No Little Havana: Recreating Cubanness in Sydney Australia

Euridice Tania Charón Cardona

BA; M. Oriental Studies; BSocSci (Hons)

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

School of Humanities and Social Science,

University of Newcastle

May 2008
This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission to candidature for the degree (except in cases where the Committee has granted approval for credit to be granted from previous candidature at another institution).

Signed: __________________________

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have materialised without the help and assistance of many people. First of all, I would like to express mil gracias to the Cubans and migrants from other Latin American countries who shared their memories, good humour, hospitality and plants with me. Special thanks to the people (they know who they are!) who put aside differences and taught me that there is always ground for understanding and mutual respect. Secondly, thanks to my supervisor Dr Michael Goddard for his continuous support, books, useful insights and help with my Spanglish during this long journey. Thanks also to Drs Peter Read and Marivick Wydham for inviting me to present a paper at their conference The Diaspora of Latin American Imagination, in Canberra 2002. The feedback given at the conference motivated me to look into other issues. I would like to thank my friends: the Australian and Latin American dance buddies who travelled with me down to Sydney for a year and a half to salsa clubs. I also would like to thank Dr Roger Markwick, Juanita Walford and other colleagues in the History Department of the University of Newcastle for their sympathetic ear and encouragement in different stages of this work. Finally this work is dedicated to mami y familia whose permanent questions about how Cubans live overseas always makes me think; to Tommy, my partner for his invaluable and unconditional support over these years and little Guillermo in the hope that one day he won’t forget where a half of his family came from.
Index

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ..........................................................................................................................7
HOW EVERYTHING STARTED..........................................................................................................................7
THE INITIAL FINDINGS: CHANGING FROM CARIBBEANS (WEST INDIANS) TO CUBANS..........................9
STUDYING CUBANS: METHODOLOGY AND RATIONALE OF THIS RESEARCH...........................................15
STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY...........................................................................................................................19

CHAPTER 2. CUBAN MIGRANTS AROUND THE WORLD AND IN AUSTRALIA .............................................23
CUBA IN THE COLONIAL TIMES FROM THE 16TH TO THE LATE 19TH CENTURY........................................24
CUBA IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA, 1902-1959..............................................................................................29
REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CUBAN MIGRATION....................................................................................34
   Economic, social and political accounts of Cuban migration post-1959....................................................37
   Golden exiles and gusanos.........................................................................................................................40
CUBAN MIGRATIONAL WAVES...................................................................................................................44
THE SETTLEMENT OF CUBAN MIGRANTS IN AUSTRALIA..........................................................................50
   Cuban migration to Australia......................................................................................................................54
CONCLUSION..................................................................................................................................................63

CHAPTER 3. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON IDENTITY AND CUBANIDAD..............................................66
FROM BOUNDARIES TO TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITY AND CREOLISATION..............................................67
VIEWS ABOUT ETHNIC IDENTITY IN THE CUBAN MIGRATION LITERATURE..........................................86
CUBANIDAD: FROM ORTIZ TO CONTEMPORARY TIMES WITHIN CUBA...................................................87
VIEWS ON CUBAN Identity AMONG THE CUBAN MIGRANTS....................................................................97
CONCLUSION.................................................................................................................................................104

CHAPTER 4. IMAGINING CUBA: THE ROLE OF POLITICS AND MUSIC IN THE FORMATION OF THE CUBAN IMAGE IN SYDNEY...............................................................107
INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................................................................107
POLITICS.......................................................................................................................................................108
SALSA ............................................................................................................................................................121
FINDINGS......................................................................................................................................................129
LYRICS..........................................................................................................................................................142
WHAT TO DANCE?......................................................................................................................................145
TOURISM: CUBA AS AN EXOTIC PLACE.........................................................................................................149
CONCLUSION...............................................................................................................................................157

CHAPTER 5. POLITICS, MUSIC AND DANCE IN THE MAINTENANCE AND RECREATION OF CUBANNESS.................................................................161
INTRODUCTION.............................................................................................................................................161
POLITICS.......................................................................................................................................................162
MUSIC AND DANCE.....................................................................................................................................180
CONCLUSION...............................................................................................................................................200
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.