that Cuba has become the “forbidden fruit” that Americans officially are not allowed to consume, mainly due to the travel ban imposed by the United States Government. However Americans overcome this ban by travelling via third countries and maritime ports. Carl comments that this “illegality” attracts American tourists, and other tourists as well. They are drawn to visit Cuba because it has not been saturated by the global market. Indeed, one of the tourists interviewed by Carl expressed the opinion that if Cuba were to open up to tourism and global trends “it will lose its charm” (Carl 2001). It is interesting to note here the paradox that the isolation and scarcity suffered by Cuba and Cubans have created the conditions that attract some overseas tourists and additionally, as can be appreciated

from the above comments, these conditions are also employed as a promotional tool for tourism in Cuba.

There also have been published a number of travel books about Cuba in this period, amongst the most popular is *Lonely Planet Guides: Cuba and Cycling*. Many of these travelling guides reinforce the stereotypes highlighted above. However, Lynette Chiang's book *The handsomest man in Cuba* is an exception to the rule. In 2003, Chiang did a presentation tour of her book for the Australian readers, and at the same time she gave several interviews about it for local ABC stations and the popular program *Life Matters* on Radio National. Chiang is an Australian, who has been living and travelling overseas for some years. Between 1999 and 2000, Lynette biked around Cuba for three months. This allowed her to gain a more realistic and deep image of Cuba, Cubans and their customs, than those analysed above. Chiang does highlight the exuberant sexual innuendos of the Cuban life; especially males' courtship techniques and the great economic divide brought by the dollar economy. However, what impressed her most was the kind nature of the Cuban people she met, their capacity to share a piece of bread even if it was the only one they have, and their contentment with their lives and the little material possessions they have. The major lesson she learnt and put forward in her books was that Cubans are, in many ways, no different to anybody else. The empty rhetoric of political posters, the outsiders' rush to 'explore' Cuba and Cubans before the fall of socialism, are just part of the background in Chiang's description of Cuba and its people. She demonstrates that Cubans have more to offer than the quick journalistic articles – a true sense of friendship, sharing, and contentment with life.

In the previous chapter, I considered the work of Appadurai and foreshadowed the relevance of his views in the analysis of the commodification of Cuba as a tourist destination. One of the main points put forward by Appadurai, in his work is related to the role of the media in the dynamics of the global cultural flows and the tensions between the homogenisation and heterogenisation of the world. Appadurai argues that the mediascape reaches an unprecedented number of people worldwide through newspapers, magazines, television, etc. Through them it distributes images, which are a collage of commodities, news and politics, blurring the borders between fiction and reality and offering an imagined world. Appadurai considers that imagined world conforms to an idea about the 'other', alternative lifestyles that can inspire people to follow those examples (1996: 35–36).

Undoubtedly, the promotion of Cuba as an exotic place by the world media constitutes an example of Appadurai's notion of the imagined world. For instance, some of the images that I sought to analyse are a mixture of everything: history, music, and socio-political forecasting. Those images show Cuba as an idyllic paradise where the would-be tourist can escape and refresh him or herself. Furthermore, it is also presented as a place that must be visited soon before a change of government occurs. These facts fostered in the would-be tourists the idea that they must get to Cuba soon, before is too late, before the end of an 'unspoiled tourist spot' untouched by globalisation.

As was noted, the media also exploits Havana's image of ancientness through its architecture, cars and music, which is permeated by nostalgia. One of the Appadurai's arguments is that nostalgia plays an important part in the production and consumption of imagery. In his example about the Philippine's inclination for American popular music he considers the Americans are not living in the present anymore because of their

access to technology and the Filipinos are reproducing the past. Appadurai warns anthropologists about this blurring in the space where the 'other' inhabits and considers that it a post-nostalgic phase (1996: 31-32). Back to the Cuban case, it shows how Cuba is represented as a mnemonic tool, where tourists mainly from the developed world can go to experience their past and run away from the present, standardised and culturally homogenous world. Once more it also shows the tensions within the dynamics of the global cultural flow: at one level the media distributes images of Cuba as a tourist destination for the whole world, but the product itself promotes the isolation from the world and being left behind the world uniformity trend.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have reviewed the way the image of Cuba is re-created in Australia through politics, dance, music and tourism. Based on this analysis I argue that Australian and Latin American leftists tend to promote an idyllic image of socialist Cuba, and react angrily to any criticism of Cuba, including that which may be well-intentioned criticism from a left-wing perspective. Additionally, we have seen that Cuban migrants in Sydney, including the younger arrivals, take little or no part in political activities in support of the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, we can conclude that the image of revolutionary Cuba in Australia is perpetuated not by the Cuban migrants themselves, but by Australian and Latin American leftists sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution. In one sense this is not surprising, given that many Cuban migrants in Australia were motivated by political reasons to leave Cuba. As noted in Chapter 2, however, such motivations do not account for all Cuban migrants in Australia or elsewhere, particularly more recent arrivals whose primary motivation was frequently economic rather than political. Significantly in the Australian case, Cuban migrants

maintain a low profile both in terms of explicit support for, or opposition to, the Cuban Revolution and Cuban Government.

The other issue analysed was the rise of the popularity of salsa music and dance forms in Sydney, with a special focus on the interpretations and marketing of Cuban dance and music. I highlighted how the diffusion of salsa in Sydney is part of the globalisation of this cultural product and how Sydney has become a recognised locale in the world salsa circuit through the staging of the Sydney Salsa Congress since 2005. It was argued that this process is an example of Hannerz's creolisation theory where a cultural product travels back and forth between the centre and the periphery borrowing new characteristics at the local level at both ends, which enriches the global cultural product and creates a continuum in the cultural flows (1996).

Moreover, I also remarked that the diffusion of salsa dance and music in Sydney has some similarities with analogous processes elsewhere, like an overnight establishment of salsa dance schools and night clubs catering for the salsa dancers which promoted, using the term coined by Urquia (2005) the de-ethnicisation of the salsa industry. In turn, value was increasingly placed on the dancing credentials acquired through winning of dancing competitions rather than the ethnic background of the dance instructors, musicians and DJs. At the same time, the development of the salsa in Sydney is forging its own idiosyncrasies like, for example, announcing at the beginning of the song which style is going to be played. This shows that despite an external similarity in the salsa development in different cities of the world, there are also some differences which illustrates Hannerz's point that cultural products are hybrid and heterogeneous despite their external similarities (1996: 67).

The diffusion and commercialisation of Cuban styles of salsa dance (e.g. *La rueda*) and music in Sydney took place within the broader development of the salsa industry described above. In the early stage of the promotion and commercialisation, Cuban dance styles were represented in a stereotyped form. But the market competition, the agency of local salsa dancers and the regular touring of Cuban performers around Australia have influenced positively the learning and representation of Cuban dance and music styles in Sydney. Undeniably, Cuban dance and music styles have become, as Hannerz points out, a part of the “cultural geography” of commoditised ethnic cultural products available in Sydney (1996: 157).

The increasing popularity of Cuban music worldwide has been a contributing factor in the increased levels of tourism to Cuba. In the case of Australia, I highlighted how the media and travel agencies use the images of Cuba as an exotic place, characterised by music, old cars and buildings, but young, virile people, to promote Cuba as a tourist destination. This promotion illustrates as well the tensions between the cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation of the world culture. Appadurai’s analysis of the role of the media in the distribution and creation of images offered a theoretical framework to examine this case. He argues that the global media creates an imagined world formed by mixed images of news, politics and commodities. This also creates images about the ‘other’ and fuels the desire to live like them, to acquire that lifestyle, etc. (1996: 36). The promotion of Cuba as tourist destination is an example of how the media has exoticised Cuba and Cubans, by using images of permanent happiness, ancientness and a pristine tourist place untouched by globalisation. The created mosaic is quite incongruous and, more importantly, sometimes it is not linked to the reality and socio-political factors that have created and sustained that environment. In sum, what is

promoted by the media and attracted people to visit Cuba is that it has survived in the periphery of global homogenizing trends.

Critically, what emerges from the whole analysis is the extent to which in Sydney some of the strongest and most visible characteristics used to identify Cuba, and a sense of Cuban identity or Cubanness, are constructed and perpetuated not by Cuban migrants themselves, but by people outside this ethnic group. This is not to deny the roles of dance, music and politics within Cuban culture and identity historically and currently, but to highlight ways in which the popular expressions and understandings of these things have been driven by factors other than Cuban migrants seeking to maintain their ethnic identity in Sydney, Australia, and how these presentations of dance, music and politics have come to dominate the popular perceptions of Cuba and the Cuban ethnic identity within Australia.

If such processes are indeed driving the construction and re-creation of dominant understandings of Cuba and Cuban ethnic identity, our interest turns to how Cuban migrants in Sydney approach these issues. In particular, to analyse the process more deeply we need to consider whether and how politics, music and dance feature in the Cuban migrants' own understandings of themselves and their ethnic identity, and their conscious and unconscious efforts to maintain their identity. The following chapter begins this analysis.

## Chapter 5. Politics, music and dance in the maintenance and recreation of Cubanness.

### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I analysed the images of Cuba created in Australia, through politics, dance and tourism. Based on the examination of those images, I elaborated how Cuba and Cubanness is re-created, imagined and understood by the wider Australian, non-Cuban born, community. In this chapter I will explore the role of politics, dance and music in the maintenance of the ethnic identity of Cuban migrants living in Sydney. That is, this chapter will examine how Cubans themselves interpret and relate to these external images.

In the case of politics, I will examine how it is used to divide the Cuban migrants in *Cubanos viejos* (old /authentic Cubans) and *Cubanos nuevos* (new/young Cubans). The analysis of this dichotomy is important because in Australia to be a loud opponent of Castro does not have the same relevance that it would have in Miami, or in other Cuban communities around the world. Furthermore, it will be argued that the politicisation of Cubanness shapes the behaviour of the Cuban migrants, even in contexts like Sydney Australia, where politics holds less relevance. Finally, the analysis will show that any division amongst Cuban migrants is fluid, open to frequent change. Consequently, individuals from both sides of this political divide change and express different views on politics, depending on the particular context in which this is discussed.

In relation to music and dance, I will analyse how these are also used by Cuban migrants themselves to identify whether or not someone is Cuban. My fieldwork also shed some light on other aspects of music, such as the types of music preferred by some

Cuban migrants, and how this relates to the current salsa boom in Sydney. Furthermore, the fieldwork also provided some information on preferred music genres. The analysis of these things contributes deeper insights into how Cuban migrants enjoy and relate to music and dance themselves, and hence the role of these features in their own sense of Cubanness.

### **Politics**

In Chapter 4 I noted the permanent presence of usually polarised politics or political views about Cuba (for or against Fidel) within images and ideas about Cuba and Cubanness generally, and as expressed by different people during my fieldwork. I observed this during my interaction with Cuban migrants and other people outside the community as well. Furthermore, politics, or even the suspicion of being a supporter of Fidel Castro, does play an important role in the group dynamics among Cuban migrants. It is used to unify, include or divide and exclude individuals from their closest circle of friends, and to compare people or Cubans from different migrational flows (intake). This was evident from the beginning of my fieldwork when early Cuban migrants in Australia tended to differentiate themselves from the later arrivals, describing them as *nuevos, jóvenes, los revolucionarios o comunistas* (the new young ones, the revolutionaries or communists).

In the review of literature about the meanings of Cuban and Cubanness I highlighted the role of politics in these concepts, noting how the Cuban Government and academics have interpreted this issue. As noted in that chapter, following the Revolution the whole notion of being Cuban was strongly and overtly linked to the political position of the person. Those who supported the Revolution were considered Cubans; those who left

were considered counter revolutionaries and *vende patrias* (traitors) (see Torres 1998: 44–45). This treatment of the opposition during the 1960s and 70s, plus bureaucratic measures implemented by the Cuban Government, reinforced the idea that emigration equated with loss of national belonging or national identity. Although the relationship of the Cuban Government towards the Cuban diaspora has changed substantially over the last twenty years or so, the influence of this and other factors in the psyche of the early Cuban migrants is notable. Indeed, it could be argued that in Sydney the behaviour of the Cuban émigrés towards their fellow countrymen, and anything related to Cuba, continues to be coloured by the politicised experience of their departure from the country.

Some Cuban migrants who arrived during the 1970s in Australia have painful memories of their departure from Cuba. These experiences are still very vivid in their minds. It can be seen in jokes made by some informants, such as following, “Don’t ask me anything! I am a *gusana* (worm). If you write up my life experiences you will be jailed by the Cubans.”

With these words the informant, in a light-hearted but at the same time a serious way, mixed her political position with her ethnic belonging. I noticed that the Cuban migrants from the 1970s often mix both categories. Thus, whether consciously or not, they are repeating or echoing the 1970s exclusionist approach of the Cuban Government.

Not all experiences of departure and division are told in such a humorous way. For example, one Cuban couple that I met in a private gathering hardly spoke initially. They asked me where I was from in Cuba. When I responded that I was from Havana, Pedro replied, “we lived in Havana too, for more than twenty years. But I was born in Pinar

del Rio.” With some pleasure I spoke with Pedro about Pinar del Rio, recalling its beautiful landscape, especially the *mogotes* (flat topped hills). I suggested that the landscape there is in some ways similar to the Australian bush – the mountains are rocky, but very green with a lot of vegetation in them. He agreed, but without much enthusiasm about the similarity.

Pedro wanted to know where I met Juana, the house-warming party host. I told him that I met here in an activity put on by one of the Latin American groups, where we began to talk and she invited me to her party. Pedro noted that he and his wife had met Juana in Spain, and that their families had known each other for more than twenty years. Later I asked Pedro why they had left Cuba, and found the subsequent exchange very confronting when his wife interjected:

“Yes, my husband spent nearly two years in the forced labour camps, in *la agricultura* (farming) in Cuba. I couldn’t see him for 6 months. They jailed him... [They] put him there for telling the truth. Because of this we left Cuba. More than leaving, I consider that we were forced to leave. We went to Spain.”

Suddenly, Juana also added, “yes, I also spent 19 months in those camps for nothing.”

After that Pedro’s wife remarked:

“I don’t owe anything to that government, because they took everything I had. I even got my education before the Revolution. This is the difference between us and the “new ones,” you all are educated with degrees, thanks to the Revolution. I always remind the ‘young ones’ of this.”

At this point I was sad and confused, and did not know what to say. I told them that I had first heard and read something about the forced labour camps as an adult and that they were the first people that I met who had spent time in the labour camps. I understood the causes of their anger and frustration. However, I also admired the Cuban woman who was in the camps, because she always had been very friendly to everyone including the 'young Cubans' like myself. In my mind, I wondered how objective and sympathetic I could be in evaluating their experiences.

This fieldwork fragment shows us the pain of their departure from Cuba, and how some still used those experiences of thirty years ago to judge anything and anyone related to revolutionary Cuba, although not everyone has the same attitude. Furthermore, moments like these helped me to understand why some Cuban migrants from the first wave have a certain suspicion and anger towards recent Cuban migrants, like me. The climate of fear promoted by that policy, when people were convicted or taken to the labour camps because of political views, their sexual preferences, or simply submitting on an application to leave the country, is still fresh in the minds of some Cuban migrants in Sydney (Lewis et al. 1977: 496; Leiner 1994: 28–33; Garcia 2006: 158–62).

The suspicion of the early Cuban migrants towards their recent counterparts sometimes acquires the form of resentment or irrational paranoia. I began to learn this from their approach towards any Cuban newcomer. I noticed that it was a common practice for the group to quietly enquire who I was, who invited me, and so on. Therefore, during my first visits to birthday parties or other activities organised by the older Cuban migrants, I made sure that I arrived at the activities with a common acquaintance. My suspicions proved to be well founded. Later on, when I got to know some of the members of the group, a person told me:

“The old Cubans don’t like to talk to the young arrivals. They think that newcomers can do them in to the [Cuban] consulate. They also believe that all of them are communists, and refuse to talk to them. I tried to explain to them that young arrivals are also victims, but they don’t understand. They even told me to ‘watch out’ and not to befriend you, but I can’t be like that. We are all Cubans! People sometimes get obsessed with what happened. It was bad and shouldn’t happen ... many of you were children then. But others argue that this does not matter, because your parents were communists then and they did that to us. So, there is guilt anyway ...”

These words surprised me. I understood the causes of the resentment but until then I had not realised the extent of it. I also struggled to understand the fear of being ‘dobbled in’ to the Cuban consulate. Early Cuban migrants hardly need to have any contact with the consulate, with the exception of applying for a visa to visit Cuba, and even then it is largely a bureaucratic procedure. Furthermore, it should be noted that even if the majority of the Cuban migrants in Australia do not support the Cuban Government, this hasn’t converted into an organised, let alone militant, opposition, as is the case in other countries.

It is reported that in the early 1980s the Cuban consulate was subjected to some harassment by unknown people. The Australian Federal Police, Foreign Affairs officials and the Cuban diplomats at the time quickly blamed Cuban exiles living in Sydney, describing it as a copycat attack in reference to events at other Cuban diplomatic mission buildings around the world. Since that time, no other such incidents have been reported (see Williamson 1981: 6). I found it difficult to fully corroborate this account from the major newspapers of the time. It is a very sensitive issue and I was constantly reminded via ‘jokes’ about my status, of the limits of some migrants’ collaboration with me, even some of the friendliest participants in this research. This is well illustrated in

my fieldwork notes taken during the festivities of *La Caridad*, the Cuban patron saint in a Sydney parish. At this event I was introduced to another couple that has been here for more than twenty-five years. Clara, the wife of the couple, went to get some soft drinks while the husband, Alberto, asked me the familiar migrant question, where I used to live in Cuba. When I told him I was from Havana he replied:

“I hate people from Havana, my mother-in-law is from there. Now you know what I hate about that place! I am from the land of the east, the milk province! But what brought you here, to this activity?”

I explained to Alberto that I was doing my research on Cuban migrants in Australia, trying to meet Cuban migrants and recollect the stories of their migration experiences. He told me that this was very interesting, but in the way outlined above added that in Cuba I would be regarded as a *chismosa* (gossiper). Laughingly, I replied by asking whether he really thought that I was a gossiper, and that anthropologists were gossipers. “Yes” he replied emphatically, laughing loudly.

At this point another Cuban woman standing nearby joined conversation adding, “he has been nice to you; if we were in Cuba we would say that you’re a *trompeta* (a trumpet).” “What?” I asked, to which she added, “yes, a dobber, because this is what gossipers do. They listen and after give you up to the [Cuban] authorities.” Trying to calm the situation down, I light-heartedly proclaimed that this was too much for me, adding that rather than being a gossiper, I was a listener seeking to collect people’s experiences. Alberto’s wife soon returned to tell me not to pay attention to him, and that “he is an old troublemaker, as his Australian grandchildren say.” Alberto responded by continuing the joke, “Clara, be careful, from now on everything that we say could be recorded.” He then added:

“It is good that you are collecting all these stories. Yes, you are right, we are getting old. Even some people have died. We used to celebrate the New Year’s Eve together a few years ago. Now we don’t do that any more.”

After enjoying our soft drinks a Spanish man that I have met previously joined the group, saying, “Ah, here is the Russian professional. She studied in Russia, do you know?” Alberto replied, “In Russia? Are you also a *ñangara*?” (*ñangara* is a Cuban vulgar term for communist). He added that he couldn’t talk in front of me anymore, before asking how a woman like me could have done so much. I told Alberto that, as the Chinese proverb suggests, I just followed the river so as not to drown. He agreed, adding, “I believe also that Fidel has made us to travel around the world. Without him we wouldn’t be here today!”

Here again we can see how politics ruled, in a covert or subtle way, the course of the conversation. Fortunately, some humour prevailed throughout the whole exchange, but the constant gaze of that suspicion hung over my fieldwork in different tones.

Moreover, based on the fieldwork, it could be argued that this suspicion and behaviour acts as an unconscious access gate to the group itself, by preventing the entry of any Cuban migrants without a previous link to their group. Indeed, it is a good example of the role of “basic value orientations” in the creation and maintenance of ethnic differences developed by Barth (1969:14). In this case, Cuban migrants use their political views to evaluate, judge themselves and others with the aim of including or excluding the newest Cuban migrants from their group. As Barth points out, the degree of relevance and influence of these features in different spheres of people’s social life and behaviour is unpredictable (1969: 14). There is, for example, a sharp contrast between the role of politics in the Cuban settlement in Miami and in Sydney. In the latter, politics does not permeate through the whole social life of the Cuban migrants,

but it does serve as a boundary-marking feature in the process of group affiliation and identification at a primary level.

For instance, another point that kept coming up during fieldwork was how Cuban migrants classified their compatriots as ‘old and new’ Cubans, and the difficulties experienced by the newcomers when trying to integrate with the group. Researchers of the Cuban diaspora in the US have highlighted the existence of similar divisions there. For instance, Bettinger-López (2000) examined the difficulties confronting Cuban Jewish migrants who arrived in the 1980s and 1990s to the US, as they sought to integrate themselves with the Cuban migrational group from the 1960s and 70s. She argues that the suspicion and preconceived idea that newer arrivals could be communists or spies has had a major impact on any such integration. Bettinger-López also highlights how those latter arrivals from the 1980s, who were accepted in the early group, only achieve this after “proving themselves as passionate anti-Castro,” and providing long justifications about why they hadn’t left Cuba earlier (2000: 197–98). The Cuban Jews who arrived in the US in the 1990s and do not have a family connection with the earlier migrants, currently experiencing this mistrust. This group noted that politics was not the only cause alienating them from the earlier arrivals, but also their very different economic situation (2000: 197–98).

In relation to Cuban migrants in Sydney, as a whole the group seems to be clearly divided by the date of arrival in Australia, although some connections do exist amongst individual people from different migrational waves. I was puzzled by the question of the divide after attending a few activities and meeting Cubans from different generations in separate places with only one or two individuals present in both ‘contexts’. When I established a closer relationship with some Cuban migrants of the 1970s group, I asked

about the causes of the division. Their responses varied. Some people argued that it did not exist as such, saying simply that their busy lives did not leave time for socialising with a lot of people. One of the informants considered that it was better to keep a 'distance' because:

“I believe that when we [Cubans] live overseas we become loners. Cubans don't like to mix with their own people. *Nadie esta metido en casa de nadie, son desamora'os.* (No one is in anybody's house, they are loveless). This is better because too many Cubans together will always end up gossiping and clearly other problems. I guess that Cubans prefer to socialise more with other Spanish-speaking people than with their own compatriots.”

Another Cuban woman present in the same conversation agreed with her, adding:

“That is true ... around here live quite a few Cuban families [from the 1970s group]. We hardly visit each other. The rest [of the Cubans] live outside this area, so it is even harder to see them at all, but I think it is better like this.”

However, others were clear that politics was the cause of the divide. For example, an informant commented that she was invited by *los revolucionarios* (the revolutionaries; a reference to the recently arrived, young, supposedly 'revolutionary' Cubans) to a fundraising event in support of a primary school in Cuba. She elaborated:

“I don't have anything against the young Cubans, but I prefer not to talk about politics with them. I told them that I was not going to the fundraising activity. I don't mind helping the Cuban children, but I can't understand the young Cubans. They want to be revolutionaries [i.e. Castro supporters] here, in Australia. They are enjoying the good living conditions of this country. If they were so happy in Cuba why did they leave, why they didn't stay there? It is very easy to be a revolutionary here, but not in Cuba with the shortages! I had

been to some of their birthday parties, but I don't have very close ties with them.”

We can observe that for this person the political sympathies of some young migrants for Cuba constitute a hurdle to a closer relationship with that group. Here again, political persuasions or beliefs serve as a “value orientation” feature used to differentiate the newly arrived migrants from the ‘old group’ and to de-affiliate one group from the other (Barth 1969: 14). As such it acts as a boundary between both groups. Moreover, in some recent research about how ethnic boundaries are created and maintained at different levels of social interaction, Wimmer argues that contractions or the narrowing of the boundaries of belonging into a smaller category is a strategy used by individuals and groups whose sphere of action and powers is restricted to “immediate social spaces” (2008: 12). Wimmer observed that sometimes people in this situation may subdivide the group into new categories, in order to differentiate themselves or others from the original group (2008: 12-13). This type of categorisation is applicable to my fieldwork finding, revealing the existence of in-group classification within the Cuban migrants based on the time or period of their departure from Cuba and arrival in Australia.

It is worth recalling here that politics also influences the relationships of Cubans with other Spanish-speaking migrants, as noted in the previous chapter. The Cuban migrants from the 1970s have close relationships with, and in some cases have married other Spanish-speaking migrants who arrived in Australia at a similar time. However, during the course of this fieldwork some mentioned to me that they had personal clashes with some politically active, leftist migrants from other parts of Latin America, because of their support for the Cuban Revolution.

However, the division created by politics is frequently blurred. The majority of Cubans interviewed on both sides of this divide, especially the youngest ones, consistently crossed the political boundary when arguing or expressing their opinion about anything related to Cuba. As an Australian supporter of the Cuban Revolution commented to me:

“Cubans and politics... I think of them as political chameleons. The same person that spoke to you so energetically in favour of the Revolution one day, will say something completely different next day in another context.”

Some of this political fluidity was very evident during the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney. I noted in the previous chapter how some of the youngest generation of Cuban migrants participated with enthusiasm in the activities promoted by Australian and Latin American organisations of solidarity with Cuba. These included films and photographic exhibitions about Cuban sport history, and talks by some Cuban sportsmen, women and government officials. I also noted how some Cubans from the early migrational intake didn't take part in these activities because it could be taken as a sign of support for the Cuban Government.

It is interesting that this refusal to support the Cuban athletes in these types of organised activities did not transfer to the sporting events themselves as part of the 2000 Olympics. Many of the Cuban migrants in Sydney bought tickets for the events in which Cuban athletes were competing with baseball, volleyball and athletics amongst the favourites. Moreover, some of the children and grandchildren of the Cuban migrants of the early intake worked as volunteers during the Olympics and made close contacts with the Cuban delegation. As it turned out, those close contacts motivated some of these children to visit Cuba afterward, and re-establish contact with relatives on the island.

The feeling of the older Cuban migrants towards the Cuban athletes was mixed. For example, in baseball matches between Cuba and the US, some went to cheer the US and other were harshly criticised for supporting the Cuban team. For example, one person commented to me:

“I know that there is a meeting with the Cuban athletes somewhere in town. You know, it will be the same day as the Cuba versus USA baseball game. We [the 1970s group] all got tickets for the game. I will go with my Cuban flag to support the Cuban baseball players.”

Days later I met this person again after the family trip to the baseball game, and asked them about it.

“It was very good. We enjoyed it a lot, but I couldn’t talk to any of the Cuban athletes. There was a lot of security and the Cubans didn’t move from their seats. In this respect I am in trouble with the others [Cubans]. They criticised me because I went with the flag and supported the Cuban athletes. I don’t support Castro; you know how my family suffered because of Castro. How can I support him? But in sport, I always support Cuba first, Australia second and US third. When Cuba plays against the US, I back Cuba.”

In an idiomatic Cuban gesture the man concluded, “*¡Tu gente no son fácil, mi hija!* (your people are not easy, my girl!).”

Another person from the same group phoned me very excitedly because she had the opportunity to congratulate a Cuban paralympian long distance runner after his competition:

“Yesterday, my neighbours invited me to the athletics with a ‘whole day pass ticket’! I didn’t know that Cuba has paralympian athletes. When they announced that a Cuban was going to run, I ran downstairs. It was so

emotional, I screamed a lot. When, he finished I went very close to where his coaches were. He was visually impaired. I think that he hardly could see me, but I kissed him and the other Cubans too.”

The experience of the Olympics highlighted again the role of politics in Cuban migrants’ lives in this case influencing decisions of some about whether or not to support the Cuban athletes. As the examples show, not everyone put politics first. Many who are opposed to the Cuban Government supported and cheered the Cuban athletes. Furthermore some of them were also proud of Cuba’s achievements in the Olympics. The sentiment of national belonging and pride appeared to take precedence over their political feelings.

To date, I have indicated how politics are used as a means of division, inclusion or exclusion within the Cuban community. With the passing of time, as I got to know people more closely, I noticed that their comments about politics, Cuba and Cubans were not at all consistent. Some, who are fierce verbal opponents of Fidel and the Revolution, stridently disagree with younger Cuban migrants when they criticise the Revolution. For example the same person that I quoted above who criticised the young ones for wanting to be ‘communists’ in Australia, told me:

“I don’t understand these young Cubans, they owe their education to the Revolution. The other day I met one... I don’t know how we ended up talking about the life in Cuba, but in one minute he started to speak out against the Cuban Government and life in Cuba. I was astonished and told him to shut up. I reminded him that a part of what he is enjoying now, the good job he has here, is because of the opportunity the Cuban Government gave him then.”

I smiled and asked if she really had said that to them. She quickly replied, “Of course! People forget what they want to. Because of this, I reminded him about it!”

The examples cited above illustrate how the Cuban migrants, old and new, constantly cross the in-group ethnic boundaries by choosing to support or not support Cuban athletes in an international sports competition or to speak against the Cuban socialist government despite being raised and educated by it. As in the other cases political affiliation is a main feature in the demarcation of these boundaries. However, these boundaries should be seen as porous, as a social medium through which people interact, change their positions and justify those changes. It is at this point that Barth's notion of self-ascription and ascription by others is particularly relevant, as in the case above where the informant constantly identifies herself as an 'old' Cuban (1969: 15). Paradoxically, having that label allowed her to criticise the younger Cuban migrant for speaking ill of the Revolution.

Finally, in relation to this topic, I had a very interesting and unexpected conversation, almost a confession, from an elderly Cuban migrant. Carlos is a well-educated man who, in Cuba, lived all his life in a country town. Like many of the young educated people during the 1950s, he had faith in the Revolution up to the moment when the socialist ideals (from the Orthodox party) were replaced by adherence to communist ideology, as he recounted:

“My father was a very good friend of the old Tabaqueros (tobacco factory workers). Many of them were communists from the 1930s. They used to give him some books or communist literature. When the Revolution triumphed, my father told me that Cuba was going to become a communist country. He then gave me the old communist books. We discussed the similarities between what was written in the books and what was happening in Cuba. But at the beginning in 1959, you couldn't tell what was going to happen. I myself worked with Orlando Pantoja, one of Che's closest aides, for nearly a year in 1959.

“On the way to Havana, Che left some of his closest officers in charge of the administration of different country towns. Orlando Pantoja was one of them.

At this point he asked me if I knew of Orlando Pantoja. I told me that I thought I had seen photographs of him in Bolivia.

“Yes, you are right, he died there. Orlando was a very nice person. I got to know him when Che called a group of teachers to set up the new school system in my town. Che wanted us to teach reading and writing to the Rebels. Once Orlando came and asked me to look at a written note. It was an order for the officers. The note was too long and its style was very informal. I rewrote it. He liked it and from that moment I became like a personal assistant for Orlando.

“The work was quite hectic, because I really used to help after my work. I continued to work in my other job and go to work there in the afternoons. For example I noticed and told Orlando that nearly all the teachers recruited in the group were old communists. Orlando couldn't believe it. He didn't want communists around there. In those times some people were merciless and opportunistic. They punished everyone who worked for the Batista government. This created a lot of friction and discontent. Indeed the whole administrative staff from the police station was jailed, while the Rebels didn't have a clue about administration or order. I asked Orlando to free some of the administrative staff from the old Police station because they never tortured a person in their lives. He accepted and their help was very useful.

“I think that Che was very pleased with my work, up to the point that he tried to recruit me several times. He wanted me to become Orlando's official personal assistant. Once, Che was passing by from Havana and he asked me why I didn't have any weapon with me. I replied to him: 'I am not a soldier!' 'Yes, I know that but you are working with us now. If someone attempts to kill you [Orlando and Carlos] you will need to defend yourself' he told me. The next day I was given a small pistol and a rifle. I handed them back when Orlando was transferred to Havana.

“I worked a lot with them. I travelled a lot around my province with Orlando. However, when Barbaroja [another officer who later became a chief of the intelligent services] came, he transferred Orlando to a small military post in another town. I quickly asked Orlando to phone Che. That was not right. Che phoned back Barbaroja and insulted him. Soon after Orlando was transferred to Havana.

“I learnt a few things in that year with the Rebels. I realised that the Rebels’ movement wasn’t as united as Fidel wanted to portray. There were a lot of factions in it. Che led one of them, Raul another and so on. Moreover, Che and his people were too honest. They were against the Soviets, so like me, they didn’t see any future [for Cuba] there.

“All of them are dead now. If I had continued with them, I would be dead too. Like Orlando who died in Bolivia. They were good people. Look what happened to Che after his speech in Algeria. Che was very honest. Look, what is happening now, even in Cuba they use his picture on T-shirts and so on. Even, here not long ago, I went to a music shop and the owner was displaying the big black and red flag of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement. On its side, there was a big photo of Che. I thought, this is the last thing that could happen to Che’s portrait, to be used to sell music!

“I was upset and asked the sale attendant why are they displaying those things there. ‘The owner went to Cuba and bought them there,’ she answered. I replied: ‘I think that the Cuban customers around here won’t visit your shop anymore!’ That shop sells good Latino music, but they will lose their Cuban customers by displaying that 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement flag and Che’s poster.”

Sensing I already knew much of the answer, I asked Carlos why he had left Cuba.

“I was a member of the Orthodox party; I believed that its agenda was right for Cuba, not the communist one. When things cleared up, in the mid sixties, I went public about leaving the country and they didn’t allow me to work any more in my old job. I was sent to a re-education, labour camp. After that I left.”

Carlos' reaction to the use of Che's portrait as selling device surprised me. Firstly, I didn't expect to meet someone here who had not just met Che Guevara personally, but had worked with him! Secondly, it highlighted that politically, the 1970s group was or is not as uniform as it is often portrayed, or portrays itself to outsiders. It seems that prior to their departure from Cuba, and to their clash with Cuban authorities, some were strong supporters of the Revolution that brought an end to Batista's government. In this context, we can understand why Carlos sees Che as pure, honest, a freedom fighter, a socialist but not a communist. He emphasises how the Cuban process did not have a space for people like himself, Che and his comrades.

However, the group of Cuban customers in the music shop that Carlos was referring from the first arrival intakes are generally very critical of Che's role in Cuban history (García 2006). Carlos was trying to convey the ideas of his compatriots, with his own personal views about the commercialisation of Che's portrait. He was trying to explain to the shop assistant that their regular Cuban customers do not support the Revolution, although personally he admires Che. Therefore those two symbols of the Cuban Revolution: the red and black flag from the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement that brought Fidel into power and Che's portrait, could alienate the Cuban customers, including Carlos himself.

If we did not know this background information it could be seen as simply a sign of disapproval of the Cuban Revolution, but the reality is much more complex. The causes of his reactions are mixed like those of someone who is standing in both political camps. In this case, we can see the ambiguity in how Carlos works through these political views and beliefs. Similarly to the previous examples, Carlos' case shows the

permeability of the boundaries and how people cross them constantly as they reassert their positions and points of views in social interactions.

The fieldwork reveals that politics are consistently present in the mind of the Cuban migrants. Politics serve as a “value orientation feature” by which people exclude or include fellow countrymen and countrywomen in their immediate group or network and judge them accordingly. They are used as an in-group membership divider, grouping people based on the date or decade of arrival in Australia. However as Barth observed, the degree of influence of cultural features in their social life varies (1969: 14). Cuban migrants in Sydney have their opinion and views about the Cuban Revolution, but these influence mainly the in-group relationships and to a lesser extent the relationship with other Spanish-speaking migrants and the broader Australian community. Despite the fact that migrants hold political views against the Cuban Government, these have not been transformed into an organised response, as often happens in the US and other countries with large Cuban migrant communities.

Furthermore, personal views for or against or in favour of the Cuban Government should not be seen as static. They mark out boundaries that are constantly crossed and reasserted by people during the social interactions. The ‘old Cubans’ sometimes support or agree with some aspects of the current government, and guard against some criticism of it, in the process crossing boundaries to reassert their exclusive rights to criticise the Cuban Government. Furthermore, while the young Cubans are less likely to criticise the Cuban Government, they are seen as not committed enough in the eyes of the leftist Latin American or Australian supporters of the Cuban Revolution, while the ‘old Cubans’ call them ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘communists’. In sum, how Cuban migrants

relate to the Cuban Revolution, through their support or opposition, contributes substantially to how Cuban identity is defined and expressed in Sydney.

### **Music and dance**

In the previous chapter I analysed the role of music and dance in the recreation of the Cuban identity in Sydney by non-Cuban born people. In this section I will review how Cuban migrants themselves relate to Cuban music and dance, and the role both play in the maintenance of their identity. Several aspects attracted my immediate attention, the first being the kind of music the Cuban migrants consumed, danced and listened to, and the diversity of their musical tastes.

The Cuban migrants that I am referring to in this chapter arrived in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. Although their musical tastes are diverse, some general patterns within these tastes can be drawn. For instance, the Cuban migrants from the 1970s migrational intake tend to listen and collect Cuban music that was mainly produced before the 1959 Revolution. Some families have large collections of Cuban music by *Celia Cruz*, *Panchito Risset*, *La Sonora Matancera*, *La Aragon*, *Vicentico Valdes* and many other Cuban musicians from the 1940s and 1950s. Moreover, they also keep Spanish and Latin American music of the similar era. Indeed, some love to hire and collect old Spanish, Mexican and Argentinean musical films from the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, during a visit to a Cuban couple living in Sydney's Western suburbs, I was invited to watch a Spanish film about a bullfighter. I was surprised and asked them if they had attended bullfights in Spain. The husband replied:

“No, I don't like them. This Spanish tradition never took roots in Cuba.

However, back in Cuba people in the countryside like rooster fights. In Miami

Cubans do it. It is illegal, but they do it. I don't see how a person can get pleasure from it.

“But in Spain it was different. Franco's Spain was very different; there were not many things [for entertainment]. Even drinking could get you into trouble. So, films were good entertainment. I like the movies from that time. I liked them in Cuba too. I don't like new Spanish movies; they are obscene. Spain has changed a lot, you can judge but the new ones [movies] shown on SBS ... We like the old movies. We buy them or sometimes we hire them from the video shop. My collection of old Spanish and Latin American movies is good. I like the musicals with *Joselito*, *Libertad Lamarque*, *Carmen Sevilla*, *Rocio Jurado* and *Sarita Montiel*. When you like you can borrow any of those films or music from us. We have also tapes of old Cuban radio shows, I usually get them in Miami.

I told them that I had seen movies with *Sarita Montiel*, *Libertad Lamarque* and *Rocio Jurado*, and had heard about *Carmen Sevilla* and *Joselito* but never seen them.

Sometimes during the holidays they used to show old Spanish, Mexican and Argentinean movies on Cuban TV, but the copies were very old and of poor quality, often making them very difficult to follow.

After watching the film the couple showed me their vast collection of music and videos scattered in three rooms. The wife told me that apart from the current news or sport, they hardly watch or listen to anything on television, preferring to watch old movies. She added that she often lends these films to her “Cuban friends.” A few weeks later, I received three videotapes in the mail, with films by *Carmen Sevilla* and *Joselito*.

The fact that these Cuban migrants keep their Spanish or Latin American musical videos and Cuban music is similar to the recorded experience of Cubans in Miami.

García (1996) for example noted that theatres, radio stations, TV programs and schools

actively reproduce pre-revolutionary Cuban culture. Furthermore, she notes that this reproduction or “duplication of the Cuban past” has become a joke amongst the Cubans who arrived in Miami in the 1980s, such that they felt like they were stepping back in time to the Cuba of the 1950s (1996: 94). Despite this, García asserts that this continuous consumption and reproduction of pre 1959 Cuban culture plays an important part in the maintenance of *Cubanidad* (Cubanness) within the Miami community. Indeed, she argues that the difficulties of the exile encouraged the remembrance and celebration of the past as a way to maintain a sense of previous identity (1996: 90). However, Garcia describes the Cuban culture that they tried to maintain as hybrid, already infused with elements of American culture (1996: 95).

In the case of the Cuban migrants I spoke to in Sydney, I observed similar elements of hybridity. However, the hybrid elements in their musical tastes were of Spanish and Latin American origins, which in itself reflect the hybrid nature of the Cuban culture itself that has consistently borrowed elements from other Spanish speaking cultures. This is similar to what has taken place, and continues to take place within the Cuban music industry as discussed in the previous chapter. Further in Chapter 3, I cited Ortiz’s theory of transculturation and how he foresaw that Cuban culture and its people are constantly taking from their surroundings to create a new culture in the process (1983 [1940]). Ortiz used an example a traditional Cuban dish to explain this process, but at this point we can say without a doubt this is transferable to other spheres of Cuban culture, like music and religion. Indeed in the previous chapter I highlighted how Cuban music today continues to take elements from reggae, hip-hop, etc. Therefore, what is happening in Sydney with the Cuban migrants may be seen as an extension and reaffirmation of that process, albeit in a very different context.

Examples of this broader, Latin American, Spanish, Cuban hybridised identity can be seen in an activity to commemorate the Day of Virgin of Charity in September 2000.<sup>18</sup> The presentations included some South American musicians, poets and a Cuban singer. The Cuban singer sang a few songs and people danced along very happily. However, what really ‘excited’ the Cubans of the 1970s migrational wave who were present at the activity were not the traditional Cuban songs, but the Mexican songs from the 1950s. The singer sang a mixture of *corrido* songs, in the traditional Mariachi style and some romantic *bolero* songs. I noticed that all Cubans and the other Latin Americans in the audience were following or singing along with the singer. I asked one of the Cubans in the party if they always sing Mexican *corridos* in these parties. She proudly responded, with teary eyes: “Yes, we love them! She can’t finish her performance without [giving us] a Mexican *corrido*. Mexican songs are beautiful!”

I was told that a similar situation frequently occurs often in some birthday parties amongst the Cubans in this group. In one of the parties that I visited, as it was drawing to an end, nearly all of the guests had left, such that the few that remained were all Cubans. The men started to play dominos outside in the garage. It was very cold

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<sup>18</sup> According to the legend three fishermen — one black and two Amerindians — found the statue of the Virgin of Charity floating in the Nipe Bay after a storm in 1611 or 1612 (Tweed 1997: 19). The statue was taken to *El Cobre*, a copper mine township near *Santiago de Cuba* a year later, where it remains to this day. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the devotion to the Virgin of Charity expanded from Eastern provinces to the Western provinces of Cuba, because the mambises — armed guerrilla movement against the Spanish rule — used the Virgin of Charity medals as talismans. After the expulsion of the Spanish rulers, in 1915 a gathering of Cuban war veterans applied to the Vatican for the nomination of Virgin of Charity as Cuban patroness. A year later, Pope Benedict XV approved their petition. Since then, the 8<sup>th</sup> of September became the national day of Virgin of Charity in Cuba, although it has never been officially designated as a public holiday in Cuba. Indeed, public festivities on this date were substantially diminished in Cuba for more than 30 years of the Cuban Revolution, linked to a clash between anti-communist Catholics and revolutionary government supporters in the Virgin of Charity church in Havana on September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1961. Following this event, some priests were expelled from Cuba provoking an exodus of Catholics (Kirk 1995: 61). Since 1961, Cubans in Miami have gathered every September 8<sup>th</sup> in their thousands to celebrate a public mass devoted to the Virgin of Charity. Similar practices occur in other countries with large or small Cuban migrant communities (see for example Cobas and Duany 1997 and Boone 1989).

outside. Some were sipping rum, others brandy or whisky. Referring to his glass, one of them told me that the drink keeps them warm. The women were inside sitting around the dinner table, talking and updating each other about the latest events in their lives and making jokes. From time to time loud laughter could be heard from the men outside, seemingly very excited about their dominos game.

Interestingly enough no music was played, nor was any singing or dancing done, in contrast to the general belief about what constitutes a typical Cuban party. I was intrigued and I asked someone why they did not put on some music. Miriam answered:

“I don’t know. In these parties maybe we dance a song or two, but we usually like someone to sing or play the guitar. Usually someone sings Mexican songs with the guitar. We like the Mariachi songs anyway.”

I noted this response with interest. My friend and I left about 11.30 pm, because we had a long drive ahead of us to get back home. We were at the party for six hours, during which time the Cuban guests joked and laughed a lot. They had a good time, there was no doubt about that, but they did so without playing music or dancing.

The interesting feature to be drawn from these fieldnotes is that assumptions cannot be made about the connection between the sense of being Cuban individually, and the particular music or dance Cubans would like to listen to, or play in social their gatherings. Of course, individual musical tastes and activities are as diverse as the people who organise and take part in them. The love of these Cuban migrants for old Spanish and Latin American musical films and Mexican songs reflects how hybrid contemporary Cuban culture is. The Cuban culture that these migrants brought with them includes elements of Spanish, Latin American and African cultures as well. This

has given them the opportunity to reconstruct and recreate their cultural past in particular ways. One could argue, that their migration to Australia reinforced these hybrid elements, as they rely on shops and contacts in the Spanish-speaking communities to borrow or buy their Latin American music and videos. It also helps to keep their memories of Cuba, their previous life, and their cultural interests alive.

Cuban people on the island similarly continue to love their old Spanish musicals and Mexican songs. Every year the Cuban Ministry of Culture holds “The Spanish footprint.” This is a festival dedicated to the Spanish folkloric music in Cuba. A similar situation happens with Mexican music, which is also quite popular in Cuba, especially in the countryside, such that some Cuban national radio stations have weekly programs dedicated to Mexican music, broadcast early in the morning and targeted at rural populations. In addition to this, there is a festival of Mariachis where musicians, singers and lovers of Mexican music in Cuba get together regularly.<sup>19</sup> As we can see the hybrid cultural or musical tastes shown by these Cuban migrants is arguably just a part or an extension of a process that began and has been underway for a long time within Cuba. This process has continued amongst the Cubans on the island and the Cuban migrants I spoke to in Sydney.

In accordance with the observations noted above, the tastes of Cuban music amongst the Cuban migrants also vary. Not everyone likes dance music exclusively. Indeed, some Cuban migrants have specific collections of music devoted to other genres including Cuban (Latin) Jazz, Filin (the Spanish version of the English word feeling), Guajiras, and the New Song movement. For example, Carlos quoted earlier in this chapter has

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<sup>19</sup> (See [www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2001/09/03/cultura/articulo07.html](http://www.granma.cubaweb.cu/2001/09/03/cultura/articulo07.html)).

devoted considerable time and effort in getting the records of the main singers or musicians in the genres of Cuban music that he likes. His collection includes early bolero singers, filin songs, Cuban lounge music and jazz. When I told him that I noticed he had a lot of CDs, he replied by telling that he had a good collection, including the music of *Maria Teresa Vera*, *Elena Bourke*, *Omara Portuondo*, *Ruben Gonzáles*, and *El trio Matamoros*. I responded with some surprise, telling him I could hardly believe that he had CDs of *Maria Teresa Vera*. She is one of the first Cuban women in the Son movement, as well as songwriter and guitar player. “Yes, come here!” he told me, after moving a seat to the front of his ‘musical corner’. There I saw a complete collection of Cuban music from the 1920s until the late-1960s, with some albums launched not long ago too. Carlos continued:

“Imagine, I met some of these musicians when they performed in my town back in Cuba. I was very devoted to the ‘filin’ (feeling music), *Juan Antonio Mendez*, *Marta Váldes* and so on. Music here ... or this music especially, has a completely new meaning for me now. Music has lifted my spirit up. I enjoy it a lot.

“In Cuba it was different, I also enjoyed it there, but I was not a dancer. Only once I went to a carnival and danced. I was behind a mask, with a costume and a lot of rum in my head. But, I always enjoyed the ‘filin’, because it pays more attention to the lyrics of the song. You didn’t need to dance, you only needed to listen to it and enjoy the lyrics.”

Marta the other Cuban migrant who introduced me to Carlos interrupted and said:

“The ‘filin’ is very nice, but I personally prefer dancing with bands. I still listen to dance music in my car... You can’t get depressed with Cuban [dancing] music!”

I responded by telling them I found this very interesting, and that I had interviewed some musicians who play Cuban music and some of them told me that they are doing it because we [Cubans] are not doing it, and believe that we [Cubans] are not interested in our music. I emphasised that this was their argument, not mine, and that personally I think that if I didn't play the *maracas* (shakers) in Cuba, then I don't need to play them here in Australia. Carlos replied:

“I agree with you. The Cuban music here has another meaning for me. Look, for years I was thinking about getting a CD player. I only got one when I got very sick. It was one of those Christmases buying craze days. I don't like Christmas, I didn't like it in Cuba either, but my family likes it. Then, a few Christmases ago I was sad after the death of a relative. I went around the shopping streets in our suburb and saw this CD player. I thought that it was a little bit expensive. While I was looking at it I hit my head into the window screen. I was very lucky that it didn't break. Then I thought, I could be dead tomorrow! So, I decided to get the CD player and buy a few Cuban CDs. I came back home, prepared myself a pork steak, some rum and sang with *Maria Teresa Vera*. It was so good and pleasant to have that music with me again. I then realised the new meaning and significance that it acquired for me here. In Cuba it wasn't the same.”

“Another detail that I have noticed here is that even the most ‘Anglophile’ Cuban, those who don't like to speak Spanish, they do dance or move their hips when the drums sound [a popular Cuban expression to describe Cuban dance music]. You see, music in Cuba and here is very important. No one can deny that Cuba has very good musicians, for dancing and for singing.”

Carlos' ideas on the newly acquired meaning of the Cuban music in his life are very insightful. Although he recognises that he always preferred listening rather than dancing to music, the ways in which he now listens to music, and his motives for doing so, are clearly very different. It helps him to remember Cuba and past times, but it has also

helped him to overcome some difficult moments in his personal life in Australia. Cuban music for Carlos is linked to a nostalgic feeling, but one which is helpful and encouraging. Even if the music he listens to is not for dancing it “lifts his spirits.” Marta, the other Cuban migrant present during the conversation, also believes the Cuban dance music is the best remedy for keeping one’s spirits up. Thus both people use different genres of Cuban music, in different ways, as a conscious strategy to maintain their emotional well being generally, and their identity as a Cuban migrant in Australia in particular.

In sum, the fieldwork highlighted the diversity of these Cuban migrants’ musical tastes, and that they have been able to maintain these thanks to the existence of small local music and video shops that cater for the wider Spanish-speaking community, their travels to the US, and more recently, internet shopping. Their musical tastes range from Cuban jazz to Mexican *corridos* or Spanish musicals. This exemplifies the hybrid nature of Cuban culture, especially of the musical tastes of Cuban people. Furthermore, although these Cuban migrants agree with the fact that familiar music helps them to overcome some personal difficulties, their tastes are diverse. Some listen to ‘the drum’ of salsa to liven themselves up, while others prefer songs with more meaningful lyrics. Music is also used as a device to remember past times, youth in Cuba and to bring these remembered times or to reconstruct them in, the space of their cars and lounge room in Australia. On the whole, music has acquired a therapeutic meaning, a needed tool for their emotional well being.

In Chapter 3 I noted how important it was to understand the differences between the public and intimate spheres of identity and the role of affection in the creation of identity (Epstein 1978: 110–11). The findings described above, illustrate how important

it is to compare both processes taking into account the role of affect. The Cuban migrants analysed above embraced a much richer musical spectrum than the one offered and identified as Cuban for outsiders in Chapter 4. This is accentuated by the fact that the music has become an important element for the emotional well being of the Cuban migrants and their recreation of Cubanness through music and dance. Epstein also alerts us about the changeable nature of cultural practices, their meanings and ways of transmission to other generations. As will be seen, dancing also offers the opportunity to observe the difference of appreciation between Cubans and non-Cubans in both private and public domains, as well as providing another insight into intergenerational views about Cubanness, in this case through the ways in which old and new Cuban migrants in Sydney relate to dance.

Carlos's conversation also provides a bridging point into the topic of dance. It touches on issues of prejudice and stereotypical assumptions that Cubans themselves have about some popular dance styles and their musical ability. For example, Carlos commented that he is not a dancer himself, but considers Cuban dance music so contagious that it moves even the most "Anglophile Cubans." Underlying this comment are class and race based assumptions about popular dance forms that still prevail in the minds of some. Traditionally in Cuba, some dances like *Rumba*, *Mambo*, or *Son* and *Danzon*, were in their beginnings considered too "black/obscene" to be danced in public places and by white people (Daniel 1991). However, all of these dance styles underwent either a 'whitening' process like the *Danzon*, *Son* and *Mambo* in pre-revolutionary Cuba, or in the case of the *Rumba* and *Casino* the government actively promoted and popularised them as national dance forms (Daniel 1991). In the process, *Rumba* was taken out of the poor-black neighbourhoods to the wealthier and more elite (in revolutionary terms)

theatre stages, while the *Casino* was taken out of the middle-class clubs to the streets. Despite Cuban Government efforts, some popular dance forms like *Rumba* in Cuba continue to be looked down upon by some sections of the population. This is most pronounced in the older generation of Cubans, inside and outside the island.

One of the findings of the fieldwork shows the different response that both generations of Cuban migrants (using the old/new classification) have to the dancing itself. As I observed in the fieldnotes from the birthday party, the older group preferred a most intimate ambience, playing the guitar, and similar situations happened in other small gatherings. Furthermore, although some males do not like dancing, they do use dancing style and movement to define Cubanness. Here some fieldwork notes from one of the Virgin of Charity activities provide further insight into these two issues.

At the activity I noticed that only one Cuban couple danced the whole time or to all the songs played. The other couples danced for only a song or two after being asked over and over again by their Cuban female partners. One of the men even commented, “every year is the same, dance, let’s dance!” Afterwards, he reluctantly went to dance. This was very interesting because the younger Cuban males I met in the Eastern suburbs seemed to be very enthusiastic dancers. However, only the Cuban women present at this activity danced all the time. One of them, in her sixties, was dancing so fast that I could barely follow her. She told me:

“I was a very good dancer. I used to go out to dance with my cousins every weekend. We went to very expensive clubs in Havana in the 1950s. You didn’t have the opportunities to dance in those places, eh?”

I replied that I never danced in Cuba, but had learned to dance here, to which she replied that Australia “is not a place for learning Cuban dances.” Another song started, but I decided to stay behind in the tables and have a rest. One of the Cuban men asked me why I wasn’t dancing. I told him I was having a rest and asked him the same question, adding that I had not seen him there before. He replied, “I have never been a good dancer. I never learnt to dance in Cuba. *Yo soy un cuadrado para el baile* (literally “I am a square for dancing,” meaning that he is not good at all at dancing).” He may not have been a good dancer, but like the other three Cuban men he was very interested in the body movements of the female dancers. Then, I heard him say to the others, “Look how Juanita is dancing, look at her movements they are like an undulating wave (indicating her hips).” One of them answered, “yes, you are right. That is Cuba, the movements are different.” The first man replied, “I regret that I didn’t learn to dance there. I can’t dance so well.” At this point I interrupted them and said, “A wave? Eh! Thank God that you are here in Australia, because if you were in Cuba you would have a heart attack!” They laughed and one of them replied, “I can’t dance, but I can at least appreciate the quality of the Cuban movement.”

Apart from the unwillingness of the Cuban men to dance, this exchange indicates two other important issues in relation to gender and identity. In relation to gender, Cuban dances like many other dance forms or styles around the world have very strict, unwritten gender codes. Based on these gender codes, women are supposed to be sensual, sexy. Furthermore they sway their bodies more than males, without it appearing to be an explicit invitation for sex. When women are seen or imagined by others as crossing this fine line they are considered ‘vulgar’. The males for their part need to be able to do the opposite, lead well, move well with strength and grace and avoid looking

too feminine. Furthermore, male dancers and spectators are supposed to admire and encourage the female dancers to move more. This dance code has transferred from one popular dance style to another in Cuba, from Danzon, to Son and Casino, with Rumba being the extreme example of this macho code (see Daniel 1991).<sup>20</sup> Its relevance resides in the fact that crossing the gender divide in dancing can also be seen as ‘non-Cuban’ or as misrepresenting the way Cuban males dance, as will be elaborated below.

With respect to identity, the conversation cited above was just one of many times that informants made a link between the way of dancing and Cubanness. I noticed that on several occasions Cuban migrants carefully examined how people dance to Cuban music in order to identify someone as Cuban or a ‘Cuban look alike’ by saying in Spanish: *‘baila como un cubano(a)’* (s/he dances like a Cuban). It thus emerged that Cubans themselves use the popular stereotype that all Cubans know how to dance to define themselves and their compatriots.

I personally experienced this during a visit to Club Havana, a small nightclub in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney, where a Cuban dance group used to perform regularly and some of the Cubans and Latinos living nearby used to gather. That night I was surprised to be identified as Cuban based on my dancing! After these initial contacts with this group, I met and was introduced to other members of the group at the South American Festival in Bondi (2000). As noted in the previous chapter, Cuban music is heavily

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<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Balbuena (2003) explains this with reference to Cuban salsa. For example, she argues that the male role in casino dance as a leading figure has decreased in the 1990s, because more women have learnt to dance and turn as males facilitating the replacement of the latter. Even some Rueda choreographies are including steps where women or men pair up and dance with their own sex. However, the social stigma against ‘vulgar dancers’ is well alive in public dance places in Cuba. Balbuena mentions that other dancers see them as troublemakers because of their unruly social behaviour. The irony is that the ‘vulgar dancers’ are very skilful dancers and they have created some of the latest most popular steps in salsa (2003: 100–101).

represented at the South American Festival in Bondi. The following notes from that occasion show part of the stereotyping belief that all Cubans dance. They also point to other issues that I have looked at before, like the use of Cuban songs and allegoric names as a marketing exercise and keeping up the ‘right gender look’.

At the southern courtyard of the Festival the Australian band, *Mojito*, was playing traditional Cuban music. The audience was a diverse mix of young and old, from Latin American, Asian, and Australian origins. All of them were dancing very happily in front of the band both under and outside the marquee. I saw Luisa, her mother and a little girl that I had met the week before in the Club Havana. After a brief hello, Luisa commented, “I love them, they play very well.” She stopped and told the little girl, “*Vamos, nena baila*” (Dance sweetie!) Luisa then started to dance herself, showing a few simple Son steps to the little girl, but the girl refused to dance. I asked if the young girl likes dancing. She told me she did, but that she “is very shy and is tired too. She is my grand-daughter, you know!” The implication here was very clear – because Luisa was a good dancer, her granddaughter was also be a good dancer.

Later, I went to say hello to Fina (Luisa’s mother), and we started to talk about how the people were enjoying the band. Fina commented:

“Some Aussies and Latinos are good dancers. But here [in Australia] men move a lot, when dancing salsa a man must not move much. They [males] don’t have good examples to follow. They see women moving and they follow them. Men need to move in a different manner without crossing the border [male-female] divide.”

After a lunch break another local salsa band played. However the band sang a few Cuban songs without giving the proper acknowledgement to the Cubans present in the

audience. The bandleader mentioned all of the countries of Latin America except Cuba. The Cuban women were visibly upset, so I tried to change the topic and asked them something else. Then I asked one of them why her husband did not dance. She told me that he was not Cuban, but from South America. I had assumed he was Cuban and told her that. She smiled and said:

“I have been trying to teach him Cuban dances for ten years now. And he can’t put two steps together. Chica, Cubans always dance, good or bad but we always dance. He can’t do it at all.”

After that I went to see Francisco (her husband) and jokingly told him that he had fooled me, and that I thought he was from Cuba and not from South America. He replied, quite correctly:

“But you haven’t asked me where I am from. A lot of people think that I am Cuban because I have been with them for a long time. But, I never sell myself as Cuban, unlike those people there.”

“Those people there” that he referred to, were unambiguously the salsa band on the stage.

These fieldnotes illustrate several examples of the level of inclusion or exclusion from Cubanness taking dance as a symbol of national identity. The Cuban migrants here are constantly evaluating the role of dance as an expression of Cubanness. Dance has become a value orientation feature, an aspect to evaluate and judge the level of Cubanness (Barth 1969). This can be seen, when the South American man is considered ‘not Cuban enough’ to the insiders because of his dance ability. Furthermore, the Cuban grandmother proudly reinforced that her granddaughter does like dancing, by virtue of her being the granddaughter of a Cuban who loves dancing. The other grandmother also

criticises Australian and Latino males for moving too much when dancing. Generally, they react strongly against other Latinos or outsiders' use of the Cuban dance music to make money, by selling themselves as Cubans to an inexpert audience. In sum, dance or the way people dance constitutes for these Cubans a strong marker of their identity. However, they do play into the stereotype that, for example, 'all Cubans dance', and use it consciously as a device to identify themselves.

The fieldwork also shows that different generations of Cuban migrants hold different opinions and attitudes towards dancing. I described, above how older Cuban males taking part in Virgin of Charity activity only danced after continuous demands from their wives to do so. This sharply contrasts with some younger Cuban males in Sydney, who are frequent participants in the Sydney salsa nightclub circuits. During my fieldwork visits to the Harbourside Brasserie and the Club Havana, I met a small group of young Cuban males, who dance regularly on a weekly basis in nightclubs around Sydney. In a monthly activity sponsored by the Sydney radio station Cubanísimo held at the Harbourside Brasserie, I spoke to some of these young Cuban migrants.

The venue was quieter than usual. First, there was a lesson and dance demonstration dedicated to Son, a traditional Cuban rhythm. After the lesson the DJ played a few songs until the *Mojito* band was ready for its presentation. *Mojito* plays only traditional Cuban music. The singer always called or let the public know which rhythm they were going to play. The rhythm of *Mojito* became very contagious, and nearly all the people (50 or so) were on the dance floor. In the middle of that contagious dance were three Cuban young men. I did not know them and a common friend introduced us. The Cuban men were dancing frenetically with their partners. However during the second song, one of them asked his friends to form two rows and follow his body movements. This

brought the attention of the people on the dance floor and many of them decided to join the fun. The Cuban men could literally move any part of their bodies (apparently 'without being too feminine'). The tallest of them asked people to move or rotate, first their shoulders, then their arms, waist, hips, legs, and then to kneel down and go up. The people were very happy to follow them. After that dance demonstration, Marcos, one of the Cuban young men explained to me:

"I arrived seven weeks ago. I wanted to go back after the first two weeks. I was so bored; sitting at home ... I am on a tourist visa and can't get work. I have a degree in physical education. In Cuba, I was a battler. Here, I feel like I am tied up. I told my partner that if I continued sitting at home, I would go mad. She found me some voluntary work with teenagers in a refuge in her suburb. It is very good there, they [the teenagers] are great. They help me with my English and we play a lot of sport. These teenagers have a lot of behaviour and drug problems, but they are great."

I told him that I had also found voluntary work to be very good, helping me to learn English. He agreed, but told me "I miss Havana, I live in Central Havana (a suburb). My suburb here is close to the city, but is too quiet for me. Australia is very quiet." I empathised with him, suggesting that he needed to find what he liked to do here in Australia, adding that there were a lot of things that he would enjoy and a lot of things from Cuba that you could never replace, and that he would get used to living here in time. He replied by telling me that I had been here for too long and adapted too quickly. Suggesting things would improve as he started to meet people, he said:

“Yes, but it is difficult, I have just arrived. At least now I have found this place and some people to talk to and made friends with Raul [the tall Cuban referred to above].”

In the middle of that conversation an Australian woman approached Marcos and asked him to dance. Other women approached Marcos’ friend and asked them to dance as well. Girls kept asking them to dance, even if they did not know a single salsa step! Raul has been here for six months and is still studying English twice a week. I asked him if he missed the dances in Havana:

“Yes, because of that I come here, every Sunday. I used to dance a lot in Havana. You know there, I used to have a party every week. But, here it is different and people dance differently too. But this does not bother me.”

When I asked what he used to do in Cuba, he replied that he was a doctor, but that “I don’t know how much time it will take me to practise again. I hope that it will be soon,” before returning to the dance floor.

In this case, the young Cuban males have found in dancing a device to cope with the difficulties of adapting to a new place and life styles, in a similar way to how the older Cuban migrants, Marta and Carlos, spoke about their use of Cuban music and dance. Through their weekly outings to dance salsa, they are trying to recreate something that they used to do back in Cuba. However, these young men seem to be more flexible in relation to their body movements while dancing, far less attached to the gender stereotypes and more interested in having fun. This has also opened their minds to be more accepting and less critical of other people’s attempts to dance salsa. Therefore, the difference in salsa dance styles is not relevant for them. As was noted above when citing Epstein (1978), this last example illustrates the more open relationship of the

young Cuban migrants to dance and how this cultural practice differs from one group or generation to the other.

The final aspect that I would like to highlight is the connection between the lyrics, dancing and how this influences the listeners. In the previous chapter I analysed the different reactions and sometimes misconceptions that the Australian public have towards salsa songs. The existence of the language barrier, brought to light once more the role that lyrics and music play in the conveying of a sense of a shared identity. In my fieldnotes I recorded how a group of Cuban migrants reacted to the lyrics of a song played at the Club Havana. Something quite unique happened. It was the first time that I could see a group of mostly Cubans, dancing together in a public place. A song devoted to the Virgin of Charity, started to play. The text of song includes the lines:

*Paz y tranquilidad le pido a la virgen de la Caridad,*

*Paz y tranquilidad le pido a la Patrona de Cuba, ...*

*Alzemos las manos pidamoles a ella*

*Que todos los Cubanos ...*

(I am asking the Virgin of Charity for peace and tranquillity,

I am asking peace and tranquillity to Cuba's patron saint,

Let's raise our hands up and ask her

Let all Cubans ask ...)

The Cubans were dancing and repeating the lines of the chorus madly. They raised their arms, as the song asked, while dancing and moving in unison up, and down, very fast. They were moving frantically on the dance floor. During the song, someone screamed,

“*Mi virgencita, Ochun mi madre, la bendicion, ayudame.* (My virgin, *Ochun* my mother, bless me, help me!).”

It was a real pleasure to see this group of Cubans dancing in a public environment, following the song, expressing their emotions loudly and interacting or exchanging their opinions with what the song said, like their compatriots do in Cuba.

Why did the words of this song have that impact on the Cubans present in the Club Havana that night? The lyrics of the song use religion, in this case the cult of the Virgin of Charity, as a concept that unifies all Cubans irrespective of where they reside. This song gives a sense of identity, of feeling a part of Cuba, Cubans and their religious beliefs. This also explains why some of the Cubans dancing engaged so emotionally with the song. In addition to this, the name of *Ochun* was also called. *Ochun* is the Yoruba deity associated with the Virgin of Charity in the Catholic religion. Connell and Gibson argue that popular music through its lyrics sometimes symbolises place, creates and transforms places, more importantly enables the formation of new identities through “shared experiences and symbols” (2003: 89–90). The cheers, claps and spontaneous dialogue with the song or the CD record formed part of that process of forging a new way of enjoying a familiar dance style and lyrics in a foreign place. This dance on a winter night in Sydney for a few minutes transformed the place into a small Cuban pocket.

In sum, the fieldwork notes show that Cuban migrants use dance or dancing styles as a tool to both define their own Cubanness and contest other people’s representation of Cubanness. However, the dancing style is also used to mark gendered Cuban identities, but these varied across generation, as did attitudes towards ‘outsiders’ dancing Cuban

salsa. Furthermore, both groups use music and dance as a therapeutic tool to cope with the challenges of migration. Some like Carlos and Marta prefer to listen to Cuban music to lift up their spirits. Some younger migrants prefer to dance to Cuban music, finding this has made it easier for them to adapt and settle into the new place. For both groups, music and dance invoke strong emotions, and past memories. Finally, the understanding of the lyrics of dance songs and the experience of dancing with a group of people from similar geographical origins, reinforced the sense of belonging to their own cultural group.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how Cuban migrants relate to Cuban politics, music and dance. The findings show the in-group dynamics, and how an element like politics is used to construct narrower boundaries within the group. For example, I found that Cuban migrants who arrived in the 1970s use politics as a way to differentiate themselves from the more recent arrivals. Barth's views on the construction of ethnic boundaries are particularly relevant here because they shed light on the question of why these strong sentiments against the Cuban Government haven't transformed into a visible organised group or response against it as has happened in other Cuban exile communities. One answer can be found in Barth's notion of "value orientation" which shows how actors can choose or make a cultural feature relevant for organisational purposes (1969: 14). In this case, politics are used as a self-identification feature at individual and group levels, contributing to a division of 'old' and 'new' Cubans. Politics serves as an organisational feature influencing the processes of affiliation and self-identification within the group and to a lesser degree influencing the relationship of some members of the group with migrants from other Latin American countries.

However the fieldwork also demonstrates that the boundaries based on political views are fluid. Therefore Cuban migrants from both sides of the political spectrum frequently crossed the boundary during social interactions between Cubans and non-Cubans. This is evident when migrants from the 1970's group, who by definition oppose Cuba's political system, simultaneously express their disagreement with others who criticise the Cuban Government or try to benefit financially from the memorabilia of the heroes of the Cuban Revolution like Che Guevara. These contradictory responses indicate the fluidity of the ethnic boundaries and how people construct their notions of belonging and differences within a group. They also illustrate the importance of Barth's notion of self-ascription because, although people often cross the lines they do emphasise their membership and links to the 'old' group.

In the case of music and dance, the fieldwork findings took us to a different level of analysis, to the role of emotions in the construction and maintenance of identity. Firstly, we found that the Cuban migrants I spoke to have very diverse musical tastes, including an appreciation of a variety of music produced through the Hispanic world as well as different styles of Cuban music from slow tempo boleros to contemporary Cuban jazz. These findings demonstrate the hybrid nature of the musical tastes of the Cuban migrants, helping to dispel the stereotypical perception that all Cubans like, and dance to salsa music. Furthermore it corroborates Ortiz's views of Cuban culture, in this case that its music has been and continues to be remade borrowing from other sources (1983 [1940]).

However, my fieldwork also found that Cubans themselves use the stereotypical perception that 'all Cubans dance' to differentiate themselves as a group and to determine the level of 'Cubanness' of others by virtue of how they dance. Here, I also

uncovered a clear difference in how different generations of Cuban migrants relate to dancing, especially amongst males. Younger Cuban migrants appeared to be keener dancers, less attached to established gender stereotypes when dancing, and more open-minded about dancing with people who do not know salsa well. However, at the same time the role of dance and music in the life of the Cuban migrants I spoke to was what unified them. Both elements have become devices that have helped them to adapt to the new environment and/or overcome personal problems. Music and dance have a therapeutic function and also help migrants to reconstruct and remember their place of origin in their minds and private spaces. Indeed, Epstein's (1978) focus on the affective dimension of ethnicity is quite relevant in this part of the study. Here we observed how Cuban migrants reconstruct their identity through music and dance, but this reconstruction has different levels and spaces and their articulation of it also varies from one group to another and from one individual to another. Externally music and dance is used to identify themselves from others, playing on common stereotypes. Internally, music and dance are used for emotional well being and as a source of replenishment in dealing with the challenges of everyday life. Both sides, the public and the intimate, give us a more complete picture of the importance of emotional aspects in the creation and maintenance of Cuban identity in Sydney.

The next chapter will further explore other ways in which Cuban migrants reconstruct and maintain their Cubanness in Australia, through religion, food and remembering Cuba as place. The markers that I have analysed so far are the most visible ones, able to be seen in a public place or gathering. Those explored in the next chapter are less overt, requiring a deeper analysis of the migrants' lives in their homes and their private lives.

## Chapter 6. Religion, Cuban cuisine, and remembering places in Cuba

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter concluded with a group of Cuban migrants dancing to the rhythms of a song dedicated to *La Caridad* (The Virgin of Charity) in a suburban bar in Sydney. Cuban popular music has a long tradition of songs dedicated to religious themes, as well as to food, fruits and their flavours (Perez 1999). This chapter will also deal with the question of music. However, in this case it will be background music, complementing other elements that contribute to Cuban migrants' sense of Cubanness such as religion, food and past memories.

This chapter is about those signs of Cubanness that are still kept mainly in the households of Cuban migrants in Sydney. Unlike salsa or Cuban politics, the elements of Cuban identity discussed below have not been commodified or copied extensively by people outside of the Cuban community. However, in these cases Cuban migrants do also borrow from other ethnic communities to maintain these elements. This borrowing includes the help of migrants from other Latin American countries to celebrate an anniversary of *La Caridad* in the local parish, cooking ingredients to make a traditional Cuban dish, or buying a gardenia plant in the local nursery because it reminds someone of the famous song, *Dos gardenias para tí* (Two gardenias for you), a traditional Cuban bolero for people in love.

In this process, Cuban migrants consciously or unconsciously create something new that is intended, or aspires, to be authentically Cuban. However many of these 'Cuban objects' may no longer be made, used, or cooked by their counterparts in Cuba.

Moreover, arguably due in large part to the small number of Cuban migrants in Sydney,

local expressions and the role of religion, food and memories, and notions of Cubanness more broadly, differ substantively from what is found in other Cuban migrant communities around the world. This chapter will focus on the way Cuban migrants use religion, food habits and their memories about their lives in Cuba to recreate Cubanness and maintain their sense of Cuban identity in Sydney. In this examination I will address the way that the process of external borrowing contributes to the maintenance of a distinctive Cuban identity in the context of multicultural Australia, and demonstrate the positive role of memory and nostalgia in this process.

### **Religion**

Studies of Cuban migrants around the world frequently refer to the importance of religion in the maintenance of Cuban identity overseas (García 1996: 96–99; Cobas and Duany 1997; Boone 1989; Perera Pintado 2005). How Cuban migrants use religion to maintain or recreate their Cubanness varies from settlement to settlement. On the surface, religion appears to be of relatively less importance to Cubans in Sydney, as a group. Only a small number of Cubans appear to consider themselves to be practising Catholics, Christians or *Santeria* devotees.<sup>21</sup> The annual celebration dedicated to the Virgin of Charity in the Ashcroft Parish of Sydney's Western suburbs constitutes the only institutional religious activity that a small group of Cuban migrants consistently attend every year. In the case of the Afro-Cuban religions the situation is very similar. There is only one practicing priestess of Afro-Cuban *Santeria* in Sydney, but this group rarely conducts religious ceremonies, and the majority of her *ahijados* (godchildren) or followers are not Cuban.

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<sup>21</sup> Santeria: is a hybrid religion created in Cuba by African slaves.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that Cubans in Sydney do not believe in a Catholic Saint or Afro-Cuban deity. In fact, as is detailed below, many do have a shrine at home, or a portrait or statue of a preferred deity. To understand why Cuban migrants in Sydney follow particular religions, or sometimes none at all, it is first necessary to review some of the main trends of the development of religion in Cuba. Statistically, Cuba is predominantly a Catholic country, though while 40 percent of its population is baptised, only a hundred thousand people (out of a population of around 10 million) identify themselves as practising Catholics (Husarska 1998). Alongside Catholics there are increasing numbers of followers of other denominations of Christianity such as Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and others. In addition, a substantial part of the population practises Afro-Cuban religion.

The Spanish introduced Catholicism with the sword during the colonisation of Cuba. They also brought in thousands of African slaves and Chinese labourers who had their own religious beliefs and were either forced or actively encouraged to convert to the 'superior' Catholicism of the Spanish. The expected total conversion did not take place, but the interaction of different belief systems led to the rise of a new hybrid religion: *Santeria* or *Ocha*. This is a mixture of 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualist readings of Allen Kardec, belief in some deities associated with West-coast African people such as the Yoruba, all combined under the name of a Catholic saint (Barnet 1997). Since the Spaniards only allowed African slaves to celebrate the Catholic festive days, the slaves started to use the official Catholic saints' anniversaries as a medium through which to celebrate their own deities. This brought about the birth of a binary religious system which is still in place in Cuba. For example, every September 8<sup>th</sup>, both Catholics and non-Catholics go to church to celebrate another anniversary of the Virgin of Charity. However, that night

or sometime on the eve of September 8<sup>th</sup>, many Afro-Cuban temples hold their own ceremonies dedicated to *Ochun*, the Afro-Cuban deity who is linked with the Virgin of Charity. Both deities are believed to embrace maternity and fertility, as well as sensuality and love.

### **Atheists, Catholics, Christians, Santeria devotees and all the above**

During my fieldwork encounters with Cuban migrants in Sydney, the topic of religion provoked some interesting discussions and comments. Some people said that “*yo creo que existe algo, pero... no voy a la iglesia*” (I believe that something exists [God?], but ... I don't go to church). This comment came out in a friendly gathering, when a group of men started to talk about the church and the visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba in 1998.

Lorenzo, a very gregarious and insightful person, explained why he didn't like to go to church.

“I believe that something exists out there, maybe it is God. But I don't consider that you need to go to a church or a mosque or any other religious institution to believe in God. I always argue about this with Jose. He is a very devoted Catholic and always wants to take us to church. I told him several times that I don't like it. He refused to accept this, but I don't believe that this is necessary. For me, how to show your faith is a personal matter. You don't need to go to that institution to show that love. I even told my wife that when I die I don't want them to take me to the church. I want to be cremated and that is it. To spend the money and energy in the church is nonsense.”

Another man confirmed:

“Yes. I believe in the Catholic teachings, but I don’t see the need in going to church too. I also question a lot of things in the Catholic faith such as the myth of Christ’s resurrection after his death. I believe in science, and some of these things are very controversial, even untrue.”

Lorenzo added:

“Because of this, you can’t believe them. I still remember how they changed a religious festivity in Cuba, when they or the clergy in Rome alleged that Christ reappeared in the Sunday and not Saturday as before. How can you believe them when they can’t get the time of resurrection right?”

Victor, a recent arrival, argued:

“This is your experience, but the new generation in Cuba is different. We believe in what we see. For example, I have an Aunt who was expelled from Cuba for being a nun. She lived in a monastery. She usually told me that the belief in Christ is inside the person. And this is my opinion that is what the new generation of Cubans have done.”

He then looked at me and pointed to both of us.

“We didn’t learn to pray or even the basics of the Catholic religion. We were not taught that in our schools. Now, when my son comes and asks me how Catholics pray I can’t say anything. I would’ve liked to know that.”

Lorenzo riposted:

“Fidel, whom I especially am not a fan of, was right in repeating this phrase: religion is the opium of the people. Look at Lebanon, Ireland and Kosovo. You should be happy that you were brought up without it. The repression against the Catholic believers in Cuba, people like your aunt, was a disgrace. But look, now they are good friends [the Cuban Government and the Catholic Church]! Even the Pope [John Paul II] went there.”

Victor nodded; “You are right in that, but you had an option anyway, we didn’t.”

Lorenzo’s opinion is not alone amongst the Cuban migrants. In some degree it explains why only a handful of Cubans attend the weekly services of the Ashcroft Parish. Part of what was said by Lorenzo reflects, too, how people related to the church in Cuba before the Revolution. Indeed, Tweed in his study, *Our Lady of the Exile*, argues that Cubans were religious people, although “they were not closely linked to ecclesiastical institutions” (1997: 18). However, people used to go to church on specific days like the anniversary of Saint Barbara, Saint Lazarus or the Virgin of Charity.

This conversation is also indicative of the changes that have occurred in relation to the religiosity of Cubans during the last forty years. In the early 1960s, the Cuban revolutionaries set out to create the ‘new socialist man’, a person that should be a hard worker, with high moral and ethical principles, and an atheist. The Cuban Government actively discouraged the practice of any religion during the first three decades of the Cuban Revolution. Officially the situation changed in the 1991 Congress of the Cuban Communist Party when religious people were invited to join the party and party rules were changed to allow members to openly practice their religious beliefs (Politica 1992: 103). As a result some social scientists argue that Cuban people have become more religious in the 1990s, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the softer position of the Cuban Government in relation to religion (Perera Pintado 2005: 149). Religion was seen as a way to fulfil the spiritual and material vacuum that appeared during the difficult decade of the 1990s.

Returning to our example, it is understandable why Victor would like to have been given the opportunity of a Catholic education, because he was from the generation that was not allowed to have a religious education. However, the older migrant Lorenzo considered religious education to be harmful, praised Fidel for his approach and even agreed with Karl Marx's famous statement about religion. Once again we can observe how people cross identity boundaries to support their points of views, but at the same time reassert their positions within the social interaction as we saw in the previous chapter. Here the supposedly 'revolutionary' new migrant disapproved of the Cuban Government for not giving him a religious education, while the 'old' migrant agreed with the government for its early atheist position.

Another Cuban migrant, who did not attend church at all, also expressed belief in the existence of God. Furthermore she assured me that her faith in God helped her to bring the rest of her family from Cuba, as we can observe in her words:

"I arrived here in my late fifties, after living in South America. I came as a refugee, but my children were in Cuba. I was a pensioner and none of my friends thought that I was going to succeed, but, I won with faith, *mi' hija* [my girl], with faith. *Hija*, deep in my soul, I always have faith in the 'big man up there' [pointing to the sky]. If you persevere and have faith, you triumph, as I did. This country is very different from Cuba, but you get used to it."

Here we see another function of religion, its use for solving personal problems.

Interestingly, in this case the recipients of the wish were not living in Australia at the time. Tweed described the diasporic religion of Cubans in Miami as transtemporal and translocative, because it moves back and forth "across time and space," taking religious symbols and beliefs from the past to create a future in the present, and at the same time goes back "in location" to Cuba the homeland and forward to the new acquired country

(1997: 94–95). In the comments of the Cuban migrant above we can see an element of this translocation and transtemporality. She asked God to help her relatives in Cuba to migrate to Australia, to create a new future for them in this country. Later we will see how these two elements are present in other examples.

In addition, some researchers like Boone (1989) have already pointed out how Cuban women in Washington did not attend church very often, but prayed and lit a candle privately as a way to cope with the stress and to help in cases of illness sometimes (1989: 102–03). The conditional use of religion seems to be quite widespread amongst the group of Cubans that I encountered. Indeed, some of the Cubans who are practising Catholics and Christians labelled them as “circumstantial believers” because “*Se acuerdan de Santa Barbara sólo cuando truena*” (they only remember about Saint Barbara when it thunders) as a devoted Catholic told me when I asked her why Cubans did not go to church. She added:

“People come or pray when they are experiencing some trouble. A few years ago many used to visit church more regularly and come to La Caridad’s party every year. Now the situation [economic] has improved and people have forgotten about coming here. But when there is a problem, they lit a candle, and say *Dios ayudame* (God help me).”

The truth of the above statement about the decline of church attendance amongst this group of Cuban migrants can be clearly perceived when visiting the Ashcroft parish in Sydney’s Western suburbs. I attended some Sunday services with one of the Cuban couples who regularly attend this venue. These initial visits took place during 2000. During the visits to the Sunday mass, I noticed that the churchgoers were mainly elderly Latin American migrants from Peru, Uruguay, Chile and a handful of Cubans. The

number of participants was not high, and one of the Cubans told me that this was because the new priest was a *pesado* ('heavy', not friendly). From the services I gathered that many of the people present in the church came to pay their respect to dead relatives or friends. Indeed, during the services the priest mentioned the names of people who passed away here and in Latin America. Here it is again the aspect of translocation so characteristic of the diasporic religious expressions (Tweed 1997: 94–95). Although the priest preached in Spanish, he said some words in English in order to stress the meaning of his preaching, especially amongst those who did not know Spanish well.

Marta, one of the Cuban parishioners once again reminded me:

“Cubans believe but don't like to go to church. None of them comes to church during Easter. I stock holy water and olive branches for my Cuban friends. They know that I always have them. I took my Holy Communion here. I told to the Father that I didn't remember a thing from the Holy Communion in Cuba. The priest, back there was a Canadian that didn't speak Spanish very well. Therefore, I didn't understand what was going on. I decided to do it again and I did it.”

Afterwards I got to know her family better and in my first visit to her place she gave me a small bottle with holy water and two dried branches of the olive tree. In Cuba many people traditionally keep a small piece of palm leaf instead of the olive branch. The priest blesses the palm leaf at the Sunday mass of the Resurrection of Christ. Sometimes the palm leaf is plaited into a cross and hung on the back of a door in the house as a talisman to repel bad influences. The holy water is believed to have cleansing powers too, and it is a substance used in minor cleansing ceremonies like baths or house

cleaning. However, some Catholics do not agree with the use of the holy water in these kinds of ceremonies, which are linked to the *Santeria* rituals.

During the earlier visits to the Ashcroft Catholic church, I was constantly told that the best day to meet a few more Cubans was in a festivity of the Virgin of Charity.

Therefore I asked Marta to let me know when the festivity of the Virgin of Charity was going to be in September 2000, because the 8<sup>th</sup> of that month was a week day, the service is usually moved to the Sunday mass. This was September 10<sup>th</sup>.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000, I went to the Ashcroft church with Marta's family. We arrived early in the morning at the special Catholic service for the Virgin of Charity. There were more people in the church than there had been in my previous visits, but still there were only eight Cuban-born people present in the service. Nearly all of them were relatives. I also observed that only one Cuban family could persuade their Australian-born grandchildren to come to the service. I was surprised at the massive presence of migrants from other Latin American countries in the activity and I asked Marta about this. She answered:

“You don't know yet your fellow Cubans? They don't care much about the church. A few years ago all used to come regularly. Now they say that they are too busy or live too far and can't come. But this activity is only once a year. It is not too much to ask. Others like to sleep in on Sundays and only will come to the lunch.”

Some aspects of the service caught my attention. First, the Italian born, but Spanish speaking priest emphasised that the Virgin of Charity was only a representation of the Virgin Mary, that happened to appear in Cuba and because of this she was worshipped by Cubans. He struggled to coherently recount the story of the Virgin of Charity.

Instead he described other cases of the appearance of the Virgin Mary in other Latin American countries. The priest also asked the audience for the name of their local Virgin Mary in their countries. I assumed that the poor attendance of Cuban migrants was one of the reasons why the priest conducted a service without a strong focus on the Virgin of Charity or the Cuban migrants per se. Furthermore, this shows some similarities with the trend noticed in other countries like Puerto Rico where non-Cubans are also strongly devoted to the Virgin of Charity (Cobas and Duany 1997). Finally, as will be seen below, this has other advantages like helping a Cuban visitor display in the altar her not-very-Catholic-looking image of the Virgin of Charity.

This is in sharp contrast with some of the documented services devoted to *La Caridad* hosted annually in other Cuban exile communities around the world. The celebrations devoted to the Virgin of Charity have become an expression of the identity of the Cuban exile community where religion and politics are closely intertwined, especially in those countries with outspoken dissenting exile communities such as in the US (García 1996: 98). A similar situation occurs in Puerto Rico where the researchers Cobas and Duany argue that *La Caridad* rituals help to maintain the Cuban identity, but it is an ‘abyss’ between Cubans in exile and those who support the Revolution, between believers and non-believers. The ritual also helps to maintain the myth of the lost fatherland as well as serving to differentiate Cubans from Puerto Ricans (1997: 99).

Another interesting aspect that attracted my attention was that one Cuban woman loaned her small statue of the Virgin of Charity for the ceremony. In addition to this, another Cuban woman, who lives in Cuba but was visiting some relatives in Sydney, brought with her a small doll dressed in a coloured skirt and a white blouse with coloured bead necklaces. She asked a fellow Cuban to ask the deacon on her behalf to

bless her doll. The Cuban and the deacon agreed to do it, with pleasure. Further, the other Cuban took the doll and put it on the side of the Catholic statue of the Virgin of Charity that was already on a small table standing in the altar. The Cuban woman visitor was pleasantly surprised that her doll was taken to the altar. This is because in Cuba and in Miami some priests and deacons are reluctant to bless these images or representations of the Virgin of Charity because of their not Catholic appearance (Tweed 1997: 48–55). This is based on the assumption that these dolls represent *Ochun* the Afro-Cuban goddess, which is associated with the Catholic Virgin of Charity. In Sydney we can see a more open-minded approach from this Parish deacon and the old Cuban migrant towards this popular expression of religiosity. Perhaps it is also due to the dwindling numbers of Cubans attending the annual festivity, and the subsequent need to embrace those who come with a more inclusive approach.

At the end of the service all the Cubans present took some photos together with both representations of the Virgin of Charity and the small Cuban flag. They told me that this was a tradition of the group, but unfortunately the group was getting smaller every year. I noticed how other Latin Americans were also taking pictures with the Virgin and some elderly ladies were kissing and showing or presenting their grandchildren to the Virgin. After half an hour, the Cuban man organising the activity took away the small statue with the flag to his car.

There are two important points to note here. Firstly, it is of interest that every year the Cubans in Sydney take pictures of themselves with the statue of the Virgin of Charity and the Cuban flag. Through the history of Cuba the Virgin of Charity and the Cuban flag are considered to be symbols of Cuban nationalism. The Virgin of Charity was used by the *mambises* (fighters) in their war against Spanish colonialism in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. A half a century later the young revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro carried pictures of the Virgin during the revolutionary war against the Batista government. Later, the Cuban exiles also used the Virgin in their fight for the installation of a different social regime in contemporary Cuba. In other words, the Virgin of Charity has been consistently linked to the notion of Cuban nationalism and appropriated by diverse groups claiming this identity. Similarly with the Cuban flag, before and after 1959 children in school have been taught that the Cuban flag is the most precious symbol of the Cuban nation and that its creation during the war against Spanish colonialism symbolised the birth of the Cuban nation. Interestingly, the Cuban flag is about the only visible nationalist and ethnic mark of Cuba that is displayed in the houses of many Cuban migrants in Sydney, as we will see later.

The second point of interest relates to devotion to the Virgin of Charity by other Latin Americans (in this case Peruvians, Uruguayans and Chileans). As noted above, this is not unique, as other researchers like Tweed (1997), Cobas and Duany (1997) and Perera Pintado (2005) have reported in reference to the US, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo respectively. The relevance of this is that it can no longer be assumed that devotion to the Virgin of Charity is confined to Cuba, Cubans, or their identity. In this case other Spanish-speaking migrants have adopted the religious devotion to the Virgin of Charity. As Perera Pintado points out “religious images are transferred from place to place and go from hand to hand regardless of nationalities” (2005: 168). Indeed, as will be described further, thanks to this transfer or the participation of other Latin American migrants, the lay festivity of the Virgin of Charity in Sydney has been kept afloat.

After the end of the service, some women and men started to organise the lunch in a room behind the church’s chapel. I noticed that about ten other Cubans came for the

lunch, after the service. Amongst the newcomers was Clara, a young mulatto woman. She came straight to the group and asked if there were any Cubans there. We all looked at each other and started laughing. One replied, “We are all Cubans standing here.” I asked whether the woman couldn’t recognise people from her homeland, to which she responded, “No, none of you looks like a Cuban or talks like a Cuban. I can’t recognise you as one!” To this I replied:

“What does a Cuban look like? Why don’t I look like one? I haven’t been here in Australia long and I am dark!”

She responded:

“Excuse me, but your colour is strange, you are dark, but your skin is yellowish brown, like faded. The mulattoes in Cuba are like me with a darker skin.”

I personally thought that our skins were similar in colour. Then, I asked her about the others, pointing to the other Cubans who had spent more time living in Australia. Again she replied that, while she couldn’t explain it, “they don’t sound or look Cuban at all.”

After this exchange one of the women standing in the group said:

“Don’t worry if when you have lived here [in Australia] for 29 years like me you won’t know what you will look like. You will see!”

Clara smiled and replied, “I believe you.”

It is interesting or even paradoxical to note that the festivity of *La Caridad* was organised by those Cubans and Clara, a Cuban who had not been living in Australia for long, could not even identify her fellow countrymen and countrywomen at the event. More strikingly, her image of what a Cuban looks and sounds like did not fit with what

she saw. I heard similar comments in relation to the cultural activity that preceded the Catholic service that day.

Just before the cultural activity, I asked one of the organisers when they first celebrated a Catholic service for the Virgin of Charity in Sydney. He responded:

“I think that in the early 1980s, we did the first festivities. This was an idea of Castellanos and Moreno. Unfortunately, Moreno passed away a few years ago and Castellanos left for the US. As you can see there are not many Cubans here. The future of the festivity is very uncertain. The church group is finding it difficult to cover the cost of the lunch.”

This comment was reinforced by the cultural activity itself. Amongst the group of artists featured there was only one Cuban, who has been singing in it for years. The other artists were a harpist, a guitarist and singer from Uruguay, and another two singers from Salvador and Nicaragua. This national diversity of performers was reflected in the program also. Some of the presenters recited Spanish poetry from medieval times, on which one of the bored Cubans jokingly commented, “this is like being back in the school. Did you learn that?” she asked. I told her I did, and thought that it was Becquer. Another Cuban woman, the visitor, commented:

“In Cuba you don’t see a festivity of *La Caridad* like this. A Cuban religious party without rum, smoke [from cigars] and drums? It is not a party. It is very boring.”

The rest of the audience were enjoying the cultural activity, those from other Latin American countries who seemed more familiar with that sort of activity than the newly arrived Cubans. The following performer was the Cuban singer, whose songs animated the whole audience. Cubans clapped enthusiastically and started to dance even when the

song was not for dancing. I did not recognise any of the songs that she sang. However, some Cubans were singing along. The singer thanked the whole audience for attending. She said:

“You have supported us a lot during all these years. I want to acknowledge that without your help in attending and cooking for this festivity we would not be able to be here. You see, there are not many Cubans here. Please, don’t pay attention to that and continue offering your support to this activity. I say this because I heard that the organisers are thinking to stop doing it. Please don’t let this happen.”

The whole audience started to clap and say, “No! No! No!” At the same time, the audience were looking to the kitchen where some of the women who have been cooking for the activity for years were standing. The only comment I heard from a Cuban woman who was in the committee was, “Another year of kitchen work!”

The music continued with some recordings. The Cubans did not dance much, especially the males. Their wives kept asking for several minutes to go to dance. Some Cuban women got up and danced in a group by themselves. A group of ladies who are regular parishioners, amongst them two Cuban women, prepared the lunch. The food served was a mixture of Cuban and other Latin American cuisines: white rice, black bean soup, beef steak marinated with garlic, lime and onion (as in Cuba), summer garden salad, Uruguayan sausages, traditional South American pastries and short black coffee. There was also a raffle of hamper full of sweets and household items donated by the Cuban migrants to raise some money to cover the cost of the activity. After 3.30 pm people began to leave, by 5.00 pm the party was finished and the last people helped to pack the seats and clean up the hall.

Since this festivity of the Virgin of Charity others have taken place. However, the number of Cubans attending has not increased. In some years, the group has been only able to organise the religious service in the Parish, without the lunch, due to the lack of funds. Otherwise, the activity has been linked to another Catholic festivity in Latin America. Finally in 2004, the festivity of *La Caridad* was used as a fundraising activity to get some money for the upgrading of the chapel. Some of the Cubans who frequent the Parish disagreed with this. But as one of them remarked:

“The only way the festivity of la Caridad will survive is to join it to ‘other things’. I don’t like it, because La Caridad should be celebrated by itself. It is shameful, but if we [Cubans] don’t attend, this sort of thing will happen.”

In sum, the cultural festivity of the Virgin of Charity reinforced the pattern of the Catholic mass dedicated to her. It was staged and explicitly catered to non-Cubans, due to the low attendance of Cubans. It could be said that the Catholic mass and the cultural activity had a broader Latin American character. This was seen in the effort of the priest to encapsulate or equalise the Virgin of Charity with all the other apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Latin America. Furthermore the cultural activity was also in the same vein; the majority of the artists and participants being from other Latin American countries. Even though this activity does not perfectly fit the traditional Cuban religious festivity with Cuban music and food, remains an effort by some Cubans to keep their public Catholic religious traditions alive. However, they have only been able to do so with the help and support of their fellow Peruvian, Uruguayan and Chilean parishioners. Consequently, in their efforts to keep the festivity of *La Caridad* alive, this too has become a new hybrid, cultural religious product.

Small hints about Afro-Cuban religions kept reappearing now and then throughout the festivity of the Virgin of Charity. As was noted at the beginning of the chapter, Catholicism and Santeria are intertwined in Cuban religious culture, but this is not always recognised or readily acknowledged by some Cuban Catholics. Indeed, I noticed that some Cubans in Sydney have small shrines devoted to a particular Catholic saint. In the offerings to their Catholic saints they include a vase with flowers and candles, but there was often a glass with water, or a small cup with honey, coffee, perfume, and a cigar. Surprisingly, the same person who gave these offerings to the Catholic saint, said: “I am a practising Catholic! It is a superior belief [to *Santeria*].” The person did not acknowledge that some of these offerings are related not to the Catholic saints as such, but to their counterparts in the Afro-Cuban religion. The stigma attached to the Afro-Cuban religion was seen to be still alive in the minds of some Cuban migrants, making it rare to find people who will openly declare that they are followers of Afro-Cuban religion. Other researchers of Cuban migration around the world have encountered a similar situation, for example Cobas and Duany characterise *Santeria* as a subculture, although the most reputed *Santero* (*Santeria* priest) in Puerto Rico claims to have a following of 40,000 people. Cobas and Duany argue that the Cuban elite in Puerto Rico supports the Catholic church, but note that the priest believed that many of the congregation practise *Santeria* or see a *Santeria* priest when necessary (1997: 100–01).

During my fieldwork, I found only a handful of Cuban migrants living in Sydney who openly said they practised *Santeria*. Moreover, there was only one practising *Santera* or religious priestess with a dozen *ahijados* (godchildren), most of whom are not of Cuban origin. The finding of an Afro-Cuban priestess was an unexpected discovery of the fieldwork. The priestess carried on her religious duties in a very low-key way, a

response I suspect to the social prejudice held amongst some Cubans about African religions. Indeed, Menéndez in her recent book about Afro-Cuban religion in Cuba notes that practitioners and believers sometimes publicly deny their affiliation to this religion altogether, as a survival strategy against the historical hostility and contempt suffered by them (2002: 110).

During one visit to the Latin American cultural festival in Bondi (Sydney), I approached a group of Latin American musicians. They had just finished singing a popular dance song whose lyrics spoke about an Afro-Cuban religion. Keeping in tune with the topic, the musicians joked about which saint they belong to in the Afro-Cuban religion. In Santería, after a special ceremony it is decided which saints or deities claim the new initiate as his or her son or daughter. Accordingly, the new initiate will need to obey a group of food and behavioural restrictions related to her or his guardian saints. In Cuba, as is the case in other countries, people who haven't gone through that ceremony usually proclaim themselves sons or daughters of any saint of their liking. Of course, under such circumstances the saint who the person is devoted to frequently does not coincide with the one who will be claimed in the special ceremony to represent the person.

One of the women started to tell each person which Saint she thought each person represented. She said; "Ricardo, you are *Obbatala*, because you are wearing white, but you are *Oggun* I know that."

Pedro claimed that he was preferably *Oggun*, because he was big and "strong." *Oggun* is the blacksmith, bush clearer and very masculine. "You are *Ochun* and he is *Chango*," she told the singer and her partner. "And me?" I asked. "I can't get it," she answered.

The Latin American girl suggested that I might be *San Lazaro's* daughter. I replied telling her that my family was very devoted to him, and that I was also, so that perhaps she was right. Later, one of the musicians complained that he missed the opportunity when he visited Cuba, as he did not inquire there which Afro-Cuban saint was his protector. Then the woman quietly said, "I will ask my saints whose son you are." I thought that she was joking, but to be sure asked her if she had been initiated in Santeria. She replied:

"Yes, I am. That girl and her boyfriend are *mis ahijados* (my godchildren). I am *la santera mayor* (the oldest or most knowledgeable Santeria priestess) here in Sydney. I was initiated more than 10 years ago. I am going to have a barbecue party next weekend, could you come to Sydney again?"

I replied that I would try. Afterwards other members of the group started an impromptu rumba jamming session, playing on small conga drums, cow bells, *claves* (wooden sticks), empty soft drink can, tables, or whatever they could find to produce a sound. The *madrina* (godmother) started to dance rumba and Carlos followed.

It is not unusual that this group of Latin American musicians should joke about which Afro-Cuban saint they belong to. The 1990s Cuba musical scene exploded with songs about Afro-Cuban religion (Hernandez-Reguant 2004). This was linked to the religious revival that I noted earlier, and the appearance of *timba*, a new style of hard salsa music created mainly by young Afro-Cuban graduates of the music conservatoriums.

Moreover, *timba* songs became very popular amongst Cuban youth and also sold very well in the tourist places in Havana. One of the ironies of that phenomenon was that everything related to the Afro-Cuban world: music, religion and negritude, came to be seen as "authentic Cuban," marginalizing other components of this culture (Perera

Pintado 2005: 161). In this sense we can see that as these musicians were recreating that ambience, to be the son or daughter of an Afro-Cuban deity, they were also seeking to be closer to or express their Cubanness by claiming such a sense of religious belonging.

A few days later I returned to Sydney for the barbecue. The house of the priestess, the *santera*, was a typical suburban Aussie brick house built in the 1970s–80s. At the entry to the house in the main hall there were some small statues and African masks. The *santera* opened the door and invited me in. We walked through the hall into a small room before meeting the other guests in the patio. When I went into the room, it turned out to be a small Afro-Cuban worship room. The *santera* asked me to greet her saints, “*Saluda a los santos!*” I bowed and put my two hands together at the door, in a gesture of respect. Traditionally, anyone who enters a house temple must show respect to the saints and ancestors venerated by the *santero* living there (Barnet 1997: 85). The room was profusely decorated. The *canastillero* (furniture where the believers keep their deities) was made from a 1970s cupboard with a mirror in its back, glass shelves and sliding doors. The Cuban priestess reinvented the original function of this furniture. She used every shelf to host an Afro-Cuban deity. Each of them had a *sopera* (soup tureen) with the sacred bead necklaces around them. This is done also in Cuba, where the *santeros* use a small or medium size wardrobe, or a traditional glass cupboard, to host receptacles of the deities and the things these deities like (Bolívar 1990: 173). Not long ago, in Cuba, this furniture was always kept closed, and the deities out of sight, when not in use. This was a preventative measure, against police raids that Afro-Cuban devotees were sometimes subjected to during the colonial times and the republican era (see Fernandez Cano 2005).

The floor of the room was also covered with the small items that the deities like. Some of them were kept in containers and vases. For example, in the middle of the floor there was a vase with sunflowers, these being very highly valued and used in Afro-Cuban religion. *Ochun*, for example, is always offered sunflowers. Close to the vase there was a statue of a North American Indian. It is common for *Santeria* rooms in Cuba to have a representation of an Indian who could be an Amerindian or an American Indian, as well as an Arab or even a Chinese god. This is evidence of the contacts that African slaves had with other cultures, in the sugar plantations and the runaway camps, where they lived together with local Amerindians and Chinese indentured workers and bought different merchandise from Arab peddlers going around the countryside (Barnet 1968: 23). It is also a sign of Afro-Cuban religion followers' acceptance of other religious entities and powers, besides their *Orishas* (gods) including representation of these in their *Santeria* rooms (Menendez 2002: 292).

The existence of an Afro-Cuban Santos' room in Sydney surprised me. The priestess told me later that she had about a dozen godchildren. I was introduced to some of them later. I also brought her a jar of honey and a perennial basil plant. She thanked me for the presents and said that her saints would appreciate them. These products are used in some of *Santeria*'s rituals or offerings.

The party went smoothly, with a small barbecue. The people attending were from the "five continents" as the priestess said, and her godchildren were also representative of these continents. I spoke to some of them, but we spoke about everything – life in Sydney, the weather, the then current water restrictions – except how they became followers of Afro-Cuban religion.

The religious structure of the Santería in Cuba does not have a unifying body like the Catholic Church. Priests and priestesses are grouped according to the person who initiated them into the religion. That is called the *linea de santo* (line of initiates), whereby all the persons initiated in Santería by the same priest or priestess will become part of a ‘family’ (Barnet 1997: 81; Ebaugh and Curry 2000). In ways similar to what is happening with the Santería in Cuba and in other countries like the US, these religious families are taking into their *linea* people from other countries and cultures. In the case of the US, Fernandez Cano argues that newly initiated persons in *Santería* are increasingly white and wealthy. He highlights these changes in the social fabric of the Santería believers in the US and other countries like Spain and argues that in those cases being an initiate in *Santería* no longer means to be black and poor (Fernández Cano 2004 and 2005). This phenomenon aligns somewhat with the fact that the *ahijados* of the Cuban priestess in Sydney were people from “around the world.” More importantly for this research, it is another example of how Cuban cultural expressions are not exclusively practised by Cuban migrants in Sydney and how in the resultant process the cultural practise, and associated aspects of Cuban identity or Cubanness, becomes hybridised. In addition, it also shows the expansion of the Afro-Cuban religion outside its traditional realms and circles which has, contradictorily, brought other tensions to the practise of that religion in Cuba today.

Fortunately, I met the *madrina* on other occasions, which allowed me to get a further insight into what is involved in being a Santería practitioner in Sydney. On one of these occasions, she explained some of the challenges of practising *Santería* in Australia. The first challenge that she faced was to be initiated in *Santería*. The lack of practising *Santeros* in Australia at the time that she started meant that she needed to go to Cuba or

the US to learn the ceremonies of initiation. These ceremonies in Cuba have become very expensive in recent times. The rise of Afro-Cuban cult worship has also brought an increase in the fees of the initiation ceremonies and nearly all the rituals, this ironically making it impossible for many Cubans on the island wanting to be initiated in Afro-Cuban religion. In a study of this phenomenon, Holbraad explains that Cubans can only afford to be initiated if they can earn hard currency, mainly via illicit activities, or have relatives overseas who could finance their initiation or have been planning and saving for it for years. In his fieldwork he found that prices could be as much as \$2,000 US dollars (Holbraad 2004).

Consequently one of my first queries was whether it was very expensive for her to be initiated in *Santeria* and if she was allowed to give all deities to the people that she initiates. When she asked which deity I was referring to, I replied, “*Olokun*, for example. This deity can be only given by women priestesses. I am aware that in Cuba it, is quite expensive to receive this deity.” She replied:

“No, I am not allowed to give *Olokun*. My godmother is daughter of the Virgin of Regla. *Olokun* is one of the Regla’s avatars. I can feed her sacred necklaces and other things.”

I told her that one of my aunties was recommended to receive *Olokun*, and that it costs a lot of money to receive some of these deities in Cuba. The *madrina* agreed:

“*Niña*, a lot! I paid over a thousand US dollars to receive *Orula* and all the others deities that I needed in my initiation ceremony. This price was with a ‘special discount,’ through friends. My family in Cuba helped me a lot and my partner helped me too. I saved for years, because it is not only the fees, but all

the others expenses, plus the trip. I am the oldest initiated here. I was initiated more than a decade ago.”

I asked her about her saints, and how she had managed to bring them into the country, and pass through customs at the airport. She smiled and replied:

“I didn’t worry much about that. I declared everything. I cleaned everything very well. In fact, I scrubbed it! After I wrapped it in a clear plastic. When the customs officer asked me, what was it?” I said: “This is Cuban voodoo!”

I laughed at her ingenuity, and told her she had scared them. She smiled again and replied:

“Look, my *Eleggua* (an Afro-Cuban deity, god of roads, of alternative pathways) has travelled with me around the world: Mexico, Cuba, South America, even here! Every time that I leave Sydney I always take him with me. I forgot it today, but this is unusual. Cuban voodoo, that is it, *Niña!*”

These brief comments about how the *madrina* classified her Afro-Cuban deities as Cuban voodoo to the customs officer is worthy of discussion. Firstly, voodoo is practised mainly in Haiti and in some parts of the Cuban eastern provinces. Once again, both Afro-Cuban religions and voodoo share some deities because of their African origin and the shared influences of Catholicism. However, in Cuba the voodoo, to a much greater extent than Santeria, was and is still looked at with fear and suspicion, being something that was practised primarily by Haitian sugarcane cutters. This has its historical roots in the 1930s when the Cuban Government used Haitian immigrants as scapegoats for the economic problems and nationalist tensions on the island. In that campaign, the government used their race and religion as ways to prove ‘their inferiority’ (McLeod 1998: 610–11). As I overheard a Santeria believer in Sydney say,

who happened to be a godchild of the *madrina* cited above, “we believe in *Santeria*, and that is not voodoo, that is a Haitian thing.”

The ingenuity of the *madrina* was knowing that it was very unlikely that the custom officer knew about Afro-Cuban religion. She quickly classified her deities as Cuban voodoo. If we take into account that this happened in the late 1980s when Hollywood films using some elements of voodoo were released, then it is remarkable how she borrowed the denomination of one the cousins of Afro-Cuban religion to explain to the origins of the religious artefacts she was bringing into the country.

On another occasion the *madrina* commented that:

“The coconut readings here are not like in Cuba. Even the *remedios* (remedies) and other rituals or offerings need also to be adapted to the conditions here. For example if a person should have a bath to get rid of bad influences or spiritual entities, sometimes I would replace or exclude some herbs if they are not available here. Usually, I replace them with other herbs or substances such as milk or honey. However, I prepared some of the traditional products myself or stock up on them when I go to Cuba, the US or other place where you can find them!”

There are a few methods of divination in the *Santeria* religion. The coconut reading is one of the most common and simple. It consists of four pieces of coconuts which are shaken and throw onto the floor, depending of how these pieces fall on the floor on their white (flesh) or brown (coconut shell), the *Santera* priestess will divine the person’s problems and how they could be solved. The *remedios* are the offerings or cleansing rituals recommended by the saints, which the person follows in order to solve their problems. They may involve offerings, or a bath with herbs or substances. The role of

the priestess or priest is effectively that of an intermediary between the uninitiated and the Afro-Cuban deities. He or she will prescribe or tailor the appropriate remedy for the occasion. This is why the *madrina* noted that she is flexible in her prescriptions of remedies.

The practise of Afro-Cuban religion is quite new in Australia. It is a religion which is practised in the private domain, as the experience above indicates. Therefore, its believers need to borrow from the outside to create and maintain the practise. For example some herbs are available on supermarket shelves or in local greengrocers, as the *madrina* told me. But sometimes she and other believers grow their own in their backyards. Indeed, one of the initiates commented:

“My *padrino* (godfather, also an Afro-Cuban priest) during a brief visit here told me that Australia was full of good *palos y hierbas* (sticks and herbs) – to work with in Afro-Cuban religion. However, we only know a few of them! I grow a few things but they are ‘simple-ones’, basil, rue, bananas, muraya, sugarcane. Other things, I find them in the shops, with friends or in my trips ... I will give you some rue. It attracts good spirits and good energy. You can put it like that on water, in a vase. It will *recoger* (clean) bad spirits in a place. I love it and have it everywhere around the house. You also can have a bath with it [rue], white flowers and perfume, as well as clean the house with it. It is good for you. This year I haven’t been lucky with the basil. I usually have a lot, but it had disappeared lately, it was too cold.”

In response I asked her if she had seen the plant that I gave to the *madrina*. It is a perennial basil, which does not die in winter. I promised to bring her some.

Other things like beads for necklaces or ingredients like cocoa butter are bought locally in specialised shops, like natural health shops. Back in Cuba the *hierbero* (herb seller),

and in the US or Puerto Rico the *botanicas* are the shops that usually cater for these needs (Tweed 1997; Cobas and Duany 1997). However, here in Sydney the Afro-Cuban believers or practitioners need to be inventive and find the needed materials in different places not connected to the religion at all, as well as be prepared to import goods for the practise. As the *madrina* pointed out, she brought her saints from Cuba, while others brought them from the US or South America.

Similarly another Cuban showed me her saints which are displayed around her house, very tastefully mingling with the furniture in different rooms. Her Saint Lazaro is on a small recreational room on the top of music speakers. She told me:

“I sewed his coat myself and I always keep fresh flowers in his vase in the floor. I brought him and all my other Catholic saints from the US, Cuba and here.”

“Here?” I enquired.

“Yes, I have this big Buddha I got him here with the Chinese, sometime I offer him oranges on the Chinese New Year... In the other room, I will show you... This is a Virgin who does a lot of miracles. The Indian migrants love her. I’ve got her [a statue] here too! Over here, is the statue of *Niño de Atocha*. It is fluorescent and you can see it when the room is dark. This is my Virgen de Regla. These are from Cuba and the US. Isn’t she nice?”

I responded positively, and noticed that these images are together with the photos of some relatives and friends in Cuba. When we were having a look at different saints statues around the house the phone rang. It was another Cuban, and I gathered that she was explaining to the person what we were doing and one of her answers got my attention.

“Yes, I believe in everything I am *santera, catolica, apostolica y romana* (Afro-Cuban religion priestess, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman). All that has helped me a lot to survive and win here.”

This Cuban was not a priestess as such, but she does follow the Afro-Cuban religion. Sometimes in Cuba people tend to call anyone who has been initiated a *santero* or *santera*. Returning to her statement, it nicely summarises what we had just seen – an eclectic mixture of saints and beliefs grouped together under one roof. Her Catholic saints were mixed with Afro-Cuban and Catholic meanings, her newly acquired Australian religious artefacts, statues and the picture of the Cuban relatives, both deceased and alive. The faith and encouragement that these beliefs gave her helped her to confront the challenges of migration and settling in a foreign land. This arises from the fact that she has effectively adapted her space in this context. There is also an element of translocation and timelessness in that room, where images, artefacts and memories of dead and live people from different times and countries are invoked.

Another example of embracing new popular beliefs and images, as a way to feel belonging, is developed in a study by Peter Read. In the study, Marivic Wyndham, a Cuban academic who has lived in Australia for more than twenty-five years, believes herself to be protected by *Chango* (Afro-Cuban deity) and a wooden Aboriginal snake. Both images, *Chango* and the Aboriginal snake, are in her bedroom protecting her, giving her security and belonging in a new place (Read 2000: 142–43). In both cases, religion is used to create “alternative allegiances and places of belonging” (Levitt 2003). Finally, here it is Cubans who are embracing new religious beliefs and imaginary, enriching their previous religious beliefs. The exchange is twofold.

During my fieldwork I also met some Cubans who are Baptists and others who have become Seventh Day Adventists in Australia. They are isolated cases, contrary to what has occurred in Melbourne where there is a known group of Cuban migrant Baptists who attend the Baptist congregation *Luz y Vida* in Moonee Ponds (Wilcox 1989). In both of the Sydney cases they expressed the view that religion has helped them to settle more in the localities where they live. One of the Cuban Baptists explained to me that she was a Baptist in Cuba, but she believes that:

“God is everywhere. I worship where I feel comfortable. I am a devotee of the Virgin of Charity, but I regularly attend the local Presbyterian Church and it helps me to feel a part of this community.”

In summary, this section has shown that the religious practises of the Cuban migrants remain a part of their identity; however we can say that religion has taken a secondary place in the maintenance of this identity. Although almost all of the informants expressed belief in the existence of God or “something,” not all resort to religion to solve their every day problems and worries. Even those who do take refuge in their religious faith to solve something tend not to go to church regularly, preferring to pray and keep their small shrines at home. Furthermore, the attendance at annual celebrations of the anniversary of the Virgin of Charity is declining and the future of the activity itself is quite uncertain. Currently the activity is surviving because the Virgin of Charity has gained other devotees amongst South Americans migrants.

Additionally, it should be noted that the devotion to the Virgin of Charity or the Catholic faith amongst the Cuban migrants in Sydney has not become politicised or a

strong public symbol of Cuban ethnic identity, as it has in Miami or San Juan (Puerto Rico). Here the religious practises have become private affairs, back into the houses of the believers. Evidently, the small size of the Cuban community in Sydney and the different political views in relation to the island held within the community, as illustrated earlier, has downgraded the political role of Catholic religion amongst Cubans here. Indeed, religion has become more of a cultural practice, and often a personal response to cope with the difficulties of migration.

Another clear characteristic of the religious practises is their hybridity, or more precisely, the syncretism of the religious practises, which is often not even noticed or acknowledged formally by the practitioners due to the existence of prejudices against Santeria worship amongst some Cuban migrants. They have Catholic statues or artefacts and worship them as in the Santeria religion. Additionally, *Santeria* practitioners also need to borrow from the outside, whether it is substances, herbs or people. All have become necessary for the maintenance of this religion. Finally, it is worth noting many of the *Santeria* followers encountered during fieldwork were not of Cuban origin, while some Cubans had adopted new religious artefacts and faiths. In sum, although some manifestations of the religious practices of Afro-Cuban religion exist in Sydney, they are not particularly strong and are not public. They are more like a flow in both directions, continuously being enriched from the outside. As Hannerz argues, culture is a flow, not a smooth one where things can be simply transmitted, but a constant shift in space, forms and interpretations “allowing misunderstanding and losses as well as innovations” (2000: 6). This exchange also occurs in other aspects of these migrants’ lives, as will be seen in the next section on their food eating habits.

## Re-encountering Cuban tastes in Australia

“Señora, everything is available here, even yellow cassava. I also bought some purple bananas some time ago ... I am sure that in Cuba, those things are not available now. This is heaven... How long is it since you have eaten purple bananas, señora?”<sup>22</sup>

These words of a Cuban migrant, who had been living in Australia for nearly 30 years, reflect their joy at being able to have something that people in the country of origin used to enjoy. But it also reflects the irony that products like these, that this migrant used to eat a long time ago in his homeland, are no longer available there, but are available in his acquired home country of Australia. There is loss and re-encounter in this story, but in a different setting and in an inverse order. To a certain degree, this story shows why some Cuban migrants decided to make Australia their home. However, the story here goes beyond the simple act of eating. It is about the love that Cubans have for their national cuisine, and their expressions of identity through this aspect of their national culture. This is illustrated through the personal accounts reviewed below.

This section explores the relevance of food in the maintenance and re-creation of Cuban identity. Through this exploration it is suggested that the existence of a substantial ethnic food market in Australia has facilitated Cuban migrants' maintenance of some of their previous eating habits, and through this they have maintained their sense of Cuban identity. In contrast with the section on religion, the group of Cubans encountered were more explicit and specific in using food as a way to identify themselves and/or to exclude people from their ethnic group. Additionally, nearly all the informants

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<sup>22</sup> *Cassava* is a native plant of the tropical part of the American continent. The most popular varieties in Cuba are crystal, sweet, sour, yellow and Cartagena. However, yellow cassava is mostly planted by small farmers, so its distribution is not very widespread. Purple banana is a variety of the *Musa rosacea* and used to be planted too by small scale farmers in Cuba (see Tomas Roig 1953: 798, 959).

expressed an opinion about food, and were actively involved in the reproduction of that “unforgettable flavour” from home, as one of them put it. Memories about food, places and plants were often mentioned as they way things used to be in Cuba.

Once again, the size of the Cuban settlement in Sydney has its impact in the way Cubans maintain their food habits. In comparison, with the US or Spain, where there have existed a number of famous Cuban restaurants during the last forty years, Australia, and specifically Sydney, have lacked this feature. Therefore, Cuban food practices in Sydney are much more part of a domestic diasporic culture than a public one.

### **Being “Cuban” through food**

Going through my fieldwork notes, I was immediately struck by the frequency of evocations of food, especially in the household settings. Indeed, food soon emerged as an important point in the lives of almost all of the Cuban migrants that I met. This was no doubt linked in part to my being obliged to eat or drink something during my social visits, this in turn highlighting and reflecting the importance of food. Additionally, it was notable that many of the houses that I visited displayed very few visible symbols or markers of the ethnicity of their Cuban inhabitants. Indeed, some of these houses are not very different in their setting from the middle-class suburban Australian house. The display of a small Cuban flag in the middle of a dining room table, in the entrance of the house, or a smaller version of it as a fridge magnet, was in some cases the only visible symbol of Cuba in those houses.

As soon as the guest arrives, however, they are invited to a short black and sweet Cuban style coffee. And then, immediately, the stories start to be told about which coffee

“nearly has a Cuban flavour,” where to get it, how long it needs to be roasted and so on. The seemingly typical, middle-class, Australian suburban house begins its transformation. The aroma of the coffee and the continuous invitations to stay longer, for lunch and/or dinner, or at least a small snack, have ‘Cubanised’ the house. Experiences like this led me to investigate the idea that for this group of Cubans, the maintenance of their previous food habits constitutes a highly significant way by which they try to reinforce and re-create their identity. Ghassan Hage suggests that this type of recreation should be seen as positive nostalgia, arguing that “the positive nostalgia does not necessarily involve a desire to ‘go back’,” but promotes the desire of “being there *here*” (1997: 108). Hage adds that migrants tend to reproduce or borrow their previous “imaged homely feelings” in the most diverse ways and situations, such as living in a suburb surrounded by people from the same language, or “surrounding oneself with culturally pleasing objects, smells and sounds” (1997: 108). Moreover, Hage claims that when migrants borrow these previous homely experiences they are better equipped to confront the life in the new country and to make better use of the opportunities offered to them by the new society (1997: 108). The practises of food consumption and production in migrant homes, as found amongst these Cuban migrants, are good examples of these processes.

During fieldwork I encountered many similar situations in which Hage’s arguments are directly applicable. For example, in a conversation with a Cuban man (Juan) who has been living here for more than thirty years, after first migrating to Spain, he commented to me:

“When we arrived, we lived in a hostel, in Villawood. We were not allowed to cook there. Every day we were fed rice and smelly lamb. I didn’t like it,

because here people don't marinate meats for a long time. However, a few weeks after our arrival someone gave us a small electric stove, so we decided to prepare our own food. We bought and smuggled in some chicken and rice. Marta prepared a big pot of *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken).”

Juan's face lit up at this point. He continued:

“It was more chicken than rice in the pot. *Me di una hartada!* (I ate a huge amount!). I even licked my fingers. It was so good ... delicious. This was one of my happiest moments in Australia. I was so happy that I told her [his wife] after eating: Marta, I will stay here! Here, in Australia!”

I laughed and inquired further whether the chicken and rice made him stay in Australia? He proudly replied, “Yes, what else do you need?”

This encounter illustrates how important it was for this man to be able to eat the food that he was used to in his homeland, to the point that this previously homely feeling helped him to decide to stay permanently in Australia. Some issues need to be considered here. First, the family in this passage left Cuba in 1970, when the scarcity of some foods and traditional products was becoming more acute, with the intake of meats in particular suffering a considerable reduction. The introduction of food rationing also acted as a push factor in many migrant cases (Portes and Bach 1985: 143). As Benjamin et al. suggest, food is so important to Cuban exiles partly because Cubans so often cited food shortages and hunger as a reason for leaving in the 1960s (1984: iv).<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, some Cuban migrants first settled in Spain where they were confronted again by a limited traditional Cuban diet. Some of those resettled in Australia due in

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<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Dr Mandy Thomas for attracting my attention to this source.

part to the scarcity of some foods and other material conditions encountered in Spain.

One of the interviewees explained his decision to leave for Australia with a good humour:

“I spent only one Christmas in Spain. It must be 1969, I think, but I couldn’t stay there any longer. It was terribly cold there. But what shocked me was the sound of the ‘national anthem’ every day at dinner time!”

“What was it?” I enquired.

“Ah, the national anthem was: tac, tac, tac [an egg beating sound]. *La tortilla, mi hija!* (The omelette, my girl!) The only thing that all of them [Spaniards] and I were eating was omelette every day! It was difficult to find a job with a good income and sometimes even hard to find a job! I didn’t like to eat egg too much back in Cuba. So, when I heard about migrating to Australia. I put in my application very quickly.”

It should be pointed out that the Cuban diet and food habits have changed substantially over the last century, particularly after the triumph of the 1959 Revolution. The US embargo, and the lack of hard currency of the Cuban Government, directly affected the acquisition of some spices and products used in the traditional Cuban cuisine. The food rationing provoked a change in Cuban eating habits, for instance in the 1970s some products like meats became very limited, but other things like eggs, split peas and rice were more readily available. For years Cuban used to nickname these three products ‘the three musketeers’. Seen in this context we can better understand the emphasis on eggs and Spanish omelettes by Carlos and his decision to resettle in Australia.

Something similar can be seen in Juan’s recollection of his early days in Australia where there was “more chicken than rice in the pot.” Indeed, in Cuba chicken and rice was traditionally considered a “Sunday dish,” or something that must be cooked when

you have guests or visitors coming to the house. While this tradition has declined over time in Cuba, due to a number of reasons, its maintenance by Cubans in Australia further highlights the strength of eating habits in revealing a Cuban identity.

In this way, some of the most traditional dishes of Spain or Caribbean origin have nearly disappeared from the daily and festive Cuban cuisine in contemporary times. This similarly has impacted on the nationally favoured dishes. As noted previously, before 1959, *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) and *tostones* (fried green bananas) were the standard Sunday dinner. Today it is likely to be *arroz con frijoles* (black beans with rice) with some meat. However, one fact that hasn't changed over the years is the act of leaving the 'protein meal' of meat or fish, or the 'best' food, for the weekends or special occasions when the family gets together.

In contrast to this contemporary reality in Cuba, I found that the diet of the oldest Cuban migrants in Australia has only changed slightly, although some of them, due to their age, have become more health conscious with respect to their diet. For example, in the catering for some social activities, Cubans are keen to include an Argentinean *asado* (barbequed beef) or Uruguayan sweets made of pastry and caramel, both of which are popular in Cuba. In the household situation only slight changes can be perceived over the extended period that the Cuban migrants have been in Australia. Once I remarked to a group of Cuban women that I admired how little their diet has changed after such a long time. Some of them started to blame their husbands for not being open to innovations and change in the kitchen. They also complained that their husbands wanted to eat rice and beans everyday. However, these women pointed out that with their children and grandchildren the case was different. They didn't want to eat 'hard food' or

(Cuban food), but only *chucherias* (snacks and fast food). The women clearly disapproved of this development.

This ambiguity in the attitudes of the Cuban women adds to the subtle role of food in the Cubans' recreation and maintenance of their Cubanness. On one level, they blamed their partners for not wanting to try dishes from a different cuisine, but at the same time did not agree with a complete change of eating habits for their children, from the traditional Cuban diet to fast food products. This example highlights the expected diversity amongst age groups in relation to food. Additionally, it can be argued that this is also used to differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups, in the sense that the maintenance of the food habits also serves as a self-assurance marker of their identity, and once again a divider between them and 'others.' For example, while an informant was telling me about her experiences with an Australian neighbour who was an elderly person, she remarked several times:

“You know...they (Australians) don't feed themselves properly. They like vegetables, fruit and 'watery' soups. This isn't food. So, I always used to tell my neighbour that she should eat real substantive food.”

When I asked her what she meant by that she replied:

“I mean ... I mean rice, meat, and beans. I mean that she needs to have hot milk with chocolate in the afternoons.”

The strength of the informant's views about what constitutes 'real food' further supports the idea of its role as a marker of a Cuban ethnic identity for this group in Australia.

On another level, the eating habits of this group of migrants are also used by other groups, especially other Spanish speaking groups, to stereotype Cubans as sweet

toothed, rice eaters, chicken lovers and coffee drinkers. In a social barbecue held in *La Casa Latina* at Marrickville community centre in Sydney in 2001, an Uruguayan cook told me that when he has Cuban consumers he usually cooks chicken because this is “what Cubans like. They don’t like slightly cooked meat, especially beef.” The same person, together with other South American people questioned my identity because I don’t drink coffee. The cook loudly exclaimed: “Ah, here is a Cuban who doesn’t drink coffee!” It should be noted that I encounter similar responses any time that I visit the house of a Cuban migrant.

Different perspectives on what constitutes the Cuban diet can be seen in Australian culture. As I observed earlier, several newspaper articles promoting Cuba as a tourist destination have increasingly appeared in Australia over the last four years. One journalist observed that ‘Cuban music and Cuban food go together about as well as an orchid in a Vegemite jar’ (Masters 2000). Although the journalist ate mainly in hotels and other public places he concluded that, unlike Cuban music, Cuban food is monotonous, blaming this, and the fact the Cubans do not like fish, on the current government. This oversimplification highlights the strength of the notion of rhythmic dance music as the Australian popular image of essential Cubanness, and misses the complexities of the importance of a varied Cuban cuisine among Cubans at home and abroad.<sup>24</sup> Again this contrasts with the US where knowledge and information about Cuban food and music are more readily available. A search in the Amazon website shows a significant number of English-language US cookbooks about Cuban cuisine. These books are targeted to the Cuban American market and the American public in

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<sup>24</sup> The popularity of the movie and CD of the musical band *Buena Vista Social Club* is one example of this.

general. No such book has been produced in Australia, but a few ‘adapted recipes of Cuban drinks and black beans soup’ have been published in the *Women’s Weekly* magazine.

Paradoxically, the absence of these books and the ready market for Cuban products have also kept the Cuban recipes in Australia ‘more traditional’ as two Cuban women pointed out in separate incidents. Some of their relatives in the US have the recipe book, but the books remind them that generally, their grandmothers or family used to do it a bit differently. As one told me:

“I helped ... my cousin sometimes calls me for that bit that is not there [in the book]. Here we don’t have cantinas or black beans in a tin, whenever I want Cuban food I need to cook it.”

After listening to a seminar I gave on the subject of food a Cuban academic living in Australia made similar comments about her relatives in the US, whom she needs to tell those “little secrets about Cuban recipes that are not in books.” In both cases the women took pride in the fact that they still remember those little secrets, thanks to not having the *cantinas*, the Cuban food delivery services available in Miami and other thing associated with large overseas settlements of Cubans.

In Australia, Cubans themselves construct their own, often rigid, boundaries of what constitutes Cuban food, and its role in identifying or validating someone’s Cuban identity. For example, during my fieldwork, I noticed that Cubans sometimes tend to include someone in their ethnic group or exclude them from it, based on their behaviour when serving or eating food. This can be seen in the story recounted by a Cuban woman

about her visit to a restaurant co-owned by a fellow migrant. Some of her impressions when she was served included the following:

“Chica, my children and I were hungry and decided to run to a restaurant close to their place. When we got into this restaurant and we saw a small Cuban flag displayed on the top of a shelf, you hardly could see it. After I heard some of the customers talking in Spanish about the owners. I heard that one of them was Cuban. Then a woman came and started to talk to them, but she didn’t have even a Cuban accent. However, when I look at *canillas* I thought, these skinny legs are Cubans.”

I laughed and asked, “you identified her as Cuban for her *canillas*?”

“Yes, they are like mine,” she responded. “But when they brought us the food I was astonished! Everything was very small. You could count the pieces of vegetables, and the two small pieces of steak ... terrible! It was so small. I thought that they were closing because they were going bankrupt for the lack of customers. They serve too little. Then I thought what sort of Cuban is this? Cubans are generous with food. They always serve a lot.”

This is a very rich passage full of meanings. What struck me first was the rapid facility with which the person included and excluded the other from being Cuban. Even more interestingly, she tried to assure me that the restaurant’s owner had “learned this custom elsewhere, this was not Cuban”. On another occasion, a different Cuban informant made some comments about an invitation she had received to a party. She was outraged because she was asked to bring a plate, emphasising to me:

“Where have Cubans learned these customs? When in Cuba did you ever go to a party and bring food? If you are the host you need to invite people and serve them, you are inviting them to your house. I never saw that there, even during the difficult times. It’s ridiculous and is not Cuban!”

In these situations we see how food is used to question somebody's ethnic identity. The act of negating the ethnic affiliation of those people, and highlighting their newly acquired habits, shows that the informants have a set of concepts and images about how someone can be Cuban in relation to food, or more specifically how a Cuban host is supposed to be in relation to food. In his work, *Flows, boundaries and hybridity*, Hannerz (2000) argues that the different flows of cultures (media, migration, commodities) form their own boundaries, making them highly context-specific. In the case of Sydney, Cubans use food to demarcate a perceptual frontier. However, this frontier is not immune from change, as will be seen below.

It is important to highlight again that the low numbers and loose spatial distribution of the Cubans in NSW may be contributing factors to this group's reinforcement of a Cuban ethnic identity through their previous national cuisine, particularly in the domestic setting. As noted in an earlier chapter, others rarely identify Cuban migrants as Cuban, the closest identification tending to be Latin American due to their Spanish accent, since outwardly they do not look characteristically different from other *Latinos*, Southern Europeans or Africans. As Peter Read and Marivic Wyndham suggest, Latin Americans in Australia are simultaneously working out several meanings, like their own identities such as Peruvian Australian or Chilean Australian, plus the general one of Latin American Australian (Read and Wyndham 2003). Given their identification by the wider society as being Latin American, eating habits emerge as a unique external marker that help Cuban people to identify and contest who is an authentic Cuban and who is not; what is Cuban and what is not.

### **The multicultural ethnic market and the re-creation of the *casi cubano* (almost Cuban)**

A general overview of Cuban cuisine makes it easier to understand how Cuban migrants in Sydney have been able to re-create and maintain their previous food habits. The different migrational waves that swept the Caribbean region over centuries have influenced the culture and the culinary habits of the region. As with any cuisine in the Caribbean region, the Cubans have taken elements from the local indigenous traditions, Spanish, African and Chinese cookeries. Cuban cuisine is a blend of Spanish and African ways of cooking applied to tropical ingredients and products. This mixture took place when the Spanish colonisers used African and indigenous slaves as housemaids to cook “Spanish” dishes with imported and locally available products. The increasing immigration of Chinese indentured workers added other flavours to the Cuban cuisine. Some dishes of the Spanish and Chinese cuisine are so entrenched in Cuba that they are consistently included in Cuban cookbooks. For example, the recipes of Spanish *paella* and Chinese *arroz frito* (fried rice) are staples, qualified only as being “Cuban versions of...” (Villapol 1992: 34, 38).

Indeed, it is no coincidence that one of the major theorists of the concept of Cubanness, the ethnologist Fernando Ortiz, highlighted the evolution of a national dish, the *ajiaco*, in this process. In Chapter 3, I remarked how Ortiz made some parallels between the evolution of *ajiaco* stew and the contribution different cultures or migrant groups made to the Cuban culinary culture. Each culture, Africans, Amerindians, Spaniards, Chinese amongst others, added something to the *ajiaco*, from the vegetables to the way the utensils are used in its cooking. Therefore, Cuban cuisine is already a transculturated entity, and in this sense the process of adjusting to changing populations, conditions and

cultures to recreate a traditional Cuban dish can be seen as a historical feature of the Cuban experience, continued by Cuban migrants in Sydney.

Rice, beans, sweet potatoes, taro, cassava, boiled or fried bananas, pork and beef are some of the main products used in the Cuban way of cooking. These products are combined in soups such as the traditional *potajes* that includes black, kidney or white beans boiled with pork or beef bones, or the traditional *ajiaco* and its newer cousin, the *caldosa*. The *caldosa* is a soup made with cassava, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, corn, different meats from chicken, lamb, beef or pork, and whatever other vegetables and spices are available. In relation to the seasoning of Cuban food, the dishes are highly seasoned, but not spicy-hot. Chilli is rarely used in Cuban cuisine, with only a handful of traditional Cuban dishes that require the use of chilli or pepper. Instead, the seasoning of Cuban dishes uses salt, lime, sour orange, garlic, onion, tomatoes, capsicum, roasted cumin, bay leaves, vinegar and cilantro in any combination. Of these spices, salt is the ultimate ingredient which gives or reinforces the flavour of any dish. Here again, as noted in the chapter about Cuban music, the Australian media has quite erroneously used chilli to promote the popular image of 'hot' Cuban dance and music (Wilder 2000).

If salt is appreciated, sugar is adored. Sugar, one of the main cash crops of the Cuban economy, is one of the most loved components in Cuban cuisine. Its use is considered a must in black coffee, fruit juices and marmalades. Cuban people enjoy drinking *guarapo* (sugar cane juice), *guarapiña* (fermented pineapple juice), extra sweet orange juice and bananas, *sapotes* and sweet mango milkshakes. The Cuban cuisine has a marmalade recipe for nearly every tropical fruit available in the island. The most

popular ones are those prepared from coconut, guava, mango and pawpaw. They are usually served on their own or with (preferably white) cheese.

The multicultural character of metropolitan Sydney, and the consequent establishment of specialist shops catering for larger ethnic groups, has made it relatively easy for Cuban migrants in Sydney to maintain and reconstruct their former eating habits. This has been achieved by their identification of particular styles and types of food, catering for other migrant groups that can be acquired and adapted to the homely Cuban cuisine (see below). Of course, like all the other migrant groups, they are not able to find some particular products, or in some cases a product with precisely the 'right flavour', but these difficulties are reducing over time (e.g. Hage 1997: 108–10). This can be appreciated in the words of one participant:

“In the beginning, it was very difficult to find spices for cooking. You couldn't get cumin, garlic, bay leaves, so to get the Cuban flavour in a dish was a real challenge. Now it is much better, but it's still not the same. For example, the chorizos here are not moist like they used to be in Cuba. The chorizos from *El Miño*, their taste was very different. You are lucky now we have nearly everything (for cooking) here.”

A further aspect emerging from my fieldwork is that the Cuban migrants of the older generation were almost always keen to emphasise that, when they arrived, they needed to get some products from specific places. For example, one person told me that she used to travel from the Western suburbs of Sydney to Bondi to buy black beans and garlic. Some of the migrants also started to grow some plants themselves, including lime trees, *aji cachucha* (a very mild, sweet version of chilli habanero), taro and even sugar cane. Additionally, among some of them the notion of preserving these plants was very preciously observed. For example, in relation to sugar cane, it is grown in Cuba,

but it is not a common backyard plant. Here, some Cuban migrants have a sugar cane clump in their backyards. The variety that is most widely planted is called *Media Luna* (half moon). One Cuban man told me, while I was admiring his sugar cane plants:

“You know that the Cuban Government stopped planting *Media Luna* in Cuba. They said that it was not profitable, that it didn’t produce as much sugar as they expected, so it stopped being produced on a large scale. I don’t agree with them. *Media Luna* is very nice and sweet, you will try it. So we have been conserving it here! I will give you a bit [of sugar cane]; you need to plant it too!”

The words express the informant’s pride at saving this sugar cane variety, which was not considered sufficiently productive back in Cuba. Underlying these expressions, however, were deeper sentiments. To have a sugar cane clump in your Australian backyard is Cuban, but to have a variety discarded by the government from which someone fled is seen to have even more prestige. While there is a large amount of nostalgia, and an effort to reconstruct those familiar flavours here in Australia, this example takes on a political dimension.

One specific flavour that Cuban migrants had experienced great difficulty finding was the right kind of corn needed to make tamales, the Australian corn being too sweet for this beloved Cuban dish. Tamales are made with freshly grated corn kernels that are cooked with spices with small pieces of pork, wrapped in corn leaves and then boiled for a few minutes before serving. There are numerous variations of this dish in Cuba. Here again the diversity of the Cuban cuisine extends to its practise by Cuban migrants in Sydney who, when unable to locate the right type of corn, resorted to techniques to *matar el dulzor* (eliminate the sweetness) of the corn. For example, in a birthday party I was surprised when the host came out with a big plate full of tamales and told her that I

hadn't eaten them for years. She joked; "Yes, we have tamales competitions to see whose tamales are the best. In every party we have them." Then the other group I was talking to went into some detail about their various ways of preparing tamales. One couple explained:

"We prefer to do them with half of canned corn and fresh corn. This way you can save time and the fresh flavour is still maintained. I found that the more spices you add to the *sofrito* (a spicy tomato sauce), it helps to eliminate the sweetness of the Australian corn."

Another Cuban woman added;

"I don't agree with you, traditionally tamales are made with fresh corn only, and the corn depends on where and when you get it. Mario [her husband] goes to Flemington market and he knows which corn is not so sweet. However, I found that the leaves of the corn are not big enough to make a parcel with only three leaves like in Cuba. I choose the biggest ones and sew them together by hand with a very fine cotton thread!"

Another Cuban woman commented; "You go to too much trouble. I only do *tamales en cazuela* (tamales in the pot without the wrapping). I mix fresh corn with polenta."

It seemed that amongst Cuban migrants in Sydney the search for the best ingredients, and the 'right flavour' for making tamales, had become something of a competition. This further highlights the ways in which these Cuban migrants are maintaining both this aspect of their traditional diet and the very Cuban act of making, improvising and experimenting with different varieties. These efforts to reconstruct authentic Cuban flavours extend also to beverages. For example, one migrant reassured me that his house was the only place in Sydney where you could drink the traditional *café criollo*, sieved through a flannelette colander. He explained:

“When my mother was here for holidays, a long time ago, we went to the shops once when she saw some plain flannelette material. She got very excited and asked me to get some to make a colander. She sewed it in a conical shape with a metal ring in the top. I asked a workmate to make this stand for it [a three legged frame with a hole in the top with the colander in it]. The coffee I sieve through it is beautiful. You know the flannelette colanders get better with time because the coffee impregnates in it.”

Indeed, in recounting their life experiences in Australia, these Cuban migrants also tend to highlight that the increased migration from different places around the world has been very useful to them in relation to food. This can be seen in these comments about how and when they find a product which resembles or is ‘almost Cuban’ in flavour, taste or appearance.

“I remember that when we arrived you could hardly get an avocado or bananas, even garlic or black beans. Today all these things are available here, thanks to migration. Take for example the cassava. It started to be imported from the Pacific for the Islanders. I found that the Fijian (cassava) is the best. It tastes like cassava in Cuba. The Indonesian cassava is not very good. The same with the taro, the frozen one has a better quality and value for money.”

“*Señora*, this [Italian] bread is the closest one to the *pan duro* (crusty bread) in Cuba. It is very nice. We always get it from the Italians, they make it by hand. The Vietnamese bakery sells good bread, but it does not last long, and it becomes soggy the next day. The Italian one is the closest bread that we have found to the Cuban *pan duro*. It is very crispy like in Cuba. I get the coffee from a Lebanese shop in Fairfield. They roast it on the spot.”

Carlos also swears that this is the closest coffee roasting to its Cuban counterpart that he had been able to find here in the Western suburbs of Sydney. At this point the informant brought me the coffee jar and the grinder to smell. After that he emphasised again that “the roasting is dark, like in Cuba.”

These accounts provide examples of how this group of Cuban migrants have used the increasingly wide offerings of the Sydney ethnic food market to reconstruct their cuisine and maintain the flavour of their beloved Cuban dishes in their everyday lives. Some scholars have criticised the way in which cultural expressions such as food and dance are used as the “acceptable face of multiculturalism” (Gunew 1993: 41). However, as is apparent here, the expansion of the ethnic food market has clearly had a positive effect for the migrants themselves. Indeed, this shows another aspect of Australian multiculturalism, in that a small community is able to reconstruct and maintain a distinct identity, in part, through using some of the conditions facilitated by numerically larger migrant groups. Thus over the last thirty years this group of Cuban migrants have been picking and choosing different products from the Italian, Lebanese, Latin American, Spanish, Asian, African and Pacific Islander shops to reconstruct their Cuban cuisine, and in turn reconstruct and maintain their sense of Cubanness.

Cuban food has not yet entered the public domain of multicultural Australia in a way like other aspects of Cuban culture, the most notable being forms of Cuban music and dance. To date, Cuban food in Australia is almost entirely found in household settings, or else some public activities organised by groups with some connection to Cuba. This situation may well change in the future. The culinary curiosity of the Australian public continues to expand, reflected in television programs that have reviewed Cuban cuisine several times via some international chefs and tourist promotional programs. In June 2000, for example, the SBS program, *The Food Lovers' Guide to Australia*, dedicated one of its programs to Cuban cuisine by visiting Cuban migrants resident in Sydney and sharing a meal with them. One of the participants in the program, Nancy Sanchez, offered a recipe of *congri*, a traditional rice and black bean dish, for the viewing public.

Additionally, as we noted above some ‘adapted’ traditional Cuban recipes have also appeared in the popular *Women’s Weekly* magazine.

We can see from the above that despite the constraints presented by the Australian context, for these small groups of Cuban migrants the maintenance of their previous eating habits and customs constitutes a significant aspect of their construction and re-creation of their remembered and reconstituted Cuban identity. As Hannerz argues, “only by being in constant motion, forever being recreated, can meanings and meaningful forms become durable” (2000: 5). In this respect Cuban food in Australia is debated, experimented with and evoked in an enduring form. The importance of food in this construction of identity was well illustrated in the informants’ use of eating habits and the serving of food as ways of determining or questioning somebody’s Cubanness. For these informants, to be Cuban involved multiple implications with respect to the food at all levels: its content, preparation, serving and consumption. At the same time, Cuban food in Australia is marked by invention and cultural borrowing.

In addition, the experience of the Cuban informants highlighted a very positive outcome of cultural diversity in Australia, as expressed through food. The possibilities of the numerically small Cuban community to access ‘national’ foods, via a larger and diverse ethnic food market in Sydney, were essential to the maintenance of their previous diet, and in turn their sense of Cuban identity. In this way the outcomes of Australia’s cultural diversity, in terms of food markets, work to facilitate relatively small ethnic groups maintaining their identity in the diversity of a multicultural society.

## **Remembering places**

The relationships of Cuban migrants to food, and to a lesser degree to religion, are a tangible feature of their identity that can be appreciated when you enter their houses. Memories of place, local streets and suburbs where they may have lived some thirty years ago, however, tended to emerge in conversations. This is in contrast to the picture of Cuban migrants in Miami where, as reported by García (1996) and Tweed (1997), Cubans have transformed the landscape of Miami, by building churches, parks, grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and naming these after townships, streets, national heroes and businesses of pre-revolutionary Cuba and their own Cuban American heroes. In the absence of these transformations of external landscapes, Cuban migrants in Sydney rely on their memories of places in Cuba, to maintain their sense of belonging and origins.

It should be noted that some of these migrants had returned to Cuba only once or twice over the last thirty years, since their arrival in Australia and others not at all. At the same time, the Cuban migrants in Australia do not appear to be highly critical of Cubans returning home to visit Cuba, in contrast to the migrant group in the US (see Eckstein and Barberia 2002). Rather, it is the cost of the trip, flying distance, the time needed to be spent in bureaucratic procedures, and the process of aging that has limited the trips home, and is forcing some Cuban migrants in Australia to come to terms with the idea that they have made their last trip to their homeland. In this context, these recollections of places in Cuba may also be linked to both infrequency of trips home, and for many that they will not return again to the island.

As noted earlier, the question of where one lives or where one was born in Cuba is one of the first questions that every Cuban migrant I encountered asked me. If the place is

known by the person they will recall anecdotes of being there, or near there, and that sort of thing. Even a remote knowledge of the place I was talking about pleased those who knew it. For example, during a conversation in a birthday party I was asked about my birthplace, I explained that I was born in Calixto Garcia, a hospital opposite Havana University, in front of the chemistry faculty. One of the younger Cubans who hasn't been in Australia long responded; "Yes, I studied there in the fourth floor." Another man who did not live in Havana, but visited it sporadically many years ago added; "I had passed through there once. Is this near the hotel *Colina*. You need to go up the hill, no?" I replied that this was it, but noted the frustration in the faces of those present who could not contribute or remember the place so well. In response, I changed the place of reference by adding that it was close to the *Coppelia*, a popular and well-known ice cream parlour. The other three people in the room immediately responded to that they knew where that was, and had been there. Not knowing the place, but a locale close to it, seemed to satisfy their need to recollect the place.

At one level this casual conversation seems to be of little significance, indicative of more general social and conversational interactions not specific to the question of migrant identities. However, it was in further contacts and after a number of specific phone calls, that the significance of knowing and recalling a town, street or location, particularly for those Cubans who had spent long time in Australia, fully emerged. One day I called to congratulate one Cuban migrant on Mother's Day. After the greetings and congratulations her husband asked me:

"I was thinking of calling you few days ago. We have called around, but no one remembers where the Colon neighbourhood in Havana is. Do you remember?"

I replied that I was not sure, but that I thought it was in *Centro Habana* close to *Prado*, and the *Malecon*, or at least in that area. “Are you sure?” Juan asked me again. I told him that I was pretty sure, but I could check on a map, and then asked him why he wanted to know:

“Nothing, from time to time we try to remember the places or streets that come out when someone is talking and we start to argue about their location... it has been such a long time ... Anyway we spent three weeks on this one!”

On another occasion during a visit to Carlos’ house, my companion and I were late to the meeting with him and when we arrived at his place he commented:

“You told me that you were going to come between 2 and 2.30 pm. It is already 3.00 pm. I had a game of solitaire on the computer and I was about to sit here ... like the other day ... The other day I was a little bit bored, it was raining. I decided to reconstruct the layout of the streets of my suburb in Cuba. It is very good! It’s amazing how much time it takes and how satisfying is to get a clear picture of the name of the streets where you lived in Cuba. This helps me a lot. I remember them very well ... I went back about a year ago. The streets haven’t changed, the park with the same people sitting in the different corners. It is the meeting point. There you can update all the gossip of the town. I was overwhelmed how they asked me to join the circle and told me who was in town and who was overseas. Sometimes, I also sit here and enjoy my gardenia on the balcony; it also reminds me of Cuba.”

These responses illustrate a strong desire to keep Cuba alive in one’s mind, as a place with its towns, suburbs and streets. It appears to be both a nostalgic feeling, recollecting details on places in Cuba, but also an invigorating and homely feeling, similar to what we observed in relation to food and the arguments of positive nostalgia as developed by Hage (1997). Furthermore, as pointed out in Chapter 2, some of these migrants left Cuba under traumatic circumstances, ranging from jail to expropriation of their houses and other belongings by the Cuban Government before their departure. For many, the

nature of their departure further reinforced their memories about their previous towns, streets and houses, with their recollection of these details of streets and suburbs taking on a political edge. Contrary to some official claims of the Cuban Government during the 1960s and 70s, these migrants did not stop considering themselves Cubans on their departure from the island.

This is well illustrated in the recollection of Marta, who left Cuba for Spain in the early 1970s and resettled to Australia shortly afterwards:

“Cubans like to own their houses. This is a very Cuban thing. Have a look; nearly all of us [the first group] own our houses. Australians are not like that. I remember that when I was working in the factory, I worked for years with some Australian women. They lived for years in Housing Commission homes, many of their parents did also. I always kept asking them why they didn’t buy their own house. ‘You have been working longer than I, you don’t have a family’ I would say. They didn’t care, but we Cubans are different. Everywhere we go we struggle and buy our own houses, *un bohio* (a hut), but it is yours. This is similar in Cuba, my family over there, has fought during all this time to keep our old farm. My brother is still living in that place. I was born there. Every time that any of us go [to Cuba] we go there. However, some of the young Cubans are still renting. They are different.”

Aside from the issue of who is more likely to own a home, to which we will return later, this statement suggests continuity in the process of belonging to a place, but in different localities of Cuba and Australia. Indeed, the person still feels a sense of attachment to the old farm in Cuba where she and her siblings were born, contributing to a sense of origin and belonging. Additionally, the fact that during more than four decades her family had fought to keep that place gives her a sense of pride. This attachment to the old place, however, may also have added to her determination to acquire a new place of

her own in Australia. As Karen Olwig argues, in the modern world places are like anchoring points that give people some stability and the option to let go and establish themselves somewhere else (2003: 74). While the early group of Cuban migrants in Sydney treasure their memories of Cuba as place, to the extent that they still imagine themselves wandering the streets in Cuba, they are, and have for many years, been physically located here. Like other migrants then, they live in two places (Olwig 2003).

Due to the notion that they will not return to live in Cuba, and the lack of major transformations of public space in the image of Cuba, the Cuban migrants tend to give a lot of attention to the private space: their own home. The private spaces of the migrants are subtly replete with small things that remind them of Cuba, like the small flag, the gardenia plant in the balcony, the Royal Palm, sugar cane or guava tree in the backyard, a collection of Cuban films or music or a prepared Cuban dish. All of these things together, in addition to their memories of the island, help to maintain a sense of Cuba as a place in their minds.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I analysed how Cuban migrants in Sydney use religion, food and memories of places in Cuba to maintain and re-create their sense of Cubanness and to contest the authenticity of someone else's Cubanness. I argued that, primarily as a consequence of the relatively small size of the Cuban migrant community in Sydney (and Australia), Cuban migrants re-create and maintain the first two elements, their religion and eating habits, by strategically using and borrowing from the wider community. For example, in the case of religion we saw that, for several reasons, Cuban migrants drew on the assistance of other Latin American migrants to keep their main

public religious ceremony alive: the annual celebration of the Virgin of Charity.

Followers of Afro-Cuban religion source the materials for their rituals from places like mainstream health shops and greengrocers.

Moreover, Cubans not only borrowed materials to practise their religion, but have incorporated beliefs from outside of their traditional religious culture, like saints and objects with religious connotations in other cultures. In this process, people outside of the Cuban community have also become devotees of the Virgin of Charity or been initiated into Afro-Cuban religion. Religion did not emerge as a major element in the Cubans' maintenance of their identity, however, but rather, like its practice within Cuba, tended to be embraced by individuals on ritual occasions, like the Virgin of Charity celebration, and during difficult personal times. Informants did not consider themselves to be practising Catholics or *Santeros*, but they did express a belief in the existence of God.

The religious practices of the Cuban migrants in Sydney can thus be seen to be at a crossroads – still kept mainly (but not exclusively) within the migrant community, in some ways dependent on external resources and religious cultural practices, but not presented by the migrant community as a way of identifying or publicly expressing their Cubanness. Nor is religion used by members of the community as a way of assessing or contesting the authenticity of others' membership within the community, in the way that food and dance are used. With respect to food and eating habits, quite the opposite is found. Everyone has an opinion and a story to tell about food. Women and men treasure their memories of flavours and ways of preparing and serving Cuban cuisine, while young and old migrants alike use food, in the broader sense, as a significant marker by which Cubanness is tested and contested.

Here too it was found that Cuban migrants actively search for different ingredients and products to recreate their beloved Cuban dishes, via the multicultural food market that has been established by historically larger and well-established migrant communities in Sydney. In this quest to reconstruct identifiable Cuban dishes and their original flavours, Cuban migrants constantly look for new ingredients to get closer to the authentic flavours. In this sense – more so than for religion, music and dance – food emerged as a significant device used by Cuban migrants to adapt to their life in Australia and make it their home. Together with the flavour of a dish kept in the mind of Cuban migrants, memories of places in Cuba are also seen to play an important role in their public and private expressions of Cubanness. Keeping memories of specific places in Cuba clearly in mind appears to have become a mental exercise for some Cubans, especially those from the 1970s migrational wave who have not returned to Cuba often, if at all, over the past thirty years. Apart from keeping those places alive in their mind, Cuban migrants were seen to keep some small objects that remind them of Cuba in their houses: a Cuban flag, or a plant popular in Cuba on their backyard or balcony.

Throughout this chapter, I have returned to the ways in which Cuban migrants themselves used these elements in their considerations of the strength and authenticity of others' Cubanness, and in their own sense of being Cuban. I have also noted, particularly with respect to religion and food, how hybrid forms emerge in this process, in keeping with the hybrid nature of the 'authentic' forms of these things in Cuba. The following chapter will analyse these ideas further to develop some clear conclusions with respect to the specific nature of Cubanness and its maintenance by Cuban migrants in Sydney, and hybrid theoretical approach that accounts for this.

## Chapter 7. Conclusions

Cuban migrants expressed understandings of what it means to be Cuban are at the core of this thesis. These understandings are clearly central to the project of identifying and analysing how the Cuban migrant community in Sydney recreate and maintain their Cubanness, and in turn to our understanding of Cuban ethnicity and identity in the context of contemporary Sydney, Australia. In the course of collecting and analysing these data five major indicators were identified by which we can explain how Cubans construct and maintain their sense of identity: political outlook; culinary culture; music and dance; religion; and nostalgic memories of place. In this concluding chapter I will briefly review the main findings of the fieldwork in reference to these major indicators, and then consider these findings in relation to theories of ethnicity and identity. This is followed by some discussion of the implications of this research for the broad field of studies about Cuban migration and anthropological studies in Australia. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for further research based on the results of my own investigations.

### **The findings**

In Chapter 3 I mentioned how Marcus Banks once remarked that ethnicity is located in three different places: in the heart and the head of the informants and in the head of the analyst (1996: 187). He argued that the first location mainly represents the primordialist, “blood is thicker than water” approach. The second location refers to how people consciously used their ethnic difference for personal reasons, for advantage and differentiation from other ethnic groups, that is to say, instrumentally. The third location refers to the way in which social scientists have converted people’s ideas and views on ethnicity into a theoretical tool.

On one level this study has broadly followed these three locales of analysis. Chapter 3 first reviewed the development of ethnicity and identity from the analysts' point of view; chapters 4 to 6 then explored ethnicity and identity from the perspective of the informants, Cuban and non-Cuban, 'their hearts and heads'. In doing so, I began with some of the most visible markers or expressions related to Cuban ethnic identity in Sydney – the salsa dance and music boom, left-wing politics/solidarity movements, and the promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination in the Australian market – to analyse the resultant image of Cubanness. This analysis considered some of the ways in which a dominant image of Cuba, and through this of being Cuban, has been constructed by these processes, emphasising the involvement of participants outside of the Cuban migrant community in these processes.

In the case of politics, for example, non-members of the Cuban community tend to view and judge Cuba, what means to be Cuban, and hence Cubanness, through particular political lenses. Given the polarised nature of Cuban politics since 1959, these lenses frequently involve harsh criticisms of the Cuban socialist process published primarily in the mainstream media on the one hand, and the promotion of an idyllic image of socialist Cuba by Australian and Latin American migrants' left-wing organisations in their own publications and activities. The fieldwork data show that Cuban migrants are to a large extent largely divorced from such political activities, with the notable exception of the Cuban born writer, ex-*Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, and self-described anti-Castroist Luis Garcia. Indeed, it has been leftist organisations in that have been the main promoters of the revolutionary image of Cuba in Australia, rather than members of the Cuban community.

The data also show that although the Cuban migrants involved in this research tend to keep a very low public or overt profile in relation to politics, within the community politics is used to differentiate, to include and exclude people from their immediate circle of friends. Politics is used by Cuban migrants to divide the group into ‘new, young revolutionaries’ (those born and raised during the Revolution, who are seen as being more supportive of the revolutionary government and who migrated primarily for economic reasons), and the ‘old ones’: those born prior to 1959 who migrated primarily for political reasons. Politics in this sense has become a boundary-marking feature used within the group narrowing the ethnic category, as Wimmer’s theory suggests (2008: 1–3). However, the fieldwork also shows that the lines are not rigidly applied. As an Australian leftist put it: Cubans are “political chameleons.” Indeed, perhaps like any group in society, the opinions of Cuban migrant groups, whether new or old, vary with respect to different aspects of domestic, Cuban and international politics, with varying emphasis in different situations or contexts.

A major finding to emerge from the fieldwork is that, contrary to dominant politicised perceptions of Cuba and Cubans, politics does not always play a dominant or primary role in the expression of Cuban migrant identity in Australia. As indicated above, politics at the level of support for or opposition to Fidel Castro, and/or the Cuban Revolution, is found at an inter-personal level. However, the Cuban community in Australia, or at least those members who oppose the Cuban Government, have not created any formal or organised opposition like that found in Miami or Spain. This lack of any formal opposition may simply be a result of the size and dispersed locations of the migrant community, but it also lends support for what analysts like Torres (1998), Croucher (1996) and Martin (2003) have been arguing: the need to acknowledge and

better understand diversity amongst Cuban migrant or exile communities with respect to politics and members' attitudes towards the Cuban Government. In countries like the United States, where the so-called Cuban vote can potentially influence the outcome of a Presidential election, politics plays a very different role, although there too increased attention is being paid to the changing nature of the Cuban migrant community and to nuances and diversity of views with respect to Cuban politics. Despite the strong support of the Cuban Revolution by leftist groups in Australia, and the strong association with politics that the dominant image of being Cuban carries, this study clearly shows that for members of the Cuban community politics has only plays a role at the personal and intra group levels what differs from the role that it has in other Cuban communities around the world.

The fieldwork data confirms my hypothesis that Cuban music, salsa dance, and the recreation of images of Cuba through tourist advertising, are an important part of how Cubanness is understood and recreated, in different ways, by both non-Cubans and Cuban migrants themselves. At one level, we saw how Cuban music and dance have become very popular forms of recreation, and in the process a very profitable industry in Sydney. As a part of this process the number of dance schools and nightclubs catering for salsa dancers increased rapidly, and the ethnic background of the dance teachers diversified. This led to a de-ethnicification of the workforce within the burgeoning salsa industry and associated changes in the way the cultural products offered in this industry were authenticated, in similar ways to those reported in London (Urquia 2005). The fieldwork findings indicated that the commercialisation and diffusion of the Cuban salsa dance and music styles started around the year 2000, at the beginning of the Sydney salsa awakening. It was also found that some schools,

instructors and bands labelled their products as ‘authentic Cuban’ as a marketing strategy to capitalise on the trend. However, what is clear is that they offered a hybrid product from the beginning, reflecting the nature of the diffusion of Cuban music and dance globally, with the hybrid product continuing to change during its reinterpretation in Sydney. This product was also represented in stereotyped forms, but the increased competition between dance schools and the agency of consumers seeking out more ‘authentic’ styles and forms themselves, helped to create an interpretation of Cuban salsa dance and music more aligned with contemporary (hybrid) styles on the island. Nowadays *La Rueda*, an icon of Cuban salsa, is one of the three major salsa dance styles taught throughout Sydney.

At another level, this research contributes to an understanding of the Sydney salsa boom as part of a global cultural trend. The local salsa industry has been annually staging the Sydney salsa congress, effectively positioning it in the world circuit of this recreational form. While some might interpret this as a symptom of the homogenisation of global culture, it can be read as evidence of an opposite trend, resonating with Appadurai’s (1996) discussion of cultural heterogeneity. It also illustrates Hannerz’s (1996) point that cultural products are enriched and reinterpreted in each place they pass through. In the case of Sydney some local reinterpretations of this kind are already happening, for example the now common practice of calling dances to let the dancers know what style they should use.

Without doubt, the popularity of salsa music and the showing of the *Buena Vista Social Club* documentary around Australia in 2000 increased the interest in visiting Cuba. The promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination in the Australian media offers another insight into how Cubanness is constructed and imagined. The media and travel agencies have

constructed an image of Cuba as sexy and exotic but simultaneously ancient, full of old cars and buildings. These constructions echo the contradictions of the global cultural flows, between the heterogenisation and homogenisation of world culture. The media distributes collages of images where politics, news, culture and commodities are mingled. Everyone in the world can see them, but also live through them and sometimes imitate or consciously reproduce such lifestyles (Appadurai 1996: 36). However, the media feeds on unique examples to transform them in an object available to everyone through their television sets, magazines, internet, and other media. The promotion of tourism to Cuba is a good example of such processes. Cuba was unique in the sense that, because of political reasons and associated circumstances, it was excluded in many ways from the homogenous race of the world. However, the intersection of internal economic problems and the global thirst for visiting such unique places like Cuba may well transform it in just another 'homogenous' Caribbean destination.

Critically for this research, in significant ways this phenomenon of 'imagined Cubanness' is quite separate from the Cuban migrant community itself in Sydney. It is not uncommon, however, for music, dance and places to be linked to people's ethnic identities by outsiders and by the community itself (Stokes 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Reed 1998). The Cuban migrants encountered in this research did use these things within the community to express and identify a sense of being Cuban, and even authentically Cuban, but they did so in very different ways to those described above. Particularly with respect to dance styles and music, members of the Cuban community identified people as being authentically Cuban by reference to their bodily movements. Interestingly, in the process the Cuban community were reinforcing stereotypical notions that all Cubans dance to salsa music, a clearly fallacious proposition highly

influenced by generational conceptions of and attitudes towards dancing. However, this use of dance to classify other members of the Cuban migrant community did not extend to musical tastes; these were more simply attributed to personal, generational and regional (from the Spanish speaking world) preferences. Furthermore, Cuban migrants themselves also commonly use music and dance as a device to adapt to new, alien environments and to help them deal with and overcome the considerable personal and emotional difficulties associated with migration and settlement.

In relation to Cuba as a place or location, Australian Cuban migrants, especially the older generation, revealed the importance of this to their sense of themselves as Cubans in Australia. Detailed memories of Cuba's street layouts, famous landscapes and plants are meticulously, and often jealously, maintained both in their minds, and through key physical reminders in their homes. Descriptions of locations, of particular Cuban streets and landscapes, of native Cuban plants and foods (see below), emerged as a highly significant part of discussions with members of the migrant community. In this way, memories of place can be seen as playing a crucial role in their maintaining some sort of sense of belonging to, and originating from, distant Cuba.

Religion and food were also identified in this research as playing an important role in the maintenance and recreation of Cubans' ethnic identity in the Australian context. What differentiates these markers from those discussed above is that these are predominantly expressed and practised within the migrant community. However, again as a consequence of the relatively small size of the community, in order to maintain these practices, Cubans in Australia borrow from those outside the community, ingredients in the case of food or the assistance / participation of non-Cubans in the case of religion, to keep these traditions alive.

Religion however, unlike food or dance, was found to be used mainly in the private domain, and was not something used to contest or judge people's Cubanness. I found followers of nearly all the religions practised in Cuba amongst Cuban migrants and non-Cubans, but their numbers are small and their religious practices vary. Furthermore, the most important public religious ceremony of the community: the anniversary of the Virgin of Charity, has practically ceased in Sydney due to the lack of Cuban worshippers. Although informants spoke of using religion when experiencing difficulties, the relative comfort of social and economic life in Australia, and perhaps its secular nature, may have reduced such instances. This phenomenon contrasts with the rise of religious practices within Cuba since the early 1990s, and the strength of religion (especially Catholicism and the cult of the Virgin of Charity) as a marker of identity in Cuban migrant communities like Miami and Puerto Rico. In Sydney, public activities like the Virgin of Charity's festivity are surviving thanks to the presence of migrants from other countries of Latin America and the work of a handful of Cuban migrants.

Like religion, food is mainly a domestic issue in the private domain; however, in contrast to their attitudes toward religion, Cuban migrants consistently, enthusiastically, almost religiously, have made great efforts to maintain their beloved Cuban cuisine. Indeed, Cuban culinary culture – eating habits, food preparation and food sharing – emerged as the single most important element in the recreation of Cuban ethnic identity amongst the migrants encountered in this research. Like other visible markers of identity, food, and the ways it is prepared, eaten and shared, is frequently used to characterise ethnic groups, if not entire nations. Here again, as was the case with music and dance, external representations of Cuban gastronomy tend toward generalised stereotypes about coffee, rum, rice and beans, and often completely incorrect

assumptions about hot and spicy food, in line with construction of an exotic Cuba. For Cubans themselves, the picture is far more complex, and more important. Food was used by the informants to contest people's Cubanness in multiple ways, ranging from its content, to its preparation and serving. To be Cuban through food is to give generous servings, to love rice, beans, chicken, sugar, coffee and marinated meats, to have a good *punto de sal* (sense of salt when cooking) and to eat substantial meals. Further, it is to constantly look for a new ingredient that will allow you to obtain the flavour of a dish closer to the traditional, authentic Cuban flavour, which may not even be cooked in Cuba anymore. In order to maintain this tradition, Cubans have very skilfully found and borrowed the different ingredients needed in the elaboration of their dishes by using the multicultural food market created by larger migrant communities in Australia. It is the diversity of the Australian ethnic food market that has clearly facilitated the maintenance of culinary traditions of small migrant communities like the Cuban community in Sydney.

The constant recreation of familiar flavours through dishes was also part of the set of strategies used to assist in the process of settling in to Australia. Like the role played by memories of place, by music and dance, and to a lesser degree religion, food emerges as a critical factor in Cuban migrants constructing and maintaining a sense of themselves as Cubans, their Cubanness, in Australia.

### **Cubanness and theories of ethnicity and identity.**

This study has established a group of characteristics that define 'being Cuban' in Australia, based on conversations with Cuban migrants themselves as well as Latin American migrants and Anglo-Celtic Australians. Once again Cuban ethnicity and

identity in Australia can be viewed as ‘ethnicity in the heart and head, to use Banks’ expression (1996: 187). According to the ‘hearts and heads’ of the informants, to be Cuban is denoted by two fundamental characteristics: physical features and a stereotyped set of behaviours. For example, Cuban physical features are said to include skinny legs, and a nicely tanned, mulatto skin. The behavioural characteristics are said to include being able to dance and move your hips like a wave (women only!); sounding like a Cuban (saying *velde* (green) with L instead of *verde* with R like all the other Spanish speakers); pretending to know everything, being noisy or a ‘show off’; being a political chameleon; and owning your own house. Finally, a Cuban is also supposed to be a *luchador* (battler) and *vivo* (quick minded), like the Cubans in Miami, who have seemingly set the international standard for Cubaness.

The fieldwork data for this thesis demonstrate that expressions and construction of Cuban identity do not fit neatly into a single major theoretical approach to the question of ethnicity and identity. In Chapter 3, it was argued that studies of Cuban identity have largely neglected the mainstream literature about ethnicity and identity, due to the locations and scholarly traditions in which the studies were produced: the USA and Cuba. In the case of the USA, migrant groups, Cubans included, have been analysed mainly through assimilation and ethnic enclave theories. In Cuba, ethnicity and identity were explained according to Soviet ethnos theory. The data generated by the Sydney fieldwork cannot feasibly be analysed through any of the theories applied in isolation.

Indeed, to fully understand the expressions of Cuban identity we need to draw on multiple approaches to the analysis and understanding of ethnicity and identity. As was shown through Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the constructionist theories of ethnicity and identity, the psychological approach to identity, Ortiz theory of transculturation and Appadurai’s

and Hannerz's conceptualisations offered useful theoretical bases for the analysis of the expression of Cuban identity in Sydney. In the first case, the constructionist theories, especially Barth's (1969) concept of ethnic boundaries, value orientation and notion of self-ascription helped to unravel what parameters have become important for Cubans informants to construct and interpret their identity at all levels. For example, Barth's notion of ascription was quite pertinent in the analysis of how outsiders (people from the left side of politics) judge Cubans as insufficiently committed to the Cuban revolutionary cause therefore inferring their lack of Cubanness based on politics. Cubans here and everywhere consider themselves Cuban regardless of their political views. In fact, we observed in Chapter 5, that for Cubans political views did not strip a person of their identity, but they did determine their group affiliation, which was always spelt out clearly. Cuban migrants use political positions in favour of, or against, Fidel Castro as a boundary-marking feature to include and exclude people from the immediate group subdivision into 'old Cubans' and 'new Cubans'. Furthermore, these intra-boundaries based on politics are not rigid, Cuban migrants from both groups cross them during social interactions as was shown in Chapter 5 and 6. But these crossings are used to reassert their political views and rights to criticise, or not criticise, the Cuban Government.

In addition, in accordance with Eriksen's (1991) language-game approach and the transculturation process outlined by Ortiz, it is through the fluidity and constant changes that takes place during social interactions that cultural differences are worked out and expressed, and new elements added or discarded. The constructionist approach to ethnicity and identity, and transculturation theory help us to see the concept of Cubanness is constantly in the making inside and outside its geographical domain.

Although Barth (1969) and Eriksen (1991) were very useful for the analysis of intra-group expressions of identity, the fieldwork revealed other angles of identity that were more related to Epstein's psychological approach to identity. For example notions of Cubanness, related to memories of place and to food, and to musical and religious culture, have a sensorial dimension of the kind emphasised in Epstein's (1978) views on the role of affect and emotion in the transmission of identity. Indeed, as we observed in Chapter 5 and 6, love for a dish, music or religious practices are mainly fostered within the private domain, at home, although these have come to represent a larger public culture, in this case Cuban culture. Finally, it should be noted as well that an acknowledgement of primordialism is appropriate in the analysis of fieldwork data. For example in Chapter 6 we observed how a migrant was using skin colour and voice inflexions to identify the Cubans within a group of Spanish speakers. It was evident that Cubans do use physical characteristics, even the shape of one's legs, to identify their compatriots, but in many cases when the flaws of such an approach became apparent they reverted to the other approaches described above.

My research also explored the imagery of Cuba and Cubanness displayed in Australia, taking as examples politics, music and the promotion of Cuba as a tourist destination in the Australian market. In this perspective on how outsiders see and sometimes reinterpret Cubanness, the works of Hannerz and Appadurai on creolisation and the role of the media in the production of imagery provided a valuable tool for understanding how global cultural flows influence the creation of people's identity at the local level. For example, in relation to Hannerz's concept of creolisation, we observed in Chapter 4 how a cultural product, salsa music and dance, travelled through different geographical locales, enriching itself on the way. Although the salsa boom in Sydney is a part of a

global cultural trend, whereby many people share the same cultural products around the whole world, it is also a response which works against centre-based forms of homogenisation like the ‘McDonalds’ process (Hannerz 1996: 157).

The fieldwork also revealed how Cuba has been imagined and marketed as an exotic tourist destination in Australia and the world. This resonates with Appadurai’s (1996) analysis of how the media distributes these mixed images and interpretations of the ‘Other’ around the world. Indeed, the media has constructed an exotic Cuba based on its geographical location, notions of architectural and musical antiquity, but including the vitality and gaiety of its people. A model of mixed images, as Appadurai observes, that created illusions and the desire to live and imitate them (1996: 35–6).

In summary, Cubanness can be represented as an imaginary skeleton with a changeable form that might include physical appearance, language, eating habits, landscapes, memories, ways of dancing and political beliefs. All of these elements form part of non-Cuban and Cuban migrants’ sense of what it means to be Cuban. Cuban-Sydneysiders use them, with differing emphases, to assert and maintain their identity in their everyday life and interaction with other people. The forms or boundaries of Cubanness are set in their minds; but to reproduce and maintain them, Cubans in Sydney need to borrow constantly from outside their immediate community. This process in itself is a promoter of the changeable nature of Cubanness in Australia.

### **Implications of this study for different areas of anthropological research**

Part of the rationale for this research was the need for greater diversity in the study of Cuban migrant communities around the world, in terms of the location of such communities (particularly, but not exclusively, the need to look, beyond Miami), and

also moving beyond the dominant themes of such research, like the golden exile and 'dirty worm' approaches, which tend to focus almost exclusively on economic or political characterisations of such communities. This is not to advocate a neglect of political and economic factors in shaping migrant communities. Rather, this research on Cubans in Sydney highlights the need to balance these with other, arguably less dramatic or more mundane, aspects of Cuban identity. It is clearly not possible to accurately characterise the two million Cubans currently living outside their homeland as a homogenous group. Equally problematic is the tendency to classify all such communities based on major settlements in the United States, Puerto Rico or Spain.

This research has explicitly sought to fill this Miami-centric void, by analysing a Cuban community which is numerically small and geographically dispersed where politics are mostly relevant at a personal level, and where the community itself is not the main producer of or spokesperson for its public images (music, current news about Cuba, dance, etc). Indeed, the fieldwork data shows how politics and religion, for example, have taken a secondary role in the construction and expression of Cuban ethnic identity in Australia. Rather, it reveals the centrality of other elements, such as music, dance, nostalgic memories of place in Cuba and the maintenance of eating habits, in constructing Cuban ethnic identity in Australia. This in its own way highlights the importance of other ways of feeling and being Cuban in a distant place, outside the set Cuban-Miami portrait of an economically prosperous, white, anti-Castro, exile Cuban community.

In the broader area of anthropological studies of migration to Australia, this research is a contribution to the study of immigration from the Latin American region. Although Latin American and Hispanic migration to Australia amounts to thousands of people,

there has been little research into these communities in Australian anthropology and other areas of the humanities.<sup>25</sup> No doubt due to the relative small size of these migrant communities, research in the area clearly has been eclipsed by anthropological studies on European, Middle Eastern and Asian migrants.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the research for this thesis also highlights the importance of the policy of multiculturalism that has developed in Australia since the early 1970s, but which in recent times has been under regular questioning and threat. The political, economic and environmental context of our current and future world is likely to continue to propel the arrival of different migrants or refugees to Australia from many parts of the globe. Policies emphasising cultural assimilation under the banner of integration, at the expense of accommodating multiple cultures, are likely to jeopardise the smooth settlement of future small migrant groups that, like the Cuban migrants, may have to draw on the facilities, resources and structures put in place by established and numerically larger groups.

Finally, the results of this research also provide some future directions for useful, further, complementary research with respect to Cuban migration. Firstly, continued, sustained research on younger Cuban migrants, who as noted in this research tend to have some quite distinctive motivations for migrating compared with earlier arrivals, may contribute further insights into the full expression of Cuban identity in contemporary Australia. Secondly, qualitative research into the entire Cuban population in Australia, providing data on their socioeconomic status for example, could add

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<sup>25</sup> The 2002 Conference about Latin American migration in Australia, *The Diaspora of the Latin American Imagination*, organised by Peter Read and Marivick Wyndham (ANU), was a significant exception. The conference produced a published conjoint work addressing the analysis of identity amongst Latin Americans in Australia, Spain and the US.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Bottomley (1979) on Greek migrants, Hage's (2002, 1997) work on Arab migrants, and Thomas's (1999) work on Vietnamese migrants.

another important dimension to the field. As the salsa dance boom continues in Australia and elsewhere, ongoing research into the provision of dance classes, collecting qualitative data from teachers and students with respect to their understandings of salsa dance, its relationship to Cuba, and of Cubans through dance, is likely to provide additional rich insights into the meanings of Cubanness for this small community in far away Australia.

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