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Mambi Totems and *Reconcentrado* Taboos:
Violence and the Unjust Dead in Cuban Literary and Visual Cultures

By

Eric Morales-Franceschini

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Rhetoric

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Judith Butler, Co-Chair
Professor Trinh Minh-ha, Co-Chair
Professor Samera Esmeir
Professor Wendy Brown

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Mambí Totems and *Reconcentrado* Taboos:
Violence and the Unjust Dead in Cuban Literary and Visual Cultures

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by Eric Morales-Franceschini

ABSTRACT

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Violence and the Specter of the Unjust Dead in Cuban Literary and Visual Cultures

by

Eric Morales-Franceschini

Doctor of Philosophy in Rhetoric

and the Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Judith Butler, Co-Chair
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This study examines the representational strategies that Cubans have employed in order to come to terms with violence in their revolutionary history and the extent to which such strategies have worked in the service of *alibi* as opposed to *critique*. Accordingly, the study looks most closely at the discursive and visual portrayals of the *mambí*, guerrilla soldiers of Cuba's wars for independence (1868-98) and, not incidentally, icons of Cuban identity and revolutionary ethos. Within or relative to these very portrayals and the same wartime history, however, stands the specter of the *reconcentrado*, victims to Spain's "camps of reconcentration" and by far the largest and most tragic casualties of the wars. Drawing on rhetorical and contrapuntal reads of war literature and historiography, political cartoons, monuments, and revolutionary era cinema, I tease out the myths and iconography by which the *mambí* has come to bespeak racial fraternity, virility, cunning, martyrdom and liberation, whereas, by stark contrast, the *reconcentrado* bespeaks vulnerability, imperialism, anonymity and atrocity.

In this respect, four representational strategies stand out: the *reconcentrado* as (i) a *campesina* or *señorita* damsel in distress under the threat of rape by Spaniards and in need of a machete-endowed savior; (ii) an emaciated, sickly mass of anonymous children with vacant gazes and no voice, carnal evidence of an atrocity that, presumably, speaks for itself yet clearly cites Holocaust iconography; (iii) interned *mambisa* or patriot who stoically bears her and her children's agony; or (iv) as sheer absence, where only the *mambises*, their heroic machete charges, and the cry "¡Viva Cuba Libre!" are visible and audible. Whichever the case, the actual history of antagonistic and coercive acts within or by the Liberation Army and any collateral responsibility for the unjust dead are disavowed; in lieu of critique, thus, the *reconcentrado* is rendered an *alibi* for revolutionary violence, centralized power, and nationalist interpellations in which sacrifice for the Patria constitutes the "sublime."

Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that the *reconcentrado* could signify otherwise. Given her agony, the paternalism with which she was dealt, and her labors against an unjust death, deaths for which patriotic consolations ring hollow, I argue the *reconcentrado*, as ethical figure and as historical fact, speaks on behalf of non-violence, democratic voice, and the summons to care for life at its most precarious. Such ethical hails have proven all the timelier in a “post-socialist” Cuba where *mambi* mythology and revolutionary identity have had to wrestle not only with transnational finance capital and consumerist culture but also the specters of (UMAP) labor camp *confinados* and Special Period *balseiros*.

DEDICATION

To Dr. Gregory Comnes,
who opened worlds to me.

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CHAPTER 1. CUBAN COUNTERPOINTS: DON MAMBÍ AND DOÑA RECONCENTRADA

He who knows how to die always prevails.
—José María de Heredia, “Himno del desterrado” (1825)

1.1. *Contrapunteos cubanos—Cuban counterpoints*

Fernando Ortiz’s *Contrapunteo cubano* (1940) recounts the history of Cuba as a “controversy” between its “two most important personages,” namely Don Tobacco and Doña Sugar. As Ortiz dramatized it, the two are sheer contrast:

The one is white, the other dark. Sugar is sweet and odorless; tobacco bitter and aromatic. Always in contrast! Food and poison, waking and drowsing, energy and dream, delight of the flesh and delight of the spirit, sensuality and thought, the satisfaction of an appetite and the contemplation of a moment’s illusion, calories of nourishment and puffs of fantasy, undifferentiated and commonplace anonymity from the cradle and aristocratic individuality recognized whereas it goes, medicine and magic, reality and deception, virtue and vice. Sugar is *she*; tobacco is *he*. Sugar cane was the gift of the gods, tobacco of the devils; she is the daughter of Apollo, he is the offspring of Persephone.¹

He continues:

steady work on the part of a few, intermittent jobs for many; the immigration of whites on the one hand, the slave trade on the other; liberty and slavery; skilled and unskilled labor; hands versus arms; men versus machines; delicacy versus brute force. The cultivation of tobacco gave rise to the small holding; that of sugar brought about the great land grants. In their industrial aspects tobacco belongs to the city, sugar to the country. Commercially the whole world is the market for our tobacco, while our sugar has only a single market. Centripetence and centrifugence. The native versus the foreigner. National sovereignty as against colonial status. The proud cigar band as against the lowly sack.²

For all their dissimilarities, however, it is tobacco and sugar’s “friendly bickering” and the “dramatic dialectic” of their histories that accounts for the idiosyncrasies of Cuban life—neither the one (tobacco) nor the other (sugar) but something else besides: “The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transculturations.”³

Ortiz’s essay is a classic—and rightly so. Who else has so provocatively teased out tobacco and sugar’s “human connotations” and their “complex transmutation of culture,” and who could deny their relevance in making sense of Cuban history and culture? Yet there are crucial senses in which the allegory may no longer resonate as it once did. Ironically enough, Ortiz may be credited with having written tobacco and sugar’s eulogy as early as 1940: “We have seen the fundamental

¹ Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 98.

differences between [tobacco and sugar] from the beginning until machines and capitalism gradually ironed out these differences, dehumanized their economy, and made their problems more and more similar.”⁴ At the essay’s closing, tobacco—that is, the emblem of Cuban sovereignty and artistry—emerges as but another mass-produced commodity beholden (much like sugar) to the fancies of foreign capital. And whereas Ortiz would nevertheless predict (or call for) a fairy tale ending, that is, sugar and tobacco “marrying and living happily ever after,” Cuba’s ensuing history proved only all the more tumultuous, not least since the Revolution of 1959.⁵

Doubtless, Ortiz employed ironic license when he invoked his “fairy tale ending,” which, after all, ends in an “unholy” Cuban trinity: sugar, tobacco, and (their offspring) alcohol.⁶ What he meant by invoking such a trinity, mysteriously and abruptly, in the closing lines of his essay is a matter for commentary and conjecture that need not lead us astray.⁷ For, whatever literary and ethnological merits, one wonders whether Ortiz’s celebrated “controversy” suffices to illuminate matters of violence and death within the Cuban imaginary. Granted, it was no mystery to Ortiz that sugar and tobacco had violent histories. Sugar meant the enslavement of Africans and tobacco the conquest of Arawak lands and lives. Sugar and tobacco have had their ties to armed resistance and radical politics, too. Formerly enslaved Afro-Cubans were prominent soldiers, guides, and healers in the nation’s wars for independence, just as white immigrant tobacco workers, isled and exiled alike, were key propagandists, fundraisers, and arms smugglers. Of these matters, Ortiz was well aware.⁸

But out of these very liberation wars emerged two entirely new “personages,” namely, the *mambí* and the *reconcentrado*. *Mambí* was the name pejoratively given to, yet defiantly taken on by, the independence guerrilla fighters of Cuba’s wars for liberation (1868-98). What once was a term meant to denote the “savagery” (i.e. blackness) of the rebel army became in Cuban vernacular a badge of unrivaled honor. By the year 1898 *mambises* were in fact beloved folk heroes with an “aesthetic” all their own: a multiracial cadre decked out in straw (*yarey*) hats with pulled-back brims, red scarves, white linen uniforms, and machetes. They would live on in Cuban history and the arts as those mounted warriors who cried out, “¡Viva Cuba Libre!” in fearless machete charges against a far more numerous and lethally armed foe. Indeed, in due course the *mambí* became *the* archetype of revolutionary ethos and national identity. As Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar noted in his classic essay, “Calibán” (1971), *mambí* is “the most venerated word in Cuba.”⁹

The term *reconcentrado*, by stark contrast, possesses no venerable qualities whatsoever. Meaning literally, “he or she who is reconcentrated,” *reconcentrado* was the name used to refer to any of the hundreds of thousands of Cuban civilians forcibly interned in what Spain called “reconcentration camps.” Between the years 1896-98 as many as 200,000 died of hunger and disease in these strategically neglected camps. By war’s end, they, at least those who survived, were a morbid spectacle that a war torn nation could not mend and would rather forget. Impossible to romanticize, their “aesthetic” became that of “ambulant skeletons” with “ghostly, sunken eyes” who

⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁵ This is not to say that sugar and tobacco, as indexes for social identities and productive relations, are no longer relevant as explanatory or interpretive variables to Cuban history and culture. Hardly. Sugar was no idle player in the newly emerging “moral economy” (i.e. voluntary labor) of a socialist Cuba, just as tobacco (i.e. cigars) would take on an aura of revolutionary bravado and potency in the hands and mouths of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and *los barbudos* (the bearded ones).

⁶ Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 93.

⁷ See Fernando Coronil’s excellent introduction to the Duke University Press edition of *Cuban Counterpoint*.

⁸ See especially Part II, “The Ethnography and Transculturation of Havana Tobacco and the Beginnings of Sugar in America,” of *Cuban Counterpoint*.

⁹ Roberto Fernández Retamar, “Calibán,” in *Caliban and Other Essays* (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 16.

wandered listlessly for alms and mercy. They would live on as tragic footnotes to otherwise “sublime” and “necessary” wars and as indexes of imperialist cruelty. Little else.

Hence, we encounter yet another Cuban counterpoint: the mambí is hero, the reconcentrado victim. Epic versus tragic, vitality versus vulnerability, uniformed versus naked, sacrosanct versus desecrated, a defiant cry as against silence, splendid monuments as against unmarked mass graves. Always in contrast! Voice and silence, avowal and disavowal, festivity and oblivion, revolution and atrocity, martyrdom and anonymity, power and powerlessness. Mambí is *he*, fellow at arms to Céspedes, Martí, and Maceo; reconcentrado is *she*, forever bound to the disgraced name Weyler. These, at least, are the attributes that each bespeaks within Cuban history, culture, and the arts. Whether they can or should testify otherwise is the subject of this critical inquiry.

Albeit only an echo of Ortiz’s marvelous allegory, thus, this project stages a “controversy” all its own between Don Mambí and Doña Reconcentrada, so to speak. Drawing on rhetorical and “contrapuntal” reads of war diaries, political oratory, photographs, political cartoons, and films, I flesh out the myths, symbols, and iconography by which the *mambí* and *reconcentrado* have been portrayed and coded within the Cuban imaginary and ask whether they can (and should) speak or signify otherwise. As I hope to elucidate, a “controversy” between *mambí* and *reconcentrado* opens up a dialogue on liberatory aesthetics and ethics that tends more critically to revolutionary violence and nationalistic interpellations and that poses unsettling questions about “bearing responsibility” for the unjust dead. For if the *mambí* is *the* figure of redemptive violence and sublime abnegation for the Patria, the *reconcentrado* is that specter which haunts any such sacralized senses of violence, death, and nation.

1.2. *Dulce et decoro est—Dying to Live*

Shortly after the Ten Years’ War (1868-78) commenced, José Martí wrote a drama in poetic verse titled *Abdala* (1869), published in the first (and only) edition to his periodical *La Patria Libre*. Against the agonized pleas of his mother, Espirta, the play’s protagonist, Abdala, takes up his spear and leads his fellow Nubians to war against would-be conquerors. In the play’s closing scene, Abdala returns from the battlefield mortally wounded. Dying in the arms of fellow warriors and in the presence of his inconsolable mother, his last words read: “Nubia [that is, a fictional Cuba] is victorious! I die happy: death/Little does it matter, for I was able to save her [the patria].../Oh, how sweet it is to die when one dies/Struggling audaciously to defend the patria!”¹⁰

A fifteen-year-old white Havana student—son, moreover, to a Valencian father and Canary Islander mother—Martí had conjured up a sense of identity with the Afro-Cuban men of Oriente’s swamplands and mountainous jungles, where the war for Cuba Libre was most alive and treacherous. He had also, literarily at least, rendered their deaths a “happy” and “sublime” affair. The young romantic was not alone in glorifying a certain manner of dying. Fifty-year-old “Perucho” Figueredo, Oriente lawyer and landowner, wrote the words and melody to what became (and remains) the Cuban national anthem: *La Bayamesa* (1868). A battle hymn that liberation soldiers heard in the field, *La Bayamesa* called on Cubans to bear arms and reassured them to fear not a “glorious” death: “for to die for one’s country is to live.”¹¹ The fact that *Abdala’s* and *La Bayamesa’s* authors died as patriot rebels in these wars only made such prose all the more prophetic and

¹⁰ ¡Nubia venció! Muero feliz: la muetre/poco me importa, pues logré salvarla.../¡Oh, que dulce es morir cuando se muere/Luchando audaz por defender la patria! José Martí, *Abdala*. (Barcelona: Red Ediciones, S.L., 2012), 24.

¹¹ *No temáis una muerte gloriosa, que morir por la patria es vivir*. Lyrics and sheet music found in Gonzalo de Quesada, *The War in Cuba* (Liberty Publishing Co., 1896).

majestic.¹² Indeed, by the time war was renewed in 1895, dying (or having died) for the Patria took on a moral grandeur in Cuban rhetoric and consciousness that scant else could rival.

Why death holds such sway within nationalist literature and consciousness is not entirely self-evident. Benedict Anderson has pointed out that modern nations write their “biographies” through a peculiar inversion of genealogy, that is, they are marked not by a series of births inasmuch as deaths. Not ordinary deaths of course: “exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts.”¹³ Deaths of a “special kind.” Violent deaths. That death is such a lively issue within nationalist “imaginings,” Anderson argued, bespeaks a close affinity with religious modes of thought. That is to say, nations, too, transform the facts of fatality and finitude into matters of transcendence and continuity, beyond the earthly body and biological time of any given citizen or generation—the “mystery of re-generation,” Anderson called it. Nations, in other words, have the capacity to evoke love and kinship between the dead, the living, and the yet unborn despite their lack of “natural” (i.e. blood) ties. So dear is that attachment that it makes it possible for millions not so much to kill inasmuch as willingly die and tender all manner of “colossal sacrifices.”¹⁴

Mid-to-late nineteenth century Cuban separatists were no strangers to violent deaths and the idiom and ethos of sacrifice. Over a period of thirty years (1868-98) they waged three wars against imperial Spain in hopes of founding a Republic “with all and for the good of all,” as Martí’s revolutionary slogan echoed. And as one rebelling generation after the next fell shy of the revolutionary mark, the calls for sacrifice grew ever more dramatic. “Everything, absolutely everything, has to be offered to the *Patria*,” exhorted Fermín Valdés-Domínguez, *mambí* colonel.¹⁵ Whether gladly or compelled by circumstances, three generations of Cubans did offer up everything to that phantasmal Patria: their lives, families, careers, savings, harvests, livestock, and worldly belongings. And by war’s end, in the summer of 1898, hundreds of thousands had either perished or scarcely survived what proved to be the longest and most catastrophic of liberation wars in the Americas and the largest scale colonial war for *any* European power prior to the twentieth century.¹⁶

Whatever the “stillness of death and the silence of desolation” that would come in the wake of the wars for independence, thus, Cuban separatists had their eyes (or, rather, arms) set on a sovereign Republic of greater prosperity and dignity for all, come what may. “We prefer to see our Cuba converted into a mound of ashes, and the cadavers of its sons reduced to charred remains, before consenting to the continued rule over this unhappy land by Spanish domination,” said Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, provisional President to the Republic of Cuba.¹⁷ His colleague, Manuel Sanguily, Ten Years’ War veteran and *mambí* colonel, pledged that Cubans were ready to see “[their] land transformed into an immense tomb, covered in ashes, bespattered with stains of blood.”¹⁸ As morbid or hyperbolic as their prose may sound to disenchanted ears, it had its correlates not only in material but also symbolic reality. Ashes, charred remains, tombs, blood—are these not the artifacts of ritual sacrifice and the sacred?

¹² Legend has it that Perucho cried out (his last words, presumably) “to die for the Patria is to live” as he faced his firing squad.

¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. (New York: Verso, 1991), 206.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁵ Fermín Valdés-Domínguez, *Diario de soldado*, ed. Hiram Dupotey Fideaux, 4 vols. (Havana, 1973), 1: 35.

¹⁶ See: Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (University of Pittsburg Press, 1982).

¹⁷ Cited in Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purpose of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 20.

¹⁸ Manuel Sanguily, “Discurso del Señor Manuel Sanguily,” November 5, 1897, in *Por la independencia* (New York, 1897), 45.

While Cuban officials' proclamations drew on a decidedly secular republicanism, the wars' and revolution's larger discourse abounded in religiously inflected terms and senses. In this regard, burnt offerings and spilt blood were *the* metonyms in the *sacri-ficium*, the "making sacred," of the Patria. Each, not incidentally, is tied culturally for Cubans, be they Catholic or Lucumí, to the sacred. Whether in a biblical or santero sense, offerings made by fire (i.e. burnt incense, oils, herbs) and by bloodletting (i.e. the ritual slaughter of "clean" animals) are understood to fulfill salutary or indeed sanctifying functions: to expiate sin, cleanse the defiled, heal the sick, give thanks, or to bless.¹⁹ And by way of both, sacrifice by fire and by bloodletting, Cubans came to figure and understand their revolution, their Patria and themselves as sacralized.

Fire, or the torch (*la tea*) specifically, was arguably the most dreaded and efficient weapon of the Liberation Army—leaving aside, for now, the myth and lore of the fierce machete. In the war of 1895-98, Generals Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo had their *mambí* armies deliberately target and set ablaze the island's sugar estates. With minimal risks and resources, they were able to reduce the colony's most lucrative industry to ash and, in due course, expect that a bankrupt Spain would gladly relinquish an island bereft of its natural wealth. Albeit worthless to wealthy Spanish and American planters, a torched island was an act and thing rich with symbolic connotations to Cuban nationalists. Salvador Cisneros Betancourt reiterated in 1897 that Cubans would "*purify* the atmosphere with fire and leave nothing standing from San Antonio to Maisí [i.e. from one end of the island to the other]."²⁰ Commander Gómez would go as far as to refer to the torch as a "blessed" object, possessed of a power to cleanse the island of an accursed economy and the industry with the closest ties to slavery, inequality, and exploitation.

Sacrificial bloodshed, too, was more than a mere material consequence of war: it came to define what it meant to be, and who could rightly identify as, "Cuban." The *independentista* newspaper, *La República*, stipulated that those entitled to the name "Cuban" are "those who are exposed to danger in the field of insurrection, those who have *shed their blood in combat* after having been despoiled of what they owned, those who have *sacrificed on the altar of the patria* their family, their positions, and their possessions."²¹ Hence, it was not bloodletting per se (i.e. the killing of another) that constituted a sacred act inasmuch as offering one's *own* blood. For just as religious sacrifice calls for "clean" and otherwise "worthy" offerings (i.e. first born males), so, too, did the Patria call for the blood and bodies of her "true and good sons."

In this respect, Cuban women were the "soul of the revolution" insofar they were those who offered up their *mambí* husbands and, above all, sons to the Patria. Martí, as ideological leader of the 1890s Cuba Libre movement, paid tributes to the "widowed mother who sees her son depart for the wilderness in search of the grave of his father [fallen in the Ten Years' War], to die to be worthy of his father, to provide with his body one more step toward the achievement of *patria*."²² Indeed, *patria* (Greek for "lineage, ancestry, tribe" and Latin, *pater*, for "father") was a patrimonial affair that called on women (as mothers and wives) to "sublimely resign" themselves to the loss of their beloved men. It also called on them to morally coerce them unto war. Manuel Céspedes, the "Father of the Nation," clarified in his 1870 manifesto to the Cuban people: "With what profound scorn would a wife look upon a husband who refused to join the insurrection, would a mother view a pusillanimous son, would a girlfriend look at her fiancé. And with what pride would a woman in

¹⁹ See: David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in Afro-Cuban Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

²⁰ *El Cubano Libre*, April 15, 1897, 2. Quoted in Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 29.

²¹ Quoted in Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 81.

²² *Ibid.*, 91.

any of these three situations look upon a husband, a son, and a lover, covered with the dust of combat and bearing the laurels of battle.”²³

By this account no other woman was more “Cuban” than Mariana Grajales. Although she was renowned as a courageous nurse and director of field hospitals and rebel workshops in the Ten Years’ War (1868-78), Mariana Grajales’ true renown derived from the fact that her husband and eleven sons all fought (and all but two died) in the wars for liberation. Her sons, José and Antonio Maceo, would in the course of the wars meritoriously rise from the rank-and-file to become the two most formidable generals of the Liberation Army. According to Maria Cabrales, herself famed by virtue of patriarchic affiliation (i.e. as Antonio Maceo’s wife), once war broke out in 1868, Mariana ran to her room, came out with a crucifix and said, “Everyone on their knees, fathers and sons, before Christ . . . and let us swear to liberate the Patria or die for it.”²⁴ Her only regret, allegedly, was that she did not have more sons to offer to the Patria.

In short, it was made clear to and, at times, ardently embraced by Cubans that dying (or offering unto death) for the patria was as “redemptive” as it was “necessary.” The fact that a crucifix and Jesus Christ would figure so heavily in accounts of *the* Cuban family (i.e. the Maceos) only lent all the more moral and spiritual credibility to calls for “sublime abnegation.” No other act, however, was more “sublime” or “glorious” than the consummating act of dying in outright combat. For whereas Jesus’ Passion bespeaks a morally redemptive dramaturgy of serene nonresistance and self-sacrifice, the late nineteenth century Cuban senses of martyrdom and sublimity were inextricably bound to the enactment of armed violence—more Sparta than Jerusalem (or, in a Caribbean dialect, more Hatuey than Las Casas). And in this context no other martyrs were more venerated than the “Apostle” (Martí) and the “Bronze Titan” (Maceo), each succumbing to an epic fall (*caída*) in the field of battle.

Whatever the moral eloquence and military prowess of a Martí or a Maceo, however, we know well that Cubans waged their war as guerrillas. Relying on the torch and mosquitoes to wage their war, Cuban rebels wisely circumvented classical battles against a better armed and more numerous foe. They ambushed and sabotaged, harassed and torched, eluded and deferred in order to wear out the Spanish army—morally, physically, and logistically. And only as a last resort did they face their enemies on battlefields, usually, at that, to draw them nearer to rifle-fire from concealed positions!²⁵ Yet this truth, a strategically sound truth, did and has not halted mythical portrayals of these wars and the *mambises* as warriors who fearlessly rode into battle against daunting odds—machetes drawn, Cuban flag waving, bugle sounding off, crying out *¡Viva Cuba Libre!*

As French critic Roland Barthes once stated, however, “Myth is a *value*, truth is no guarantee for it; nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi.”²⁶ The thesis that myth is an alibi resonates deftly with René Girard’s theses on violence and the “scapegoat.” Girard has famously argued that (religious) sacrifice is a mechanism by which a collectivity obliquely resolves its own antagonisms and brings about a new equilibrium, however volatile and destined to erupt in violence anew. What facilitates this is a “scapegoat,” that which is held culpable for the unrest and which is thereby either expelled or killed in order to restore stability. At root is what Girard has called “mimetic desire” and the rivalry that emerges between members of a collectivity for a desired object.²⁷

²³ Ibid., 94.

²⁴ Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (University Press of Florida, 2005), 63-66.

²⁵ For excellent discussions of military strategy and tactics in the wars, see: John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism: Volume I, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

²⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 123.

²⁷ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

If Cuba was the object of mimetic rivalry, then Cuba *Libre* and the *mambises* were “her” mythical inflexion and sacrificial victims. But it seems misled, indeed contradictory, to say that the *mambises* were “scapegoats.” We are not, after all, talking about an already existent bourgeois myth (as with Barthes) or ancestral tribe (as with Girard) inasmuch as a *revolutionary* war to found a *new* order. In this respect, Georges Sorel’s theses on myth and violence as “creative” bear relevance. Sorel’s myth of choice was the General Strike. The idea of an epic standoff that brings capital to a halt and marks the dawn of a new economy and morality would, whatever its feasibility, engender the “serious, formidable and sublime work” that Revolution calls for in the unsavory present. Just as with the early Christians and their apocalyptic myth, it would arouse in workers the “forces of enthusiasm” requisite to bear “innumerable sacrifices” and venerate the martyred dead. Indeed, for Sorel, violence is a “creative” force. Workers’ propaganda by deed and the state’s violent reprisals are “acts of war” that serve to heighten class awareness and stir acts of heroism on behalf of the kingdom to come.²⁸

The myth that stirred Cubans to undertake the “serious, formidable and sublime work” of their late nineteenth century revolution was neither socialist nor internationalist but *nationalist*: a *Patria* “with all and for the good of all.” The “Manifesto of Montecristi” (1895), penned by Martí and Gómez, could not speak with the “majesty” of national sovereignty inasmuch as faith in a “moral republicanism” that would emerge from a “calamitously necessary” war.²⁹ Whatever the abstractness of terms like “independence” and *patria*, Cubans for Cuba Libre fully expected collective betterment of themselves and their lives—a “just republic.” And there were many vices and many grievances to address. Hence, Martí’s prose and oratory of the 1890s, reaching out to as many constituencies as it could, closely aligned the concepts of “independence” and *patria* with items as various as agrarian reform, full employment, free education for all, better wages and working conditions, free trade, and women’s suffrage.³⁰

No other morality tale, however, acted more decisively on the present than the nationalist myth of racial harmony or even transcendence. “There are neither whites nor blacks, only Cubans,” avowed Antonio Maceo, the legendary mulatto General.³¹ Martí referred to the idea of “race” as a “sin against humanity” that spoiled our ability to judge “character” and reward “virtue and creativity.”³² Black intellectual and chief rebel organizer, Juan Gualberto Gómez, extolled the ethos of “racial fraternity” that set apart the Cuba Libre movement as truly “redemptive labor.”³³ And in this regard no other revolutionary institution was more racially (and socially) integrated than the Liberation Army of 1895-98: as many as 60 percent of soldiers and 40 percent of commissioned officers were men of color.³⁴

A liberation movement and multiracial army that enacted (albeit imperfectly) as much as espoused a politics of racial fraternity was, indeed, a striking anomaly in an Atlantic world under the sway of Darwin and scientific racism. But let us be clear that if racial fraternity was constitutive of the *Patria*, such was the case only insofar as it was predicated on camaraderie in arms—camaraderie

²⁸ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), Essay IV.

²⁹ “The Montecristi Manifesto,” *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Esther Allen (Penguin Books, 2002), 337-345.

³⁰ Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, xxv.

³¹ Philip S. Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The “Bronze Titan” of Cuba’s Struggle for Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

³² “My Race,” in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, 320.

³³ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 213.

³⁴ Racial categories were not even recorded in army registers; the only marks aside from one’s rank were “C” or “CC,” standing for “citizen” (*ciudadano*) or “Cuban citizen” (*ciudadano cubano*). Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 39.

“certified by death,” as Martí poetically intoned.³⁵ What mattered most was whether “true” Cubans, particularly men, would offer themselves to (as well as kill for) the Patria as their fathers and grandfathers had. For as deaths mounted year after year and war after war, Cubans began to draw on a mythical past of exemplary sacrifice and redemptive violence as much as they did on a mythical future of collective virtue and “peaceful labor.” Cuban Chargé d’Affaires to the United States, Gonzalo de Quezada, explained that “to teach young Cuban men how to die, [they must] remember all the martyrs” and “vow never to dishonor the history written in sublime blood.”³⁶ And remember they did: the names Céspedes, Martí, and Maceo; the dates October 10 (the cry of Yara) and February 24 (of Baire); the anthem, *La Bayamesa*; the tricolor flag; and the *mambí* ethos of “sublime abnegation” would all live on as moral “summons” to generations of Cubans thereafter.³⁷ None other than a twenty-seven year old lawyer and rebel leader, Fidel Castro, would say at his 1953 tribunal: “I shall let the Apostle [Martí] speak for me: ‘There is a limit to weeping over the graves of the dead, and that is the infinite love of patria and glory that one vows over their remains, a fearless love that never drifts or weakens; because the bodies of the martyrs are an altar more beautiful than any other honor. When one dies in the arms of a grateful patria, death ends, prison shatters; and, at last, by the graces of death, life begins.’”³⁸

Of course not all of the wars’ dead could be so reverently narrated within that history of “sublime blood.” Hardly. In point of fact *mambí* soldiers accounted for only 1 in every 20 Cuban fatalities!³⁹ No other event explains this disparity better than the peculiar disaster that was “reconcentration.” As a military strategy, the Spanish army laid waste to the Cuban countryside, despoiling it of all sentient life and life-giving resources, and forcibly interned hundreds of thousands of Cuban civilians into “camps of reconcentration.” There, living in squalor and scarcely provisioned, as many as 200,000 *reconcentrados*, as they came to be known, died by starvation and disease. Beriberi, dysentery, malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis, and typhoid ravaged their bodies, not least children under six years of age, as mass graves became an everyday expedient of the war. It was hoped that this morbid spectacle would compel the clandestine Cuban rebels to surrender. But no surrender came, only more misery and hundreds of thousands living under the sentence of death—a death that could only perversely be described as “sublime.” And it is in this respect that this study shall keep alive, pace Barthes, the question of myth and its alibi(s).

1.3. *The Unsacrificeable—A Living Death*

As of the years 1896-98, one could not yet speak of “genocide” or “crimes against humanity” in any morally or legally salient sense, nor was there any self-conscious “art of the unrepresentable” to consult. But it was no secret that something was terribly amiss. “Unspeakable,” “unimaginable,” “unprecedented,” and “unthinkable” were all words routinely invoked to describe what otherwise went by an artless euphemism: “reconcentration.” As a *modality* or *technique* of violence that was neither conventional combat nor senseless slaughter, so-called reconcentration did not abide by the existent regimes of what normatively constituted “civilized” and “savage” violence. It killed en

³⁵ The Montecrsiti Manifesto,” *José Martí: Selected Writings*, 337.

³⁶ Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 106.

³⁷ See Pérez, “Nation in Waiting,” *Structure of Cuban History*, 115-170.

³⁸ Fidel Castro Ruz, *La historia me absolverá* (Política: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 2007), 67.

³⁹ These is my calculation based on estimates found in Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*; Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*; and Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Herida profunda* (La Habana: Edicions, UNION, 1998).

masse *without modern weaponry* and, technically, *without shedding blood*, just as it recklessly “let die” those who should have been safeguarded from the ravages of war, namely noncombatants.

Whatever *it* was, those who were taken by it did not “shed their blood in combat” and, thereby, teetered at the thresholds of the sacrificial motif and nationalist honorariums. They bore no arms—neither torch nor machete—and they were interned in a space conspicuous for its *absence* of war or combat proper. No agency: only naked hunger and illness. It is noteworthy in this respect that, albeit less “sublime,” one needed not necessarily bear arms and die in battle to constitute a martyr for Cuba Libre. No other case is more exemplary than the eight Havana medical students who were executed in the midst of the Ten Years’ War. Within only two days of their arrest, the eight students (all young men, ages 16-20) were executed by firing squad for, allegedly, having desecrated the tombstone of a Spanish official. Their unjust deaths and memories were hailed throughout the wars for liberation and, to this day, enjoy a commemorative regard that only Martí, Maceo, and Céspedes surpass.⁴⁰ Albeit unarmed, thus, their case contrasts remarkably with that of the *reconcentrados*. For, however farcical their trial, the medical students, exact and relatively few in number, died a ceremonious death. Their blood was shed, and, evidently, it was shed *for* Cuba Libre.

By stark contrast, *reconcentrados* were peasant women and children dying *en masse* throughout the island and never once accorded the dignities of a trial or last rites. Their deaths were not marked by bloodshed, and they were never, officially at least, accused of any crime. Quite contrarily, Spanish war decrees (*bandos*) called on the “rural inhabitants” of Cuba to “reconcentrate” themselves (*reconcentrarse*) in the nearest fortified town or city so as to “prevent resolute dangers to the honorable inhabitants of this Island [that is, Cuba].”⁴¹ Dying of hunger and disease and under the pretext of a humanitarian measure, how could their deaths count as murder or as capital punishment? No rifle or artillery fire, no bayonets, no garrotes, no iconic torture devices—only undernourishment and pathogens to blame. And how could one speak of martyrs and martyrdom?

Derived from the Greek word for “witness” (*martis*), “martyr” and “martyrdom” were terms coined by the early Christian Church to refer to those Christians who, facing tortuous deaths at the hands of Roman authorities, refused to renounce their faith. Yet it would seem quite out of order to refer to the *reconcentrado* dead as having “bore witness” to something sacred. They were not known to have defiantly professed their faith in Cuba Libre, nor were they known to have faced their drawn-out (bloodless) deaths with “sublime resignation.” Did their deaths constitute, thus, the “scandal of a meaningless death”—to borrow Giorgio Agamben’s phrase?⁴²

Agamben, in *Remnants of Auschwitz* (2002), has taken care to criticize the will to make sense of the senseless. He quotes Bruno Bettelheim, a Dachau survivor, on the matter: “By calling the victims of the Nazis ‘martyrs’, we falsify their fate.” As well as Primo Levi, Auschwitz survivor: “What is terrifying is that it [the “extermination”] was senseless...”⁴³ Senseless? Let us be clear that *reconcentrado* deaths and “living-deaths” were not senseless *per se*. It may have been “senseless” that one particular family or child suffered as they did and that others were spared, but their interment as

⁴⁰ José Martí played no minor role in their commemoration with his poem: “A mis hermanos muertos el 27 de Noviembre [1871].”

⁴¹ Guzmán, *Herida profunda*, 217.

⁴² Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Zone Books, 1999), 26-27. Agamben points out that early Christians did not agree as to whether these deaths were commendable or senseless (*perire sine causa*). Did they not defy the teachings that Jesus had died for all, and why, after all, would the Lord desire the death of innocents? Out of these theological disputes emerged a doctrine on martyrdom, citing the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, which made it possible to render the “scandal of a meaningless death” into a divine act. Matthew 10: 32-33: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26-30.

a whole was a calculated war measure with punitive and preemptive vectors. The fact that Cuba's "rural inhabitants" were targeted was no coincidence, after all: no other class of Cubans was better situated to serve as auxiliaries (i.e. nurses, cooks, spies, etc.) to the Liberation Army and rebel cause—and serve many did, however (in)voluntarily. Hence, whether or not they had ever aided and abetted or were kin to a Cuban *mambí*, their "living-deaths" as *reconcentrados* were far from senseless or inconsequential to Spanish as well as Cuban war officiates.

But their fates as the "living-dead" of the camps situated them a far cry from constituting martyrs or "sacrificial offerings" to the Patria. *Reconcentrados* were unarmed civilians who died sickly and gaunt, anonymously and silently, with no heroic deeds or dictums to their credit. Their deaths may have been "tragic," colloquially put, but hardly exemplary or sacral. After all, if they could not be likened to Spartans (or a *ñáñigo* of the Afro-Cuban Abakúa fraternity), nor could they be likened to a Socrates or a Jesus. Both Socrates and Jesus freely faced their deaths and permitted miscarriages of justice to be carried out: Socrates forgoes the opportunity to flee in exile and voluntarily drinks his hemlock; Jesus prophesies his betrayal and guilty verdict but solemnly bears his cross. Nor were their self-sacrificial deaths in vain: the one on behalf of philosophical truth and the other to expiate all of humanity's sin, respectively. It would be an utter absurdity, however, to speak of *reconcentrados* as having freely, let alone graciously, sacrificed themselves for the greater posterity of Cuba. Had sacrifice thereby "lost all rights and dignity," as Jean-Luc Nancy has stipulated?⁴⁴

Nancy is not alone in trying to make sense of the ethical and epistemological peculiarities of concentration and death camps. Agamben, in *Homo Sacer* (1995), has argued that within the "the camp" life is but "naked" (*nuda*), a mere existence one kills but does not thereby murder or desecrate.⁴⁵ Hannah Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), provocatively figured colonial Africa as that "phantom world" in which "natives" are to Europeans "just another form of animal life" that one killed but did not thereby murder.⁴⁶ Her final chapter concludes, as near parallel, that "the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human" was the ghettoized and encamped European Jews' "greatest danger."⁴⁷ But it was her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) that addressed the Nazi's "Final Solution" most pointedly. Rejecting the term "genocide," Arendt argued that what makes the Nazi atrocities so noteworthy is that they were *not* unruly massacres; rather, they were a series of "administrative massacres organized by the state apparatus." In search, thus, for a more satisfying name to confer upon the event and its truest horror, she coined her own neologism: the "banality of evil."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy "The Unsacrificeable," *Yale French Studies* 79 issue on "Literature and the Ethical Question" (1991): 20-38.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), especially Part II.

⁴⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd Ed. (Meridian Books, 1958). There are many inconsistencies in this work nevertheless. It is odd or troubling that Arendt would claim that it is only until Chinese and Indian "coolie" labor is imported to South Africa that "the real crime began, because everyone ought to have known what he was doing," 206. This seems to exculpate all prior wrong or at least relegate it to the category of reckless endangerment and negligence rather than murder and thus repeats what she critiques. Nor are the Americas any part of her study, which would have revealed Las Casas and Montesinos, among others, as aware of a "crime," indeed a "sin," taking place.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 299. She went as far as to note that the ancient and medieval European customs of "outlawry" and excommunication had the effect of placing a person at the mercy of anyone he met and his death outside the realms of law and the sacral. Again, I am not sure what to make of the fact that Arendt would so readily place the African within the realm of the "animal" yet keep the Jew within the world of the human—albeit "nothing but human."

⁴⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics, 2004), 294. The term "genocide" is credited as Raphael Lemkin's neologism first found in his seminal work, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), which cites as other historically notorious "wars of extermination" the following cases: the decimations of Carthage by the Romans in 146 B.C., of Jerusalem by Titus in 72 A.D., the

Whatever the utility of concepts such as “bare life” or “banality of evil” for the case of Cuba, our inquiry likewise endeavors to come to ethically and aesthetically sound terms with violence and its excesses. Matters of representational tact and facility are of course no strangers to many artists and intellectuals in the wake of the Holocaust (or Shoah). Theodor Adorno is renowned for having asserted that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.” As explicated in his essay “Commitment” (1962), Adorno worried that any aesthetic “stylization” of brutality in the world might elicit enjoyment or remove something of the “horror” that the account putatively represents. He worried, more specifically, that any such renderings would make it easier for spectators to “play along with the culture that gave birth to murder.”⁴⁹ So serious is the risk of doing injustice to the victims and their reality that intellectuals have invoked reverent silence as the most fitting ethic to embrace.⁵⁰ Elie Weisel’s “Plea for the Dead” (1968) quotes an ancient proverb to this end: “Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know... So, learn to be silent.”⁵¹ Yet, as Adorno himself reckoned, any art that was to eschew “the problem of suffering” could not “stand upright before justice.”⁵² In his Frankfurt lectures of 1965, Adorno clarified that “it could equally well be said, on the other hand, that one *must* write poems [after Auschwitz], in keeping with Hegel’s statement in *Aesthetics* that as long as there is an awareness of suffering among humans there must also be art as the objective form of that awareness.”⁵³ And while Adorno conceded to the “antinomies” of ethics and aesthetics after Auschwitz, there is a moment in these same lectures where he invokes the “tortureable body” as that which all “committed” art must, in the end, bring to our awareness.⁵⁴

No one in recent times has more meticulously scrutinized the “tortureable body,” as it were, than Elaine Scarry in her *The Body in Pain* (1985). Scarry worked from the premise that bodily pain is notoriously difficult to verbalize or otherwise communicate to others such that they, too, can appreciate its sentient force and reality. This relative difficulty to “make real” and “visible” (via language or artifact) the physical pain of one’s self or others begets the relative ease with which others can doubt, appropriate, or altogether deny its existence. Hence, as Scarry has detailed, regimes of power can and have spoken about torture and war as though mutilations, injury, and death either never occurred or were only incidental (rather than essential) to the fact.⁵⁵ For even the wounded body must reckon with “referential instability.” Scars or missing limbs or an agonized look on one’s face do not *in and of themselves* communicate to others what exactly happened and who or what is responsible. The wounded body and its advocates must formulate an art and “language of agency” that renders suffering real and that militates against its co-optation under the “insignia” of perpetrators and offending regimes. The paradox, thus, is that to confer reality upon the sentient fact of an aggrieved body one must rely on artifice and “invention.” In other words, giving voice to

Christian Crusades against Islam in the Levant (c. 1095-1300), and the Ottoman massacres of Armenians in the First World War.

⁴⁹ See Theodor W. Adorno, “Commitment” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. A. Arato and E. Gephardt (Continuum Publishing Co., 1982), especially 312-13; Adorno, *Metaphysics*; and Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Routledge, 1997), 361-73.

⁵⁰ See for instance: Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Syracuse University Press Edition, 2003); George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (Yale University Press Edition, 1998).

⁵¹ Elie Weisel, *Legends of our Time* (Schocken Books, 1968).

⁵² Adorno, “Commitment,” 313.

⁵³ Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 110; can also look to *Negative Dialectics* Part III Chapter 3

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, *in passim*. Adorno attributes the notion of the “tortureable body” to Bertolt Brecht.

⁵⁵ Elaine Scarry, “The Structure of Torture: The Conversion of Real Pain into the Fiction of Power,” and “The Structure of War: The Juxtaposition of Injured Bodies and Unanchored Issues,” in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

suffering is an activity laden with artistry and poetics as much as it is the sheer force of pain and the “problem of power.”⁵⁶

Hayden White has elaborated a similar thesis relative to history, however aggrieved or catastrophic. Just as the tortured body is susceptible to having many stories told about it, so, too, are historical events. For White, historical events do not themselves dictate how one can “emplot” the story one tells about those events. Whatever the documentary evidence, that is, history never so much re-presents what happened inasmuch as *narrates* what *putatively* happened and *why* it mattered or “turned out” as it did. Drawing on the cultural *mythoi* at his or her disposal, the historian as storyteller recounts what-was as tragic, comical, romantic, ironic, or the like and thereby makes sense of an otherwise unruly, fragmented corpus of “factual” records and situations. Even an event as morally catastrophic and momentous as the Shoah, argued White, cannot do away with such indeterminacy and creative license. Hence, it may be the case that one should be held accountable to *ethical* as much as *veridical* criteria—i.e. that one not only speak or write truthfully but also respectfully—but White has cautioned against the stipulation that a serious issue calls for a serious genre. His case in point is Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, which makes use of humor, irony, the “low-brow” comic book genre, and animalized characters to touching and provocative effect.⁵⁷

That the *reconcentrado*’s emaciated body stood (and stands) out as *the* iconic datum to the moral disaster that was reconcentration does not, consequently, mean that it speaks for itself—let alone effortlessly. Nor does it mean that the trope of tragedy and a realist aesthetic are the only (or most) edifying ways to tend to the unjust dead, or dying, and their calamity. Let us recall that our inquiry hopes to tease out what representational strategies have been at Cubans’ disposal to thematize violence and to what extent they have worked in the service of *critique* more so than *alibi*. Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) tells us that such judgments must take into account the capacity for “atrocious images” to “haunt” us. For Sontag, visual portrayals must contextualize the misery and wretchedness they stand for or speak to. Rather than depict generically and elicit mere sympathy for those who suffer, such portrayals ought, she proposed, to “invite” the witness to partake in an ethically and politically robust retrospect that asks who is culpable, whether they can be held accountable, and what it would mean to act accordingly. For, however rightly aroused, pity and moral disgust do not substantively address our and others’ political (dis)empowerment. Rather, they much too readily profess our “innocence” and ask little more from us than charity—as opposed, say, to critique and a politics of solidarity.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Scarry, *Body in Pain*, especially the Introduction.

⁵⁷ Hayden White, “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed., S. Friedländer, 37-53. Also: Introduction to *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973); and “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978).

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004), 102, 117. The relevant literature I have consulted includes: John Berger, “Photographs of Agony” in *Understanding a Photograph*, ed. Geoff Dyer (Penguin Books, 2013); *Beautiful Suffering: Photography and the Traffic in Pain*, ed. M. Reinhardt, H. Edwards, and E. Duganne (University of Chicago Press, 2007); *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, ed. G. Batchen, et al. (London: Reaktion Boosk, 2012);

Stanely Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (John Wiley & Sons, 2001); James Dawes, *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (Harvard University Press, 2007); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Susie Linfield, *The Criel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (University of Chicago, 2010); Carolyn Dean, *The Fragility of Empathy after the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2004); Christina Twomey, “Framing Atrocity: Photography and Humanitarianism,” *History of Photography* 36:3 (2012): 255-64; Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (University of California Press, 2007); Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (Rutgers University Press, 2004); James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: lynching photography in America* (Twin Palms, 2000).

This problematic is only aggravated by the fact that, as Judith Butler has stressed, our “responsiveness” to others is always already prefigured by those normative regimes and “frames” that render this or that act legible as unjust and this or that life as “grievable.” Trying to make sense of our responsibility to even those who defy our norms of likeness, Butler has called for narrative and visual accounts of others’ suffering that “awaken” us to the “precariousness” of life, which is to say, our ineradicable vulnerability to injury and loss as well as our interdependency on each other’s labor and welfare. Taking her cues from Levinas’ ethical philosophy, she has argued that the (human) face constitutes an ethical proxy for “injurability” and the sacred commandment not to kill.⁵⁹ “Giving face” to others as such renders their life all the more dignified, their loss all the more grievous, and our responsibility for them all the more earnest. But, as Butler has clarified, there are techniques by which the face can be “effaced.” Indeed, effacement may operate by sheer “occlusion,” whereby others’ suffering falls outside the frame altogether: no name or testimonial or ravaged body as evidence of a precarious life or wrongful death. Less obviously, however, effacement may occur *by means of* representation. The face of others may be conveyed to me, for instance, as that of a “menacing Other” that endangers me and my kin’s lives and welfare. Or others’ faces may be depicted as joyful and gratified in ways that fail to vocalize the loss and agony that comes with war and atrocity.⁶⁰

Must we, however, take the face to communicate only, or at least principally, a “wordless vocalization of agony” and commandment not to kill? Taking his cues from Levinas’ ethical philosophy and Marxist social philosophy, Enrique Dussel has proffered that the face of the other reveals a “people” (*pueblo*) more so than it does any singular subject. They are, above all else, the “social bloc of the oppressed,” and the “ugliness” of their weathered faces is a “provocation” and “populist beauty” that cries out for Justice.⁶¹ In point of fact, for Dussel the “cry” (*el grito*) is that ethico-political proxy which not only bespeaks sentient trauma (i.e. the guttural “Ahh!”) but also “liberatory power” (i.e. the defiant *¡Basta!* of the Zapatistas—“Enough!”). The “cry” as such bespeaks not so much an “I suffer” inasmuch as “We have been wronged!” It is a “lament of protest” that has been uttered by a *collective political actor* who lives precariously, no doubt, but who can, at the right “critical conjunctures,” rebel against wretchedness.⁶² We shall infer, consequently, that a liberatory aesthetics would thereby: i) tender an analysis and critique of injustices, ii) dignify or otherwise bear witness to “the people” and their liberatory power, and iii) hail the spectator to take on the cause of the cry.

Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Cuban wars for independence are narrated in terms of inaugural cries (*gritos*): the Cry of Yara (1868) and the Cry of Baire (1895). The Spanish verb *gritar* more precisely translates as “to yell” or “to shout,” and its use in this context conveys both the literal speech acts and allegorical (war) cry of the people—Céspedes reading the “October Manifesto” in 1868 or rebels throughout Oriente laying siege to towns and crying out *¡Viva Cuba Libre!* in 1895. This larger context of “liberatory power” and the “state of rebellion” must be taken into account when we are trying to come to terms with the *reconcentrado* and vice versa. For “the camp” came to the fore in the midst of national liberation struggles—not only in Cuba but also in the structurally analogous and historically contemporaneous cases of British South Africa, the American Philippines,

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006), 131-5.

⁶⁰ Ibid. and Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2009), 55.

⁶¹ Enrique Dussel *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. G. Ciccarillo-Maher (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 71-77.

⁶² The main texts I have consulted are: Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación* (Universidad de Santo Tomás 1980), especially sections 2.4 and 2.6; *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. A. Martínez & Christine Morkovsky (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985); *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y la exclusión*. (Madrid: Trotta, 1998); and *Twenty Theses on Politics*, trans. G. Ciccarillo-Maher (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), especially theses 11 and 12.

and German Namibia.⁶³ What is noteworthy, thus, is that the camp was a retaliatory and, later, preemptive strategy of war employed by state and imperial apparatuses that had lost their monopoly on the use of force. In other words, the camp came to life as a technique of sovereign violence *due to and in competition with* organized revolutionary violence. This is no idle difference from what we know about the Nazi Holocaust and other genocidal wars, nor is it any less different from the manner in which Agamben has theorized “bare life” and “the camp” as devoid of any relation to emancipatory politics. The truth is that the camp’s genealogy must account for the Cuban, Filipino, Boer, Herrero and Nama armed forces and ad hoc revolutionary councils that sought to rectify a host of imperial wrongs.

Liberatory power and bare life, *mambí* and *reconcentrado*, are thus intimately related. This is why a “hyperbolic aesthetic of the sublime,” to borrow Dominick LaCapra’s phrase, would not suffice to reckon with figures at such odds yet historically, militarily, and culturally bound to one another.⁶⁴ Neither a “negative” sublime of bare life as something plagued by “unrepresentable excess” nor a “positive” sublime of liberatory power as innocently “redemptive” can truly make sense of the *mambí* and *reconcentrado* as simultaneously kin and estranged. What is called for is a *contrapuntal* aesthetic of the cry and the face that dwells simultaneously with, as Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea would likely have recommended, the “rapture” (*enajenación*) of the *mambí* and the “rupture” (*desenajenación*) that is the *reconcentrado*. The “ecstasy” of the cry (liberatory power), that is, must be dramatically countered by the “epiphany” of the face (precarity) in order that we may tend more critically to the interpellations of revolutionary as much as sovereign violence.⁶⁵

1.4. *Contrapuntear*

Fernando Ortiz’s muses for the contrapuntal “method” were the itinerant *campesino* performers of the Cuban *contraversia*. The *contraversia* is a musical debate that takes place between two singers who exchange improvised ten-line stanzas (*décimas*) set to African and Andalusian rhythms and voiced in Cuban vernacular. Traditionally, as Virgilio López Lemus has documented, it was a practice of peasant (and, later, urban) culture that not only entertained but also aroused political consciousness and dialogue within the polity’s humbler classes. It did so by theatrically, poetically, and musically conveying, usually on street corners or in plazas, the liveliest of social and political issues.⁶⁶ The “controversy” does not thereby reconcile opposing “points” (*puntos*) inasmuch as stage a “versified counterpoint” that lays bare the (de)merits of each point and may bring forth a “transmuted” *punto(s)* of greater merit and insight.

⁶³ See: J. Hyslop, “The Invention of the Concentration Camp: Cuba, Southern Africa and the Philippines, 1896-1907” *South African Historical Journal* 63.2 (2008): 251-76; Luzviminda Francisco, “The Philippine-American War,” in *The Philippines Reader*, ed. D. Schirmer and S.R. Shalom (South End Press, 1987), 8-19; S.B. Spies *Methods of Barbarism?: Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics* (Human & Rousseau, 1977); Jürgen Zimmerer, “Colonialism and the Holocaust: Towards an Archaeology of Genocide,” in *Genocide and Settler Society*, ed. A. Dirk Moses (Bergahan Books, 2004); Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2005); Benjamin Madley, “From Africa to Auschwitz: How German South West Africa Incubated Ideas and Methods Adopted and Developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe.” *European History Quarterly* 35.3 (2005): 429-64.

⁶⁴ Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001); and his *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, and Trauma* (Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁶⁵ Alea argued on behalf of a revolutionary art that could effect a “dialectical movement” between the “ecstasy” of an Eisenstein and the “distanciation” of a Brecht. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, *Dialectica del Espectador* (La Habana: Cuadernos de la Revista Union, 1982), 45-57.

⁶⁶ Virgilio López Lemus, *Décima e identidad: siglos XVIII y XIX* (Havana, 1997).

Our project studies the *mambí* and *reconcentrado* as Ortiz would likely have recommended, namely as “disputants” and “personages” who contrapuntally bespeak richer understandings of violence, aesthetics, and national identity. To my knowledge, however, the *mambí* and *reconcentrado* have rarely, if ever, been discussed within the larger field of Cuban studies as cultural *figures* that can and ought to be placed in critical dialogue with one another. There are of course general surveys of the wars for independence (1868-98) that touch upon the subjects of the Liberation Army and reconcentration. Indeed, as Cuban-American historian Louis Pérez Jr. has noted, “the literature is voluminous,” not least because these crucial years amount to “the very making of the Cuban nation” and because the wars proved no less momentous to Spanish and American history.⁶⁷ The most noteworthy surveys of the wars and their contexts include the works of historians Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Philip S. Foner, and Louis Pérez Jr.⁶⁸ But we shall review only those works that are specifically devoted to a study of the *mambí* or reconcentration.

When it comes to the subject of the *mambí* and his army, there are numerous chronicles, memoirs, war diaries, and biographies that recount the various military exploits of the wars and their most notable leaders, not least Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez. These works aside, there are select scholarly and critical works that take up the subject of the *mambí* as a sociological and cultural entity. Nearly all, in fact, study the *mambí* as a historical curiosity. Juan Padrón’s *El libro del mambí* (1985) is a visually rich survey of Spaniard and *mambí* uniforms, weaponry, tactics, and military customs. Blancamar León Rosabal’s *La voz del mambí* (1997) offers a textually rich study of the social origins and everyday musings of rank-and-file *mambí* soldiers on matters such as food, love, race relations, and proper governance. Isamel Sarmiento Ramírez’s *El ingenio del mambí* (2008) exhaustively details the *mambí* army’s “material culture” as well as its tactical and technological ingenuity in fields such as medicine, weaponry, engineering, logistics, and communications. Ada Ferrer’s *Insurgent Cuba* (1999) lays bare the “constitutive” ambivalences of the antiracist rhetoric and realities of the Liberation Army and how they came to irrevocably define *cubanidad* and Patria. And Teresa Prados-Torreira’s *Mambisas* (2005) offers a rare study of the “feminist consciousness” that came about due to women taking on gender “inappropriate” roles as public speakers, organizers, writers, and soldiers for Cuba Libre. As valuable as they are, these and kindred studies do not critically analyze the *mambí* as a *figure* of popular culture and political consciousness well beyond the years 1868-98—let alone read contrapuntally against the *reconcentrado*.

The prolific and highly innovative Louis Pérez Jr. does, nevertheless, offer many historical clues and provocations to this effect. *The War of 1898* (1998), for instance, analyzes the discursive frames by which Americans have by and large written Cubans out of the tellingly named “Spanish-American War.” As Pérez has argued, Americans have narrated the war as a “war of humanity” in which

⁶⁷ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., “Selective Guide to the Literature,” *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and the bibliographical essay in his *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

⁶⁸ Guerra y Sanchez’s *Azúcar y población en Cuba* (1927) stresses the socio-economic and demographic forces that prefigured the wars’ onsets and outcomes, and his *En el camino de la independencia* (1930) argues that the separatist movement was indeed, by the 1890s, a populist movement for a just polity and not about mere national sovereignty. Roig de Leuchsenring’s *La guerra libertadora cubana de los treinta años: 1868-1898* (1952) and, especially, his *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (1960) argue that Cubans had already defeated Spain prior to any U.S. intervention and that this fact explains why America’s war against Spain was so “splendid” and “little.” Philip Foner’s *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism* (2 vols., 1972) echoes and elaborates upon Roig’s thesis, offering discussions of the military and diplomatic strategies of the Cuban Republic in Arms, on and off the island, and critically foregrounding American imperialist policies. Pérez Jr.’s *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (1983) is most useful as a history that contextualizes not only the separatist but also the various autonomist, loyalist, and annexationist (counter-)campaigns.

Cubans, if they are spoken of at all, are framed as helpless victims (i.e. *reconcentrados*) or as defunct belligerents—rarely, however, as morally driven, militarily viable, and politically entitled actors. *Cuba in the American Imagination* (2008) echoes his earlier thesis but takes a closer look at the metaphors and symbolism used to portray Cubans (as well as Spaniards and Americans) within American political oratory and visual culture, not least the political cartoons of the era. Whether portrayed as feminized victim or as mongrel child, argued Pérez, Cubans were repeatedly situated as not only inferior but also morally indebted to the United States. For a better sense of how *independentista* Cubans have been depicted (and put to use) within the *Cuban* imagination, however, one must turn to his *The Structure of Cuban History* (2013). Here Pérez recounts the culturally traumatic and politically disjoint exigencies of living in the shadows of not only United States imperialism but also the *mambí* sublime. Commemorative holidays, veterans clubs, statues, memorials, published memoirs and chronicles, family stories and local lore all cumulatively, and relentlessly, called on neocolonial era Cubans to “redeem” their Patria as their *mambí* ancestors had gloriously tried. It was not, though, until the Revolution of 1959 and its ensuing years, as Pérez has shown, that the *mambí* project of national liberation was discursively framed as a “consummated” fact. The guerrilla soldiers of the Sierra Maestra, the “bearded ones” (*barbudos*), portrayed themselves as latter-day *mambises* and thereafter oversaw a renaissance of nationalist oratory and cultural productivity that, not unlike their *mambí* ancestors, extolled militancy and a sacrificial ethos. Pérez does not, however, pursue any close reads of *mambí* iconography and aesthetics, much less the specter of the *reconcentrado* in many of those same cultural artifacts and what alternative visions they may bespeak.

There are far fewer studies that address “reconcentration” in detail. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring’s *Weyler en Cuba* (1947) puts forth a general survey of the wartime context out of which emerged the policy and strategy of reconcentration; critiques the apologetic biographies that have been published on Weyler and his tenure as military governor of Cuba; and reprints a host of satirical poetry written against Weyler at the time of the atrocities. Roig was cautious, nevertheless, to clarify that Weyler was but a symptom of a larger imperialist culture and ideology. Raul Izquierdo Canosa’s *La Reconcentración, 1896-1897* (1998) is a brief study of reconcentration’s demographic and economic tolls on Cuba. It is noteworthy as a study that stresses the ruinous effects of the American naval blockade that came in the wake of reconcentration’s titular end, rendering it an ongoing crisis. Francisco Pérez Guzmán’s *Herida profunda* (1998) thoroughly details the various legal reforms of the policy and its variable realities (i.e. types of illnesses, food rations, exploitive labor, mortality rates, etc.) across each of the island’s provinces and major cities. It is noteworthy as well as a text that offers occasional *reconcentrado* and witness testimonials. Herminio Portell Vilá’s *Clara Burton, protectora de los reconcentrados cubanos* (1954) offers an account of Clara Burton and the American Red Cross’ “noble,” if stymied, relief efforts. Lastly, John Lawrence Tone’s *War and Genocide in Cuba* (2006) discusses reconcentration as a larger military strategy, dwelling not only on the camps and death tolls but also on the island-wide *trocha* (trench) system, scorched earth tactics, and extra-judiciary patrols licensed to kill with impunity *outside* the camps. Tone’s controversial thesis stipulates that the *mambí* guerrilla strategy of war by the torch and sabotage constituted a “precursor” to reconcentration. By burning or laying siege to town after town and sugar estate after sugar estate, that is, the rebels left scores of Cuban workers and peasants unemployed or fleeing for safer cities ill-equipped to feed, house, or employ them. By the time Weyler issued his infamous decree, thus, the guerrillas had already initiated a variant of “reconcentration.”

Tone’s argument is not entirely new; it echoes, among others, American war correspondent George Bronso Rea’s *Facts and Fakes about Cuba* (1898). Philip S. Foner, in *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism* (2 vols., 1972), argued that any such “moral equivalence” arguments fail to account for the fact that whereas Gómez waged war on the imperial economy, Weyler waged war on Cubans. It is not, after all, as though Gómez had the material

capability (let alone the moral incentive) to *enforce* any species of reconcentration as the Spaniards did, nor was it the case that Weyler and his colleagues' *only* option was to retaliate as they did. Yet we must confess that, pace Tone, it would be mistaken to unilaterally hold Weyler and Spain liable for the unjust deaths and atrocities of the wars—as Cuban rebels cleverly did then and Cuban historiography, collective memory, and political culture have done since. *This* scandal, as it were, touches most keenly upon the need for a contrapuntal read of *mambí* and *reconcentrado* and a liberatory aesthetics that can tend to both the cry *and* the face.

Our project teases out and interrogates this problematic over the course of the next four chapters. Chapter 2, “¡*Al Machete!*, or the *Mambí* Sublime,” studies Cuban wartime literature (*literatura de campaña*) and revolutionary era cinema in order to flesh out the iconography and myths by which the *mambí* has become the most venerated figure in Cuban culture and consciousness. Here we look especially to the most iconic of all *mambises*, namely (and ironically) Elpidio Valdés, the fictional *mambí* colonel and loveable hero in Juan Padrón's televised cartoon series and animated film trilogy of the same name. The fetish with the phallic symbol of the machete and the guerrilla soldier as fearless *machetero* is made evident as an aesthetic that codes manly camaraderie in arms and in death as pleasurable and redemptive—nearly all else as effete or morally corrupt. This aesthetic, as I clarify, is not without its charms: it extols, in a decidedly Cuban vernacular, the liberatory power of the people as a non-elitist, multiracial, and family affair that relies not only on virility and prowess but also on ingenuity, humor, and integrity. Nor is it without its troubles: it belies the (factually corroborated) moral ambiguities, racial strife, and less than heroic tactics of the rebel movement as well as only elliptically refers and tends to the “face” of the *reconcentrado*.

Chapter 3, “*Mudos testigos: Can the Reconcentrado Speak?*,” reads for the *reconcentrado* as mute counterpoint to the *mambí* sublime. Here we clarify that the *reconcentrado* functions as an index of abject passivity and imperialist cruelty and, thus, paradoxically, as the constitutive other to the *mambí*, he who signifies revolutionary agency and ethical violence. There is a proclivity to portray the violence of reconcentration as either, dramaturgically, the rape of beautiful Cuban women or, documentarily, through a series of photographs that put on display the emaciated body and vacant gaze of *reconcentrados*. In either case, the *reconcentrado* either merely screams or says nothing at all and as such morally as much as mutely validates, in a circular manner, the “necessity” and “sublimity” of the *mambí* cause for Cuba Libre and her need for an armed “chivalric” *savoir*.

Chapter 4, “Bearded Crypts: *Mambí* Totems and *Reconcentrado* Taboos,” traces out the symbolic redeployments and counterpoints of *mambí* and *reconcentrado* as politicized tropes in the “Special Period” of the 1990s. Here I flesh out the ways in which the *mambí* sublime must contend with the dire hunger and social distress of a Cuba without Soviet subsidies. Coinciding with the centennial years 1995 and 1998 as well as the burial of Che Guevara's repatriated remains in 1997, political oratory, historical essays, and newly minted monuments and museums of the era rhetorically hail Cubans to emulate the exemplary sacrifice and “stoicism” of their ancestors—not least, ironically, the *reconcentrados*. Cubans of the Special Period are, that is, recast as latter-day *reconcentrados* at the mercy of a dramatically revitalized US embargo and aggressions. These rhetorical tactics nevertheless prove relatively anemic against the social and moral crises of the 1990s, wherein the luster of the *mambí* and *barbudo* are haunted by the *balseros* (rafters) and *confinados* (labor camp internees) of Cuban revolutionary history and openly critiqued by a new generation of writers and filmmakers.

Closing out our inquiry, Chapter 5, “History of an Alibi,” recapitulates the ways in which the *reconcentrado*'s dramatic role in the narrative of the nation has been as they who die a horrific (not heroic) death so as to rouse the *mambí* protagonist to arms and prove just how evil are the Patria's foes. That is to say, their value to the Nation is as that of an *alibi* for revolutionary violence *and* for the lack of participatory democracy *vis-à-vis* the project of Cuba Libre. Unethical violence and

authoritarianism are situated *elsewhere*, namely in the camps or in Madrid (or in Washington D.C.). I conclude, by contrast, that her vulnerability, her muteness, and her labors against an unjust death could just as readily be read as claims for non-violence, democratic voice, and caring labor and conjecture at what a *contrapunteo* of *mambi* militancy and *reconcentrado* ethicality might engender in our times, times in which liberatory politics, ethics, and aesthetics are haunted by the specters of Gulags, vulgar Marxism, and “totalitarianism” as much as stifled by the imperial reign of monopoly finance capital and its neoliberal “austerity” paradigm.

CHAPTER 2. ¡AL MACHETE!, OR THE MAMBÍ SUBLIME

Yo soy bueno, yo como bueno/ moriré de cara al sol
—José Martí, *Versos sencillos* (1891)

This chapter, firstly, contextualizes the *mambí* and his racialized genealogy, clarifying just how indispensable was the presence of Cubans of color in Cuba Libre’s liberation armies and, consequently, how this historical fact and strategic alliance came to define *cubanía* and national identity as inextricable from racial equality. As an “emancipatory” project, thus, the wars for Cuba Libre gave birth not only to a Nation but also to the myth of racial harmony, a myth that belies the ways in which Cubans of color were left disempowered in postwar Cuba. Secondly, we look to wartime literature to tease out the making of a *mambí* aesthetic and historiography predicated on the symbol of the machete and trace its ambivalent legacy in Juan Padrón’s iconic *Elpidio Valdés* animated series, where *mambises* are a multiracial, non-elitist force of ingenuity and slyness but where violence, too, is portrayed as jovial and innocent. Against this, thirdly, we take stock of the war *mambises* actually waged, a war not won or waged by the machete inasmuch as by the torch and the mosquito. This, however, has not deflated the mythical value of the *mambí* and machete as historically rich symbols of virility and virtue. The olive green *barbudo*, as we see lastly, consciously reenacted and discursively portrayed himself as the *mambí*’s rightful heir and his Revolution as a consummation of the *mambí* liberatory project. With the revolutionary era, marked especially by the centennial year 1968 and a motif of *cien años de lucha*, Cubans are hailed to embrace a *mambí* ethos of militancy, heroic sacrifice, and unity rather than ponder the darker recesses of *mambí* history, namely collateral violence, racism, paternalism, and dissensus.

2.1. *Mambí: A Genealogy*

Mambí was not always a venerated word in Cuba—at least not Cuba Española. No one truly knows its etymology, but everyone agrees that Spaniards, especially the army conscripts (*quintos*) sent to Cuba, employed it to jeer at the black or Africaness—as code for “savagery”—of the Cuba Libre rebels. Conjecture has it that the term is a deformed variant of a Yoruba prefix *mbi*. It is said that Cuban maroons called each other by *ma embí* or *ma m’bí*, which means “my hunted” or “my persecuted” brother (*mi perseguido*) in Afro-Antillean dialects of Yoruba.¹ Evidently, Spanish soldiers

¹ Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba: Historian en común* (Barcelona: Crítica: 1995), 291. The other most commonly cited accounts has it that *los mambís* (or *mambises*) was a term Spanish soldiers used to refer to Dominican guerrillas under the command of Juan Ethnuis Mamby, also known by Eutimio Mambí. Mambí was a black military officer loyal to Spain who defected to the Dominican nationalists in their war (1863-65) to restore national sovereignty. His guerrilla forces evidently wrought havoc on the Spaniards and became known as *los mambís*. And while the term literally meant, “the men of Mambí,” it came to constitute a racial slur in the mouths of Spaniards. Its closest

and spies must have heard this alias amongst the rebel army's rank-and-file, a disproportionately Afro-Cuban force, and come to use the variant *mambí* as their racial epithet of choice. And use it they did to speak of an imminent "race war" the likes of "another Haiti." This was no idle rhetoric to Spanish loyalist and white Cuban separatist (not merely autonomist) ears. The memory of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) was still very much alive in Cuba and elsewhere. Indeed, to many nineteenth century Atlantic eyes and ears, the specter of "another Haiti" meant little other than the massacre of white men and the rape of white women by godless Africans.²

Cuban separatists did go by other names—pejoratives, that is. Spanish officiates took care to refer to them as "insurgents" (*insurrectos*) and "bandits" (*bandoleros*), presumably subject to criminal law and police actions, rather than confer upon them the legal and military status "belligerent," customarily held by sovereign states. Within international laws and customs of the era, to be recognized as a "belligerent" meant not only that the Geneva Convention of 1864 should apply to *mambí* soldiers and civilians but also that they could legally transact with other states. What this meant more concretely was that Cubans could take out loans and purchase arms and munitions from other sovereign states—not least the United States—without having to fall prey to the usury and unreliability of illegal arms markets. Little wonder, thus, that the Cuba Libre movement took on a stoutly Euro-American profile: it had a provisional government that included a president, ministers, diplomats, magistrates, and a legislative assembly; a ratified constitution that included provisions for representative democracy as well as treaty and tax powers; a national flag and coat of arms; and an army at the ready—the *Ejército Libertador Cubano*—outfitted with commissioned officers, a health corps, judicial corps, press corps, and dozens of cavalry, infantry, and artillery regiments.

Yet whatever care they took to organizationally mimic European armies and publicly extol the "discipline" and "decorum" of their soldiers, the Cuban Liberation Army (ELC) was a multiracial force unlike any other in the Americas or colonial Asia and Africa—let alone Europe! As many as sixty percent of its non-commissioned officers (i.e. sergeants) and, all the more remarkable, as many as forty percent of its commissioned officers (i.e. captains, colonels, etc.) were men of color.³ By the 1890s, in fact, Afro-Cubans Brigadier General Antonio Maceo and his brother, Mayor General José Maceo, were outranked by only one other soldier in the entire army—namely the elderly (and white) Generalísimo Máximo Gómez—and enjoyed a multiracial loyalty across the island and in exile communities that, as Ada Ferrer has noted, "in the United States would have been rare in local contexts and unthinkable at the national level."⁴ These anomalies were of course liabilities as much as they were assets. Spaniards were quick to exploit as much as stir up racial angst by portraying the Maceo brothers and their *mambí* regiments as "Negro hordes" with an ulterior

equivalent would be "African savage." When Spanish veterans of the Dominican war were redeployed to Cuba in the late 1860s, they used the derogatory term to refer to the Cuban rebels, an army similarly composed of black and mulatto men armed with machetes. See: Arthur Steinberg, "Mambises," in *Encyclopedia of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War*, v1. ed. Spencer Tucker (ABC-CLIO, 2009), 366-367.

² That very war had displaced a large number of French planters, engineers, merchants, and overseers to Haiti's neighboring island and sugar producing successor, namely Cuba, which thereafter imported enslaved Africans and Haitian seasonal laborers. So it was indeed no idle accusation. See: C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

³ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 141-69

⁴ Add to this the fact that Afro-Cuban journalist Juan Gualberto Gómez was by then the chief political coordinator of the war from within the island. See: Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, ed. *Por Cuba Libre: Juan Gualberto Gómez* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974); Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 5.

motive to instate a “black dictatorship” in Cuba—if only Oriente (far east) Cuba.⁵ And in this regard the slur *mambí* was far more condemnatory than *insurrecto* or *bandolero*: whereas the latter were meant to convey the illegality and illegitimacy of Cuban rebels, the former was meant to evoke their inhumanity.

Whether Cubans could convey their cause as worthy did not, thus, necessarily bear on whether others would agree that they, Cubans as a multiracial alliance, were fit to wage a “civilized” war and govern their “Republic” accordingly. But the most sublime of ironies is that Cubans would come to render the term *mambí* an honorary title within their nationalist vernacular.⁶ If in the mouths of Spaniards it evoked racial animosity, in the mouths of Cubans it came to signify racial harmony and patriotic valor. What it meant to be a *mambí* in fact became coterminous with racial fraternity and, within due course, bled over into conceptions of Patria and *cubanidad*. “There are neither whites nor blacks, only Cubans,” avowed Antonio Maceo.⁷ José Martí, the intellectual leader of the 1890s movement, professed, “Many [Cuban] whites have already forgotten their color, and many blacks have, too.”⁸ And this, as Martí and others narrated it, was due to the “redemptive labor” that was ten years of war: “when so many times we [whites and blacks] died together, in each other’s arms.”⁹

Nor was it all hype. The Ten Years’ War had its symbolically rich moments and earnest tendencies. When Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the “Father” of the Nation, rang the slave bell at his plantation, *La Demajagua*, on October 10, 1868, he declared Cuba independent and his slaves free. Within days, he and his forces seized the town of Bayamo and reconstituted its town council, appointing white creoles, Spaniards, and—for the first time in the nation’s history—two men of color: José García, a bricklayer, and Manuel Muñoz, a musician. Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, Céspedes’ successor as President of the Republic in Arms, went as far as to bury his white daughter in the same grave as a black soldier—a gesture that Martí would later exalt as emblematic of the Revolution’s glory.¹⁰ Generalísimo Máximo Gómez, for his part, was staunchly for rank by merit, regardless of color or class. He would famously tear apart (and defy) a Republic order to commission (white) men he knew to be the sons of wealthy Cubans—little else to their credit—and unflinchingly endorsed the Maceo brothers.¹¹ Indeed, Antonio and José, hailing from a family of small farmers of color, joined the rebel army as mere foot soldiers and became, by sheer merit, its most beloved and gifted field generals.

But only fitfully and falteringly did *mambí* and Patria become coterminous with racial fraternity and equality. The earliest iterations of the ELC were closer to a *patrocinado* system of white leaders and their freed slaves (*libertos*). Rebel leaders quite cautiously issued decrees for slavery’s abolition—“gradual and indemnified”—and allayed pro-Cuba Libre landowners with promises that their property (in cash crops and in humans) would be spared—or at least justly compensated. Indeed, freed slaves, *libertos*, as they were called, were expected to fight or labor for the Revolution without

⁵ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 47.

⁶ Within the first year of the Ten Years’ War, Cubans would convene their first Constitutional Assembly (May 1869) in the eastern town of Guáimaro and release the first official newspaper of the Republic in Arms: *El Mambí*.

⁷ Philip S. Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The “Bronze Titan” of Cuba’s Struggle for Independence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

⁸ José Martí, “My Race,” in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. Roberto González Echevarría (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 320.

⁹ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 123.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37, 121.

¹¹ Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism: Volume I, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14-34.

pay and had to report to an Office of Libertos in order to be reassigned to new “masters” (*amos*).¹² Although this policy would end (on paper) within two years time, throughout the war *libertos* were routinely set to the most menial and laborious tasks (i.e. digging trenches, clearing paths, carrying loads) and subjected to punitive measures more akin to slavery (i.e. stocks, flogging) than to military discipline. Little wonder, thus, that many *libertos* fled rebel camps and sought refuge in Cuba’s elusive *palenques* (maroon communities).¹³

Some men of color, however, embraced the Revolution and its antiracist rhetoric more fervently than any white friend or foe could have anticipated. When the Ten Year’s War was brought to a close by the whitest and wealthiest of Cuban delegates, it was Antonio Maceo and an entourage of black and mulatto military leaders (i.e. Flor and Emilio Crombet, Guillermo Moncada, Quintín Bandera) who refused to surrender to the terms of the Zanjón Treaty. The treaty’s palliatives aside (i.e. amnesty to rebel leaders and greater political autonomy), it legally emancipated only those slaves registered to the Liberation Army. This could not have meant much greater than ten thousand Afro-Cubans—a trifle by comparison to the six hundred thousand enslaved throughout the island.¹⁴ In a meeting at Baraguá, a thirty-two-year-old Maceo told Spanish commander Arsenio Martínez-Campos that he and his soldiers would not lay down their arms lest the “indispensable provisions of independence and the abolish of slavery” be met.¹⁵ Needless to say, Martínez-Campos did not oblige, and Maceo and his colleagues’ defiance, however “absolved” by history, only further fueled accusations and anxieties about the *mambises* as Afro-Cubans with their own “racial agenda.”

Spanish propaganda did not, after all, fall on deaf ears. Many white Cubans, not least wealthier landowners, were not eager to endorse (ie. fund) or fight in a revolution headed, militarily at least, by generals of color such as José Maceo and Guillermo Moncada. When war was renewed in 1879, Commander Calixto García, a white Cuban of aristocratic ancestry, strategically forbid Antonio Maceo to hold military office in hopes to dispel talk of “another Haiti”—despite the fact that Maceo was the army’s most formidable field general. A disaffected and strife-ridden ELC would subsequently falter in short order, and the next fifteen years would be devoted to reorganizing not only materially but also discursively and ideologically for war.

No small measure of what this amounted to was a reappraisal of the black soldier in nationalist literature and oratory as a heroic yet subordinate, even innocuous, patriot. Such portrayals, as Ada Ferrer and Aline Helg have documented, abounded in the interim years (1880-1895). Máximo Gómez, the Dominican-born and highly respected general, published a small book in 1892, *El viejo Eduá, o mi último asistente*, to tell the story of his most trusted and admirable of assistants during the Ten Years’ War, an elderly black man named Eduardo—Eduá, for short. “Taken” by the revolution, Eduardo had been a slave on a coffee farm but soon found himself at the general’s side. Eduá, we are told, was a natural leader (to other slave assistants) and a most proficient aid. Gómez goes as far as to comment on his “agile movements” and the “care and tidiness” with which he

¹² “Reglamento de libertos,” in *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*. ed. Hortensia Pichardo (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1968-80); also: Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor* (Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹³ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 26.

¹⁴ Spain also rather cunningly agreed to emancipate those slaves born before 1810 and after 1868, which translated into slaves over the age of 58 (a rarity under the circumstances) and the unborn. In other words, nearly all existing slaves remained legally enslaved. Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 4-6.

¹⁵ Maceo rejected as “dishonorable” a bounty offered for his surrender and, to Martínez-Campos’ plea for Cuba to join the “civilized peoples” of the world, rejoined that Spain had not kept its word to abolish the slave trade or slavery—as the rest of the “civilized” world had already done. Not only a colonial subject, thus, but a man of color had thereby acted out as the true bearer of honor and integrity in the face of he (and they) who ostensibly stood for these very values. Foner, *Antonio Maceo*, 72-87.

performs the most mundane of tasks (i.e. preparing coffee). But above all, he is loyal: Eduá declares himself ready to leave aside his own wife and children to serve under Gómez even after war's end.¹⁶

Not all accounts, of course, were of elderly and docile Cubans of color. Ramón Roa, author of the highly popular Ten Years' War chronicle-cum-memoir, *A pie y descalzo* (1890), also authored a highly influential article titled "The Blacks of the Revolution" (1892). In the latter, Roa shared the story of José Antonio Legón and his transformation from "negrito" slave to Cuban patriot. Legón, who fought with "astounding agility" and "audacity," nevertheless fell into enemy hands. Given the option to defect and save his life, Legón, allegedly, replied: "Well, when my master—who raised me and who was good—was dying, he told me: 'José Antonio, never stop being Cuban', and the poor man left this world for another. Now I comply by being Cuban until the end... You may kill me if you wish."¹⁷ The reader (or *lectura* listener) was left with the image not only of an exemplary death (for the Patria) but also of an exemplary black: he who abides by his white master's will—even in the latter's earthly absence! Valiant and skilled yet docile, loyal, and always under the auspices of respectable whites—how could one justifiably fear a "race war"?

The relentlessly parlayed threat of a "race war" was indeed taken up more explicitly by Cuba Libre's intellectual leaders, black and white alike. Black journalist and chief political organizer, Juan Gualberto Gómez, took the indictment of "another Haiti" quite seriously. In a comparative study of Cuba and Haiti, his rebuttal, Gómez noted five decisive differences: i) Haiti's slaves hailed from warlike tribes in Senegal and Dahomey, whereas Cuba's were drawn from amongst the "gentle dwellers of the Congo basin"; ii) the slaves who revolted in Haiti were nearly all African-born, whereas Cuba's blacks were mostly Cuban-born; iii) whereas the ratio of persons of color to whites in Haiti was 24:1, it was 1:2 in Cuba; iv) Spanish slavery was (supposedly) milder than the French variety such that Cubans of color were less resentful; and v) in Haiti it was the metropolis who abolished slavery against the will of masters in the colony, whereas in Cuba it was local masters who "freed" their slaves in opposition to the imperial metropolis.¹⁸ Not only had Gómez thereby rendered Cubans of color harmless, but so, too, morally indebted—to former slaveholders no less! Martí and Máximo Gómez's "Manifesto de Montecristi" (1895), addressed to the People of Cuba and circulated on the eve of war, likewise took pains to "indignantly" deny that the revolution was tantamount to a "race war." It accused Spanish officials and "halfhearted, sedentary Cubans" of "wickedly" employing the "slanderous notion" that Afro-Cubans sought out to make of Cuba "another Haiti." If there was any hatred to be dealt with it was the white's "senseless," projected fear of Afro-Cubans: "Only those who hate the black see hatred in the black." And if there was a "black menace [*peligro*]" in Cuba, it was to be blamed on the "vile" effects of racism and slavery, a menace that "the black race itself will extirpate." Vouching for the "intelligence and virtue" of the "black Cuban," the Manifesto clarified that it was upon his "shoulders" that the Republic entrusted its safety—not, however, its design, philosophy, or governance.¹⁹

Not all Cubans of color took kindly to such paternalistic (or worse) ovations to racial fraternity and equality. At times they led to fierce polemics. In 1893, *La Igualdad*, the premiere periodical of the Cuban black press, published an article titled "Por justicia y patriotismo" (For Justice and Patriotism), sounding out against the tiresome claim that blacks owed a debt of gratitude to whites. "Did men of color not figure in the Revolution? Did they not lend eminent services? Did they not distinguish themselves as much as the whites? Did they not shed their blood with as much

¹⁶ Máximo Gómez, "El Viejo Eduá, O mi Ultimo asistente," in *Diario de campaña (1868-1898)* (Universidad de Oviedo, 1998), 219-38.

¹⁷ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 119.

¹⁸ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 52.

¹⁹ José Martí, "The Montecristi Manifesto," in *José Martí: Selected Writings, in passim*.

abnegation? Were they not as perseverant? Were they not the last to surrender?”²⁰ Manuel Sanguily, white colonel in the Ten Years’ War, journalistically lashed back: “Even if there had been thousands of men of color alongside the whites in the Revolution, the origin, preparation, initiative, program, and direction of the Revolution, that is the Revolution in its character, essence, and aspirations, was exclusively the work of whites.”²¹ Sanguily of course failed to specify that the very exclusivity to which he so proudly laid claim was predicated on racist prejudice and discrimination: save as war fodder, no one petitioned (let alone appointed and listened to) Afro-Cubans and their initiatives and visions for Cuba Libre and the Republic in the hereafter.

Indeed, these racially inflected antagonisms and misgivings were never truly reconciled. In the closing months of 1895, Antonio Maceo’s military vanguard enacted a historic march across the island to its farthest westward reaches against a Spanish force decidedly superior in numbers, training, equipment, and funds—a military exploit so audacious and against all odds that the Atlantic press would come to refer to Maceo as a virtuoso the likes of Napoleon, Sherman, and Toussaint L’Ouverture.²² Yet the white civilian cadre of the Republic in Arms would, suspiciously enough, leave Maceo and his elite “expeditionaries” to fend for themselves in the hostile western provinces where (throughout the better part of a year) a heavily reinforced and tenacious Weyler would hunt them down. That same year (1896), his brother, José Maceo, was relieved of his command of the East and replaced by Calixto García, a Cuban “of good condition.” García, with President Cisneros’ blessings, would leave José in command of a miserably armed and provisioned unit. Refused new arms and munitions, José died shortly thereafter in combat against Spanish forces.²³ By 1898, with Martí and the Maceo brothers long since perished, and with the American army on Cuban soil, the émigré delegates in the United States would consolidate their racist and elitist coup by stacking the ELC’s ranks with the whiter and wealthier sons of Cuba. These newly minted officers would exit the “splendid little war” with no real combat duty to their credit, yet no less ennobled by the venerated title *mambí*—equivalent in Cuban vernacular to war veteran and truest of patriots.

Nevertheless, the myth of *mambí* racial fraternity and equality would live on to ward off Afro-Cuban criticisms of postwar Cuba. The Ten Year’s War would continue to be narrated as that noble (white) act that expiated the sin of slavery. None other than Martí had said: “It was the revolution that returned the black race to humanity, and that made the dreadful fact [of slavery] disappear... She was the mother, she was the saint, she was the one that seized the master’s whip, she was the one that lifted the black man from his ignominy and embraced him—she, the Cuban revolution.”²⁴ And the Liberation Army of the “necessary war” (1895-98) would be touted as no greater proof that racism had given way to an “equality proven by virtues and talents”—as Martí and Gómez had prophesied in their “Manifesto of Montecristi.” Quite insidiously, however, these mythical portrayals of Cuba Libre served to belie the fact that Afro-Cubans not only fought but also died in higher proportions to whites in the liberation wars and could, thereby, rightly expect that they (veterans) would receive their just deserts in the postwar Republic. Black intellectual and Cuba Libre organizer Rafael Serra voiced a grievance held by many of his kin when he said: “Unfortunate are Cuban blacks if all they will get as a just reward for their sacrifices for the independence and freedom of Cuba is to listen to the [national] anthem of Bayamo and to the false adoration devoted

²⁰ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 133-34.

²¹ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 49.

²² José L. Franco, *La vida heroica y ejemplar de Antonio Maceo* (La Habana: Instituto de Historias, 1963); For a collection of contemporary eulogistic publications in the wake of Maceo’s death, see Foner, *Antonio Maceo*, 252-270.

²³ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 75.

²⁴ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 123. No one mistook the cryptic “she” for Afro-Cubans.

to the memory of our illustrious martyrs. No, my brothers, we deserve justice, and we should no longer continue to encourage a humiliating and ridiculous patriotism.”²⁵

And discourage they did. Not least for having so many outstanding veterans (and martyrs) to their credit, let alone the rhetoric of Martí about a Cuba “with all and for the good of all,” Afro-Cubans had bolstered their esteem and expectations for life in the postwar Republic. Yet their services rendered to the Patria were met with scant political representation, high unemployment, no anti-discriminatory laws or empowerment programs, and their lands being sold off to American corporations. Disgruntled, a cadre of largely *mambí* veteran officers formed (in 1908) the Partido Independiente de Color—the first Afro-American political party in the hemisphere. A counter-campaign was unleashed in the Cuban press and throughout the polity that conjured up the specter of a “black conspiracy” led by Afro-Cubans with French surnames (i.e. “another Haiti”), and by 1910 the party was legally banned on the grounds that it was “racist” and its leaders seditious. When in 1912 its leaders organized an armed protest—as display of force—to relegalize their party, the Cuban army and vigilante mobs violently repressed and killed at least 2,000 Afro-Cubans in southern Oriente.²⁶ It had come to a “race war” after all. That the massacre was led by many white veterans of the *mambí* army and that it took place in the province that had given birth to the Cuba Libre movement was indeed a bitter, if not cruelly ironic, testament to how far Cubans had come. It was neither ironic nor bitter enough, however, to undo the undying myth that Cuba is a racial democracy and Cubans the heirs to a *mambí* ethos of multiracial fraternity.

2.2. ¡Al Machete!—Icon and Fetish

Albeit noteworthy and much flaunted virtues of the *mambí* army and Cuba Libre rhetoric, racial fraternity and equality do not fully account for the *mambí* ethos (and aesthetic) as Cubans have come to understand it. For, first and foremost, by all discursive and visual accounts, the *mambí* is he or she who is ready to take up arms and sacrifice everything for the Patria. And that “sublime abnegation” for Cuba Libre has to its credit an exact and exemplary speech act: the war cry, ¡Al machete!, and a subsequent rush of *mambí* regiments on their trusty steeds riding into battle against all odds—Cuban flag waving, bugle sounding off, machetes drawn. Little else can rival its cachet within the Cuban historical and nationalist imaginary.

Nor is it purely “imagined.” December 15, 1895, the Liberation Army entered Santa Clara province and received advanced notice of a Spanish detachment of 300 soldiers in nearby Mal Tiempo. Maceo and Gómez had their cavalry flank the unaware troops and, to the cries ¡Arriba Oriente! and ¡Viva Maceo!, ambushed them with machetes drawn. It is said that the Spaniards, terrified, lost their nerve and either ran for their lives or knelt for mercy. With sixty-four enemies dead and forty more wounded, Cubans walked away only four men lighter and with a bounty of Mauser rifles, bullets, pack mules, and a most precious asset, namely high morale.²⁷

²⁵ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 117. We note that anarchist and socialist labor radicals in Tampa and Key West dealt with a similar issue: they received no proportionate rewards and representation in postwar Cuba despite their disproportionate financial and propagandistic contributions to the cause and war. Foner, *The Cuban-Spanish-American War*.

²⁶ See Chapter 7 of Helg, *Our Rightful Share*; and Part I of Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁷ John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 125.

The Battle of Mal Tiempo, as it came to be known, was a most auspicious start to Maceo's and Gómez's unlikely "invasion" of the Cuban West and would prove the most significant battle in the war against Spain until the Americans' victory at Santiago de Cuba in July 1898. Equally valuable, it served to bolster mythical portrayals of the *mambises* as horseback charging *macheteros* who struck terror into blindly fleeing Spanish soldiers. Indeed, the Liberation Army has been enduringly revered as an army of *macheteros* who galloped their way to victory one fearless charge after the next. And, albeit misleading, the myth proved its worth both in times of war and for the sake of nationalist posterity. For if Spanish officers mocked the machete as a primitive weapon that befit "savage Negroes" and "illiterate mongrels," their rank-and-file conscripts (the *quintos*) came to dread the idea of being mutilated by machetes or of dying a slow, feverish death from a festering machete wound. This dread had no idle effect on troop morale, and it is little wonder that the Republic in Arms so earnestly publicized battles such as Mal Tiempo and spoke of their soldiers' skill with horses and machetes as unrivaled.²⁸

In postwar years, it is no less a wonder that Cuban veterans would devote so much ink (and marble and stone) to their *mambí* patrimony as mounted and machete-endowed war heroes. *Mambí* war literature (*literatura de campaña*) came to constitute a genre within Cuban letters, and it was a rare war diary, chronicle, or memoir that did not pay homage to the machete and machete-charge.²⁹ Nor was it any less rare for a town not to erect monuments to the martyrs of Cuba Libre. Official decrees rendered the dates October 10 (Grito de Yara) and February 24 (Grito de Baire) national holidays and called on Cubans to solemnly commemorate their most hallowed dead throughout the year: February 27 (for Céspedes), May 11 (for Agramonte), May 19 (for Martí), and December 6 (for Maceo). "The living were in continual dialogue with the dead," as historian Louis Pérez Jr. has pointed out, "the dead residing in the present in the form of moral authority, to be addressed and asked—rhetorically, of course—to render judgment" on the conduct of Cuba Libre's heirs.³⁰

Yet the Cuban youth of the early (and nominal) Republic, those born after 1898, were no less in dialogue with the living elders and veterans of Cuba, namely their neighbors, parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Less officially, yet all the more intimately, Cubans learned their "epic history" and inherited their "*mambí* sensibility" through testimonials right out of the mouths of loved ones and esteemed elders. Cuban writer and psychotherapist Flor Fernández Barrios said of ninety-eight-year-old Salvador Guitérrez in Cabaiguán:

In the evenings, we children sat around him with great anticipation, waiting for another colorful tale of the old days. Salvador's repertoire seemed unlimited, and every night he had a new story for us ... I learned more about Cuban history from Salvador Gutiérrez than from any textbook ... The old man's raspy voice transported us to the battlefields, capturing our attention with imaginative sounds and images: I could hear the old shotguns and the *machetes* of the Cuban independence fighters, see the *morros* and the *cañones* firing at the enemy.³¹

Truly, every town had its Salvadors (not altogether a pun), and they could be found at the local veterans' *centro* and *hogar*—a recreational center, museum, and at times retirement home. Filmmaker Juan Padrón reminisced fondly of the veterans' center in his childhood Cárdenas: "What I most appreciated were the photographs of the last war for independence [1895-98] and the first years of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Louis Pérez, Jr. *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purposes of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 304.

³⁰ Ibid., 141-46.

³¹ Flor Fernández Barrios, *Blessed by Thunder: Memoir of a Cuban Girlhood* (Seattle, 1999), 79-81.

the twentieth century that were hanging on the walls. On display were the field uniforms, the *machetes*—in sum, for me an elegant portrait of the men who had taken up arms in the fields of Cuba.”³²

Ironically enough, however, it would be Padrón’s animated character, Elpidio Valdés, who came to constitute *the* iconic *mambí* in the Cuban imaginary and popular culture. Surely, Cubans had their illustrious martyrs, not least the “Father of the Nation” Céspedes, the “Apostle” Martí, and the “Bronze Titan” Maceo—each one a *mambí*, however honorary the title. But in the cases of Céspedes and Martí, their typical portrayals were (and are) that of the eminently respectable statesman and intellectual. Whether a face on currency, a statue in town plazas or central parks, a bust or portrait in city halls, or a photograph in textbooks, Céspedes and Martí are men dressed in the bourgeois civilian attire of their era and rarely, if ever, armed or on the battlefield. Even Cuban painter Esteban Valderrama’s “Óleo Muerte del Apóstol” (1918), the most popular illustration of Martí’s “fall” (*caída*) at Dos Ríos, illustrates a mounted and mid-stride Martí falling backwards and holding his chest at, one can infer, the site of a bullet’s impact. He is dressed in the dark slacks, vest, and coat of a *licenciado* (a university educated professional) and, noticeably, bears no arms—neither a pistol nor, all the more crucially, a machete. A similar unarmed, intellectualized aesthetic resounds in the two most popular monuments to his honor, namely the larger than life marble statues in Havana’s Central Park (1905) and Revolution Plaza (formerly Civic Plaza 1958)—with these even the horse is absent.³³ All, moreover, share an affinity to whiteness: Martí’s horse in Valderrama’s painting is white and his statues cast him in an immaculate white marble (i.e. no black veins)—conveying, in a Western classical sense, purity and sacredness, yet with no clear ties to the multiracial fraternity and equality that was the rhetoric (and reality, if episodically and ambivalently) of Cuba Libre.

Cubans, after all, understood by the term *mambí* a soldier and had come to know him not only as a lover of Patria and liberty but also as a horse-straddled bearer of a machete. In this regard the Antonio Maceo monuments in Havana and Santiago de Cuba do not disappoint. The Havana monument (1916), near the Malecón, features a uniformed Maceo atop a rearing stallion, a machete (that more closely resembles a sword) drawn at his side—the likes of a Napoleon or a Bólvivar. Santiago de Cuba’s Antonio Maceo Revolution Square (1991) features an enormous equestrian Maceo (over 52 feet tall) and 23, equally enormous, iron machetes piercing upwards from the earth—the 23 symbolic of the date March 23, 1878, the day Maceo renewed war against Spain after his famous Protest of Baraguá. Maceo’s horse rears and is poised in a westward charge, as Maceo looks back with his left hand outstretched—as if to say “onward” or “follow me.” In both works he is dark: bronzed pewter in the former and granite stone in the latter—mediums evocative of virility and colors more representative not only of the *Bronze* (i.e. mulatto) Titan but also of the Liberation Army. Yet Maceo is precisely that: a titanic, singular warrior more so than a depiction of the “liberatory power” of the People. Throughout the tiers of the Havana monument’s base are naked Greco-Roman stylized humans (hardly a nod to the *mambises*), and the Santiago de Cuba Maceo gestures back at an undisclosed, unrepresented army—even the machetes are, as it were, disembodied.

Contrary to historic martyrs on public display and (white) *mambí* officers in print, Juan Padrón’s *Elpidio Valdés* has offered Cubans of the last four decades a far less saintly (i.e. Martí) and grandiose (i.e. Maceo)—yet no less heroic—portrayal of the *mambí* and *mambí* ethos. Cubans have to come to

³² Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 177-79.

³³ See chapter 2 of Emilio Bejel, *Jose Martí: Images of memory and Mourning* (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2012); and *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*, ed. Mauricio Augusto Font, Alfonso V. Quiroz. (Lexington Books, 2006).

know Elpidio over the course (thus far) of three series of televised cartoons (1970s, 1990s, 2000s) and three animated films: *Elpidio Valdés* (1979), *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón* (1983), and *Elpidio Valdés contra el águila y el león* (1995).³⁴ And although these works were produced for the Cuban youth, Elpidio is beloved by Cubans of all ages and has become, as filmmaker Fernando Pérez has said, a “referent within our culture.” Indeed, amusement parks on each ends of the island either bear his name or feature his character, and commentators have referred to Elpidio as the Bugs Bunny of Cuba. Minister of Culture Abel Prieto has retorted that Elpidio is a “decolonizing” alternative to the “ambit of Disney.” And, as to why the character is so popular, creator Juan Padrón has affirmed: “We do not make films for profit, but for Cuba. That is why they speak in Cuban and touch on Cuban themes.”³⁵

That Elpidio and his co-protagonists speak in Cuban vernacular and avow their love of Patria does not, however, quite answer how and why they have so endearingly interpellated Cubans over the years. In a sense Elpidio harks back to an earlier Cuban icon, namely Ricardo de la Torriente’s periodical comic character Liborio—the early-to-mid twentieth century persona of the Cuban people. Liborio was a slender *guajiro* with straw hat, sideburns, and Pancho Villa mustache whose captions often voiced a sarcastic remark about Cuban politics at the mercy of US intrigues.³⁶ And indeed Elpidio is much beloved for a similarly jocular temper and clear markers that he hails from the rural, humbler classes of Cuba. Liborio, however, was a lone Cuban with an Iberian look and no clear ties to Cuban history. Albeit a fictional character, Elpidio’s ties to Cuban history are unmistakable and impeccable: he is a (if not *the*) *mambí*—a colonel in the Liberation Army of 1895’s cavalry, mounted on his trusty steed, Palmiche, and decked out in the iconic *mambí* gear of straw hat with pulled back brim, white linen uniform, bandoliers, (red or blue) neck kerchief, and machete (usually brandished).

As the first of the animated films spells out, in fact, Elpidio could not be any more *mambí*. We learn that he is named (and takes) after his father, Elpidio Valdés Sr., a cavalry colonel in the Ten Year’s War army, and that his mother, a *mambisa*, gives birth to Elpidio Jr. in the midst of war and raises him in rebel camps. The *mambí* as such is neither a lone vigilante nor a specially trained warrior. Instead, Cuba Libre is portrayed as a decidedly family and people’s affair, and it is no idle detail that the Cuban people are represented by a multiracial and multigenerational cadre of provincial farmers and artisans: Maria Silvia, *mambisa* and girlfriend (later wife) to Elpidio; Eutelia, pre-pubescent *mestiza* and co-conspirator to Maria Silvia; Marcial, mulatto major and trusted comrade to Elpidio; the elder General Pérez, Elpidio’s mulatto commander; and Elpidio, who hails from a *campesino* family and is noticeably *mestizo*. None of those who cry *¡Viva Cuba Libre!* are identified or coded as wealthy landowners or merchants, and only a few are identified or coded as educated professionals. That the unwittingly comical *mambí* “inventor” Oliverio is diminutive, bespectacled, with thinning red hair and an almost shrill voice itself speaks volumes. Nor, as a corollary, do any other of the Cuba Libre characters speak a proper Castilian or cosmopolitan Spanish. Quite to the contrary, they speak an emphatically Cuban dialect that one associates with the economically humbler classes of rural and urban Cuba.

Yet the *mambises* (as proxies for the Cuban people) are portrayed as quite more than just humble and racially harmonious. So, too, are they a gregarious and jovial as well as sly and witty folk that

³⁴ For general information on *Elpidio Valdés* series, see: “Portal de Elpidio Valdés,” EcuRed, accessed November 2014, http://www.ecured.cu/index.php/Portal:Elpidio_Vald%C3%A9s. *Elpidio Valdés*, directed by Juan Padrón (Havana: ICAIC, 1979); *Elpidio Valdés contra dólar y cañón*, directed by Juan Padrón (Havana: ICAIC, 1983); *Elpidio Valdés contra el águila y el león* [alternative title: *Más se perdió en Cuba*], directed by Juan Padrón (ICAIC-Telemadrid, 1995).

³⁵ La Jiribilla, “Los primeros 40 años de Elpidio,” Libertad González, accessed November 2014, http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2010/n474_06/474_11.html.

³⁶ See: Arístedes Hernández & J. Piñero, eds. *Historia del humor gráfico en Cuba* (Editorial Milenio, 2007).

audiences cannot help but find endearing. Elpidio and his comrades are always making off safe and sound through clever (and humorous) ruses that leave their adversaries irate or sullied. *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón* (1983) is, for instance, driven by a plot to smuggle rifles into Cuba for the Liberation Army, an exploit, as it turns out, that requires the *mambises* to outsmart a sinister cast of Spaniards and Americans who think that *they* are pulling one over on the *mambises*. Of all the ways that *mambí* (i.e. Cuban) virtues are conveyed, however, none is more operative than constitutive otherness: Spaniards and Americans are all things Cuban *mambises* are not. In this regard Spanish rank-and-file soldiers are routinely depicted as drunkards or imbeciles, but the heaviest brunt of jokes falls on the Spanish officers: General Resóplez and his aides, colonels Andaluz and Cetáceo (also his nephew). Resóplez and Cétaceo are mocked as pompous bourgeois Spaniards with their fine military regalia and a hyperbolic Castilian that inflects *th* sounds for *s*'s—which, not incidentally, makes them sound as if they have a lisp. Probably above all, however, they are mocked as doctrinaire and cowardly. In every battle they shield themselves behind the superior numbers and technology of Spain—its infantrymen, its machine guns, its artillery, its gunboats, and its forts—and whenever their by-the-book field strategy falters they grovel on their knees for mercy (Andaluz's forte) or flee hysterically.

As proxies for the United States, Americans, too, are far from flattered. In *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón*, they are represented by a corrupt sheriff who conspires to rob Elpidio and his comrades of their revolutionary funds and rifles. The sheriff is a portly, pig-faced man whose two deputies are all but faceless, their eyes covered under their oversized cowboy hats. His voice is a groggily deep bellow that sounds like a monster and theirs like that of minions. In *Elpidio Valdés contra el águila y el león*, the historic Rough Riders are featured as a band of scrawny, lazy cavalymen with southern drawl accents and faces distorted by big noses, big ears, or gangly teeth. Teddy Roosevelt, their leader, is mocked as a vain dandy, and all are openly racists. But the most notorious of American characters is the wealthy latifundista tellingly named Mr. Chains. Heavily featured in each of the three films, Mr. Chains has a vampire-like physiognomy—slender face, buzzard nose, angular eyes and eyebrows, sharp teeth that glimmer when he grins—and sports a cloak-like coat and monopoly-style top hat. If that were not unsightly enough, he speaks an absurdly “gringo” Spanish that would make any native-speaker's skin crawl—or laugh out loud. And his morality matches the aesthetic: he only has regard for himself and his exploitive wealth in the states and on the island.

Elpidio and his fellow *mambises* could not differ any more starkly. As against the Spaniards' pomposity and cowardliness, Cubans are jocular and improvisational tacticians, and all are known for their defiance and poise, whether when held in captivity or at the lead of a machete charge. As against the Americans' bigotry and greed, Cubans are a multiracial and economically humble alliance that never falls prey to material or individualistic incentives—only Cuba Libre matters. This is not to say that *all* Cubans are virtuous *mambises*. Elpidio's most fierce nemesis in the first film is none other than a Cuban, namely Mediacara (literally, “Half-face”). Mediacara is the leader of the notorious “contraguerrillas”—historically, the Cuban mercenaries that the Spanish army enlisted in its worst war crimes. A gorilla-like *mestizo* with an unkempt beard and hair that cover most of his face—that is to say, a dehumanized foe—Mediacara is every bit the wicked criminal he is made out, visually, to be. And although he and his motley crew speak in Cuban vernacular and hail from the *campesino* strata of Cuba, they are rogue anti-Cubans. They have no scruples whatsoever about placing unarmed women and children in harm's way or “betraying” their Patria for some proverbial silver—as Cortico, a Judas figure, does in the first film. Nor are those Cubans who historically advocated for peaceful reforms and “autonomy” cast in a favorable light. Throughout the third film, for instance, an effeminate dandy who gives lofty speeches and panders opportunistically to

either Spanish or American officials represents the autonomists. Against these less-than-Cuban Cubans, thus, *mambises* are the morally good and manly harbingers of Cuba Libre.

That Elpidio, a soldier and *mestizo*, ultimately stands for the exemplary-yet-everyday Cuban is indeed worth closer scrutiny. Creator Juan Padrón named Elpidio Valdés after (or as culturally kin to) Cecilia Valdés, the protagonist to Cirilo Villaverde's novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), widely acclaimed as one of the greatest novels in Cuban literature.³⁷ Known for its realist criticisms of slavery and colonialism set to the tale of a tragic and incestuous love, the novel's Cecilia, a beautiful mulatta, came to stand allegorically for Cuba itself. Indeed, although the Cuban press of the early-to-mid twentieth century graphically stylized the Patria as a white woman with Phrygian cap the likes of France's Marianne or the United States' Columbia, revolutionary era Cuba's visual aesthetics symbolized the Patria through the figure of the mulatta. One need only cite the two most critically renowned films of Cuban Third Cinema, namely Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968) and Humberto Solás' *Lucía* (1968). The protagonist to Alea's *Memorias*, Sergio, uneasily wanders and muses over a revolutionary Havana only to fall for and bed the much younger Elena (Daisy Granados). A beautiful mulatta, Elena's ties to Cuba and its people are effortless, and not a few critics have argued that she stands allegorically for Cuba. Granados would later play the role of Cecilia in Humberto Solás' *Cecilia* (1982), a cinematic adaptation of Villaverde's novel, but it was Solás' *Lucía* that spoke to critics and audiences alike. With each of the Lucías set in a momentous period of Cuban history, it is no idle detail that each woman hails from a progressively humbler socio-economic class: aristocratic criolla (1895), urban bourgeois student (1933), and *campesina* worker (196...). Nor is it any less significant that she goes from the Castilian and urbane beauty of Lucía 1895 to the unglamorous beauty of Lucía 196..., the mulatta who defiantly learns to read despite her *machista* husbands' abuse.³⁸

Only in the third film of the *Elpidio Valdés* series does a mulatta character emerge and take on any "significance," namely as the eroticized object of desire of a Spanish soldier turned *mambí*. For, in the final analysis, it is Elpidio and María Silvia's love for each other and for Patria that defines the series and its nationalist plea. They meet and fall in love in the first film and marry and have a son (not a daughter) in the third—the consummated heterosexual couple and their *mambí* patrimony. Nor are Elpidio or María Silvia recognizably Afro-Cuban. Elpidio is *mestizo* (more Taino-Euro than Afro-Euro), and María Silvia resembles Solás' Lucía 1895—lush cascading dark hair, light skin, and Victorian-style dress. This in a culture with well-known proverbs that speak to the inconceivable racial "purity" of Cubans—"Quien no tiene Congo, tiene de Calabari"—and in a series meant to teach Cubans the history of an army that was majority Afro-Cuban.³⁹ And although María Silvia is a most feisty and self-reliant (proto-feminist) character, in every one of the films she is a subtly eroticized figure that Spanish and American characters court and lust after. She functions thereby as an allegorical (virginal) Cuba under the threat of Spanish or American defilement and in need of rescue from a phallically armed, chivalric Cuban man. To this end the first film climaxes, tellingly enough, with a machete duel between Mediacara and Elpidio to rescue (or lay claim to) María Silvia, a duel to see who can wield his phallic symbol more aggressively, more adroitly than the other. If María Silvia (or an eroticized mulatta) symbolizes the Patria, thus, it is because such an aesthetic and its narrative take for granted, if not proffer, the armed heterosexual man as its ideal citizen: he who

³⁷ There are many published sources on the novel, but for a general introductory discussion, see: George Schade, "Cecilia Valdés," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, ed. Verity Smith (Fitzroy Dearborn Publishes, 2007), 846-7.

³⁸ It is worth nothing that she is decidedly less eroticized in Solás' *Lucía* versus that of Alea's *Memorias*. *Lucía*, directed by Humberto Solás (Havana: ICAIC, 1968); *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Havana: ICAIC, 1968).

³⁹ It is worth nothing that Cuba's greatest ethnologist (Fernando Ortiz) and national poet (Nicolás Guillén) repeatedly figured Cuban culture as "mulatto" in their respective works.

shall defend her honor. The fact that each *mambisa* character—Elpidio’s (nameless) mother, María Silvia, and even the pre-pubescent Eutelia—can wield a machete as capably and fearlessly as any other *mambí* does not undo inasmuch as reinforce this moral of the story: it is as if she cannot be taken seriously *unless* she, too, performs and partakes in a martial masculinity. And the fact that neither of the lead protagonists is Afro-Cuban only further places in doubt the force of the series’ liberatory aesthetic.

In this regard the series’ aesthetic of violence calls for critical commentary as well. If the soldier proves to be the exemplary Cuban, it is noteworthy that the *mambises* are decidedly not GI Joesque or Marvel superhero types. None of the *mambises* in the series have a stellar, muscular physique, are experts in the martial arts, or possess any special powers. In fact, it is not beyond the series to portray *mambises* as skinny, not exactly handsome, dressed in tattered slacks, and at times barefoot—to wit: Elpidio’s physique is marked by softer, almost corpulent lines that render him more huggable than fearsome. This aesthetic no doubt readily lends credence to the Liberation Army as a People’s Army, and it is hardly surprising that, as if by corollary, the *mambises* are never portrayed as harming civilians or, for that matter, soldiers and villains who either surrender or are unarmed. Whatever violence the *mambises* do exact is either ethically restrained or valiant. Indeed, despite the series being a visual account of a historic war, there is no bloodshed, gore, dismemberment, or corpses. There are combat deaths, but these tellingly take place either off screen (Elpidio Sr.) or in the shadows (Marcial). And in the rare scenes that a foe is struck by a machete he makes a goofy face and keels over—a “death” more theatrical and comical than anything else. Nearly all the machete charges are projected as close-ups of Elpidio’s stern face and panoramic vistas of the *mambí* cavalry charging at their foes, who are thereafter reduced to a disorderly cloud of dust and grunts. Surely it could be said that such renditions are better suited for the youth audiences to whom the films are explicitly addressed, but that would be to elide the fact that armed violence is all but exclusively portrayed as pleasurable and heroic. Elpidio’s jovial temper, María Silvia’s smile, Eutelia’s mischievous pranks, Marcial’s hearty laugh, the bugler Pepito’s innocent earnestness, and all the battle scenes that end to euphoric cheers with machetes held upright cumulatively bespeak an army and a war that were as cohesive and enjoyable as they were just.

2.3. ¡Bendita sea la tea!

Albeit a fictional and animated series, Juan Padrón’s *Elpidio Valdés* brands itself as a historically faithful account of Cuban history. The closing credits to *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón*, for example, juxtapose 1890s-era black-and-white photos with the animated characters and scenes from the film that they closely resemble—documentary “evidence,” as it were, to testify to the film’s fidelity to the way things actually occurred. Nothing, however, is more authoritative in this respect than Padrón’s *El libro del mambí* (1985). A visually rich text, Padrón’s “Book of the *mambí*” offers Cuba’s youth (young adults as much as adolescents) historically precise sketches and illustrations of the uniforms, weaponry, tactics, and military customs of the Spanish and Cuban forces in the wars for independence. Images in fact occupy far more of each page than does any written explanatory text. But the images are not only realist depictions of stout, dignified soldiers in uniform or catalogs of the various types of rifles and machetes used in the wars; so, too, is the text punctuated with comic strip stylized inserts of Elpidio and the gang—once again “validating” the series’ fidelity to Cuban history yet also contributing to an overall aesthetic that conveys war as pleasurable and “clean.”

Indeed, for all its devotion to historical accuracy and pedagogy, *El libro del mambí*—not unlike its kin *Elpidio Valdés*—only further congeals mythical portrayals of the *mambises* as heroic warriors who joyfully won over the Patria’s independence one machete charge after the next. The cover image to the chapter titled, *¡Los Mambises!*, foregrounds a mounted Elpidio with machete gesticulating and his crew on the ready: María Silvia bears the Cuban flag, Marcial a rifle, and the young Pepito blares his bugle—each with a cheerful smile on her or his face. And while this may come across as juvenile or ingenious, the book’s closing image is a realist color painting of virtually the same scenario: a *mambí* cavalry armed only with machetes rides fearlessly into the rifle-fire of Spanish infantrymen—Cuban flag upright and bugle sounding off. If there is any bloodshed or dismemberment to take place, it is suspended, imaginatively deferred to a moment and scene outside the frame (yet presupposed by it). Its accompanying caption tells the reader that the text’s authors were, in the course of their dutiful researches, “repeatedly astonished ... by the heroism of our patriots who, nearly naked and poorly armed, were able to surmount [*vencer*] one of the most powerful armies of its era.”⁴⁰

Yet for all that neither the text nor the films truly discuss (or portray) how in fact Cubans were able to “vanquish” the Spaniards—let alone *whether* they themselves did “vanquish” said foes.⁴¹ The historically corroborated “truth” is that battles such as Mal Tiempo were strategic anomalies. Generals Gómez and Maceo had learned relatively early on that the machete-charge was an all but suicidal tactic that had to be used sparingly or under dire circumstances. The volley fire of even poor marksmen would suffice to take out large numbers of men and their horses—war diaries and chronicles would live to tell of such dismal losses. Instead, the tactical norm was for Cubans to *dismount* their valuable horses, leave them on standby for retreats, lure Spaniards into tactically advantageous sites such as open fields or bottleneck trails, and fire at them from concealed positions. It was, after all, only because of chronic shortages in war supplies that the typical *mambí* was armed with little other than a machete or hopelessly antiquated Remingtons and Springfields. Given such arsenals, Gómez and Maceo knew well that they could not defeat the Spanish army in a traditional war of “open fronts”—no matter how heroically they wielded their machetes.⁴²

An altogether different repertoire of military insight and strategy would have to be called on in order to counter, if not surmount, such disparities. And the disparities were bleak. At war’s outset in February 1895, Spanish forces numbered nearly 80,000. By December of that same year, another 70,000 Spanish regulars had been sent to the island, and by war’s end Spain will have deployed a massive force of 190,000 regulars and 60,000 irregulars.⁴³ These were by and large trained uniformed soldiers armed with Mausers, a repeating rifle that fired a bullet jacketed in nickel steel and that could exact a range, velocity, and accuracy that the Cubans’ older Remingtons, Springfields, and Winchesters could not rival. By stark contrast, the ELC was rarely greater than 30,000 combat effective soldiers at any given time in the war. Worse yet, they were chronically short on rifles,

⁴⁰ Juan Padrón, *El Libro del mambí* (Havana: Editorial Abril, 1989).

⁴¹ It should come as no surprise that Spanish and American historians debate to whom the credit should be given; as a general rule, Spaniards do not want to be remembered as losing to a degenerate make-shift army of colonial subjects, just as Americans have repeatedly taken all the credit. See: Louis Pérez, Jr. *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴² See Tone’s wonderful chapter, “Mal Tiempo and the Romance of the Machete,” *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 123-138.

What did prove militarily effective was for the Cuban cavalry to charge at Spaniards and compel them to tighten their ranks so as to render them easier targets for Cuban riflemen in concealed positions. And rather than tear Spanish soldiers apart with their machetes, the cavalry would pull away early enough not to fall prey to their foe’s Mausers and bayonets.

⁴³ By the war’s end in 1898, Spain will have deployed 190,000 peninsular men to the island and have armed and fielded another 60,000 irregulars from the island. It will constitute the largest expeditionary force in history till that date to be sent abroad to fight a colonial war. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 16.

ammunition, and field supplies. Even when re-supply expeditions did make it ashore, the medley of rifles and ammunition that was sent often did not match, rendering them worthless!⁴⁴

Gómez and Maceo thereby had to exploit the *conditions* of war on an island and with peoples they knew, loved, befriended, or could outright coerce. With the Republic in Arms' reluctant blessings, the elder Commander Gómez had his ELC enact a "total war" and systematically assault the colony's economic infrastructure. This of course meant first and foremost the colony's prized commercial asset, namely its sugar estates. ELC circulars were issued July 1 and November 6, 1895 to the following effect:

Article 1. That all plantations shall be totally destroyed, their cane *and* outbuildings burned and railroad connections destroyed.

Article 2. All laborers who shall aid the sugar factories...shall be considered as traitors to the country.

Article 3. All who are caught in the act, or whose violation of Article 2 shall be proven, shall be shot...⁴⁵

In a letter to Delegate Estrada Palma, Gómez explained that he sought out "the total paralyzation of all labor in Cuba."⁴⁶ The Maceo brothers, as had Martí, thought it wiser to be selective in their desolation so that the Republic in Arms would not be "needlessly" deprived of financial resources and productive capabilities *post* bellum. But Gómez, quite justifiably, was weary that it would lead to class favoritism and fail to bring capital's accumulation to enough of a halt. At any rate, wherever the ELC had a monopoly on the use of violence, they could charge planters a "revolutionary tax" in lieu of absolute desolation. They also made it a practice of "confiscating" any absentee planter's property and redistributing it to the small farmers of the region. Militarily, this enabled the newly endowed farmers to grow crops and care for livestock that would feed the revolutionary army. But it was no less a socially driven policy consistent with Gómez' and Maceo's outspoken antipathy towards social inequalities and class privileges. Gómez had once confessed to a colleague in arms:

When I arrived in this island and saw the plight of the poor workers, I felt wounded with sadness. There was this poor wretchedness working beside magnificent grandeur; beside all that beautiful richness was so much misery and so much low morality. When I saw the wife and children of the poor worker coerced with rags and living in a battered hut, I was touched with the enormity of the contrast. When I asked for the school and was told that there had never been one, and when I entered innumerable towns and saw no culture, no morality, no clean people, no acceptable living accommodations [...] then I felt indignant and profoundly disgusted against

⁴⁴ The Republic in Arms (i.e. the PRC) did assiduously raise funds, purchase arms and supplies, and send out Cuban filibusters in unarmored, but quick schooners from the shores of Florida. All told, sixty-four expeditions were sent to Cuba throughout the war's three years—twenty-three of which the U.S. interceded and another four that either the sea or the Spanish laid claimed to. All told, thus only sixty percent of supply expeditions made it to Cuban shores and in the hands of the ELC. Even when supplies did arrive, the lack of standardized weaponry meant that rifles (Springfields, Remingtons, Winchesters) and ammunition were often incompatible and thus worthless, or at least laid fallow until the proper match was, if ever, made. Even had they enjoyed a one-hundred percent success rate to smuggle in supplies, it would not have sufficed to match the Spaniards' capabilities in terms of weaponry, munitions, and supplies. Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 82; Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 19.

⁴⁵ Reprinted in *Algunos documentos políticos de Máximo Gómez*, ed. Amalia Rodríguez Rodríguez (La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 1962), 10.

⁴⁶ Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 22.

the elevated classes of the country. And in an instant I exclaimed to myself, 'Blessed be the torch!' [*Bendita sea la tea!*].⁴⁷

It is no exaggeration to say that *la tea*, the torch, was the most efficient weapon in the ELC's arsenal. To torch a plantation did not require costly-to-feed and difficult-to-maneuver brigades of armed soldiers. Rather, small, dispersed cells of highly mobile guerrillas could wreck havoc at little expense and with minimal operational "friction." For the Spanish army, by contrast, this meant having to undertake a soldier-intensive and militarily disadvantaged effort to guard plantations and outlying towns from their incendiary demise. And for the Spanish regime it meant having to weather a *social* as much as financial crisis. Sugar was the colony's largest revenue source *and* its largest employer. Every newly unemployed worker was now either i) a potential recruit for the ELC or ii) yet another disgruntled colonial subject in need of food, shelter, and security. The ELC would of course always welcome and put to work a "compatriot," but they could not possibly afford to feed all of Cuba's rural peasantry and agro-industrial proletariats. Moreover, the Spanish had taken care to portray the ELC as a horde of black savages and anarchist terrorists such that most Cuban *pacíficos* (non-combatants) hedged their bets and fled for Spanish-garrisoned towns and cities, involuntarily yielding the equivalent to a general strike!⁴⁸ The colony as such quickly became a colossal financial liability to Spain—all of which Gómez had strategically foreseen and tactically precipitated.

And insofar as the war progressed as such, the *mambises* retained the initiative and odds were not nearly as disparate as they once seemed. Especially in the central and eastern provinces, the ELC was able to convert tens of thousands of otherwise "neutral" bystanders into vital auxiliaries who repaired weapons, raised crops, tended to livestock, cared for the sick and wounded, and gathered intelligence. The ELC seemed to know the whereabouts and capacity of every advancing Spanish force *and* their relief columns, enabling them to set up roadblocks and ambushes or to altogether avoid a much too risky encounter. Confidant José Miró Argenter credited these near-mystical sounding words to Gómez on the subject:

I know where the sucking insect lays its egg in Cuba. I know where the fat bull is and where the best water is. I know the hour the Spaniard is wakeful and the hour when he sleeps most deeply. I divine his moments of fear, and then I am courageous and daring. And I quickly recognize when he is fearless, and then I prudently let him pass, so that he expends his bravery in a vacuum.⁴⁹

Of course, Spanish officers soon realized that every Cuban in their midst was a potential spy. Within due course, they began to deliberately "leak" misinformation and to plan their stratagems through the confidence of whispers.⁵⁰ But such counter-measures could never account for the most lethal of Spanish foes, namely the "sucking insect," as Gómez called it.

If the torch was the Revolution's most effective destroyer, the mosquito was its most effective killer. As a vector for yellow fever and malaria, the mosquito wrecked havoc on the Spanish army, whose combat-ready forces were cut by anywhere from a third to nearly half at different junctures in

⁴⁷ Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, ed. *Ideario cubano: Máximo Gómez*. (La Habana, 1936), 68-72. It should come as no surprise, militarily or ideologically, that Gómez and Maceo were decidedly more lenient on Orientales, laborers, artisans, and smaller scale farmers and ruthless towards the propertied elites and their hired goons.

⁴⁸ Tone has an excellent discussion on this: "Máximo Gómez and Total War," *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 57-68.

⁴⁹ José Miró Argenter, *Cuba: Crónicas de la guerra, las campañas de invasión y de occidente, 1895-1896* (La Habana, 1945), 175.

⁵⁰ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 77.

the war's history.⁵¹ The aggregate figures tell part of the story: for every Spanish servicemen killed in combat, roughly ten died to disease. Yellow fever, malaria, typhus, pneumonia, dysentery, small pox, and other diseases killed off twenty-two percent of the Spanish forces and accounted for ninety percent (41,288) of all Spanish fatalities.⁵² Yellow fever in particular took the largest toll and was, to boot, a quite dreaded end. Its signature symptoms were not so much jaundice and fever inasmuch as bleeding from the gums, ears, rectum, and genitals and vomiting up a mixture of internal organ tissue and blood that looked like wet coffee grounds—hence its colloquial names among the Spanish and Cuban troops: the “black vomit” and the “friendly fever,” respectively.⁵³

Again, this was not serendipity as much as foresight and strategy. It had not yet been “scientifically” validated that particular species of mosquitoes were vectors for yellow fever and malaria, but two things were popularly known: i) that Iberian peninsulares had a heightened susceptibility to tropical diseases and ii) that there was a correlation between epidemics and the rainy season.⁵⁴ It had been no mystery to Toussaint, Dessalines, and Christophe in their revolutionary war against the continental French forces sent to Haiti (1793-1804), and it was certainly no mystery to Gómez: “My three best generals? June, July, and August.”⁵⁵ If Gómez's and the ELC's estimates are to be trusted, Spanish servicemen were falling at a rate of 1,000 per day throughout the rainy season. Nor did yellow fever, malaria, or the like have to be lethal to be effective. For every fatality to the “friendly” fevers, roughly another four servicemen were temporarily out of commission to illness and recovery in the rear.⁵⁶ Little wonder, thus, why Gómez would reassure his officers with a routine farewell: “Another day, gentlemen, and another battle won.”⁵⁷

All told, thus, it was by the strategically sound graces of the torch and the mosquito that the Republic in Arms had brought the war, by early 1898, to a stalemate—arguably, the equivalent to a “victory” for the Cubans. No greater than ten percent of Spanish casualties could be credited to combat proper—even fewer to machetes strictly—and cavalry charges, however nobly depicted, posed no real threat to Spain's imperial economy. The horse does, however, deserve far more credit than the machete. Cuba's cattle ranchers were known for breeding fine horses, which they tended to let roam freely to forage and round up when necessary. This made them easy for the ELC to “commandeer.” That Cuba's cattle ranchers were concentrated in Camagüey, just on the border of rebel-teeming Oriente, made it even easier. Spain by then was better known for its pack mules than its horses and could not so readily acquire and restock quality horses from the Peninsula or from any of its former viceroyalties in the Americas, most importantly Mexico. As a result, the ELC had a monopoly on horses, whereas the Spanish fielded a large army with relatively few cavalry units. Militarily, their value at the time was quite handsome. Without horses, the Spanish could not flank marching troops or lead an advance, could not properly scout ahead for intelligence, and could not pursue retreating forces to effect a larger number of casualties. Whereas, on horseback the ELC was

⁵¹ By January 1898, in fact, only 50,000 of the 114,000 Spanish forces still on the island were combat-ready. Emilio Roig de Leuchsinring, *Cuba no se debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (La Habana: Sociedad Cubana de Estudios Históricos e Internacionales, 1950), 34-35.

⁵² Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 9-11. By contrast, fewer Cuban *mambises* died to disease (3,437) than to battle or combat-related injuries (5,180). Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 20.

⁵³ Ibid. And Murat Halstead, *The Story of Cuba: her struggles for liberty* (Chicago: Cuban Libre Publishing Co., 1896), 122.

⁵⁴ That mosquitoes were a vector for yellow fever was a theory proposed by the Cuban doctor Carlos J. Finlay as early as 1881; his extensive studies and proofs were, ironically enough, then corroborated by the the U.S. Army's Walter Reed Commission in American occupied Cuba in 1900—the rewards of which the U.S. would reap in its war in the Philippines!

⁵⁵ Roig, *Cuba no debe*, 24.

⁵⁶ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 9.

⁵⁷ Roig, *Cuba no debe*, 24.

able to move swiftly and elusively about the island as it wrought its saboteur's havoc on railways, bridges, telegraph lines, outposts, and sugar estates.⁵⁸

That the horse plays a robust role in *mambí* iconography of course cannot be doubted: Elpidio's iconic portrayals (i.e. film posters and comic book covers) rarely, if ever, fail to depict him astride Palmiche, his trusty steed; Havana's monuments to Maceo and Gómez each feature a soldierly leader mounted on a regal stallion—the likes of a Washington or a Bólvivar; and Gonzalo de Quesada's *The War in Cuba* (1896), the official account by the Republic in Arms' Chargé D'Affaires to the United States, is lavishly “embellished” with illustrations such as “Spirited Charge of the Cuban Cavalry,” a wood engraving every bit as faithful to the machete charge mystique as its successors. But that the horse's symbolic value is more classical than “guerrillero” should be little wonder. At least Euro-classically, the soldier on horseback resembles or conjures up the senses of either a medieval knight or a modern cavalry officer, icons of nobility and gallantry. As a mounted warrior, the *mambí* has thereby enjoyed greater respectability than if he were to be rendered a mere infantryman—let alone the ELC soldier's truer identities: saboteur and arsonist! Rather than bespeak a “dastardly” or “irregular” war waged in the shadows—elusiveness made possible by the horse!—the undying imagery of a charging *mambí* bespeaks a romanticized scene of war and its heroic protagonist. The fact that he bears a machete—the everyday implement of the Cuban *guajiro* (the quintessential peasant)—only further heightens his cachet as an irresistible hero against all odds. Indeed, to feel the force of this interpellation one has only to imagine the reaction to the historically fastidious Cuban who recommended that the torch in lieu of the machete or, worse yet, the mosquito in lieu of the *mambí* become symbols of national identity.⁵⁹ Sacrilege of most peculiar sort!

2.4. *Mambiserías—Citation and Consummation*

The *mambí*'s sublimity was not always so luminous. With the US Army on Cuban soil, the *mambises* were relegated to an auxiliary force that had no say in the war's strategy or the terms of its armistice. On January 1, 1899, as the Spanish flag at Havana's El Morro fort was lowered and the US' flag ceremoniously raised in its place, *mambises* were little else than spectators. Before that year's close, the US Army would pay bounties to roughly 34,000 Cuban soldiers for the surrender of their arms, thereby effectively disbanding the Liberation Army, and in its place instate a Rural Guard and police force. These latter institutions were tied to literacy and property credentials such that the poorer (and darker) of the *mambises*—that is to say, the majority—were left unarmed, un-uniformed, and unemployed. Worse still, Spanish officials and Cuban autonomists who held public office—and who had previously labored *against* Cuba Libre—were allowed to keep their cushy jobs insofar as they pledged allegiance to the United States. And, as if any further demoralization was in order, what members of the Cuba Libre movement were invited to partake in the newly founded “Republic” were drawn mostly from its civilian and wealthy elite: Cuba's first president, Tomás Estrada Palma (1902-06), was a Cuban émigré who had lived in the United States for over thirty years, a US citizen, a Quaker convert, and friendly to American investment in Cuba.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 77. As we know, however, even on this last count the ELC had learned that the most valuable tactic was to only *partially* charge at Spanish troops. This “taunt,” as it were, would cause the Spaniards to form their famous “block” (*cuadro*), which they thought more impervious to cavalry charges, but which likewise rendered them more vulnerable to Cuban rifle fire from concealed positions in the trees and brush

⁵⁹ I have borrowed this phrasing from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 9.

⁶⁰ Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*; Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, chp3; Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War* vol II.

The cultural and psychic milieu of postwar Cuba was well defined by José Miró Argenter, *mambí* colonel, who in the preface to his chronicles of the war spoke of the “veil of melancholy” through which Cubans now (late 1899) looked to their history.⁶¹ Cuba was anything but that Republic “with all and for the good of all” which Martí had famously intoned and the *mambises* had earnestly sought after. Rather, all through the first half of the twentieth century, Cuba’s governance came to be characterized by bribery, graft, embezzlement, electoral fraud, and at times extralegal military rule and dictatorships (i.e. Gerardo Machado from 1925-33 and Fulgencio Batista from 1934-40 and 1952-58).⁶² And, as though things were not scandalous enough, under the authority of the Platt Amendment American diplomats exercised final say over Cuba’s internal affairs. As Cuban poet Cintio Vitier commented in 1957: “It is obvious that within a very few years of the founding of the Republic, what remained of the political inspiration of the founders ... was hardly anything more than a grotesque phantasm. Today, not even that.”⁶³

As Louis Pérez Jr. has argued, Cubans thereby turned to their history as moral solace or, indeed, as summons. Not just any history, of course. Historian Herminio Portell Vilá was clear: “the first duty of every Cuban who truly wishes to rescue Cuba from the ills of today [1947] is to believe in the *epic* history of Cuba and in the heroes, martyrs, and patriots who created Cuba.”⁶⁴ Street names, monuments, anniversaries, commemorative acts, school lessons, family lore, memoirs, essays, anthems, and veteran’s centers all cumulatively testified not only to a *mambí* ethos of sacrifice for the Patria but also to an “unredeemed” Patria (*Cuba irredenta*). For the cruelest of ironies was that while Cubans, like so many other modern citizens, could revel in a past of heroic deeds and martyrs, they could not celebrate a “founding” per se. The Tenth National Congress of History (1952) declared as its Final Act:

The Republic established on May 20, 1902, was without doubt not the one that several generations of Cubans had envisioned and for which they fought and died, ... The nation of [Félix] Varela and [José de la] Luz y Caballero, [Carlos Manuel de] Céspedes and [Ignacio] Agramonte, [Máximo] Gómez and [Calixto] García, [José] Martí and [Antonio] Maceo, was thwarted by the shameful intervention of the United States in the larger conflict between Cuba and Spain. Immediately upon the end of the war, the ideals of liberation were suppressed by force as a result of a foreign intervention. The departure of Spain notwithstanding, Cuba was neither independent nor free.⁶⁵

A sense of having been wronged only deepened, as the present grew more scandalous. Or was it the other way around? It is difficult to tell whether the present was received as so dissatisfying precisely because the past was so exalted—or vice versa. But what was clear was that not a few Cubans were taken in by that past and its moral summons to do as the *mambises* had done, namely, take up arms and sacrifice one’s life for the greater good of the Patria.

When twenty-seven-year-old Fidel Castro answered for the armed assault on the Moncada Barracks on July 26, 1953, he declared that one reason stood out above all else:

We are Cubans, and to be Cuban implies a duty: not to fulfill this duty is a crime, a treason... We were taught from early on to venerate the glorious example of our heroes and our martyrs. Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Gómez, and Martí were the

⁶¹ José Miró Argenter, *Cuba: crónicas de la guerra* Tomo I. (Santiago de Cuba: “El Cubano Libre,” 1899).

⁶² Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 134-5.

⁶³ Cintio Vitier, *Lo cubano en la poesía*, (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 484.

⁶⁴ My emphasis: Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 153.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

first names engraved in our minds; we were taught that the Titan had said that liberty was not begged for, but conquered with the blade of the machete ... we were taught that October 10th [Grito de Yara] and February 24th [Grito de Baire] are glorious events worthy of patriotic rejoice because they mark the days on which Cubans rebelled against the yoke of an infamous tyranny; we were taught to love and defend that beautiful, solitary-starred flag and to sing every afternoon a hymn whose verses say that ‘to live in chains is to live in disgraceful and opprobrious submission’, and that ‘to die for the patria is to live’.⁶⁶

One could only infer, thus, that the Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio (MR 26-7) was heir to Cuba’s *mambí* patrimony. History had “absolved” the Maceos and Martí of Cuba, and so, too, Fidel rhetorically figured, would it analogously absolve him and his compatriots—whatever violence may have been perpetrated. These were no idle allusions. Castro and his comrades had, after all, coordinated their assault in the year 1953, the centennial of José Martí’s birth. MR 26-7 was of course not alone in this respect. All across the island Cubans used the solemn occasion to agitate against Batista’s regime, calling on each other to honor and live up to the Apostle’s teachings and liberation project. But no other revolutionary constituent would so deftly inscribe itself within the nationalist narrative of carrying forth the *mambí* legacy of 1868 and 1895 as did MR 26-7.⁶⁷ For theirs was a struggle symbolically rich with parallels, mimicry, and reenactments.

MR 26-7 quite expressly emulated the rhetoric, personas, and strategies of the nineteenth century Cuba Libre movement. As if a reincarnated Martí, Fidel suffered as a prisoner and, once released, traveled to the United States to enlist the émigré communities of New York, Tampa, and Key West. Fidel and his comrades’ voyage aboard the yacht *Granma* and landing at Playa Las Coloradas in 1956 was strikingly akin to the arrival of Maceo at Duaba and Gómez and Martí at Playitas de Cajobabo in 1895. And the fact that they landed and waged their war from Oriente province only heightened the historical aura and credibility of their struggle: Oriente “is the land of the invincible heroes, for it represents the spirit of sacrifice and love of the *Patria* of the Liberators of 1868 and 1895,” broadcasted MR 26-7. Indeed, even their media were not casually linked to *mambí* history. The rebel newspaper *El Cubano Libre*, established in the Sierra Maestra in 1957, went by the same name as Antonio Maceo’s 1895 newspaper for the *mambí* ranks: “Today *El Cubano Libre*... is the voice of those of us ... who struggle to reclaim the liberty that forms the legacy that the *mambises* bequeathed to us.” And famed Radio Rebelde transmitted its inaugural broadcast on February 24, the anniversary of the *Grito de Baire*. Other examples abound, but probably no other stands out as enthralling as does the westward march in late 1958 of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s and Camilo Cienfuegos’ guerrilla columns. It was dubbed “the Invasion,” exactly the name of Maceo’s westward march in 1895-96, and Camilo designated his column the “Antonio Maceo” Column. But beyond symbolic gestures, it was very much materially on par with the Liberation Army’s incendiary warpath. Che’s and Camilo’s march, that is, set ablaze the sugarcane fields and declared war on the economy: “The 26th of July Movement has decided to use against the Tyranny the same method that Máximo Gómez used with success against the Captain Generals of the colonial regime.”⁶⁸

Little wonder, thus, that when they arrived in Havana in early January of 1959 the young bearded revolutionaries (*los barbudos*) were greeted as latter-day *mambises* and Cuba Libre as a consummated fact. *Times of Havana* columnist Carlos Todd described the MR 26-7 rebels as “living embodiments of the famed ‘*mambises*’ of the revolutionary past ... They appeared before the cameras, a

⁶⁶ Fidel Castro Ruz, *Historia me absolverá* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 88-89.

⁶⁷ Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 196.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 202-5.

reincarnation of the men led by Maceo, Máximo Gómez, and Calixto García, bearded, long-haired, bristling with bandoliers and rifles and carbines.”⁶⁹ Indeed, when Fidel took the speaker’s platform at this first of many-to-come Havana mass rally, he shared the stage with surviving *mambises* of 1895—“palpable testimony,” the newspaper *Revolución* reported, that these young men had liberated Cuba with their patriotic elders’ blessings. One year later, the cover to the commemorative issue of the newspaper *Hoy* echoed this sentiment with a sketched Fidelesque *barbudo* partially superimposed on that of a *mambí*—portraying a historical metamorphosis (yet continuity) of *mambí* into *barbudo*.⁷⁰ That the image foregrounds their raised weapon—machete and rifle, respectively—is no idle detail, for, as in 1868 and 1895, it and *he* (i.e. the armed man) served as metonym for liberation, Revolution, and a free Patria.

Doubtless, the “aesthetic” of the Revolution was that of young bearded men in olive green uniforms, usually with a rifle (or cigar) within arms reach, and its iconic faces those of Fidel, Che, and Camilo. Theirs was an aesthetic, in other words, that bespoke (and revered) masculine bravado and virility, but so, too, did it code the rebels (and their Revolution) as roguishly humble and morally upright. The rank-and-file *barbudo*’s unkempt hair, not only his beard but the hair on his head, his vernacular speech, the fact that he hailed from Oriente’s peasantry and had endured the hardships of war in the mountains and jungles (*en la manigua*) all cumulatively bespoke a people’s army and a patriotic hero neither urbane nor urban—and, not incidentally, much akin to the *mambí*.⁷¹ Rooted in the *campo* and the *campesino*, the *barbudo* (as reincarnated *mambí*) was the vintage and authentic Cuban. And if this proved seductive, it was in no small measure because the *barbudos* had so adeptly cited the *mambí* archive, an “archive” accruing in the cultural imaginary since 1868. Fidel and the MR 26-7 rebels had, in other words, not just verbally invoked the *mambises* but aesthetically resembled and performatively re-iterated their look and labor as young armed *campesino* men who took up arms for the “redemption” of the Patria.

Whatever the existent *mambí* archive, the revolutionary regime would not only cite but also augment it quite notably. Especially in or near the year 1968, the centennial of the *Grito de Yara*, the wars for independence were heavily featured throughout Cuban oratory, historiography, and visual culture as part of the regime’s *cien años de lucha* motif, that is, One Hundred Years of Struggle for Independence. Examples abound, but arguably the most noteworthy are the ICAIC documentaries and films to this effect: Jorge Fraga’s *La odisea de General José*, Humberto Solás’ *Lucía*, and Alejandro Saderman’s *Hombres del Mal Tiempo*—each released in 1968—as well as Manuel Octavio Gómez’ *La primera carga al machete* (1969), Bernabé Hernández’ *1868-1898* (1970), and José Massip’s *Páginas del diario de José Martí* (1971).⁷² Critics and the Cuban filmmakers themselves have noted that these films elaborated a *cine rescate*, that is, a cinema that recuperates a past mystified by bourgeois ideology and revisions it as “something alive” and of relevance to the revolutionary present.⁷³ In many regards this amounted to stressing the historical “continuity” between the *mambí* past and “olive green” present in order to confer the former’s moral credibility upon the latter—whatever the aesthetic techniques employed or experimented with. A bit more subtly, and as a corollary, these works no

⁶⁹ Ibid., 217.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 224; another excellent source is: Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

⁷¹ See Guerra, “The Olive Green Revolution,” *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 37-74.

⁷² Later would come Santiago Alvarez’s *El primer delegado* (1975), ostensibly about José Martí (though actually a moral justification for Cuba’s one-party rule), and José Massip’s *Baraguá* (1985), about the famous meeting between Martínez-Campos and Antonio Maceo, though these would, critics agree, not stand out as their avant-garde predecessors. See: Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) and Cuban film critic: Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción* (Arte y Literatura, 2001).

⁷³ Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 273.

less inextricably tethered national identity and liberation to revolutionary violence. Of these films, *Lucía* and *La primera carga al machete* stand out as the most critically acclaimed of the cohort.

Humberto Solás' *Lucía* (1968) is actually a cinematic triptych, set in three momentous periods of Cuban history (1895, 1933, 196...) and told through love stories involving three different women each named Lucía. One of the most striking things about the film, at least for our purposes, is the fact that it repeatedly relies on a scheme of unseemly as against seemly violence—the former the precursor to, and justification for, the latter. Let us consider, for now, only the first of the three “episodes,” the closest to our historical subject matter. Cuba is in the midst of yet another war for independence (1895) when Lucía I, a middle-aged and unwed virgin of the creole aristocracy, falls for a Spanish dandy, Rafael. The rebel's cause for war is made evident, albeit obliquely, to the viewer through the figure of Fernandina, the town's wandering madwoman. We learn that she was once a nun, who while blessing the dead in a battle's wake (presumably in the Ten Year's War), was suddenly pounced on and stripped naked by sexually ravenous Spanish soldiers—hence, her madness. We see it on screen in over-exposed shots that Anna Marie Taylor has described as a “dream-like allegory, the rape of Cuba by Spain.”⁷⁴ That Fernandina is *mestiza* and was once a nun bespeaks a racially mixed and morally pure Cuba.

But the plot is driven by the budding romance of Lucía and, as it turns out, a duplicitous Rafael. Rafael, purportedly apolitical, convinces Lucía to take him to her family's coffee estate in the *campo*, away from the prying eyes and rumors of urban and aristocratic Cuba. Yet once they are within sight of the estate, the Spanish cavalry suddenly emerges and raids it. As Rafael dumps her on the roadside, Lucía learns the truth: he is a Spanish agent. Lucía then desperately searches amongst the dead for her brother, Felipe, who she knew to be a *mambí* officer clandestinely organizing guerrillas and using their family estate as a rebel headquarters. He is found, dead. Lucía, driven by a fierce grief, later finds Rafael in the city and publicly stabs him to death. That she takes up a dagger is no idle choice, for it could readily be read as the machete in miniature. Lucía, in other words, is subsumed within (or mimics) the logic of violence as redemption: she redeems herself, her brother, and the Patria by killing Rafael. One could of course argue that she merely avenges her brother, but family here blurs into nation because Felipe was a *mambí* and Lucía, if only tacitly, was for Cuba Libre. What is more, Lucía “executes” Rafael publicly—rather than, say, anonymously poison him in her home—and her target, Rafael, is unambiguously coded as the colonizer: when she finds him in the city, he is now openly dressed in his Spanish military regalia, surrounded by fellow officers.

One takes into account, thus, the rapacity and treachery of the Spaniards as against the lost innocence (i.e. Fernandina, Lucía) and virility of Cubans. Indeed, one of the most spectacular scenes of *Lucía* 1895 is that of the naked Afro-Cuban *mambises* on horseback who, armed only with machetes, meet the Spanish cavalry in the field of battle. According to filmmaker Manuel Octavio Gómez, a regiment of black *mambises* was known for riding naked in the night to terrify its enemies, who could not see them.⁷⁵ The battle scene, however, does not occur at night, and even if it were a bona fide tactic of the wars, one cannot help but wonder why a choice that flirts with portraying the *mambises* as atavistic. Yet it is quite clear, in other respects, that they represent the *mambí*'s bravery and might and that neither their blackness nor violence is coded as “savage” or “primitive” inasmuch as patriotic and revolutionary. Hence, it is more in line with Glauber Rocha's “aesthetics of hunger,” which assert that violence is but the “most noble cultural manifestation” of the colonized against the colonizer.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ A. M. Taylor, “Review of *Lucía* by H. Solás,” *Film Quarterly* 28.2 (1974-75) 53-59: 55.

⁷⁵ Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 280.

⁷⁶ Glauber Rocha, “An Esthetic of Hunger” in *New Latin American Cinema: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, v1, ed. Michael Chanan (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 59-61.

Whereas *Lucía* operates firmly within a fictional mode, Manuel Octavio Gómez' *La primera carga al machete* (The First Machete Charge) is fictional but stylistically crafted as a documentary or, better yet, what Latin American critics call *cine encuesta*, a film that “investigates” or “inquires” about (rather than merely reenacts) the historical past. Here the event in question takes place October 25, 1868—literally, the first known, and resoundingly victorious, machete charge. The film actually opens at the scene of the battle's aftermath, exposing the viewer to visually high-contrasted images of corpses sprawled about a roadside creek. The viewer is here also introduced to the film's deliberately anachronistic “aesthetic” of newsreel reportage, with hand-held cameras and portable “on the spot” sound relaying an interviewee on screen speaking to an (anonymous) interviewer off screen—a technique that puts past and present in touch with one another. In this first of many interviews to come, weary-looking and heavily bandaged Spanish soldiers tell the interviewee: “They [the *mambises*] don't fight like soldiers; what we were [militarily] trained for does us no good here.” Other constituencies will be called on throughout the film to answer for the war: patriotic citizens of Bayamo, which has been taken by the *mambises* and serves as Cuba Libre's first headquarters and the namesake to the Patria's anthem; Spanish authorities, such as the governor and *latifundista* gentry, who refer to Cubans as “lazy, insolent, and ill suited for combat” and reassure the interviewer that Bayamo will soon be retaken; civilians in Havana, who are beaten by the police for openly debating the prospects of Cuba Libre; and, of course, the *mambises* themselves, from officers to rank-and-file soldiers. These scenes are punctuated by a wandering troubadour (a young Pablo Milanés), who sings a ballad, tellingly enough, to the machete.

All of this leads us, retrospectively, to the film's final scene, namely the battle. An overall scene taking up no less than ten minutes of screen time, the “machete charge” turns out to be portrayed as an almost feverish slaughter. All that is heard are agonizing cries and a metallic tish-tish as an unsteady hand-held camera delivers a visually delirious spectacle. In fact, throughout the ten minutes no image holds the screen for much longer than two seconds, making it difficult to watch not only for its violent content but also due to its visual form. Of all the imagery, however, a “counterpoint” stands out, namely that of the alternating high-angle to low-angle close-ups of the *machetero* striking down at his prey and the Spanish soldier crawling away, eyeing over his shoulder with a look of terror on his face. Cubans (Cuban men) are portrayed, thus, as fierce, even merciless. But their ferocity has been contextualized as an act of liberatory violence, as if to visually depict the “purging” effect that Frantz Fanon attributes to decolonizing violence and that Jean-Paul Sartre prefaced as follows:

For [Fanon] shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of the savage instincts, nor even the effect of resentment: it is man recreating himself ... to shoot down [or slay] a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man.⁷⁷

Indeed, let us not overlook the fact that, however mercilessly they kill, the *mambises'* victims here are Spanish cavalry and infantrymen—uniformed and armed with bayonets and rifles! What else could the *mambises* be, thus, if not fearless and virile to dare take on such a superiorly armed foe? And what else could they be, if not clever to have lured their foes into an ambush? By stark contrast, the Spaniards enact the most loathsome and cowardly of violence, namely the rape of Cuban women. In an earlier scene depicting a town's pillage, a woman's testimonial voices over the imagery of Spanish soldiers cornering (young, beautiful) Cuban women and forcibly wrestling them

⁷⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Preface,” in Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 21-2.

to the ground. It is obvious what transpires next, although it is neither shown nor narrated (the woman's voice, or language, fails her). Once again, the viewer walks away with a sense that the *mambises* have avenged and redeemed her (allegorically, the Patria) and villains gotten what they deserved—all at the helm of a (rather, *the*) phallic symbol. No torches, no mosquitoes, no dissensus, no collateral violence—only a resplendent *mambí* sublime, illumined by the blade of the machete.

CHAPTER 3. *MUDOS TESTIGOS*: CAN THE *RECONCENTRADO* SPEAK?

This chapter explores, firstly, the gender normativity of Cuba Libre oratory and literature, a normativity that called on men to bear arms and women (above all, as mothers) to stoically bear grief. These accounts of stoic and patriotic mothers who offer their sons to the Patria would have us believe that Cuban women suffered the horrors of wars only from afar or by emotional proxy (i.e. loss). The truth, however, is that when all was said and done she and her children were exposed to the greatest of dangers, namely reconcentration. How, secondly, that horror was registered by witnesses is telling. Americans graphically portrayed *reconcentrados* in the manner of the Christian pieta and a (subtly eroticized) melodrama in which Uncle Sam proves the chivalric savoir to the damsel in distress that was Cuba. Conspicuously absent from these accounts were the *mambises*. Cubans, however, just as readily depicted Weyler as a “Butcher” and *reconcentrados* as the proverbial “innocent women and children” who the *mambises* would liberate. Against these dramatized accounts, thirdly, I sketch out reconcentration’s historical realities as a complex military strategy and as (disavowed) humanitarian crisis not so easily dissociated from the Republic in Arms’ responsibility. Lastly, I offer a read of rare testimonial memoirs and of revolutionary era *cine encuesta* that likewise render the *reconcentrado* woman as prey to an Other’s violence. The value, thereby, of her mute vulnerability is as a figure that *corroborates* and *endorses*—rather than *critique* or *problematize*—the *mambi*’s liberatory violence and patriotism.

3.1. *Martí-dom*—Death and the Sublime

“Nubia is victorious! I die happy: death/Little does it matter, for I was able to save her... /Oh, how sweet it is to die when one dies/Struggling audaciously to defend the patria!”—these, the last words of Abdala, a fictional Nubian warrior in José Martí’s play of the same name.¹ Written in the first year of the Ten Years’ War, the Nubia of Martí’s *Abdala* is but a thinly veiled Cuba and Abdala, as black savoir, a literary nod to the *mambises* (not least the *libertos*) of Oriente. Albeit the romantic drama of an adolescent Martí, *Abdala* voiced motifs that would carry through to his later (presumably, “mature”) works and that were, after all, not uncommon to nationalist rhetoric: the affinities of death to the sublime and of necessary to redemptive (even pleasurable) violence.

In *Abdala*, violence is framed quite neatly: the “warriors” who defend their homeland against an enemy who threatens with “vile slavery.” Although never explicitly identified as a tribe, nation, or religious other, to refer to the enemy as “conquistador,” “barbarian,” “tyrant,” “master,” and “oppressor” more than sufficed for any Cuban (or Spanish) reader at the time. And the fact that the enemy is figured as an unprovoked aggressor only makes the literary call to arms all the more justifiable. Yet the play’s dramaturgy is not driven by scenes of injustices or, for that matter, of epic battles—all such matters take place off stage. Rather, *Abdala*’s truest drama is that of Abdala’s odes to patriotic love (and to war) against the pleas of his inconsolable mother, Espirta, who fears she shall lose her son. When asked by Espirta what his love for her awakens in him, Abdala dryly

¹ ¡Nubia venció! Muero feliz: la muerte/poco me importa, pues logré salvarla.../¡Oh, que dulce es morir cuando se muere/Luchando audaz por defender la patria! José Martí, *Abdala*. (Barcelona: Red Ediciones, S.L., 2012), 24.

replies, “Do you truly think there is anything more sublime than love for one’s patria?” This patriotic love (and Nubian identity as a consequence), however, is readily conflated with a love of war and manly prowess. Nubians are “fierce tigers” and “ferocious panthers” mounted on “noble steeds” and with spears in hand—a literary proxy for the *mambises* and their machetes. As for Abdala, their “chief,” he can hardly temper his enthusiasm to see “torrents of blood” flow through the African plains: “Oh! What strength and life such joy brings to my soul! How my valor grows! How the blood in my veins burns! How this invincible ardor stirs me! How I desire to be off to battle!”² Even Abdala’s sister, Elmira, scolds her mother for her tears and grief: “Do you not hear the sublime sound of the roar of battle? ... With what joy I would swap out this humiliating dress [*veste*] for the lustrous armor of the warriors, for a noble steed, for a spear!”³

The gender normativity of Martí’s war fantasy is unmistakable. The two women in the play possess an identity that is meaningful only insofar as it relates to Abdala: sister and mother to the “illustrious warrior.” Their dramaturgical roles are those of parlaying the (im)proper conduct for women in times of war: “A Nubian [that is, Cuban] mother is not she who cries if her son soars to the patria’s rescue!,” says Elmira to her grieving mother.⁴ Rather, she, as Elmira has done, sees her brother, son, or husband off to war with a loving kiss and great pride—if not envy! In so doing, she subordinates her love of family to that of love for one’s Patria and her deeds as woman to that of his as man: *he* redeems the Patria and *she* exalts him for it, not least if he dies in the act. “Battle laurels” and the “crown of martyr” are what await Abdala—never Espirita or Elmira.

A strikingly similar logic plays out in the rhetoric of Cuban collective memory and historiography of the independence wars. Cuba’s heroines are routinely identified as the patriotic daughters, mothers, and wives to *mambí* officers.⁵ They were those who gave themselves over to Cuba Libre, a liberation project designed and governed by men. “And our women?” asked rebel journalist Luis Quintero in the midst of the Ten Years’ War:

There is no task they have not performed, no misery that have not suffered, no sorrow that has not afflicted their heart. They have lost their dear brothers, their beloved husbands, their adored sons. Their sons! ... And yet these women suffer their exile and their misery and their pain without the slightest complaint against the revolution, and they encourage and support the patriot who wishes to share with his brothers the horrors of war.⁶

No other Cuban woman could rival Mariana Grajales in this regard. Grajales was nurse and director of field hospitals and rebel workshops in the Ten Years’ War. But her true renown was due to the fact that her husband and eleven sons all fought (and all but two died) in the wars for liberation. This included her sons, José and Antonio Maceo, who worked their way from mere soldiers to the Liberation Army’s most formidable field generals. According to Maria Cabrales, herself credited by virtue of patriarchic affiliation (i.e. as Antonio Maceo’s wife), once war broke out in 1868, Mariana Grajales ran to her room, came out with a crucifix and said, “Everyone on their knees, fathers and sons, before Christ ... and let us swear to liberate the Patria or die for it.”⁷

It is telling, indeed, that in Maria Cabrales’ account “fathers and sons” is what qualifies “everyone.” Mariana Grajales had, in fact, two living daughters at the time. Could they not stand

² Ibid., 14-15.

³ Ibid., 22

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See: Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005)

⁶ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 93.

⁷ Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas*, 63-66.

before Christ and vow to liberate or die for their Patria? One can only infer that, as with Marañón, their greatest value was their capacity to birth *mambí* sons and offer them as sacrifices to the Patria. That her daughters, Baldomera and Dominga, are rarely named in Grajales biographies—let alone the biography of the Nation—speaks volumes to their (and woman’s) value within what Martí tellingly called a “*brotherhood of sacrifice*.”⁸

The monument that stands in El Vedado district of Havana to Mariana Grajales’ credit features her with one of her young sons (not one of her daughters). Mariana stands close behind him, nudging him forward with her body and with one hand pointing ahead. That her shirtless son, his sturdy-bodied on display, holds a machete makes it quite clear that she points to a proverbial field of battle. His uncertain gaze upwards at her (he is no taller than her chin) meets with her unflinching eyes, eyes that reassure as much as they insist on the task at hand—a scene, all told, of sacrifice unto the Patria that resembles or conjures up the biblical tale of Abraham and Isaac. Little wonder that in 1894 a now middle-aged José Martí, chief delegate to the Cuban Revolutionary Party, would eulogize Mariana in the leading Cuba Libre periodical, *Patria*, as the exemplary Cuban mother (i.e. woman):

It was the day that they brought Antonio Maceo in wounded: he had been shot in the chest. Carried on their shoulders, he was unable to focus, and pale with the color of death. All the women, and there were many, began to cry, some against the wall, others on their knees by the dying man, another in a corner, her face sunken in her arms. And his mother, with the scarf from her head, expelled the crying women from her hut, as if scarring away chickens: ‘Out, out of here you skirts! I won’t stand for tears!’

Having already lost one son and with three others wounded, Martí explained, Mariana then turned to her youngest son, Marcos, and (allegedly) said: “And you, stand tall, because it’s time for you to fight for your patria.”⁹ As Martí famously intoned, Mariana was Mother to all Cubans. The fact that Mariana embodied an ethic that went against what customarily passed for (Cuban) motherly love did not bother Martí. Rather, it pleased him to no end: whereas Espirita could not bare her son’s death, Mariana’s only regret, allegedly, was that she did not have more sons to offer to the Patria!

A mother’s tears and grief no doubt could demoralize any would-be soldier to fight in a war with odds already stacked against him. What danger it was to bereave the dead, not least a mother for her *mambí* son! Instead, the call of the day was to welcome a martyr’s death. The battle hymn (turned national anthem), *la Bayamesa* (1868), reassured soldiers (and their female loved ones): “Fear not a glorious death/for to die for the patria is to live./To live in chains is to live/in shameful and opprobrious submission.” Not just any death, but a soldier’s death: “Run, men of Bayamo, to combat!” and “To arms, valiant ones, run!” open and close the hymn, respectively.¹⁰ As a consequence, men as much as women were called on to endorse a cultural and moral economy that let aside reconciliatory or civil disobedient politics for armed violence and a militancy that fetishized physical prowess and, as Martí put it, the “heroism of death.”¹¹

Martí in point of fact died the “happy” death he had long since exalted in prose and oratory, a death worthy of an Abdala. After twenty-four years in exile, he returned clandestinely to Cuba as chief delegate to the Cuban Revolutionary Party (PRC) and, once on Cuban soil, was named Major

⁸ José Martí, “Manifiesto de Montecristi” in *José Martí: Selected Writings* ed. Roberto González Echevarría (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 337-345.

⁹ Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas*, 65. Original passage in *Patria* January 6, 1894: ¡Y tú, empínate, porque ya es hora de que te vayas al campamento!”

¹⁰ Lyrics and sheet music found in Gonzalo de Quesada, *The War in Cuba* (Liberty Publishing Co., 1896).

¹¹ Martí, “Manifiesto de Montecristi”

General of the ELC. Commander Máximo Gómez had no illusions about Martí's lack of military experience and his truer value to the Republic in Arms as orator, poet, and its provisional president. Going against Gómez's order that he stay in the rear-guard, however, a forty-two year old Martí "audaciously" (others said carelessly) charged into the Spanish line of fire at the Battle of Dos Ríos on March 19, 1895. He was shot dead in short order, never truly a chance otherwise. He had fallen far enough into the field of fire that his body could not be recovered. At first buried in a mass grave, the next day his corpse was exhumed once Spanish Colonel José Ximenes Sandoval learned that the high-profile leader, Martí, was one of the casualties at Dos Ríos. The exhumed body was then placed in a coffin with a small window over Martí's face and put on public display in Santiago de Cuba as morbid evidence to the rebel's lost cause.¹² Martí's death, however, did not demoralize inasmuch as "certify" and embolden his and others' capacity for "sublime abnegation." His patriotic prose and oratory were now beyond reproach. Cuba Libre's official history, Gonzalo de Quesda's *Cuba's Great Struggle for Freedom* (1898), no longer referred to him as the "Delegate" but as "our new redeemer" and, most lastingly, as the "Apostle."¹³

Yet even the far humbler likes of rank and file *mambises* would enjoy honorary tributes, however generic or anonymous, as "heroes" within the nation's annals. On war's eve, Martí's "Manifiesto of Montecristi" (1895) referred to those who had fallen (and would soon fall) for Cuba as "warriors of independence" and "martyrs" whose "memory shall forever be blessed."¹⁴ At war's close, Generalísimo Máximo Gómez echoed with a eulogy that ranked his soldiers as the "apotheosis of humanity," never to be forgotten before the "sacrosanct altar" of History.¹⁵ Indeed, whether dead or alive, and however impoverished or mutilated by the war, the *mambí* and his loved ones at least enjoyed the solace that he, as soldier, fought the good war and, if dead, died honorably. He, as liberation soldier, would forever signify defiance, valor, cunning, and moral integrity, and his memory would forever be tied to the hallowed names Céspedes, Martí, and Maceo and to the *Grito de Yara* and the *Grito de Baire*.

The cruelest of ironies, however, is that the Cuban women and children who died or endured "reconcentration" could not enjoy such solace, such memories forever blessed. The rhetoric of Cuba Libre would have one believe that Cuban women suffered the "horrors of war" only from afar and by emotional proxy (i.e. loss). But the truth is that she and her children were calculatingly engulfed by the war and that by 1898 their tribulations far out weighed those of any *mambí*: twenty *reconcentrados* died for every one *mambí* soldier killed in the war. Of these civilian casualties, as many as eighty percent were women and children and every other a child under six years of age.¹⁶ Starved, stricken, and unarmed, at the sovereign's mercy in what were called "camps of reconcentration," they were beyond the pale of "battle laurels" and the "crown of martyr." Rather, their memory would forever be tied to a diabolical name Weyler and to an utterly *non*-sublime death.

¹² See: *José Martí: Selected Writings*, 414.

¹³ Gonzalo de Quesda, "Distinguished Cuban Patriots," in *Cuba's Struggle for Freedom* (Liberty Publishing Co., 1898), 513.

¹⁴ Martí, "Manifiesto of Montecristi" in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, 344.

¹⁵ Gómez, "Mi Escolta," printed in: Bernabé Boza, *Mi diario de la guerra: desde Baire hasta la intervención Americana* (Habana: La Propagandista, 1900), 285.

¹⁶ This is my calculation based on estimates found in John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism: Volume I, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); and Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Herida profunda* (La Habana: Edicions, UNION, 1998).

3.2. “The Butcher”—*Tropes & Iconography*

Valeriano Weyler y Nicolau enjoyed many aristocratic titles: Marquis of Tenerife, 1st Duke of Rubí, Grandee of Spain. Yet the sobriquet that would haunt his otherwise decorated career and pedigree was “the Butcher.” It was as Governor General of Cuba (1896-97) that Weyler earned this far from dignified title, but the truth is that his infamy as a man “without scruples” (*sin contemplaciones*) was already well known in Cuba. During his first tour in Cuba, Weyler distinguished himself as the leader of a unit he nicknamed *Los Cazadores de Valmaseda*, “the Hunters of Valmaseda,” in honor of his old commander and fellow aristocrat (General Blas Villate, Count of Valmaseda). The “Hunters” were mostly Cuban Volunteers (not Spanish conscripts) handpicked from among the most fanatical of Spanish loyalists and disguised as Cuban rebels. Governed by little else than orders to hunt down *mambises*, Weyler’s *cazadores* gave no quarter to the wounded, tortured prisoners, mutilated corpses, and terrorized villagers throughout Oriente.¹⁷ They were quite simply the Spanish army’s most feared and effective “counterguerrilla” force.

Accordingly, as Gómez and Maceo made their way across the island with near impunity in late 1895, all eyes and hopes in Spain turned to Weyler. His credentials by then spoke for themselves. Weyler had, after all, not only served Spain well in 1870s Cuba but also had just quelled large-scale uprisings in the Philippines (1888-91) and Catalonia (1893-96) through a variety of repressive tactics.¹⁸ In Cuba anew, he would not disappoint. With the blessings of Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas, Weyler set out to redeploy the Spanish army in Cuba as a counterinsurgency, rather than constabulary, force and to wage “war with war,” as he famously said. Many measures were taken to this effect, but it was Weyler’s orders for all “rural inhabitants” to be relocated into garrisoned “camps of reconcentration” that would excite the North Atlantic press and its moral imaginary in ways few other events ever had. More exactly, it was what ensued shortly thereafter: the women, children, and elderly of Cuba’s peasantry, now fending for themselves in poorly provisioned “camps,” began to die by the dozens on a daily basis, plagued by starvation and epidemics of beriberi, malaria, yellow fever, tuberculosis, and typhoid. Within a year of Weyler’s reign, it was reported that as many as 400,000 had died.

Albeit erroneous, that is, routinely inflated, the death tolls’ were only one item within the larger register of moral shock and indictment that was leveled against Weyler and Spain. At least as much was made of the percentage of those interned dead, the rate at which they were dying, and, not least, the scandal that they were noncombatants. Before they became known as *reconcentrados*, literally “the reconcentrated ones,” they were identified as *pacíficos*, literally “the peaceful ones,” the term used by Cubans and Spaniards alike to refer to Cuba’s peasantry. And whether or not they had secretly aided and abetted the rebels, as *reconcentrados*, they were unarmed civilians. The fact that they were mostly women and children, moreover, only rendered them all the more pitiable and precarious within a gaze and economy that equated the soldierly man with power and ability.

Indeed, their identity as pitiable and precarious went hand in hand with the ways in which witnesses, above all American journalists and statesmen, portrayed them and the progenitor of their misery, namely Weyler. Weyler’s soon became the name and face of evil in the North Atlantic press and political oratory, spoken in the same breath as Herod, Nero, and Hamid. These were no idle associations to any Christian reader or addressee. Herod, the Roman client ruler of Judea, was he who ordered John the Baptist’s death (by decapitation) and the “Massacre of Innocents,” that is, the slaying of all boys two years of age and younger in Bethlehem to try to quiet prophetic talk of a

¹⁷ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 155.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

newborn “King of the Jews” (i.e. Jesus). Infamous for having executed his own mother, Roman Emperor Nero was also reknown as one of the first Christian slayers and persecutors, so much so that early apocryphal writings identified him as the Anti-Christ. And if Weyler was being placed on a par with the Anti-Christ, Cubans were thereby placed on a par with Christian martyrs!

The other most commonly used analogy did not refer to antiquity inasmuch as contemporary events. Cuban news, not least the Republic in Arms’ propaganda, was vying for headlines at a time when the liveliest humanitarian issue was the Armenian massacres of 1894-96. Armenians had begun to more visibly organize and protest for greater autonomy and rights against a host of Ottoman wrongs, and as a reply, Sultan Abdul Hamid II let Turkish forces and the Kurds of the upper Tigris lay waste to Armenian villages, churches, and lives. The North Atlantic press published accounts of the atrocities, not to exclude photos of mass graves and orphaned children, and nicknamed Hamid “the bloody Sultan” and “le Boucher.”¹⁹ Thus, when Virginia Senator J. Daniel referred to Weyler as “the Turk of the West” and veteran journalist James Creelman referred to Cuba as “our Armenia,” everyone had a sense of what they meant and the moral weight that such an analogy carried.²⁰

Indeed, Christian tropes by far outnumbered any others when it came to rhetorically fleshing out what Americans called the “Cuban Question.” Cubans were repeatedly figured as “our neighbors,” with all of the biblical connotations of duty and covenant this entailed. Americans, accordingly, were called on to be the “Good Samaritans” to their distraught neighbors.²¹ When it came to visual tropes, however, illustrators and cartoonists turned to the Christian *pieta* as their aesthetic of choice to portray Cuba’s sorrows. And in this respect the victim was not likened to a *man* robbed, beaten, naked, and half-dead on the Jericho road inasmuch as an aggrieved and saintly *mother*. The cover-image to Stephan Bonsal’s *The Real Conditions of Cuba To-day* (1897) was exemplary in this regard. The reader beheld a (Cuban) mother on her knees, in a tattered dress, with her sickly child’s head on her lap. It is unclear whether the child is dead or alive, a boy or a girl, but the mother’s bearing is less ambiguous: her face’s profile and outstretched arms plead an agonized plea for mercy or succor. Notably, her gesture is not aimed at the (Spanish) soldier who, leaning against his rifle, stands to her rear right and looks on indifferently to the vast sea before him. For this, too, is noteworthy: they are at the seashore, not in a “camp.” This situates her plea such that the proximity of Cuba to the United States is recalled to the reader—in other words, such that the reader does not mistake to whom her plea is addressed. The fact that she, Cuba, is figured after a dolorous Virgin Mary with her dead son, Jesus, in her midst only rendered the interpellation all the more morally solemn.

Pieta-style renditions of the *reconcentrado*’s woes gave representational life to what was otherwise hailed as “inconceivable,” “unprecedented,” and “indescribable.” The *New York World* conceded in early 1896: “No pen can fitly describe the awful scene of devastation and misery the island now presents.”²² And many times over did this trope of indescribability echo so as to accentuate the atrocity’s gravity as much as the witness’ horror. Two years later, Vermont Senator Redfield Proctor testified to Congress: “It is not within the narrow limits of my vocabulary to portray it . . . What I

¹⁹ See: Peter Balakian, *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide and America’s Response* (Harper Collins, 2004).

²⁰ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 60-64.

²¹ Illinois Senator W. Mason was one among many who provocatively avowed: “We [must] take Cuba as the good Samaritan did, and bind up her wounds, furnish her people with something to eat, and clothes to wear; and the nations of the world will say at last, in the beginning of the new century, there is one nation not seeking conquest, not seeking power, but one nation following the Nazarene [Jesus of Nazareth], that has learned the sublime thought, ‘Bear ye one another’s burdens.’” Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 47.

²² May 29, 1896; quoted in Marcus Wilkerson, *Public Opinion and the Spanish-American War: a study in war propaganda* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1932). 38.

saw I cannot tell so that others can see it. It must be seen with one's own eyes to be realized."²³ Indeed, the more lurid was an account of the "carnival of slaughter" and "sickening spectacle" that was reconcentration, the more readers doubted its veracity—or at least accused it of hyperbole and overwrought pathos.²⁴ So serious had the stakes over veracity become that in early 1898 the *New York Journal* launched its "Human Documents" series, a series that featured illustrations of actual Cuban *reconcentrados*. Nearly all of the images put on display the severely emaciated bodies of women and children—in some cases skeletally deformed by disease and nutrient deficiencies. And nearly all have the eerie quality of the photographed looking at, or beyond, the camera: a gaunt, almost vacant look that haunts the viewer.²⁵

The *Journal's* images caused quite a stir—in their own gruesome right, surely, but also because poet-novelist Julian Hawthorne introduced them as "far from the most ghastly, the most horrifying of all, for some are too frightful to print."²⁶ Even in the face of what passed for infallible documentary evidence of the Butcher's handiwork, that is, witnesses and critics of reconcentration nevertheless called on some unrepresentable excess. In a sense, this gesture must have been an intellectually honest one: the full extent of the horrors of life and death in the camps defied any verbal or graphic expedient at their (or anyone's) disposal. But they, witnesses and advocates, did not of course defer to that "excess" altogether. They could not. "[The images'] publication is a duty, not a pleasure," qualified Hawthorne. And in this sense, the outcry against reconcentration in all of its "indescribable" and "unprecedented" horror was no less about the orator's or writer's *own* moral integrity and that of his addressee's. For he could only indict such cruelty as "ghastly," "horrifying," and "too frightful" for American eyes insofar as it was taken to be an atrocity Americans had and would never commit or condone.

But what *was* representable, or actually represented, was at least as noteworthy. The emaciated body of the *reconcentrado* did not speak for itself, after all. It could just as well bespeak or constitute "evidence" of a naturally induced famine, not a "crime against humanity." A story had to be told in order for that body to "speak" and the event to constitute a morally heinous crime. The irony is that whereas tragedy must have seemed the likeliest of choices, melodrama won the day. The story most memorably told was one that portrayed Cuba as a damsel in distress, prey to a villain (Spain) and in need of a chivalric savoir (the United States).²⁷ What this meant was that the unsightly body of the *reconcentrado* needed not be the signifier of choice. Instead, the *reconcentrado* could be eroticized, however subtly or not so subtly.

A popular weekly, the cover to *Puck's* June 3, 1896 edition was aptly titled "The Cuban Melodrama." Its caption read: "The Noble Hero (to the Heavy Villain)—'Stand back, there, god darn ye!—If you force this thing to a fifth act, remember that's when I git in *my* work!'" Barefoot, in a shabby dress and with unkempt hair, "Cuba" was coded as vulnerable prey to "Spain," personified by a Weyler cloaked in all black. Her voluptuous body, dark hair, and markedly sexualized posture

²³ Cited in Clara Burton's *The Red Cross* (D.C.: American National Red Cross, 1899), 534-539. Proctor's speech is historically credited time and again as the most decisive speech concerning the war and convincing all skeptics that the "rhetoric" was not empty or sensationalized; Senator Redfield Proctor, elder statesman who the *Wall St. Journal* described as a man of "unimpeachable integrity," enjoyed an illustrious career: Union Colonel in the Civil War, Governor of Vermont, Secretary of War to President Harrison, and U.S. Senator (VT) from 1891 until his death.

²⁴ Wilkerson, *Public Opinion*; also: Charles H. Brown, *The Correspondents' War: Journalists and the Spanish-American War* (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1967).

²⁵ March 14, 1898. The actual images upon which the illustrations are based have been published *in passim* or as an appendix to: Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Herida profunda* (La Habana: Ediciones, UNION, 1998); Raúl Izquierdo Canosa, *La Reconcentración, 1896-1897* (La Habana: Ediciones Verde Olivo, 1997).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Williams, Carolyn. "Melodrama", in *The New Cambridge History of English Literature: The Victorian Period*, ed. Kate Flint, Cambridge University Press (2012), 193–219.

also rendered her and her supplications erotic, not merely helpless. The reader could as such enjoy a laugh and, vicariously, a heterosexual fantasy: it was little mystery as to what “work” was in store for her in the fifth act.²⁸ Other cartoonist portrayals put forth a more somber-faced (and respectably dressed) Uncle Sam poised to “free” a helpless Cuba, usually depicted by a slender, raggedly dressed woman always situated beneath him: laying prone or on her knees.²⁹ And even in these, “her” most dire and precarious representations, Cuba as woman was subtly eroticized: be it an exposed neck and shoulder or curvy hips.

But not all was fictionalized fantasy. Come August 1897 the melodrama would come to life and stir America’s martial and chivalric spirit like no other story had—or perhaps could. Under a three-column-wide headline, “The Cuban Martyr Girl,” *New York Journal* broke the story of Evangelina Bentacourt Cossío y Cisneros. Niece to the Cuban Republic in Arms’ provisional president and daughter to a *mambí* officer, Evangelina lived in exile on the Isle of Pines, where the governing Spanish officer, Colonel José Bériz, is said to have lustfully forced himself upon her. Her friends rushed to her aide upon hearing her scream and tied Bériz to a chair. Once freed, Bériz had her and her accomplices arrested on the grounds that she had lured him into a deadly trap. Without trial, she was subsequently sent to Havana’s notorious Casa de Recojidos where she awaited to fulfill her (alleged) sentence of twenty years in an African penal colony.³⁰

A young, nominally beautiful señorita, Evangelina became the face of Cuba. Nearly all accounts that echoed her story lingered on her physical beauty—so much so that it was Evangelina’s beauty, not the *reconcentrado*’s sickly body or misery that now “baffled” and “startled” witnesses and storytellers alike. Now, in other words, it was Evangelina who yielded headlines and whose “torment” was deemed “worse than death.”³¹ Here was Cuba personified in the “pure flower of maidenhood,” as Julia Ward Howe put it, a real life heroine. Yet to fulfill the melodrama what was needed was a flesh and blood hero, an Uncle Sam incarnate.

This, William Randolph Hearst delivered in mid October 1897. The *Journal*’s Karl Decker, a D.C. based war correspondent, was sent to the island to orchestrate Cisneros’ jailbreak. As the story goes, Decker, aided by others, drugged the jail’s guards and made his way to Evagelina’s adjacent cell. He then scaled the wall and wrenched apart the iron bars to her cell’s window, carrying her out of bondage. Taken to a safe house, Evangelina was then disguised as a man in order to board her on a U.S. vessel named *Seneca*. The steamer set sail directly for New York, where a mass rally in Union Square welcomed the “rescued maiden” and her hero. So spectacular was the affair that U.S. President McKinley received Decker and Cisneros at a D.C. banquet in their honor and New York publishers clamored to cash in on *The Story of Eva Told By Herself* (1897).³² Whether the likelier truth is that Decker bribed Havana jailers and customs officials in order to smuggle Cisneros out of Cuba

²⁸ And while Uncle Sam seems satirized as a dandy with a drawl, it was because the Republican *Puck* did not take kindly to President Cleveland and the Democrats’ “ambassadorial” handling of the Cuban Question. See Bonnie Miller’s excellent discussion of the image: Bonnie M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest: The Visual and Popular Cultures of the Spanish-American War of 1898* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 29.

²⁹ Examples can be found in Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination*, 70, 73.

³⁰ See: Brown, *The Correspondents’ War*, Chapter 5; Wilkerson, *Public Opinion*, Chapter 6; Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*, 42-47; Pérez, *Cuban in the American Imagination*, 77-80; and of course: *The Story of Evagelina Cisneros* (New York: Continental Publishing Co., 1898).

³¹ Brown, *The Correspondents’ War*, especially Chapter 5.

³² Many wealthy, childless widows volunteered to be her guardian, a legal tender won by Mrs. John A. Logan. And the *Journal* thereafter widely published Eva’s education in the English language and her naturalization as an American citizen. The melodrama was thereby consummated, as it were, save for one hitch: she married a Cuban, Carlos Carbonell, instead of her American rescuer! Carbonell was instrumental in her clandestine rescue, keeping her hidden in a safe house till she could be smuggled onto the *Seneca*. After the Spanish-American War, they promptly returned to settle in Cuba. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest*, 47.

is beside the point. Suspicions aside, Americans embraced the story that Cisneros (Cuba) was freed by the “dashing intrepidity” of Karl Decker (the United States).³³

Whether it was a *pieta*-stylized *reconcentrada* or Eva the “girl martyr,” thus, Cuba was portrayed as both innocent and desirable through the figure of the womanly woman. But her innocence and desirability, indeed her *worth*, relied just as much as on her (and her children’s) whiteness as on her femininity. This much was clear in the *New York Journal’s* “Human Documents” series: no Cubans of color, or racially ambiguous Cubans, are included in the series. The humanity at peril was that of white Cubans and, elliptically, their white saviors. Cartoonist portrayals of the era, too, always put forth a fare-skinned woman with Castilian features as their allegorical Cuba. On the face of it, this ran contrary to the Spaniards’ portrayal of the *mambises* as black savages. Yet all told, each was drawing on similar “regimes of intelligibility,” as Judith Butler would say. It is hardly a coincidence that American portrayals of Weyler drew heavily on blackness as a code for vice and villainy. Despite Weyler’s light-skinned nobility, for instance, war correspondent Elbert Rappleye gave this account of first meeting the Governor General: “And what a picture! . . . An apparition of blacks—black eyes, black hair, black beard, dark—exceedingly dark—complexion.”³⁴ A black Weyler was intelligible to Anglo Americans as a pathological other, just as a black *mambí* was intelligible to Iberians and white Cubans as an evil menace. And just as blackness sufficed to discredit, whiteness was called on to convey purity and arouse pity—indeed to mark one as intelligibly human and worthy of moral regard. Nor were the normative regimes of what constitutes man and woman, masculinity and femininity, any less faithfully cited: capability, chivalry, and power on the one side; vulnerability, allure, and victimhood on the other.

The cruelest of ironies is that all, or nearly all, was as the Cuban rebels would have it. The Republic in Arms had headquarters not only in Florida but also in New York and D.C. In other words, they had strategically situated themselves not only for “filibuster” expeditions but also for press releases and lobbying campaigns. It was hard to know in fact to whom one should credit the “news.” The Republic in Arms gave daily press releases of “Spanish atrocities” in Cuba and, in turn, cited (no doubt selectively) senior U.S. diplomats and journalists in Cuba who reported on the “horrors” of reconcentration. Regardless, Cubans, too, portrayed Weyler as a diabolical villain and employed all the sobriquets and adjectives Americans had or in time would: “Murderer,” “Butcher,” “Inquisitor,” “monster,” “bloodthirsty,” “perverse,” and “inhuman.” And not unlike Americans did Cubans taunt and mock Weyler’s stature: at five feet tall, he was known not only as the “Butcher” but also as the “sinister dwarf.”³⁵ Weyler was thus the moral *and* physical inferior to Cuba’s manlier savoir, be it the United States or the Cuba Libre rebels.

Indeed, if there was disagreement, it was on the count of *who* would redeem the damsel in distress that was Cuba. If for Americans it was a gallant Uncle Sam with sword or sledgehammer in hand, for Cubans it was the *mambí* with “redemptive torch” and “fearsome machete.” By early 1897, after all, Americans had in effect written the *mambises* out of the melodrama: Cubans were

³³ John D. Stevens said that the act required “more bribery than bravery.” See his: *Sensationalism and the New York Press* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 9; whereas, W. J. Campell has argued it was no hoax: *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001).

³⁴ Quoted in Murat Halstead, *The Story of Cuba* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1896), 91-2. After all Anglo and Dutch Protestants had, after all, long since conceived of Spanish Catholics as the inquisitors, conquistadors, and (Moorish) mongrels to their liberal, industrious, and racially pure selves; For an account of the so-called “Black Legend” see: Julián Julerias, *La leyenda negra: estudios acerca del concepto de España en el extranjero* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1974). For the popularization of the Black Legend in the United States, see: Richard L. Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” *The American Historical Review*, v101, n2 (April 1996): 423-446.

³⁵ See Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, “Weyler y la musa satírica revolucionaria” in *Weyler en Cuba: un precursor de la barbarie fascista* (La Habana: Paginas, 1947).

(feminized) victims to atrocity, not belligerents in a revolutionary war. But if Cubans disagreed, it was only insofar as they touted their own prowess and decorum as “warriors of independence.” For they, too, spoke of “atrocities,” “shocking indignities,” and “unspeakable cruelty,” and they, too, spoke of *reconcentrados* in generic terms of the “defenseless woman” and the “innocent child.”³⁶ And just as spokesmen for the United States did not self-reflexively critique their own imperialist history and atrocities, Cuba Libre’s spokesmen did not hint at any collateral responsibility for the war’s horrors. Weyler was equally the United States’ and Cuba Libre’s villain, a symbol of repressive and unseemly violence: the constitutive other, that is, to their liberatory and ethically sound violence.

3.3. *Bandos—Decrees & Disavowals*

In all fairness to Weyler, the policy of reconcentration was neither entirely unprecedented nor was it a cruelty for mere cruelty’s sake. This was not lost on Weyler: “None other than the North Americans employed it to battle and subdue their adversaries to the South.”³⁷ Although there were no “camps” per se, Union General William T. Sherman’s march from Atlanta to Savannah in 1864 has been touted by military historians as the first conscious use of “total war” strategy.³⁸ Sherman’s orders were for commanders to unleash “devastation more or less relentless” upon Georgia’s infrastructure (i.e. mills, cotton-gins, farms, livestock, orchards, “&c.”) and to thereby render war unwageable by his adversaries.³⁹ Arguably closer to “reconcentration,” however, was the United States’ strategy in the Plains Indians wars of the 1870s and 80s. The strategy was to render resistant tribes more docile (or altogether annihilated) by making their lives unlivable—hence destroy their food (i.e. the deliberate massacres of the American bison); strike in the winter months, when they are most vulnerable (i.e. starved); and forcibly relocate survivors onto “reservations” with scarce resources (or arms) at their disposal.⁴⁰

Indeed, Weyler would later relish the fact that those who most censured him for reconcentration had “copied” it, namely the English in southern Africa and Americans in the Philippines.⁴¹ No doubt these cases were much closer to Weyler’s exploits in Cuba, materially not just lexically. Under General Kitchener’s command, the British army and its commonwealth auxiliaries swept the Boer Republics bare of all that could give sustenance and forcibly interned tens of thousands of black Africans and Boers into “concentration camps” during what was known as the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). According to official reports, 27,927 noncombatant Boers (of whom 22,074 were children under the age of 16) died by starvation and disease in these poorly rationed and medically neglected camps. Black Africans were placed in segregated camps where many were labored to

³⁶ Ibid.; also Bozá, *Mi diario de la guerra*; Jose Miró Argenter, *Cuba: crónicas de la guerra* (Santiago de Cuba: El Cubano Libre, 1899), *in passim*.

³⁷ Valeriano Weyler’s prologue to Fernando Gómez, *La insurrección por dentro: apuntes para la historia* (Habana, 1897).

³⁸ See: Russel Frank Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of the United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Indiana University Press, 1977). another useful source: Manfred Boemeke, et. al., *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

³⁹ Ibid. R. F. Weigley has noted that General W. Scott’s “scorched earth” strategy in the Mexican-American War was another important precedent.

⁴⁰ See: Andrew J. Birtle. *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1860-1941* (Center of Military History US Army, 2001), especially Chp 3. Birtle notes that between 1865 and 1895 the U.S. Army engaged in over a thousand combats with Western Indians.

⁴¹ Valeriano Weyler, *Mi mando en Cuba: historia military y política de la última guerra separatista durante dicho mando*. (F. González Rojas, 1911), 11.

death and where reforms came much too belatedly.⁴² Similarly, in what came to be known as the Philippine-American War (1899-1913), American Generals J. Franklin Bell and J. Smith enforced “reconcentration” policies in the Batangas province of Luzon and on the island of Samar, respectively. Reminiscent of Cuba: livestock were slaughtered; farmlands and foliage were scorched; suspects were tortured or summarily executed; entire villages were razed; and civilians were forcibly relocated into garrisoned camps with scarce resources at their disposal. The number of Filipinos punitively killed or recklessly let to die in the war falls anywhere between 250,000 and 1 million, and it is estimated that as many as nine-tenths of these fatalities were civilians.⁴³

Weyler, in his *Mi mando en Cuba* (1910), felt that he could cite these examples as cause not to have to defend the “system of war” he employed in Cuba. Evidently, however, he knew this alone would not suffice. So other rationales were put forth: i) *ad populum*, ii) legality, iii) efficacy, and iv) humanitarianism. As such Weyler noted that the Spanish press asked that he “unleash the requisite energy and rigor” called for in Cuba and that his fellow officers and soldiers backed him with “enthusiastic fervor.” Furthermore, his conduct was always “within accord of the decrees and laws.” And, arguably most to the point, his strategy was well on its way to victory: “with the insurrection already dominated in Pinar del Río, Habana, Matanzas, and las Villas, poised to pacify the remainder of the island in the coming winter campaign,” Weyler thought his command was brought to untimely end.⁴⁴

Whatever its popularity, legality, or efficacy, however, none of these rationales addressed what was truly at stake, namely the ethics and morality of Weyler’s “system of war.” And it was clear that *this* was what was at stake—why else a published retrospective on his tenure in Cuba than to clear his good name? Weyler had taken no trouble, after all, to publish an account of his exploits in the Philippines, the Basque, or Catalonia. For it was in Cuba that he yielded international notoriety as “the Butcher.” As Weyler’s retort would have it, rather than butcher, he saved lives—or at least those lives that mattered by his and his associates’ count. *Pacífico* lives, to be clear, did not matter. Cast *writ large* as “auxiliaries” to the rebels, be it by choice or by circumstance, *pacíficos* were victims only insofar as they died at the hands of *mambises* or, as *reconcentrados*, to pathogens. Their misery and deaths were figured rhetorically, that is, as a generic tragedy to a generic event, namely war. If not the *mambises*, then “war” was to blame: “*reconcentrados* die as those who are not *reconcentrados* are dying, because of the epidemic diseases that are the indispensable cortege of all wars,” disavowed Weylerite officer, Fernando Gómez.⁴⁵ What Gómez (as spokesman for Weyler) failed to infer, however, was that having so many malnourished humans in such squalid quarters was a public health fiasco in the works. Little wonder, in other words, that so many soldiers and loyalist citizens—not just *reconcentrados*—fell prey to the epidemics of typhoid, tuberculosis, yellow fever, and malaria that “took the country by prisoner.”⁴⁶ Let us recall that as many as ninety percent of the Spanish army’s 44,000 fatalities were due to disease. *Mambí* commander Máximo Gómez enlisted the mosquito to

⁴² There are no reliable estimates for how many black Africans thereby perished. Here again the casualty numbers are telling: 27,927, an exact figure, can be given for the Boer casualties, but not for the African casualties. In the African case, documents and records were destroyed. Black Africans were put in what were largely “labor camps” instrumentally and “death camps” consequentially. It is noteworthy in this respect that the black Africans interned and their camps were *not* widely publicized or criticized in Britain; it was the “white” Boer who aroused moral outrage back home within the Kingdom and across the Atlantic. See: J. Hyslop, “Invention of the Concentration Camp”; and S.B. Spies *Methods of Barbarism?: Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics* (Human & Rousseau, 1977).

⁴³ See: Luzviminda Francisco, “The Philippine-American War,” in *The Philippines Reader*, ed. D. Schirmer and S.R. Shalom (South End Press, 1987), 8-19. Also: Stuart C. Miller’s classic: “*Benevolent Assimilation*”: *The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903* (Yale University Press, 1982).

⁴⁴ Weyler, *Mi mando en Cuba*, 10-13.

⁴⁵ F. Gómez, *La insurrección por dentro*, 19-21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

this end, and Weyler's "camps," however inadvertently, stacked the odds even further against his Iberian conscripts.

Alas, the only other disavowal at Weyler's disposal was (v) necessity. "War necessarily demands severe procedures, and severe I was..."⁴⁷ It is hard, indeed, not to conclude that Weyler's apologetics were in bad faith. Rather than offer any details on reconcentration's logistics and effects (let alone humanizing stories), his voluminous *Mi mando en Cuba* procedurally recounts the logistics and tactics of military campaigns and reprints a host of circulars and *bandos* (decrees). But such prose at least exposed that "butchery" was a misnomer for reconcentration.⁴⁸ *Reconcentrados* were not, after all, slaughtered: they were strategically starved and stricken to death by a state apparatus. Their misery was leverage, not mere cruelty or "collateral damage." When a coalition of mayors and priests implored Weyler for rations and medicines, he (allegedly) replied: "You say that the *reconcentrados* are dying of hunger? Well, it was precisely for that reason that I implemented reconcentration."⁴⁹ Whether Weyler (and others) perversely enjoyed the fruits of their "severe procedures" or not, he and Madrid knew well why they needed to "reconcentrate" Cuba's peasantry and thought they could enlist the *reconcentrado's* foreseeable misery to their own ends. In other words, they could (i) deprive the *mambises* of their "auxiliary" army and (ii) whatever misery came thereafter could be blamed on the rebels' incendiary war. Indeed, Weyler and Madrid could take credit for shielding *pacífico* lives from *mambí* exploits.

The first such decree (*bando*), dated February 16, 1896, ordered all "rural inhabitants" of eastern Cuba to "reconcentrate themselves" (*reconcentrarse*) in the nearest fortified town or city. They were told to vacate their homes and were given eight days to comply, lest they be subject to the "responsibilities" attendant with disobedience to the law. A generic preamble to the *bando* reassured them that the measure was meant to "prevent resolute dangers to the honorable inhabitants of this Island."⁵⁰ That same day another *bando* was issued. This decree detailed all of the crimes now punishable by death or life imprisonment: sabotaging train tracks, cutting telegraph or telephone wires, destroying bridges, burning commercial properties or Army barracks, smuggling arms or munitions, spreading rumors favorable to the "rebellion," providing rebels with horses, or acting as a spy, guide, or courier to the rebels.⁵¹ The *bando* evidenced as such the guerrilla style of war that the Cuban Republic in Arms had thus far waged quite victoriously (i.e. since February 1895). It also evidenced, albeit elliptically, that the guerrilla strategy could work only insofar as Cuban "civilians" were free to act as an auxiliary force to the ELC. Hence, Weyler outlawed and severely punished pro-rebel activities and forcibly cut the ELC off from its effectual nurses, cooks, spies, smugglers, recruiters, and any number of other vital functionaries that the *pacíficos* were or could be for the Revolution.

Weyler likewise re-outfitted the *trocha* (militarized trench) system. Two major *trochas* were cleared and armed to this end—one from Júcaro to Morón and the other from Mariel to Majana. A militarized line that ran north to south across the center of the island, the Júcaro-Morón *trocha* cut off rebel-friendly Camagüey and Oriente from sugar- and tobacco-rich western Cuba. Its efficacy in the first year of the war was the butt of many *mambí* jokes, but once at capacity (i.e. late 1896), the *trocha* kept Máximo Gómez' columns at bay in the East while Weyler tore apart Antonio Maceo's forces in far off Pinar del Río of the West. This was no ordinary "trench." A 200 yards wide

⁴⁷ Weyler, *Mi mando en Cuba*, 10-11.

⁴⁸ Just as Arendt argued that "massacre" was for the Holocaust: Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Classics, 2004), 294.

⁴⁹ Roig, *Weyler en Cuba*, 94.

⁵⁰ Guzmán, *Herida profunda*, 217.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 215.

clearing in otherwise dense jungle or forest, the trees felled were mounted on each side to constitute a barrier at least five feet tall. Down its center ran communication wires and a single-track railway equipped with armor-clad cars to transport men and supplies from one post to the next. Every half-mile or so stood a fort encircled by trenches and barbed wire, and between these stood smaller blockhouses at variable intervals. 20,000 soldiers manned its fifty miles. The Mariel-Majana *trocha* had searchlights, artillery, and 14,000 soldiers across a twenty miles stretch that insulated imperial Havana from Maceo's columns to the west in Pinar del Río. Weyler as such parceled out three "departments" (i.e. west, center, east) that he would "pacify" one after the next.⁵²

If Weyler never had his opportunity to pacify the East, his "reconcentration" strategy nevertheless jeopardized the revolutionary war like no other foe had. By early 1897, all provinces were under reconcentration orders, the Maceo brothers had been killed, imperial Havana was no longer under siege, and *mambises* were left to fend for themselves. Not only could the *mambises* no longer enjoy or coerce services out of Cuba's peasantry as once before; so, too, could they not forage or commandeer as once before. Weyler had his forces despoil the island of its bounty: they torched or confiscated all crops and grains; slaughtered any cows, pigs, chickens, or goats they could not consume or easily transport; contaminated farmlands and fresh water sources; torched or pillaged outlying trading posts, homes, cottages, and ranches; cut down any fruit trees and shot any hogs they found in the wild.⁵³ With Weyler's orders to redouble naval patrols and fortify ports, moreover, the *mambises* could not rely on their exile government's supply expeditions as once before. All told, the *mambises* and their Revolution had entered their most dire hours.

If the *mambises* were at risk, *reconcentrados* were in peril. Estimates have it that no less than 400,000 Cuban *pacíficos* flooded major cities such as Matanzas, Havana, Cienfuegos, and Santa Clara—"voluntarily" or at gunpoint. Old, structurally unsound warehouses or crudely improvised corral-like structures were used to house them at first. But they filled to capacity so quickly that the *reconcentrados*, as they came to be called, crowded the cities' courtyards and plazas. Within weeks the cities were riddled with human feces and *reconcentrados* begging for morsels of stale bread or boiled rice. Shortly thereafter corpses began to litter the streets. Cemetery lands were expanded, but the toll was so hefty and so swift that mass graves (and bonfires) became the Spanish regime's method of choice for disposal.⁵⁴

Not all, but most, *reconcentrados* were elderly men and women, mothers and their children. Adolescent boys and adult men had, by and large, already been recruited, imprisoned, or killed by either of the armies. *Reconcentrados* hailed, moreover, from communities and families of meager financial means. Their wealth and subsistence were intimately tied to their rural life: homes, tools, livestock, and farmlands that were left behind—if not engulfed by either of the armies. Nor were they warmly welcomed to the cities. Many urban dwellers blamed their woes on the *pacíficos*, believing that the war would have already ended were it not for their "auxiliary" activities. Indeed, by mandate, any family member to a known insurgent was to be denied all quarter and rations. But the truth is that this made little material difference. Nearly all *reconcentrados* had only their bodies to sell and mercy to pray for. And since rations and charity rarely sufficed, many *reconcentrados* were exploited, sexually and otherwise, for their labor. At first, small details of *reconcentrados* were allowed to forage nearby lands and (abandoned) estates under the watch of a soldier's escort. But within months, the well ran dry, as it were. Weyler then issued orders, quite belatedly, to set aside "cultivation zones" near Spanish forts so that *reconcentrados* could grow their own food. How this

⁵² Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 34; Roig, *Weyler en Cuba*, 71-72.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; and Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 193-224.

⁵⁴ For fuller descriptions, photographs, and statistics: Izquierdo Canosa, *La Reconcentración*, 28-66; Pérez Guzmán, *Herida profunda*, 61-110; Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 193-224.

policy was enforced, however, was left to local juntas and subject to graft. What yields they could muster, for instance, were used to feed the Spanish soldiers first.⁵⁵

Records were not methodically kept and were subject the vagaries of local juntas. In certain cases a dedicated mayor or citizen's "charity" council pooled resources and saw to it that as many *reconcentrados* received as many (or more nutrient rich: i.e. milk) rations as could be hoped for under the circumstances. But mortality rates never fell below 26 percent in the least-worst cases (Matanzas) and soared as high as 50 percent in the worst of the worst (Pinar del Río and Havana).⁵⁶ All told, the most rigorous estimates say that no less than 157,000 and as many as 200,000 died in the camps—of these the majority where children under five years of age.⁵⁷ With the dramatic fall in natality rates per annum, one could cite an additional 59,000 *unborn* victims to reconcentration.⁵⁸ Even after it was officially rescinded (November 1897), at least another 200,000 *ex-reconcentrados* were left to wander listlessly as homeless, jobless, landless, and half-starved on a despoiled island: commerce had been brought to a halt; the once lucrative sugar estates were now rubble and ash, as were many villages and towns; agricultural fields and orchards were barren; grain stockades emptied; many freshwater sources spoiled; livestock had been systematically slaughtered—no ox to plow fields, no chickens to lay eggs, no pigs for meat; and families had been irrevocably torn apart: no other country in the Americas had a higher percentage of orphans and widows than did postwar Cuba.⁵⁹ All told: catastrophe.

3.4. *Mudos testigos—Mute Witnesses*

As we know, however, official decrees and statistics can only ever tell or indicate so much. But the bleak truth is that there exists scant documentary evidence that can attest to the *reconcentrados'* lives (not only deaths) in anyway other than generically and sorrowfully. We know so few names and have even fewer stories. Indeed, as is the case with written archives, the voices of an illiterate and disempowered multitude are barely audible in the published sources that do exist.

Francisco Machado's *¡Piedad!: Recuerdos de la reconcentración* (1917) is by far the most extensive memoir-cum-testimonial devoted to the "horrid spectacle" that was reconcentration. As its former mayor, Machado wrote the saga of Sagua la Grande's travails to feed and shelter—and later, apprentice and employ—the "sickly ambulant skeletons" in their midst, not least orphaned girls. At times, indeed, Machado's prose is wrought with the most insufferable of scenes: the mother, pleased to see her child die at her milkless breast; the child, "suckling at the flaccid and cold chest of her dead mother."⁶⁰ But grief and cruelty are neither the text's plot nor protagonist. Rather, *Pity!* tells the story of how the "noble sentiments" of Sagua's bourgeois citizenry overcame cruelty and saved innocent lives. In many respects, thus, *reconcentrados* never speak or act in the text inasmuch as

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 212; Izquierdo Canosa, *La Reconcentración*, 36-37. The highest mortality rates were, then, in the West, which may seem counter-intuitive given that the West was the haven for Spanish immigrants; but this is misleading because 74% of population of island resided in the West anyway.

⁵⁷ The most rigorous calculations of fatalities can be attributed to Cuban demographers and historians Juan Pérez de la Riva, Blanca Morejon, and Julio Le Riverend who offer the range of 157,000 to 200,000—attesting to the Spaniards lack of administrative efficiency, a margin of 43,000 lives only vaguely accounted for (see: Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 209-217).

⁵⁸ Izquierdo Canosa, *La reconcentración*, 79.

⁵⁹ According to the census of 1899, only eight percent of Cuba's population was under five years of age, the lowest such percentage for all other countries in the world for which such data existed. Postwar Cuba also had the highest proportions of orphans and widowed women in the Western Hemisphere. Pérez, *The Structure of Cuban History*, 28.

⁶⁰ Francisco P. Machado, *¡Piedad! Recuerdos de reconcentración* (Sagua, 1917), 22.

constitute an adversity that “Charity, Compassion, and Pity” must overcome. In their place one reads a series of vignettes on Sagua’s charitable juntas and their distinguished members: names are listed, virtues and sacrifices are respectively detailed, periodicals to their credit are cited, and faces are honored with full-page illustrations. For *Pity!* is a richly illustrated text. But its illustrations are not symmetrical. On the one hand, Sagua’s charitable ladies and gentry: each a singular bust with captioned name and title, dressed in Victorian attire, and willingly posed as a respectable man or woman. On the other, Sagua’s *reconcentrados*: a dejected nameless collectivity, emaciated and nearly naked, with empty gazes that do not welcome the camera’s eye. The images thereby work in tandem to signify bourgeois “civility” (*civismo*) as against the *reconcentrado*’s mute precarity. The reader walks away from the text without any sense for *reconcentrado* lives, talents, or virtues—only that they suffered en masse or died horribly were it not for Sagua’s clinics and asylums.

The only, to my knowledge, published work by a former *reconcentrado* is that of Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez’s memoir, *Por las veredas del pasado* (1957).⁶¹ It is noteworthy that even here the reader must parse through telling equivocations. Guerra’s family did not suffer as others did. They came to Batabanó with a milking cow, two oxen, cooking supplies, clothing, and all of their harvested vegetables in tote. Within short order, they were gainfully employed. Guerra’s mother found work as a cook for the port city’s military commander; his father made and sold sugar cane syrup (*melado*); and the young literate Guerra would write letters on behalf of Spanish soldiers to their loved ones back in Spain—services that earned him the privilege to freely forage for fruits and vegetables. All in all it was “tolerable,” as Guerra put it. Indeed, his family’s services for the Spanish military ensured that when the young Guerra contracted typhoid and, later, yellow fever he had sufficient nutrients and quinine to survive it. Their relative fortune did wear thin: their milking cow was killed in a shoot-out with rebels; the region’s sugar cane for his father’s *melado* was torched by rebels and Spaniards alike; and foraging was doomed to diminishing returns. Guerra’s family also dealt with their share of loss. He spoke of cousins and uncles that were imprisoned or had been killed by Spanish forces for having aided the rebels. And this, as it turns out, is quite key to the text’s narrative: Guerra never truly identifies as a *reconcentrado*.

Guerra knew “*reconcentrado*” to be an identity one affixed to those living dead of the camps. And he, understandably, resisted it. At a telling moment in his text, he described a most “pathetic scene.” In the outskirts of Colón, Guerra, in the company of Spanish soldiers, came across a *reconcentrada* who, barefoot and half-naked, held out a tin plate to beg for food. Her green eyes, her youth, and her “silent supplication” moved him to make a “defensive gesture” on her behalf. That “gesture” must have been a relatively benign act, for Guerra did not elaborate on it. It produced no scandal other than one soldier’s remark “*mambí!*” The accusation was aimed at Guerra, who reminisced: “His supposed insult I took as a great honor.”⁶² Albeit vicariously, Guerra thereby identified with the *mambí*—if not *as a mambí*—not the *reconcentrada*. He knew the latter to signify the no longer fully human; whereas the former was the hallmark of patriotic valor and, as this scene attested, a defiant benevolence. That the *reconcentrada* was a young woman only further solidified their counterpoint: the precarious and the capable, passivity and activity, mute and spoken, beggar and protector, pity and benevolence, woman and man.

Indeed, it was a rare historical or artistic work that devoted more than a chapter to the *reconcentrado*—usually, at that, as a discussion of Weyler’s wickedness and *en masse* misery more so than any substantive or detailed account of *reconcentrados* as persons, families, and communities with stories and desires, voices and visions. Within such works one deduces a familiar narrative and its logic: the *reconcentrado* as a traumatic footnote to the otherwise epic drama of eloquent martyrs and

⁶¹ Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez, *Por las veredas del pasado, 1880-1902* (Habana, 1957).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 104-05.

valiant *mambises* who wagered their lives to liberate the Patria. This is not to say, however, that the *reconcentrado* has no real value within that narrative and its logic. Quite to the contrary! It is they who constitute the *prey* or *abject victim* with which Cubans have most decisively narrated the Spaniard's cruelty as against the *mambí's* integrity. The fact that this routinely operates through the figure of the *reconcentrada* (i.e. woman as prey) is noteworthy, for it codes the *mambí* and his militant prowess as the revolutionary figure who shall redeem her. She is that figure of mute vulnerability, thus, that not only testifies to the Spaniards' inhumane violence but also condones the *mambises's* liberatory violence.

We can locate this logic not only in memoirs but also in cinematic interpretations of the wars for independence. In Manuel Octavio Gómez' *La primera carga al machete* (1968) the climactic scene of a frenzied *machetazo*, a visually delirious spectacle of violence at the hands of the *mambises*, is prefaced—which is to say, exonerated—in many ways by scenes of Spanish violence against Cuban civilians.⁶³ In particular, the viewer had already seen Spanish soldiers raid and pillage a Cuban town. A woman's voice narrates the scene. Her testimony is that of a survivor, and although she says they killed all the men, the scene rarely shows any violence against the town's men. Instead, the scene(s) focuses in on violence against women—youthful *cubanas* with dark, wavy long hair and shapely bodies. They are unarmed, and although they resist fiercely, the Spanish soldiers wrestle and subdue them. The scene then synchronizes with the survivor's voice, and we see her in a hammock, consoled by another survivor. The film's undisclosed interviewer asks her, "Then what happened? What did they do to them? to you?" All she can do is cry as her *compañera* shouts to the interviewer, "Enough! Leave her alone already!" A crime so heinous it cannot be uttered. But the film answers for her visually: the soldiers are then seen chasing the women into vacated homes, where they are cornered with a look of horror on their face. The viewer has little difficulty inferring what then took place. Dressed elegantly in white, they are an allegorically pure Cuba sullied by Spain. And the fact that they are interviewed thereafter in a *mambí* camp is no idle detail: Spanish soldiers are those who violate unarmed women (i.e. Cuba), whereas Cuban *mambises* are their refuge and her, Cuba's, only armed hope.

It is tempting to say the film bears within it a noteworthy exception. In an earlier scene, the interviewer comes across a group of haggard civilians marching along a country road. When he asks "Where are you taking them?" a Spanish soldier on horseback replies: "They've come with us voluntarily for their safety." A woman steps forward and interjects, "They brought me by force. I'm here as a prisoner." The scene is almost surely a cinematic nod to the first reconcentration order in Cuba (April 1869), a policy that openly targeted women: "Women who are not in their respective farms and dwellings, or in the homes of their parents, must relocate to camps in the towns of Jiguaní and Bayamo, where they will be cared for. Those who do not voluntarily obey this proclamation will be escorted by force."⁶⁴ As the scene ensues, the woman/*reconcentrada* who speaks grows ever more defiant: "[I was taken] because I took to the streets to decry the injustices... They abused me. They raped me." At this point the Spanish soldiers intervene to quiet and tame her, as she resists wildly and they push away and (partially) block out the interrogatory camera. The only intelligible sound made out hereafter is her cry: "¡Viva Cuba Libre!" If one wishes to say that this is the moment when the (proto)*reconcentrada* speaks, thus, such a claim would have to take into account the fact that her voice is subsumed within the nationalist epic: where patriots are ready to die for their Patria, where no collateral violence takes place, where armed violence for the Patria is unequivocally justified, and where women are figured as *alibis* for that very violence.

⁶³ *La primera carga al machete*, directed by Manuel Octavio Gómez (Cuba: ICAIC, 1969).

⁶⁴ Pérez, *The Structure of Cuban History*, 102-104.

The *reconcentrada*, as a figure of abject misery and precarity, thus, is she who solidifies the *mambí*'s moral credibility as a valiant, even mercilessly violent, soldier. It is either the case that she performs this valuable function within the nationalist epic or that she is altogether left out—as if forgotten or incidental to the wars for independence. One need only look to the *Elpidio Valdés* series for evidence that “her” voice and condition were not worthy of the *mambí* sublime and its *machetero* romance. Only the first of the three feature films portrays *reconcentrados*, ambiguously and transiently at that. They, a small *guajiro* family, are shown (for a matter of seconds) standing idly by as the *mambises* plot Maria Silvia's (and the town's) rescue from Spanish captivity. Maria Silvia, looking outside her cell's window, calls to the family's father, who recognizes her. She does not recognize him. “It's me, the imbecile who believed the Spanish would honor the white flag ... now we're dying of hunger.” The viewer, too, is thereby reminded of the earlier scene when Maria Silvia and Eutelia, as fugitives in Cuba's countryside, asked this man for some provisions and why he had not joined the rebel army. The man pointed at a makeshift white flag that flew above his peasant's hutch (*bohío*) and claimed neutrality. By the time she chances into him again, later in the film, it is clear to the viewer that the man was more naïve than neutral and that, as the film not too subtly insinuates, he and his family's naivety are to blame for their calamity. Indeed, as Elpidio and others cleverly and valiantly set their rescue into motion, it is clear that *his* neutrality—it is the father, after all, who answers for his *reconcentrado* family—is just as readily coded as cowardliness.⁶⁵

The cruelest of ironies is that *reconcentrados* are nowhere to be seen—let alone heard—in the second and third episodes of the series, regardless of the fact that these were set, respectively, in the years 1896-97 and 1898—that is, reconcentration's worst years. *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón* (1983) does introduce its audience to Weyler, largely an object of mockery. In particular, Weyler's notoriously small stature is the butt of many jokes, graphic and verbal alike, with the character's incorrigible fury represented by childlike tantrums.⁶⁶ But there is little else—namely, *reconcentrados*—that breaks up the good-humored drama of machetes and *mambises* against Spanish officers with Castilian lisps. One could (too) easily refer to the youth genre of the animated films as an excuse for this silence/absence, but how, then, to account for films that have no qualms about depicting machete charges, fist fights, and rifle shoot-outs? Would an emaciated, unarmed body—or rather, masses of them—really be “too much” or in “bad taste” for a child or adolescent to bear? I think the short answer is there is no pleasure or identifiable redemption in it. Like its *literatura de campaña* predecessors (and bibliographic sources), the *Elpidio Valdés* series gives to Cubans a sense of themselves as cunning, gregarious, and valiant patriot-soldiers that cry out ¡*Viva Cuba Libre!*—decidedly not as a nameless, helpless collectivity dying en masse, ingloriously and silently.

But there may be a longer, messier answer as well. Perhaps it is the case that under closer scrutiny the *reconcentrado* has the capacity (or potential) to pose uneasy questions, questions otherwise disavowed by the nationalist epic and its *mambí* aesthetics. I do not mean by this what Weyler and his biographers (and Spanish nationalist historians) would have us believe, namely that the *mambises* were to blame for the *reconcentrados*' misery. This is no easy matter to parse out historically, but at least three reasons defy such an accusation: i) Weyler and his associates had a state and imperial apparatus—not least the powers to tax and conscript—at their disposal, whereas the rebels were never materially in a place to effect, let alone enforce, anything like Weyler's “reconcentration” policy; ii) even if they could, it would have been morally and psychologically disastrous for the rebels to target civilians as such, thereby alienating and weakening an otherwise invaluable “auxiliary” army; and iii) the Spaniards' propaganda against the rebels (i.e. “negro hordes,” “another Haiti”) was no doubt at least as much of an incentive for *pacíficos* to flee to garrisoned towns and cities as was the

⁶⁵ *Elpidio Valdés*, directed by Juan Padrón (Cuba: ICAIC, 1979).

⁶⁶ *Elpidio Valdés contra Dólar y Cañón* (Cuba: ICAIC, 1983).

rebel's incendiary war path. Albeit a bit too simplistic, there is much truth to the fact the Cubans waged war against a colonial economy and infrastructure, whereas Spaniards, at least for Weyler's tenure, waged war against Cuban lives.⁶⁷

This of course does not absolve the Republic in Arms of any harm done to civilians. Hardly. Gómez, surely, could foresee that his war of the torch would deprive not only wealthy planters of their profitable harvests but also Cuba's agro-proletariats of employment, however exploitive. He also surely knew that neither his Liberation Army nor the colonial regime could logistically care for so many "spontaneously" unemployed (and hungry) workers. It was a wager, thus—that the Spaniards would bow out of a too costly war—and Cuba's agro-industrial workers (and their families) were the collateral. Arguably, Gómez and other rebel leaders could not foresee that Spain would up the ante as gravely as it did under Weyler, but the fact is that they, the Republic in Arms and its "patriots," wagered these bets, as it were, against not only their own lives but also the lives of those never consulted—and deaths nearly forgotten. It is in this regard that the *reconcentrado* may constitute a figure of *critique*. For, rather than bespeak anything so sublime as a martyr or venerable as a *mambí*, the *reconcentrado* renders revolutionary violence, at best, an expedient—fallible and risky—or, at worst, an ethical mistake. The *reconcentrado* as such, in all her emaciated vulnerability and as voiceless collateral, bespeaks a call to mourn, atone, and reassess—instead of boast or romanticize—liberatory violence and nationalist interpellations.

⁶⁷ I agree with Foner on this count: Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 34. As against, for example, Tone's thesis (of near equivalence) on the ELC's "deconcentration": *War and Genocide in Cuba*.

CHAPTER 4. BEARDED CRYPTS: *MAMBÍ* TOTEMS AND *RECONCENTRADO* TABOOS

¡Patria o muerte!
—Cuban revolutionary slogan

All of Cuba's problems are, in reality, only three: breakfast, lunch, and dinner
—Cuban joke of the “Special Period”

If the 1960s were a renaissance for the *mambí* sublime, the 1990s were the closet to its eclipse. This chapter spells out the major social and psychical dislocations brought about in Cuba of the 1990s. Triggered by the loss of Soviet subsidies and aggravated by renewed US hostility, the so-called “Special Period” was marked most notably by food scarcity and hunger, a *balseero* (rafter) and *jinetera* (sex worker) crisis, and an emergent youth culture characterized by bitterness, hedonism, and even nihilism. The 1990s were, nevertheless, centennial years charged with extraordinary historical and moral weight. Guerrilla martyrs and the *mambí* ethos of anti-imperialism, patriotic unity, and sacrifice were conjured up in a flurry of memorials, essays, speeches, films, and events—not least the burial of Che Guevara’s remains in 1997. Arguably most interestingly of all, however, was the rhetoric that framed the Torricelli (1992) and Helms-Burton (1996) Acts as tantamount to latter-day reconcentration. In so doing, Cuban officials and their partisans rewrote a history in which the *reconcentrado* was a stoic “resister” more so than a victim and tried, however perversely, to confer a measure of “dignity” onto actually living (and starving) Cubans. Yet such rhetoric was haunted by an encrypted history of labor camps, institutionalized homophobia, and other culturally or politically tabooed issues. These specters come to life, as it were, with the event that was *Fresa y chocolate* (1993), a film that stirred and opened up public dialogues on state repression, sexual politics, religious rights, and censorship in ways that evidenced the *mambí* sublime’s taxed, if not defunct, allure.

4.1. Crisis & Embitterment

The 1960s were years in which the *mambí* could thrive as a cultural icon in Cuba. The *barbudos* had come to power in what was an unrivaled euphoric moment in Cuban history, with Cuba emerging as the vanguard of internationalist struggle and Third World socialism. Arguably no other period since the war years of 1895-98 was more hospitable to a symbol that stood for collective sacrifice and armed struggle against imperialism and in the name of a dignified and prosperous future. But if the 1960s were leavened by hope and enthusiasm, the 1990s were soiled with despair and embitterment. Cubans had entered their post-Soviet years, an era in which the *mambí*—let alone the *barbudo*—had lost much of his sublime luster.

It is no secret that the Cuban economy relied heavily on Soviet subsidies and markets throughout the 1960s to 80s, just as any number of strategically vital national states (i.e. Israel, South Korea, etc.)

relied on United States aid in order to prosper.¹ Once those subsidies and markets dissolved (1989-91), thus, Cuba not surprisingly fell into economic disarray, if not calamity. Adrift in a world in which history had ended, as it were, Cuban socialism had to fend for itself without the aid, quotas, “fair prices,” diplomatic ties, and foreign exchange reserves it once enjoyed. Notably, the regime could no longer fund its rightly touted social services and accomplishments in health care, nutrition, education, and the arts, and within short order critics abroad began to pontificate on the Revolution’s “final hours.”²

The crisis was officially, if not euphemistically, termed the “Special Period in Times of Peace.” And while the Cold War was ostensibly over, the United States did not lessen its embargo or aggressions against Cuba. Rather, it enforced harsher punitive sanctions that, as they were designed to do, made life in Cuba all the more miserable.³ Indeed, the so-called embargo was never more akin to a blockade than in these “times of peace.” The 1992 Torricelli Act, for instance, forbid not only US corporations but also their subsidiaries in third countries from doing business with Cuba—regardless of (or precisely due to) the fact that food and medicine accounted for 90 percent of such trade. It also stipulated penalties for those countries or institutions that granted aid to Cuba—such that if, say, Mexico awarded Cuba \$1 million in aid, the US would offer Mexico \$1 million less in US aid. The 1996 Helms-Burton Act was no less hostile. Under the guise of standing up for the non-indemnified property rights of exile Cubans and American businesses, it extended the US’ prosecutorial powers against foreign companies that invested in Cuba. So, too, did it renew a budget in the order of tens of millions to fund dissidents and insurrection on the island.⁴

Needless to say, the cumulative effects of lost Soviet aid and trade and renewed US hostility were near catastrophic. Cubans, by 1993, were suffering deprivations and hardships that bore uncanny resemblances to war—none more pressing or ubiquitous than food scarcity and hunger. Rations for staples like coffee, rice, bread, and beans had never been more limited; meat and spices were scarce or nonexistent; and recipes for typically discarded, yet edible, foods were concocted (e.g. fried grapefruit or plantain peels, salads made from sweet potato leaves, rice with egg shells, etc.). Caloric consumption fell dramatically, and a black market for food (re)emerged as did its prices soar. Energy, too, was rationed as oxen replaced tractors, bicycles replaced automobiles, wood fires replaced gas stoves, and candles electric bulbs. Even things as prosaic as soap and matches became premium commodities, as material life for Cubans no longer resembled the twentieth inasmuch as the nineteenth century.⁵

As many commentators (Cubans and non-Cubans alike) have noted, such material privations and uncertainty yielded not only a dramatic fall in fertility rates (and spike in abortion rates) but also a culture of disenchantment, cynicism, and embitterment. No other film conveyed this better, or at least as lyrically, than did Fernando Pérez’ *Madagascar* (1994). The film portrays the existential angst of Cubans in the Special Period through single mother, Laura, and her teenage daughter, Laurita.

¹ Nearly 85 percent of Cuba’s trade was with the Soviet Union. Cuba could count more or less reliably on sugar quotas in exchange for petroleum, machinery, and technical and financial aid. See: Salim Lamrani, *The Economic War Against Cuba: A Historical and Legal Perspective on the U.S. Blockade* (Monthly Review Press, 2013); on US aid see: Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Monthly Review Press, 1969).

² For an account of this (prematurely) celebratory discourse: see Roberto Fernández Rétamar, “Cuba Defended: Countering Another Black Legend,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.1 (Winter 1997): 95-115.

³ Even the exceedingly judicious Louis Pérez Jr. has to admit this was their intent. Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *The Structure of Cuban History: Meanings and Purposes of the Past* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2013), 262.

⁴ Lamrani, *Economic War Against Cuba*.

⁵ For accounts see: Ariana Hernández-Reguant, *Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Aviva Chomsky, “Special Period,” *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); José Quiroga, “Untimely Cuba,” *Cuban Palimpsests* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

Laura's voice-over narrates (putatively, to her therapist) her relationship with her disaffected, unruly daughter as well as with her monotonous work and estrangement from official rhetoric. Indeed, one of Laura's chief complaints is that she dreams the same dream (of her daily bleak routine) over and over and would like to dream something else. Laurita herself drops out of school and daydreams of going to Madagascar. This motif of lost bearings and a desire to flee (or at least live otherwise) is accentuated throughout the film through Laura and Laurita's repeated moves: they move four times in what must be less than a year's time. Yet each move is within (presumably) urban Havana and into housing that is as dark and dank as their last abode. More generally, disillusionment is conveyed through a noir aesthetic of a Cuba where the sun never shines and people are nearly catatonic and colorless—a decidedly un-Cuban Cuba in realist terms, yet metaphorically a portrait of Cuban inner reality and its existential lament for lost revolutionary hopes.⁶

In Cuban letters, Leonardo Padura's quartet of crime novels (published between 1991 and 1998) exemplifies the era's "bitter aesthetics," to borrow José Quiroga's apt term. The novels' protagonist is the melancholic, if not cynical, detective Mario Conde, who is nevertheless quite diligent at his job. With every gruesome murder he solves, in fact, Conde uncovers malfeasance past and present that trails its way, inevitably, to the highest ranks of the ruling regime. That Conde's friends are the disgruntled and persecuted of Cuba (i.e. transvestites, owners of underground bars, maimed veterans of the Angola wars, formerly imprisoned writers) is telling in its own right.⁷ But arguably closer to the pulse of the Special Period is Antonio José Ponte's *Las comidas profundas* (1997)—translated as *Waiting to Eat*. A series of poetic meditations, *Waiting to Eat* plays on the theme of hunger, both literal and metaphysical. Its author contemplates the paintings of food that sit on his mantel against the tiny morsel of bread that lays atop his otherwise empty table and muses: "Days and days marked by a prisoner's ration. I suppose that to the north or in the future pineapples and bread will abound. Like an old cartographer that fills his maps with whales and aeolus and peoples of the antipodes, I place on some point The Place From Where Come the Savory Foods [...] And I still call that imaginary place, Cuba."⁸ Again and again Ponte plays on the theme of substitution of the symbolic for the real—that is to say, the theme of an illusory Cuba. To this point he recalls the scandal of washrags soaked, breaded, fried and sold on the black market as steak as an allegory of Cubans' desperate hunger for that which they are promised but cannot truly have. The fact that Ponte blends centuries past and far off places itself stresses the point, namely that of a paradisiacal (socialist) Cuba that is neither here nor now—if ever.

Nothing, however, was more emblematic of a distraught Cuba than the *balseros* crisis of 1994. As war-like hunger and scarcity wore on, some Cubans hijacked ships or cast off in makeshift rafts (*balsas*) bound for Florida. The US policy at the time enticed precisely such risky ventures: Cubans who reached US waters would all but instantaneously be granted permanent residency status in the US.⁹ And while the US agreed to grant 27,000 visas a year to Cubans who wished to immigrate legally, its Interests Section in Havana only granted a fraction of that amount per year (i.e. 2,700 in 1993). In other words, it structurally encouraged *illegal* over legal entry to the US. Indeed, Miami organizations such as Brothers to the Rescue, founded by former Bay of Pigs veteran and wanted terrorist in Cuba, José Basulto, patrolled (in small aircrafts and boats) the waters between Cuba and

⁶ *Madagascar*, directed by Fernando Pérez (Cuba: ICAIC, 1994). For a more comical look at the contradictions of life in the Special Period see: *Guantanamo*, directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío (Cuba: ICAIC, 1995).

⁷ Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests*, 20, 132-33.

⁸ José Antonio Ponte, *Las comidas profundas* (Angers: Ed. Deleatur, 1997), 11.

⁹ This policy has been in place since the Cuban Adjustment Act (Public Law 89-732) of 1966.

Florida in order to pick up *balseros* and expedite their US welcome.¹⁰ And while the Cuban Coast Guard tried to intercept as many *balseros* as possible, Cubans continued to take their chances at sea.

August 11, 1994 Fidel Castro brought the *balsero* issue to a calculated head. He announced the Cuban coasts open and bid farewell, as it were, to any Cubans who wished to flee. Within days hundreds of Cubans set out to sea in their makeshift rafts, and the US was forced to reply. Rather than its customary welcome, however, US President Clinton placed Cubans on legal par with any other refugee, not least their Haitians neighbors who, in an exodus from a military junta (1991-94), were repatriated to Haiti courtesy of the US Coast Guard. By the close of 1994, roughly 50,000 Cubans had been caught at sea and brought to the US military base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. And while (*unlike* Haitians) many of these Cubans were admitted to the US, the US' new "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" policy (as of May 1995) led to a precipitous fall in the number of *balsero* incidents.¹¹

Indeed, the Cuban regime did not stand by idly in these most dire years. Its legitimacy had never been quite so precarious. A black market for food and other necessities had taken over Cuba, and this market operated almost exclusively in dollars. Cubans, reasonably enough, assumed the peso would soon be worthless. The government accordingly decriminalized the dollar in July 1993 as well as turned over state farms to cooperatives that could now (as of October 1994) legally sell their excess produce in farmer's markets (*agropecuarios*). On a larger and longer-term scale, the government also conditionally opened the nation's economy to foreign investors, not least in order to renew and enlarge its infrastructure for cultural and health tourism. It also permitted Cubans to privately rent out their rooms to tourists and for the opening of small restaurants (*paladares*).¹²

Cuba's reforms as such were neither in vain nor entirely felicitous. They managed to make life more tolerable for many and considerably improved for others, especially those with family abroad. One of the Special Period's most popular jokes, in fact, was that in order to survive in Cuba one needed to have *fe*—Spanish for "faith," but truly a pun on the acronym for *familia en el exterior*, "family abroad."¹³ *Fe* thus meant, above all else: remittances. Cubans with family abroad, especially in the United States, could count on greater or lesser amounts of remittances in US dollars. And with the dollar decriminalized, such Cubans could openly buy any number of basic or luxury goods at farmer's markets and newly opened "hard-currency" stores. Access to dollars was also the surest path to investment and self-employment opportunities in the tourist industry, which begat all the more access to dollars. Another "joke," consequently, of the Special Period was that Cubans could now be classed as *los condólares* and *los sindólares*—those *with* and those *without* dollars.¹⁴

Access to dollars was no less a racially correlated phenomenon. Due to pre-revolutionary social inequities in Cuba and post-revolutionary subsidies in the US, Cubans in exile were (and are) not only wealthier but also whiter. As of the year 2000, 84 percent of Cubans in the US (and 96 percent

¹⁰ Basulto is wanted for, among other things, the attempted assassination of Fidel Castro. Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 168-70.

¹¹ To clarify: "wet foot" means those who are captured at sea and are to be treated as any other illegal immigrant; "dry foot" means on land. Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 169; also see the documentary: *Balseros*, directed by Carlos Bosch and Josep Ma Domeench (Spain: Bausan Films, 2002) for the best account of the issue; the film follows the lives of seven of those refugees over period of seven years and shows the difficulty of life for each in a disaffected, alienating, and work-intensive US economy and culture. It was shown in Cuba at the Havana Film Festival and more shows added by popular demand.

¹² Max Azicri, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow: Reinventing Socialism* (UF, 2000).

¹³ Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 164.

¹⁴ Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *Growing Economic and Social Disparities in Cuba: Impact and Recommendations for Change* (University of Miami Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies/Cuban Transition Project, 2002); Susan Eckstein, "Dollarization and its Discontents: Remittances and the Remaking of Cuba in the Post-Soviet Era," *Comparative Politics* 36.3 (April 2004): 313-30.

in Miami) identified as “white.”¹⁵ *Los condólares* on the island are accordingly whiter. Yet not only *fe* and its remittances have dealt Cubans of color an unfair hand; so, too, have hiring preferences for whiter Cubans in the much coveted tourist industry. Afro-Cubans’ share in the tourist economy (i.e. access to dollars) has been confined by and large to cultural performances in dance, music, and religion (i.e. *santería* ceremonies) or, as is especially the case for young women of color, in *jeneterismo*.

Jinetera is idiomatic Cuban for “prostitute,” but *jeneterismo* has come to refer to any number of illegal and semi-legal activities that service tourists: hustlers, pimps, unofficial tour guides, sex workers, etc. Officially tolerated and socially scorned, many researchers have noted that *jeneterismo* is but a survival strategy under circumstances that offer little else. Cuban-American Coco Fusco has remarked that *jineteras* are “sophisticated traffickers in fantasy,” but so, too, are they symptoms of a “post-socialist” Cuba having fallen prey to the global capitalist market.¹⁶ One such telling indicator is income disparity. Prior to 1989, the salary of the lowest as against highest paid employees in Cuba amounted to a ratio of 1:5. With the onset of a dual currency economy (i.e. dollars and pesos), that ratio was estimated at 1:289 in 1995 and 1:12,500 in 2001.¹⁷ Indeed, that Cuba, or especially Havana, now resembles its 1950s pre-revolutionary days of tourist hedonism and social inequality is an irony that has not gone unnoticed.

4.2. *Mambí Totems*

The 1990s were also centennial years: the *Grito de Baire* (February 1895), Martí’s death (May 1895), Maceo’s death (December 1896), and, of course, the momentous year 1898. And while so many of these memorialized events could readily evoke tragedy or even humiliation, for Cubans they had come to signify the most illustrious of their martyrs and their finest hours of sacrifice “with all and for the good of all.” In this regard, revitalized historical interpellations could not have been timelier than in those most dire years of the Special Period. For if Marxist-Leninist rhetoric could no longer hold sway at it once did, Cubans were never so morally indebted to it as they were their own history. “Our alliance with Soviet socialism was never more than just that—an alliance,” said poet Cintio Vitier, “Where the Soviets hoped to find an ideological voice, the community of Céspedes, Maceo, and Martí was waiting for them. It was more than an ideology; it was a true vocation for justice and freedom.”¹⁸ And it was to this past that they turned all the more vigorously in order to muster moral stamina against a calamitous present.

Obviously enough, no other historic archetype bespoke that “vocation” more so than the *mambí*, the independence fighter who would perish rather than see his Patria subdued by imperial or elitist powers. Two events thereby stood out in the 1990s: i) the dedication of the Antonio Maceo Revolution Square in 1991 and ii) the burial of Che Guevara’s remains in 1997—events that coincided with the Cuban Communist Party’s 4th and 5th Congresses, respectively. The Maceo Revolution Square includes a museum that recounts Maceo’s extraordinary life (i.e. his overall 26

¹⁵ Eckstein, “Dollarization and its Discontents”; Sara A. Blue, “The Erosion of Racial Equality in the Context of Cuba’s Dual Economy,” *Latin American Politics & Society* 49.3 (Fall 2007): 35-68; and Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Coco Fusco, “Hustling for Dollars: *Jineterismo* in Cuba” in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, edited by Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema (New York: Routledge, 1998); Cynthia Pope, “The Political Economy of Desire: Geographies of Female Sex Work in Havana, Cuba,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 6.2 (June 2005): 99-118.

¹⁷ Carmelo Mesa-Lago, *The Cuban Economy Today: Salvation or Damnation?* (University of Miami Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies/Cuba Transition Project, 2005), 25.

¹⁸ Cintio Vitier, “Martí and the Challenge of the 1990s,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 96.1 (Winter 1997): 215.

bullet wounds), a larger plaza for cultural and political events, and, most strikingly, the Maceo monument, which towers at 52 feet. The enormity of the bronze equestrian Maceo, which emerges as if from stone, is no doubt an architectural salute to Maceo's touted physical prowess and stature as a man of war. His particular worth to Cuba was not, however, only as its best field general but also as a martyr of moral and political rectitude. Maceo, after all, was immortalized as the voice and figurehead of the Protest of Baraguá, where, in the company of Spanish commander Martínez-Campos, he refused to sign the Treaty of Zanjón (1878) insofar as it did not stipulate the independence of Cuba and the abolition of slavery.¹⁹ Indeed, the equally enormous 23 machetes that sprout from the ground near the monument are symbolic of the date March 23, 1878, the day when Maceo's forces resumed hostilities against Spain.

More than a mere testament to Cuban history, the monument calls on Cubans to take up Maceo's fierce fidelity to Patria in his stead. As Maceo's horse rears, Maceo beckons with one arm for others to follow him. With a horse that faces westward, the path before him (and his followers) is clearly that of revolutionary war, historic as well as perpetual. Just below the towering Maceo and the 23 machetes is a circular inlet with an eternal flame and a nearby wall with Maceo's famed words: "Whosoever should try to seize Cuba, will recover only the dust of a ground soaked in blood, if he has not already perished in battle."²⁰ That the Revolution Square, in all its phallic and historic grandeur, is situated in Santiago de Cuba is all the more noteworthy. Although Maceo was born near Santiago, the city evokes a larger aura as capital of revolutionary Oriente (the East), where the *mambises* and Cuba Libre cried their first *gritos* and enjoyed their strongest foothold. The East, however, is not only home to Yara, Baire, and Bayamo, but also to the Moncada Barracks and the Sierra Maestra, that is, where Fidel Castro's 26th July Movement was born and its guerrilla war took hold. A distraught and ailing CCP hoped that such contiguity and commemoration would confer much needed legitimacy upon its rule, if not respectability onto everyday Cubans for their historic "opportunity" to emulate Maceo. The Fourth Party Congress went as far as to conclude: "The future of our *patria* will be an eternal Baraguá."²¹

When the CCP met again in 1997, the dead conjured up to haunt the living was one of the Revolution's very own, namely Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Akin to Maceo's Revolution Square, the Guevara Memorial is a sculptural ensemble: museum, mural, gardens, plaza, and mausoleum that all surround a towering monument of El Che. A bronze 22-foot Che dressed in military fatigues stands atop a marble pedestal of at least another 30 feet. He carries his rifle in one hand, with his other forearm in a field-expedient cast—a scene from the Cuban revolutionary war. Indeed, the memorial is located in Santa Clara, where Che's troops seized the city on December 31, 1958 in the decisive Battle of Santa Clara, though it faces southward towards Latin America, symbolic of Che's dreams to export the Cuban Revolution abroad. By all accounts, however, when the Guevara Memorial was inaugurated (1988) Che's body was somewhere in Vallegrande, Bolivia, where he and other guerrillas were killed by Bolivian soldiers and CIA operatives in 1967 and buried in an unmarked grave.

Fortuitously enough, an international team of forensic specialists found and exhumed Che's body in 1997 and repatriated it to Cuba, where his remains were buried with full honors. The coffin was

¹⁹ Maceo rejected as "dishonorable" a bounty offered for his surrender and, to Martínez-Campos' plea for Cuba to join the "civilized peoples" of the world, rejoined that Spain had not kept its word to abolish the slave trade or slavery—as the rest of the "civilized" world had already done. Not only a colonial subject, thus, but a man of color had thereby acted out as the true bearer of honor and integrity in the face of he (and they) who ostensibly stood for these very values. Philip S. Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The "Bronze Titan" of Cuba's Struggle for Independence* (Monthly Review Press, 1977), 72-87.

²⁰ This is how the monument's symbolism is described on the EcuRed entry on the subject. Accessed May 2015: http://www.ecured.cu/index.php/Plaza_de_la_Revoluci%C3%B3n_Mayor_General_Antonio_Maceo_Grajales.

²¹ Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 272.

put on display at the feet of the José Martí monument at Revolution Plaza in Havana, where an estimated 250,000 Cubans filed in line to see and pay their respects to the iconic Commandante. The remains were then brought to Santa Clara, where, in the presence of his widow, Aleida March, and children, they were entombed in the mausoleum. A 21-gun salute and a children's choir singing Carlos Puebla's 1965 elegy, "Hasta Siempre," punctuated the ceremonies.²² On one register, thus, the funerary rites and honors were meant to lay the Fallen Hero to rest, to rectify the fact of his ignominious death. But on another register, as with Maceo's memorial in 1991, the pageantry of Che's reburial in 1997 was a campaign to enliven the precariously living by recourse to the heroically dead. More exactly, it identified revolutionary ethos and national identity with the guerrilla soldier who would sacrifice all in the war against imperialism. From *mambí* (Maceo) to *barbudo* (Che), it is this "rebellious spirit" that each of the memorial's eternal flames, both lit by Fidel Castro, is said to symbolize as historically continuous and perpetually undead.

But if in the 1890s and the 1960s the *mambí* sublime and all its attendant sacrifices could be buoyed by clear and present dangers as well as collective hopes for a better future, in the 1990s it could not fare as well. The 1990s were nominally "times of peace," and Cuba's foreseeable future was anything but auspicious. But as centennial years, and under such dire circumstances, it was unlikely indeed that the regime, as presumed heir to the *mambises*, would shy away from its "duty" to endorse their predecessors' revolutionary spirit. The year '98 in particular was thought to be rife with "lessons" for Cubans of the day. And to this end, two films stood out as the ones charged with carrying forth the *mambí* sublime, namely *Mambí* (1998) and *Más se perdió en Cuba* (1999).

Mambí tells the fictional story of Goyo, a Canary Islander *quinto* (conscript) whose life changes irrevocably by virtue of his tour in war torn Cuba. Once in Havana, Goyo meets and falls in love with Ofelia, a beautiful mulatta and adopted daughter to his Cuban uncle. Little, however, does Goyo know that his uncle and Ofelia are underground rebels. Off to the war front, Goyo finds himself at odds with the war and his superiors and eventually deserts the Spanish army, only to be held captive by the *mambises*. To his surprise, Goyo reencounters his Ofelia, who vouches for him. Whether to prove his loyalty or merely his love for Ofelia, Goyo then partakes in a mission to deliver dynamite for sabotage operations. But the mission goes awry, and Goyo and Ofelia must flee to the wilderness. It is here that, under a clichéd waterfall and soft music, they "consummate" their love. And it is hereafter that Goyo emerges a bona fide *mambí*: on horseback and with machete in hand. By the film's close, in fact, Goyo decides to stay in Cuba after the war: "My home is here now," he says to his friend, Sevillano, in the Havana port, with a pregnant Ofelia at his side.

The film is thereby less a love story about Goyo and Ofelia than a story about Goyo's metamorphosis into an honorary Cuban—that is to say, *the* Cuban. As the drama unfolds, Goyo progressively takes on an uncanny resemblance to José Martí, famed poet and the Patria's "Apostle." By the film's closing sequence, in fact, Goyo looks as if a reincarnated Martí: statesmen-like attire, receding hairline, and Martí's signature bushy, chevron-style mustache with small patch of beard below the lips. There are other cues throughout the film that associate Goyo with Martí and Cuba: Goyo is an islander, like Cubans; Ofelia remarks that Goyo "talks likes us [Cubans]" (i.e. not in an Iberian dialect); he recites poetry to Ofelia; and he is imprisoned by the Spanish in Havana's El Morro, as a young Martí once was. But what settles matters are Goyo's relations to desire and violence. Firstly, his object of desire is Ofelia (Cuba) not a loyalist *peninsular* (Spain). The fact that Ofelia is a *mambisa* and mulatta only renders Goyo's desire all the more politically palatable and in tune with Cuba Libre's antiracist rhetoric. Indeed, in this regard, Ofelia is a proxy for authenticity,

²² A reply to Che's farewell letter to Fidel and Cuba, the Puebla's song's title was homage to one of Che's well-known sayings, "Onward to Victory, Always!" The saying is in fact inscribed just below the Che statue, as is the full letter in a nearby marble block. Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests*, 209-211.

an authenticity that extends to Goyo by virtue of having lain with (and, especially, impregnated) her. Secondly, Goyo never enacts violence that is not “necessary” or “redemptive,” as Martí would have it. He is in fact quite sensitive and scrupulous about violence, vomiting at the sight of his fellows’ corpses and refusing to torture or execute a *mambí* prisoner of war. Goyo does not kill anyone until he stabs the Spanish officer who tried to rape Ofelia, and thereafter he is shown in a montage series of machete charges against armed Spanish soldiers.

The film thus plays out a familiar enough logic and aesthetic *vis-à-vis* Cuba’s “necessary war” and its heroes. *Mambises* are portrayed as tactically savvy and patriotically valorous. They torch cane, charge boldly with their machetes into Spanish lines of fire, and never enact violence against civilians. What is more, they look the part of a people’s army with their straw hats and their multiracial constituency. Indeed, once defected to the Cuban liberation army, Goyo’s new commander is the stoic and war-wise Colonel Nazario, a mulatto. One of the noteworthy differences is that the film offers a more nuanced and humanized portrayal of Spanish soldiers. Weyler does make a cameo (and voiceless) appearance, and Goyo’s former regiment commander, Captain Gonzalo, is a particularly vicious disciplinarian and torturer. But Spanish rank and file *quintos* are coded as a humbler lot who have been forcibly conscripted to toil and die on behalf of Madrid’s elite. Rather than the imbeciles, drunkards, or rapists Spanish soldiers are in *Elpidio Valdés* (1979) and *La primera carga al machete* (1968), the *quintos* of *Mambí* (1998) are everyday working men who would rather be home with their loved ones: Goyo and his friend, Sevillano, were miners in the Canary Islands, as was his Sergeant a shepherd in Salamanca.²³

Spaniards, in fact, are cast as only the proximate and lesser enemy of Cuba Libre. Her truest enemies are “bad” Cubans and the US. Accordingly, the “bad” Cubans are the latinfundistas, those whose loyalties are to their own wealth rather than the Patria. In the film, *mambí* Colonel Nazario is invited to meet with a faction of wealthy (white) landowners at one of their plantation estates. Dressed handsomely and with a banquet of food at their table, they break the news that Weyler has been dismissed and toast with wine that ’98 brings “peace and prosperity”—to which they add, with a snicker, “and higher sugar prices... and autonomy.” Nazario, dressed in *mambí* fatigues, toasts to “independence.” The men plea that now is the time for “dialogue” and “negotiation,” but Nazario replies, “In what language? The language of Spain or that of Cubans?” Riled, he stands, pulls out his pistol and says, “Let me tell you what my men will say. If you propose autonomy reforms... Fire [*Fuego*]! If you propose provincialism... Fuego! No one here is going to put down his machete!” Nazario punctuates each “fuego” with a gunshot to the sky. But the meeting is a ruse; soldiers surround the estate. Nazario quickly mounts his horse and charges into the foggy night (i.e. his death) yelling, “¡Viva Cuba Libre!” Nazario thereby consummates the *mambí* sublime, a heroic death at arms that, not incidentally, eclipses any other modality of dissident or conciliatory politics. So, too, does the scene speak to a highly contemporary issue, namely that of the Special Period’s mounting inequality and conspicuous consumption. The scene, in other words, codes as traitors those Cubans who choose their individualistic wealth and bourgeois amenities over Patria and socialist solidarity.

The United States does not take on a carnal existence in the film *Mambí* until the closing scenes. As Goyo bids farewell to his Spanish friends in Havana port, a US Marine brusquely interrupts them and, in southern drawl, barks at Goyo, “Whatta ya doin’ here? Git back in line.” That the soldier is on horseback only accentuates the power differential, a scene that evokes a proverbial David (Cuba)

²³ No doubt this far more favorable depiction was the result of the film being a Cuban-Spanish co-production, directed by Spanish filmmakers Teodoro and Santiago Ríos. No longer solvent, ICAIC has had to turn to foreign capital in order to fund many of its projects. *Mambí*, directed by Teodoro and Santiago Ríos (Spain/Cuba: ICAIC-SOCAEM: 1998).

against Goliath (United States) scenario. Goyo does not slay the giant, as it were, but he does grab hold of the horse's reign and temper it in quiet defiance. A tense stare down ensues, which does not end until Goyo is called away by his lovely Ofelia. There is as such no resolution, only an antagonistic encounter that is meant to be prophetic. For if the Marine is a proper historical referent, signifying the occupations of 1898-1903 and 1906-09, his truest salience is as a symbol of the "yankee" imperialism that endures in the new '98—1998 and the 21st century, that is.

More highly anticipated was Juan Padrón's *Más se perdió en Cuba* (1999), the third (and latest) installment in the animated *Elpidio Valdés* film series thus far. Whereas the first two *Elpidio* episodes unravel in the years 1895 and 1896-97, respectively, this episode takes place almost exclusively in the year 1898, the year that the US intervened militarily. The plot is driven by a quest on all sides to seize (or destroy) an American watch that possesses an encryption of the order to sink a vessel (i.e. the *USS Maine*) in Havana harbor as a "false-flag" tactic. Indeed, the *Maine* "tragedy" is what defined the war for Americans. And although no one party's culpability was ever proven, the war's most memorable slogan resounded: "Remember the *Maine*, to Hell with Spain!"²⁴ In *Más se perdió en Cuba*, however, responsibility for the *Maine* falls squarely in the hands of American capitalists and officials, who kill dear friends to Elpidio and co-protagonist Manolo in order to destroy the incriminating evidence. Their deaths are avenged in 1933, when an elder yet capable Elpidio and Manolo "settle accounts" with "Jr.," son to the infamous American planter Mr. Chanes (pronounced "chains"), and all who conspired with him.

Interestingly enough, the film plays these antagonisms out in terms of a virtuous as against vile trinity. Symbolic of multinational coalitions, each trinity includes a member from each of the belligerent nations: Spain, Cuba, and the US. Naturally, Elpidio is Cuba's heroic representative. Other than Elpidio, there are Manolo and Sergeant Washington. A young blond-haired Spanish officer, Manolo undergoes a transformation akin to that of Goyo's: he falls in love with a Cuban mulatta, Rosita, stays to live in Cuba, and fights for Cuba Libre. But he is not the only ally to Cuba. Sergeant Washington, a US Army "Buffalo Soldier," comes to Elpidio and Manolo's aid at crucial moments in the drama. All three are skilled fighters with integrity and their "alliance" emerges organically as a stand against Chanes Jr., Miranda, and Colonel Porrones. Jr., heir to an American latifundista and media tycoon, is the wicked ringleader with allegiances only to his wealth. Like his vampire-faced father, Jr. (as metonym for capital) talks in an egregiously *gringo* inflected Spanish and is obsessed with trying to kill Elpidio, Cuba's hero (and metonym for the Revolution). Lanky and with a whiny voice, Manolo is a Cuban autonomist, historically those who stood for "reforms" over "revolution" in the wars for independence. A Judas-figure, Miranda joins the *mambises* but actually does Jr.'s (i.e. America's) bidding, a service for which he receives high office after the war as recompense. Lastly, Colonel Porrones is a Spanish officer who treats his subordinates, most notably Manolo, with disdain and spies on behalf of Jr. and the US. If Manolo ends up an honorary Cuban, Porrones ends up an honorary American—so much so that upon his return to Cuba in 1933 he goes by the name Mr. Johnson. Hence the contrasts could not be starker: Elpidio, Manolo, and Sergeant Washington fight "clean" and bravely, whereas Jr. and his cronies fight "dirty" and cowardly. The former take on only the armed, always face-to-face and usually outnumbered; the latter execute the unarmed, hide behind superior numbers, or flee. The former are handsome and stoutly built, whereas the latter are frail or ugly. All told the cumulative effects of their aesthetic and their deeds bespeak many such rudimentary contrasts: the loyal versus the traitorous; camaraderie and solidarity versus opportunism; equality versus racism; sovereignty as against imperialism.

²⁴ See: Louis A. Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History & Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

One notes a simultaneous project at work in the film to “rectify” silences or misrepresentations in American historiography and collective memory of the war. Arguably no other such silence is taken up more assiduously than that of the absence of Cuba’s heroes, namely the *mambises*. As the popular American imaginary has it (then as now), the war was won by the likes of “Teddy” Roosevelt and his intrepid regiment of volunteers, the Rough Riders. And, in this regard, no other battle was more emblematic than that of San Juan Hill (July 1, 1898), as famously depicted in Frederic Remington’s paintings. But the truth is that the African-American regiments of the 10th Cavalry and 24th Infantry, popularly known as the “Buffalo Soldiers,” undertook the deadliest and most decisive advances that day.²⁵ *Más se perdió* rectifies this in deliciously comical ways. For one thing, Teddy and his Rough Riders charge the wrong hill and only arrive at San Juan Hill after it has been taken. Moreover, the Rough Riders are portrayed as an ugly lot: skinny, disheveled, with hooked noses and gnarly teeth. Not just ugly, but racist and cowardly: in southern drawl, they badger and taunt the Buffalo Soldiers with epithets (i.e. “nigger,” “smoked Yankee”) and cower when Spanish rifles are turned on them. The Buffalo Soldiers are in fact the only American soldiers consistently portrayed as astute, disciplined, and brave. No less crucial is the fact that as Sergeant Washington and his troops rush San Juan Hill, Elpidio and the *mambises* are right there at their side. Indeed, the *mambises* prove vital to the American victory. This is stressed in a series of US failures to safely disembark on Cuban soil. With each try, a regiment of Spanish artillery and infantry repel the US Navy and Army. It is not until the *mambises* clear and secure beachheads like Guantánamo and Daiquiri that American troops land, only to prove lousy shots, strategically inept, and ungrateful.

As one might expect, the film places a premium on Cuba’s capacity to resist against all odds. When the American flag is officially raised at El Morro in Havana, a Cuban flag suddenly appears in the sky. Affixed to a kite and cushioned by the sun’s light, the Cuban flag defiantly flies higher and brighter than that of its competitor’s, as Cubans in the streets at last cheer. And while Cuba Libre becomes a repressed dream under neocolonial rule, Elpidio and his associates see to it that Jr. Miranda, and Porrónes pay their debts. That this reckoning comes in 1933, the year of the “provisional” revolution, and with Elpidio and Maria Silvia’s now adult son, Elpidio III, an active member of the resistance, speaks to the historical and intergenerational continuity of the *mambí* ethos. And, as we have argued, that ethos is routinely translated into the act of taking up arms and risking one’s (and others’) life for the Patria. This holds true whether it be the *mambí* and his machete or the urban guerrilla and his Tommy gun. The film’s closing scene, to wit, is a freeze frame of Elpidio hanging outside the window of his getaway car, sleeves rolled up and teeth clenched, with semiautomatic rifle blasting at the police in pursuit. He hollers out to Manolo, “One of these days we’re going to win!” The moral is easy enough to infer: the fight for Cuba Libre continues...

Why the film would conclude on such a note is just as easy to infer: Cubans of the day (i.e. late 1990s) must continue to fight the good fight against “yankee” imperialism and for Cuba Libre.²⁶ But upon closer scrutiny it is hard to miss the fact that the more plausible analogy for Cubans of the Special Period is not that of the *mambí* inasmuch as the *reconcentrado*. Was not their material life eclipsed by hunger? And could it not be attributed—decisively, if not uniquely—to an imperial aggressor? Let us reconsider the two centennial films in this light.

²⁵ Pérez, “Constructing the Cuban Absence,” *The War of 1898*.

²⁶ Another way to read it is more cynically: a means to lower expectations and reconcile a people to prospects of ongoing adversity. But that the film intimately associates racial democracy, collective welfare, and political sovereignty with the terms “Patria” and “Cuba Libre” should not go unnoticed. Cuba Libre’s enemies are racist, opportunistic, exploitive, and cruel. “Patria” and “Cuba Libre” are never associated with material prosperity, meritocracy, consumerism, free markets or entrepreneurialism.

Padrón's *Más se perdió en Cuba* does not address reconcentration substantively or dramatically. As a preface to the film's drama, a voiceover narrates the history of the war for independence from the *Grito de Baire* and Weyler's reconcentration orders to the loyalist rioting in Havana against Weyler's dismissal. As the history is recounted comic book stylized imagery fleshes out the narrative, including the image of a frail *campesino* family standing behind barbed wire—a nod to, or citation of, Holocaust iconography. This “preface” lasts but one and half minutes, and nowhere else in the film's two-and-a-half hour drama are *reconcentrados* and the camps seen or discussed. Teodoro and Santiago Ríos' *Mambí* (1998) offers two scenes of reconcentration. The first features emaciated children in a camp near a train station. Goyo, who is aboard the train, sees the children, his eyes met by a young (white) *reconcentrada* who hauntingly, quietly stares back at him through the barbed wire fence. There is no dialogue, only visual and musical cues that what one witnesses is a crime against humanity. Later Goyo's unit actually enforces reconcentration in a small rural town. Peasant homes (*bohíos*) are burned, civilians are forcibly rounded up, and some, accused of hiding arms, are executed. Somber, operatic music slowly drowns out the cries of women and children, as Goyo's face bespeaks a conscience in turmoil. Neither of the two scenes is longer than a minute and in neither of them does a *reconcentrado* speak. Quite tellingly, the latter scene ends with the sudden appearance of a mystic-like *mambí*. He is shirtless, a black muscular body and fierce looking face straddled bareback on a horse and, naturally, with machete in hand. The *mambí*, nameless yet iconic, charges the Spanish captain and with a guttural scream runs him down. Just as suddenly, he is gone, and the captain and his lieutenant are left to marvel at the officer's halved sword, handy work of the *mambí*'s machete and symptomatic of the film's identification with phallic power. Only soldierly, armed men speak and act throughout the film—with the lone exception that proves the rule, namely Ofelia as an object of desire more so than subject of history and politics. That the *mambí* emerges as he does in this scene only reinforces the morality tale that they, the *mambises*, were the *reconcentrados*' (and Patria's) saviors, or at least avengers.

This is not to say that the historical parallels were missed or that the *reconcentrado* was irrelevant. Officials and scholars alike did not squander the opportunity to flesh out the denunciatory and disciplinary value that '98, generally, and the *reconcentrado*, specifically, had to offer. The same year the Torricelli Act was passed (1992) and as Cubans began to feel their post-Soviet precarity in earnest, Fidel Castro avowed: “We cannot forget that this is the people of 1868 and of 1895, that we are the descendents of those who struggled for ten years, those who endured the reconcentration program of Weyler, which tried to do what the US seeks to achieve today: to force us into submission through hunger.”²⁷ Castro was neither the first nor the last to draw an analogy between reconcentration and the “blockade” (*bloqueo*). Military historian Raúl Izquierdo Canosa, in *La reconcentración, 1896-1897* (1997), made a bolder case for placing the 1990s blockade on par with the naval blockade of 1898 and its disastrous effects. Deployed, ostensibly, in order to prevent any further enemy soldiers or arms from entering the island, the US' blockade of major Cuban ports not only isolated the Spanish army and navy but also blocked Cubans' access to foods and medicines. And while reconcentration had been annulled *de jure* in October 1897, its structure lingered well into 1898 such that the naval blockade aggravated what was an already miserable situation. Even Clara Barton's Red Cross committees were denied access to their humanitarian cargo. By Canosa's accounts, no less than half of the total 200,000 *reconcentrado* dead can be attributed to that “pitiless and criminal” tactic.²⁸

Arguably more striking than the value of the *reconcentrado* to denounce (yankee) imperialism was the *reconcentrado*'s newly deployed identity as a patriot, a resister no less! Echoing Fidel and Raúl

²⁷ Quoted in Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 276.

²⁸ Raúl Izquierdo Canosa, *La reconcentración, 1896-1897* (La Habana: Verde Olivo, 1997), 67-75.

Castro's rhetoric, Canosa says he wrote his study as a "tribute to those hundreds of thousands of anonymous victims who enriched [or, literally, "fertilized," *abonaron*] with their blood and mortal remains the land where they were born." "Through its resistance and stoicism," he clarified, "the suffering Cuban people [*pueblo*] demonstrated its will, its capacity to struggle and disposition to face the greatest sacrifices, including that of surrendering [*entregar*] the life of nearly 20 percent of its population..."²⁹ Yet these belated tributes, however symbolic, were in fact quite specious, for they were never truly tributes to the dead inasmuch as interpellations of the living. It was to the living (and starving) that these "tributes" were addressed and meant to dignify—if not discipline. For what else *could* it mean to identify with the *reconcentrado* as such except as one who shall suffer any hardships "stoically," that is to say, mutely and obediently?

It should come as no surprise, however, that the *reconcentrado* was never seriously taken up in the 1990s as an icon of resistance. One did not encounter billboards with images of emaciated *reconcentrados* aside a slogan that read, "Faithful to Our History" (*Fieles a nuestra historia*) or *Patria o muerte*. Nor was '98 taken up as a year to erect grand monuments for the *reconcentrado* dead. Rather, such billboards and such monuments carried the faces of armed martyrs: Martí, Maceo, Camilo, and Che. The frail, sickly female and child bodies of the *reconcentrados* could not possibly cohere to an iconography of resistance and emancipatory power that called for stout, youthful men's bodies adorned with symbols of phallic and martial power: horses, beards, machetes, rifles. For however much "dignity" and "resistance" one wished to attribute to the *reconcentrado*, how likely was it that Cubans would identify with a mute, anonymous mass of the ignobly dead over that of a heroic identity and the myth-cum-fantasy of a soldierly death? The *reconcentrado* was not, after all, reintroduced in these centennial years so as to *problematize* the *mambí* sublime inasmuch as to *supplement* and *endorse* it. The *reconcentrado* as such was valuable insofar as she served to define *revolutionary* as against *sovereign* violence, the decorous and emancipatory from the cruel and repressive, the "stoic" and patriotic from the fickle and disloyal. She could be invoked, in other words, to denounce the violence of *others* and to discipline the patriotic self, but never as a figure that voiced or signaled disagreement or collateral violence.

4.3. Specters of the Camp

The campaign to rhetorically equate the US' late twentieth century blockade with Weyler's late nineteenth century reconcentration had another (moral as much as historical) defect, namely the specter of revolutionary Cuba's own camps. Arguably no other human rights scandal tainted the image of the Cuban Revolution and the socialist "New Man" more so than did the UMAP camps of the 1960s, especially when read as only the most acute symptom of a larger repressive apparatus and its policies.

Euphemistically termed Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP), these forced-labor camps were the regime's answer as to how to deal with young men deemed unfit to partake in obligatory military or police service (i.e. 2 years for men between ages 17-28). Internees, or *confinados*, were subjected to prison-like quarters and feed, grueling agricultural labor of as many as 10 to 12 hours a day, and regular sessions of indoctrination. Hemmed in by 10-foot barbed-wire fences and with only 120 men per camp, the camps were relatively small and dispersed throughout Cuba's east-central and largely rural Camaguëy province. In a larger context, they addressed national security and economic imperatives. The early 1960s were plagued with CIA-sponsored bombings, sabotage,

²⁹ Ibid., 12-13.

armed rebellion, and assassinations such that community vigilance organizations (CDRs) were formed and entrusted to report on the “counter-revolutionary” activities of their neighbors. It is generally agreed that the majority of UMAP internees were victims to CDR prejudices and abuses of power. Equally important, however, was Cuba’s dire need for greater productivity in order to adjust to the US’ embargo and rising military and social expenditures. UMAP thereby yielded the cheap regimented labor of as many as 35,000 men precisely where ranch lands were being converted into sugar cane fields. Indeed, military conscripts and UMAP internees received seven pesos a month for their services—one-tenth the state’s monthly minimum wage for agricultural labor at the time.³⁰

Victims to the UMAPs included Catholic priests, farmers who rebelled against state appropriations of their lands, religious minorities associated with criminality (i.e. Abakuá) or “yankee” intrigues (i.e. Pentecostals, Gideons, and Jehovah Witnesses), nonconformist university students, government officials accused of corruption, persons who were illegally self-employed, drug addicts, prostitutes, “hippies,” and “homosexuals.” Of all these, the two most frequently interned were the religious minorities and gay men.³¹ In this regard, one cannot explain UMAP solely in terms of national security and economy, for Jehovah Witnesses and gay men were not only disproportionately overrepresented in the camps but also treated the worst. According to Hector Santiago, interned in a gay camp, “With us, they were terrible, but let me tell you the truth, they treat you like a lady compared to the Jehovah Witnesses. Oh my god, they really, really were terrible with them, terrible. The things that they did to them... horrible, horrible.”³² It is said that Jehovah Witnesses were subject to all manner of cruel treatment: beaten; deprived of food, water, family visits, and leaves; forced to stand at attention in the hot sun until they fainted; tied up naked outside and left for the mosquitoes and sun; or forced to stand in latrines filled with excrement. Closer scrutiny recommends that Jehovah Witnesses were not treated so inhumanely because of their religiosity per se. For instance, other religious minorities were not systematically tormented inasmuch as exploited for their labor. The truly revealing matter is that Jehovah Witnesses *doctrinally* refuse to work in military industries or serve in the armed forces. So, too, do they refuse to salute or pledge allegiances to flags or sing national anthems.³³ At a time (i.e. 1960s) when revolutionary identity and ethos were so spectacularly tethered to the figure of the patriotic guerrillero such refusals were tantamount to sacrilege. For they in effect communicated that Cuba’s “New Man” was violating sacred prohibitions against murder and idolatry and that, by extension, there was a calling and entity more sacred than Revolution or the Patria. That Jehovah Witnesses refused, moreover, to wear the UMAP camp uniforms of olive green pants, blue denim shirt, and military boots only made matters worse for them—at least in terms of the flesh.

But revolutionary identity and ethos in the 1960s were understood to entail more than militarized patriotism. Just as with the *mambises* of the 1890s, revolutionary identity and ethos of the 1960s was a deeply moral affair with, as Antoni Kapcia has put it, a “*martiano* pedigree.”³⁴ In his oratory and essays, José Martí routinely invoked the “decorum” of the *mambises* as exemplary of the “moral republicanism” the liberation army fought to install. *Mambises* were those who not only sacrificed

³⁰ Works consulted on UMAP: Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Gray Fox Press, 1981); Enrique Ros, *La UMAP: El Gulag Castrista* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004); Joseph Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba” *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 14.2 (December 2013). Accessed June 2015: <https://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html>.

³¹ Tahbaz, “Demystifying las UMAP.”

³² Ibid.

³³ These practices of course make them targets in every nation in which they reside, especially in times of war. In both WWI and WWII Jehovah Witnesses were interned in labor camps in US, UK, and Canada.

³⁴ Antoni Kapcia, *Cuba in Revolution: A History since the Fifties* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008).

their lives and worldly possessions for a collective good but also those who embodied the virtues that everyday citizens would come to embody in Cuba Libre. It is indeed little coincidence that Commanders Gómez and Maceo did not tolerate gambling, cock fighting, alcohol use, or prostitution within their ranks or army affiliates. Cuba Libre was to be free, in this regard, not only of imperialism but also of “vices,” including racism. A racially harmonious and morally pure Republic in Arms was supposed to be, after all, the embryonic form of the sovereign Patria “with all and for the good of all” to come. Drawing on and citing such morally inflected precedents, the revolutionary regime of the 1960s sought out to eradicate the vices of a brothel- and casino-ridden Havana through “offensives” such as Operation P (1961). A secret police identifying itself as the “Scum Squadron” raided Havana streets and establishments for “pederasts, prostitutes, and pimps” in order to push out the mafioso sex and drug lords of Batista-era Cuba. Nearly all of the economically marginalized (and socially stigmatized) women they thereby rounded-up were then trained and reemployed as seamstresses and other occupations in the formal economy.³⁵

Operation P was, however, only one such offensive in a larger moralistic campaign to “sanitize” Cuba and its people of their neocolonial-era and capitalist vices. For it was one matter to structurally adjust an economy with hopes to undermine dependency and boost technological development, and another matter altogether to alter the consciousness of the “masses.” Che Guevara was the most conspicuous revolutionary leader devoted to this latter project under the premise that moral (in lieu of material) incentives would pave the way towards non-alienated labor and non-commodified human relations. Rather than overtime pay, bonuses, or raises, for instance, excellent workers would be offered symbolic tributes like national awards, certificates, and honorariums that paid off in other respects such as a gratifying sense of duty and social mission or peer admiration—not least when one undertook voluntary labor.³⁶ And while men *and* women were called on to partake in voluntary labor and institute a “new scale of values,” it was clear that for the revolutionary vanguard moral virility was as if a derivative of masculine virility. Fidel and Che, in this regard, were only the most conspicuous models of this revolutionary *hombria* (manliness). With their signature bravado and gallantry, they conveyed a sense that to be physically weak was tantamount to being morally weak. It was easy as such to draw out the corollary that the effeminate man was surely less, if not counter, revolutionary.

Indeed, within this regime of gender normativity, the least tolerable of all were the so-called *maricónes* (faggots) and *locas* (queens). Cuban writer and painter Samuel Feijóo, in an *El Mundo* editorial of 1965 titled “Revolution and Vices,” declared:

No homosexual represents the Revolution, that is a matter for men [*varones*], of fists and not of feathers, of fury and not of trembling, of sincerity and not of intrigues, of creative valor and not of candy-coated surprises [*sorpresas merengosas*]. ... We are not talking about persecuting homosexuals but of destroying their positions in society, their methods, their influence. Revolutionary social hygiene is what this is called.³⁷

Persecute they did. Gay men in particular were systematically purged from the universities and press; officially prohibited from joining the military, the CCP, or representing Cuba abroad; and forcibly rounded-up and sent off to the UMAP camps under the pretext of “antisocial” behavior. In the camps, they were subjected not only to exploitive labor but also to “rehabilitative” experiments

³⁵ Lumsden, “Institutionalized Homophobia,” *Machos*; Lillian Guerra, “Gender Policing, Homosexuality, and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution, 1965-1970,” *Social History* 35.5 (2010): 268-289.

³⁶ see: Ernesto Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man” in *Che Guevara Reader: Writings on Politics and Revolution* (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2003).

³⁷ Quoted in Lillian Guerra, “Gender policing,” 280.

that included electroshock therapy. And while there were public trials and assemblies for “outing” politically unreliable peers, gay men were thought to be easily identifiable for their tight pants, sandals, and flamboyance. These were no idle metonyms. The true revolutionary, identifiable by his olive green fatigues, military boots, and disciplined body, was he who stood for moral integrity and productive labor as against the (presupposed) sexual promiscuity, if not vulgarity, and the intellectual “vagrancy” or artistic “escapism” of queer (or, queered) Cubans.³⁸ The iconography and performativity of the militant revolutionary (*mambí* as much as *barbudo*) paradoxically bespoke a sexual austerity, if not asexuality, and virile, youthful men’s camaraderie in phallic arms. Whatever its ambivalence, however, it was clear that if a man received—rather than made use of—the phallus (be it a penis or machete or rifle) his moral as much as sexual integrity were suspect and grounds for internment or other “hygienic” measures.

The UMAP camps lasted from November 1965 to July 1968. They were condemned internationally and domestically, with Cuba’s union of writers and artists (UNEAC) and its Council of Churches among their most vociferous critics. It is said that some commanders were subject to court martial and convicted for their brutality.³⁹ But this did not spell the end for gay persecution in Cuba. In 1971 the Congress on Education and Culture concluded that homosexuality was “sociopathological” and that, accordingly, gays and lesbians should be denied employment in any institution in which the corruptibility of Cuban youth was at stake. It is generally agreed that such openly hostile purges and provocations ended in 1975, with the next five years seeing many of those purged financially, if meagerly, compensated and many others finding a more hospitable milieu in the arts.⁴⁰ This is only to say that there was greater tolerance, not that there was an apology for the camps and purges or recognition for lesbian and gay contributions to Cuban culture and the Revolution.

Indeed, such changes did not suffice for critics abroad who pled their case against the Revolution’s institutionalized homophobia. There was no greater catalyst in this regard than Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal’s *Improper Conduct/Mauvaise conduite* (1984). Largely a series of testimonials by Cuban exiles and former UMAP internees, *Improper Conduct* recounts the maltreatment and humiliations that gay men (little is said by or about lesbians) and political dissidents, especially writers and intellectuals, suffered under Castro’s regime. The story of gay persecution is, however, but a subplot in a larger narrative of a Revolution betrayed, or worse. The documentary, in fact, not too subtly equates “Castro’s Cuba” with “Hitler’s Germany.” No other analogy is more routinely invoked throughout the film, and its power resides, quite obviously, in the fact that the UMAP labor camps were a species of “concentration camps.” One interviewee smugly comments that whereas at the entry to Auschwitz hung a sign that read, “Work will make you free,” to the entry of one of the UMAP camps was a sign that read, “Work will make you a man”—a quote attributed to Lenin. Another insists that just as Nazis denounced Jews and sent them to Auschwitz in order to seize their “huge mansions,” covetous Cubans denounced their neighbors and sent them to UMAP because they wanted to reside in their nicer homes. And, as if to rest their case, another interviewee cites Jean-Paul Sartre’s alleged comment that “In Cuba there are no Jews, but there are homosexuals.”

Clearly, the filmmakers and spokesmen for the “anti-Castro movement” hoped to capitalize on the moral revolt that tags like “Hitler’s Germany” and “Auschwitz” could arouse in the North

³⁸ According to Lillian Guerra, there was also at least one camp for lesbians and recidivist prostitutes, which she argues attests to their logic as policing of gender normativity, that is, because they interned women who either rejected men as locus of desire or, as in case of prostitutes, dependency on the patriarchal State. Guerra, “Gender Policing.”

³⁹ Lumsden, *Machos*, 65-71.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Atlantic's collective consciousness, not least when uttered by camp victims and literary luminaries within the Cuban exile community.⁴¹ So, too, did they hope to capitalize on the sensationalized events of the 1980 Mariel exodus, when as many as 125,000 Cubans pounced on Fidel Castro's offer for them to flee by boatlift to Florida. *Improper Conduct* portrays the event in the manner of the nightly news: newsreel footage of *marielitos*, as they came to be known, harassed and stigmatized as "scum" (*escoria*) in Cuba now welcomed with open humanitarian arms in the United States. This touches upon the film's strategy to decontextualize events. One need only ask, rhetorically, how many Mexicans or Haitians at the time would have turned down the offer for safe, free passage to the United States, where they could count on timely naturalization and federal aid for housing and employment.⁴² Probably more to the point, however, is the fact that even on the issue of gay persecution, which is richly testified to, there is no history or context—let alone self-reflexivity. It is not as if homophobia spontaneously emerged in Cuba in the year 1959. Nor is it irrelevant that in the early 1960s the CIA recruited (and blackmailed) gay men in Cuba for the purposes of espionage, assassinations, or simply to lure them to defect. Gay men of literary stature or highly placed within the Party were either threatened to be brought "out of the closet" or were offered contracts and fellowships with US publishers and universities.⁴³ This was, after all, a bread-and-butter Cold War tactic that both the United States and Soviet Union employed.⁴⁴ And its efficacy was predicated on a homophobia and heteronormativity that was existent on both sides of the "iron curtain"—to say nothing of the playfully named "*croqueta* curtain."⁴⁵ The film counts, thereby, on a North American and European viewer who shall only too gladly accept the premise that he or she lives in the "Free World" (free, in particular, of homophobia!) and that socialism and communism are tantamount to "fascism" and "totalitarianism."

There is no reason to doubt that conditions in the camps were harsh or torturous.⁴⁶ And, surely, no extent of "contextualization" could ever justify the camps, purges, raids, and harassment. *Improper Conduct*, in this respect, has the merit of pressing its case not only for gay human rights but also against militarized culture. As we have already hinted, such relations are not idle. Not surprisingly, the film fails to contextualize Cuba's militarized culture. Susan Sontag, an interviewee in the film, comments on the militarization of socialist and communist nations, but says nothing (unless edited out) about her own government's unparalleled military spending, counterintelligence, proxy wars, and propaganda against those very nations, not least Cuba. It is noteworthy, nevertheless, that as against the martial *hombria* (manliness) of the revolutionary, *Improper Conduct* situates homosexuality not as psychological disorder or moral vulgarity, but as conscious dissidence. This is not to say, as the film incorrectly insinuates, that all lesbians and gays who had the opportunity fled Cuba or are estranged from the Revolution. Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich's field research of the early 1980s clarified that many Cuban lesbians stayed in Cuba because their

⁴¹ Other analogies invoked were the Spanish Inquisition, Pinochet's Chile, and Stalin; high-profile, and extended, interviews featured: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Heriberto Padilla, Reinaldo Arenas, Carlos Franqui, and Armando Villadares.

⁴² Dan Georgakas, "Improper Conduct" *Cineaste* 14.1 (1985): 45-48.

⁴³ Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experience, Part I," *Signs* 9.4 (Summer 1984): 683-699.

⁴⁴ See: David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). Consider, for instance, that the American psychological *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* classified "homosexuality" as a mental disorder from 1952 to 1974 and that the Stonewall riots were in 1969 (after the closing of UMAP) and in reaction precisely to government-mandated police raids.

⁴⁵ Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests*, 157.

⁴⁶ According to two former Cuban intelligence officers, of the 35,000 internees an estimate of 500 ended up in psychiatric wards, 70 died from torture, and 180 committed suicide. Tahbaz, "Demystifying UMAP."

position as women had improved substantially. This was all the more forcefully the case for lesbians of color or those of working class backgrounds.⁴⁷ But it still begs the question about a national and revolutionary identity that calls for the emulation of, or deference to, virile men at arms who could stand as much for anti-imperialist solidarity with the poor and oppressed of the world as for homophobia.

In 1993-94, many of these issues were taken on in (officially sanctioned) ways as never before with the release of *Fresa y chocolate*. The film was nothing shy of an international sensation, winning the prestigious Silver Bear prize in Berlin and having the honor of being the first Cuban film nominated for an Oscar. And though it was the most sought after screening at film festivals in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Italy and Spain, what was truly remarkable was that it caused a welcomed stir in Cuba itself, winning the Critics' and the People's Choice Awards at the Havana Film Festival and playing to packed Havana cinemas for the unusually long tenure of eight months.⁴⁸ No small measure of the film's hype was due to the fact that it discussed culturally tabooed and politically repressed issues and that it featured a gay co-protagonist who is erudite, warm, and principled.

Nominally set in 1979, though with an uncanny feel of the contemporary, the film is about the unlikely yet heartfelt friendship that buds between David and Diego. David and Diego are stark, if clichéd, contrasts: David the atheist, heterosexual university student and member of the Union of Communist Youth, and Diego the gay photographer and eclectic intellectual who prays to the Virgen de Caridad. Diego spots the younger David at the Coppelia, Havana's famed ice cream parlor and cruising spot, and lures him back to his apartment. The reluctant David, a would-be writer, is drawn to Diego's knowledge and possession of literary and artistic works rarely found in Cuba. Within due course, Diego becomes David's mentor, not only in matters of art but also in sex and politics. For David is a virgin in every sense—culturally, sexually, and politically—and it is Diego who initiates his metamorphosis into a revolutionary with a liberal and artistic sensibility.

It is not *with* Diego, however, that David sexually “consummates” his maturity, but with Nancy, Diego's neighbor and close friend.⁴⁹ Nancy, too, is older and, like Diego, symbolizes a Cuban outcast—or rather, nonconformist. A former prostitute who prays to the Virgen and trades illegally in dollars, Nancy is a kindred rebellious spirit to Diego, and it is to the film's credit that David is drawn to them instead of Vivian and Miguel. Vivian, David's ex-girlfriend, and Miguel, his roommate and fellow militant, are portrayed as cold, dull, and doctrinaire Cubans who wish only to fulfill their socially prescribed roles—Vivian as married with children, Miguel as Party bureaucrat. Against this, David (and the viewer) encounters Nancy and Diego, who, despite their socially stigmatized lives, are loving and gregarious.⁵⁰ And while it may be the case that Diego's character is stereotypically “gay”—that is, flamboyant and has a passion for (bourgeois) culture and the arts—it is by virtue of Diego that David matures culturally and politically. Diego's apartment (not Nancy or any other person or space) is, after all, the place of erotic and dialogical fecundity in the film. An ensemble of art gallery, library, and shrine, Diego's apartment symbolizes the forbidden and the repressed, and its on-screen portrayal is akin, as Emilio Bejel has argued, to a “coming out” of sorts.⁵¹ It is where, for instance, José Martí and Lezama Lima can be equally revered and where

⁴⁷ Arguelles and Rich, “Homosexuality,” *Signs*.

⁴⁸ Emilio Bejel, “Attempting a Difficult Rectification,” *Gay Cuban Nation* (University of Chicago Press, 2001); Michael Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 463-474.

⁴⁹ John Hess has argued that Nancy functions to reign in the homoerotic and emotional “chaos” the film has unleashed and that David, occupying the passivity of a *maricón vis-à-vis* his relationships to Miguel and Diego, “redeems” himself through Nancy. John Hess, “Melodrama, Sex, and the Cuban Revolution,” *Jump Cut* 41 (May 1997): 119-125.

⁵⁰ There is something to be said for Germán, Diego's *loca* friend; Hess has argued that the more flamboyantly *loca* Germán serves to “normalize” Diego for the film's predominantly heterosexual audience and cultural context. *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 156.

David and Diego can openly debate the “errors” of the Revolution while they nurse their glass of contraband whiskey, the “enemy’s drink.”

This is not to say that David and Diego’s interactions are frictionless. David’s liberality does not come easily. It takes time for David to work through his ambivalence towards Diego and whether he should, as Miguel recommends, spy on and denounce him or, as his heart and intellect evidently tell him, trust and befriend him. Diego, too, must work through an ambivalence all his own, namely whether to seduce David or be his mentor and, ultimately, friend. As this arch from *eros* to *philia* unfolds, there are fiery disagreements. One such disagreement was, notably, over the topic of the UMAP camps:

David: “What I’m trying to say is that it’s lamentable but understandable if mistakes are made like sending Pablo Milanés to the UMAP.”

Diego: Not only him! What of all the *locas* who don’t sing.”

David: The mistakes are not the Revolution. They’re part of the Revolution, but not the whole of it, understand?

Diego: And the bill? Who should that go to? Who’s going to answer for them?

That a taboo subject like the UMAP camps would be aired out in such a highly visible forum—a ICAIC film directed, no less, by Cuba’s premiere filmmaker, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea—was remarkable enough, but the fact that, as Michael Chanan has pointed out, Diego gets the last word makes it all the more poignant.⁵² In many respects it is as prophetic statement because for Diego there is no happy ending. Diego’s protest letter to the Ministry of Culture, which has censored his *loca* friend Germán’s art exhibit, gets him fired, leaving him no other viable option but exile. This leaves, as Emilio Bejel has noted, Diego “in disgrace and solitude,” whereas David and Nancy enjoy their heterosexual happy ending in their homeland.⁵³ And although Diego does not leave with the Mariel boatlift, as so many other gay Cubans did, the fact that the film is set in 1979, a year prior to the 1980 exodus, situates Diego’s exile in dialogue with the historic *marielitos*. Alea, to wit, confessed that his film was a cinematic reply to the far less nuanced *Improper Conduct*.⁵⁴

An argument could be made, thus, that *Fresa y chocolate* was no less a reply to—that is, critique of—what we have named the *mambí* sublime. One need only take into account the fact that the film’s most rebellious spirit is, unquestionably, Diego. And Diego, rather than occupy the position of the patriotic soldier (or patriarch) who enacts redemptive violence, articulates a *critique* of violence and a bid for amity, however unlikely. Granted, it is not Diego, the queer libertarian, with whom the Cuban viewer is meant to identify. That honors goes to David, the heterosexual communist. But David has no real allure until *after* Diego has re-crafted him into a revolutionary with sensitivity for beauty and difference. Indeed, it is hard to resist not calling their unlikely friendship a *contrapunteo*, especially given the antagonisms they are meant to signify. And this came at a most auspicious time,

⁵² Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 463.

⁵³ Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 161.

⁵⁴ Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 474. Alea described *Improper Conduct* as “very crude and schematic simplification of reality, very manipulative, like a piece of socialist realism in reverse.” In turn, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the acclaimed Cuban exile writer, also featured in *Improper Conduct*, was signatory to a letter of protest to Jack Valenti, President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, to block *Fresa y chocolate*’s Oscar nomination. And *Fresa y chocolate* did not get the last word in, for if it was a cinematic reply to *Improper Conduct*, then Julian Schnabel’s *Before Night Falls* (2000), about the highly publicized life and death of gay Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas, was another iteration in the ongoing polemic.

namely, a time when Cubans at large were living closer to the realities of the famished *reconcentrado* than the heroic *mambí*. For the fact that the film stirred—or opened a space for—such enthusiastic public dialogues on national identity, revolutionary history, sexual politics, religious rights, and censorship is probably the greatest evidence that the *mambí* sublime had become a taxed, if not defunct, paradigm for revolutionary identity and post-socialist realities.

CHAPTER 5. HISTORY OF AN ALIBI

...even the dead *will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.*
And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.
—Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

5.1. *Death & Disavowal*

I would like to recall Benedict Anderson’s insight that nations’ trace their genealogies in terms not so much of births inasmuch as deaths: “exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts.”¹ Over the course of thirty years (1868-98), the idea of “Cuba” as a venerable *patria* emerged not coincidental to, but precisely by virtue of, wars and violent deaths. Indeed, no other country in the Americas had suffered through independence wars so deadly and so disastrous. As many as 600,000 Cubans perished, cumulatively, in the wars, with as many as 400,000 dying in the last three years. This meant a near 20 percent demographic loss in a mere three years. Even the notorious American Civil War, the deadliest in American history, only amounted to a 2.5 percent overall loss. Had it been as deadly as Cuba’s “War of Independence” (1895-98), it would have amounted to 6 million fatalities—rather than a “mere” 650,000.

And this is to speak only of the dead. At least as many Cubans were left infirmed, maimed, homeless, jobless, penniless, exiled, or irremediably distraught and aggrieved by a war so ferocious and a denouement so tragic: commerce had been brought to a halt; the once lucrative sugar estates were now rubble and ash, as were many villages and towns; agricultural fields and orchards were barren; many freshwater sources spoiled; livestock had been systematically slaughtered—no ox to plow fields, no chickens to lay eggs, no pigs for meat; families had been irrevocably torn apart—no other country in the Americas had a higher percentage of orphans and widows; and, of all things, Cuba was not left in the hands of Cubans, but those of Americans.² All told: catastrophe.

One cannot, however, so readily conclude that all was for naught. Post-bellum Cubans looked back on their wars through a “veil of melancholy” not only because they had lost corporeal loved ones but also because they had lost a phantasmagoric beloved, namely Cuba Libre.³ For in the midst of these wars emerged a myth of Cubans dying unconditionally for a republic “with all and for the good of all.” The myth was not, after all, without its material correlates—let alone its affective

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. (New York: Verso, 1991), 206.

² According to the census of 1899, only eight percent of Cuba’s population was under five years of age, the lowest such percentage for all other countries in the world for which such data existed. Postwar Cuba also had the highest proportions of orphans and widowed women in the Western Hemisphere. Louis Pérez, Jr., *The Structure of Cuban History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 28.

³ The characteristic melancholy of the pseudo-republican/neocolonial era is discussed in Ambrosio Fornet, *Narrar la nación: Ensayos en blanco y negro* (Habana: Letras Cubanas, 2009) and Rafale Rojas, *Isla sin fin: Contribución a la crítica del nacionalismo cubano* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998).

allure. However fitfully and episodically, the separatist movement of the 1860s to 90s went further than any other to address, or at least disrupt, long-standing injustices and prejudices. Cubans of color, mostly enslaved at the onset of the liberation wars, came to hold some of the highest offices in the Republic in Arms' press, municipal assemblies, and, not least, military, as the very idea of "Cuba" and national identity became inextricably bound to the notion of racial equality.⁴ Women, too, transgressed and rearticulated gender norms as they took on new identities as organizers, propagandists, spies, and political prisoners with a share, not only stake, in a Republic where their "wings" were to be "unpinned," as Ana Bentacourt advocated at Cuba's First Congressional Assembly (1869).⁵ Even relatively impoverished and disempowered peasants and workers brought much prestige to their family's name or to their occupation (i.e. tobacco workers) by struggling for a Republic in which, it was assumed as much as alleged, "dignity" and "peaceful labor" would reign.⁶

Whatever anticipatory bliss was on the Cuban horizon of the 1860s or, especially, the 1890s, the historical present called for sacrifices. Not just worldly possessions, careers, or leisure: women, as wives and mothers, were to sacrifice their husbands and sons, and men, as soldiers, their lives. "To die for the Patria is to live," resounded the national anthem (*la Bayamesa*); "to die is to live, is to sow (*sembrar*)," echoed José Martí, "In Cuba, after all, who lives more than Céspedes? than Agramonte?"⁷ Céspedes and Agramonte were *the* martyrs of the Ten Years' War, the war in which an adolescent Martí wrote his *Abdala*. They each died "happy," as *Abdala* fictionally does: "I die happy: death/Little does it matter, for I was able to save her [the patria].../Oh, how sweet it is to die when one dies/Struggling audaciously to defend the patria!"⁸ Years later Martí, too, died his happy death at Dos Ríos, as did Antonio Maceo near Punta Brava. All of these martyrs died on Cuban soil, at arms, and for the Patria. They "bore witness," accordingly, not only to the Patria as "altar," but also to death and violence as "redemptive," not merely necessary. For while Martí, amongst others, would deem war "calamitously necessary," so, too, would he repeatedly invoke the "sublimity" and "heroism" of dying at arms for the Patria, a sentiment that neither began nor ended with him.

Indeed, as historian Louis Pérez Jr. has said, "to commemorate past sacrifice was to consecrate future sacrifice."⁹ Cuban Chargé d'Affaires to the United States, and author of the Republic in Arms' official history, Gonzalo de Quezada, insisted that "to teach young Cuban men how to die, [they must] remember all the martyrs" and "vow never to dishonor the history written in sublime blood."¹⁰ Quezada took this responsibility to "teach" the nation's youth quite seriously. As early as 1900 he began to publish a multivolume series of José Martí's works and went farther than many others to consolidate Martí's identity not as "the Delegate" (to the Cuban Revolutionary Party) but as the nation's "Apostle," as he has been lovingly known since. Vidal Morales y Morales' *Iniciadores y primeros mártires de la revolución* (1901) and Nestor Carbonell Rivero's *Próceres* (1919) set the nationalist templates for a historiography of epic tales of the martyrs and "warriors of independence" whose

⁴ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

⁵ Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

⁶ José Martí, "Manifiesto de Montecristi" in *José Martí: Selected Writings* ed. Roberto González Echevarría (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 337-345.

⁷ Cintio Vitier, *Ese sol del mundo moral* (Habana: Ediciones Union, 2002), 92.

⁸ ¡Nubia venció! Muero feliz: la muerte/poco me importa, pues logré salvarla.../¡Oh, que dulce es morir cuando se muere/Luchando audaz por defender la patria! José Martí, *Abdala*. (Barcelona: Red Ediciones, S.L., 2012), 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁰ Pérez, *Structure of Cuban History*, 106.

“memory shall forever be blessed.”¹¹ These “blessed” memories and the utopia of a Cuba “with all and for the good of all” were, however, set against the reality of a “pseudo-republic” in which corruption, US dependency, and poverty reigned with near impunity. It is hardly a wonder, thus, that precisely these discrepancies fueled the revolutionary discontent of the 1930s and 50s. None other than twenty-seven year old lawyer and rebel leader, Fidel Castro, would assert at his 1953 tribunal that Martí was the “intellectual author” of the assault on the Moncada barracks and that “the Titan [Maceo] taught us that liberty is not begged for, but conquered by the blade of the machete.” As for those who fell at Moncada, Castro continued, “they are neither forgotten nor dead. Today they live more than ever [...] from their heroic corpses surges the victorious specter of their ideas!”¹²

This study has, however, tried to conjure up the “specter” of the dead who died tragically or worse—the dead, that is, who cannot so readily be accounted for by a history of “sublime blood” and “victorious” ideas. And they are far greater in number than the exemplary dead. For every *mambí* soldier who fell in combat as many as 20 unarmed, noncombatant Cubans died in reconcentration “camps.” Indeed, our gaze has looked most closely at the discrepancy in quality as much as quantity: combatant v. noncombatant; armed v. unarmed; uniformed v. naked; adults v. children; men v. women; martyrdom v. anonymity; revolution v. atrocity; virility v. vulnerability; tribute v. oblivion. These “discrepancies”—or rather, counterpoints—are aggravated by the fact that so many *reconcentrados* were auxiliaries and accessories to the “Liberation” army. They were interned and let to die, after all, precisely because they—above all: Cuban peasant women—were so strategically valuable to the rebel army. Whether and to what extent Cuba’s peasantry was driven, as such, by the force of circumstance or by faith in Cuba Libre is impossible to know with any precision or confidence. But, notably, it proved—and has proven—relatively beside the point: the *reconcentrados* fell decidedly outside the logic and luminosity of what I have called the *mambí* sublime. They bore no machete or torch, rode no “noble steeds,” donned no *yarey* hats, waved no lone star flags, cried no *grito*, shed no sanctifying blood. To their credit, rather, were emaciated, diseased bodies and unceremonious mass graves.

This is not to say that the *reconcentrado* has proved worthless or “unrepresentable” within nationalist oratory, historiography, and the arts. As this study has demonstrated, the *reconcentrado* has long functioned discursively as an index of imperialist cruelty and, accordingly, of the ethicality of the *mambí*’s violence. Arguably no other figure has served as well as the *reconcentrado* to *substantiate* that virtue of “decorum” (*decoro*) which Martí so incessantly and reverentially invoked. The *mambises* were they whose violence was “civil,” “revolutionary,” and “necessary” as against an enemy violence “barbaric,” “imperialist,” and “tyrannical.” It has been by recourse to the travails and “horrid spectacle” of the *reconcentrado*—as the proverbial “innocent women, children, and elderly” of Cuba—that such dichotomies have found their force.

The *reconcentrada* in particular, as a youthful and lovely Cuban *señorita* or *campesina*, has enjoyed a special place within Cuba’s literary and cinematic iconography as that allegorical Cuba under the threat of rape and, thereby, in need of her savoir, namely the *mambí*, the patriotic man at arms. Her, let alone her children’s, agony and grief are rarely, if ever, portrayed as the protracted, anonymous death of Cubans en masse. Rather, since her and her children’s deaths could only perversely be narrated as “sublime” or “sacrificial,” she has usually been dealt with in terms of desire and mimicry. She is, in other words, the voluptuous and lusted after Cuban damsel or the patriotic *mambisa*. She is

¹¹ Rafael Tarragó, “Rights are Taken, not Pleaded’: José Martí and the Cult of the Recourse to Violence in Cuba,” in *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*, Ed. Mauricio Augusto Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz (Lexington Books, 2006).

¹² Fidel Castro Ruz, *La historia me absolverá* (Política: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 2007), 66.

Elmira, Abdala's loyal sister, who rebukes her mother's "unpatriotic" grief and envies phallic power: "With what joy I would exchange this humiliating dress/For the lustrous armor of the warriors/For a noble steed, for a spear!"¹³ She is Lucía of 1895, who takes up a dagger and publicly "executes" Rafael, the Spanish spy, to avenge her *mambí* brother's death and Fernandina's lost innocence. She is María Silvia, who weds Elpidio Valdés and gives birth to Elpidio Jr. She is Mariana Grajales, whose sobriquet as "Mother of the Nation" holds true not because she was a healer but because she gladly offered up her husband and 11 sons—only two of which survived the liberation wars! Or, most tellingly of all, she is the anonymous *reconcentrada* who, as in Manuel Octavio Gómez' *La primera carga al machete* (1969), "speaks" only insofar as she reiterates the *mambí* sublime: "¡Viva Cuba Libre!"¹⁴

But surely the *reconcentrado* could speak otherwise. Only uneasily (and desperately) could one speak, as Fidel Castro, Raúl Izquierda Canosa, and others did in the 1990s, of the *reconcentrado* as a historical precedent of patriotic "resistance" and "stoicism."¹⁵ It is noteworthy, after all, that the CCP did not accordingly adorn Cuba with billboards and monuments featuring the sickly, emaciated body of *reconcentrados* along side "*Patria o muerte*" in bold or stylized print. It was not as if the parallels were without merit. The *reconcentrado* and the Cuban of the Special Period were both *victims* to imperialist aggressions and indifference. In this regard, the thin, hungered body of the Cuban bore witness to a bloodless violence from afar, namely a fiercely revitalized US embargo (or blockade), against which one was to suffer "stoically."

But this does not tell the whole story. We know that "reconcentration" was first employed, albeit on a smaller and less lethal scale, in the Ten Years' War and that veterans at the highest command (i.e. Máximo Gómez) rightly anticipated its reuse in the 1890s.¹⁶ *Pacífico* lives were thus wagered as collateral in a war deemed "calamitously necessary," and it was precisely calamity that befell them. That the Liberation Army's incendiary strategy left so many *pacíficos* and agricultural workers jobless and fleeing to cities that could neither adequately feed nor house them only begs the question all the more forcefully: who bears responsibility for the unjust dead?

There is no easy answer, whatever nationalist historiography would have us believe. Each belligerent party to the war has its more or less official disavowal. The Spanish have their apologists for Weyler, who for generations have echoed his specious argument that reconcentration was a "humanitarian" measure or a military "necessity" in the face of the rebels' incendiary and guerrilla tactics.¹⁷ That the war is popularly known to Spaniards as "the disaster of 98" is no less consistent with Weylerite disavowal: rarely, if ever, does the word "disaster" refer to anything other than the humiliating loss of imperial power or a cultural integrity in need of "regeneration."¹⁸ Americans came to memorialize the war as their "war of humanity," as a war in which they "liberated" a besieged Cuba from Spanish "tyranny." As such all culpability for the unjust dead fell on the hands of the Spaniards, with the 260 dead sailors of the *USS Maine* a far worthier "tragedy" than that of the 400,000 *reconcentrado* dead and nearly dead.¹⁹ Cubans of course have vilified Weyler, the "sinister

¹³ Martí, *Abdala*, 22.

¹⁴ Children, too, are either the loyal *mambises* (or *barbudos*) in the making (i.e. Pepito or Elmira of *Elpidio Valdés*) or they are, especially in case of *reconcentrados*, cast in the mold of Holocaust iconography.

¹⁵ Raúl Izquierdo Canosa, *La reconcentración, 1896-1897* (La Habana: Verde Olivo, 1997), 67-75.

¹⁶ See chapter on Máximo Gómez and on Valeriano Weyler in: John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁷ For critical accounts see: Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Weyler en Cuba: un precursor de la barbarie fascista* (La Habana: Paginas, 1947) and Francisco Pérez Guzmán, *Herida profunda* (La Habana: Edicions, UNION, 1998).

¹⁸ One need only ask rhetorically if it would have come to be called a "disaster" had Spain won the war, regardless of its use of reconcentration, to get a sense for the trope and its implications. See Rojas, "La Frontera Moral," *Isla sin fin*, 125-166 for exceptions to this rule.

¹⁹ See: Louis A. Pérez, *The War of 1898: The United States & Cuba in History & Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

dwarf,” and criticized the US naval blockade of 1898, which by all archival accounts made an already precarious situation all the worse. It was *after* the blockade was put in force that *de facto reconcentrados* began dying at their most alarming rates.²⁰ Nor have Cubans failed to craft their own alias-cum-disavowal for the war and its unjust dead: if Spaniards speak of the “disaster of 98” and Americans of their “war of humanity,” Cubans speak of their “Necessary War.”

No easy answers, thus, but we know well enough that Cuban rebels *initiated* (or, “renewed”) the war and never ceded to the Spaniards, even in the face of reconcentration’s catastrophic toll. And while that renewal of war and the refusal to lay down one’s arms have been memorialized as a sublime *grito (de Baire)* and patriotic purity, the *reconcentrados* have never enjoyed such solace, such splendor—indeed, *can* never. Those symbolic gestures that try to confer the dignity of “stoic resistance” onto her agony do little else than reiterate a variant of the romance of the armed guerrilla and his love for Patria. “Stoicism” as such is tantamount to muteness: no voice. That is to say: no dissent. And nothing explains this better than the fact that her scandalous death calls for a *critique*—rather than mute *endorsement*—of the *mambí* sublime.

5.2. Ethicality, Cuban-style

Let us recall that Cuba Libre was, for its advocates, *inconceivable* without recourse to violence. And there is much evidence that recommends they were right. What reforms Madrid had conceded to the colony rarely came if not *consequent to* a violent antecedent (i.e. armed rebellions). Moreover, all other former Spanish colonies in the Americas had secured their sovereignty through or by default of war. It was clear, in other words, that organized violence was the greatest leverage at their disposal, and Cuban rebels were not shy to make use of it. For thirty years they either waged or eagerly organized for war.

In so doing, however, violence was never a mere (let alone, regrettable) expedient: it was “redemption.” “To live in chains is to live/mired in insult and disgrace,” resounded the national anthem (*La Bayamesa*) at the outset of those thirty years. That slavery was *the* metaphor by which Cubans most routinely described their colonial subjugation was hardly a coincidence. At the time of the *grito de Yara* (1868), slavery was legal in Cuba, and no others were as likely (or as expendable) as enslaved Afro-Cubans to heed the call “to arms!” With slavery not officially abolished until 1886, it was still very much a lively metaphor come the *grito de Baire* (1895). In any case, no other “metaphor” could convey humiliation and exploitation quite as forcefully as that of slavery, and, evidently, no other act was accordingly more redemptive than that of taking up arms for one’s liberty. The Ten Years’ War was thus that “emancipatory war” that all but inextricably aligned the liberty of slaves with the liberty of the Patria. The effects of this were no small matter, for in due course to be antiracist was no small measure of what it meant to be a Cuban—indeed, a revolutionary! No other institution embodied this better than the Liberation Army and its formidable multiracial cadre. No other institution, that is, could better testify to a Cuba in which the “affinity of character,” rather than the “affinity of color,” reigned.²¹

²⁰ The testimonials/memoirs of “Lola” Ximeno y Cruz, *Aquellos tiempos*; Francisco Machado, *¡Piedad!*; Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Por la veredas del pasado*; and American Red Cross President Clara Barton’s *The Red Cross in Peace and War* (1899) all speak to this.

²¹ José Martí, “My Race,” in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. Roberto González Echevarría (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002).

Far more than mere “sovereignty” was, after all, at stake in these wars. The “Manifiesto of Montecristi” (1895) spoke of a “*moral* republicanism” that Cubans sought to safeguard and enact. Whatever this may have meant materially, “Cuba Libre” was never only a matter of procedural rights: so, too, was it a matter of “dignity.” In this regard, the rebels’ *means* were to be worthy of the *end* for which they shed their (and others’) blood. This meant not only an army in which, allegedly, the meritorious and virtuous lead, regardless of color or class, but also an army whose conduct was “decorous.” If the war was deemed “calamitously necessary,” thus, it was nevertheless to be a “civilized” and “humanitarian” war. And, evidently, they were true to their word as best as—probably better than—could be hoped for under the circumstances. Maceo and Gómez’s war policy was to give quarter to the wounded, treat prisoners mercifully, and harshly punish any criminal acts, not least those committed by their soldiers against civilians.²² And this they did against imperial odds.

That the *mambí* is, thereby, not only valorous (e.g. war by the machete) and cunning (e.g. war by the torch and mosquito) but also virtuous within Cuban collective memory is no idle matter. The *mambí*, as Cuba Libre’s archetype, codes revolutionary violence as morally driven and ethically bound because of *why* he took up arms and *how* he carried out his war. And this has no less coded the Patria as a socially robust project because of *what* he stood for: antiracism, anti-imperialism, and collective welfare. Cuban poet Cintio Vitier has argued that these values exemplify Cuban “ethicality” (*eticidad*), with the likes of Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Martí, Julio Antonio Mella, and Fidel Castro as their life in the flesh.²³ The “sublime” as such for Cubans, Vitier has argued, has never been a matter of beauty in the natural world or in the arts; rather, the “beautiful” for the Cuban is to sacrifice oneself for Justice, to rebel against the ugliness of the world.²⁴

Insofar as this is what the *mambí* (and *patria*) normatively stood for and symbolically conveys, it is hard to find any faults. And maybe this is why even the bitterest critics of socialist Cuba no less venerate Martí and the *mambí*.²⁵ But there are corollaries to the *mambí* (or *martiano*) sublime that, as this study has clarified, call for critical scrutiny.

One such corollary is the fact that the deaths of *mambises* and Cuba Libre’s martyrs have been dealt with in terms of a sacrificial trope that disavows war’s homicidal reality: one *dies* rather than *kills for* the Patria. This is not without its plausibility. Cuban rebels fought against imperial odds and, thereby, assumed greater risks than did their foes. They could, thus, readily conceive of themselves as “offering up” their lives (i.e. sacrifice) more so than “taking” the lives of others (i.e. homicide). Nevertheless, to rebel meant to kill. The *gritos* of Yara and Baire as much as the Protest of Baraguá are the reverentially memorialized events they are because they signify a *war* “cry,” when Cubans took to arms, tore at flesh, and wagered lives. And it is no idle consequence that both *Patria* and “revolutionary” thereby came to signify armed violence as much as antiracism, anti-imperialism, and collective welfare. For despite the fact that “Generals” July, August, and September (i.e. the rainy season and mosquitoes) were the true killers, Cubans have consistently exalted the *mambí* with machete as their iconic patriot and revolutionary—unlike, for instance, the worker with hammer or peasant with sickle in Soviet arts and iconography.

And it is in this regard, namely, with the *mambí* immortalized as a fierce *machetero*, that we realize his use of violence evidences not only his “ethicality” but also his virility. Rare is the war literature

²² Emilio Roig de Leuchsinring, *Cuba no se debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (La Habana: Sociedad Cubana de Estudios Históricos e Internacionales, 1950); Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism: Volume I, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14-34.

²³ Vitier, *Ese sol del mundo moral*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, especially chapter VI.

²⁵ Louis Pérez, Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 369.

(*literatura de campaña*) that does not refer to the rigors of life in the *manigua* and the nerve it takes to tear at flesh with a machete while under fire as a manly man's labor.²⁶ Indeed, such touted rigors and nerve came to closely align patriotism not only with antiracism and anti-imperialism but also with martial masculinity. None other than José Martí, a man of letters and of the word (lawyer, journalist, orator, poet), was enamored by and fell prey to it. Ten Years' War veteran Enrique Collazo famously called Martí out in a 1892 letter, published in the periodical *La Lucha*: "If the hour of sacrifice should again arrive, we will perhaps not be able to shake hands in the *manigua* of Cuba; surely because you will still be giving lessons on patriotism in exile, shaded by the American flag."²⁷ And while it is popularly believed that Martí's deeds proved Collazo's words little more than slander, it is, paradoxically, the case that he proved Collazo right. Martí would never have earned the honorary title "martyr," much less "Apostle," were it not certified by the "unassailable title" of his death on Cuban soil and in the throes of battle. It is hardly a coincidence as such that Cuban "autonomists"—that is, those who were for juridical and conciliatory paths to (modest) reforms—were portrayed not merely as unpatriotic but also as effeminate. Nor is it any less noteworthy that the *mambí's* alleged heir, namely the *barbudo* with rifle, upheld this masculine mystique. One need only consider the "olive green" gallantry and bravado that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara symbolized and the *machista* and homophobic rhetoric with which their regime decried intellectuals, artists, and the *confinados* of the UMAP labor camps as effete and immoral.²⁸

Of course other modes of "service" to the Patria and its army were given their token due as valuable, but no service was worthier of reverence than that of men's camaraderie and lethality at arms.²⁹ Rare, too, for example, was the war diary or chronicle that did not set the risks and rigors of combat duty against the ease and effeminacy of civilian duty in the Republic at Arms. Yet even these civilians had respectable titles and historic roles as assemblymen, judges, lawyers, editors, and ministers to Cuba Libre, whereas the lesser services fell almost exclusively on the shoulders of (poorer) women. With far less prestige and far less power, women, not least the women of Cuba's peasantry, were the nurses, cooks, farmers, livestock handlers, tailors, seamstresses, laundresses, nursemaids, couriers, and liaisons to Cuba Libre. They and their labor, in other words, were always already *auxiliaries* to the Patria and its Revolution, and it was *violence* that demarcated theirs from his labor and its value. Indeed, to get a sense of just how (de)valued their labor was *vis-à-vis* the labor of violence, one need only consider the fact that even Afro-Cuban men, insofar as they soldiered for Cuba Libre, underwent an extraordinary metamorphosis from slave to *liberto* to *mambí*, whereas her likelier itinerary was to go from *pacífica* to *reconcentrada*. This, too, was no idle matter, for gender (unlike racial) equality was never embraced as a core tenet of Cuban "ethicality" and what it meant to be revolutionary.

With the Revolution of 1959 gender equality and justice were addressed more earnestly than ever. If the 1930s brought about the rights to vote and to divorce as well as legal equality to men, the 1960s and 70s amounted to far more radical reforms: cooperative day cares for working mothers,

²⁶ See: Blancamar León Rosabal, *La voz del mambí: imagen y mito* (Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1997); and Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*.

²⁷ Si de nuevo llegase la hora del sacrificio, tal vez no podríamos estrechar la mano de usted en la manigua de Cuba; seguramente porque entonces continuará usted dando lecciones de patriotismo en la emigración, a la sombra de la bandera americana; consulted August 2015: at http://www.iose-marti.org/jose_marti/historia/conflictomarticolazo/cartacolazo1/collazo3.htm

²⁸ See: Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); and Lillian Guerra, "Gender Policing, Homosexuality, and the New Patriarchy of the Cuban Revolution. 1965-1970," *Social History* 35.5 (2010): 268-289.

²⁹ For instance: Raúl Izquierdo Canosa, *Las prefecturas mambises: 1868-1898* (Habana: Verde Olivo, 1998); Juan Padrón, *El Libro del mambí* (Habana: Editorial Abril, 1989); and Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas*.

maternity leave with pay, free and legal contraception and abortion, readily executed divorces, free health care and education, some of the harshest penalties in the world for sexual harassment and rape, a “family code” that called for shared parental and domestic duties between husband and wife, and a centralized organization (the Federation of Cuban Women) whose duty it was to advocate for women’s rights as well as incorporate women into the revolutionary process.³⁰ As many scholars and critics have noted, such reforms had no idle relation to the need to facilitate women’s entry into the paid workforce, which aggravated their lives insofar as they then assumed the “double shift” of labor outside the home *and* all the unremunerated labor of childcare, cooking, and cleaning at home. It was no mystery, of course, that this was due to a resilient patriarchy and machismo, which was admirably explored and critiqued in films such as Sara Gómez’s *De cierta manera* (1977), Pastor Vega’s *Retrato de Teresa* (1979), and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Hasta cierto punto* (1983). But arguably most noteworthy for us was Humberto Solás’ *Lucía* (1968).

Whereas in the cases of *Lucía 1895* and *Lucía 1933* unseemly violence is identified with the Spanish Empire and the (Machado) dictatorial State, respectively, *Lucía 196...* identifies it with the *machismo* man. From the outset we learn that *Lucía III*, a *mulatta campesina* worker, is struggling for her liberty to participate in the betterment of herself and her Patria. She joins her *compañeras* on the truck, off to a day’s work, to discuss animatedly her new boyfriend, Tomás, who, she says, does not want her to work once they are married. Once married, the viewer comes to see that Tomás does in fact make every effort to reduce *Lucía* to a sexual plaything and his personal servant. In one scene, after attending a birthday party at the local community center, a party in which Tomás picks a fight with a man who dares to dance with his *Lucía*, Tomás nails shut the windows to their small home, rendering it her prison and yelling at her: “I want you to obey me, you hear? That’s what you’re my wife for!”

Tomás’ reign, however, is slowly undone by the Revolution. *Lucía*’s *compañeros* in the community see to it that a *brigadista* is assigned to her. *Brigadistas*, dressed in military (class B) attire and members of Cuba’s “literacy brigades,” were young Cuban volunteers sent out to the island’s countryside in 1961 to help build schools and teach illiterate peasants how to read and write. Always under the jealously watchful eyes of Tomás, the *brigadista*, a handsome young man from Havana, teaches *Lucía* to read and write—and not without a playful intimacy that makes Tomás irate and abusive. In the end *Lucía* leaves, breaking to the news to Tomás, poetically enough, in a note she herself has written: “I’m going. I’m not a slave.” Furious, Tomás chases her down at her work sight, the salt flats, and tries to forcibly reclaim her. *Lucía* runs and, in one of the film’s most memorable scenes, her *compañeras* grab hold of an irate Tomás and collectively restrain him. In the closing scene, *Lucía* finds Tomás on the beach, distraught and pleading for her love, but rather than reconcile they again break out into a fight. A young girl, wearing a white peasant veil that covers her head and shoulders, looks on from afar, laughs, and walks away—the next generation’s *Lucía*, presumably.

There is much to be said about the exuberantly executed (almost comical) drama and aesthetic of this last of the three *Lucía* episodes—from Joseito Fernández’s humorous and moralistic sung commentary to the tune of the classic “Guantanamera” (well suited to the *campesino* milieu) to the intimacy and delirium that the hand-held camera work delivers.³¹ But what stands out, for our purposes, is the fact that *Lucía III* was not scripted into a tale of the Sierra Maestra and the *barbudos*

³⁰ There were, of course, more radical agendas, especially those of socialist feminists of the 1930s—most notably Ofelia Domínguez Navarro and Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta, who also took up labor rights and a critique of US imperialism. K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman’s Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940* (Duke University Press, 1991); and for one of the best sources on women’s movements in the revolutionary era, see: Lois Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (Oxford, 1995).

³¹ Peter Biskind, “*Lucía*—Struggles with History” *Jump Cut* 2 (1974); and John Mraz, “Visual Style and Historical Portrayal in *Lucía*” *Jump Cut* 19 (1978).

taking up arms for the Patria—which would have made, after all, for a perfectly plausible ending to a film that dealt with historical rebellions. Rather, the viewer is interpellated by a history still in the making, and it is hardly insignificant that the Revolution is identified with cooperative labor, education, and women’s rights and empowerment. Even racial equality gets a nod with Lucía III a mulatta (unlike her white cinematic predecessors) and the community’s head foreman, Flavio, black. The Revolution’s constitutive other is, thus, a *machismo* that is portrayed not only as abusive towards women but also as antithetical to labor productivity. Whereas the *brigadista* is a most industrious young man, with close-ups of his sweated brow and voluntary labor in the fields (not only as Lucía’s tutor), Tomás is never seen at work. Quite to the contrary, he is repeatedly shown kicked back joking about and rarely without a cigar in his mouth. And this deserves a pause: Tomás is a tall, boisterous white man with all the cigar-gesticulating bravado of a Fidel or a Che; had he sported a beard the resemblance would have been uncanny—and impermissibly dangerous! And if this were not delightfully scandalous enough, the fact that Lucía’s *compañeras* forcibly, yet forgivingly and without recourse to arms (i.e. phallic symbols), restrain Tomás—instead of slay him—is a far cry from that “sublime” aesthetic of *mambí* warriors and their machetes or *barbudos* and their rifles. A closer read, thus, evidences a film and aesthetic that offers us *compañeras* and cooperative labor rather than *barbudos* and revolutionary violence; a calm and conscientious *brigadista* as against a belligerent and boisterous Tomás; a tragicomedy as against a nationalist epic.³²

We know, however, that such artistic provocations did not rival in number or in intensity the popular portrayals of the Cuban heroine as either patriotic mother or *mambisa*: she who “sacrifices” her sons and bears her grief stoically or she who daringly bears arms and fears neither dying nor dealing out death. The two (and only two) women that Cintio Vitier cites (in passing!) in his study of Cuban “ethicality” from colonial to revolutionary times are no less consistent, namely Mariana Grajales and Haydée Santamaría.³³ Mariana, the “Mother of the Nation,” who sacrificed her eleven sons in the wars for independence; Haydée, who participated in the legendary assault on the Moncada Barracks and who fought in the Sierra Maestra in the tellingly named (all-women’s) “Mariana Grajales Platoon.”³⁴ Indeed, it is as such that Haydée Santamaría is popularly (or officially) renowned, namely as a *guerrilla*, not as a founder of the Casa de las Américas and advocate for queer, black, and feminist dissidents liable to state repression.³⁵ One need only look to the iconic imagery associated with her name: a younger Haydée in battle fatigues and at Fidel’s side in the Sierra Maestra. A Cuban heroine is she, in short, who is loyal to the Patria and its patriarchs—a “loyalty,” to be clear, measured by bloodshed or by silence.

5.3. *Contrapuntal Horizons*

To what or whom were the *reconcentrados* loyal? We have already noted that *pacíficos*, Cuba’s peasantry, were either loyal or *liable* to the *mambí* army, not least in the eastern provinces of Oriente and Camagüey, and that there exists no reliable evidence or method to deduce whether they were adherents to a cause or victims of circumstance. What is painfully clear is that within a year’s time

³² That the overall project (i.e. the three Lucías) evidences a *dialectical progression* with each instance its own aesthetic makes it all the more noteworthy.

³³ Vitier, *Ese sol del mundo moral*. This is to say nothing of the larger issue of women’s near absence in highest ranks of political power as well as in literature and film—with the one exception being poetry. See: Catharine Davies, *A Place in the Sun?: Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Zed Books, 1997).

³⁴ Pérez, “To Die for the Patria,” *To Die in Cuba*.

³⁵ See: Margaret Randall, *Haydée Santamaría, Cuban Revolutionary: She Led by Transgression* (Duke University Press, 2015).

all *pacíficos*, east or west of the Júcaro-Morón *trocha*, were liable to the Spanish army, whose numbers had swelled to over 150,000 *quintos* and 60,000 *voluntarios*, and that Weyler's "reconcentration" orders treated all *pacíficos* as allies, be they coerced or no, to the *mambises*. Here again we cannot reliably know what were their exact loyalties or affinities—or whether they were "political" at all. We do know that the vast majority of *reconcentrados* were drawn from the more densely populated Cuban West, which was itself (in the 1890s) heavily populated by recent Spanish émigrés. Bernabé Boza, aid to Commander Máximo Gómez, commented in his chronicles of the war that entering Matanzas was like "crossing the Pyrenees and entering Spain."³⁶ But this does not necessarily mean that these *pacíficos* were for Cuba Española as against Cuba Libre—let alone the lively questions of Cuba Autónoma or American Cuba.

Nevertheless, we shall not settle for the sterile answers that they, the *reconcentrados*, hailed from any and all such constituencies or that we simply cannot know. It is better to stipulate—that is, to confidently conjecture—that surely not all *reconcentrados* were partisans who willingly chose to endure their agony. For what is truly at stake is not so much whether we can *know* their political sympathies or allegiances inasmuch as whether we can say they had any real *choice* or *say* in the matter. In his study of Cuban "ethnicity," Cintio Vitier argued that a Revolution puts forth a choice, namely, to militate (*militar*) or not—a choice that one cannot indefinitely abdicate. In this regard it is obvious to Vitier (as much as to critics of the *socialist* Revolution) that those who chose to "militate"—and, especially, die—for Cuba Libre in the 1860s and 1890s were those who chose well and they whose violence has been "absolved," at it were, by history. The only way the *reconcentrado* can accommodate this logic is as a *sacrificial lamb*, as they whose dramatic role within the narrative of the nation was to die a horrific (not heroic) death so as to rouse the *mambí* protagonist to arms and prove just how evil are the Patria's foes. As this study has tried to flesh out, the *reconcentrado* thereby amounts to an *alibi* for revolutionary violence *and* for the lack of participatory democracy *vis-à-vis* the project of Cuba Libre. Rather than subject the coercive acts of the rebel army or the racial and gendered paternalism of its émigré government to critical scrutiny, the logic of the *mambí* sublime situates unethical violence and authoritarianism *elsewhere*, namely in the camps or in Madrid (or in Washington D.C.). The *mambí's* only responsibility to her as such is as her—the *reconcentrada's* and Cuba Libre's—machete-endowed *savoir*.

As it turns out, however, not a few *mambises* laid down their arms and left the Liberation Army's ranks for the sake of their *reconcentrado* kin. He helped them escape to the wilderness or smuggled in what meager foods and medicines he could offer or surrendered and pled for mercy towards his wife and children who were otherwise "marked."³⁷ That *mambí* commanders had to grant more and more temporary leave *and* chose to punish deserters harshly are symptoms of its toll on the rebel army.³⁸ Nor, crucially, were the *reconcentrados* as powerless as they have been routinely portrayed. Many mothers and older siblings did not—indeed *could* not—wait around for charitable relief or for a *mambí* *savoir* to feed and care for their endangered loved ones. And while many were forced to beg for alms, many others (also) sold the only thing they had to sell, namely their labor, their bodies. This could range from the more dignified work of a cook, nursemaid, or laundress to the least desirable of all: cane cutter or prostitute.³⁹ Surely this was exploited labor, and surely these were acts of survival. But were they not also "sacrifices" in their own right? They did not entail bloodshed, arms, love of Patria, or the stout, youthful bodies of soldiers inasmuch as sweat, tears, love of family,

³⁶ Quoted in Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 123.

³⁷ This latter scenario was what Weyler had hoped for, with amnesty offered to those who surrendered their arms and an even higher price for those who surrendered a horse.

³⁸ Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 193-224.

³⁹ The best source on this matter, to my knowledge, is: Guzmán, *Herida profunda*.

and the frail, sickly bodies of children and the elderly. They did not symbolize the liberatory power of the people or the sanctity of Patria inasmuch as the precariousness of life and the ethical summons to care for it.

The cruelest of ironies is that she, *not* the *mambí*, was exposed to the greatest risks to life (on the order of twenty times riskier) and that she, *not* the *mambí*, had the most asked of her, namely tending to her children and loved ones as they died merciless deaths, deaths for which patriotic consolations could only ring hollow. And while his virility and rebelliousness have accordingly enjoyed all reverences due, her labors and torment have never truly registered in Cuban arts and culture as anything other than tragedy—which is to say, as an *alibi* for revolutionary violence and “stoic” allegiance to the Patria (i.e. its rulers).

But what if we were to embrace her vulnerability and her labors against an unjust death as conveying an ethical, if not political, claim for non-violence, that is, for an attentiveness to and responsibility for the precariousness of life? And what if we were to read her less valued status as an *auxiliary* or as mute *adherent* as a claim for a democratic voice? And what if we were to read her peasantry labors and her ties to the land as claims for the health and welfare of life and economy writ large? She and hers died and ailed as they did, after all, because there was no one left to labor and care for the land, whose livestock and fruits were themselves ravaged or left fallow by the war and, particularly, “reconcentration.” What would these claims look like in drama, on the screen, or in the streets? And what would they yield when faced off *contrapuntally* with the *mambí* and all that he normatively symbolizes? For the *mambí*, let us not forget, symbolizes—and to an extent historically embodied—racial fraternity and sacrifice for a greater good as much as machismo, patriarchy, and romanticized violence. The *mambí* as such stands to be *measured against* and *inflected by* what the *reconcentrado*, as an ethical figure and historical fact, can signify: non-violence, humility, generosity, democratic voice, an ethics of caring for life at its most precarious (i.e. ill, infirmed, elderly, infant, unemployed, unarmed, in refuge), and the value of agricultural labor and ecological integrity.

In many respects we have enumerated precisely the needs of Cuba, not unlike so many other nations of the global South, in the twenty-first century. As Cuba has fallen prey to the reign of monopoly finance capital and its neoliberal “austerity” paradigm, it has taken on those ills most characteristic of the global South: urban violence, inequality, an economy reliant on tourism and remittances, the hemorrhaging of educated youths and professionals to the global North, food insecurity, and environmental hazards. It is not, of course, as if the CCP has stood idly by. While critics of revolutionary Cuba call for multiparty elections, a free press, and a newly conceived Nation as diasporic and without a (socialist) *telos*, the CCP has resiliently or pragmatically pushed for progressive taxation, socialized medicine, health tourism, cooperative organic farming, and the historically endowed concept of the Nation as a *social* and *internationalist* project.⁴⁰ And it is precisely in this respect that one must speak of a *contrapunteo* of *mambí* and *reconcentrado*. For if, rightly, “we” wish to move beyond an ethos and aesthetic consigned to or overwrought by armed violence and the heroic *grito* (as well as death) of virile and patriotic protagonists, we must nevertheless ponder *how* one would institute—let alone safeguard—the participatory democracy, economic equity and opportunity, and healthy lives and planet that “99%” of us are clamoring for, if not without an ethos enriched by sacrifice, discipline, and rebelliousness. We find ourselves, thus, in search of an aesthetic that engenders a new ethicality out of the fertile ground that precarity *and* militancy have, contrapuntally, to offer.

⁴⁰ On the questions of diaspora and nationalist teleology, see: Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012) and Rafael Rojas, *Isla sin fin*.

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