REMEMBERING ANGOLA – CUBAN INTERNATIONALISM, TRANSNATIONAL SPACES, AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORIES

by

Marisabel Almer

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Ruth Behar, Chair
Associate Professor Kelly M. Askew
Associate Professor Maria E. Cotera
Professor Maxwell K. Owusu

La vida no es la que uno vivió,
sino la que uno recuerda y cómo la recuerda para contarla.

Life is not what one lived,
but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it.

– Gabriel García Márquez

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DEDICATION

For big F who never doubted, M^2 squared who made it all worth it,
and little f who never once left my side.

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PROLOGUE

The room was emptying at an international academic conference in Lisbon. I had just delivered a paper on the memories of Cuban veterans about their time in Angola. One of my fellow panel members who had also stayed behind turned to me and said: "Oh I understand, you don't really care about Angola; you are studying Cuba." With these words he knocked the wind out of me. I told him that that was not true, and rambled on about how I do care about Angola, wished I had been able to do field research there, that for a variety of reasons was not able to, but that I hoped to in the future. He was correct, however, my project is essentially about Cuba and not Angola.

This study is an attempt to better understand Cuban society by looking at one particular event in their history, the Cuban intervention in Angola. Like the Vietnam War for the United States or the Afghanistan War for the former Soviet Union, this event defined a generation, and has had long and lasting, deeply felt consequences in Cuban society. There are conflicting stories regarding almost every aspect of the nearly sixteen-year Cuban presence in Angola, underscoring the complexities and controversies of any war, but especially one during the Cold War in which the governments from around the world were involved.

Although it is easy to get caught up in the political situation of the Cuban Revolution and the reasons why Cuba became involved in Angola, documenting the military history of the endeavor is not the primary objective of this work. Rather, I am

interested in the stories of everyday Cuban soldiers and how their experience in Angola affected and shaped their lives, and how they made sense of the exchange between the two countries.

At times in the process of researching and writing the dissertation, I myself lost sight of the objective, but I was fortunate that my Angolan and Cuban friends reminded me of the importance of telling their story; the importance of not having their voices erased, nor having them simply reduced to a history of battle tactics and Cold War propaganda. They pushed me forward. I hope that my attempt to document their memories has lived up to their expectations.

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GLOSSARY

alarde—boasting, bragging

antes—before

atraso/atrasado/a—backwardness, backwards

Battle of Cuito Cuanavale—largest land battle in Africa since WWII which occurred in a southern province in Angola; decisive battle ending Cuban and South African involvement in Angola

bemba—lips, thick lips

blanco/a—white person

carné—identification card

chavito—one of two currencies in circulation, also known as the peso convertible, its value is pegged with the US dollar, but change houses charge a fee of approximately 20%

chivato/a—state informant

después—after

durante—during

FAPLA—Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola), the Angolan/MPLA army

FLEC—Frente de Libertação por Enclavo Cabinda (Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave); rebel insurgency in the Cabinda region that aims to gain autonomy from Angola

FNLA—Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (National Front for the Liberation of Angola); independence/guerrilla group in Angola led by Holden Roberto

hombría—manliness

ICAIC— Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry)

interés—ulterior motives

interesado/a—materialistic person

jinetera—prostitute

mambí—black Cuban independence fighters during the wars with Spain

moneda nacional—Cuban currency, also known as the Cuban peso; one of two currencies in circulation, typically used to buy basic subsidized goods, exchange rate is approximately MN$ 25 pesos for $US 1

MPLA—Movimento Popular pela Libertação de Angola (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola); independence/guerrilla group in Angola backed by the Cubans and led by Agostinho Neto; political party presently in power in Angola, current president is José Eduardo Dos Santos.

muerto—a spirit

mulato/a—person of black and white ancestry

NAM—Non-Aligned Movement; international organization founded in 1961 with the aim of promoting national sovereignty, avoidance of colonial and neocolonial dependency, and the desire to circumvent having to align politically, economically, or ideologically with one of the two superpowers (the U.S. and the Soviet Union)

negro/a—1) black person; 2) a spirit

OAU—Organization of African Unity; international organization founded to promote cooperation among the independent nations of Africa

OMA—Organización de Mujeres Angolanas (Organization of Angolan Women)

Operación Carlota—Operation Carlota; name given to initial Cuban military mission in Angola

orisha—deity

patria—homeland

paloma/palomero—pigeon/pigeon racing aficionado

Periodo Especial—Special Period; term for the decade or so after the collapse of the Soviet Union that caused economic chaos, severe food shortages, and acute scarcity

peso convertible—one of two currencies in circulation, also known as the chavito, its value is pegged with the US dollar, but change houses charge a fee of approximately 20%

pioneros—pioneers, term for children in revolutionary Cuba

povo—the people/the nation

pueblo—the people/the nation

quimbo—village

radio bemba—word of mouth, word on the street

resolver—resolve things, make money, solve one's immediate economic problem

salvaje—savage

Santería—a syncretic religion of African/Yoruba origin and Roman Catholicism practiced in Cuba and other parts of Latin America, also referred to as Regla de Ocha.

Santero/a—a practitioner of Santería

santo/a—saint or deity

subdesarrollado—underdeveloped

tapa rabo—loin cloth

turista—tourist/foreigner

UNITA—União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola); independence/guerrilla group in Angola led by Jonas Savimbi

yuma—1) foreigner/American; 2) the United States or another foreign country

ABSTRACT

This dissertation places Cuban internationalism, specifically its military mission in Angola, as an entry point to explore Cuban culture, the larger context of transnational memories, historicity, and racial politics. Taking a phenomenological approach, this study uses the memories of those involved in the intervention as a departure point to examine the meanings people ascribe to their sense of national identity and historical placement. This extraordinary exchange between two emerging nation-states created a transnational space where national identity was contested, reevaluated, and transformed. The personal memories of the Cuban veterans are inextricably tied to the social and historical disjunctures in contemporary Cuban society, including colonialism, apartheid, the end of the Cold War, the ongoing economic crisis since the fall of the Soviet Bloc, and other social themes on the island. The significance and ramifications of their experiences abroad is still being debated, and in some cases, erased by opposing global ideologies.

My research documents the individual memories of rank and file soldiers whose experiences have largely been ignored. The memories of these men are nuanced, contradictory, and do not always correspond with the national narrative, particularly concerning race. I argue that their stories about national and racial difference regarding the Angolan "other" are an extension of *cuentos de negros*, a long-held derogatory manner of referencing blackness in general, but applied to an international context. I further demonstrate how their recollections as internationalists are mediated and

challenged by larger ideological forces, a generational divide, and a changing Cuban self-image crisis brought upon by the Special Period. I suggest that the memories of ordinary soldiers and of Angolans who grew up in Cuba are particularly vulnerable to global trends that do not historically legitimize their experiences.

Vital to the methodology used to gather the information for the dissertation is a discussion of the particular Cuban milieu during the time I conducted research, as well as the inclusion of my own struggles with the limits of ethnography, the transformative nature of field work, and with how to best present another person's life on paper.

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: REMEMBERING ANGOLA – NO VINE A MORIR[1]

I first met Enrique over a decade ago when I was twenty-four and on my second trip to Cuba, first time as a researcher. I was studying male sex workers for a master's thesis. Enrique's sister, whom I knew from a previous trip to visit family, was trying to set me up with her brother in the hopes that I would fall in love with him, or at the very least, like him enough to marry him and take him out of the country.

Enrique and his sister shared a home – he occupied the upstairs part and she the downstairs. When I entered their home that warm November day Enrique was in the patio, shirtless and washing up in an outside sink. Tall, dark, and handsome, he walked over and gave me the compulsory kiss on the cheek, not the usual half air, half cheek kiss, but a full thick lipped kiss on the cheek. I was surprised to see that a young man, probably only in his early 40's, had such a pronounced limp, one that he was trying to mask with unhurried steps.

His sister, who immediately remembered she had something very important to do, sped out the door leaving the two of us alone and uncomfortable – it was obvious we had been set up. As we started talking Enrique confessed that his sister had been trying to get him to be more social since he had separated from his wife. His sister had accused him

[1] *No vine a morir* (I didn't come to die). Told to me by an informant. Also the title of a memoir published in Havana by the same name by Surí Quesada, Emilio, La Habana, Cuba: Editora Abril 1990.

of being a *maricon*[2] (homosexual) because he didn't feel like meeting new women. Despite this admission, he seemed pleased enough to meet me, and asked if I had a boyfriend. I answered affirmatively, while remembering the last conversation I had with the man I was seeing in which I specifically told him we should hold off on any long-term commitment until I returned from my research trip.

"You have a boyfriend in Cuba?" he asked.[3]

"No," I said, "he's in Los Angeles."

"Then you don't have a boyfriend," he responded.

I smiled. He had a point. It was all in the details of the question and the answer. I did not have a boyfriend in Cuba.

We kept talking, and somehow I found a way to bring up my recent trip to Brazil. I was very excited about my time there, and I wanted to talk about it to anyone who would listen. To my surprise, he started speaking to me in Portuguese.

"*Você fala português*?" (Do you speak Portuguese?), he asked me.

"*Falo sim*" (Yes I do), I responded, "*e você*?" (and you?), I asked.

"*Sim, falo*" (Yes, I do).

I asked him why he knew Portuguese and he told me he had picked up some words in Angola. It was the first time that Angola as a country entered my consciousness. I might have heard about Angola before, or maybe read the name on a map of the world, but in all honesty I didn't know anything about the place other than it

[2] *Maricón* is a derogatory but commonly used term for a homosexual.
[3] Throughout the dissertation, conversations that are paraphrased based on detailed field notes are included in the main text. Transcriptions of recorded interviews are offset except when otherwise indicated. The discussion with Enrique is taken from my field notes from November – December 1997 for my masters thesis (Almer 1998).

was in Africa. More importantly, until that moment I had no idea that Cuba had even been involved in a war in Angola.

Confused and intrigued, I asked Enrique to explain further about Cuba's venture in Angola and his experiences. Aside from generalities – there was a war there and Cubans went to help – Enrique was reluctant to talk about it. First, in part because he was clearly more interested in the much "lighter" topic of seduction, and secondly because he was obviously bothered by some of his memories. I probably should have known better to be more sensitive despite being a novice researcher, but I pressed anyway.

After insisting for some time, and with reluctance, Enrique looked off into the distance and spoke slowly, carefully choosing his words. He explained that he lost many friends during the war. Once, immediately after crossing a bridge and getting safely to the other side, he looked back and saw the bridge explode. His friend's jeep was blown to bits, and he remembered seeing pieces of his friend flying through the air. As he spoke I tried to picture the scene – Enrique, the bridge, the jeep, and his friend.

I was silent, conflicted that I had insisted, and yet energized with what he was sharing. "Why did you go?" I asked.

"I wanted to," he answered.

Everyone around him was going and he felt he should go too. He volunteered for a mission, but: "I regretted it the minute I got there. When I got off the plane and smelled *ese lugar* (that place) – *olía a muerte* (it smelled of death)."

Enrique did not tell me much more regarding Angola that afternoon. I asked his sister about it later and she told me that he had been injured in Angola, hence the limp.

After that initial meeting with Enrique, I started asking people in Cuba about the intervention in Angola. Indeed while researching my master's thesis I was unknowingly beginning preliminary research for a doctoral program for which I had yet to apply, let alone even consider.

When I eventually went back years later on subsequent visits for doctoral research I tried to find Enrique and talk to him again about his experiences, after all, he was the reason I had chosen this topic of study. I was told through his sister and mutual friends that he was remarried to a very jealous wife. She would never allow him to meet with me. Knowing all too well about jealous Cubans, being one myself, I left well enough alone and have not seen him since. Fortunately, other men have shared their memories with me about the time they spent in Angola.

Overview

After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Fidel Castro's government began an international campaign abroad that provided military and humanitarian aid to third world countries. The largest presence was in the newly independent Angola where over a 15-year period 450,000 Cuban troops, approximately 5% of the Cuban population, provided military assistance and a civilian mission of 50,000 supported the country's educational and medical programs (George 2005; Hatzky 2008). This study places Cuban internationalism, specifically its military mission in Angola, in the larger context of transnational memories, historicity, and racial politics. Using the memories of those involved in the intervention as a point of departure, I examine the meanings people ascribe to their sense of national identity and historical placement. This extraordinary exchange between two emerging nation-states (revolutionary Cuba and independent

Angola) created a transnational space where national identity was contested, reevaluated, and transformed.

The personal memories of the Cuban veterans are inextricably tied to the social and historical disjunctures in contemporary Cuban society, including colonialism, apartheid, the end of the Cold War, the ongoing economic crisis, and other social themes on the island. The significance and ramifications of their experiences abroad is still being debated, and in some cases, erased by opposing global ideologies. As Campos notes, the: "absence of extensive historical reflection on this subject highlights [the] importance of the ex-combatants' individual interpretations and representations of the conflict" (2008).

How do the participants find meaning in what occurred, and how do these events form part of their life story? What role does internationalism play in the island's self-image as a historic and emblematic representation of self-autonomy, revolution, and utopia, especially now that Cuba's iconic weight is fading into the realm of history?

On a wider level, this study attempts to gain a better understanding of the racial politics associated with a prolonged transnational event in which race was used as the rationalization for war. For the Cuban soldiers on internationalist missions in Angola, it meant entering a war zone, a separation from family and country, and encounters with other cultures, but it also provided opportunities and experiences not otherwise available to those on the island. Conversely, for the young Angolans that went to study in Cuba, it also meant a departure from the country of their birth, but it was a chance to leave behind a ravaging civil war and a new start at life.

This chapter (I - Introduction) presents the methodology of the dissertation, a review of the literature on the subject, and also gives the historical context of the Cuban

intervention in Angola. Chapter II provides examples of Cuban official or "public" memory during involvement in the war, particularly examining how "race" informed foreign policy. The Cuban government linked the similar history and parallel revolutionary struggle between the two countries, emphasizing a shared colonial history, similar revolutionary leaders, and ancestral blood ties. By underscoring these shared histories, a collective national or transnational memory was promulgated that went beyond traditional ideas of nation as bound and separated by conventional geographic boundaries, and instead one based on ideological and racial affinity. Central to this public memory are the parallel ideas of Cuba as a "latinafrican" nation and partners in the historic defeat against racist apartheid South Africa and its allies.

In Chapter III, I compare the public memory discussed in Chapter II with the private memory of Cuban veterans shaped by their experiences of war in Luso-phone Africa. These wartime narratives incorporate themes of female sexuality, racial hierarchy, tropes of Cuban virility and superiority, and further encounters with "the other." These sensuous memories about how "Angolans are" form a long line of *cuentos de negros* (stories/tales about blacks), the casual and engrained ways blacks are stereotypically and pejoratively talked about in Cuba. Chapter IV analyzes the blurring of memory, storytelling, and life story, by documenting the recollections of an internationalist – a personification of the relevant historical events and sentiments of his era. Chapter V presents an assortment of war narratives that expound on previously mentioned themes, but also emphasize other experiences and sentiments, including cultural exchanges, death, ambivalence, spirituality and pride. This chapter also grapples with the changing notion of internationalism itself, from "before" and "after" the Special

Period, the return of materialism, and the crisis of Cuban self-image. Chapter VI analyzes the memories of non-combatants regarding the intervention in the form of vignettes – brief kernels of descriptive ethnography that capture the essence of Cuban contemporary life, while still grounded in the topic at hand. Chapter VII places the author in the narrative and traces her steps and missteps in the field as a reminder of the limitations of any ethnography, as well as an example of the transformative nature of field research and the writing process. Finally, Chapter VIII summarizes the relevance of transnational research and expands on areas for further study.

Methodology

The study is primarily based on fieldwork conducted in Cuba from April 2005 to January 2007. Before this, I did preliminary research during the summers of 2002 and 2003, as well as follow-up trips in December 2007 and August 2008. In addition, I also conducted research with members of the Angolan community in the United States through phone and email conversations, and during three research trips to Boston, Massachusetts in February 2005, June 2006, and from January to April 2007. My research is based on over 450 pages of single spaced notes, and almost ten hours of recorded interviews.

My field methods consisted of participant observation in conjunction with formal, informal, individual and group interviews. I spoke with whoever was willing to talk to me – anywhere and everywhere – about the intervention in Angola or other internationalist missions. I struck up a conversation at parties, while waiting for the bus or picking up hitchhikers on park benches, and in communal cafeterias, usually by asking

if they had been abroad.[4] From this type of extensive and random selection I gathered information on how the intervention is perceived by the general public. Even people who had not been directly involved in the intervention had stories about other people they knew – family, friends, and neighbors – and this was a good way to get a sense of what people remembered about that time.

My most important informants I met through other people I knew. Someone knew about my topic and would introduce me to someone that had been in Angola, and so forth in a domino effect, one contact leading to another. At that point I would ask to set up an initial meeting with the possible candidate, and see if they were interested in talking with me further regarding my study. Understandably, it was usually hit or miss, with some being very interested in sharing their experiences for the project, while others not so. I followed up with those who were willing to participate in the study and who stated that they believed in my project. These people, mostly men, ultimately became my principal informants.

As with all field research, some days were better than others. On a good day I would have an interview lined up. On not so good days I would go around town to public spaces and try to meet new people, or simply observe whatever there was to observe. On really bad days, particular during heavy rains or hurricanes (I was there during several hurricanes and tropical storms) I stayed indoors and watched television if there was still electrical power, talked to neighbors while it was safe to move about, and once the heavy pounding started, played cards and dominoes to pass the time.

I did a lot of what I refer to as "front porch ethnography" where I would sit on the front porch, the front steps, or the sidewalk and just people watch, both alone or with

[4] An activity that is generally safe and ubiquitous in Cuba.

family and friends. This is an easy way to start a conversation, especially in the smaller towns because people rarely go by without at least saying hello, and more often than not, they stop for a quick chat. In general I would say Cubans tend to be very friendly and love to tell stories, so it was not hard to meet and speak with people, at least it was not in my case.

I never gave anyone monetary compensation for their time, although on a few occasions I gave the person a small gift, *como un detalle* (as a small gesture). For example, I gave white candles to practicing *Santeros* (Afro-Cuban religion practitioners), or a kitchen ornament or decoration to someone who had gone out of their way to help me, or I would bring a harder to find ingredient when a meal was prepared for me.

I made every effort to record the interviews, but because military internationalism is still considered a sensitive topic by some and since there is a general mistrust of American intentions because of continuing efforts to overthrow the revolutionary government (particularly during the George W. Bush presidency when political relations deteriorated to a new low) I was not always able to do so. Some Cubans did not feel comfortable being recorded so I would ask to take notes during the interviews and/or I would write detailed field notes afterwards while the events were fresh in my mind.

On a few occasions, ordinary Cubans told me that it would be impossible to research my topic because "nobody wanted to talk about it." The assumption being that either the government would put a stop to it or the veterans themselves would be too nervous or unwilling to talk to me. In part they were right; not everyone I approached spoke to me. For some it was out of fear that it was inappropriate to talk to a foreigner, especially an American during the Bush administration, about a sensitive topic, and yet

for others it was simply because they would rather not talk about that time in their life. I could try to guess as to why, but I assume the reasons are as varied as they are personal. Yet I found that it was mostly those that had not participated in a mission that were the most nervous talking about the intervention. By and large, those that went were willing to share their experiences, good and bad, and most were proud of their service.

While in the field I also read the local newspapers, *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*, as often as I could. I read grammar and high school textbooks to understand what is included in the school curriculum regarding these historical events. I watched the nightly news, and a daily current events/roundtable-style program, *La Mesa Redonda*, much to the amusement of many. People who knew about my religious habit of watching La Mesa Redonda usually admitted that they rarely, if ever, watched the show because they found it boring. On more than one occasion I asked someone if they saw so and so on La Mesa Redonda talking about this or that, and that question would be met with a look of disbelief, and a comment that no, they had not watched. During my stay, La Mesa Redonda dedicated a couple of shows to Cuba's relationship with Africa and the legacy of their political and social bond.

For some I am sure it is easy to pass the program off as state propaganda, but precisely for that reason I found it to be extremely useful as a tool to gauge what was of current relevance to the government, and in that sense, gauging "official" thought. Plus, some of the topics discussed were very good, with interesting international guests, including Noam Chomsky and George Galloway, who offered a refreshing and varied point of view from most myopic political shows in the States, like Hardball and the O'Reilly Factor.

At the time of my stay Cuba was celebrating the 30th anniversary of the intervention in Angola and the government was commemorating this fact with a multipart documentary series detailing the events of the initial battle and interviewing key Cuban officers. The series also included interviews with Angolans who lived and studied in Cuba as youths and were now professionals in Angola. I watched and recorded as many in the series as time and access to a VCR and blank tapes would allow.

My research in the United States was more limited in time and scope than in Cuba. It consisted of the same basic field methods, participant observation, informal and formal interviews, and individual interviews. The Boston area has a large Angolan community and many Portuguese-speaking immigrants in general. As in Cuba, I mostly met informants through other people. I had previously established relationships with two key informants, Angolans who had spent their youth in Cuba, and subsequently met their friends, many of whom were other Angolans who had lived and studied in Cuba.

From what I concluded, many, if not most of the Angolans and other foreigners that lived in Cuba, left the island during the Special Period.[5] Some returned to Angola while others migrated to countries all over the world. Through my contacts in Boston, I spoke with or corresponded with Angolans that had lived in Cuba and were currently

[5] When I first went to the island in 1996, Cuba was in the midst of the "Special Period." The "Special Period in Peacetime" was the name given to the decade or so immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cuban gross domestic product, imports and exports decreased dramatically causing an unprecedented economic downturn that led to severe food shortages, and acute scarcity of even the most basic items, including soap, deodorant, and toilet paper. The Special Period was a defining moment in Cuban history and people talk about it like an older American would talk about the "Great Depression." It marked a generation. At the time of my first visit people would talk about the Special Period in the present – "*como estamos en periodo especial*" (since we are in the Special Period). But now most people seem to talk about it in the past – "*cuando estábamos en periodo especial*" (when we were in the Special Period). Sometimes people will say that Cuba is in an eternal Special Period, but for the most part, I would say that people tend to talk about it in the past. Therefore I refer to it in the past as well.

living in the United States, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, and Angola. Lastly, through one Angolan informant, I was able to meet the family he left behind in Cuba, including two sons and their Cuban mothers.

Field Sites

I limited my research to three areas, the capital, Havana, and two provinces, Matanzas, and Pinar del Río. Although I spent a considerable amount of time in all three, my base was in Matanzas. I purposely chose not to establish myself in Havana because I feel that the majority of monographs on Cuba are primarily about Havana, and Havana and Cuba are then conflated. In doing so, any differences in lifestyle, regional idiosyncrasies, class, and racial politics are obviated.

Havana, Matanzas, and Pinar del Río are on the western side of the island (See Appendix C). Although I was not able to spend an extended amount of time on the eastern side of Cuba, one of my main informants is originally from *Oriente* (the eastern most side of the island) and relocated to Matanzas as an adult. On previous occasions I have made shorter visits to Oriente with stops in various towns and cities in between.

To research the Angolan side, I chose Boston as my base city. I did so because my main informants live there. There I met and interviewed other Angolans that had lived in Cuba. Via phone and internet correspondence, I was able to supplement my interviews with Angolans currently living in Angola and Europe.[6]

I considered interviewing Cuban veterans of the Angolan intervention now living in the United States, but in the end decided not to. My study focuses on those Cubans living on the island and their sense of national identity and Cuban historical placement.

[6] As a result of limited funding I was unable to travel to Angola as I would have liked.

Although I can understand why scholars include the diaspora in their individual projects, I chose not to.

In the Field

Carrying out ethnographic work anywhere is difficult, but doing so in Cuba brings with it its own challenges. The continued U.S. embargo against Cuba and government restrictions on both sides make travel and stay in Cuba problematic. Being a researcher from an American institution during the Bush administration was even more problematic. The antagonistic changes in policy that Bush enacted, including severely restricting undergraduate education abroad programs, limiting family travel to once every three years for a total of twenty-one days, changing who qualified as family (to the exclusion of cousins, uncles, and grandparents) and lowering the amount of allowable remittances by family members to the island garnered an equally antagonistic and wary sentiment by the Cuban government in return. I, as an American in Cuba, paid the price for it. After trying every avenue and going through every anthropological/cultural center that had sponsored University of Michigan students in the past, I was continually rejected and told literally to wait until there was a change in government in the U.S. Eventually I found limited approval through a much smaller institution in Matanzas.

Doing fieldwork in Cuba for me has always been a conflicted and emotionally fraught experience. The first time I went to Cuba in 1996 I felt at home with my family there in more ways than with my immediate family in Los Angeles. There are cultural elements of informality, directness, and warmth that resonated with me. At another level I was unsettled and deeply affected by the experience. I went during the Special Period when things were extremely difficult economically and when even the most basic goods

were scarce. Yet while I sat at the airport before returning home, I was not sure if I felt sorry for myself because I had to leave, or for my family and new friends because they had to stay. I was torn inside.

When I left, I knew I had to return and spend more time there. Considering U.S. laws prohibiting unrestricted travel to Cuba, I knew the only way to do so legally would be to make Cuba an object of study. This was something I did not want to do, because I was afraid that in the process I would lose the place, both literally (in that I wouldn't be allowed to go back by either the U.S. or Cuban government) and emotionally (in that I would become detached to the place by viewing it mostly for academic purposes). I am still torn over that decision I made so many years ago as a masters student, and later again as a doctoral student. In many ways, I wish I could just go and enjoy being there with my family without the worries of an academic. Instead Cuba has become, at least in part, a place where I attempt to frame most everything – experiences and conversations – into some sort of intellectual exercise.

I say in part because obviously it's not that way with everything or everyone. A prime example is that during my research I met and married a Cuban national. Although I sometimes try to view his behavior through an ethnographic lens, most of the time I cannot, too caught up in the personal dynamics of our relationship. But as a result of this union I now I have a larger extended family on the island that further complicates my experience in the field and my relationship to the island.

As several anthropologists have argued, it is crucial for the ethnographer to include herself in the text in order for the reader to better understand the interpretations offered about the life of another person, and as a way to explore the difficulties for any

ethnographer in retelling these memories (Behar 1996; Mintz 1989). At this time I would like to state a few key elements about myself, my positionality as a researcher, and personal identity that shape this study. Chapter VII discusses this and other challenges I faced in the field in greater detail, particularly the dynamics of dealing with mostly male informants in the study.

I am a Cuban/Colombian-American (my father is from Cuba, and my mother from Colombia), born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I grew up speaking Spanish at home, and I later studied Spanish literature at the university level. I have lived and traveled extensively in Latin America, particularly South America. Therefore learning the language was not an issue. I do not have either a strictly Cuban or Colombian accent, but something in between. I can also play up one accent or the other when I want to, and although I have been told I sound "Caribbean" or "costal," these are subjective categories that depend on whom is doing the listening. For the most part, I would say that Colombians and Cubans (those who were raised or live there) can tell from how I speak that I am not from either respective country because my accent is not specific enough or I use words and expressions from the other country. When I want to, I can fool most other Spanish-speakers who aren't as intimately knowledgeable about the particularities of different regional accents, that I am either Cuban or Colombian. Typically my accent makes me ambiguous, hard to pinpoint my country of origin. In Cuba no one thought I was an American when they heard me speak, usually people thought I was Spanish, or a Cuban who was living abroad, or from some other Spanish-speaking country.

How I was viewed depended on so many subtle and not so subtle factors, and they could change depending on location, attire, the company I was with, what I was doing

etc. So I cannot say I "passed" as Cuban or that I did not, because each situation was always different. As I got to know people better and invited them to be in my study, it would have been unethical of me to omit fundamental aspects about myself, like the fact that I am an American, so the issue of passing is just in regards to brief encounters.

In quick exchanges I was often thought of as Cuban, but only after being there a while and soaking in the tropical sun. There is nothing like very pale skin, the *pomo de leche* (bottle of milk) hue my skin would get after the Michigan winter, to tip off a local that one is not from there. My "summer" wardrobe mostly consists of casual shorts or jeans, tube tops, tank tops, and flips flops or sandals, which is what most people wear on a day-to-day basis, so I did not stand out much in this aspect. When I went around with other Cubans, it was really easy to "pass" as Cuban. This of course was more difficult to do in the smaller towns, mainly because everybody knows most everybody, so it was easily noticeable that I was not from there. Oftentimes, how I was perceived depended upon my arrival into a neighborhood or house - by foot, on bicycle, by bus, in a collective taxi, or by driving a rental car. When I stayed in hotels in Havana, I was easily targeted as a tourist in contrast to when I stayed in a home. The main point is that how I, or anyone, is perceived is influenced by a variety of factors, some of which one can strategically manipulate, and others which one cannot.

In Cuba, where one resides is much more important in how one is viewed or treated than where one is from. Being a "tourist" is a special category. Foreigners/tourists get special treatment – they are allowed in the best hotels, restaurants, cabarets, etc., as long as they have the money. At the time I was doing my field research, Cubans, even if they had the money, were excluded from certain locales and activities,

like renting a tourist car. Likewise, with some exceptions, only foreigners could buy and set up a cell phone account. Accordingly, Cubans would ask family and friends living abroad to purchase the phone line for them. This has subsequently changed, but in any case, when someone thinks too highly of him or herself, people will say, "*ese se cree que es yuma*" (he thinks he's a foreigner) or "*se quiere hacer el turista*" (he's trying to act like a tourist), as a way of pointing it out.[7]

As a result, being a foreigner or a tourist holds a real and symbolic value in Cuba because of the special privileges that foreigners have, and because of presumed wealth. In general, Cubans assume that anyone living abroad is economically much better off than they are.[8] The distinction then is not so much as to whether one is Cuban or is of Cuban descent but rather where one currently resides, and one's ability to travel back and forth from the island. In the case of my father, who was born and raised in Cuba and left

[7] These two examples were true when I was there but have changed under Raúl Castro. He has changed official policy to permit Cubans to enter, purchase, or use any of the amenities tourists can as long as they have the currency to do so. Most Cubans cannot afford these privileges, especially on their monthly state salary. Regardless, in many ways this has opened a can of worms because previously, the official reason for the differential treatment was to avoid overt class distinctions and inequality among Cubans. Giving access to certain Cubans over other ones based on economic leverage is to admit that some Cubans are significantly more well off than others, despite any government effort to control social and monetary discrepancies; and moreover, it goes against the socialist design of economic and social egalitarianism.

[8] I have had this discussion countless times with Cubans and I try to explain that the majority of the world's population is actually poor, and in some cases severely economically disadvantaged. But for the most part it never seems any one believes me. This is in part do to the fact that most of the foreigners that Cubans come into contact with are indeed tourists, who have to have at least some disposable income to be making the trip in the first place. Secondly, the majority of Cubans that leave the country: a) go to countries with higher economic levels than Cuba (i.e. the U.S. and Spain), and b) those that migrate tend to exaggerate their economic success abroad regardless of the reality. Why that is, I don't know. But I suspect it is a combination of factors, including expectations. It is expected that one will make money once they go abroad, so no one wants to be the only one that does not. Another reason might be not to worry the family back home. Lastly, exaggeration and *alarde* (to try to impress/boast) are a central part of Cuban culture, as most Cubans will admit. Since few Cubans living on the island have had the opportunity to travel, and much less to other poor or "underdeveloped" countries, then few comparisons can be made except for what they hear from family members mostly living in Miami or Canada. This is why the experiences of internationalists abroad make them unique, they have had the opportunity to travel, and in many cases, to countries or regions in dire straits.

as an adult at age 26, his Cuban identity can be negotiated and contested in any one encounter. For instance he can walk down a street in Cuba and a hustler will ask him where he is from in English, Italian, Spanish or German hoping to figure out his nationality. My father will stop and tell the hustler proudly that he is from Matanzas, *soy Matancero*. The hustler will laugh realizing that he is indeed Cuban, but gauging from my father's clothing, *pomo de leche* skin tone, his demeanor, and other unspoken cues, the hustler will point his finger to the distance and add "*pero de la yuma*" (but from the U.S./abroad). To the Cuban hustler residing in Cuba, my father is Cuban, but a Cuban who no longer lives on the island, and is therefore privy to those special privileges afforded to tourist, but not those given to Cubans.

Another story regarding my father further illustrates the importance of residency. At places like museums and musical shows he wants to pay in Cuban pesos rather than in the convertible dollars because it is much cheaper.[9] The cashier will tell him that only Cubans can pay in pesos and that all others must pay in convertible dollars. My father will protest claiming rightfully that he is Cuban, but the cashier will ask him to show his *carné* (identification) to prove it. Cubans living on the island contributing into the system can purchase certain items at subsidized prices, but my father who lives abroad is

[9] Cuba has two official currencies: the *moneda nacional* or *peso* (Cuban peso) (MN) and the *peso convertible* (convertible dollar) (CUC), colloquially known as a *chavito*. One convertible dollar (CUC) is worth approximately twenty-five Cuban pesos, depending on whether or not you are selling or buying the convertible peso and your location on the island – in rural areas the convertible dollar tends to be one or two pesos more expensive. The convertible dollar (CUC) is pegged with the US dollar, but because change houses, *cadeca*, charge close to a twenty percent fee, the CUC's value is approximately US $1.20. So for instance a museum entrance might be MN $2 pesos (approximately US $0.20) whereas for foreigners and those living abroad it is CUC $2 (approximately US $2.45). State salaries are paid in MN, and certain professions get an incentive in addition to their monthly salary in CUC. Food purchased at the local plazas or small neighborhood stores is in pesos (MN), but most "luxury" items are found in the "for dollar" stores and are charged in convertible dollars (CUC).

not allowed to pay in pesos at these venues because he has not contributed into the system.[10] These examples show how identity is both subjective – how we perceive ourselves and how others view us – and objective – does one have the proper paperwork – but also strategic.

Consequently, at certain times I would accentuate different characteristics of myself over others accordingly while in the field. For instance, when I have been pulled over by a police officer at routine stops they typically assume I am from *la comunidad* (the community), a Cuban living abroad mostly in Miami. However, I point to the part on my passport that says that I was born in the United States, because I do not want to be associated with the community. Although there are wonderful members of the community, there is also a tense relationship between some members living in the States and some living on the island. I would therefore stress the fact that I am American at those times to disassociate myself from whatever negative baggage being a Cuban-American might bring. At other times I would say I was Colombian to avoid any negative connotations with being American.

Those around me – my family and friends – would do the same. They would emphasize the fact that I was American to get whatever benefit that might get at any one particular moment (usually gaining access to somewhere or something to which Cubans were excluded), or have me pass as Cuban to gain whatever benefit that might get at

[10] This only applies to certain venues, like museums, shows, etc. Anybody can pay for food in pesos at the farmers market and for items in peso only stores. Those immigrating to the U.S. are typically asked to turn in their identification card before departing, however this is not always required of those that show intent to work/travel abroad and return. Also some people claim to lose their identification or bribe someone in order to be able to keep it for return visits for just this purpose before it expires.

another moment (usually paying in subsidized Cuban pesos prices rather than in convertible dollars).

Among the people I knew well, my informants for instance, they knew everything about my cultural background. That meant that I was referred to as *la cubanita* (the little Cuban), *la cubiche* (Cuban-American), *la turista* (the tourist), *la yuma* (the foreigner), or *la Americanita* (the little American). But most of the time I was simply Mari. The fact that I came and went so often and that I was there for such extended periods of time really helped. It showed people that I was truly interested in Cuba and that it was not just a passing fancy. I related with those on the island, and more importantly, I could tolerate living there. This is another complicated issue.

Often Cubans will say with both embarrassment and annoyance how someone will visit for a few days and then want to leave because they cannot take the power outages or the general lack of basic comforts. Oftentimes their own family members living abroad will visit and rent a tourist house or room, rather than stay in their former residence because of the lack of certain comforts, even if it has been a short time since they left.[11]

[11] I've seen this happen on many occasions, where family members in the States will try to take things to Cuba that are readily available there for dollars, like garlic, chocolate, or powdered milk. It's almost as if there is an exaggeration, conscious or subconscious, of the goods that are lacking. Or perhaps a lack of understanding since before they left they did not have access to dollars, so there is an assumption that you cannot find these things even with dollars. I can understand this more in the rural provinces, but not in tourist areas like Havana, Matanzas (which has Varadero nearby), or Cienfuegos, where for dollars you can find most goods found in any other large city, but at a higher price and with less variability. Similarly, I have known Cubans that felt uncomfortable that their relatives no longer wanted to stay in the same home with them on visits to the island, but rather that they said they were now used to certain amenities like air conditioning and only wanted to stay in a rented home or hotel room. At one level people understand that you get used to the "nice things" in life quite easily, but at another level it is a direct snub to the family remaining behind, especially when they have only been gone a few months.

I was viewed as *sencilla* (simple), down to earth. This "simple-ness," however, associated me more with being an American rather than a Cuban, because the perception is usually that Cubans returning to the island are anything but simple – instead rather complicated – they tend to be exaggerated in their dress, often arrogant in demeanor, and trying to impress the fact that they have left the Cuban *polvo* (dust) behind and have moved on to bigger and better things.

Another related element about me that was always brought into question was whether or not I was a sympathizer with the political system on the island.[12] People would ask questions about what I thought about an aspect of Cuban life or if I agreed with a certain policy. In general my answers were ambiguous because I see things from so many different points of view and because I do not believe in easy answers. I believe most things in life, including the complexity of the reality on and off the island, cannot be expressed in black or white, but rather shades of gray. Moreover, I have traveled extensively in other countries to know that economic difficulty is hardly unique to Cuba, and quite frankly, in some aspects, Cubans are better off than members of other societies. My diplomatic answers would often lead to Cubans saying that I was a communist, an American infiltrator, or a *chivata* (state informant).[13] This was never said in a truly angry way although sometimes it was said out of frustration out of my perceived naïveté. It was also said as a joke, or even with pleasure that I was more understanding, and not as

[12] This also occurs in the U.S. While presenting a paper at Florida State University, a commentator said that I had not made it explicit on which side I was on politically. I objected stating that it was precisely this divisive and tired argument that prevented good historical or anthropological work about Cuba. The insistence on stating whether you were a "commie" or a "capitalist," as if these were the only two options that existed, destroys any capacity for fruitful scholarship and dialogue. In Chapter VII I discuss this further.

[13] The term is used either in the feminine or in the masculine, *chivato*, and it is used to refer to a "state informant" or "stool pigeon."

severe in my criticism of everything in Cuba as some people can be. I always tried to be as truthful as possible to myself and to anyone that asked me - there is good and bad, corruption, mismanagement, hypocrisy, as well as good and bad intentions and people in every system and in every place – and I am no one to judge whether or not my life is better or more rewarding than anyone else's simply based on where I reside.

However, those types of comments also reflect realities of Cuban life and conducting research in Cuba. There are communists, there are people who pretend to be communists when it suits them, there are infiltrators and state informants, there are people actively trying to overthrow the government, and equally as important, there is suspicion. Because of intolerance for open dissention in Cuba, some informants were guarded and self-censored their answers, making research difficult as they overcame this initial wariness and gained trust. At times people would answer based not on how they actually felt, but rather based on what they thought I wanted to hear, or what they wanted me to hear. Eventually I built enough trust with my main informants where we could have discussions that were not tainted with trite "politically correct" answers, but rather were complex, rich, and as with all humans, contradictory.

By contrast, my positionality in the field in the U.S., particularly Boston was somewhat different. The basics remain the same, each individual encounter was different and negotiated by different factors, but in general since there are many immigrants in the U.S., and since I was talking with immigrants to the U.S., it was easily understandable that I am the product of immigration, the child of immigrant parents – an American of Cuban and Colombian descent. Fluency in Portuguese also aided my ability to relate at a more intimate level.

In summary, my positionality in the field was subjective and variable. There are different degrees of "insider/outsider," of acceptability, friendship, and trust. All these qualities depend on numerous factors, and on the particulars of a given exchange.

Cuban Milieu

While telling the story of these early internationalists, I hope to take the reader on a journey to Cuba. This account does not represent a static picture of Cuba, but rather the ethnographic detail is clearly situated during the time that I was conducting research in 2005-2007. What I have written on these pages is representative of the people and places I visited during the time I was there, supplemented by the knowledge of past visits to the island since 1996 and after my return from the field. In this section I want to introduce the specific historical context of Cuba at that time – what were the important events during those months and what was the talk on *radio bemba* (word of mouth).[14] I try to leave much of the day-to-day ethnography free of interpretive analysis so that the reader can come to his or her own conclusions regarding contemporary Cuba.

It is important to point out that I was asking my informants to recall and explain events from around twenty to thirty years earlier. Therefore, I am focusing on their current memories and feelings towards past events. I would assume that if I interviewed

[14] Literally, *radio bemba* translates to lip radio. *Bemba* is a word used to describe thick lips. Historically it was used more commonly to refer to thick-lipped black Cubans, but nowadays, especially among the younger generations, it's used by and to describe Cubans of all color who have thick lips or are pouting. It is not necessarily a pejorative term, although depending on the context, how it's used, to whom it is addressed, etc., it can be. *Radio bemba* is a play on the words – lip radio - what is heard coming from the lips of everyone, the word, hot gossip, word of mouth, or rumors on the street. Emerging literature on "rumor" (Renne 1993, White 1997) highlight the importance of rumor as "an apt and potent form of political commentary because it is unofficial, important in regimes where the official bears little resemblance to experience" as is sometimes the case in Cuba (Kirsch 2002: 57). The word *bemba* comes from the name of the tribe by the same name in Zambia where anthropologist Audrey Richards did her fieldwork among the Bemba in then Northern Rhodesia (Richards 1939). How this word has come to define "lips," particularly "thick lips" in Cuban Spanish emphasizes the historical links and exchange of people between Africa and the Caribbean.

them again in twenty years they might feel differently about those events, just as they might have felt differently twenty years ago when the events were fresher and they had less time to process and make sense of them. Similarly, the informants' surroundings, the spaces they inhabit, and the people they interact with would also be different and would have changed. This may be stating the obvious, but oftentimes major anthropological texts, even as they age, continue to be regarded as present-day reality, rather than a time capsule of a particular place and time (Chagnon 1968; Shostak 1981). Eventually, ethnographies become historical texts: "Just as there is no timeless 'ethnographic present' for the people anthropologists study, anthropologists and their work are also products of history" (Frank 2000: 8).

The current popular imagery, tastes and sounds of Cuba that is often portrayed in the U.S. is that of the 1950's (Dopico 2002). The fact that cars from that era, and other household items, can still be found in circulation intensifies the mistaken impression that Cuba is trapped, figuratively or literally, in the 1950's. Once while coming back from Cuba a U.S. immigration officer asked me the dreaded question: "what is Cuba like?" Before I could answer, he continued, "I hear it is like stuck in the 1950's." I knew what he meant of course, but the assumption still bothered me. "No," I said, "I can assure you that Cuba and Cubans are very much in the present like we are."

Time does pass in Cuba, things do change, and people come and go. That's not to say that there are not aspects of day-to-day life that aren't painfully slow, or that the lack of resources, particularly gas, forces people to resort to antiquated means of transportation – like horse drawn carriages. But it does not mean that people are somehow waiting around for something to change (i.e. a new government), and then, and

only then, will their life begin. Life goes on, and everyone must make their life under the best or worst of circumstances. For some, that includes plans to immigrate elsewhere, like millions of immigrants the world over, but for others it does not. Their life is and will continue to be in Cuba.

I've personally witnessed the passage of time in my own family in Cuba. I've seen my little cousin grow up from a beautiful little five-year old when I first met her, to a stunning sixteen year old who is now taller than me. When I went to her friend's *quinceañera* (coming of age party) and saw them dancing in their beautiful evening gowns and costumes I couldn't believe how much time had passed since I first met them. During these years she has learned to play the cello at a professional level at an art school and now plays in local concerts. Her immediate family has also been transformed – her grandfather died, her brother is living in Spain, and her sister is in Miami – yet they were living in Cuba when I first started traveling to the island. It is remarkable when I think about all the people that were originally in the neighborhood when I started visiting Cuba that are no longer there, either because they moved homes or (mostly) have gone to live abroad. An estimated eighty thousand Cubans, mostly men under forty-five, have migrated to the United States between 2005 and 2008 (Bardach 2009: 218). Movement/migration and transformation is not exclusive to Cuba, but again I state the obvious to move away from the trope of a population in stagnation and total isolation that I observe in many commentaries on Cuba.[15] The U.S. has isolated itself from revolutionary Cuba, but Cuba has, to varying degrees, engaged the rest of the world since

[15] For more information on Caribbean migration, see (Duany 2010; Germain 2010; James: 2010; Knight 1990; Manderson-Jones 1990; Mintz 1985; Richardson 1992).

the beginning of the revolution. The internationalist missions, past and present, are concrete examples of that engagement.

During my research, an American friend of mine went to visit me in Cuba. It was her first time in Cuba, so she noticed details that I had long ago stopped noticing, and saw the country through fresh eyes. She was surprised when we went to a party and saw that almost all the guests had digital cameras. From all the negative press she had heard about Cuba in the U.S. she assumed that nobody would have cameras, let alone digital cameras, which were certainly not around in the 1950's! She was further surprised at the obsession with brand and designer names, so many teenagers had on Armani and Dolce & Gabbana t-shirts, sunglasses and belts, the same popular fakes found around the world. She was expecting to find communist drab instead of the slinky, body revealing clothing that most Cubans of all ages and sizes prefer.[16]

Brand names are an obsession among Cuban teenagers. I have had quite a few ask me to bring them back Adidas warm-up suits, Nike or Reebok tennis shoes, and even winter boots for those hot tropical days. They are very specific about what they want, and are not shy about asking: for example, the Nike swoosh on the tennis shoe has to be in a particular place and the shoe has to have a certain color combination. I always say

[16] The tropical climate in Cuba causes people to wear light clothing or little clothing year round. Fifty years of communism and centralized companies mean few television or print adds that try to sell you on the latest product by telling you your defects – this I argue causes people to be less self-conscious about their bodies, regardless of whether or not they are heavy, older, or even disfigured – categories of people that are typically presumed to be more self-conscious. Aside from this, however, Cuban society, like other parts of the world, is experiencing a trend in which younger and younger girls seek to emulate the mostly imported hypersexualized female images found in music videos, pornography, film and television, as well as the image of the Cuban *jinetera* (female prostitute). These women mostly have foreign men as their cliental and therefore have better economic leverage, access to clothing, and occasionally leading to a ticket out of the country. Thus, following this trend, girls and women tend to dress in a way that can be considered provocative.

that I cannot have them custom made. Some Cubans have also told me that they are aware of 99Cent-type stores or bargain clothing stores like Ross and Marshalls, and that they do not want clothing from those places, but rather from Nordstrom's or Macy's.

That is the crux of Cuba – a place so full of contradictions. There is clearly widespread poverty and scarcity in Cuba, but that is not the whole picture. In the same home where someone has a digital camera or a laptop computer, there can be newspaper strips and wads of cotton for toilet paper. There is certainly a lack of "basic" comforts.[17] However despite the government's overall attempt at equality for all, the reality is that there are economic classes and differences. Not everybody is poor as one would assume on a quick 10-day, superficial, first time trip to the island. The longer one stays in Cuba, the more one sees these inequalities. On more than one occasion I have entered a home that appeared modest on the outside, only to be surprised at how beautiful the interior is, complete with tile floors and walls, leather couch, full entertainment system, contemporary comforts, and extravagant décor.

The privileged classes mostly consists of higher brass communist party members that exploit the system, TV personalities, recent internationalists that have worked and profited abroad, those who rent their homes to tourists, and those in strategic jobs, like flight attendants, pilots, and hotel employees, that have access to hard-to-get products. *Gente que tiene negocio* (black market entrepreneurs) and those with family members

[17] I have a problem with using the word "basic" because what is basic to one person is not necessarily basic to someone else. For instance, I would argue that most Americans would consider the cell phone as a basic necessity where I view it as a "luxury" item, particularly in reference to other parts of the world. Having said that, the spread of the cell phones is making landlines seem like more of a luxury.

abroad that send remittances also have the cash to buy sparse consumer goods.[18] Usually class differences are marked by racial/color lines as well, because except for black market entrepreneurs, the trades I mentioned above tend to be dominated by lighter skinned Cubans because they are considered to have a more "professional appearance."[19] The majority of Cubans living abroad tend to be "white" or lighter skinned.[20]

On a Friday or Saturday night at the *Todo En Uno* in Varadero, Matanzas, one can see the elite young, mostly white, well off teens in nice clothing, with money to spend.[21] This is a very different crowd than would be found in *El Tenis*, an open air area in La Playa, a *reparto* (residential neighborhood) also in Matanzas, where local bands or a DJ play free music and concerts. There seems to be an assumption in much of the literature about Cuba that only prostitutes and hustlers enjoy these "border" areas where Cubans

[18] I am referring to those with family members who consistently send money and in large amounts, not $50 every three to four months – which helps, but isn't enough to let you live the "high life."

[19] Often it is a foreign entity that partially owns a business in Cuba that will set these guidelines in regards to "professional appearance."

[20] I will get into the question of race in more detail in the rest of the dissertation. However, racial/color identity is very subjective. "Race" is discussed in terms of color rather than as a biological factor, and there is a variety of terminology associated with various skin tones. Having said that, there are people who identify as "white" Cubans that probably wouldn't be considered white in the U.S., although that certainly wouldn't be the case with all self-identified white Cubans. Similarly, there are "black" Americans that wouldn't be considered "*negros*" in Cuba. I know American scholars that have conducted research in Cuba who consider themselves black, yet they were constantly told in Cuba that they were not black, but rather *mulato*, or some other mixed color category. Likewise there are *mulato* Cubans that do not associate themselves as black, and insist on being called a *mulato* or *mulata*. Anthropologist Conrad Kottak explains a similar phenotype based system of racial categorization exists in Brazil and concludes that the "rule of hypodescent is rarely encountered outside the United States" (Kottak 1974: 44).

[21] Varadero beach is the second highest tourist destination after Havana. It is located 140 kilometers east of Havana. Recently constructed or renovated hotels line the streets of this twenty-kilometer peninsula, and tourist can choose from a variety of nightclubs and restaurants. Although many of the social establishments and hotels were off limits to Cubans (this has recently changed under Raúl Castro), Cubans with a little extra cash to bribe the doorman usually find a way to get in and mingle with foreigners. But some places, like the *Todo En Uno* – a mini-amusement park type place – was never off limits to Cubans. If you had the money and transportation, you could go.

and foreigners intermingle. Although that is indeed frequently the case, it is not exclusively the case; there are Cubans that go because they or their family have money.

From my experience these economic inequalities are more common (or perhaps more apparent) in the larger cities, like Havana, Cienfuegos, and parts of Matanzas that have a continuous influx of tourist and tourist revenues. In the smaller provinces and towns this is not usually the case. For instance, in Pinar del Río (outside the city center) there are more homes made of wood, which makes them particularly vulnerable to hurricanes, whereas in Havana and Matanzas, the homes tend to be built of more weather resilient *mampostería* (cement mixture). However, despite the humble appearance of some of these homes, many of them (as well as the local schools) are nicely and freshly painted in pastel colors. This may be surprising to anyone who has the image of the dilapidated sections of Havana as their sole representation of Cuba. It is in these small towns that one sees the government's effort to disperse scarce resources away from the capital and towards the provinces.

For much of 2005, Fidel Castro's health and his prolonged absences from television caused a flurry of speculation and rumor. One night while watching television at a friend's house, three of us were talking about how *el comandante* (the commander-in-chief) had not been shown on television for a while. We wondered aloud if maybe he had passed away and the state was keeping it a secret. At that moment La Mesa Redonda had a hurricane-watch special report with Cuba's premier meteorologist, Dr. José Rubiera, telling viewers the course hurricane Wilma was taking and proposed evacuation proceedings. The invited guest for the evening was none other than Fidel himself.

"There he is!" we shouted in unison, laughing at the coincidence. He was clearly not dead and he obviously had more lives than a cat.

By the end of the year it was clear that something was wrong and that Fidel had an acute health problem. I attended a *misa del gallo* (midnight mass) on Christmas Eve 2005 for ethnographic purposes. The church was packed, standing room only, and almost everybody had a *Niño Jesús* (Baby Jesus) in his or her hands to be blessed at the end of mass. During the concluding rites the priest asked the congregation to keep the commander-in-chief in their prayers because of his poor health, and to pray, not for recovery, but that it be "god's will."

The year 2006 saw the historic transfer of power from one of the longest sitting heads of state in history, Fidel Castro, to his little brother Raúl. Raúl was appointed interim president on July 31st, 2006, and on August 1st, I was flying back to Cuba after a short visit home. My parents, who were listening to the national Spanish language news in Los Angeles, which sometimes report presumed events as well as actual ones, were scared that there was pandemonium in Cuba. My mother called a relative on the island, waking her up at three in the morning to ask her if everything was under control. Half asleep, she answered that everything was fine. Indeed, all was calm when I arrived the following day, completely anticlimactic. Some of the reservists had been mobilized in case of a possible U.S. or "Cuban Mafia" led invasion that never came. The transfer of power had gone without a hitch.

During 2006, *el Año de la Revolución Eléctrica* (The Year of the Electrical Revolution), the government implemented new energy efficient and environmentally friendly initiatives to renovate the outdated electrical grid to meet the demands of the

population and curb the hated power outages. Cubans were slowly weaned off their gas and kerosene stoves, while electrical appliances, including rice cookers, pressure cookers, small water heaters, portable electric burners, and refrigerators were distributed at a subsidized price and with government credit/lay-away plan. A set amount would be deducted from the monthly paycheck until the appliances were paid off, or paid off upfront if one had the money and so chose to.[22] There were plans to distribute new TV sets and washing machines in the near future, but nothing has materialized. Now with the global recession it is even less likely.

The move towards electrical efficiency is more than environmental planning. It is an attempt at escaping the dependency on foreign oil, which crippled the Cuban economy when the Soviet Union collapsed and the subsidized gas supply ended. Although, currently receiving oil from Cuba-friendly Venezuela in exchange for medical and technical assistance from Cuban internationalists, the reality is that Cuba needed to overhaul its electrical grid. The success of the electrical revolution has been mixed, as with all things Cuban. Some international environmental groups laud the endeavor, while others sharply criticize the results.[23]

In Cuba the arrival of the appliances was met with overall enthusiasm. People in the countryside got the appliances before those in Havana. Urban legend-type stories spread immediately as the appliances were distributed: *fulanito* (so-and-so) heard that

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[22] The pressure cooker was MN $350 pesos (approx. US $14) and the rice cooker was MN $150 pesos (approx. US $6). Average salaries at the time were around MN $300-350 pesos per month, so these appliances represented one to two paychecks. Some people preferred to have an amount, say, MN $50 pesos deducted every paycheck, while others who had extra money paid them off immediately.

[23] In November 2010 there was word on *radio bemba* that gas appliances were going to be sold again because the electrical appliances distributed were not built to last twenty years, most nothing ever is. The wear and tear from daily use has been too much and most broke down fairly quickly, leaving families with creative ways to cook their meals.

menganito (so-and-so) had destroyed their new pressure cooker by cooking directly on the hot plate rather than in the pot. There was also the one about the lady that put the rice pot to cook on the burner instead of the rice cooker and it melted, or others spoke about the amazing flan that a neighbor could make in her new rice cooker. The local *taller de enseres menores* (electro domestic appliance repair shop) quickly got steady business from customers that had damaged their appliances or had received defective ones, and the mechanics performed minor miracles to keep them operating.

Nothing caused such a commotion as the arrival of the new refrigerators. The first ones to be distributed were the small refrigerators for smaller households, and months later the larger ones arrived. They were taken to the local CDR,[24] accounted for, and then several strong men in the neighborhood were asked to distribute them to the corresponding head of household. In order to get the new refrigerator the family had to exchange it for their old one. Many people were wary of getting rid of their old (1950's again!) American, English, or Soviet made refrigerator, despite the fact that they expend enormous amounts of electricity. Cubans know that most appliances nowadays are not made to last, and they worry that these new refrigerators could not last another fifty years, if need be. For the most part people complied, exchanging the old for the new and were happy with their choice. However, there were a few holdouts that preferred to keep their old refrigerators or did not turn in a second one and kept it for extra storage.

Some of the appliances were popular, like the refrigerators, the water heater, rice and pressure cookers. But the portable burner, the type used to make coffee on a

[24] *Comité de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR) - Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. Neighborhood community watch-type organizations set up across the nation that coordinate social programs, events, block parties, and also report any criminal or counter-revolutionary activities.

camping trip, made life miserable for the poor women who had to wait an eternity for water to boil. As is often the case these social experiments affect women the most, who by far do the majority of the household chores despite the institution of the Family Code in 1975 that stipulated equality and division of labor between men and women. With the patience of a saint, and the use of the catchall phrase when things get tough – *no coja lucha* (don't fight it) – many of the women I knew attempted to accept these changes in stride. But I could sense a real frustration and even depression as they tried to figure out how to cook a meal for a large family with one, very slow electric burner.

Fittingly, there was satirical commentary on *radio bemba* in 2006 - fifty years of revolution to get a rice cooker.

The remainder of the introduction will be devoted to providing the historical context of Cuban internationalism, the history of independent Angola, and a review of the current literature on the intervention.

Cuban National Identity, Revolutionary Internationalism, & the "New Man"

Fidel Castro and Che Guevara emphasized proletarian internationalism as part of the revolution's platform. "Proletarian Internationalism" refers to the concept established by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in their writings, particularly in the 1848 "Manifesto of the Communist Party," which urged working class men around the globe to unite against oppressive and exploitive economic and political systems (Tuker 1978: 500). Subsequently, class solidarity, more than national allegiance, is essential to this framework.

In a 1963 speech Castro defined proletarian internationalism in the following terms: "…proletarian internationalism, manifesting fraternal solidarity with all the

countries and peoples who fight against oppression and exploitation."[25] Moreover, in 1967, Fidel explained during an interview with journalist Lee Lockwood that: "Guevara is that rarest type of man, the pure revolutionary. He has no nationalist allegiance." By doing so, Castro underscored the centrality of internationalism over nationalism, and a worldwide ideological camaraderie in the revolutionary project (Lockwood 1967: 288).

Fidel Castro's revolution then is marked by a discourse of armed struggle as the most essential and purest aspect of revolution. As several scholars have suggested, war histories are central to national identity and memory (Birmingham 1992; Cooke and Woollacott 1993; Enloe 1993; Mosse 1990; Noakes 1998; Watson 1994; White 1995). The myth of war is a national ideology centered on fallen soldiers, masculinity, and acceptable mass death (Mosse 1990). Although the emphasis on the collective consciousness of the proletariat in Marxist theory highlighted international working class solidarity and a departure from nationalist ideology (Tucker 1978), socialist states came about through military revolutions. Class wars were fought militarily rather than intellectually or morally, and therefore military strength and war mythology are vital discourses under state socialism (Watson 1994).

Correspondingly, Cuban nationalism centers on the myth of a "Cuba Libre" – an independent, autonomous, and sovereign Cuba (Kapcia 2000), defined by the idea of rebellion, armed struggle, and war as a means to attain national autonomy. This myth has carried through the wars of independence against Spain, subsequent U.S. occupation, the failed revolution of 1930's, the 1959 communist revolution, and by anti-Castro dissidents

[25] July 3, 1963. LANIC. Castro Speech Database. University of Texas, Austin. http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html.

on and off the island.[26] For the revolutionary government, internationalism is a means by which to attain national autonomy.

After the revolution all aspects of Cuban society were militarized. Military terminology and culture became widespread and inculcated into everyday activities. Some examples include the literary and work brigades, the mobilization practices, the olive green fatigues and uniforms worn by the leaders, communist party members, and ordinary Cubans, the emphasis on the need to "defend" the revolution as expressed by the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) and the *Día Nacional de la Defensa* (National Day of Defense), the reference to certain party members as *militantes* (militants), and the use of Fidel Castro's military rank, *comandante en jefe* (commander-in-chief) as the most common way to refer to him.

Che Guevara and the other Cuban leadership advocated the need for the ideal citizen, the "new man" – an exemplary, revolutionary, altruistic citizen. According to Guevara, the "new man" is created through struggle, guerilla warfare, and "heroic attitudes in everyday life" (Guevara 1968). Consequently, a true socialist identity is formed through struggle, battle and resistance, in other words, war (Liss 1994).

In "Socialism and Man," Che Guevara's famous essay, he refers to proletarian internationalism as a revolutionary obligation and an educational tool: "Proletarian internationalism is a duty, but it is also a revolutionary need. This is how we educate our people" (Guevara 1968: 45). Therefore, the creation of a "new man," a new communist man, free from capitalism alienation, is accomplished by the edifying opportunities offered by internationalism – the experience of living, working, educating, and most importantly, fighting side by side with other working class people around the globe.

[26] Castro did not actually declare the Revolution Marxist until 1961.

It follows then that Cuban internationalism provided an opportunity for the populace to validate themselves as exemplary revolutionary citizens. The Cuban intervention in Angola, which began sixteen years after the revolution and lasted for another fifteen, was a new moment in Cuban history to demonstrate revolutionary character, particularly for those citizens that had missed the fighting in the Sierra Madre[27] or the literacy brigades[28] that followed the triumph of the revolution.

Some Cubans were motivated to volunteer on missions in order to prove their revolutionary fervor and be a part of the long history of their country's internationalism going back to the independence wars. Others however, felt pressured to volunteer and worried about repercussions in their professional lives, while others simply refused to go. These life altering decisions, and the consequences that came with them, will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Third World Solidarity, the Non-Aligned Movement, and Cuban Internationalism

Historian Vijay Prashad describes the Third World as a project rather than a place, one created as a consequence of the Cold War and the aftermath of World War II:

> "During the seemingly interminable battles against colonialism, the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America dreamed of a new world. They longed dignity above all else, but also the basic necessities of life (land, peace, and freedom). They assembled their grievances and aspirations into various kinds of organizations, where their leadership then formed a platform of demands… these leaders crafted an ideology and a set of institutions to bear the hopes of their populations. The 'Third World' comprised these hopes and the institutions produced to carry them forward" (2007: xv).

It is within this historical context that Cuban internationalism must be understood.

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[27] The mountain range in *Oriente* in Cuba where the revolutionary guerrilla fighters hid out, planned, and executed most of the military campaigns against Fulgencio Batista's government.
[28] A government campaign in the early years of the Revolution that had thousands of volunteer teachers, mostly young students out of high school, go all over the country, particularly in rural areas, to teach people of all ages to read and write.

A variety of organizations and conferences, like the Non-Aligned Movement and the Tricontinental Conference, as well as solidarity movements and philosophies, such as Pan-Africanism and the Afro-Asian movements emerged to contemplate and discuss the particular challenges facing the Third World and the best policies and strategies to achieve favorable outcomes.[29] The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was one such international organization founded in 1961.[30] Their main objects were the promotion of national sovereignty, avoidance of colonial and neocolonial dependency, and the desire to circumvent having to align politically, economically, or ideologically with one of the two superpowers (the U.S. and the Soviet Union). Revolutionary Cuba was an early member of the organization – the sixth NAM conference was held in Havana in 1966 and Fidel Castro was the secretary general from 1979-1983, and again in 2006-2008 (Raúl Castro replaced him until 2009).

During this particular moment, Third World intellectuals and leaders were forming economic, political, and ideological allegiances, highlighting their similar and shared histories as exploited colonies, the need for independence, and the right to sovereignty, and the struggle against racism and imperialism. The defeat of U.S. military forces in Vietnam and the success of the Cuban Revolution were pivotal moments, inspiring emerging leaders from the Third World who sought similar outcomes. Many viewed the revolution as an example to follow in their own countries.

Cuban internationalism then, stems from this Third World solidarity movement. What makes Cuban internationalism different than Third World solidarity is the emphasis on action, participation, sacrifice, and armed struggle. For Che Guevara particularly,

[29] For further readings on these philosophies and movements, see (Du Bois 2003; Nkrumah 1973; Prashad 2007).
[30] For further readings on the NAM see: (Gupta 1992; Prashad 2007; Willetts 1978).

ideological solidarity was not enough, but rather military action was needed to cause general insurrections:

> "In a letter to the Tricontinental, Che asked the hardest question of all: What is the value of solidarity when the imperialist guns were not challenged? 'The solidarity of the progressive forces of the world towards the people of Vietnam today,' he wrote, 'is similar to the bitter irony of the plebeians coaxing on the gladiators in the Roman arena. It is not a matter of wishing success to the victims of aggression, but of sharing his fate; one must accompany him to his death or to victory'" (Prashad 2007: 108).

Therefore, the Cuban military missions were the physical manifestation or implementation of Third World solidarity. Cuban internationalism, and particularly the intervention in Angola is unique because of the extent of this south-south exchange in relation to other forms of solidarity: "As for the active participation of Cuban troops in the struggle to defend Angola's sovereignty, this marked the strongest level of external support in an African war of liberation" (Mazrui 1993b: 121).

Cuba has always been Internationalist

A comment I heard various times over by some of my informants was that Cuba has a long history of internationalism. Not necessarily internationalism defined by Marxist terms, as in proletarian internationalism, but rather the idea of international solidarity and assistance. Throughout Cuban history there have been many foreigners who have helped Cuba at key moments during its quest for independence, revolution, and general autonomy.

Historical accounts on Cuba, mostly written in the U.S., frame foreign influence in terms of migration, exile, or simply an interesting footnote. Whereas some of the Cubans I spoke with referred to these historical figures and events as part of an extended history of internationalism on the island going back to colonial times. This alternative,

national/revolutionary history maintains that the spirit of internationalism has defined Cuba since its inceptions and forms a central part of who Cubans are. In part for this reason, Cubans have continued to volunteer for missions throughout the 50 years of revolution to the present day as a way to repay, or uphold the long held tradition of internationalism. Contemporary humanitarian internationalist missions include, but are not limited to: Angola, Bolivia, Brazil, Chad, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mali, Nicaragua, Niger, Pakistan, Tanzania, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. Cuba offered to send medical doctors to the U.S. after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, an offer that was quickly rejected by the U.S. government.

When I asked for examples of early internationalists, I was told about the following historical figures from the colonial and the revolutionary eras. Examples of internationalists that aided Cuba against the Spanish during the independence battles in the late 1800s include Henry Reeve, Máximo Gómez, and José Martí, among others.

During the Ten Years' War,[31] Brooklyn native Henry Reeve fought as a member of the *ejército Mambí* (Mambí army)[32] and died in battle in Matanzas province. Reeve arrived in Cuba as a 19 year old, and came to be known as *Enrique el Americano* (Enrique the American) and *el Inglesito* (the little Englishman).[33]

[31] The Ten Years' War (1868-1878) was a failed attempt at independence from Spain. It started after a group of landowners in *Oriente* province declared Cuban independence. The conclusion of the war was brought about by the Pact of Zanjón, which did not grant either Cuban independence or the abolishment of slavery.
[32] Name given to the Cuban soldiers that fought in the independence battles against Spain.
[33] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Reeve_(soldier).

General Carlos Roloff Mialofsky was a Polish immigrant who served as general in the final battle for independence during 1895-1898. He married the sister of the first president of independent Cuba, Tomás Estrada Palma, and became Cuban Treasurer.[34]

Máximo Gómez y Baez was one of the most important figures in the independence battles against Spain. Gómez, born in the Dominican Republic, was a former officer in the Spanish army. He moved to Cuba in his twenties and became a rebel sympathizer shortly before the Ten Years' War. He was a major general and eventually became the military commander of the Cuban army. Gómez is an exemplary example of an internationalist because he not only offered help to Cuba, but he also sold his belongings and traveled to Puerto Rico to lend his military expertise and raise economic support for a revolt in Puerto Rico against Spain.[35]

A further extension of the idea of independence era internationalism includes the years several leaders spent abroad developing their ideas and military strategies. For instance, Lieutenant General Antonio Maceo Grajales spent time in Haiti, Jamaica, and mostly Costa Rica between the end of the Ten Years' War in 1878 and the start of the final battle for independence in 1895 (Helg 1995). While in exile he communicated and planned a return to the island for the final liberation battle with fellow independence leader and exile José Martí.

José Martí is widely known for his poetry, journalism, intellectual writings, and as the principal martyr of Cuban independence. During the long quest for Cuban autonomy, Martí spent several years living in Latin America, Spain, and the United States, writing, publishing, and gathering support for Cuban self-rule. He was clearly influenced by his

[34] http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/1895/chronology.htm.
[35] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Máximo_Gómez.

experiences outside of the country. His most famous work, a book of poetry, "*Versos Sencillos*," (Simple Verses) was written in the Catskill Mountains of New York in 1890 during his second exile. The poems, mostly autobiographical, reflect on Cuban independence, honor, and love, and several of the verses have become the lyrics for the well-known Cuban patriotic song, *Guantanamera*.

One of the most influential intellectuals in the nineteenth century, Martí advocated independence from Spain and promoted the idea of a unified Latin America, "Our America" (Martí 1977). Although he admired elements of U.S. society, he also criticized its political system, elitism, and growing desire for direct involvement in Cuban affairs. His death on the battlefield during the third and final war of independence is largely considered a suicidal mission, occurring scarcely a month after his return to Cuba in April of 1895. His image and writings are synonymous with a free and autonomous Cuba, and as such both the revolutionary government on the island and the exile community abroad use his image and writings as sources of inspiration. For this reason, it is important to reiterate that labeling well known independence figures like Martí and Maceo as "internationalists," in the same line as Che Guevara would be controversial, to say the least, to anti-Castro opponents.[36]

Further examples of Cuban internationalism can be found during the revolutionary period, particularly with the case of Argentine, Ernesto "Che" Guevara. As a medical student, Che traveled throughout Latin America before meeting Fidel Castro in Mexico City. He was aboard the Granma with other members of the 26th of July

[36] Some scholars, particular Jamaican scholars, have noted the extensive historical connections and political influence between Cuba and Jamaica, phrasing it in terms of internationalism and citing Antonio Maceo, José Martí, and Máximo Gómez as examples. See: (García Domínguez 1988; Manderson-Jones 1990; Payne 1988).

Movement when they landed in Cuba in 1956 with the intention of overthrowing then president Fulgencio Batista. After helping to establish the Cuban Revolution, Guevara continued to travel the world as an internationalist initiating and aiding other struggling revolutionary movements, culminating in his capture and execution during a battle in Bolivia.

Another internationalist that aided the revolution was also killed in Bolivia a few weeks prior to Che's death. Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider, better known as *Tania la Guerrillera* (Tania the Guerrilla), was born in Argentina to communist, Russian-German immigrant parents who had fled Nazi Germany. When she was 15 she and her parents moved back to what was by then East Germany. She was an informant for the Stasi and a state translator because of her fluency in English, German, Russian, and Spanish. In 1960 during a delegation visit from Latin America she met Che Guevara and shortly afterwards moved to Cuba and joined the revolutionary movement. She was trained in espionage by Cuban intelligence and was sent as a spy to Bolivia to get a sense of the political situation in the region before Che and his troops arrived.

Little else about Tania can be confirmed and her life continues to be shrouded in mystery. She was rumored to have been Che's lover, possibly pregnant with Che's unborn child (or someone else's) at the time of her death, a triple agent for the Soviets, East Germany, and Cuba, and the woman responsible for betraying Che's whereabouts leading to his death.[37] Regardless, for the Cuban government she continues to be an important historical figure, an internationalist that fought and died for the revolution. Her remains were returned to Cuba over thirty years after her death. She is entombed

[37] http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article4477656.ece.

alongside Che in the province of Santa Clara, the only woman in the beautiful museum/mausoleum dedicated to Che and the men who died with him in Bolivia.



Figure 1.1 Mausoleum dedicated to Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Santa Clara[38]

Cuban Internationalism in Africa, 1959 - 1975

Revolutionary Cuba first intervened militarily in Latin America – Nicaragua, Guatemala, Argentina, Venezuela, and Chile – but after rapid defeats, Cuban officials accepted that perhaps the populace in Latin American was not yet ready for revolution.[39]

[38] All photographs taken by author unless otherwise stated.

[39] Politicians in Washington who did not want to see another "Cuba" in the Western Hemisphere intervened to stop the spread of socialist and communist uprisings throughout Latin America. They provided aid to conservative political groups and backed military dictatorships and paramilitary groups that came to power through any means necessary. The outcome was brutal

The focus for Cuban officials then turned to Africa, where Cuban leaders believed the on-going independence movements there made the revolutionary process inevitable. During the 1960s, Cuba sent military and humanitarian missions to Africa, starting with Algeria in 1961, and continuing with the Democratic Rep. of the Congo (Zaire), Benin, the Republic of Congo, and Guinea Bissau, among others. In all, Cuba sent military and humanitarian aid to 17 African countries and three African insurgencies (Domínguez 1978, 1989; Durch 1978; Eckstein 1982, 1985; Falk 1986; Feinsilver 1989; Gleijeses 2002; Taylor 1988).

In 1965, Che Guevara went on a three-month tour of Africa where he met with various African leaders to discuss their political inclinations and future plans for their countries. He met with Angolan revolutionary leader, and later the first president of independent Angola, Agostinho Neto. After concluding his tour, Guevara and a military column went to what had been the Belgian Congo for seven months on a failed mission to help a revolutionary movement led by the Simbas.[40] The Simbas were ethnic or regional rebels, but not necessarily a leftist-leaning movement, who at one point controlled the

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civil wars throughout Central and South America. A period of state-sponsored violence and terrorism ensued in countries like Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, with the intention of silencing anyone suspected of having socialist sympathies. During the 1970's through the 1980's, citizens in the region were terrorized, tortured, and disappeared. Women were systematically raped as part of the torture and in Argentina the offspring produced from these violations were given to the families of military officers. Known as the *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War) in Argentina, estimates of disappearances are from 10-30,000 people. In Guatemala it is estimated that 200,000 people were killed during the civil war, approximately 40-50,000 of those were disappeared. And in Chile it is estimated that 1-3,000 were disappeared and more than 30,000 tortured. Since then, hundreds of mass unmarked graves have been found. Truth Commissions have been set up by various governments in the region, and human rights groups and activists like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo continue to demand for more information regarding disappeared relatives and their children. The citizens in these countries continue to suffer from the effects of psychological trauma (Barros 2002; Besteman 2002; Dorfman 1991; Feitlowitz 1998; Harbury 1997; Kornbluh 2003; Sluka 2000; Smith 1996).

[40] The former Belgian Congo was renamed the Republic of Zaire from 1971 to 1997. After this date until the present its official name has been the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

majority of the country. By the time the Cubans arrived, a mercenary army (composed of mainly South African and Rhodesian soldiers) contracted by the CIA was annihilating the rebels (Cooper 2002; Geraghty 2009).[41] Guevara's column found a dwindling and scattered movement, whose surviving members had mostly fled into safe areas and were no longer interested in fighting. Guevara writes about this doomed episode in his Congo Diaries, acknowledging from the first line that: "This is the history of a failure" (Guevara 2000: 1). Guevara and his troops had no other choice but to retreat and leave the country.

Although Cubans participated in armed battles, as in the case of the Congo, the majority of the internationalist missions up to that point had consisted of humanitarian aid and technical assistance in the form of monetary aid, food supplies and medical and educational programs (including full scholarships for Africans to study in Cuba). Often the Cuban doctors, nurses, chiropractors, and dentists were the only health professionals in a given country. Despite Cuba's early involvement in Africa, extensive contact with the guerrilla movements in Angola was not made until the 1970s. In Angola, three main warring factions were fighting for independence from Portugal and control of the country.

Angola's Struggle for Independence from Portugal

Of all the Portuguese colonies in Africa, Angola was the largest and the richest, containing high quantities of precious metals, minerals, and oil. The anti-Portuguese guerrilla movements in Luso-phone Africa became prominent after World War II, and the

[41] Colonial/post-colonial history is very complicated despite the attempt by many authors to simplify the conflicts into ethnic or Cold War ideological rivalries. The reality was much more complicated than that, and the majority of the rebels were trying to gain independence, autonomy, and power at all costs, requesting aid from anybody and everybody regardless of philosophical inclinations. All sides were guilty of committing atrocities to varying degrees against the civilian population who ultimately paid the heavy price for the mess that was left as the colonial powers exited, leaving their former colonies in political and economic shambles.

first large scale battles against the Portuguese military began during the early 1960's. Each Portuguese possession in Africa – Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde – had its respective guerrilla movement battling Portugal for independence. In Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde there was the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde* (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde – PAIGC) led by Amílcar Cabral, and Mozambique had the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* (Liberation Front of Mozambique – FRELIMO) the strongest of the guerilla movements in the Portuguese colonies, led by Eduardo Mondlane. Angola was different, only Angola was internally divided between three warring guerilla groups – the FNLA, the MPLA, and UNITA.

The *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* (National Front for the Liberation of Angola – FNLA) had its base in the Bakongo region. It was led by Holden Roberto and was the strongest militarily, yet its leaders were the least formally educated. They were economically and militarily supported by the United States, South Africa, and for a while, China (by then a rival of the Soviet Union).

The *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola – UNITA), based in the Ovimbundu region, was initially the weakest of the three Angolan guerilla movements and was led by the charismatic Jonas Savimbi who was very successful at getting his group's name and cause known in international circles. He was originally aligned with Holden Roberto and his group, but dissented and instead advocated a Maoist-style peasant based revolution. At the time of independence, Savimbi had an undisclosed agreement with the Portuguese not to fight each other in order to mount a joint attack against the MPLA. After

independence Savimbi switched from "Maoism to Reaganism with scarcely a blink of an eye" and gained the support of the Unites States and South Africa, although ideologically he claimed to be a social democrat (Cooper 2002: 141).[42]

The third group, the *Movimento Popular pela Libertação de Angola* (People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola – MPLA) originally had various leaders, including Lúcio Lara, Daniel Chipenda, and Agostinho Neto, which led to internal friction, strife, and ultimately, party divisions. Eventually Neto emerged as the dominant head in 1960, advocating for a Marxist vanguard elite to lead the country. The MPLA leadership, including Neto, consisted of mostly foreign educated intellectuals who had lived abroad in Paris and Lisbon. The party was the most racially mixed with a high number of mulattos in its membership. Both Lara and Neto were married to white women, and the leaders sought to integrate Angolan whites into the independence movement.[43]

At the time of Angolan independence, the warring guerrilla factions vying for control of the country were ideologically diverse and receiving support from various governments all over the world. For many researchers and journalists trying to understand the root cause of the violence that engulfed Angola shortly before independence and for twenty-seven years afterwards, tribal and ethnic chauvinisms have long been favored as an explanation. But this generalization does not begin to explain the complexity of the situation, and recent scholarship argues for more nuanced analyses of the conflict that stress political, regional, ideological, and economic allegiances with

[42] Economist Keith Somerville suggests that Savimbi was essentially a nationalist who "flirted" with Maoism (1986: 36).
[43] Both the MPLA and UNITA were known to have funded their movements with illegal diamond smuggling throughout the long years of civil war.

individual quests for power, exacerbated by oppositional Cold War politics. The guerilla groups were not necessarily ethnic adversaries, but rather the "conflict became, as Christine Messiant puts it 'ethnicized'" (Cooper 2002: 40).[44]

On April 25, 1974, the Portuguese military, led by war-weary generals tired of defending the Portuguese colonies in Africa, engaged in a successful coup d'état against the Marcelo Caetano dictatorship in Portugal. The coup, known as *the Revolução dos Cravos* (Carnation Revolution), facilitated independence for most of the Portuguese possessions. For Angola, independence would come at a later date because of the importance of its wealth in natural resources and because of internal dissent between the three guerilla groups. In 1975 Portugal and a representative of each of the three factions signed the Alvor Accord in which they accepted the leadership of a provisional Portuguese high commissioner until an official transfer of power to the Angolan people set for November 11, 1975. The agreement also set up an interim collaborative government for Angola made up of members from each of the three guerrilla groups. Portuguese troops would remain in Angola to keep the peace and prepare the white population for evacuation until the agreed upon independence day.

Angolan Independence, Cuban Involvement, and the Cold War

Civil war broke out before independence and fighting resumed between the MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA. The Portuguese troops that had remained in the country to keep the peace did not engage and only intervened to protect the white population that remained in the country. Military advisors from Cuba had arrived to coordinate the

[44] In her work on war and identity during the Angolan civil war, historian Inge Brinkman demonstrates how shortly before independence from the Portuguese, there were 58 different political groups vying for control of the government, of which UNITA, the MPLA, and the FNLA were the largest. And that economic and political differences were the main causes of divisions between the groups and not ethnic or tribal differences (Brinkman 2003: 205-06).

training of an MPLA people's army some months before. The newly trained fighters alongside the Cubans, were successful in taking back regions held by the militarily stronger, U.S. and South African backed FNLA. As independence day approached, the MPLA gained control of the majority of the country including the capital, Luanda.[45]

In the midst of the Cold War and shortly after American defeat in Vietnam, the United States did not want to see the socialist-leaning MPLA take over the country. In order to prevent this from happening, the United States clandestinely encouraged South Africa to invade Angola with its regular army, while the CIA arranged a covert operation to raise a mercenary army as it had in the Congo, recruiting volunteers in Rhodesia, England, Portugal and Brazil (Gergahty 2009). The recruits were mainly untrained youths from England who proved incapable of mounting a successful operation.

The South African army on the other hand was very successful in their onslaught against the MPLA and gained back lost territory for the defeated FNLA. In order to cover up the direct foreign intervention, South African soldiers were told to say that they

[45] Although I have looked at various texts to provide insights into the main events and key players leading up to Independence and beyond, I privilege Piero Gleijeses' account because I feel he has done exhaustive research and is the only person to have access to never-before-seen Cuban military archives as well as Soviet archives. He compares this information with ethnographic interviews, newspapers, journal entries, declassified CIA documents, and other similar documents from other governments involved in the independence wars in Africa. Gleijeses argues against the accepted belief that Cuba acted as a Soviet proxy and details how the Cubans acted alone in their decision to engage troops in Angola, informing the Soviets only after commencing the mobilization process. Most texts written in the U.S. about Cuba's involvement in Angola have Cuba and the Soviet Union acting in unison, or the Cubans following Soviet orders. However, with the new evidence that Gleijeses makes available it seems clear this was not the case at all, but rather the Cubans acted mostly independently in their decision making, particularly in the early stages of the war. The history provided in this section is mostly based on his findings and timelines (Gleijeses 2002). Political Scientist Edward George who also interviewed various officials in Cuba, South Africa, Angola, and the U.S., but mostly privies South African and American documents, also comes to the same conclusion about Cuba not being a Soviet proxy. However, he suggests that during the 16 year involvement there were moments when Cuba was able to express more autonomy in its decision making, and other times where they were forced to follow Soviet orders (George 2005).

were mercenaries from any English speaking country except South Africa. Cuba, like the rest of the world, thought that a mercenary army had attacked Angola. But after the capture of South African soldiers, it came to light that South Africa was not only using regular soldiers, but that the U.S. was also involved in the situation. Up until this point, Cuba had not engaged in any significant fighting and had participated mainly as military advisors and instructors for the MPLA members, many of who had not yet learned how to use the high-tech Soviet weapons. When the Cubans realized how dire the situation had become, Castro requested the mobilization of thousands of troops in the successive months.

Sending the Cuban troops abroad was a difficult ordeal as the planes in the Cuban air-force were not capable of making the trip to Angola without stopping twice to refuel. The U.S. was able to pressure even Cuba-friendly countries into not allowing Cuban flights to land on their soil for this purpose. Eventually, the Soviet Union agreed to provide a limited number of flights to transport Cuban troops. At times fighting alone and with no participation by the MPLA soldiers, the recently arrived Cubans held back the South African army and by independence day, the Cubans had secured for the MPLA Luanda and the majority of the country.

Although Portugal no longer had any control over the country, on November 11, 1975, the Portuguese high commissioner handed over sovereignty to the Angolan people before he and the last of the Portuguese troops departed the country: “That was how Portugal today ended, with little glory and certainly no pomp and ceremony, nearly five centuries of colonial rule” (Gleijeses 2002: 311). All three of the guerrilla factions claimed power, but since the MPLA controlled Luanda and with the majority of the

country under its control, governments abroad recognized Agostinho Neto and the MPLA as the official government. Originally the Organization of African Unity (OAU)[46] was divided in its support of the MPLA, with "leftist" members favoring the MPLA while "moderates" favored a cohesive government with representatives from all three factions. However, after the rapid defeat of the FNLA and South African backing for UNITA, the OAU members united in their support of the MPLA leadership (Mazrui 1993a: 15). Angola became a member of the OAU in 1976 (Ibid: 220).

Thousands of Cuban troops stayed in Angola throughout the 1970s and 80s to help the government militarily against continued attacks from UNITA forces and from internal divisions among the MPLA leadership, including a rarely discussed coup attempt in 1977 against President Neto.[47] Cuban civilian workers also remained to establish and maintain public aid programs. The healthcare system was almost completely run by Cuban medical missions, and Cuban teachers were found in schools all over the country. The Cuban humanitarian missions averaged around 2000 individuals every year (George 2005).

From October 1975, after the South African invasion, until April 1976, Cuba mobilized 30,000 troops in Angola. In comparison, in previous African interventions, only between 500-1000 Cubans had been sent. This two-year period between 1975 and

[46] The Organization of African Unity (OAU) was founded in 1963. It was an "international organization founded to promote cooperation among the independent nations of Africa. The main objectives of the OAU were, inter alliance, to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid; to promote unity and solidarity among African States; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development; to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States and to promote international cooperation within the framework of the United Nations" (http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/AboutAu/au_in_a_nutshell_en.htm).

[47] "Lara Pawson has written of the obstacles that still stand in the way of an open discussion of the coup attempt of 27 May 1977 and subsequent reprisals: an episode that threatens the MPLA's self-depiction as a unified nationalist organization" (Pearce 2010: 19). For more info see (Pawson 2007).

1977 represented the commencement and the height of the intervention in Angola until the final decisive Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1987, which saw more than 50,000 Cuban troops deployed (George 2005).[48]

In 1979, the first president of Angola and the man who made the initial contact with Che Guevara, Agostinho Neto, died of complications from cancer in a Soviet hospital. He was succeeded by José Eduardo dos Santos who remains president of Angola today. Historian Frederick Cooper states that despite the MPLA's pronouncement of socialist ideals, the MPLA government never enacted any socialist changes to help the majority of the population living in poverty except for half-hearted attempts at agricultural reform (2002: 140). Other scholars are more circumspect, suggesting that the long-lasting civil war (Owusu 1993: 344), internal divisions within the government, ethnic, class, political, and regional differences (Mazrui 1993c: 488), and the shortage of educated Angolans and drastic social inequality left by the Portuguese colonial system made reform nearly impossible: "the MPLA had inherited from the Portuguese the massive social, educational, and economic problems of an illiteracy rate of 85 percent" (Somerville 1986: 76).[49] The MPLA government continued to receive aid from Cuba and Soviet Bloc countries until the end of the Cold War, and continues to

[48] For a complete and detailed military history of all the battles during the 16-year intervention, see (George 2005).

[49] As Somerville suggests, the social problems after independence were further exacerbated by class and regional alliances: "While the party stressed the importance of peasant participation and the need to work to improve living standards and social welfare (i.e. health services and education in rural areas, the party had as its political base the urban slum-dwellers, workers and intelligentsia rather than the peasants, although a fair-sized peasant following had been developed in the MPLA's liberated areas and operational sectors and it was certainly the case that many town-dwellers and workers had peasant origins and many retained close links with families in the countryside. The danger was that the party could serve the interests of the small urban proletariat while largely ignoring or at best relegating to second place the peasantry. There was also the danger that the high *mesitço* and *assimilado* membership of the MPLA and its leading bodies could lead to the alienation of the poorer urbanites (a factor that was reflected in the Alves coup and surrounding events)" (1983: 73-74).

gross high revenues from the oil rich fields in Cabinda province today. Even in the midst of the devastating civil war offshore drilling was never interrupted.[50]

Cuito Cuanavale, the New York Peace Accord, and Cuban Withdrawal

The Civil War in Angola continued during the 1980's between the MPLA, UNITA, and all the external actors that were playing out the Cold War on Angolan soil. Cuban troops were present during this time in lesser numbers to maintain control over the borders and the insurrection, as well as to protect their civilian mission. One area of the country, Cuito Cuanavale, a southern town in the province of Cuando Cubango, was the site of heavy fighting during the conflict between the principal actors involved culminating in the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale. The skirmish lasted for three months in late 1987 to early 1988, and is considered "Africa's largest land battle since World War II" (Broadhead 2004: 14). Cuban troops, the Angolan national army, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) – the military division of the African National Congress (ANC),[51] and the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)[52] faced off against UNITA and South African troops aided by Reagan administration overt and covert support.

In the end there was a military stalemate and all sides claimed victory. The parties involved agreed to a diplomatic solution that led to the New York Accord at the

[50] "The Cabinda Gulf Oil Company (Cabgoc), then a subsidiary of US-based Gulf Oil, began explorations in 1958 and was pumping by 1969. Even when Angola gained independence in 1975, and the socialist-style Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) took power, Cabgoc carried on operating. Production was not even affected by the US government's support for Unita rebels; and at one point, in one of the lesser known ironies of the cold war, the Cuban military protected the US company's Cabinda operations from potential attack. Today, Cabgoc (now a subsidiary of ChevronTexaco) is still in Cabinda, where offshore oil installations fill half a million barrels of oil each day" (Pawson 2010).

[51] The ANC was a South African revolutionary group that campaigned against apartheid and came to power in 1994. Its leadership included Nelson Mandela.

[52] SWAPO was a Namibian independence liberation group. At the time Namibia was called South West Africa.

United Nations Headquarters.[53] Representatives of Angola, Cuba, and South Africa agreed to end direct foreign involvement in the Angolan Civil War and on a timeline to withdraw troops. Namibia, then under South African control, was granted independence. The Cubans started to remove the troops over the following months, and by May of 1991 Cuba had withdrawn the last of its troops from Angola.[54]

The 1988 accords coincided with the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries, as well as the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Thus, both sides claim to have inflicted a mortal wound to the other. The U.S. and South Africa maintain that they were securing their borders against a communist bloc invasion that would have been created if Namibia had gained independence, and the prolonged engagement in Angola proved to be the nail in the coffin of communism.[55]

Cuba claims the opposite - it was doing what it had been doing all along – assisting the MPLA leadership at their invitation against a racist apartheid South African government that had invaded Angolan borders and was oppressing their revolutionary brothers in Namibia by refusing to grant them independence. Their relentless battle against South African forces exposed their weakness, ended the myth of white superiority, and led the way to free elections and the appointment of Nelson Mandela as the first black South African president in 1994.

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[53] Also known as the Tripartite Accord or the Three Powers Accord.

[54] A medical mission remains today in Angola. Scholar Edward George states that a small number of Cuban military experts remained after the accords and still remain today, mostly to help the MPLA army protect the oil reserves in Cabinda and as the president's close guards. He further states that there are approximately 150 Cuban-Angolan families in Angola, Cuban men married to Angolan women (George 2005: 270). For more detailed information on the Cuban withdrawal process, see the United Nations Angola Verification Mission I (UNAVEM I) http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/Missions/unavem1/unavemi.htm.

[55] George argues that South Africa was more concerned with preserving their own political power than communist expansion (George 2005: 279).

Who really won the battle? If anyone did it is still being debated. Some day, when all the classified South African, Cuban, American, Russian, and Angolan archives regarding the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale are made available, historians can sort out the details and make better claims of winners and losers. In the mean time, on-line one can find various websites dedicated to this one battle and its greater ramifications. Former Cuban and South African soldiers discuss battle strategies, confer on the artillery used, reminisce about the glory days of war gone by, and question what, if anything, it all meant and why they were there.[56] In a way history has forgotten about these antagonists. The South Africans were fighting for a government and cause that now seems archaic, and if the Cubans won, what did they win? The Soviet/communist collapse eclipsed everything else at the time, and what was being discussed historically at the time was the fall of communism not a win for communist Cuba. And in any case, the civil war in Angola quickly restarted and lasted for another decade.

Despite claims to victory on both sides, the hastily arranged 1992 Peace accords soon fell apart. Contested national elections that same year showed no clear majority for either main presidential candidate, Jonas Savimbi, or sitting president, José Eduardo dos Santos. Savimbi disputed the results and dos Santos stayed in power claiming victory because of a slight advantage in votes. The civil war resumed in Angola for another ten years. During this time the MPLA dropped any pretence of a socialist platform and aligned itself with western neo-liberal governments. Despite the influx of oil money, the huge majority of the population continues to live in abject poverty. Dos Santos has been president since 1979, and although parliamentary elections were held in September of

[56] See for example: http://www.militar.org.ua/foro/cuba-en-africa-guerra-de-angola-t90-600.html and http://www.militaryphotos.net/forums/showthread.php?117771-Angolan-War-Cuito-Cuanavale-Battle.

2008, presidential elections have been postponed until 2010.[57] Political scientist Edward George asserts that the unfortunate outcome is that the MPLA that the Cubans helped to install in power is an "elite in Luanda more corrupt than any administration in Angola's tragic history" (George 2005: 282).

The civil war in Angola finally ended in 2002 with the death of Jonas Savimbi during a skirmish with Angolan Armed Forces.[58] It is estimated that at least one million people were killed in the 27-year Angolan civil war, with thousands more physically impaired.

Not much is said these days in the Angolan press about the support provided by the Cubans and their alliance to the MPLA leadership (Gleijeses 2002). As a former Cuban military member stated in an Internet forum regarding this silence:

> That shows Angola's true gratitude towards the enormous and selfless Cuban endeavor. In time, this assistance will be erased from Angolan memory, since it is in nobody's interest (except the Cubans) that it be remembered. Was it worth it? Nooo…[59]

The End of the Cold War, General Ochoa, and the Special Period

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[57] The last presidential elections were the disputed ones from 1992, and they are supposed to occur every five years. Numerous scholars and activists condemn the MPLA's authoritarian rule and disregard for human rights. Angolan writer Wilson Dada calls the situation the "Mexicanization" of Angolan politics, in reference to the parallels between oil rich Mexico and the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), the revolutionary party in Mexico that held power through controversial means for over seventy years: http://unstrunglarapawson.wordpress.com/category/angola/.

[58] Fighting continues today in the oil rich province of Cabinda, where the rebel insurgency, *Frente de Libertação por Enclavo Cabinda* (FLEC) (Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave), hopes to gain autonomy from Angola. Despite the signing of a controversial peace agreement in 2006, there was a recent attack against the national soccer team from Togo during the early rounds of the 2010 African Cup of Nations. Journalist Lara Pawson speculates that the attacks were not committed by FLEC, but were orchestrated by the MPLA itself in order to paint FLEC as terrorists to the international community in order to garner support for their repressive tactics in the region (Pawson 2010).

[59] "Ése es el agradecimiento real de Angola al enorme y desinteresado esfuerzo cubano. Con el tiempo esta ayuda será borrada de la memoria Angolana, pues no le conviene a nadie (excepto a los cubanos) recordarla. ¿Valió la pena? Nooo..." (http://www.militar.org.ua/foro/cuba-en-africa-guerra-de-angola-t90-585.html).

The end of the Cold War came about suddenly and speedily. The haste with which the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 surprised many, and by 1991 the Soviet Union had collapsed. Cuba relied heavily on the economic and military support of the Soviet Union, and once this aid was gone, the Cubans were forced to end the assistance they gave to other countries, including Angola. Hence, the New York Peace Accords offered the perfect justification to bow out gracefully of the Angolan quagmire that seemingly had no end.

At home, the Cuban government claimed victory in Angola, but this was overshadowed by the economic crash that followed the dissolution of the USSR. The country was quickly spiraling into the Special Period that brought about unprecedented scarcity and desperation. Many asked themselves if the severity of the situation in Cuba might have been avoided if the money and effort spent in Angola had instead been applied domestically.

The withdrawal from Angola was also tainted by the dishonorable events of a few years earlier. In 1989, one of the highest decorated generals in the Cuban military, General Arnaldo Ochoa Sánchez, and other high-ranking officials had been executed on charges of drug trafficking and corruption in Angola. During his trial, which was broadcasted to the Cuban populace, the many crimes for which he and his accomplices were convicted came to light – along with the drug trafficking and corruption charges was added the condemnation of causing irreparable damage of the Cuban leadership's reputation. He was later executed, and in one account of his execution it is alleged that Ochoa asked not to be blindfolded and led the command of his own firing squad. Despite

the trial and execution, many believe that Ochoa was put to death because of his close ties to Mikhail Gorbachev[60] and because of suspected plans to overthrow Fidel Castro:

> One senior Cuban commander [Ochoa], who was implicated in the corruption was taken home and shot for economic sabotage after allegedly being caught trafficking in diamonds, ivory and ebony carvings in exchange for hard currency or hard drugs, though his crime might have been political ambition as much as financial malpractice (Chabal 2002: 165).

The Ochoa episode foreshadowed the questionable end of Cuba's fifteen-year presence in Angola. The enormity of the domestic issues eclipsed much of the commemoration of the departure of Cuban troops from Angola. While Cuba declared victory and the end of apartheid South Africa, the end of the Soviet Union, the Special Period that followed, the legacy of corruption regarding General Ochoa, and the fact that Angola immediately slipped back into civil war, tainted the withdrawal of Cuban troops.

Review of Literature on Cuban Internationalism

When I have discussed my topic of study with other scholars, many have asked me to send book and article citations to give to their students. The reality is there is very little written on this topic specifically. Most books dedicated to African history mention Cuban involvement but as an aside about foreign involvement in Africa, not much different than what has come before or after. And fewer monographs on Cuba or Latin American history discuss this exchange between Cuba and Africa.

The majority of the literature regarding Cuban internationalism in Africa was written while the military interventions were occurring during the late 1970's through the 1980's. Once the Soviet Union fell apart and Cuba suspended its military support abroad and focused exclusively on its civilian and humanitarian efforts, the writings on the

[60] Mikhail Gorbachev was the last head of state of the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1991.

subject matter tapered off until the last decade. The essays and monographs published in this era tend to fall in one of two main categories: 1) autobiography/memoir and 2) political science/military history. However, there are contributions in other fields worth mentioning, such as in economic analysis (Blasier 1979; Roca 1979), biography (Dennis 1985; Taibo 1994), literature (Burness 1996), and journalism (De Costa Dash Jr. 1979).

The autobiographical contributions provide a participant's look at the personal experiences in Angola. Much of the ugliness of war, stories of loss and death, the longing for family, and the higher purpose that I heard from my informants are also echoed on the pages of these diaries. However, the personal becomes rather politicized and it quickly becomes evident on which side of the political divide the publishing editorial is partial to: anti-Castro (Alarcón Ramírez 1997; Fonseca Llorente 1981; Ross 1999) or pro-revolutionary (Dreke 2002; Fulgueiras 1995; Rodríguez Cruz 1982; Sarracino 1988; Surí Quesada 1990; Valdes Vivo 1976).[61] The politics in these writings are very transparent making it difficult to find them useful in my work. It is not that I doubt the sincerity of the scholar, but in my experience talking with informants in Cuba there is more ambiguity and contradiction in the telling of their accounts. Rarely are the memories discussed through such a blatantly political lens.

One could argue that once outside of Cuba these men are free to express themselves openly and demonstrate long held anti-Castro feelings reflected in their dissent of the war. But on the other hand, those leaving the island tend to have (although

[61] The photography of Havana-based photographer, José A. Figueroa, can also be included with this latter group. The current retrospective of his life's work exhibited in a new book (Figueroa 2010) and in various art gallery shows around the world includes images from the year he spent as a photojournalist in Angola from 1982-83: http://www.couturiergallery.com/Acportfolio.asp?eventid=9; http://www.cubaheadlines.com/2010/10/04/26939/jose_a_figueroa_a_cuban_self_portrait_a_book_looking_at_cuba.html; http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/revolucion/photographers.html.

not exclusively) more anti-Castro sentiments. Equally as important perhaps, the politics outside of Cuba, especially in Miami where some of these works were published, are just as dogmatic as in Cuba.

The political science and military history contributions detail the major battles and international players, as well as analyze the reasons as to why Cuba/Castro was sending such significant amounts of military and humanitarian aid abroad. A variety of factors are introduced as possible explanations, including the desire by Cuba for an increase in trade partners, economic gain, and political, hemispheric, or international influence (Adams 1981; Cotman 1993; Domínguez 1978a; Domínguez 1978b; Domínguez 1989; Durch 1978; Eckstein 1980; Eckstein 1982; Eckstein 1985; Erisman 1998; Erisman 2000; Falk 1986; Gleijeses 2002; Grayson 1978; Levine 1983; Moore 1988; Samuels 1983). For example, one theory states that as a prominent member of the Non-Aligned Movement, Cuba hoped to gain influence over other member countries. Another posits that Cuba's involvement abroad supported the idea of internationalizing the revolution.

Global prestige is also offered as a possible reason for the importance of internationalism in foreign policy. The idea being that Cuba cared more about its image around the world than domestically, and has made aid to other countries a visible part of its platform abroad. This sentiment was echoed by some of my informants (see Chapter V). Julie Feinsilver proposes that the medical missions in particular are an example of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. For a country so small, Cuba has an impressive number of medical technicians working overseas:

> Currently, Cuba sponsors what the New York Times called 'perhaps the largest Peace Corps style program of civilian aid in the world: some

> sixteen thousand doctors, teachers, construction engineers, agronomists, economists, and other specialists serving in twenty-two Third World countries. In fact, Cuba has more doctors working abroad (fifteen hundred in twenty-five countries in 1985) than does the World Health Organization (Feinsilver 1989: 11).

A few of the authors discuss whether internationalism proved an economic benefit for Cuba. At times, Cuba received money from a certain number of the governments it helped; mostly if the country was financially well off. However, it did not always receive compensation, most notably from poorer countries. A clear economic gain for Cuba is difficult to prove since most of the Cuban and Angolan documents dealing with this issue have not been declassified. From some estimates, Cuba received at times $20 million/per year – "a 'modest fee' given that any other country would have charged four to five times that amount" (George 2005: 150). Other estimates claim that Cuba earned $300-700 million per year (Ibid). Whatever the amounts, it does not appear that in the long run the intervention was economically viable (Hatzky 2005).

Ideological issues – solidarity with other "progressive" or anti-imperialist/U.S. governments – are also mentioned in the literature as a justification or motivation for the campaigns. It has also suggested that the missions provided Cuba with a training ground for its military. Or a market to "export" the large number of trained professionals in Cuba in order to avoid high unemployment at home, or conversely, to train Cubans in education and medicine (George 2005: 144). However, it is important to point out that Cuba never left behind any military bases in Angola (Pottie 1993).

Race is also mentioned as a possible reason for Castro's Africa policy. Black American civil rights activist Eldridge Cleaver believed Cuba's international policy was a way of getting black Cubans out of Cuba in order to neutralize dangerous elements

(Sawyer 2006: 95). Conversely, Sawyer's argument is slightly different, stating that concentrating on racial politics abroad diverted attention from racial problems at home: "Internationalism allowed the Cuban Revolution to externalize racial problems and the battle against racism" (Sawyer 2006: 63).

Much of the debate in the 1970's and 1980's centered on whether Cuba was acting as a Soviet proxy. Even back then many of the authors concluded that Cuba was not always acting on Russian orders, and recent evidence provided by the declassification of certain Cuban documents seems to confirm this (George 2005; Gleijeses 2006). George's work has demonstrated how the Soviet/Cuban relationship was exceptionally complex and there were various moments during the intervention where Cuba had more or less sovereignty to act (George 2005).

In regards to this study, however, I am not interested in doing this type of analysis behind the motivations of the revolutionary government's policy on internationalism. Was Castro deciding policy based on conviction or individual gain? I do not know. Personally I believe the answer is much more complex than what has been considered in many of the writings. Scholars need to step away from the idea that Castro somehow had a master plan or controlled every step of the way from the beginning of the revolution to the present, without considering the greater historical forces to which he was oftentimes reacting to and that influenced his and his advisors' decisions (Erisman 1985). In all likelihood, Cuba intended for the intervention in Angola to be short-term, and never intended it to last as long or incorporate as many Cubans as it did. The Cubans were not prepared for a military mission of that size, and it was maintained at a considerable cost to the Cuban economy and the families of those involved (George 2005).

Lately there seems to be an explosion of interest in the Cuban intervention in Angola, and the early years of the Angolan civil war, as illustrated by recent publications from foreign scholars and the comments generated recently on a Luso-phone discussion list on books in progress on the subject (Brinkman 2003a; Brinkman 2003b; Carrasco 1997; George 2005; Gleijeses 2002; Gleijeses 2006; Gleijeses 2007; Hatzky 2004; Hatzky 2008; Pawson 2007; Pearce 2010).[62] Their work examines the relationship between these two countries from outside the stifling Cold War prism in which the earlier works by American based scholars typically get caught up. There is nothing unique about a country being involved in the affairs of another, except that in most cases it involves an uneven relationship between a First World and Third World country, the colonial power and its colony, or a contestation between the center and the periphery country. But as these authors contend, the Cuban/Angolan situation, in particular the humanitarian missions, represents an unparalleled instance of South-South cooperation and solidarity (Hatzky 2008).

My interest is also not primarily in the heads of state, high ranking officials, or military officers involved in the foreign policy decision-making process; who are the people interviewed in the works cited above and in recent Cuban documentaries and other war memorials. Rather my work focuses on regular people who were just following orders, those who decided to become internationalists from a sense of duty or on a youthful whim; or those who had little to no say in the events, the Angolan youths that were sent to Cuba and the children born because of the exchange between these two countries. How does internationalism form their sense of nationalism and their understanding of themselves as historical figures?

[62] H-LUSO-AFRICA@H-NET.MSU.EDU.

Salvaging Memories

There is an element of "salvage anthropology" in this project because of the age of participants, and because of the ongoing ideological shift in Cuban society, and arguably world-wide. Although partial releases have occurred, it will probably be many, many years before the military archives in Cuba, Angola, South Africa, and the former Soviet Union release all classified material regarding the military mission in Angola. In any case those documents will not include the life stories of rank and file soldiers, nor of the Angolan children who studied and lived in Cuba and their offspring.

Various researchers have considered the ephemeral nature of memories and the need to record them before they disappear (Frank 2000; Shostak 1981). Anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff "salvage[d] the memories" of a vanishing community of elderly Jews in Los Angeles (2000), and Andrea Huyssen reminds us how a generation of people can take their memories with them after all the members of that generation have passed away. (1995). James Young refers to "collected memories" rather than "collective memories" because at a certain point all the people alive during a particular time will have passed away, and the only accessible memories will be some type of memorial or commemoration (1993). Yet despite the ethical and methodological problems with salvage anthropology, all these authors agree on the need to preserve and record living memories before they are gone.

Many of the veterans I interviewed are older men, and their memories have largely gone undocumented. Moreover, as Young further argues, the struggles of the Cold War specifically are quickly being forgotten and erased by a global amnesia on the topic (1993). The U.S. and its allies won the Cold War, and is the only remaining

superpower, one that dominates much of the global publishing market. The story of these men is not one that will necessarily be heard. Thus, time is of essence in recording their memories before their memory starts to be significantly effected, or the participants pass away.

Because of time and space limitations, this dissertation excludes the voices of those that went to Angola in humanitarian missions, and as a result, many female voices. And while the Angolan side is also not represented, the ethnographic research I conducted among Cuban-Angolans does inform this study.

The following chapter provides an examination of the theoretical debate regarding the embed interrelationship between collective memory, individual memory, and history. It outlines the creation of national, officially sanctioned, state memory during the internationalist military mission in Angola. A reading of the public memory allows for a sense of the inconsistencies and discrepancies between official discourse and private memories to get a sense of what memories have not been incorporated into "official" narratives of Cuba's involvement in Angola. Additionally, Chapter II details the deployment of race in Cuban foreign policy, which involved the formation of a new transnational and trans-racial Cuba.

CHAPTER II
AFRICAN SOLIDARITY AND THE MAKING OF CUBAN (TRANS) NATIONAL MEMORY

This chapter defines and analyzes the relationship between individual and national memory and history. It also documents the construction of a Cuban (trans) national history that emphasized race as its unifying factor and rational for intervention Angola, and the real consequences of this policy which took thousands of Cubans to war in Angola, and thousands of Africans to Cuba.

Memory and History

The interrelationship between national memory, private memory, and history is central to the arguments presented in this dissertation. In this chapter I analyze the construction of "collective" or "national" memory in Cuba regarding the internationalist missions in Angola in order to examine the various mediations between the three. First, I will define the term by exploring the literature regarding national memory. While this chapter focuses on collective memory, Chapter III provides a comprehensive review of the concept of individual or private memories.

Collective memory, as the term implies, are simply put, any memories shared by a group of people. The concept has been studied under various terms, as official, institutional, political, cultural, and historical memory, each calling attention to the mode of production of those memories. Although there is overlap, examples include, "cultural memory" which refers to the product of the public media, including literature, films, art,

and memorials (Sturken 1997); the sites of memory, such as archives, museums, and anniversaries (Feeley-Harnik 1991; Nora 1989); and the performance of memory in public commemorations (Gillis 1994). I am partial to the concept of "public memory" as defined by scholar Lucy Noakes because of its simplicity and since the use of the concept in her research deals specifically with wartime memories. Noakes defines the term public memory by delineating the relationship between public and private memory. Thus, "private memories refer to memories that focus, at least in part, on the individual experience and memories of the war years" whereas "public memories refer to more general images of the war that appear in public sites of memory" (1998: 12-3). Public sites include all those aforementioned – literature, film, the arts, archives, museums, etc.

Having set up the above dichotomy between private and public memory, various researchers, including Noakes, have cautioned about taking the division between what is considered collective or public memory versus what is individual or private as a natural divide (Boyarin 1994). As Noakes suggests: "In the practice of people's everyday lives, of course, public and private memory can be difficult to separate" (1998: 12-13). After all, what the person remembers about an event and how they feel about lived experience is mediated through public memory, societal norms, and one's own inter-subjectivity (Benjamin 1969). Instead the focus should be on how divides, both individual and collective, come to be seen as "natural" or "common sense" and are taken as social fact (Boyarin 1994). Jennifer Cole describes the interplay between what is considered social and personal memory as "a fragile truce among contending social forces" or "multiple memory practices" (2001: 300). Ultimately memory is a social practice and therefore

ethnography is crucial as a way to navigate how public and private memory is experienced (Antze and Lambeck 1996).

Research on national memory has focused on the need of unifying projects for nations, particularly emerging nation states, in order to define the nation (Benjamin 1969; Sommer 1991). A consolidated national memory forms a part of this unifying project which serves to legitimize the nation, governments, and in turn delegitimize other national movements and marginalized people (Werbner 1998). However, national memory is always being contested by other memories – marginalized memories, repressed, forgotten, contending memories, and histories. The association between national memory and consolidated memory leads to an analysis of the tension and interrelatedness between memory and history.

Historians recreate the past with documents, memories, artifacts, and other sources that are considered legitimate. But who does the historical legitimizing? According to R.S. Watson, whatever entity controls the means of production of collective memory, controls the creation, and endorsement of history (1993). Thus, the victors control production of history, the means of writing history (Benjamin 1969).

Looking specifically at socialist states, Watson argues that the production of history in these nations becomes very important as a way not only to legitimize the government, but also as a way to mold the present: “Under state socialism the past was read from the present, but because the present changed (leaders, plans, and lines of thinking came and went), the past also had to change” (1993: 50). Accordingly history is always constructed from the present, is a work in progress, and is used to decipher the past in order to understand the present. Thus, in order to do so, what memories are erased

or forgotten? What is left out of a country's history (Trouillot 1997)? Watson further contends that the socialist state tried to control national memory, but that the citizens would find ways to subvert state control through private memories.

The Cuban case is an interesting one because of how highly politicized the history of the country is. Cuban history produced on the island is probably read with more skepticism than historical accounts in other places. As I stated in the introduction, the few state sanctioned books published on the subject of Angola in Cuba, or in Florida and Spain by members of the exile community are so partial that their embedded politics are quickly apparent.

At the beginning of the military mission in Angola in the 1970s, Cuba downplayed its involvement for strategic purposes and/or to avoid any Cold War ramifications. At the end of the endeavor, Cuban withdrawal and the claim to victory against South Africa was overshadowed by the end of communism in Europe, and the ensuing economic troubles on the island. Thus, no official history on the subject was written, nor was the mission commemorated like important national holidays such as the 26th of July. What is available are newspaper publications of Fidel Castro's speeches from the time, and a few books of fiction, memoir, and poetry. The archives are still mostly off limits. Recently however, the Cuban government is remembering and reclaiming the intervention in Angola as a heroic and altruistic part of Cuban history and national identity. There have been two new documentaries made, and select archives have been declassified. Fidel has even said that the archives were open for "serious" scholars. Among former Cuban internationalists there is a growing interest to publish their memoirs after so many years of silence (Hatzky 2004). But by and large it is the

memories of decorated military officers that are privileged. In the midst of ongoing economic problems and questions of political validity, Cuba is turning towards a relatively recent past to give meaning to the present. In remembering a heroic past in which the government was on the "correct side of history" – after all, nowadays who would be in favor of apartheid? – the government seeks to legitimize its current state and future prospects for the country: "even though this order may be posited as a future hope, something to be achieved in the making, this hope is drenched in nostalgia, the imagined glory that once was" (Daniel 1997: 208).

What has not been addressed as much in the literature regarding the interplay between memory and history is that control of the means of historical production is often outside the country and the government itself, particularly in today's transnational world (Trouillot 1997; White 1995). Thus, history is created from the mediation between collective memory and domestic means of historical production, but also by foreign ideologies, economic and political power, and publishing firms that dominate the global means of historical production and the international market that consumes this history. Appropriately, Geoffrey White asks: "What kinds of history emerge in such moments of transnational memory-making, as representations of a national past are produced in concert with foreign veteran, military, and tourist interest?" (1995: 53).

In regards to the Angolan intervention, this history is just now being written, particularly about key battles like the battle of Cuito Cuanavale:

> Wars make good histories. In particular, they make good national histories… But this business of remembering wars and making national histories is always marked by contestation, by dissonant memories that vie for space in collective consciousness (White 1995: 552).

Until recently, the foreign governments implicated in Angola for the most part denied, downplayed, forgot, or ignored the memories of such involvement.

For South Africa it was an embarrassing defeat (whether or not they actually won the battle, it led to a new government with Nelson Mandela as president), and a blatant reminder of the country's racist and colonial past; one which the country seems to be perfectly content to forget, and with which it is still trying to come to terms. Similarly, the United States wants to erase the fact that the U.S. government was aligned with apartheid South Africa and aiding oppositional forces against the very popular Nelson Mandela and his allies. In Angola, the MPLA leadership has downplayed the extent and decisive role of Cuban involvement in their ascent to power as a unifying and legitimizing project after decades of civil war, a continued rebellion in Cabinda province, and postponed presidential elections (Hatz 2004; Gleijeses 2002; Pepetela 2005; Peterson and Rutherford 2001). And worldwide there is a collective amnesia regarding the concerns of the Cold War (Young 1993).

Perhaps the opposing politics of the Cuban situation, that ideologically pits those for the revolution with those against, makes all Cuban memory contested or marginalized memory. Those recollections, particularly politically neutral and ambivalent ones, are habitually unacceptable to one side or the other. History privileges the decision makers and the archival record that is mostly composed of official policy. Thus, the memories of the ordinary soldiers and civilians regarding the intervention in Angola, those in South Africa, Cuba, Angola, and Namibia, for instance, are all largely marginalized and forgotten. As mentioned previously, there is an increase of interest regarding the transnational exchange between Cuba and Angola, so as more histories of the events are

written, it will be interesting to see what memories are ultimately legitimized and which are not, especially since "foreign actors are the leading authors of the nation's public history of the war" (White 1995: 536). I suggest that the memories of rank and file Cuban soldiers, like the ones included in my study, and the memories of Angolans who grew up in Cuba are particularly vulnerable to global trends that do not historically legitimize the recollections of their experiences.

In the following section, I detail the construction of Cuban national memory in order to examine the mediation between public memory individual memory and history. I follow the official account without much interjection precisely because one can appreciate the construction of a national memory in this case. I leave those reservations for the rest of the sections of the dissertation that deal with precisely those moments where the discrepancies and contradictions between public and private memories become obvious, where the "fragile truce" between the two collapse revealing contested and marginalized memories. This happens most noticeably with the question of race, and deeper support for internationalism as an ideology that would surpass allegiance to nation. As Katherine Verderey contends, socialists states are/were actually very weak because certain aspects of national memory and discourse were never fully accepted by the citizens except at a "superficial level" (Verdery 1991: 427). The fact that internationalism was never fully accepted by Cubans, and instead seemed to produce the opposite sentiment of hyper-nationality is not surprising. Instead what is interesting is to explore the affects of internationalism, particularly race-based internationalism like the intervention in Angola, in those most closely involved.

A Latin-African People – the Making of Cuban (Trans) National Memory

For Cuban internationalism during the Cold War, much of the official discourse of a new revolutionary nation expanded beyond geographically and imperially imposed national boundaries. Rather, discussions of creating a new society included not only the island's citizens, but also ideological citizens worldwide that sought to avoid complete dependency on either of the two super powers. By linking the national memories of various countries struggling for independence, Cuba constructed a collective third world, or a common memory of the underdeveloped world, based on the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. As a prominent Third World actor and member of the non-aligned movement, Cuba, in the midst of the Cold War – which had divided the world in two ideological halves – attempted to erase geo-political borders drawn by European imperialism and aggravated by Cold War politics in order to reconstruct non-geographic ideologically based borders. Central to this transnational space was the notion of "race" and Cuba as an extension of Africa, a "Latin-African" people.

Official Cuban state discourse linked Africa and Cuba historically via blood—shared African blood through the slave trade and the blood spilled on the battlefield in independence and revolutionary struggles. In so doing, an emphasis was placed on Cuba's African roots, claiming Cuba as an extension of Africa, and thereby reversing at an ideological level the various whitening policies common in pre-revolutionary Cuba and the rest of the Americas (Helg 1995 ; Skurski 1984; Sommer 1991; Wade 1997)**.** Rather than being elements that needed to be included or excluded from the national discourse, Africa and Africanness came to define Cuban national identity in terms of involvement in Angola.

A common Africanness was used as the focal point, the justification, and motive for Cuban foreign policy, which included the massive and prolonged exchange with Angola. What is significant about this moment is that it was the government, rather than the diasporic subjects, the Africans or descendants of Africans, who employed strategies to counteract racist exclusionary policies that had been the norm before the revolution. This is unique and contrary to black diaspora cases typically cited in which the government policies are used to erase or "whiten" African elements.

The nearly sixteen-year Cuban military presence in Angola does not allow a day-to-day account of how the intervention was promoted officially. Instead I concentrate on key speeches, mostly around relevant anniversaries, national holidays, and the press coverage of visiting dignitaries, to substantiate the construction of a national memory that positioned Cuba as an extension of Africa.[63]

I consulted two main sites of public memory: Fidel Castro's speeches, particularly during the height of the intervention in the 1970's, and the periodicals—*Casa de las Américas* and *Granma Diario*— the latter is the official government newspaper which publishes full texts of Castro's speeches. Additionally, I also looked at the journalistic writings on Cuba in Angola by Colombian author and long-time supporter of the Cuban Revolution, Gabriel García Marquéz, for a comparison of semi-official accounts intended for an international audience. Lastly, I also gave a more cursorily inspection to state sanctioned internationalists' memoirs published on the island.

Cuban forces were the deciding factor in securing MPLA victory at the time of Angolan independence on November 11, 1975. Yet Cuban involvement was not covered

[63] For an exhaustive study and more quantitative information on the use of Latin-African in Castro's speeches, see (Adams 1999).

in the Cuban press. Average Cubans spoke about family members leaving on an internationalist mission, but many did not know the specifics of the mission. Press coverage of the Angolan struggle leading to independence, highlighting the role of the MPLA was reported as exclusively Angolan. Cuban participation remained clandestine to the rest of the world. However, this changed early in 1976 when Fidel Castro mentioned during several speeches how Cuban involvement in Angolan independence had been a responsibility of Cubans because they were a *pueblo latinoafricano* (a Latin-African people):

> We Cubans helped our Angolan brothers first and foremost on principle, a revolutionary principle, because we are internationalists, and secondary, because our people is both a Latin-American people and a Latin-African people. Millions of Africans were shipped to Cuba by the colonialists, and a good part of Cuban blood is African blood. And today our people are a revolutionary people, a free people and an internationalist people who know how to fulfill their revolutionary duties and their duty toward their brothers and sisters in Angola.[64]

Thus, Castro used blood, inherited blood from Angolan slaves brought to Cuba, to reaffirm contemporary African presence among the Cuban populace.

In a speech two months later, Castro connected Cuba and Angola via historical commonalities: "The victory in Angola was the twin sister of the victory at Girón. For the Yankee imperialists, Angola represents an African Girón."[65] The Bay of Pigs invasion, which took place at Girón beach, was an embarrassing defeat for the United States who assumed incorrectly that the Cuban people would rise up against the revolutionary government upon the arrival of Cuban exile invaders. In this speech, Castro correlates the victory in Angola to one of revolutionary Cuba's most important military victories.

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[64] *Granma* Newspaper, March 17, 1976.
[65] *Granma* Newspaper, May 2, 1976.

On July 26 of the same year, then president of newly independent Angola, Agostinho Neto, was on his first official visit to the island on the 23rd anniversary of the assault on the Moncada Barracks. The July 26 movement was a failed attack in 1953 by Castro and fellow rebels on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba. They hoped the assault would set off a nation-wide rebellion against then president Fulgencio Batista. They were wrong. Instead they suffered a great defeat. Most of the participants were either killed or arrested. During his trial for the failed attempt, Castro gave his now famous defense, *La historia me absolverá* (History Will Absolve Me), and became a national hero to many sparking the flames of revolution. During this defense, he attested to the redemptive power of history that would one-day uphold his actions, thereby placing himself in Cuban and world history even before he was a historical figure.

During the 1976 speech, Castro underscored the significance of understanding the facts that link the Angolan and Cuban people. He again delineated the similar history and parallel revolutionary struggle of the two countries, emphasizing their shared colonial history, comparable revolutionary leaders, ancestral blood ties, and survival as invaded territories.[66] The significance of the Cuban national holiday being celebrated and the inclusion of President Neto in this commemoration cannot be missed. Likewise, the incorporation of Neto into the commemoration of this anniversary situates Neto as a historical figure.

Castro stated that the presence of Neto at the anniversary of the Moncada assault was: "…a living page in history that recalls the history of our own fatherland… At times history develops right before our eyes and we are unable to understand its full

[66] *Granma* Newspaper, July 28, 1976.

significance."[67] Thus, there was a conscious re-telling of the past, tied to current events, to evoke how the two men would be remembered in the future as "history." All those present in the day's activities were witness and participant of history in the making. Moreover, the inclusion of Neto in the festivities of Cuba's national holiday placed the Angolan revolution and its leadership as an important part of Cuba's historical trajectory.

Also during that speech, Castro highlighted Cuban and Angolan shared history as colonies of Iberian imperialism, Spain and Portugal, respectively. Referencing the colonial, he compared Neto to Cuban national independence hero, José Martí, by saying that Neto was an equally relevant figure among the list of great revolutionary leaders. Granma newspaper photo coverage included pictures of Neto paying homage at Martí's tomb with Fidel's younger brother, Raúl. Castro paralleled Neto's and Martí's backgrounds, including their dedication to, and ability to forge, the revolutionary spirit in their people. Castro compared the men's shared intellectual and poetic capacities, as evidenced by their ability to be prolific writers at poetry under conditions of suffering and exile.

The association as poets is particularly significant because just two months prior to when this speech was given, Agostinho Neto's poetry, written during one of his imprisonments, was published in the Cuban literary periodical, *Casa de las Américas*.[68] Thus, the publication of Neto's poetry, confirming his status as a poet on par with Martí, provided a tangible link between the revolutionary figures of both countries. The timing of the publication of Neto's poetry just two months prior suggests a well structured and

[67] *Granma* Newspaper, July 28, 1976.
[68] *Casa de las Américas*, March–April, 1976.

sequential planning leading up to Neto's official visit.[69] It is interesting to note that Neto's poems, as well as four poems published in 1977 by Cuban writer and internationalist veteran, Waldo Leyva, are the only mention of Cuban involvement in Angola in the 1975-2000 issues of *Casa de las Americas*. As a comparison, a number of literary articles and poetry dealing with revolutionary struggles in Nicaragua and Guatemala during those same years were frequently published.

Castro further mirrored the trajectory of the Angolan and Cuban movements towards liberation by stating how he and his men were imprisoned on the *Isla de los Pinos* (Isle of Pines) after the attack on Moncada at the same time that Neto and his men were imprisoned in Angola for similar political activities. Moreover, he set forth that both men were set free because of international pressure in reaction to their imprisonment.

The Bay of Pigs invasion was again utilized to evoke the status of both countries as survivors of imperialist invasions, stressing that it was the defeat of Yankee imperialism at Playa Girón that then made it possible for Cuba to intervene in Angola. Additionally, Castro posited that worldwide independence movements, such as Vietnam and Algeria, were fighting for each other and in collaboration with each other, to combat imperialism and bring about a global socialist order. Thus, isolated events that were

[69] In Lisbon, Agostinho Neto was a founding member of the *Centro de Estudos Africanos* (Center for African Studies) that called for the "study and promotion of creative African literature" and his poetry had previously been published in Italy in 1966 (Mazrui 1993c: 562). Scholar A.A. Mazrui proposes that: "in the case of people like Neto, it is impossible to be sure whether we are studying political animals who became literary or literary creatures who became political" (1993c: 564).

previously unrelated were synchronized, despite geographic distance, by a common goal independent of colonial and imperial powers.[70]

A common African heritage among the diaspora was alluded to yet again by the union of the two countries through blood —the shared African blood and the blood spilled during battle:

> Many are the things that unite us to Angola: our cause, our common interests, politics, ideology. But we are also united by blood [applause], and blood in the two senses of the word, blood of our ancestors and blood we shed together on the battlefields [applause].[71]

Castro emphasized ancestral blood by stating that many Cubans were the descendents of Angolan slaves, and that it was these same former slaves who were the most involved in the battles of Cuban independence from Spain. He parenthetically mentioned how despite Angolan absence from the Montreal Olympics, Angolan would be well represented at the games by the number of Angolan descendents from throughout the Americas, including Cuba.[72]

Bloodshed on the Angolan battlefield further served as an example of Cuban and Angolan brotherhood. Castro stated that Cubans and Angolans alike proclaimed the

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[70] To reiterate, the linking of a common history and revolutionary struggle was not unique to Cuba, but formed a part of the project of Third-World Marxism and the Non-Aligned Movement.
[71] *Granma* Newpaper, July 28, 1976.
[72] According to Africanist historians (Henderson 1979; Coello 1989) there is a dearth of information on aboriginal Angolan societies, and what is available is lacking in detail. The region that is present-day Angola consisted of various ethno-linguistic tribes, including the Kongo, Kimbundu and the Umbundu, among others. Modern borders, many of which were enacted at the 1884-85 West African Conference in Berlin, cut across these ethnic groups arbitrarily as Africa was divided up among European powers. During the slave trade, Angola served as one of the most important commercial ports for the exportation of slaves to the new world. Thirty percent of slaves in the Americas, about four million people, came from Angola (Henderson & Coello 1979: 94). Approximately 400,000 slaves were taken from the Kongo region to Cuba throughout the slave trade, representing the largest African ethnic group on the island. Another large number of slaves came from the various ethnic groups in what is now Nigeria, including members of the Yoruba, Igbo, and Ijaw tribes. By these accounts, about a third of all slaves in Cuba were from Angola.

Cuban revolutionary slogan of *Patria o muerte* (Fatherland or death) as a battle cry while on Angolan soil. Thus, the national boundaries of the two countries were merged, blurred, and ultimately subverted.

Although the troops sent to Angola were racially mixed, the earlier units sent to other parts of Africa in the 1960's had consisted almost exclusively of Cubans of African descent, at the request of African leaders who felt that "Afro-Cubans" would be less noticeable and would fit in better with guerrilla fighters weary of whites (Gleijeses 2002).[73] In this sense, the allusion to the shared ancestral blood and the fraternal blood ties forged on the battlefield was meant to be literal. However, as Cubans of all racial make up were sent to Angola, especially after the initial years, the sentiment towards ancestral blood was increasingly figurative.

In a 1977 speech, Castro discussed the irrelevance of the concepts of nation and tribe, stating that both would be useless and proven equally archaic in the future:

> When you travel though Africa today, you hear about tribes. No one doubts that tribalism should be surmounted – no one in the world. The day will come when no one will doubt that nationalism has to be overcome, too – because, really, what is the nation? A somewhat larger tribe doing much the same thing: [Laughter] the Cuban tribe, the Mexican tribe, the Venezuelan tribe, the Jamaican and Dominican tribes (Taber 1981: 36).

In other words, tribal affiliation usually based on ethnicity, and national affiliation usually based on citizenship, were conflated and found to be equally useless. Thus, suggesting a move beyond traditional and limited ways of dividing and categorizing the

[73] Historian P. Gleijeses mentions how many of the soldiers that participated in the earlier ventures in Africa were shocked when they found themselves in an all black battalion because it was nothing they had ever experienced before. At the beginning, during the selection process in Cuba, only very dark black Cubans were allowed to go and those deemed too light were rejected. However, as the Cubans gained more experience fighting in Africa and they realized that there were mulattos amongst the African guerrillas, they allowed lighter skinned Cubans to participate (2002).

world, to a more inclusive, international or transnational belonging based on Marxist ideology or Third-World solidarity.

As an intellectual, Fidel Castro, is very much aware of the importance of historicism and of his own relevance within history as a revolutionary figure. In addition, he believes in the redemptive quality of history and of the ability of people to constantly recall, mold, and transform past events to enact effective change in present-day situations (Benjamin 1969: 254; Liss 1994: 38-41). Thus, in his writings and oral communications it is clear he does not conceive of the "past" as stagnant and bound by temporal limitations, but as a relevant component of the present and future (Benjamin 1969; Boyarin 1994). He explained the then present action in Angola by creating a past that included the merging of the two countries' trajectories.

In the speeches above, we can see how by creating a national memory that stressed the shared colonial experience through the slave trade and one that emphasized Cuba's African roots, Castro positioned Cuban nationality to include Africa. As such, Castro officially recognized Cuba as an extension of Africa, inhabited by Latin-African people. The legacy of a shared Africanness was the grounds for Cuba's foreign policy and intervention in Angola.

Operación Carlota

World-renowned Colombian writer and Fidel Castro's friend, Gabriel García Marquéz, picked up on many of the themes Castro posited in his journalistic reports on Cuban involvement in Africa. In 1977 he published what is still considered one of the most detailed accounts of the initial Cuban mission in Angola, *Operación Carlota – Cuba en Angola* (Operation Carlota – Cuba in Angola) on behalf of the Cuban government.

True to form, García Márquez's narrative, eloquent and full of historic symbolisms, linked Angolan and Cuban independence. His accounts painted a clearer picture of the physical characteristics, the sights and smells, of "Latin-Africa."

The initial mission to Angola in November of 1975 was named after a Cuban slave, *la Negra Carlota* (Black Carlota). According to the official Cuban timeline of events, she led a slave revolt in Matanzas province on the same day the Cubans left for Angola more than a hundred years later:

> Otro 5 de noviembre como aquél, en 1854, una esclava del ingenio Triunvirato de la región de Matanzas, a quien llamaban la Negra Carlota, se había alzado machete en mano al frente de una partida de esclavos y había muerto en la rebelión. Como homenaje a ella, la acción solidaria en Angola llevó su nombre: Operación Carlota (García Márquez 1999: 137). (On another November 5, this one in 1843, a slave from the Triumvirate sugar mill in Matanzas, called Black Carlotta, had risen up, machete in hand, at the head of a slave rebellion, and was killed in the act. In homage, the solidarity action in Angola was named after her: Operation Carlotta) (Taber 1981: 345).

The Angolan struggle was also linked to the Cuban Revolution. The first military contingent that boarded a passenger plane bound for Angola to aid the MPLA revolutionaries consisted of 82 men. This is the same number of men that accompanied Fidel Castro onboard the boat the *Granma* from Mexico to eastern Cuba, which began the guerrilla struggle in the Sierra Madre, eventually leading to revolution.

Clearly, these similarities are emblematic intersections that piece together Cuban independence, the Cuban Revolution, Cuban internationalism, and Angolan independence, not actual facts and figures. When García Márquez wrote *Operación Carlota*, November 5, 1975 was the official date of Cuban involvement in Angola. The exact date of initial Cuban engagement in Angola has always been in question and Cuba had always denied earlier involvement. But in the last few years Cuban officials and

former intervention officers have stated publicly that advisors/instructors/soldiers were in Angola before 1975. At the time of the intervention, the actual date mattered more since Cuba claims to have become involved at the request of the Angolan government. However, Portugal was still in control of Angola and would be turning over power to representatives of the three factions – the FNLA, MPLA, and UNITA – on the 11th of November. Cuban intervention was at the request of the MPLA and not the Angolan government. The MPLA were able to gain control of the government precisely because of Cuban help before the turnover of power. In all fairness, other foreign governments besides Cuba had also been sending military aid and funding to the three main factions before the transfer of power. Moreover, after initial disagreement, the OAU members supported the MPLA leadership and quickly recognized their government. Regardless of the actual dates and the recent admission of such, the official date of the start of the intervention in Angola continues to be marked in Cuba on November 5th.

The early insistence on those two specific dates, November 5, 1875 and November 5, 1975 is a clear example of how carefully constructed were the symbolic and historical parallels between Cuba and Angola by the Cuban revolutionary government.

Whereas Fidel provided historical and political links between the two countries, García Márquez, related their sensual similarities:

> En realidad, los cubanos encontraron el mismo clima, la misma vegetación, los mismo aguaceros apocalípticos y los mismos atardeceres fragorosos con olor de maleza y caimán. Algunos eran tan parecidos a los angolanos, que muy pronto prosperó la versión festiva de que sólo era posible distinguirlos tocándoles la punta de la nariz, porque los africanos tienen el cartílago blando por la forma en que las madres cargan a los bebés con la cara aplastada contra la espalda (García Márquez 1999: 146). (In reality, Cubans found the same climate they knew in their own country, the same vegetation, the same apocalyptic showers, and the same afternoons fragrant with molasses and alligators. Some Cubans resembled

> Angolan so much that a joke soon made the rounds to the effect that it was possible to distinguish them only by touching the point of their noses, because the Africans have soft nose cartilage from the way they were carried as babies, with their faces pressed against their mother's back) (Taber 1981: 351).

Thus, the countries of Cuba and Angola were one, the sights, sounds and scents, were the same, and Cubans and Angolans were essentially indistinguishable, with the only difference being the cartilage at the tip of the nose, essentially impossible to differentiate.

García Márquez testified to the "africanization" of every level of Cuban society, cultural, spiritual, and natural:

> Había un cambio demasiado notable no sólo en el espíritu de la gente, sino también en la naturaleza de las cosas, de los animales y del mar, y en la propia esencia de la vida cubana. Había una nueva moda masculina de vestidos enteros de tela ligera con chaquetas de manga corta. Había novedades de palabras portuguesas en la lengua callejera. Había nuevos acentos en los viejos acentos africanos de la música popular (García Márquez 1999: 155). (There was an undeniable but notable change not only in the spirits of the people but also in the very nature of things, the animals, the sea, and in the very essence of Cuban life. There was a new male fashion of suits made of light cloth with short-sleeved jackets. Portuguese words had penetrated the language heard in the streets. There were new accents in the old African musical rhythms) (Taber 1981: 356).

In contrast to how the concept of "africanization" is typically employed as something negative, Cuban africanization was positive, uplifting, and enriching for the country and its people. Conversely, in the next passage, by employing the typical usage of "africanization," García Márquez "de-Europeanized" Portugal, Angola's former colonial power:

> Portugal no parecía en realidad una metrópolis europea, sino todo lo contrario: parecía una colonia menesterosa y lúgubre de sus propias colonias africanas (García Márquez 1999: 165). (In reality Portugal did not seem like a European metropolis, instead it was the complete contrary: it seemed like a dismal and needy colony, one of its own African colonies).

In this manner, he challenged and reversed typical colonial tropes of center and periphery, and of metropole and colony.[74]

A key aspect of the construction of Latin-African nationalism, which is alluded to in Castro's speeches and in García Márquez's writings, is the idea that all Cubans embraced this African identity and viewed themselves as brothers and sisters to Angolans. Thus, all Cubans understood the reasons behind the internationalist mission and were eager to participate and defend Angola as they would Cuba, thereby helping themselves as well as the revolution. As one high ranking internationalist veteran stated in a book about his adventures:

> We say we have African blood in our veins, and you see this in Cuba every day, with our dance, our music, everything. It doesn't matter whether your skin color is lighter or darker. There's an African presence in all of us (Dreke 2002: 151).

In this manner, the responsibility and the initiative of the involvement in Angola was placed on the Cuban people, and not with individual actors, like Fidel Castro, or on an outside force, like Moscow. Castro was merely voicing what the people wanted, and what the people wanted was to aid their brethren in Angola, what García Márquez called a "genuine people's war" (García Márquez 1999).

Gender, Sexuality, and Sacrifice

[74] Spain and Portugal have long been thought of as "backwards," especially in comparison to England and France. This idea is supported by the biographies of MPLA leaders. One such high ranking official, Américo Boavida, argued that Portugal never went through an industrial revolution because the country held on so long to its colonies and overly depended on them. He spoke of a "collective colonialism" in which both Angola and Portugal were trapped, stunted, and never developed. Moreover, he observed that Portugal and Angola were collectively colonized or neo-colonized by foreign powers, such as the United States, or economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund. This idea of Portuguese inferiority has served as an explanation as to why the Portuguese "got along so well" with the Africans (Boavida 1972: 6; Khazanov 1986; Sissako 1997).

Iconography of female combatants has a long history in Cuba, starting with the *mambisas* (black, female independence fighters), like Black Carlota, whose image was later appropriated by the revolutionary government to promote internationalism and create a historical bond with Angola. The figure of the Cuban female combatant who is willing to battle and die for her country is a powerful image used to shame and humiliate enemies since colonial times (Stoner 2003: 92). During the Cuban intervention in Angola, the image of the female combatant was extended to internationalist causes, she fought willingly and loyally on behalf of Africa, and as such, she was a transnational soldier.

In *Operación Carlota*, García Márquez related the story of the first woman sent to Angola:

> La primera mujer que se fue, a principios de diciembre, había sido rechazada varias veces con el argumento de que <<aquello era muy pesado para un mujer>>. Estaba lista para irse de polizón en un barco, y ya había metido su ropa en las bodegas con la complicidad de un compañero fotógrafo cuando supo que había sido escogida para irse legalmente y por avión. Su nombre es Esther Lilia Díaz Rodríguez, una Antigua maestra de veintitrés años que ingresó en las Fuerzas Armadas en 1969, y tiene una Buena marca en tiro de infantería (García Márquez 1999: 141). (The first woman that was sent, early in December, had been turned down several times with the argument that <<it would be too rough for a woman>>. She was all set to go as a stowaway on a ship and had already hidden her clothes in the hold with the help of a photographer, when she found out she had been finally chosen to go legally, and by plane. Her name is Esther Lilia Díaz Rodríguez, twenty-three, a former schoolteacher who joined the armed forces in 1969, and an excellent markswoman (Taber 1981: 347-8).

The Cuban female soldier is portrayed as persistent and eager to do combat abroad. She does not follow orders, because the justifications given that it would be too difficult for her as a woman are flawed since the Cuban female is no mere woman for whom military

combat would prove too difficult. In the end, her allegiance is noticed and rewarded by proper inclusion into the battalion and the right to fight abroad.

In another passage from the same piece, the presence of women in Angola is utilized to shame Cuban men to become internationalists:

> Y de una mujer que estuvo a punto de ser admitida como soldado raso… En cambio, un sargento de veinte años no consiguió que lo mandaran por ningún medio, y sin embargo tuvo que soportar con el machismo herido, que mandaran a su madre, que es periodista, y a su novia, que es medico (García Márquez 1999: 141). (And a woman who was almost admitted as a rank-and-file soldier. … Then there was the twenty-year-old sergeant who, despite his efforts, was turned down, and had to nurse his wounded male ego when his mother, a journalist, and his fiancée, a doctor, were sent to Angola) (Taber 1981: 347).

Consequently, the male who cannot participate, even despite his willingness to do so, is emasculated in the face of the women in his life who are internationalists. During wars, women, motherhood, and wives are politicized, affecting the relationship between the men/soldiers, the women, and children in their life (Higgins and Silver 1991).

In contrast to the heroic female combatant, women were portrayed differently in the literary works that emerged from the period. Poems and memoirs make up the bulk of these texts, and the writers were mostly white males. The central theme in the writings is the desire the soldier (and author) has for women, both Cuban and Angolan. Along these lines, women's bodies, a longing and nostalgia for women, and women and children are also prevalent. The men/soldiers in the writing express the need to protect and defend the women (Burness 1996; Dreke 2002; Fulgueiras 1995; Guevara 2000; Rodríguez 1982; Sarracino 1988; Surí Quesada 1990; Valdés Vivo 1978; Waters 2000). Femininity compliments and promotes the masculine, and is used as a rationalization for being at war, by providing a feminine symbol of the nation itself, vulnerable to attack, penetrable,

and in need of its male populace for protection (Verdery 1991). After the revolution there were significant changes and advancements made in regards to women's issues in Cuba, and new rights and opportunities made available to women.[75] Internationalism provided a way for Cuban women to achieve full status as an ideal Cuban citizen since they are not allowed to serve in the military. Specifically, the missions gave women more independence, and the first and sometimes only opportunity to travel outside the country.

Ultimately however, the heroic female internationalist upholds strong male control of the government (Stoner 2003). Women are included in male war fantasies as symbolic figures to save, protect, die for, and return home to, but "real" women, their contribution to the war and nation outside the fantasy are oftentimes erased or looked over (Higgins and Silver 1991). In particular, much has been noted about the lack of female representation in the government and permanence of sexist attitudes: "The revolutionary war was indeed very much a male affair, although women were involved in the urban struggle and in the struggles in the Sierra Maestra. The leaders of the revolution, however were and are almost exclusively men" (Rosendahl 1997: 86). Cuban masculinity emphasizes strength, bravado, the ability to take care of one's family, sexual conquest, and most importantly in revolutionary Cuba, the idea of sacrifice. Cuban men and women are expected to sacrifice and constantly do more for the revolution: "Every good revolutionary must sacrifice whatever is necessary and to do so willingly" (Rosendahl 1997:148), but men are particularly vulnerable to the ultimate sacrifice,

[75] The Cuban Family Code which, legalized in 1975, gave women equal rights in the household/marriage and stated that men were expected to share in the household responsibilities. (Successful implementation of the Family Code depends on the individual couple/family, but in general, women are still expected to do the large majority of household chores, including cooking, washing, and cleaning.)

death, because of their representation in the Cuban military and in the military missions abroad.

The bulk of internationalist coverage in the Cuban press during the intervention revolved around the all male Cuban and Angolan leaders, and the physical strength and might of the mostly male military from both countries. Currently, although women are mentioned in the commemorations of the intervention, male soldiers and the military missions are center point. As Margaret Randall argues:

> …women's lives were changed to better serve the goals of the revolution, not for their own self-realization. [The Cuban Revolution did not] encourage the development of a feminist discourse that allowed for any real female autonomy (1992).

The focus on a mainly male military activity can serve as a productive entry point with which to analyze the creation of gender ideologies (Brown 1998; Cook and Woollacott 1993). What language is used to talk about Cuban women, Angolan women, and female sexuality in general? What war stories do these men tell about women and how do they relate them as peers, fellow citizens in the fight against racism, and internationalists? 'An examination of the culturally constructed meanings of Angolan, Cuban, and *negro* reveal the formation of a gendered and racial politic of internationalism' (Brown 1998). The following chapter analyzes the language of gender during the intervention in Angola.

The Fight Against Apartheid South Africa

The emphasis on Cuban/African transnationalism and the Latin-Africa policy appeared right at a time when African countries were trying to define themselves as sovereign nations, rather than transnational entities. The focus on Cuba as a Latin-African nation died down after most African governments began embracing capitalism.

Subsequently, by the end of the intervention in Angola, Castro was emphasizing the fight against racist South Africa and its imperialist backers as the reason for Cuban involvement in the country.

During the 1980's, official discourse regarding Cuban involvement in Angola shifted to the struggle against the South African invasion of Angola, solidarity with Nelson Mandela and the ANC party to end apartheid, and with Namibia's effort to achieve sovereignty, also from South Africa. This was expounded as the justification for Cuban intervention and continued permanence in Angola, despite the fact that it was not the explanation given early on. The Cuban press covered the progression of Cuban and African freedom fighters as they fought together to oppose the advances of apartheid and imperialist South Africa. Thus, race was still a factor in official discourse regarding the intervention. Much of the imagery of shared blood spilled on the battleground, a shared history, and African solidarity remained the same, but in terms of the struggle against racist ideology and practice.

The close relationship between Nelson Mandela and Fidel Castro has been a very public one, both sending the other gifts and well wishes on their birthday.[76] On numerous occasions Nelson Mandela has defended his friendship with the Cuban leader stating that Castro and the Cuban people were there for him and his movement when no one else was:

> Many people, many countries, including many powerful countries, have called upon us to condemn the suppression of human rights in Cuba. We have reminded them they have a short memory. [Laughter] For when we battled against apartheid, against racial oppression, the same countries were supporting the apartheid regime. [Applause] A regime that represented only 14 percent of the population, while the overwhelming majority of the people of the country had no rights whatsoever. They

[76] "Castro Sends Mandela 88th Birthday Cigars," July 17, 2006, Yahoo News.

> supported the apartheid regime. And we fought successfully against that regime with the support of Cuba and other progressive countries. They now want to be our only friends, and dare to ask us to renounce those people who made our victory possible. That is the greatest contempt for the morality and the principles which are the basis of our relations, not only with the various population groups in this country, but with the entire world. And I wanted to make a commitment that we will never let our friends down, friends during the most difficult period of our struggle, especially Cuba [Applause] (Mandela 1995).

In a 1988 speech Fidel Castro proclaimed the relevance of the role of Cuban internationalism along with the other African freedom fighters in the continent of Africa when he declared: "the history of Africa will be written as before and after Cuito Cuanavale," referencing the contentious and hard fought battle between all the above mentioned parties.[77] The book, How Far We Slaves Have Come documents the speeches given by Fidel Castro and Nelson Mandela in Cuba on July 26, 1991 that link the histories of Cuba, Namibia, South Africa, and Angola in their struggle against apartheid. Once again it is important to note the significance of linking Cuban and African history, and memorializing the victory of Castro's Cuba, Mandela, and anti-apartheid Africa on July 26th – the Cuban national holiday commemorating the attack on Moncada, and the subsequent movement that overthrew Batista.

Currently in Cuba, commemorations regarding the intervention in Angola reference Cuba's involvement in the fight against the U.S.-backed South African invasion in southern Angola, and for Namibian liberation from apartheid South Africa. The aid offered in 1975 that helped the MPLA gain control of power after independence are merged with the final battle in Cuito Cuanavale where Cuban and South African forces met. Thus the entire endeavor is conceived as a fight against imperialism and racism.

[77] 1988 http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html.

The fact that there was a civil war going on and other Angolan factions vying for power is glossed over – if mentioned, they were simply South African or imperialist cronies.

The Legacy of Racial Solidarity

Although it is easy to be cynical about the "real" government motives behind the Cuban intervention and the decades long presence in Angola, the fact remains that thousands of people interacted, migrated, left, stayed behind, died, killed, and were born as a direct result of this intervention. Part of the legacy of the African centered policy in Angola include the creation of the Cuban-African Friendship association, the African National Congress office in Havana, as well as the Africa House and the House of Angolan culture, both in old Havana. Greater emphasis was placed on the cultural importance of the National Folkloric Group; there were Pan-African literature and art exhibits, and generally more artistic exchanges between Cuba and Africa.

Various African leaders and dignitaries were invited to the island and awarded special honors and recognition. The Cuban government also reached out to the majority black population Caribbean. In 1979 Cuba hosted the pan-Caribbean conference, Carifesta, and articles and speeches leading up to the event also mentioned a common heritage, the unnecessary borders that were barriers between the Caribbean peoples, and the need for unity and pan-Caribbean identity (Adams 1999: 193-4).

Perhaps most importantly, there were new members of the African diaspora to the Americas: thousands of Africans (many of them war orphans) sponsored by the revolutionary government in Cuba to study, train, and live. Most were housed in international instruction centers on the small island off the southwestern coast of Cuba, the aforementioned Island of Pines, now renamed the *Isla de la Juventud* (Island of

Youth), formerly called the *Isla de los Pinos* (Island of Pines). By 1984, approximately 15,500 Angolan children had studied in Cuba, and during 1987-1988, there were 16,000 students from thirty-seven countries on the Island of Youth (Stubbs 1988).[78] Foreign students still remain today around the island. In 2006 there were 30,000 students from forty-four African countries enrolled in Cuban schools.[79]

Presently, most of the research on this historic moment seeks to explain the economic and political reasons for Castro's involvement in Angola. Only one study to my knowledge has explored why "race" was used as a justification for internationalism as opposed to other possible ideologies, such as Marxist solidarity void of discussions of race, or the fight against imperialism. Instead the government leadership strategically chose to use historic and contemporary ties to Africa as its rationale. As political scientist Gordon Adams argues:

> There is no sense that the government believed a mobilization campaign centered exclusively on ideological principles would not resonate among the Cuban people. In large measure, the stress on racial solidarity appeared to be directed toward addressing potential criticism of Cuba as a foreign force of occupation, similar to previous colonial rulers (Adams 1999: 185).

According to him, the Cuban government positioned itself as an extension of Africa, in order to avoid being viewed as an intrusive, colonizing force.

Nelson Mandela has stated that Cubans never went as colonizers to Africa, but instead to aid the people of Africa.[80] Whereas scholars of Angolan history and

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[78] Data comes from (Stubbs 1988) and *Granma* Newspaper, January 21, 1984.
[79] "Cuba Grateful to AU Leaders," The Daily Observer, AllAfrica.com, July 19, 2006.
[80] "Cubans came to our region as doctors, teachers, soldiers, agricultural experts, but never as colonizers. They have shared the same trenches with us in the struggle against colonialism, underdevelopment, and apartheid. Hundreds of Cubans have given their lives, literally, in a struggle that was, first and foremost, not theirs but ours. As Southern Africans we salute them.

ethnography have suggested that Cuba was not always welcomed as humanitarians or 'brothers in third world revolutionary struggle,' but rather as corrupt, 'better colonizers than the Portuguese,' and imperialist (Chabal 2002; Clarence-Smith 1980; Cooper 2002; Geldoff 1991; George 2005; Hatzky 2008; Hodges 2001). Interviews with affected Africans, as well as my own limited interviews with Angolans, demonstrate that lived experience is usually more intricate than two mutually exclusive choices. There is ambivalence regarding both Cuban involvement and the actions of the Angolan government.

This disparity serves to highlight how various people experience and remember events differently depending on a variety of factors, particularly how the accounts of high ranking officials or heads of state, ie. Nelson Mandela, might differ from civilians and rank and file soldiers. In any case, how may a rethinking of Cuba as a colonizing power complicate current norms in the study of empire and colonialism, especially considering the country's direct influence and engagement in so any countries abroad? Or alternatively, is an outside force always a colonizing force?

After decades of civil war, Angola is involved in a unifying nationalist project to placate internal divisions and discontent. Angola's "public memory" is at odds with Cuba, since independence and the ensuing civil war was a foundational moment for the new nation (Sommer 1991). Recent work documents that part of this project includes the erasing of Cuban involvement in the war of independence in order to stress national unity, sovereignty and achievement (Glejeises 2002; Pepetela 1995).

We vow never to forget this unparalleled example of selfless internationalism." *Militant*, Vol. 59, no. 39, 23 October 1995.

In Cuba, the term "Latin-African" or Cubans as a "Latin-African people" has been collectively forgotten, or perhaps never remembered (Casey 1987). Not one person I interviewed recalled ever hearing this terminology, and much less recalled it being used as a rationale for intervention in Angola. This includes all the veterans I interviewed and two noted Cuban scholars on race and racial issue in Cuba. One of these scholars was surprised that he did not remember hearing or reading the term despite his familiarity with the issue, and concluded, "*no se me grabó*" (it didn't register). This is both surprising and not. The fact that the average Cuban on the street does not recall the term "Latin-Africa" is understandable, because as historian Watson has described, people under socialist states try to subvert state control of public discourse and practice through their private memories, and many Cubans do not register general government propaganda despite its ubiquity (1993). However, the fact that a well-versed scholar does not recall any mention of the term perhaps implies that the "Latin-African" based foreign policy was probably meant more for a foreign audience than a domestic one for the aforementioned reasons.

The military missions in Africa and Latin America were largely clandestine and downplayed because of ramifications from the Cold War and strategic purposes, especially at the beginning of the intervention. As a result of the general silence regarding these missions, Cubans did not openly talk about their experiences or actively commemorate the fallen until the return of the bodies of the dead once the troops were pulled out (see Chapter V). For the most part Angola is a forgotten war, especially among the young. For those who can remember it is a rarely, if ever, talked about war. However, since the end of the Cold War and subsequent economic crash, the Cuban

government has made efforts to honor and remember those involved in Angola. As historian Stephen Ellis contends, "a rhetorical insistence by political leaders on the ideals of the past is a way of avoiding the real political debates of the present." (2002: 7). Recent publications and broadcasts recounting Cuban heroism in Angola indicate an official attempt to rescue these memories as a source of revolutionary pride in the face of ongoing economic problems. One example is the multi-part TV documentary commemorating the 30th anniversary of the initial battle in Angola that was produced and broadcasted during November 2005, and that has been rebroadcast annually since then on the anniversary of the start of the intervention.

John Gillis notes the importance of states in creating and controlling sites of commemoration, such as the school curriculum included in textbooks, films, and the recent commemorative documentary series (1994). The rest of this chapter will briefly look at these contemporary sites of public or collective memory. The analysis will focus on how race and gender are addressed and how Cubans and Angolans are represented.

Textbooks

I spoke with both primary and secondary school teachers, and perused history textbooks to understand when and what Cuban children are taught about internationalism. Children learn about Argentine Che Guevara and his contributions and participation in the Cuban Revolution early on in primary school, but they are first introduced to proletariat internationalism and Cuban missions abroad in the ninth grade. The chapter, entitled: *Principales manifestaciones de la política internacional de la Revolución Cubana* (Principal Manifestations of the Cuban Revolution's International Policy), posits internationalism as a historical tradition of the revolution:

> La Revolución Cubana es heredera de la tradición solidaria e internacionalista que siempre se ha manifestado en nuestro proceso histórico, y ha aplicado consecuentemente esos principios desde los primeros momentos posteriores al triunfo revolucionario. (The Cuban Revolution is heir to the tradition of solidarity and internationalism that has always been manifested in our historical process, and as a result those principles have been applied from the earliest moments after the triumph of the revolution) (Valdés López, et al 1996: 39).

Missions to Algiers and the Belgian Congo are covered, as well as solidarity with the war effort in Vietnam.

The Angolan mission is studied in depth in the tenth grade. Mostly in the form of discussion points, tenth graders learn how many internationalists were sent, how many died, how long the endeavor lasted, the affected areas, and that the help of the Cuban military produced a clear win in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale (Appendix A has the original text in Spanish and the English translation). In addition, students in some classes are taken to the homes of former internationalists or family members to learn directly from them about their experiences (Chapter V contains a meeting with such a family). Predictably, in talking to youth what is retained from their history lessons regarding this time period is rudimentary. As can be expected from a secondary school textbook, the history regarding internationalism is straightforward, uncomplicated, and conforms to official history.

N'Vula

"N'Vula" is a 1981 animated short produced by the *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC) and directed by Juan Padrón that depicts a confrontation between the Portuguese and a group of Angolan children. In the film, Portuguese soldiers intend to blow up a school for Angolan children and a nearby guerilla camp. They capture a little girl, María, but she and other kids working together with

adult Angolan guerillas are able to outsmart the Portuguese and save the school and camp. In having children as the principal characters in the film, the animated short gives Cuban children a juvenile image and role models of internationalism to which they can relate and emulate.

The Portuguese are depicted as blondes, whereas the Angolans are referred to as "*negritos*" (blacks).[81] Interestingly, the film contains no reference to Cubans or Cuban help, and the Angolans solve their own situation with no outside help. In the Cuban newspaper the *Granma*, Cuban assistance was also omitted around the same time during the mid to late 1970's and early 1980's. Angolan success against South Africa was reported, while Cuban involvement was either not mentioned or greatly downplayed. The Cubans contend that this was done as part of military strategy.

The publicity still for the film portrays a thick-lipped African or person of African descent; one can assume an Angola, choking a blonde, blue-eyed "Uncle Sam" around the neck (See figure 2.1). For years *Granma* newspaper has published several images of a similar looking Uncle Sam being overpowered or outsmarted by a caricature from Cuba or the Third World.

[81] *Negritos* is in the diminutive, and depending on tone and/or context can be used as a term of endearment or pejoratively.

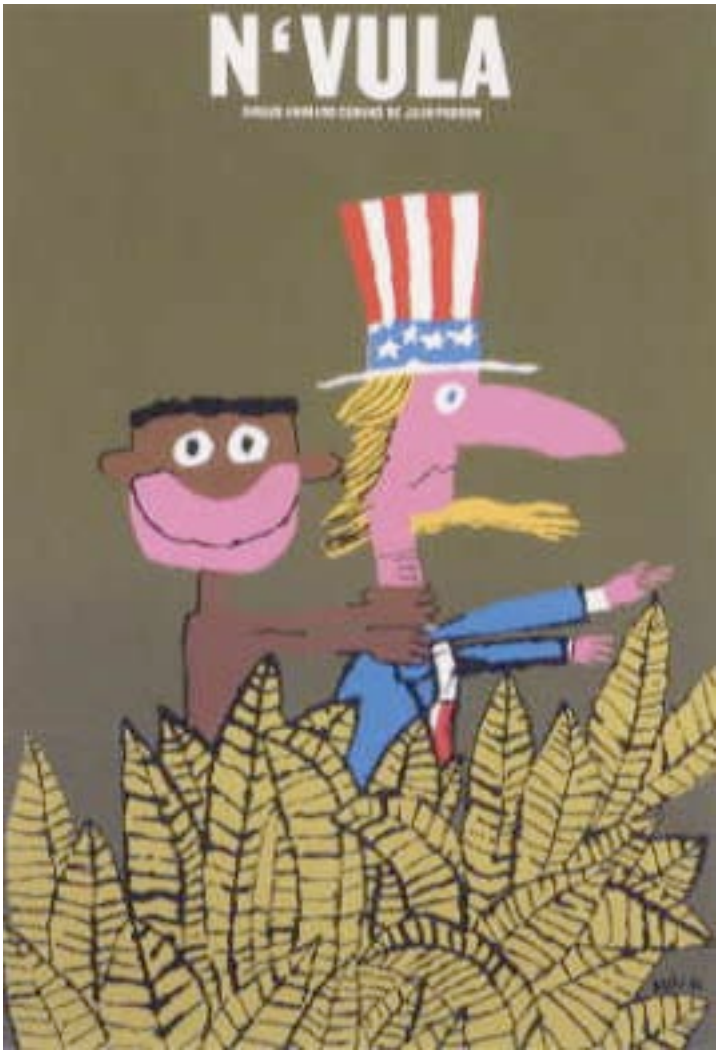

Figure 2.1 N'Vula Publicity Still

Caravana

Caravana (Caravan) is a 1990 film shot during Cuban withdrawal by directors Julio César Rodríguez and Rogelio París. The film follows a Cuban convoy/caravan as it tries to get food and supplies to Cuban soldiers fighting in Central Angola. They struggle against a South African army joined with UNITA forces bent on thwarting their efforts. Events mostly center around one character, the very likeable Rubio, an explosive disposal technician who carries around with him a pet monkey. UNITA combatants kill Rubio and the battalion general at the end of the film.

The cast representing Cubans is mixed racially, but the main characters are white. In the film Angolans and Cubans are visually differentiated through their coloring and dress. Angolans have the darkest skin tones in the movie, and the civilian clothing has richer, more vibrant colors. They are distinguished by language, with Angolans speaking in Portuguese, and the South Africans in English – both with subtitles. For simplicity, the directors could have chosen to have everyone speak Spanish or given these characters accents, but instead they had them speaking in their native languages. Cubans are shown speaking in Portuguese/Portunhol with the Angolans.[82] The UNITA soldiers are distinguished from the Cubans and Angolans by their darker green uniform, in general darker skin color, and matching black berets, similar to one that UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi wore on certain occasions. They terrorize the villagers and set entrapments for the coming Cuban convoy.

The members of the caravan remove land minds along the route to their final destination to distribute supplies. As the caravan arrives into a town, the Angolans line up to greet them with cheers. The all male Cuban troop is animated by the arrival of Paloma, a white Cuban military member, and several of them vie for her attention. The men discuss the need for "beauty" during war while watching a black Angolan and a white Cuban woman dance. Issues of infidelity and spousal separation are mentioned. One of the male characters is concerned about his wife's possible infidelity back home, and a young internationalist couple worries about their upcoming deployment to different areas. Angolans and Cubans are shown socializing.

The great majority of people I spoke to about Angola would mention this film to me and told me I had to see it. It has been widely viewed on Cuban TV (see Chapter IV).

[82] Portunhol is a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese.

Both this movie and the following film, *Kangamba*, essentially adhere to public/official memory, but like many films produced by the ICAIC, they are high-quality projects with multifaceted and well-developed characters. However, the films are about the Cuban experience in Angola, thus Angolan characters, although present, essentially are secondary characters.

Kangamba

A recent release, *Kangamba*, is a 2008 film directed by Rogelio Paris. The events take place during a decisive battle in 1983 in the village of Cangamba in the southeastern province of Moxico in Angola. A small group of Cubans and Angolan soldiers from the *Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola* (People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola) (FAPLA) are outnumbered and under attack by the better-equipped UNITA and South African army. Through sheer resilience and with the aid of superior air reinforcements sent from Havana, they manage to hold back the onslaught at a high cost to both Cuban and Angolan soldiers.

Mayito, a white Cuban soldier who returns to Angola after being home in Cuba for only 24 hours, narrates the film. The movie depicts the solidarity between the Cuban and Angolan soldiers as well as between black and white Cubans. The FAPLA general calls the Cubans *primo* (cousin), and a white Cuban *campesino* (man from the countryside) and a black Cuban *Habanero* (man from Havana) are said to be like father and son. The main Cuban characters, however, are mostly "white" in contrast to the FAPLA and UNITA who are black. The military leaders in Havana are also mostly white. The Cubans positioned in Angola are shown drinking alcohol, dancing, and fraternizing with their Angolan hosts.

As with *Caravana,* the Angolans and Cubans speak in Portuguese and Portunhol, and the UNITA generals speaks in Portuguese to each other and in English to the South Africans advisers. The Angolans living in the *quimbo* and the Cubans stationed there are under constant attack not only from UNITA, but also from the flora and fauna of the Angolan bush. The women are dressed in bright colors, and many of them are topless. Suffering from the violent effects of war, the village tribal leader realizes that he can no longer protect his village and states that the Cubans are in charge because they are the only ones that can salvage the situation. The small group of Cubans tries different strategies to survive, including placing a land mind to prevent an UNITA rear retreat.

At the beginning of the movie, Mayito asks the young local Angolan doctor, João, to give him an injection for an unnamed venereal disease (most likely syphilis), and João warns him to be weary of Angolan women for that reason. João dreams of going to Cuba to study medicine, and he and Mayito develop a friendship based on mutual respect. Nevertheless, Mayito and many of the other Cuban men are interested in João's sister, Maria, a beautiful Portuguese speaking Angolan. Although João initially warns his sister that Mayito will not take her seriously, Mayito and Maria commence a passionate love affair. Mayito acknowledges in the narration of the film that he has fallen in love with Maria.

Most of the film portrays battles between the FAPLA, the Cubans, and UNITA. The film shows several Cuban casualties and injuries, and the fact that many Cubans were maimed. Themes of sacrifice and Cuban masculinity are at the forefront. For example, one young soldier loses an eye, but he is still willing to fight, whereas another Cuban soldier "*se empendeja*" (acts cowardly), but eventually proves himself on the

battlefield. The film ends with a Cuban/Angolan win, but it is a bittersweet victory because of high casualties on all sides.

30th Anniversary Documentaries

Two documentary specials were produced in 2005 for Cuban television by Cuban journalist Milton Díaz Cánter, himself an internationalist, to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the intervention in Angola.[83] The first is entitled *Operación Carlota* (Operación Carlota), and it deals with the beginning of the intervention. The second documentary is a twenty-two part series (11.5 hours), entitled the "*Epopeya de Angola*" (The Epic Feat of Angola).[84] Both documentaries include the personal accounts of Cubans and Angolans, mostly interviews with high-ranking officers (captain, colonel, brigadier general, and general) like Jorge Risquet Valdés, who were interviewed about their experiences for the 30th anniversary.

Military officers in Angola were also interviewed. One Angolan states that Cubans will always have "Angolan brothers" and that he hopes the Cubans will never forget their Angolan brethren. In another episode, an Angolan soldier discusses how he thought all Cubans were white and was surprised to see black Cubans. And in yet another, an Angolan states how he became "*un hombre*" (a man) and an internationalist by observing the Cuban example.

The third episode has a dedication:

> A los que lo dieron todo a cambio de nada. A los pueblos de África Austral, en particular al de Angola, y también al pueblo de Cuba, auténticos protagonistas de estas historias. (For those who gave everything in exchange for nothing. For the people of Southern Africa, especially the Angolan people, and also for the Cuban people, the authentic protagonists of this history).

[83] http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2007/06/cuba-in-africa-internationalists-tell.html.
[84] http://panafricannews.blogspot.com/2007/06/cuba-in-africa-internationalists-tell.html.

The documentaries do not deviate from official memory. Many of the episodes outline the military strategy of key battles by the Cuban forces and contain rare footage of Cuban soldiers in action.

Conclusion

After the commencement of Cuban involvement in Angola, Castro promulgated the idea of Cuba as a Latin-African nation that justified Cuba's foreign policy of aiding the MPLA faction during Angolan independence and subsequent civil war on the bases of a common Africanness. As the years turned into more than a decade of Cuban involvement in Angola, the rationale for intervention emphasized the common struggle against apartheid South Africa and solidarity with oppressed countries like Namibia. To this day, Fidel Castro and Cuba are honored by governments all over the world for the assistance provided by Cuban internationalists on various occasions throughout the years.[85] At the same time, however, other governments condemn Fidel Castro and Cuban internationalism as a way of imposing and spreading communist ideology and influence around the globe.

Ongoing economic concerns since the Special Period have resulted in a revival of past revolutionary accomplishments in order to highlight the achievements and uniqueness of the Cuban Revolution. This includes the commemoration of internationalism in Angola and the defeat of apartheid South Africa. In contrast, a nation building and unifying project in Angola has downplayed the extent and decisive role of Cuban involvement in the success of the MPLA.

[85] For example: Ukrainian Order of Merit, 2010 for rehabilitation and treatment for the children of Chernobyl; Order of the Zambian Eagle, 2009 for aid in the education and health sectors; Order of Welwitschia, 2008 for Cuba's help in the African independence wars; CARICOM award, 2008 for contribution to the Caribbean region; World Health Organization Health for All Award, 1998.

Regardless of the economic or political reasons as to why Cuba was involved in Angola or why African/Black solidarity was employed as the cause for participation, the fact remains that through their physical presence, Cubans were active participants of contemporary African history. Likewise, the thousands of Angolans and other Africans who went to Cuba and then migrated to other parts of the America or Europe form a part of the contemporary transatlantic black diaspora. The rest of the dissertation seeks to understand how the movement of bodies and the resulting memories engendered from this exchange changed the individuals' sense of national or transnational identity and historical placement.

The examples of public memory analyzed above stress the solidarity, commonality, and bond between Cubans and Angolans during the intervention. Indeed, for many Cubans, particularly black Cubans, being in Africa in an all black country was a life altering experience. However, Che Guevara's concept of internationalism went beyond solidarity, and instead stressed action and sacrifice: "one must accompany him to his death or to victory" (Prashad 2007: 108). The Cubans sent on military missions, more so than those sent on humanitarian missions, were brutally confronted with the reality that they could die for another person, another culture, and another country based on ideological solidarity. In my conversations with veterans twenty to thirty years after the fact, many were not prepared or willing to make the ultimately sacrifice. Although most were proud of their service, their memories reveal an opposition to ideological unity, established by a radical divide between themselves and the Angolan "other" based on nationalism and race.

In the remaining chapters, I use the life history method to analyze the memories of veterans and non-participants alike regarding this transnational event to gain a better understanding of revolutionary Cuban society. Specifically Chapter III looks at the effects of an Africa or race-based foreign policy on the Cuban soldiers, as well as the ways certain individual memories regarding race and the intervention have become marginalized. Much can be learned about race relations in contemporary Cuba by analyzing these memories (Noakes 1998: 2).

CHAPTER III
WAR NARRATIVES – RACE, AND SENSUOUS MEMORIES OF THE OTHER

In this chapter I analyze the memories of the Cuban soldiers who fought in Angola in order to explore ideas of national and racial difference as these were shaped by their experience of war in Luso-phone Africa and their encounters with the "Other." Specifically in this section I document wartime narratives that emphasize notions of Angolan "backwardness," "underdevelopment," and "deviant" sexuality that inform notions of racial and national hierarchies. By doing so, I hope to accomplish three objectives: 1) to show the ways in which these personal memories contrast with official state discourse that promoted racial and ideological solidarity over nationality, 2) document how these memories/stories are an example of *cuentos de negros* (stories/tales about blacks)[86] – the long-held tradition and particular manner in which blacks are often talked about in Cuba – and, as such, what these "past" memories reveal about race and racial politics in contemporary Cuba, and 3) to demonstrate how this unique south-south post-colonial exchange produced similar tropes of difference and the Other as traditional colonial/travel writings in which notions of "Cuban" and "Angolan" were essentialized.

I will first summarize the essential debates in the literature on memory, followed by a discussion of the deep-rooted notion of the "Other" in anthropology and war. Finally, I will explore what *cuentos de negros* are and how they form part of Cuban oral

[86] I would like to thank a Cuban scholar who wanted to remain anonymous for pointing this out to me.

and physical communication, before presenting and analyzing the memories themselves, placing them within the larger context of race relations in contemporary Cuba.

Current Literature on Memory

I presented a paper at a conference in Portugal on the recollections of my Cuban informants, in particular those memories that dealt with their encounters with Angolans.[87] Several of the narratives were about Angolan "backwardness," lack of hygiene and even cannibalism. It was clearly not what the other participants expected to hear. Most of them were African or Brazilian scholars and they were taken aback with what they heard. A few of them made a point of telling me that these memories were not "true." Angolans were not, and are not, like that, they protested. I tried explaining my project more clearly stating that my intention was not to document a laundry lists of "truths" about Angolan cultural practices as witnessed by the Cuban soldiers, but rather, to record and analyze these memories to gain a better understanding of Cuban nationalism and cultural identity.[88]

The interviewees' memories were varied in scope and detail, however a pattern did emerge regarding certain themes about Angolans and life in Angola as they experienced it. Various Cubans from different regions of Cuba repeated similar stories of shock and disbelief at Angolan behavior, specifically regarding savagery, backwardness, and lack of civilization. Whether or not these memories are "true" is not in the intent of this project. To paraphrase Luise White, the very falseness of these memories can give them meaning (White 2000: 43). My project seeks to understand how the intervention is

[87] "Remembering Angola: Cuban Memories of the Intervention in Angola" presented at *From Brazil to Macao: Travel Writing and Diasporic Spaces*, University of Lisbon, Portugal, September 2008.

[88] For a detailed ethno-historical account of Angola during the civil war and interviews with civilians, see (Brinkman 2003).

remembered and understood by the participants themselves and what can be accessed by these memories about national identity and racial politics in Cuba.

The experience at the conference however, served to make me aware of how we automatically associate memories with actual past events. We tend to believe a person when s/he remembers an event taking it at face value - surely it must have happened the way they said it did. Despite the fact that we have all had the experience of recalling something completely different about a same event as someone else who was also present. What exactly then is memory and what does it represent? Can we trust memories as "true" recollections of past events? More importantly, what can we learn from them? In order to make sense of these complicated questions, I draw upon some of the most relevant literature on memory in recent years.

In the field of psychology there has been an ongoing discussion, what Daniel Schacter calls the "memory wars," regarding the fallibility of memories (1996). More to the point, the main questions center on whether memories represent the truth, and if the person remembering (or a third party listening or looking at a brain scan) can distinguish between fact and fiction (Casey 1987, Lindsay 1994, Neisser 1994, Schacter 1996, Terr 1994). Likewise, in the social sciences scholars also grapple with the question of truth, but the discussion has moved beyond the mind-memory paradigm to examine memory as a socio-cultural phenomenon. As Davis and Starn point out: "… whenever memory is invoked we should be asking ourselves: by whom, where, in which context, against what?" (1989: 2).

Rather than a yes or no question regarding authenticity, scholars explore memory as a complex practice of remembering, reconstructing, de-defining, re-imagining, and

reexamining the past. Thus, memories of the past are interwoven with the present, and they impact and reveal important aspects about the present, they make sense out of the present. We recreate, reorganize, or decipher the past in order to explain and understand the present. Personal narratives of past experiences can be a tool with which to understand and gather insight into the present as much as the past (Antze & Lambek 1996, Halbwachs 1992, Kotre 1996, Levi 1988, Steedman 1987, Sutton 1998). The memories of lived experiences are mediated by collective memory, cultural norms, and one's own subjectivity (Benjamin 1969). As such, the memories themselves change and evolve depending on where, when, or why they are being repeated and to whom they are being told. Maruice Halbwachs argues that:

> precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had (Halbwachs 1992: 47).

In other words, memories are constantly evolving and highly selective (Cole 2001).

In the last couple of decades, there have been many developments in the area of "war memories," academic research dealing specifically with the memories of soldiers, former combatants, the commemoration of wars, and the link between private memory and written history (Ashplant 2004, Dawson 1999, Evans 1997, Mosse 1990, Noakes 1998, Sivian and Winter 1999, Thomson 1998). These works have contributed to the understanding that war narratives cannot be studied in a vacuum but rather within the specific socio-historical context of the individual, civil society and the state. Specifically, Alistair Thomson posits the idea of "memory composure" – the process by which veterans remember and compose their memories "in relation to their own shifting

memories and identities" (1998: 238). Or as historian Mangini deduces in her research on the Spanish Civil War:

> Recounting memories is a slippery task. Questions of truth versus fiction are based on the fickly nature of memory, the passage of time, the need for self-justification, self-compassion, and self-aggrandizement, and so on (Mangini 1995: 53).

My objective then is not to discern truth or error in the memories I document in the following pages, but rather to analyze them to achieve a deeper meaning of historical events in fifty years of revolution and contemporary Cuban cultural ethos. Memories provide a self-awareness that make national and individual identity possible (Malkki 1995), in that they help to understand, form, and shape both personal and national identity (Antze & Lambek 1996, Boyarin 1994, Gillis 1994, Kirsch 2002), and are the site of political and moral contest (Werbner 1998). As Gillis argues, "Identities and memories are not things we think about but things we think with" (1994: 5). These individual memories reveal "the importance of identity construction both as cause and consequence of the war" (Brinkman 2003: 195). In the case of Cuba, a Cuban identity based on nation remained and flourished, contesting official memory that promoted a new nationalism based on race, class solidarity and internationalism.

As George Mosse argues, some war memories are reshaped into a national mythology (Mosse 1990), while other memories are forgotten, erased, and marginalized (Brinkman 2003; Noakes 1998). In Cuba, the national mythology regarding the intervention in Angola has largely been based on official accounts mostly consisting of the memories of high ranked military officers, like Víctor Dreke and Jorge Risquet Valdés. My research documents the individual memories of rank and file soldiers whose experiences have largely been ignored:

> The prominence given to certain narratives within cultural memory is related to the power of those who recount the events, normally important public figures and high rank military officers. The experiences of these individuals are seen as more important than those of thousands of fighting men that do not have a direct access to political and cultural power (Campos 2008: 115).

The memories of these men are nuanced, contradictory, and do not always correspond with the national narrative, particularly concerning race.

Certain studies on memory emphasize a more theoretical analysis of memory, debating the appropriateness of the terms used to comprehend their cultural significance (Boyarin 1994, Werbner 1998). However, it must be remembered that although some of the memories of my informants are positive or inspiring, they refer back to occurrences during a war. War is always a traumatic event. To focus on a theoretical analysis of memory at the expense of feelings and emotions felt by the participants does a disservice to those who shared their memories with me (Daniel 1997). Therefore I prefer a phenomenological theoretical framework whose focus is on how events were experienced by the soldiers rather than recording chronological events (Casey 1987, Kotre 1996). As H. Hirsch so aptly put it:

> … when the experience of the survivor is filtered through some forms of theory which can function as an ideological screen separating the survivor's experience from the survivor's humanity a great deal of the compassion and humanity are removed (1995: 55).

Ethnography then is a means to explore memory, the experience of remembering, and the feelings associated with certain memories. In order to accomplish this it is crucial to incorporate what scholars refer to as "sensuous scholarship" or "anthropology of the senses" – ethnography which embraces the body and the senses – visual, auditory, gustatory, somatosensory, and olfactory – as the focal point in the study of memory

(Feeley-Harnik 1991; Stoller 1993). Consequently, this type of ethnography is a move away from the bias of the chronological and the visual over the other senses (Seremetakis 1994; Stoller 1997). By integrating the body and the senses into these accounts, the ethnographic detail is enriched by additional layers of analysis.

Of all the senses, sense of smell takes precedence in the imagery recounted by the veterans. Most of those I spoke with have vivid memories of not only what they saw and what took place, but of particular smells linked with certain memories. The smell of the place itself and the bodies of the others with which they interacted became a way to denote difference between the Cuban soldiers and Angolans.

Encounters with the Other

As stated above, the memories of the men I interviewed go beyond simply stating a chronology of personal events or charting the military history of battles won or lost. Instead their recollections are filled with the sights and smells of a different place and people, the likes of which they had never experienced before. These very corporal, visceral, and sensuous descriptions serve to highlight the differences between them and the "Others" they encountered. In the majority of the stories recounted, strict binaries between representational categories, such as, "us" versus "them," or "Cuban" versus "Angolan," are utilized to describe what happen without an explicit definition of what these terms mean. Yet these post-colonial war narratives gathered years after the events took place, employ the same colonial tropes of "backwardness" and "savagery" as the native "Other."

Michel Trouillot defines the "other" in opposition to the "observer," and the "other" as the "observed" (1991). And as bell hooks states: "There is power in looking,"

in who controls the gaze, and the "observer" controls the gaze (1992: 115). In the case of these informants, the observers are the Cubans and the Angolans are the observed. The construction of the "other" in a war context brings its own particularities because of the need to see the enemy as something less than human, an element which needs to be destroyed: "In any war, the construction of 'enemy' is a process that entails a 'politics of belonging,' drawing the boundary between "us" and "them" (Brinkman 2003: 196).

Nonetheless, the narratives regarding the intervention are interesting for a variety of reasons in addition to the discussion of an essentialized Angolan other. There is a significant multi-media campaign by the communist state in Cuba to mobilize support for the intervention in Angola and create a national memory regarding the intervention and internationalism as part of revolutionary ethos. The propaganda campaign includes the imagery of Cuban/Angolan fraternity, ancestral ties, equality, partnership, and a united fight against racism and imperialism. Yet despite these efforts, there are discrepancies and inconsistencies between the private memories of the veterans and official state sponsored memory. The prolonged involvement in Angola seems to have fostered the opposite sentiment to international fraternal brotherhood – but rather a strong sense of cultural and national difference.

Secondly, the people doing the "othering" are from a former colonial state themselves, many of whom are non-white. The intervention in Angola was not an encounter between the "West" and the "Non-West," or "North" versus "South," but rather, as stated in the first chapter, a South-South exchange – two Third World countries meeting on the battlefield and in the political arena. Thus, any intuitive understanding of what is meant by these representational terms based on accepted oppositional binaries –

native/non-native, black/white, colonizer/colony – is at times blurred and ultimately contested.

El Habanero and Sensuous Memories of the Other

I first met El Habanero[89] about seven years ago while looking for a cab to take me to a store in Havana. I walked to a nearby hotel where there were five men in taxicab driver uniforms talking and smoking while they waited for customers. El Habanero was at the head of the line so he held the door of his hotel-issued Mercedes open for me, and I climbed in. I told him to take me to a nearby store to find essential toiletries, but we ended up driving around to various stores because I couldn't find what I was looking for. Ultimately I found something better, El Habanero himself, who became one of my most colorful and memorable informants.

Originally, before I had decided on what pseudonyms to give my main informants, I had wanted to call him "Pablo" in honor of Paul Newman.[90] In my head and in my field notes I referred to him as the "*Mulato* Paul Newman" because he reminded me so much of the iconic film actor from the minute I saw him. He is an older man, a latte colored *mulato* (mulatto) with honey brown eyes, and slow deliberate movements.[91] This struck me immediately because he contrasted starkly with the rest of the city. Havana, like most large cities worldwide is fast, cars and motorcycles whiz by, and the movement of the people on the street is equally paced, especially in contrast to

[89] *Habanero* refers to a male from Havana.
[90] Paul Newman, 1925 – 2008, American movie star: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Newman.
[91] *Mulato* (mulatto) typically refers to a person with one black parent and one white parent. It is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese term for *mula* (mule), the usually infertile hybrid offspring of a male donkey and a female horse. In Cuba the term refers more to one's skin color and hair type, regardless of parentage, or any ideas of "biological race." It can be used in a pejorative way, but for the most part, people, including Cubans of color, employ the word to describe someone as one would a blonde or a brunette or someone who is overweight or skinny. Often it is used in the diminutive, *mulatico*/*a* as a term of endearment.

the provinces. In the midst of this rapidness was El Habanero. His movements were methodical, deliberate, and he didn't even seem to sweat in the scorching heat like everyone else, including me, but rather he was always dry, cool, and steady. A tropical *Cool Hand Luke*.[92]

El Habanero told me he hated everything about Angola – everything – it was the antithesis to his nature. The truth is I could barely imagine this well dressed, polished, elegant looking man being in the midst of a war. He had volunteered to go in the 1980's because he knew others that had gone, and he just felt he had to go. Perhaps it was a bit of "*hombría*" (manliness) as well, because "if you were with a group of friends and you hadn't gone, it looked bad, like you were less than them, a coward." He chose to go, but regretted his decision soon after arriving.

He left Cuba on a ship headed across the Atlantic. He had pictured his arrival to be different than what it was. He expected the war to be right there in his face when he got off the boat, but instead the new arrivals were sent to a region away from the war zones to rest and acclimate. As the boat docked and he got off the ship everything smelled differently to him: "I had never realized that Cuba had a smell until I smelled that place, it smelled of death." For El Habanero his arrival in Angola came with the realization that every place has a scent, including Cuba, the home he had just left behind. In leaving Cuba for the first time he became aware that not only did Cuba have a particular smell, but that he preferred the smell of home to the scent of this new place which he associated with death.

By the time of his departure two years later, he again stepped off a boat, but this time back in Cuba. He was once more reminded of how differently Cuba smelled to him

[92] 1967 Paul Newman movie.

in contrast to Angola. According to him his own smell had changed, along with that of his compatriots. They had all acquired the same bad odor: "You knew a Cuban that had been there [Angola] for a while because that smell had penetrated them." El Habanero told me he smelled differently from his family and friends, the penetrating scent set him apart from those closest to him: "I couldn't get the smell of Angola off of me no matter how many times I bathed; I couldn't get that smell of Angola off of me. It took fifteen days."

The reference to the "penetrating smell" and the inability to get the smell off him, conjures imagery of a physical violation. For many victims of trauma, washing, cleansing, and ridding oneself of any tangible evidence of the trauma that took place is part of the healing process. For El Habanero, ridding himself of the odor he felt had penetrated his body allowed him to re-incorporate himself, although now permanently changed, back into his previous life.

Echoing what El Habanero told me, another informant said that Angola did not smell like Cuba: "here [Cuba] it is natural, there it is underdeveloped." He attributed Angola's unpleasant odor to its "underdevelopment" as opposed to Cuba, which did not and does not, smell of underdevelopment to him.[93] Similarly, another former internationalist told me that Cuba smelled differently than Angola. He reasoned it to be because Cuba was a "nice place and Angola was at war and exploited." Therefore, the difference in scents was a logical disparity in the then conditions of the two countries.

[93] Underdevelopment is a theme Cuba has struggled with throughout its history. The iconic Cuban film, *Memorias del Subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment) (Guitierrez Aléa 1968) deals with precisely this theme, Cuba's underdevelopment in relation to the United States. And many Cubans speak in terms of Cuba's underdevelopment. But for this former soldier, Cuba is "natural," close to nature, not underdeveloped.

Yet, as with El Habanero, the difference these two men perceived in the smell of the two countries, expressed in terms of invasive or negative smells, engendered an awareness, appreciation, and gratefulness for their country that had previously not been there. I heard this sentiment from other veterans - Cuba could have all the problems it currently has, but they understood that it was better than what they had lived through: "Things may be bad here, but I know they could be much worse."

Whether or not Angola actually smelled of death is not the point. Smell, like beauty, is in the nostril of the beholder. What is of relevance is that for these soldiers the experience, characterized by the olfactory difference of the other, engendered a self-awareness that had previously eluded them, an awareness of themselves as Cubans and Cuba as a place, and conversely, of Angola and Angolans as a different place and a different people.

The Backward Savage

An underlying vein in the memories of the internationalists I interviewed is the idea of Angolans as *atrasados* (backwards), *subdesarrollados* (underdeveloped), and *salvajes* (savages). Informants told me of various examples of Angolan "backwardness," particularly outside the capital of Luanda in the provincial areas. Most, when pressed for more detail, would differentiate between Angolans from the capital and people from the provinces.[94] But in general, the men were not so specific, and casually speak of Angolans and Angola as a whole being backwards.

Two examples of *atraso* (backwardness) have to do with domestic issues. For instance, the Cubans were surprised that it was perfectly acceptable for men to have

[94] Historian Inge Brinkman puts forward how MPLA policies had poor distribution of wealth, favoring Luanda while other regions were neglected. But no veteran I spoke with who observed stark differences between Luanda and the rest of the country attributed it to MPLA policies.

multiple wives. Another example that various people mentioned was how the women worked while the men stayed at home. They commented on how Angolan men took advantage of hardworking Angolan women. Those I spoke with thought these were situations out of the past, a condition with which "modern" Cuban women would never put up.

Other informants mentioned savage or animalistic actions in the cruelty committed by Angolans towards other Angolans. For instance one informant mentioned his shock and dismay towards a family he knew for taking better care of one daughter because they were planning to selling her.[95] Other veterans mentioned the atrocities committed by the varying war factions towards the civilian population, particularly women, as examples of Angolan savagery, rather than the unfortunate "normal" state of affairs in warfare.

Others cited examples of dress as a form of backwardness, such as the use of *tapa rabos* (loincloth), or the lack of clothing on the women who left their breasts uncovered, even among elderly women which was particularly shocking for the Cubans. Lastly, a couple of former soldiers told me that Angolans were cannibals, claiming to have witnessed this activity. According to them, Cubans were targeted because of their bravery in battle, and as such to ingest the heart or testicles of a Cuban would impart them with this attribute.

All these stories about perceived Angolan backwardness create a difference between the Cubans and the Angolan Others, establishing a temporal separation in which

[95] The informant was talking about a dowry, but the informant did not use this word in Spanish, but rather the verb *vender* (sell). As with the account in the next chapter, it seems that the informants were unfamiliar with this practice and saw it as an act of selling, rather than a monetary exchange that demonstrates the worth of the daughter and the right to marry her.

Angolans are essentially trapped in an antiquated past – backwards and underdeveloped. The Cubans recounting these stories do not see the Angolans as equals but rather as less than, culturally and morally. Although the memories are from events that occurred anywhere from twenty to thirty years ago, the references to Angolans were in the present: "Angolans are…, Angolans do….." It is as if nothing could have changed in the last three decades, or perhaps that some of the events witnessed, such as lack of hygiene, if indeed it were the case, might have been because the population was under the effects of a violent 30-year civil war that completely shattered any normality of life. Cuban values and way of life are exalted at the expense of everything Angolan, even decades after the fact. For Cuban veterans, Angolans are trapped in an eternal present, savage and underdeveloped.[96]

Sexuality, Hygiene, Disease, and the Other

El Habanero and I met up to talk about his time in Angola. He arrived impeccably dressed, as he always did, in a *guayabera*[97] (men's shirt), dress slacks and dress shoes. He smelled of cologne, soap, and cigarettes, and there was a trace of white talcum powder visible on the upper part of his chest – probably his secret to staying dry in the miserable heat. I'd rather not think of what I smell like, and make a mental note to buy enough talcum powder to cover my entire body. We decided to go to the zoo to see

[96] Ironically, the Angolans who lived in Cuba saw the Cubans in a similar light, particularly since most Angolans left Cuba a couple of years after the Special Period began. Their final memories are of abject poverty, scarcity, especially a shortage of basic toiletries like soap, perfume, and deodorant. Thus, for some of the men I interviewed, they remember Cuba as unhygienic and backwards, and with a lot of misery and scarcity. And they were the ones who were in a position to give money and goods to the Cuban people who were severely lacking. And this relationship still has not changed. Those who left family, sons and daughters, in Cuba are constantly being asked to send thing, regardless of their individual economic situation.

[97] Traditional shirt from Cuba, the rest of Latin America, and the Philippines: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guayabera.

the lions, and afterwards we drove around the main part of *Parque Lenin* (Lenin Park), which houses the zoo. There is a large white monument to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the Russian communist leader. I wonder if some day the bust will end up in a post-communist amusement park in Havana where tourists can visit Cold War relics (Verdery 1999).

The banter between El Habanero and myself is usually friendly. He is very flirtatious, but since most Cuban men and women speak with playful innuendos, I do not take it seriously. He is always the gentleman, and he never crosses the line, so I do not feel threatened in any way. Making the most of the theme at hand, I ask him about love and romance in Angola. He put his tongue to the back of his teeth to produce a crackling/popping sound – what is referred to as *freír un huevo* (to fry an egg). This sound means: "you can't be serious."[98]

He proceeded to tell me that he never had any type of romantic or sexual relationship while in Angola, not once. When he tells me this, I "fry an egg" incredulously. I tell him that his story is difficult to believe since he had been there for two years. He responds: "If you had been there and had seen how any little scratch, any little wound would become infected, then you wouldn't have touched anybody either." I press further and he insists that he did not have any type of sexual relationship whatsoever while in Angola because everything was dirty, filthy, and unhygienic.

So much so, that when he returned to Cuba after two years, he felt he was owed the sex he had missed – "once a day for the last two years." That meant that he would have to make up for exactly "seven hundred and thirty" missed opportunities for sex, AND on top of that, not get further behind.

[98] The sound, referred to as *chu* is also made when one is upset or disappointed about something.

He described his homecoming as bittersweet because all he wanted was to be alone with his wife, yet most of his family was waiting to greet him when he got off the boat. And when he got home there were even more friends, family, and neighbors waiting for him at his own welcome-back party. He was annoyed. He couldn't believe there were so many people in his house, and they were all asking him questions about Angola. So after two years of waiting, he would have to wait a few more hours before finally being left alone with his wife.

According to El Habanero, his attempt to make up for lost time proved too much for his wife. She was unable to keep up with him, it was simply more than she could handle. The only solution was to be unfaithful to her. She of course could not understand his logic, and eventually they divorced. When he was done telling me his story, I wasn't sure how to respond. Finally I laughed, and told him that was the most creative excuse I had ever heard for *pegando tarros* (being unfaithful).[99]

However preposterous his story might sound, it is very revealing. There is a strong sense of loss – loss of time (two years), loss of a normal life, of sexual pleasure, and intimacy with his wife. Sex represents the loss of time, and El Habanero has an exact number – seven hundred and thirty – and he made it a goal to reclaim this loss time, as if somehow if he could just reach this tangible goal, it would make up for the years spent abroad. Directly or indirectly, for El Habanero, Angola was the reason for another loss, his failed marriage.

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[99] In Cuban Spanish, "*pegar tarros*" is most commonly used to describe adultery/unfaithfulness between a couple, regardless of whether the one cheating is a man or a woman. In other Spanish speaking countries, "*ponerle los cuernos*" or "*poner cachos*" is also used. All three expressions literally mean to "put horns" on someone. In English the older term "to make a cuckold" is probably the closest literal translation, except in English it refers specifically to a man with an unfaithful wife.

The story also serves to illustrate ideas of *atraso* (backwardness) regarding Angolan sexuality, and sexual relationships between Angolans and Cubans. Most of the men I spoke with mentioned sex and the sexual practices of Angolans in their stories. For some, like El Habanero, it was the lack of sex they highlighted, for others sex with Angolans was considered a dangerous activity that could get a person killed.

Sexual encounters between Angolans and Cubans are often remembered as dangerous and risky adventures. Many veterans related stories of Cubans being killed while out pursuing sex after hours away from the base. I heard slightly different versions of the same story of some colleague(s) who was killed because he left the safe zone to look for local women. While out the Cuban would either be attacked or ambushed by Angolans, adding to the distrust already felt between Cubans and Angolans. For some of the men I spoke with, the majority of Cuban casualties were not caused by tropical disease or accidents, like official state accounts claim, but rather by Cubans who were killed during these late night expeditions.

Sexuality then, further serves as a way to compare Angolans and Cubans, and to mark distance and difference between Cubans and Angolans. Angolan sex was often described as "animalistic." One former soldier mentioned how Angolans had sex like "animals" – only from behind. According to him, some of the Cubans ultimately grew to like this so much that they got used to this way of having sexual intercourse. When they returned to Cuba and attempted to have sex with their wives in this same way, the Cuban women would become upset because it was inappropriate and unacceptable. Cuban sexuality and sexual practices are taken for granted, viewed as "normal," whereas Angolan sexuality is seen as abnormal, even deviant. Moreover, like in travel tales of the

past and present, some of the Cubans went “native” in this example, behaving like “animals” themselves, picking up the customs of the people with which they cohabited.

Closely related to unpleasant odor was the recurring theme of lack of hygiene. Cubans in general emphasize the hygienic nature of Cubans, in which daily bathing, soap and perfume play a key role. Therefore, in the recollections of the internationalist I spoke with, the very clean Cuban came into opposition with the perceived dirty and unhygienic Angolan. Several informants recalled how Angolans, both men and women, urinated or defecated anywhere, even in the middle of a public street, and how this was considered normal and acceptable behavior. Additionally, informants told me that women in the rural areas added excrement to their hair and body. Traditional practices that made all the females have an unpleasant odor regardless of how attractive the woman might be.

Similarly, disease also played a role in justifying abstinence and a general fear of sexual relations with locals. I was told that Cubans had to be careful because of the many tropical and sexual diseases to which Cubans could easily succumb. As one informant told me, “there were too many diseases, strange diseases.” Another man told me he knew somebody that got a disease that caused his skin to peel completely: "*se pelo como una papa*" (he peeled like a potato). A different veteran recalled:

> *Allí hay enfermedad que la penicilina no le hacía na’ [nada]. Ya tú puedes creer que situación había allí. Aquello no era fácil. Y vivían así como animales…. No se bañan*. (There are diseases there that penicillin did nothing for. You can imagine what the situation was like there. It wasn’t easy. And they lived that way like animals… They don’t bathe).

AIDS specifically was mentioned several times by both former combatants and civilians as having been brought to Cuba from Angola.[100] Various informants stated how

[100] The fact that initial cases were first seen among heterosexuals and not homosexuals in Cuba meant that unlike in other countries, AIDS was treated like any other infectious disease without

Cuban soldiers contracted AIDS from having sexual relationships with Angolan women, and then introduced the disease to the island when they returned home and passed the disease to their spouse.

According to Cuban health officials the first HIV case in Cuba was detected in a heterosexual internationalist returning home from either Angola (Parameswaran 2004) or Mozambique,[101] depending on the publication. Other publications have also mentioned the high rate of AIDS among soldiers returning to Cuba from Angola (Collelo 1989, 106; del Pino 1987: 33). Hence, while their memories are consistent with public health accounts regarding AIDS, diseases in general were given as a reason to reject having any type of sexual relationship in Angola. These two conditions, personal hygiene and disease, further serve as a marker of divergence between what is "normal" – Cuban, and what is not – Angolan.

Yet for as much as sex played an important role in their memory, the majority of the men I interviewed, never admitted that that they had any type of sexual relation in Angola.[102] As one man responded when I asked him if he had met anyone special while abroad. He said: *"Hay cosas que se dicen y otras que no, chisme íntimo*" (There are things you say, and others that you don't, private gossip). He smiled as if he had something to hide, but did not confess to anything.

Most said they knew other people who were involved with Angolan women, but they personally had not been. For the men I spoke with, there was a clear difference

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the social/moral debates that hindered early prevention in other countries. For more on AIDS, see Chapter VI.

[101] http://www.cybercuba.com/hivaidscuba.htm

[102] This contrasts with researcher George who writes that various men he interviewed claimed numerous relations with Angolan women (George 2005). This serves to highlight how different ethnographers can solicit different information – discussed more in Chapter VII.

between Cuban and Angolan women, and moreover, between Cuban women of color and Angolan women of color. The Angolan women were "Othered" by their perceived lack of hygiene and backwardness, and thereby changing the dynamics of a possible relationship with an Angolan female. To admit having sexual relations or being in love with an Angolan would be something tricky and contradictory to do.

Only two men admitted to me that they had relations with Angolan women. These two informants told me they had pretty *mulatas* in love with them. Note the women were in love with them, and not the other way around. Moreover, the women were *mulata*s, not *negras*. One can see the racial/color hierarchy in Cuban society at play in this example. *Mulatas* are acceptable mates, especially if they are light skinned, whereas *negritas* are less acceptable. A phrase commonly used to describe a beautiful black woman is "*una negra de paseo*" (a black woman to show off) – in other words, a black woman you take out in public because she is beautiful. What is excluded outright in this comment, but alluded to, is that there are *negritas* that you do not show off and take out in public, but rather, that you keep hidden, a secret.[103] Women were essentialized into Angolan or Cuban, beautiful or ugly, black, mulata, and white.

Underlying the preceding tropes of savagery, odor, and deviant sexuality in the soldiers' war narratives is a negative outlook on black Africa and blackness overall. For many of the white (or lighter skinned) Cubans I interviewed, these "Angolan" characteristics simply reiterated the common belief that people of color are different and

[103] People often tease each other about being with or liking a *negrita*, and keeping it a secret, someone that is not introduced to friends and family as a girlfriend. This is a generalization and there are always exceptions, but this is frequently heard or discussed. This is not to say that there are few interracial relations, because there most clearly are in Cuba, and lots of them (Fernández 1995). Additionally, this sentiment seems to be slowly changing among younger generations of Cubans.

less than. But different and less than who? It is never outright said, but it can be assumed that blacks are different from whoever is talking, whoever is present in the conversation, and whoever self-identifies as non-black, despite their skin color.

This general derogatory stance is most often embodied by way of odor, although other qualities are also mentioned, including laziness, hyper sexuality, loudness, and a propensity for crime. It is very common to hear Cubans from all over the island, of different shades of skin color, from different age groups, and even otherwise socially progressive Cubans, say that blacks have a different, stronger, and/or unpleasant odor.

Cuentos de negros (stories/tales about black people) refers to the casual way in which people express difference as a given, unquestioned, and form a part of the day-to-day language. Negative stories and references to *negros* are very common, often repeated, and widely disseminated. Thus, I argue that the narratives regarding black Angolans are an extension of *cuentos de negros* commonly heard in Cuba, but projected onto an international context. As El Habanero, who is a Cuban of color told me, he couldn't believe how they [the Cubans] had to go help "*esos negros allá*" (those blacks over there). He and others spoke of the Angolans as being ungrateful, backstabbers, disorganized, lazy, and cowardly, and as a consequence, the Cubans had to do everything, even much of the fighting while the Angolans retreated in fear. However, this sentiment, although referring to Angolans, reinforces unfavorable attitudes towards blacks universally. No one made these types of comments about the South Africans, their enemies, or the Portuguese.

To better understand how the veteran's narratives form a part of *cuentos de negros*, and these *cuentos* form a customary part of Cuban ethos, it is necessary to review the debate on racial relations in Cuba.

Racial Politics in Cuba and Cuentos de Negros

As with all things Cuban, the issue of race is a polarizing subject. Take for example the following two newspaper articles published in 2008 and 2009, respectively.

First article:

> Cuba's Castro Wins South African Humanitarian Award – South Africa Thursday said it has given its 2008 humanitarian award to former Cuban president Fidel Castro for his contributions to 'humankind beyond boundaries.' Castro, who turned 82 Wednesday, becomes the first non-African and the third ex-head of state to win the 'Ubuntu' award, the National Heritage Council of South Africa said in a statement. 'The Ubuntu award is honoring persons who have consistently lived the humanitarian values of the African philosophy of Ubuntu,' which defines the individual in terms of their relationships with others. Castro won the award 'for the role he played in the Cuban revolution and the worldwide contribution to the struggle for an alternative, just and humane society,' the statement said. It said that Cuban patriots, under Castro, had 'shared their blood… fighting colonialism for the liberation of the countries of Africa'[104]

Second article:

> Cuba Blasts U.S. Black Leaders for Charges of Racism – Cuba hit back Thursday at 60 prominent U.S. black leaders who challenged its race record, with island writers, artists and official journalists calling the criticism an attack on their country's national identity. The five-page signed statement, distributed by Cuban government press officials in an e-mail, defended Cuba's progress in providing social and personal opportunities for blacks and people of mixed race. But it focused more on Cuba's past than the situation in contemporary Cuban society that came under criticism from Americans such as Princeton University professor Cornel West; Jeremiah Wright, former pastor of President Barack Obama's Chicago church; and Susan Taylor, former editor of Essence magazine. Cuba's response said the country has proven its racial credentials by sending troops to Angola and Ethiopia during the 1970s and

[104] Cuba's Castro Wins South African Humanitarian Award," Agence France Press (AFP), September 11, 2008.

> offering free education through exchange programs and medical schooling to youngsters from Africa. It also recycled past Fidel Castro comments on race and noted that the 1959 revolution led by his bearded rebels 'dismantled the institutional and judicial bases of a racist society.[105]

How is it possible for intellectuals from two countries, the United States and South Africa, to see Cuba in such opposing viewpoints? The answer in part lies in the divergence between the implementation and outcomes of Cuba's foreign policy in contrast to its domestic policy regarding issues of race. As can be seen in the comments of the veterans and civilians I interviewed, this discrepancy between what the revolutionary government does domestically versus what it does abroad continues to be a source of resentment for Cubans that feel the revolution has gained prestige and recognition internationally at the expense of the Cuban people.

After the triumph of Castro's revolution, the leadership did away with many of the structural and institutional barriers against Cubans of color, such as the elimination of private schools and white-only associations and centers. Simultaneously it increased access to health care and education, and it gave women particularly new opportunities to work outside of the home, giving them economic leverage. Revolutionary Cuba declared itself a "raceless" society, and as such, the Cuban government did not see the need for any organizations based on race or ethnicity. Thus, the end of white-only associations also meant the end of black-only organizations. Moreover, as an atheist, Marxist state, all religious practices were banned and forced underground. Afro-Cuban religions were disempowered, disassociated with the divine, and categorized "as 'folk traditions' objectified and reconstructed without consideration for their contemporary religious

[105] "Cuba Blasts US black Leaders for Charges of Racism," by Will Weissert, Associate Press Writer, December 4, 2009, Yahoo! News.

context" (Hagedorn 2001: 4). Afro-religious imagery was housed in museums and eventually sold for foreign consumption in the tourist sector.

The government asserted that racism was tied to capitalism. Therefore by exchanging capitalism in favor of socialism, any vestiges of racism would eventually be erased. With the declaration that racism had been eradicated the subject was essentially closed for public debate. Further conversations on race would mostly center on pre-1959 race relations. Questioning the race record in Cuba could mark a person as counterrevolutionary and unpatriotic (Fernandez 2001).

Castro himself, however, often mentioned race and racial problems during his speeches as examples of the continued exploitation of colonial and neocolonial powers in other countries. Cuban foreign policy during the 1970's included a variety of cultural and political exchanges, delegations, and events with African countries and their leaders in what has been called the "African Decade" (Moore 1988: 219). Moreover, as outlined in the Introduction, Cuba began courting several rebel groups and governments abroad, most notably in Africa, and supplied military and humanitarian aid to various governments around the world.

The literature that emerged in the U.S. on Cuban racial politics during this time tended to focus on whether or not the revolution has accomplished its claim of ending racism. There were scholars on either side of the debate, but as historian Devyn Benson argues, the authors' stance often had more to do with polarizing Cold War politics rather than a nuanced analysis of how the day-to-day lives of how Cubans were affected by the official discourse of racelessness in Cuba (2009).

One of the most important works criticizing the revolution was Carlos Moore's monograph on race relations in Cuba and Castro's foreign policy in Africa. He concluded that the discourse on racial equality and integration had done little to positively influence the lives of Cubans of color. According to him, the revolution was not a disjuncture from the anti-black policies of the past, but rather Castro's paternalistic views on blacks was a continuation of these values. Also, the authoritarian government worsened the social condition of black Cubans by not allowing political mobilization based on race and a black agenda determined by blacks themselves (1988).[106] Years after he wrote his famous book, Moore again questioned the continued "Silence on Black Cuba" that prevails among the leadership on the island that severely limits an open and frank debate on the issue of race and the prevailing exclusion of blacks in the top leadership positions and in the communist party (Moore 2003).

There are many parallels that can be made between the struggles of Cubans of color and African Americans, particularly during the heyday of the civil rights movement in the 1960's. Initially many African-American intellectuals supported the revolution and championed it as an example of a society that was achieving racial equality, unlike what they saw occurring in the United States. Fidel Castro's historic stay at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem during a trip to address the United Nations in 1960 cemented the goodwill between African-Americans and the revolution's then young leader.[107] Various black

[106] For a critique of Moore, see Brock and Cunningham 1991. Among other concerns, the authors argue that Moore's scholarship relies too heavily on hearsay and generalizations, and that his target audience is clearly U.S. Black intellectuals.

[107] Castro and the Cuban delegation rented eighty rooms at the Hotel Theresa after their accommodations in Manhattan at the Hotel Shelbourne fell through when the hotel management demanded cash payment in advance. Many African Americans and leftist intellectuals around the world saw this move as a direct blow to racist white America and a genuine gesture of solidarity with the plight of African Americans. Others saw this as typical Castro fanfare, shrewdly

activists visited the island, including Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, Huey Newton, and Assata Shakur, among many others.[108] Their experiences were varied, some felt welcomed and were impressed with revolutionary Cuba, while others who criticized the authoritarian government and its politics were accused of being U.S. spies, arrested and/or deported (Moore 1988; Sawyer 2006). Davis, for example, was asked to speak in public while Cleaver was detained and encouraged to leave the country.

Since the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Special Period, scholars have produced more nuanced analyses that move the discussion beyond whether or not the revolution succeeded in achieving racial equality, but rather the focus is on how the revolution's racial policies affected the lives of its citizens. These works conclude that Cuba's race record is contradictory and inconsistent, with clear gains in some sectors of society and setbacks in others. At the time of the revolution black Cubans lived in marginalized and poor neighborhoods, and they were less likely than whites to be formally educated or have educated parents. Thus, from the outset of the revolution black and white Cubans did not start off as equals. As one Cuban intellectual told me, black Cubans have accumulated poverty just as one accumulates wealth, and this economic and mental state is often passed on to subsequent generations.

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exploiting an opportunity to his advantage to humiliate the U.S. and garner good publicity towards his government.

[108] Assata Shakur is a former Black Panther member, who is wanted in the U.S. for the murder of a police officer in New Jersey. She escaped prison in the 1980's and fled to Cuba where she was granted asylum. At present, Shakur, lives in Havana. In 2005 the FBI declared her a state terrorist and put out a one million dollar bounty for her arrest. Shakur has stated that Cuba is: "One of the largest, most resistant and most courageous *palenques* (maroon camps) that has ever existed on the face of this planet:" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assata_Shakur#cite_note-r64-193. There are other U.S. fugitives living in Cuba, including former Black Panther, William Lee Brent, who shot and wounded police officers in San Francisco. He is married to Jane McManus, also a U.S. citizen who went to live in Cuba after becoming disenchanted with the Left in the United States. Although they both continue to there, McManus is openly critical of the government.

Recent debate on race and racism in Cuba recognizes the Special Period as an important disjuncture in recent Cuban history. The collapse of the Soviet Union forced Cuba to turn to tourism and the international market as a way to stay afloat. While there were areas of improvement regarding racial inequality before the Special Period, the severity of the economic chaos has brought about a resurgence of racist practices in Cuba. This is seen particularly among the tourist sector where whites and lighter skinned Cubans are preferred for their "good appearance" while darker skinned Cubans are discriminated against, often signaled out as delinquents.

Alejandro de la Fuente contends that black Cuban intellectuals saw the revolution as an opportunity to change racial politics and pushed to make race an important issue for the revolution. By using census data, he concludes that Cuba has achieved racial equality in terms of education, fertility, and mortality rates, but he argues a "racist mentality" remains (2001). In contemporary Cuba, Cubans of color are in a contradictory position as representatives of Cuba's cultural legacy, particularly in terms of music and religion, yet they simultaneously face discrimination and are deemed "socially dangerous" (Ibid: 200).

Another researcher, Mark Sawyer, also points out the contradictions in Cuban society in regards to race. He uses a transnational approach to situate Cuban racial politics within a historical and political context. He states that Cuba has not ended racism despite having done more than any other country to eliminate racism. He traces Cuban race relations not as a linear event, but rather as a cyclical movement, with moments of greater or lesser inclusion. His work highlights the attempts at erasing racial barriers as

well as the limitations and missteps by the government that have influenced the continued racism (2006).

In actuality, African internationalism provided a new chance for black men and women to showcase themselves as national heroes, one not otherwise available. Indeed many of the principal officers involved in Angola who are commemorated for their support of the government are black:

> Although the revolutionary government's redistributive policies and its ending of public racism had an immediate impact upon the welfare of Cuban blacks, it has been the Cuban Revolution's foreign policy, rather than domestic policy per se that has ultimately favored full integration of blacks into Cuban society (Taylor 1988: 19).

However, this didn't necessarily translate to black representation in the government, particularly at the higher levels of government. As Castro himself said in a 1986 speech, there are few blacks in the party leadership, despite their efforts as internationalists on behalf of the revolutionary government (Adams 1999: 262).

In general, official discussion of racism is limited to events, policies, and practices in other countries, and is used as a tool with which to attack other countries, particularly the U.S., for its ongoing racial problems. The Cuban government claims that the island society is no longer racist and offers its endeavors abroad, especially the humanitarian aid and educational programs, as proof. Indeed this discrepancy between domestic events and global ones is the reason why Cuba is seen in such different lights by the international community, as demonstrated in the two newspaper articles quoted at the beginning of this section. As Sawyer observed: "Internationalism allowed the Cuban revolution to externalize racial problems and the battle against racism" (2006, 63). Thus it can be argued that the government has focused primarily on helping victims of racism

and exploitation abroad at the expense of the situation at home. The memories regarding the intervention, in particular from those that refused to participate (Chapter VI), underscore the tension between how racial politics were used to the benefit of Cuba's image overseas, while the domestic situation was, and continues to be, largely ignored.

On a final note regarding race in Cuba, researcher Nadine Fernández asks how it is possible that racism has endured in Cuba despite the structural changes enacted by the revolution? Focusing her research on young interracial couples, she concludes that the amount of years since the revolution cannot erase the legacy of slavery, colonial, and neo-colonial control. Equally as important, she argues that racism persists because of cultural attitudes and beliefs that are perpetuated in quotidian activities, passed down generation to generation (Fernández 1996: 99-101). Building off of Gramsci's idea of "common sense," she calls these culturally engrained values and behaviors "racial folklore" (Ibid: 101). What she terms "racial folklore" I refer to as "*cuentos de negros*" (stories/tales about black people), using Cuban terminology, thus privileging a local category.

Cuentos de negros refers to the way that Cubans, regardless of their own skin color, often talk about *negros* (black people).[109] For example, people will say *los negros son*… (blacks are…), *los negros hacen*…(blacks do…), *a los negros les gusta*… (blacks like…), and a variety of different ways to discuss *como son los negros* (how blacks are).

[109] An interesting counterpoint to the *cuentos de negros* I am refereeing to are Lydia Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (Black Tales from Cuba). Lydia Cabrera was one of Cuba's most famous ethnographers and sister-in-law of famed Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. She was involved in the Afro-Cubanismo movement and directly involved in the preservation of Afro-Cuban folklore. Her book, *Cuentos negros de Cuba*, originally published in 1936, are a collection of short stories told to her by slaves in Cuba, mostly dealing with language, religion, music, the arts. After the Cuban Revolution she lived the rest of her life in exile in Miami (Simo 1984) (http://afrocubaweb.com/cabrera.htm).

It also includes casually referring to blacks in disparaging terms, such as *gorilas* (gorillas) or *monos* (monkeys). Typically at the heart of these *cuentos* is a generalization about a derogatory characteristic or behavior.[110] Their use is not exclusive to white Cubans, and it is common for a Cuban of color, even someone who is dark skinned or non-white, to talk about a *negro* in this same manner. So for example on a couple of occasions that I went to carnival, I had friends warn me not to go, even very dark skinned *negros* (blacks), who told me to be careful because "*solo hay negros*" (there are only blacks there), or that they (blacks) will cause an altercation.

Usually these generalizations about blacks refer to people and events within Cuba, in other words about black Cubans. I argue that many of the memories regarding the intervention are an extension of *cuentos de negros* applied to an international context. The inconsistencies between the official discourse on Cuban internationalism and the individual memories of those involved presents a unique opportunity to study contemporary race relations in Cuba: "Such discursive practices of recognition – and misrecognition – offer locations for scholars to seek processes of racializing or nationalizing" (Lemon 2002: 55). These marginalized and ignored memories undermine the idealism portrayed by official memory and presents a much more complex Cuba, one

[110] In this section I am referring only to negative connotations of the word *negro* (black). Unlike in English, *negro* (black) in Spanish can be marked both positively or negatively. For example *negros* can be used to refer to *el pueblo* (the people), as in the refrain from the popular song immortalized by the Cuban singer, Bola de Nieve, "*Todos los negros tomamos café*" (All us people [blacks] drink coffee). Another example of how *negro/a* can be a positively marked word is when it is used as a term of endearment for someone regardless of his or her skin color – *mi negro/mi negra* – literally it means "my black man/woman" but figuratively it translates to (my sweetheart/my dear). I have pale skin, and by my phenotype I would be considered "white," just about anywhere, yet I have been referred to as "*mi negra*." Some American scholars argue that to employ the term *negro* as a term of endearment is degrading and racist. However, I do not agree, and I believe it to be an imposition of U.S. English racial vernacular onto Spanish.

that is full of contradictions and still struggles with ingrained racism despite so many years of claiming to be "raceless."

Conclusion

The effects of war on the Cubans returning home should not be minimized. As one of the African scholars at the conference in Portugal I attended said after she heard me speak: "*os cubanos estão muitos traumatizados*" (the Cubans are very traumatized). For anyone directly involved in a war, death is a "natural" consequence, as are the violent and haunting associations of war. In several ways, the intervention in Angola can be compared to the Vietnam War for the United States. Both were unofficial wars, a military conflict in a foreign territory, with an unresolved ending.

Yet those I spoke with were able to incorporate themselves back into society and become productive citizens (George 2005: 163). Governmental and social safety nets, such as access to mental healthcare, near total control of narcotic substances, subsidized prices and pensions, preferential hiring practices for returning internationalists, and multi-generational households, helped to minimize the manifestation of posttraumatic stress syndrome among the generations of veterans. In addition, although many of the men alluded to atrocities they witnessed, most do not seem to suffer from the weight of guilt of war. The soldiers feel they were acting in good faith, helping and aiding the Angolans, and because of the strong state control, there were no public protests or anti-internationalists sentiment manifested against returning soldiers. Quite the contrary, they were national heroes.

Despite it being a south-south exchange between these two countries, the Cuban soldiers involved in the intervention in Angola took the role of "colonizer" or "discoverer" in these wartime narratives, describing exotic encounters between them and the "natives," and in the process establishing racial and national hierarchies. Their experience engendered a love of country, an appreciation for Cuba that previously was not there. These personal memories contrast with official collective Cuban memory that stress a common "Africanness," and sought to define Cuban national identity based on race and shared ancestral African heritage. The individual memories resist official public memory that promotes internationalism, racial solidarity, and the struggle against racism above all else. The fact that Cubans and Angolans were at war exacerbated any possibility of treating each other as similar people, as equals:

> The process by which people designate themselves and those by which they are described by others do not necessarily coincide. Especially in a war context, such divergence may acquire enormous proportions. Identity politics in such instances form both cause and consequence of the war. People may be caught in a spiral of violence in which the enemy is ascribed ever more grotesque and horrific characteristics. Through the inflation of monstrousness, 'we' become more and more different from 'them' (Brinkman 2003: 218-19).

Cuban and Angolan identities became "essentialised, presented as if there were unalterable and everlasting" (Brinkman 2003: 196).

Hygiene, backwardness, deviance, and especially scent established both a national and racial difference and hierarchy between themselves and the Angolans. State propaganda was unable to successfully promote a transnational and trans-racial solidarity above nationalist tendencies. Internationalism had the opposite effect and strengthened national identity among the returning Cuban soldiers, as epitomized in the memories of El Habanero and his return home. This awareness of difference, of what was Angolan

and therefore what was Cuban in relation to it, created an appreciation and a new way of seeing home.

CHAPTER IV
THE CUBAN STORY TELLER – THE LIFE HISTORY OF AN INTERNATIONALIST

In this chapter we meet El Palestino, a revolutionary internationalist with a talent for storytelling and relating his experiences to important historical events in Cuba. By presenting his life story as it relates to this transnational event we can better understand Cuban society in the last fifty years. The historical and social ruptures in the last half century – the Cuban Revolution, its tangible and iconic influence worldwide, as well as its fading relevance in the global community, the Special Period after the fall of the Soviet Bloc, and the effects of the revolution on racial discourse on and off the island – are more easily accessible via his memories.

Memory, Life History, and Storytelling

My friend and I were walking up the coast on an ocean road. The sea was to our right. The homes around the area mostly belong to fishermen and small ranchers in the area. He was taking me to meet a man who was an internationalist in Angola. Before we arrived he casually asked me if I wanted to stop and talk to another man first, a friend of his who had sired a son with a pig.

"Did he go to Angola?" I asked, a little confused.

"No, but he had a baby with a sow."

Never one to pass up a good story, I agreed to meet this man despite him having nothing to do with my research project. My friend told me that Mr. Pig Man was very

proud of having fathered a baby with a pig and all his neighbors in the area knew about this. When we arrived at the house, a very friendly man in his 60's greets us. My friend told him that I wanted to hear the story about his pig. Immediately Mr. Pig Man started to tell me how years ago when he was younger, he had a beautiful sow, very plump and white, and the sow fell in love with him. She followed him everywhere, always wanted to be by his side, and would be lovesick when she did not see him for a few days. Eventually Mr. Pig Man gave in to the sow, and had, what according to him, was consensual "relations" with the pig. A few months later a farrow of piglets was born. One of the piglets had a human-like face and inherited Mr. Pig Man's blue eyes. He was sure this was his son, his son with the sow. That was the end of his story, Mr. Pig Man was silent, awaiting my response.

I asked what happened to the baby human piglet, and Mr. Pig Man wavered. He didn't seem to remember this part of the story as well as he did the first part – the part about the sow being enamored of him and the resulting love piglet a few months later.

"He grew up with the other piglets," he told me.

"Then what happened," I asked, "when he grew up?"

"I sold him, like I did the other pigs."

"You sold your son?!"

"Maybe he died," he stammered, "I don't remember so well, it was years ago."

What, one might ask, does the above story about a man and his pig have to do with the life history of a Cuban internationalist? Well, a lot. As stated throughout this dissertation, my research is based on memories, the memories of internationalists

regarding their experiences in Angola years earlier. As such, I am asking them to recount their experiences from between fifteen to thirty years ago. In previous chapters**,** I discuss some of the concerns regarding "memory" – what is a memory, the fallibility of memory, the mediation between individual versus collective memory, the relationship between memory and history, and the use of memory as a tool of analysis in cultural studies.

Anthropologists use the life history as a way to analyze memories. Gelya Frank states, "the life history is a related anthropological genre that traces how a culture influences the experiences of a specific individual" (2000: 2). Watson and Watson-Franke define life history as "any retrospective account by the individual of his [or her] life in whole or part, in written or oral form" (1985: 2). Since the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropologists have documented the life history of their informants as a form of cultural analysis. Traditionally this meant a transcribed and translated text version of a narration given by an informant from a so-called "primitive" culture, with little or no context or commentary provided by the ethnographer regarding how the narration and text were produced.

By mid century, the first contextualized life histories began to appear in the works of anthropologists and sociologists (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985: 6). Subsequently during the 1970's, a shift in the methodology of anthropology from "participant observation" to "observation of participation" meant a reevaluation of how ethnography was conceptualized and written. A narrative style of ethnography emerged in which the ethnographer, his or her informants, and the informant's community were in dialogue with each other (Tedlock 1991). One of the principal examples of this shift in anthropology is Sidney Mintz's 1960 publication of the life history of a Puerto Rican

sugar cane worker. The work was based in part on recorded interviews, written narration by the informant, and the friendship between ethnographer and informant. Mintz reflected on the reception of his seminal work years after its publication, which had initially been criticized for lack of objectivity because of the relationship between the two men, but was later criticized for not being reflexive and transparent enough, highlighting the radical shift in the anthropological method during that time (1989).

Researchers have continued to struggle with how best to present another person's experiences, the memories of these experiences, and the narration of these memories, onto paper. Even something that on the surface might seem simple is not, like the best term for this practice – oral history, life history, life story, life narrative, autobiographical narrative, biography, and testimonial. These are all terms used, sometimes interchangeably, to describe the act of documenting an individual's experiences from recorded interviews, journal entries, letters, or field notes, into a written, transcribed, translated, edited, and published text. The ongoing critique on the reliability, construction, and implications of using life histories has been equally as contentious as the literature on memory.

Feminist anthropologists and ethnographers of color especially, have questioned the conditions under which anthropological knowledge is produced and published, including the construction of life histories. At the forefront of reflexive or critical ethnography is the relationship between the ethnographer and her informant, questions of privilege and power, concerns regarding authenticity, representation and giving voice to another person, community, or cause, and what is lost in the transcription of oral narrative, translation, and the editing process (Behar 1993; Owusu 1978; Rosaldo 1989;

Narayan 1997). Despite these points of contention regarding the production, presentation, and uses of life history within the discipline of anthropology, it continues to be an invaluable tool for understanding culture.

Returning to the man and his pig, what then does this story have to do with presenting the life history of a Cuban veteran? The story forms a part of Mr. Pig Man's life history, a very important part, and one that everyone who knows him has heard. Yet Mr. Pig Man's account illustrates how the lines between lived experience, memory, history, and storytelling are often blurred, particularly with Cubans. It reminds us that informants are usually storytellers, people who have a life narrative they have repeated various times in a variety of settings for different audiences, and one which makes sense out of the events of their life in the context of the world around them (Behar 1990; 1993). It further reminds us, as Ruth Behar observed, the Spanish word *histori*a makes no distinction between history and story (1990: 13).

In Cuba there is a long tradition of storytelling through poetry, music, literature, dance, religious ritual, and political speeches, particularly among men, stories that emphasize the art of *alarde* (boasting/bragging). This is not an attribute that is unique to Cuban society, nor is it meant to be a generalization. The emphasis on storytelling is not to discredit the life stories presented in this study, but rather to stress that recognizing this aspect of Cuban national character is the only way to understand the culture – its contradictions and ambiguities, especially after more than fifty years of an often-surreal revolution. As Winter and Emmanuel have stressed, "the word 'memory' has profoundly different shades of meaning in different languages" (1999: 1). Moreover, a:

> person's culture and language, and life experiences hearing others recount their stories influence their own style of autobiographical narrative and affect the memories of their experiences (Wang 2000).

The economic situation in Cuba, particularly after the revolution, promotes storytelling as a national pastime. The lack of housing results in multiple family members sharing reduced living quarters. Thus, it is difficult to find absolute privacy, especially for something as commonplace as a conversation. Although people try to respect each other's conversations, "private" discussions can quickly turn into "public" presentations with other family members and friends overhearing and contributing. Group testimonials can slant what the speaker is saying to what he or she believes the audience wants to hear, thus encouraging an environment of storytelling (Frank 1979: 87). As Casey further contends:

> Storytelling is itself a special form of recounting, but one that is not confined to the relating of actual incidents. Stories bear not only on the real but on the imaginary, which they help to create… Indeed, the very telling of one's reminiscences to others induces or encourages a storylike form, and few can resist the temptation to embroider storywise upon otherwise banal reminiscences (1987: 107).

Equally as revealing as the storytelling quality in Cuban culture is the reception of Mr. Pig Man's account by his audience – his neighbors, friends, and family – the acceptance of those events without the urge to fact check, cross check, and background check the validity of his claims. It is taken for what it is, a good story, entertainment. As several scholars have suggested, ultimately it is the audience, the person listening or reading the account that determines whether or not the narrative being told is worth telling (Mintz 1989; Winter and Emmanuel 1999), and whether the account resonates with the listener/reader and finds "echoes of surveillance and disclosures of truth" in what is presented (Behar 1990).

That being said, audiences who consume popular and academic literature, film, or photography about Cuba are largely given "an already-fixed representation" of Cuba and Cubans. The prevailing representation from the last two decades is usually urban with a dilapidated Havana as a backdrop for the bored, impoverished Cuban trapped in a time warp, waiting to be saved by a foreigner, otherwise leave the island, or for Castro to die in order for his or her life to begin. Paraphrasing Chandra Mohanty, the image usually depicts the long-suffering Cuban communists leading a truncated life based on the economic and political system in which they were born, in comparison to the capitalist superiority of the U.S. and American lives (1982: 337). And sexy, the Cuban is always sexy, hyper-sexed or over-sexed, with the common joke being that sex is the only thing on the island that Fidel could not ration.

The competing representation of Cuba, especially before the end of Soviet support, was one of a Cuban workers' paradise, where everyone got along, helped each other communally, had equal access to healthcare and an education, and working women could have it all – continued femininity, children, and a career (Dopico 2002). As Stephen Ellis suggests:

> In countries like [Cuba] that are riven by conflict, different groups of people have different visions of the country's history to the point that they are hardly talking about the same place (2002: 25).

Yet neither of these representations does justice to the complexity of life in Cuba, nor to the island's emblematic and historical significance in the twentieth century, of which Cubans have been central actors. Whether sincere, even possible or doomed to the realms of myth, Cuba's attempt to create a utopia on earth, its iconic status as a symbol of hope and a moment of possibility, an alternative to exploitative capitalism and

imperialism, and its eternal role as David to the United State's Goliath, is a soap opera that has played on the international stage for over five decades. The country's internationalists mission, both military and humanitarian, have dispersed Cubans all over the globe and introduced people from different countries to Cubans, to Cuban internationalism, and Castro's revolution.[111] Cubans who have traveled and lived abroad as internationalists have experienced how their country is perceived by people in other parts of the world, and not just within the myopic dynamics between those living on opposite sides of the Florida straights, or from tourists with enough superfluous cash to travel to the island.

The goal of this project is in part to document a variety of nuanced, reflexive, and often contradictory representations of Cuban lived experience which tell "history within life history," especially in a place like Cuba "where rapid and fundamental social change [has been] occurring" for over half a century (Mintz 1989: 791). To gain a better understanding of what has happened to Cuban society in the past decades – the wider cultural context – it is crucial to understand what happened to these individuals and how they make sense of their experiences as internationalists. Paraphrasing Behar: "I want to see [El Palestino] not as a type but as [he] sees [himself], as an actor thrust in the world seeking to gain meaning out of the events of [his] life" (1990). In recounting his experiences as an internationalist, El Palestino "becomes powerfully representative of his culture and his time, without being ordinary or typical" (Mintz 1989: 4).

[111] When I've been in different academic settings with other anthropologists, historians, literary and regional/ethnic studies scholars, and I've mentioned my research, I inevitably get comments about Cubans popping up in their own research, and not realizing how Cubans had been sent to so many parts of the world. Likewise in non-academic settings, most typically in taxicab rides to and from the airport with non-American drivers, when I have mentioned my own cultural heritage of being half Cuba, I usually get some comment about being treated at no cost by a Cuban doctor at a Cuban run medical clinic in their home country.

On a Rooftop with El Palestino

I was high on a third-story rooftop looking north at the dark blue sea. The ocean breeze was steady and in late afternoon, the sun was not as intense as it would have been at mid-day. From the rooftop I could look down at the layout of the city, a maze of pastel homes along the crumbling cement and dirt roads, the steeple of the renovated Catholic church in the distance, and the large leaves of the Royal palm trees swaying gently. The streets were bustling with children playing after school, adults coming home from work or running errands, and the occasional horse drawn carriage or Lada among the mostly pedestrians and bicycle riders.

In the sky there were flocks of pigeons flying in various directions, a few birds here and there separating from their flock to take a solo flight before returning to their band. To a casual visitor, especially one from a large city with an abundance of undomesticated pigeons, this might go unnoticed, except for the fact that in Cuba, there are few pigeons in the wild, particularly outside Havana. The pigeons flying in the sky all have owners, *palomeros*, or pigeon handlers, as I like to translate in my head to make myself chuckle.[112] Since it was January the training period had just begun, and the *palomeros* stood on their respective rooftops with whistle in hand to train their beloved *palomas* (pigeons). On most afternoons from then until September when the racing season ends, one can find *palomeros* scattered on various rooftops throughout the country.

My friend Basilio, on whose rooftop I was on, is a thin man in his late 50's with the deep wrinkles of someone who has spent too much time in the sun. He has been a

[112] A *palomero* is a pigeon breeder, trainer, and pigeon-racing aficionado. *Palomero* is in the singular, usually attributed to a male, and *palomeros* is in the plural.

palomero his whole life, and his adult sons are also *palomeros*. Basilio proudly tells me that his sons were practically raised in the *palomar* (pigeon coup) crawling around the rooftop structure as babies. He, his sons, and some friends stood around the rooftop making sure the pigeons stayed in the sky, not letting them land until they had sufficient *trainin* (training), one of the many Anglicisms that color Cuban Spanish.[113]

Most *palomeros* are not alone, as this is a group sport usually done among friends or relatives by one's side. On my rooftop there were a few men and myself, no other women. There are not many *palomeras* (female pigeon aficionados) in Cuba. The common belief is that *palomeros* are *tarrudos* (cuckold) because during the winter, spring, and summer months, the *palomero* spends too much time with pigeons and not enough with his wife, leaving the wife bored, restless, and with plenty of opportunity to find a lover during the Columbidae racing season.

On that afternoon however, Basilo was expecting more company at the *palomar*. His friend, *El Palestino*,[114] a former *palomero*, would be dropping by to help out with the training. "He's been in Angola" he told me referring to El Palestino and smiling a wide grin, happy to help me out with my research interest. I smiled back at him, opening my eyes wide with giddiness and excitement to show my gratitude. Before El Palestino arrived, Basilo told me that El Palestino almost lost his feet in Angola because of the amount of walking he did all day in the same pair of boots. It gave him a severe case of fungus and his nails were black when he returned from Angola and even now, many years later, his toenails are not healthy. To Basilo's amusement, El Palestino is not

[113] They pronounce it "try-neen."

[114] A *palestino* is a man from the eastern side of the island, formerly known as Oriente province. In 1976 this region was divided into the five province: Las Tunas, Granma, Holguín, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo. Women are referred to as *palestinas*. In English, *Palestino* means (Palestinian).

embarrassed to his show his nails in open-toed sandals and flip-flops: “I wouldn’t wear shoes that showed my nails if they were like that.”

Then, dropping his voice to a whisper and leaning closer to me, Basilo advised me to think twice about what I said to him because “*El Palestino es un comunista*” (he is a communist). Basilo’s two sons who were also on the rooftop overheard what he whispered and snapped back at him, asking if he wasn’t also a communist, and wasn’t he always talking about his good ‘ol days in the military? Basilo shrugged his shoulders and grinned, not really knowing how to answer. El Palestino, he clarified, was <u>still</u> a communist.

Many men their age are proud of having supported and even fought for the revolution in their youth, and like Basilo some proudly recount how thanks to the revolution they were able to learn to read, finish 12th grade, and participate in creating a better society. But since the Special Period particularly, it has become harder and harder to maintain support for the current system because being loyal to the Party and helping out in the community no longer ensures economic security as it once did. As Basilo once told me, summoning up the sentiment of many of his contemporaries: “I may have only fired two shots for the revolution, but at least I fired them.” Contradictory laws, economic inequality, and little compensation for commitment has made it hard for them to categorically support the revolution as they once did. Basilo’s point, however, was that El Palestino was one of the few who still ardently believed in the revolution and socialism as a viable economic and political system, even though Basilo thinks El Palestino is a hypocrite because “*le gustan las cosas buenas*” (he likes nice things).

From the rooftop I saw a caramel colored skinned man with a full head of white hair approaching the house. Once he made the climb all the way up to the pigeon coop I could see that he was a tall man, slightly over six feet, strong and agile. Later I would learn that he was in his mid 60's and a *Palestino* – originally from the eastern side of the island. We greeted each other with the customary kiss on the cheek, and exchanged pleasantries.

Once he found out I was American he told me that he was sad because his son left with his wife and two children to Miami the preceding year. He missed them terribly. He asked me questions about the "United States," but really he was asking me about Miami. Miami is conflated with the United States just like Havana is with Cuba. I answered as best as I could, having spent time in Miami, but ultimately I couldn't answer what he wanted to hear which was that his son would be back for a visit soon.

El Palestino changed the subject and asked Basilo if he had seen the then newly elected Bolivian president, Evo Morales, talking on the news the previous night. He said President Morales was talking in a "strange language." I told him that it was probably Quechua, an Indigenous language from Bolivia.[115] Basilo asked me if I had been to Bolivia and I told him I had years earlier. They asked me what it was like and I told them about the altitude sickness I had experienced, drinking coca leaf tea to calm my inability to breath, and the bowler hats the women wore as part of their traditional dress. I also spoke about the dire poverty I saw, and told them that I felt people liked to complain in

[115] I didn't see the interview he was referring to and I wouldn't have been able to identify the language specifically but Evo Morales is fluent in Aymara and a dialect of Quechua, as well as Spanish. According to one source he is more fluent in Aymara than Quechua and he claims to be of Aymaran descent and not Quechuan, although this is sometimes disputed because of the integration in the region. Regardless, he was mostly likely speaking Aymara that night and not Quechua as I had stated.

general, but that there were worse places in the world when it came to poverty, in particular in Latin America where the stark contrast between the incredible amount of wealth and economic misery are sometimes sickening.

El Palestino nodded in agreement with me and added "like in Africa." Pleasantly surprised he brought up Africa so casually in the conversation, I took it as a sign he felt comfortable talking about his experiences, and asked him what he meant. He told me he had spent over a year in Angola and Equatorial Guinea as an internationalist delivering supplies to Cuban troops and grateful locals. There was so much poverty in those places, he continued, and he witnessed children starving to death. The time he spent living abroad changed him permanently, giving him a stronger appreciation of the life he left behind in Cuba, his family, friends, and his homeland.

Recording El Palestino's Life History

On that first day we met we spoke for over four hours, and in the following months we met on a regular basis to talk about all sort of things, usually about current world events, politics, and of course his time in Angola, but also about mundane things like whether the lead singer of *Aventura* has a nice voice.[116] Either he would come see me where I was staying, or I would go to his home. Sometimes we were alone when we spoke, especially when we met late at night. On most nights he is usually up late since he legally rents rooms in his home to Cuban couples looking to find a little privacy and he has to tend to his late night guests. Often, however, we were in the company of others, either friends or family. As stated previously, personal space and privacy is negotiated differently in Cuba than somewhere like the U.S., because of the limited amount of

[116] *Aventura* is a very popular Dominican-American Bachata group. The lead singer, Anthony Santos, has a high pitched voice which El Palestino thinks sounds too effeminate for a male. His wife and I disagree.

housing. On those occasions the others present listened or joined in our conversation, or we were left alone to our own "private" discussions in the company of others – little clusters of seclusion and intimacy in a room full of people.

In their own research, Behar and Frank emphasize the importance of the relationship between ethnographer and informant in the process of producing a life history (Behar 1993; Frank 2000). Throughout the dissertation I have situated myself within the text, offering an examination of the relationship between myself and my subjects, as well as an analysis of how the life stories presented were developed. When El Palestino and I sat down to record his life history, I did not ask El Palestino to start by telling me about his earliest memories as a child growing up in the eastern province of Santiago, nor did I ask him to tell me about the day he met his wife of over forty years, or the day his oldest son was seriously injured in an automotive accident. But I know all these things about him and more because of the longstanding friendship we have had for five years.

What follows is a partial transcript of our recorded conversations. I did not record any of the conversations we had during the previous year and a half, but instead had taken detailed field notes. Therefore, I had already heard most of the anecdotes he recounted when they were recorded. What we documented was specifically a life history as it relates to his time in Angola, "a selected sample of his experiences" (Frank 1979: 72), one which places the events that make up his life as an internationalist and revolutionary as the focal point of the narration, the lens through which the events of his life are organized for this recording of his life history. If my project had been about internal Cuban migration, the focus of his narration would have been completely

different. This version of his life history therefore represents "only partial examples of what might have been going on in [his] head at the time the conversation took place" (Schrauf 1997: 436).

Additionally, the documentation of a life history depends in part on the "retrieval environment," the social setting in which we interviewed during the recording (Schrauf 1997: 447). On that particular occasion, his brother-in-law was over when we started to record. Initially the brother-in-law was listening in, but after a couple of hours, he fell asleep, leaving us "alone." He had guests in the rented rooms, so occasionally we had to stop the recording while he fulfilled their requests for beverages and snacks.

Despite these interruptions, El Palestino was particularly eloquent during the recording, especially as the hours went by. He usually spoke movingly about his life, making meaningful connections between his experiences and historic events, linking his story with the history of Cuba and the Cuban Revolution. This was one of the main reasons I approached him to be an informant and asked him to record his life history in the first place. I was always impressed with how he thought about his role as an internationalist within the historical context, and how he spoke about his life as a story he had told before (Behar 1993).

Another reason I wanted to document his experiences was that he was one of the few men that felt comfortable recording his life story at length. Most of the other men I spoke with were either worried about any possible repercussions with working so closely with an American on a project about Angola, particularly during the Bush years, or were simply embarrassed by the idea of being recorded. When they knew the recording device was on they would become self-conscious and unable to narrate a coherent story. What

had previously been a relaxed conversation became an uncomfortable session of: "Is this good?" or "Is this what you wanted?" In contrast, El Palestino liked the idea of being recorded; his voice that is – he did not want to be filmed because he rarely thought he was appropriately dressed.[117] When being recorded, he became more conscious of his word choice and sentence structure, but unlike the others he became more animated and articulate as the recording went on. I also became more self-conscious when the recorder was on. I knew that whatever I said would be recorded, every word, and even though I have the power to edit myself, it was still something that weighed in the back of my mind whenever I opened my mouth.

Ultimately, the decision to be involved in my research project was El Palestino's. Informants choose their ethnographer as much as the ethnographer chooses them (Behar 1993). He had a story he wanted to tell as much as I wanted to tell it. On numerous occasions he told me my project was important and the story of the Cuban internationalists in Angola needed to be told. It was an undertaking that needed to be remembered and not forgotten, as he felt it had been. The longer we worked together the more this became clear to both of us. El Palestino is proud of the work we have put in together on this project, and when we have communicated subsequently, he always reminds me to hurry up and finish because his stories, and the stories of the other veterans need to be told.

An Oral History – Examples of Early Internationalism

Marisabel: You once told me about the history of Cuba, and how internationalism isn't new…

[117] On other occasions he would ask me to film a home movie for me to send to his son in Miami, but he would dress up for the filming, only then agreeing to be on-camera.

El Palestino: Let's talk about the war of independence, and how I've always told you, we are an internationalist country. Why? Because we have helped, not now, always, an entire lifetime, we've helped others. Not just Cubans, but during the Spanish War, I don't remember well, but around four hundred combatants fought in the Spanish War. Here in Matanzas there were quite a few combatants.

"We helped Granada. We have helped Peru during the earthquake in Peru. All of this for free. In Algeria we can say that when the war against France ended, and since the year 1961, if I remember correctly, we sent the first physicians who went from Cuba. They went to Algeria to help everyone there. We helped Guinea, Angola, Ethiopia, we helped Namibia, the Congo. To Africa we can say that we sent in the years that I was there, 75-76, we had already given internationalist aid.

"Like you know we have three hundred thousand physicians spread out all over the world, let's say in Africa, Asia. Including the Pacific, in East Timor, a country in the Pacific, we currently have over a hundred physicians there.

"So internationalism has been on our behalf. Now on behalf of other men, we had Carlos Roloff during the war of independence who helped us and even became a general. We had the American Henry Reeve, who helped us during the war of independence, an American physician. We had Máximo Gómez, a Dominican military chief during the war of independence.

"Let's see if I remember what other men helped us. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara; an international man because he wasn't from Cuba. Instead Ernesto, *el Che*, the United States killed him in a deluge, but he came to help us. There are countless of people that

have helped us. Tania the Guerrilla, because we have to talk about the women too. Tania had a fundamental role in the struggle with Che.

"And when we speak of struggle, the internationalist struggle, it is not just about Cubans like I was telling you, but rather, problems that I don't even remember anymore, because there are many things, and I no longer have good memory. But many of our patriots, Jose Martí, the newspaper *Patria*, a newspaper established by Martí, he established it in Tampa. You see?

"José Martí. Maceo, sons and daughters of the Jamaican people supported Antonio Maceo. When he found himself in Jamaica during the war, when Maceo could no longer take care of his wife, she went to Jamaica, and observed the war from there.

"And like that, many things, what happens is that there are things that I tell you about because I really like history, but I don't remember because there are so many things. If you would have liked, maybe you could investigate more. There are people who can, but I can't because it's too much.

Cuban Internationalism

Marisabel: So how does Angola form a part of this, of Cuban internationalism?

El Palestino: As I was saying, in my case, and I think in the case of all Cubans it's the same, how could I say no? I was a person who was educated, practically, in a revolutionary process, one in which the first revolutionary principal is internationalism. I was educated in that manner, and so that sentiment is one that all us revolutionaries have.

"The independence war in Angola takes form. Portugal gives Angola its independence. Other governments [were] very interested in Angola's riches, especially *el régimen norteamericano* (the US regime). [The US] had South Africa as a country that

could intervene. When South Africa intervened there, they invade Angola. Angola had a group, practically guerillas. Angola defended itself. But ultimately they couldn't. He couldn't. It wasn't that he [Agostinho Neto] wanted to do it, but rather, it's that he had to because he couldn't, he was a young person and they no longer could [defend themselves].[118] So he called for us knowing about our country's internationalism, and we were sent to Angola.

"When somebody asks for our help, because after the triumph of the Angolan revolution was not the first people we sent. We already had our foot in the door. The first combatants that went to Angola were blacks. And our women, many Cuban women, were also involved in the people's struggle, of the Angolan guerilla. In fact, the minister of light industry was a Cuban woman from Santiago de Cuba. She was with the guerilla teaching the women how to fight. The OMA – *la Organización de Mujeres Angolanas* (Organization of Angolan Women) – were sponsored by our women.

"When we talk about the struggle of the Angolan people, we also have to talk about the *pioneros* (pioneers), the children. The children there played a tremendous role. If I recall correctly, we had one or two children in our camp. In fact, we had a sergeant major in our company that was a teacher here in Cuba and he taught classes for the children. We were able to open a school there. Very young, young children picked up arms to defend the revolutionary moment for Angolan independence.

"Regardless, Angolans are patriotic, they love their homeland, their flag, and their coat of arms. *Verdaderos Angolanos* (Real Angolans). With everything they went through, they were a Portuguese colony for five hundred years, and there were fifty years

[118] Agostinho Neto, leader of the MPLA, one of the first to make contact with Che Guevara and the Cubans in the 1960's, and the first president of Angola.

of bloodshed, of struggle to rid themselves of that imperialism that oppressed them so and destroyed them. Look, I can tell you to what heights, to what extent the Portuguese oppression of those people reached, that when we arrived everyone would throw themselves into the street and would leave the sidewalk for us because we were white. We had to tell them, 'no, you are women, you women, children, and the elderly should walk with us on the sidewalk. And they told us that they only did that because the Portuguese had trained them. When we were returning back, they had a different concept about us.

Saying War is Easy, Being in One is Not

El Palestino: We left for Angola in 1975. We left in December of 1975 and arrived in Angola in January 1976. We arrived in Luanda. There you could see all the barbarisms committed by those who opposed Agostinho Neto's plan. Like dumping cadavers in the waters, like using grenades to enter through doors and windows to kill people and bring them down. From there we continued on to Lobito, a port city in the south of Angola. We disembarked there on the 25th of January 1976. From there we saw wartime incidents – the dead, the destruction mostly. Everything about war is destruction, the people dying of hunger, illnesses, the wounded, a disaster, a disaster. To say 'war' is easy, but to be in a war is not, because of all the things you witness.

"During the night the enemy acted one way and during the day another. During the night he was an enemy of the MPLA and during the day many of them were just in their home and you believed they were with the MPLA but they were your enemy.

Marisabel: Why do you believe they were like that?

El Palestino: Because it was a way to not be discovered. During the night you go out and do your dirty activities, come home and nobody imagines anything. There was a time when Savimbi's people said that those who took a Cuban's testicles – that was a war trophy for that soldier. I think that that wasn't done only to Cubans. I think they would go to any cadaver, cut them off, and there you have it. Later they would say they were Cuban. How are you going to know if they're Cuban or not? You understand? They would do that.

"From there we moved to the town of Jua. There we started seeing all the phenomena of war. In fact I met – and I don't think it's wrong of me to say it, but rather it's to bear witness, live how I lived – two women who ate a Cuban. I saw how they had the thighs in the refrigerator. It appeared that they had already eaten the rest. Two Angolans. Two women. There were cannibals, those people who eat people, and apparently that Cuban was injured and they took advantage of this to eat him. I saw that, and the only way to see something like that is in a totally underdeveloped, inhuman country. I don't even know how to measure a person capable of committing such savagery, such barbarism. Yes, barbarism, because this type of thing shouldn't be happening among humans at this day and age.[119]

[119] At times some of these stories that I heard sounded familiar and repetitive, almost like urban legends. Even those who had not participated in a mission repeated similar stories. Historian Brinkman offers an alternative explanation. She argues that the accusation of cannibalism in order to scare the rivals/enemies and civilians had a long history in the area: "Furthermore, people from Northern Angola and Congo/Zaire had a longstanding reputation of cannibalism and witchcraft… Government propaganda also did much to reinforce such stereotypes. After the MPLA came into power in 1975 it had more means than the other parties to disseminate its view. The Angolan government stressed national identity and presented all 'enemies' as 'foreigners.' Accusation of cannibalist atrocities by FNLA troops further harmed the image of returnees" (2003: 208).

"Then we continued to Catonga, more to the south of Angola. There I also saw all the hunger, misery, and backwardness despite having tribes. They weren't a people united. They were divided among the different tribes from there – the Mismila, the Mbundu, the Kimbundu, the Kwanyama, and all those people. From there, in the very roads when you entered a city, like Huila, previously Lubango, in whichever entrance to Huila you would see a sign that said from there forward if you were Mismila then you were with the Mismila.[120]

"So if a Mbundu or a Kimbundu was going through the city to look for food or something that interested him – clothing – he had to ask permission from the oldest member of the tribe, who was the one who authorized that person to enter the town. They had many divisions. That's why during the triumph of the Angolan Revolution, the rebel leader would say *un sólo povo, una sola nación, de Cunene a Cabinda, un sólo pueblo, una sola nación* (one *povo*, one nation, from Cunene to Cabinda, one people, one nation).[121] In other words, it has one people and one nation. And it is so because the leaders' revolutionary idea was to unite, precisely because of all those tribal ways that the Angolan population had, to unite the Angolan people. Everyone united, despite beliefs

[120] According to Brinkman regarding Angolan civilians during the civil war: "Most civilians only expressed casual loyalty for the party to which they belonged. They had no choice: residence determined which party one belonged to: 'we were in MPLA because we were in town.' If the rival party took over the area, the civilians' membership automatically shifted. Ideological differences, ethnic loyalties, and regional rivalries hardly inspired civilians' accounts of the war (2003: 217-8).

[121] El Palestino is referring to a political slogan promoting Angolan national unity. In Portuguese the complete slogan is: *Angola, de Cabinda ao Cunene, um só povo, uma só nação*. When he first says it, he uses the Portuguese word *povo* (people) instead of the Spanish word *pueblo*. He remembers the slogan slightly incorrectly switching the order of the provinces. Cabinda is the northern most province, a highly disputed and oil-rich exclave, and Cunene is one of the southern most provinces. The slogan is still used at present to call for Angolan unity and challenged by those in favor of autonomy for Cabinda province where fighting continues today.

and all those things. You can believe, but you can't be separated from your people. From whom? From the Angolans.[122]

"I've been talking now about the tribes, but now I can tell you about the political groups that were there. During my time, there was the MPLA that was Agostinho Neto's group. There was FLEC,[123] which was from Zaire, from Mobutu's people.[124] He was a guy, a politician that was also involved there. And look how great was the interest of the U.S. imperialists,[125] that all those people, that man, José Samuel,[126] was the same as Mobutu. Mobutu was the president of the Congo, of Zaire, which is the Congo but used to be Zaire. And there was UNITA, which was Savimbi's group. He was an Angolan man, it was an Angolan group, but it was against the Angolan revolutionary process, against the MPLA, and aligned with the interests of the U.S. imperialist. That man *costó trabajo* (was very difficult), he was very difficult for us, he put up a good fight against us, and he continued to put up a good fight against the Angolan government after we left. They've killed him since. They hunted him down and killed him. They killed him, it

[122] Historian Brinkman argues that the MPLA's policies were focused on Luanda at the expense of the rest of the regions, and that it was this neglect and lack of distribution of wealth that caused a rise in "regionalism" and "extrem[e] suspicio[n] of the nation. If Angola only means Luanda, then is it not more fruitful to create or renew ethnic networks?" (2003: 209).
[123] FLEC is an insurgency in Cabinda: *Frente de Libertação por Enclavo Cabinda* (FLEC) (Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave). FLEC itself is splintered into various competing factions.
[124] Mobutu Sese Seko, President of Zaire from 1965-1997.
[125] El Palestino uses the word *imperio* (empire) in Spanish, and in Cuba, particularly among those in favor of the revolution, it is used to refer to the United States and its allies. I have chosen to translate it as "U.S. imperialist" and not simply "the U.S." so as not to lose the derogatory tone of "imperialist."
[126] General José Samuel Chiwale was a founding member of UNITA, along with Jonas Savimbi. Both UNITA and FLEC had close ties with each other and with Mobutu, receiving aid, and using the capital of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Kinshasa, as a base. The US and South Africa funneled support for UNITA through Zaire and Mobutu's government. El Palestino is making the connection between FLEC, UNITA, and Mobutu and stating that because of U.S. interest in the region it supported those movements/governments.

was the end of Jonas Savimbi, and the war ended, finished, since then Angolans live in peace.

"Things over there were difficult, I imagine because of all the cruelty, the barbarism, the backwardness. I remember once we were in a place that was known as the Bairros de Almeida, it was called Chibia. One night in Chibia we were at the chief's camp and a crazy man entered at around two in the morning. You can imagine, a man who comes in there at two in the morning could be an enemy. He was looking for food in the pots. It was because of the hunger; maybe he went crazy from hunger.

"We turned him over to the *comité* (commission). The commission there is like the police. *Lo mataron a palo* (They beat him to death) because they said if he was around the camp he was an enemy. That was the basis of our rejection towards them. We went there and I said, 'That man was sick. How can you do that?' They said that they didn't know he was sick. I told them, 'You don't beat prisoners. You arrest them, investigate, and later take the necessary measures, but measures that are within the law and statues. You can't kill them.' They have a lot of hatred towards the enemy.

"There in Chibia I saw another barbarism inherited from that same system. I was going towards Cuanhama, which is around four hundred and sixty kilometers from where I was in Huíla. I was in a trucking rig distributing bread, meat, and that sort of thing. About a kilometer from Chibia, almost arriving, I found a kid that had been run over by a Portuguese man, and the boy's heart landed about a meter and a half away from his little body, his head somewhere else. He was ripped apart.

"I went after the Portuguese man, and I told him, 'You killed that boy!'"

"'No, it wasn't *eu* (me).'"[127]

"I told him, 'It was you because the only car that passed through there was yours. So it was you.' I took down the license plate and told him, 'Look, I don't have the authority, I am military and we don't take prisoners, and I don't have Angolan authority to detain you, that's not my function here. But I am going to tell the commission that you killed him.' I kept going and I informed government officials about what had happened. When I returned from the commission in Chibia, the same one where they killed the crazy man, I was told they hadn't found him, that they hadn't taken the report.

"In other words, these are things that one experiences that are against human principles. And these experiences strengthen anyone with feelings. Everyone with feelings emerges stronger when they witness these things, those disasters, and that's what, like I said, strengthens your feelings as Christian, as a person, and strengthens my revolutionary principles. That's why when an internationalist travels abroad; you become an internationalist when you see all those things, unjust things, things that go against other human beings. We humans have to live like who we are, like human beings not animals. Even animals love and respect each other. There might be a row between one animal and another, but they respect each other. You see? So that's what gives us Cubans, to fight not for ourselves, but for others. There are words Fidel said; Fidel says you can change whatever needs to be changed. It's true. That's always been our struggle.

"I was one of the people that spent the least amount of time there [Angola]. I was there for thirteen months. I spent one month in Cuba preparing for when I got there –

[127] When recounting the Portuguese man's words, El Palestino uses the Portuguese *eu* (me) instead of the Spanish word *yo*.

what it was like, the language, the dilemma, that I had to take care of myself – because we were going to war, not a dance, it was war. And we also took precautions against diseases since there was a lot of malaria and yellow fever over there. There are no nurses there and your fever won't go down and you are in the middle of the jungle. How do you bring down the fever? There is a disease over there that kills people. It's like AIDS, incurable.

"So I went there for thirteen months. We were mostly not a combat unit. We were in combat zones, but we were mostly an army transportation unit. We took care of logistics, like clothing, food, and fuel. We weren't entrenched with the combat units, but we did go to all the units in every location.

"Back then Namibia was a South African colony. When the Cuban mission, jointly with the leadership of the Angolan government, gathered together in Cunene for the transfer of power and regarding the invasion, because [South Africa] had invaded Angola. An African general said, 'We've been waiting fifteen days for you.' One of our generals responded, 'Yes, but for the last fifteen days we've been removing truckloads of landmines along the road that you laid so that we couldn't pass through. We've been removing all those mines so that we can get through.'[128]

"I had a…a…friend of mine, an Angolan woman, a thirty-something woman, a very clean woman, very clean, yet she smelled badly.[129] Why did she smell bad? Because there the peasant women, the women from the countryside, they had, or have,

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[128] After decades of civil war, Angola has one of the highest rates of landmines in the world: "More than 40 different types of mines from 15 countries have been found during clearance operations" http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php. In the last few years, the Miss Angola Landmine Beauty Pageant has been held to bring attention to the problem and to celebrate female disabled pride and empowerment http://miss-landmine.org/misslandmine_news.html.

[129] In this sentence I use the two ellipses to indicate long pauses before deciding on the word "friend."

no, I think had because that was their underdevelopment, and she isn't developed but she probably has changed otherwise since then, that was thirty years ago. That woman had three daughters and a son. She wasn't rich. She was poor, poor, poor. She asked me everyday to give bread to her children. I distributed to the units but I would talk to the people from the slaughterhouse, and I would say, 'Give me some liver.' I would eat two or three steaks. I left at eight in the morning and would often return at twelve at night. It was more than four hundred kilometers, and delivering to all the units.

"I would get four, six, seven steaks for myself, and the rest I would give to her. That was almost daily, and she was very considerate to us. I would tell her – I don't even remember her name – and I would tell her, 'I wish that my wife and kids could meet you. Do you have a picture?' She would say no, that she didn't. If not I said, 'I need you to cut off a little braid of the girl's hair and give it to me to take to my wife and kids.

"That braid is maid of cow shit, milk from a tree that that gives a lot of milk – its creamy and sticky, we would use it to seal letters – and goat milk. She would make a paste with goat milk, milk from the tree, and cow milk. The shit gave the paste body. Then she would braid the girl's hair with it. Very pretty, but smelled like what? Like shit!

"The day I told her – damn, what was her name? I don't remember her name – 'I'm leaving, mama.' That woman cried. She hugged me and cried because she had been widowed, and that woman cried asking what was she going to do now since everyday I gave her food for her children, and they ate a can of sardines, and they ate. I felt bad seeing that woman struggling for her life, struggling for her kids. She lived in *el atraso*

(the dust).[130] I think I have a good heart, maybe I don't. The day I left I joked around with scissors that I was going to cut the girl's braid, but I didn't, because the little girl would have looked ugly if I had.

"My impression is that it is a country completely… very rich, Angola is RI-ICH![131] There are goldmines everywhere. Yet the wealth and poverty do not coincide. There, the poor… that's a kind of poverty that is very horrible. But it is a result of the mines in Angola being exploited by the big international companies. If there was an Angola mine, that never reached the poor, it was only for the rich. There, the poverty was indiscriminate, a vast underdevelopment. People didn't know how to read, write, they didn't know anything. That was the reality, one that I lived during the war.

"I remember once, during December 1976, we went with the people from the Cuban embassy in Angola to tend to the Cuban combatants that were in the reservoir in Cunene. I remember when we arrived there was such a vast backwardness because the region belonged to the Kwanyamas. The Kwanyamas are a tribe that doesn't even speak. Their language consists of hand and head gestures, like whistling, making some signal, and with that they are saying something in their own way. Officially the tribe does not have an original dialect that is theirs. We were lucky there was a soldier there that was married to one of those women, and she knew how to say some words. She was our interpreter.

"There is poverty in the town as well, but poverty is mostly found outside the cities. There is industry there [Angola] and many modern cities, even cities more modern

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[130] *Atraso* literally means "backwardness" but I thought the reading would flow better with a figurative rather than literal translation.

[131] In this phrase I use the ellipsis to show how El Palestino changed his train of thought mid-sentence. He was going to talk about Angola's poverty but then decided to talk about the country's wealth and inequality.

than here in Cuba. Luanda is gorgeous, beautiful, beautiful, beautiful, BEAU-TI-FUL! It is right up there with New York. I'm not saying it is the same as New York, but it is just as modern. I'm not referring to the inhabitants and that sort of thing, but it's beautiful, the streets are clean and everything. But don't go out a half a kilometer from there! The cities all have development. Where is the poverty concentrated? There is poverty in the towns, but where is the poverty? Outside the cities. You would see all those things – people in loincloths with bows and arrows. You would see women in loincloth! Can you believe it? Incredible![132]

"You would see women with really rough hands – women! Then you would see them, those poor ugly women, but they seemed clean, educated, but educated within her particular level, within her *quimbo* (village). When development begins, what does a country need, any country rich or poor? It needs men, men to work, for them to pay others. Instead there you would see them [the men] eating *fúnji*, drinking – what did they call it? – a little wine they made from fruit and corn, I don't remember what it was called.[133]

"So that's their life, backwardness, the lack of education in the people, and among the very ones that controlled the country that didn't want them to get ahead. How can an inhumane regime keep humans at their feet and treat them like nothing? Not teach them anything, not allow them to develop, because people when they begin to develop, when people begin to develop they start to think, to think how to live, how to make your own way, obtain everything you couldn't have before. Once people are like that you can no

[132] As historian Brinkman argues, MPLA policies favored Luanda, thus most of the wealth was concentrated in the capital. None of the veterans that noticed the prosperity of Luanda at the expense of the other regions, including El Palestino, mentioned the partiality of MPLA policies.
[133] *Fúnji* is a staple food in Angola. Similar to the Ghanaian *fufu*, it is a porridge made from corn, cassava/manioc, or sweet potato flour. Spelling variations include: *funje* and *funge*.

longer dominate them. You have to demonstrate that you are good, because if you show that you are bad or you continue with your oppressive ways, they will hate you and war against you.

"There are people now with a certain level, but they are not easy to find. There are many Angolans that have come here to Cuba and have even become physicians because they kept studying. For many years Cuba had orphan children here that were educated. Over there is a lot of ignorance, a lot, too much. There is no comparison, when you see a countryperson, because any countryperson here in Cuba, many of them have cars or a lot of money. Over there it is different, the person from the country has nothing.

"Those are the customs. For example, during the time I was there, there was a family that had a pretty girl and she was well fed because they were going to sell her. If the girl told her dad, 'Dad, I have a boyfriend.' 'That's fine,' but when the guy would say to him, 'I'm going to marry your daughter,' the dad would say, 'Well look, that girl of mine is worth this much.'

"I knew a police officer who gave six kwanzas for his wife. Six kwanzas are like two hundred dollars or six thousand pesos. The kwanza doesn't have much value, its around forty-three for one dollar.[134] He gave like twenty-five cattle or something like that, plus the money for the woman. She was young. He was a police officer. He was Angolan but used to be a soldier in the Portuguese musical band. When the Portuguese left, he stayed in Angola, and went on to the Angolan police. He would drive us when

[134] El Palestino is describing a dowry, a tradition practiced all over the world. However, he does not use the Spanish word *dote*, and instead the verb *da*r (give) money. El Palestino's calculations seem to be incorrect. If one dollar is equal to forty-three kwanzas, then six kwanzas would only be about US $0.15, not two hundred dollars. At that rate, two hundred dollars would be approximately 8,600 kwanzas. Perhaps he was confusing the exchange rate back then and now.

we went to change money. He was a chauffeur. So he had his wife and two children. That woman was certainly not in loincloth anymore, not even close! That woman… did you get to use or remember platforms?

Marisabel: Yes.

El Palestino: You remember them?

Marisabel: Yes.

El Palestino: You were a girl.

Marisabel: I have platform shoes.

El Palestino: You do? Hey! Those aren't in style.

Marisabel: They are in style again.

El Palestino: Well, now really big ones are in style. Yes, they are in style again. Well, back then platforms were in style, and here in Cuba you would see people in platforms the entire day, every woman in platforms, and this woman wore platforms, and she was well dressed and perfumed, a French perfume. You walked by that black woman and she was *una blanca de paseo, una blanca de Cuba de paseo* (a white woman to show off, a white woman from Cuba to show off).[135] She was no longer a black girl from the countryside. He brought her from the countryside, but that black woman had been civilized.[136]

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[135] El Palestino is playing with the saying typically reserved for beautiful black women, *una negrita de paseo* (a black woman to show off). As stated in Chapter III, this saying refers to a beautiful black woman you take out to show off in public, but alludes also to black women you don't take out in public and have a non-public relationship with. In this case, El Palestino is saying the black Angolan woman was so beautiful that she was as beautiful as any white Cuban woman. Clearly the standard of beauty is the white woman.

[136] Brinkman cites the dichotomy between town and bush in Angola during the civil war, where anyone in the bush was believed to support UNITA and everyone in town the MPLA. Before the war people moved between town and bush with ease, but during the war, civilians with relatives in either place could not visit each other. Civilians felt trapped in either town or bush and had to

"He [the police officer] would tell me stories. If by chance she asked him for a divorce, her father had to return everything he was given for her. But if he asked her for a divorce, he would lose everything. There are faithful and unfaithful spouses there too, that's normal, but generally the women there are very faithful. Well, that's how things were, a lot of ignorance, a lot of backwardness, hunger, necessity, calamities, lack of education, and lack of humanity.

The Return Home – Internationalism and a Revolutionary

Marisabel: Nowadays how do you remember that time, that moment?

El Palestino: It was worth it. First of all, Cuba would not have been Cuba if Cuba had not given that internationalist aid to Angola. Cuba would have lost its internationalist principles, but Cuba has never lost them. Cuba never lost them because it started with Algeria, then in Angola, Ethiopia and all, and Cuba still has an army dispersed all over the world, nowadays of physicians, athletes, because the times have changed.

"I see it that way, and personally it strengthened me. In the first place, Che once said, as did other revolutionary leaders, that the highest stage that a man could reach, outside of being a revolutionary, was being an internationalist, because for Che internationalism was something vital for him, and for man. For the man who fought, the revolutionary man, from this country or another, not only in Cuba, the revolutionary is in every country in the world. He manifests himself in different ways, for example in Peru the revolutionary party is the leftist party. Whereas in Chile it is not, in Chile it's different. Generally in any country the Left are the revolutionary people.

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maintain appearances for fear of reprisal: "Civilians [in the bush] tried to avoid any association with town life. Children were dressed in rags and animal skins for fear of being seen as traitors" (2003: 216).

"And that [experience in Angola] taught me many things, it taught me how people outside my country think, how other people think. For example, how you who are not Cuban but American. You understand? It helped me a lot. You see that you have been interviewing me, you have done interviews with me since… *coño* (shit)!… and I learn from you.[137] I am learning from you, because in the first place I see your emotions, I see that your emotions are not bad, they are human emotions, and you understand things well. There are people who understand things about Cuba based on what they were told. But there are those who are against your ideas but know for themselves, they study, don't manifest them, they don't see things your way, but they know it.

"So yes, I think it truly helped me. When I met those people, saw the life of the people of Namibia, not a lot, but I got to know the people of Namibia, how they think, how they struggled, so many things, how much appreciation for our era, our cause, the reasons why we helped them. I was in Guinea, saw the people of Guinea, you could see the people, how they saw us.

"I am going to die but I have my conscious clear that I harmed no one, that I helped, that not one of us laid one finger on an Angolan, never. It only occurred to one to abuse an Angolan woman and he was executed. Ochoa gave the order to execute him, and he did so for killing an Angolan woman. I don't know the details, but he definitely killed the woman and it cost him his life, and Ochoa gave the execution order.

"Afterwards, Ochoa got completely off track. Not against the Cuban Revolution, but against the principles of the revolution – which is respect and that sort of thing. That guy was even doing deals with elephant tusks, drugs, everything, and they executed him.

[137] In this sentence I use the ellipses to indicate long pauses before use of the exclamation word – he was stressing how long we had been working together.

We never laid one finger on anyone, and we never brought back anything at all because no one owes us anything, gratitude and nothing else. Angola doesn't owe me anything. Angola doesn't owe me anything.

"And the state didn't give anything either. Nowadays you go to Angola and the Angolan government gives to you, but back then they gave nothing. Firstly because there was no development, they didn't have anything. When we went we had it hard.

Marisabel: When you returned, how did you feel, what did you do?

El Palestino: Customarily Angolans, I'm talking about the peasants, of the uncultured people, they wash their hands, feet, and face, and the rest nothing. They had a bad odor; it was really a stench. It's that the person of color truly has a bad odor. It's kind of a strange odor, a strange foul-smelling odor.

"So when I left after a year of looking at all that, at all those things, the stench, everything. I went there on a boat, and we navigated for twenty-five days, but I returned on a plane. By plane it is only fourteen hours. When we were over Puerto Rico, you could see, even though we weren't on land, but you could see, I don't know or maybe it was my impression, but there was a different atmosphere on the plane, even the air was different. Well in the first place, there was air conditioning on the plane, oxygen, food, a little candy, a stewardess that would pass by your side – back then I was only thirty-three years old, so I was rendered speechless! So I don't know, when we were over Puerto Rico you could see things, I don't know, a little more, I don't know.

"It was around five in the afternoon and it had rained heavily here. You could see the sun after it's rained, the sun looks so beautiful. I wanted to be here so badly already,

to arrive home already. When the plane landed in Havana it was so beautiful. There were puddles on the runway when the plane arrived, and all the water went flying.

"When I arrived in Havana the children looked so beautiful to me, as if, it seemed to me they shined, like they had been scrubbed or something. They had such a delicious smell those children. Although they were very clean and all, they were beautiful. To me Cubans are beautiful. To me Cubans are very beautiful and they are always well dressed, really they are so beautiful.

"In order for you to know about life, a Cuban has to leave Cuba. If you always stay in Cuba, you think Cuba is a disaster! No! Leave Cuba so you can see! Even in countries more advanced than ours they have that problem, because everyday in Cuba everybody is always in uniform. Here in Cuba there is not one child that doesn't have uniform, not one. You go around in one of those countries, like Angola, and those poor children, barefoot, without a pair of shoes.

"So when I saw my children, what a beautiful sight! There were more than five hundred people there to meet me. When I returned people welcomed me like a god, they were waiting for me. At work they threw me a party with like thirteen cases of beer and roasted pork. How they admired us back then. There were two of us, me and another guy. They put a table for my family and his family. And what a table! And around us other tables with all the workers. Everyone was drinking beer! That was the best thing ever in life! The best thing ever!

"But I went to Angola clandestinely. Back then it was a secret. I had a passport with entry for Angola, but aside from that we had to hop over to Zaire, see how you made

it to the embassy in Zaire, and from Zaire to the Soviet Union. And from there they would tell you where you were going or what you had to do, but it was clandestine.

"Now those things are declassified. They are very valuable, but no longer a state secret. When I went to Angola, six military officers summoned me. Since I was also on active duty, the first guy asked me, 'Do you know why you are here?' I said yes. I had never been summoned. The official tells me, 'Are you willing to undertake a mission outside of Cuba?' I said, 'Right away.' Those were my words, 'Right away'.

"He says to me, 'Put together some underwear, toothbrush and toothpaste, at any moment you will be called.' And they called me on the 4th or 6th of December of 1975. I was mobilized all of New Years Eve! I didn't see my family again, my children who were very small at the time, until 1977, until March 8, 1977.

"They told me a mission outside Cuba. 'Right away.' And without any ulterior motives at all. I was an internationalist without ulterior motives. I am a party militant without ulterior motives. And nobody put a gun to my chest so that I would go. No, no, no, I went of my own free will because of my revolutionary conscience and formation. There are people that are mistaken. That word, 'revolutionary' encompasses so many things – responsibility, patriotism, sacrifice. What does the word imply? Sacrifice. You can't be a revolutionary person and have a brand new car or a million pesos. No, the revolutionary is not like that, the revolutionary is sacrifice and nothing more. Yes you can have money if you earned it honestly.

"Being a revolutionary is a lot of sacrifice. Just like when we went to Angola while a lot of people stayed here, we were already sacrificing, putting my chest forward so that no one would kill me. They could have killed me, because I didn't go for a stroll

or anything like that. I went to a war. That is sacrifice; that is internationalism; that is doing for others; that is love of country. I am Cuban, I love my Cuba, problems or no problems, I am Cuban, and I love my homeland, where I was born, where I was raised, where I know everyone, where I speak the same language with my people. The revolutionary has to be primarily patriotic, its my homeland, I love her.[138] You can be against the revolution but continue being Cuban. But there are many who say, 'I am Cuban but I'm not staying here.' Maybe it's because they are spineless or cowards. It's my homeland, I was born here, and here I will die.

Race, the Other, and the Triumph of the Angolan Revolution

By and large, El Palestino's narration follows public memory about Angola. For instance, he fuses the histories of Angola and Cuba as oppressed former colonies and uses terms associated with the Cuban Revolution when referring to events in Angola. But aside from these terms that link Angola and Cuba as partners in struggle, there is little else that demonstrates solidarity or equality with the Angolan people – in fact, quite the contrary.

Although he mentions the other two warring factions in the Angolan conflict – UNITA and the FNLA – he discusses them in terms of foreign alliances and not as domestic political groups, for instance he cites Zairian/Mobutu's support of the FNLA and apartheid South African and U.S. support of UNITA and FLEC in Cabinda. For El Palestino, the only legitimate heirs to the Angolan nation were the MPLA, the rest were associated with outside interests:

> In the complex ensemble of politic of belonging 'foreignness' is one of the most damaging of all identity categories: foreigners do not belong here. Much war propaganda thus revolves around concepts like 'external' and

[138] *Patria* (Homeland) in Spanish is gendered feminine.

> 'foreign.' MPLA, for example, labeled FNLA 'foreign' because of its ties with Zaire, while FNLA saw MPLA as an 'un-African' party promoting 'foreign' Portuguese manners (Brinkman 2003: 219).[139]

Equally, the MPLA represented the Angolan people to El Palestino, their wishes and desires for a new independent nation, whereas the other two groups embodied foreign greed; despite the fact that the MPLA also enjoyed foreign support from the Cubans and Soviets. The Cuban internationalists I interviewed all spoke of the MPLA as "the Angolans," making no distinction between the people and the MPLA leadership. Therefore, the civil war is not discussed in terms of competing political or ideological agendas on behalf of local leaders with local support, of which the MPLA was a part; instead the MPLA was the only valid choice of "real" Angolans. This, however, was not necessarily the case when I spoke with the Angolans who had lived in Cuba who mostly viewed all foreign support, including Cuban, as the same, and equally culpable of prolonging the civil crisis in the country.

Therefore in El Palestino's narration, the MPLA are the genuine representatives of the Angolan people, the Angolan nation, and the Cuban support that ensured their victory was a selfless act in solidarity with the people of another nation in search of political autonomy. The creation of an Angolan nation, regardless of regional, ethnic, religious, political, and linguistic differences was not ever questioned. "Real" Angolans

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[139] As scholar Keith Somerville explains, what can be considered "foreign" influence and loyalty is also the result of arbitrarily drawn national borders that cut across ethnic affiliation: "Related to Angolan geographical position and the influences of neighboring states is the ethnic make-up of the population. Several of the larger ethnic groups are not limited to Angola and extend into neighboring Zaïre, Zambia and Namibia. This has led to numerous problems, notably in northern Angola where the large and important Kongo tribe stretches into Zaïre, creating the opportunity for conflicts of loyalty, porous borders and possible interference in Angolan affairs via the Kongo peoples. In the early stages of the rise of African nationalism within Angola, Kongo separatism and nationalism was a strong and divisive influence which detracted from the national liberation struggle. The Luanda-Chokwe group also spans the borders with Zaïre and Zambia, and the Ovambo people are to be found on both sides of the border with Namibia" (1986: 3).

supported the MPLA and the design for a unified nation, while local chauvinism and tribalism were a root cause of the conflict, archaic and throwbacks at best. As I showed in Chapter II, this is all in line with Castro's speeches from the era that critiqued tribalism, pushed for a unified, sovereign nation of Angola, free of foreign elements, except for Cuban which was not viewed as a foreign influence.

What is noteworthy in El Palestino's account is how he takes the idea of "nation" as a given, the Angolan nation, regardless of the fact that the very idea of a unified nation was being fought to the death by the warring factions, there was no Angolan nation to speak of. Moreover, I myself do this when discussing Angola; and in studying the state, the nation and transnational spaces, I am taking the nation state as a given, something which is debatable then and now (Ellis 2002).

Essentially, El Palestino's account is one of difference with the Angolans. For him and the other men I interviewed, Angola is a unique event in their life since none were career soldiers. This was their only time abroad and only wartime experience. The intervention proved to be a "jarring moment" that gave cause for self-reflection, particularly about aspects of their lives that were previously taken for granted or "natural" (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985). His memory of the return home is the best example of how what had previously been normal to him had changed because of the experience. Even the airspace above the Caribbean was different than it had been in Africa. And the beauty of the rain puddles and the cleanliness of the Cuban children that awaited his return mark the moment of awareness of his homeland in contrast to the Angola he had left behind. For El Palestino, the time he spent abroad made him grateful

for what he had at home – family, friends, and country. It made him more aware of his "Cubanness" in relation to Angola.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the memories of the internationalists provide a tool with which to see how race is negotiated and discussed in Cuba. Of all the men I spoke with El Palestino's account is the most aligned with the official memory as it is portrayed in the textbooks, films, speeches, and commemorations of the Angolan intervention. Notwithstanding, one can see inconsistencies with official memory in the way he speaks about Angolans, particularly in regards to race.

The same themes of body odor, backwardness, and barbarism appear in his account to mark difference between Cubans and Angolans. He creates temporal and physical divisions between himself and Angolans who he views as arrested in a primitive past, submissive to their Portuguese colonizers, still dressed loin cloth, committing "barbarisms" like cannibalism and selling their daughters.

This is most clearly observed in his discussion of Angolan women – the two female cannibals, the poor single mother who asked him for food for her children, and the beautiful wife of the police officer. The cannibals provide the ultimate evidence of Angolan backwardness, because as he says, cannibalism could only be seen in an underdeveloped country. The story of the beautiful Angolan woman suits the political project for Angolan national union, urbanization, and "civilization." The black, country girl, "sold" by her father and purchased by a police officer, who in leaving her village and wearing modern clothes is transformed into a beautiful woman. So beautiful that she is described as equal in beauty to a white Cuban woman "*una blanca de Cuba de paseo*" (a white Cuban woman to show off) – the standard of beauty. Finally, the single mother

embodies the lack of hygiene and bad odor, but also the economic failure due to the exploitative nature of the Portuguese colonial system.

There is a notable difference in the way he talks about Angolan and Cuban women. The Cuban women are more complex, yes they are held as standards of beauty, but through their actions they are also positive examples of revolutionaries, like the minister of light industry and the significant role of Cuban women in Angola in general. Similarly he emphasizes the accomplishments of Tania la Guerrillera, a German woman, but one representative of the Cuban Revolution. In contrast, he refers mostly to sexual qualities, lack of civilization, and deviance in regards to Angolan women and *negras* broadly.

Like others I interviewed, El Palestino denied ever having any sexual relationship with an Angolan woman. However, I silently questioned the long pause before calling the single mother he helped out his "friend." In the end he is the only one who knows whether he was involved with anyone romantically or sexually, and the nature of the relationship between him and his "friend." But I also wondered what other stories he would have told me if I were a male ethnographer? As noted previously, another researcher who interviewed Cuban veterans states in his monograph that many of them recounted having sexual encounters with Angolan women (George 2005). Perhaps the men felt uncomfortable confessing to me they had intimate relationships abroad since I am a female, but at the same time, perhaps they felt they had to tell a male ethnographer they had sexual relationships because they felt inadequate if they admitted to being abstinent for such a long period of time. Regardless, it highlights how different ethnographers can solicit different types of information from the subjects they study.

Eventually El Palestino's discussion of Angolan imperfection turns into a conversation of black deviance in general, an extension of *cuentos de negros* – (stories/tales about black people). Once again, smell plays an important role in the way blacks are referenced. El Palestino suggested that not only Angolans, but blacks in general, universally, have a bad scent. One can see how contrary to social memory, these individual memories paint a more complex and contradictory picture of Cuban society regarding race and race relations. Moreover, although El Palestino is proud of his roots on the eastern side of the island, and he himself is of color, he thinks and speaks of himself as white. This was a common trend – there are many Cubans that would auto-identify as white yet to my "American" eyes, I would consider them of color (See Chapter VII).

Language

The use of language among internationalists like El Palestino is important to note. El Palestino uses Cuban revolutionary terms when discussing Angola, such as "*pioneros,*" when referring to children. The MPLA did indeed co-opt socialist terminology, for example, the *Organização dos Pioneiros Angolanos* (Angolan Pioneers' Organization). He also calls the MPLA's control of the government, "the triumph of the Angolan revolution," a phrase that is synonymous with the Cuban Revolution. Several times he simply states "the Angolan Revolution" when referring to the MPLA's assent to power, despite the fact that civil war raged on for years afterwards, and the MPLA's right to govern continues to be contested today.

He also makes an effort to incorporate words he learned in Angola, even if at times they were used incorrectly or didn't remember them well. For example, he used

quimbo (village), *eu* (I), and *povo* (people), instead of their equivalents in Spanish. Curiously, he also incorporated Portuguese into conversations that were not related to his memories about Angola. For instance, on various occasions when I went over to his house, and he would make me a papaya shake, and instead of using the Cuban Spanish term, *fruta bomba*, he used the Portuguese word, *mamão*.[140] On another occasion he asked me if I was going away soon, and asked "*¿Cuándo te vas embora?*" using the Portuguese word *embora*, for "going away" (When are you going away?). After saying this he laughed not knowing why a word in Portuguese came out. But we had been speaking about Angola and in thinking about past events the language he used backed then filtered through.

The internationalists I interviewed did this while we spoke; they made an effort to use words or phrases in either Portuguese or an African language from the region. When they used Portuguese words they were pleasantly surprised that I could understand them, and it seemed to encourage them to use more.

Other internationalists who participated in missions in different countries did the same. I remember on one occasion being with a group of workers in a grocery store when a man walked in and started speaking in a different language to one of the workers. One of the female employees turned to me and made a comment about how they were speaking whatever language of theirs from Africa. He looked at her and said, "It's Amharic – please have some respect." The entire exchange had partially been in jest, but at the same time it was obvious her ignorance annoyed him, and the two men used their "secret" language to differentiate themselves from the others present. They had been

[140] In Cuban Spanish *papaya* is a term used for female genitalia, so the term *fruta bomba* is used instead (except in the Eastern side of the island where papaya is used). Literally it means (bomb fruit).

internationalists that had gone abroad and were able to communicate in anther language, while the other workers were not.[141]

A Revolutionary in Changing Times

While listening and subsequently reading El Palestino's life history certain themes emerge in the telling of his story. The most obvious thread that runs through his narration is that of being a committed revolutionary and his service as an internationalist as the highest expression of that commitment. He assumes a broader definition of internationalism, associating past transnational movements and foreign aid with internationalism. In his reminiscences regarding Angola, he makes clear the distinction between those Cubans who laid their life on the line in support of another people's right to self-autonomy and those who did not; between those, like himself, who chose a life of individual sacrifice for a greater collective good at the expense of individual material gains. In his own narration, he spoke up in defense of his fellow subjugated human beings in Angola and sought to empower them by protesting the questionable behavior he witnessed. He did all this without asking for anything in return. He is owed nothing, as he says, for what he did.

At first glance, his revolutionary fervor might seem contrived, and if I had spent little time with him, I might have thought that. But after years of knowing him, I believe El Palestino is sincere in his loyalty to the revolution, although he is not naïve like some of his friends and family accuse him of being. Like all human beings, he is contradictory and complex. He participates in the black market like most everyone else in Cuba, and bends the rules when convenient. Retired and receiving a pension from his job as a factory manager, he is enjoying the fruits of his labor, including a nice home, and has all

[141] The men had served as internationalists in Ethiopia.

the luxuries that are not available to most Cubans – an entertainment center consisting of a TV, DVD player, VCR, MP3 player, a nice motorcycle, and a computer. Most of this he has earned with his current business of renting rooms to Cuban couples, along with the help he receives occasionally from his son in Miami. As he says in his story, a revolutionary can have money, as long as he worked hard and honestly to earn it, and in the process paid his dues. Which he feels he has.

El Palestino knows perfectly well that there are serious problems in Cuba, but he associates them mostly to individual human error and corruption, and not something intrinsically wrong with the ideals of the revolution. He believes in socialism, solidarity with the other exploited *pueblos* (nations), and is against the dehumanizing aspects of capitalism. At times he has paid a high price for his convictions. He was physically assaulted at the factory he worked at for years on several occasions by angry co-workers upset that he foiled their plans to steal something extra to sell on the street.[142] As a result of spending time in a war-torn country, he knows that for all the problems there are in Cuba, things could be much, much worse, and that is the comparison he chooses to make – things could be worse, rather than things could be better – reflecting a personal attitude towards life and life expectations.

Those who served in the military internationalist campaigns prior to the Special Period, like El Palestino, received little or nothing material in return for their sacrifice. And those who did, did so mostly clandestinely and at risk of being disciplined. In his account, he points out how people are compensated economically in the internationalism of today unlike in his day. This discrepancy has led to resentment because economic

[142] This was not something he brought up originally, I heard about it from former co-workers and mutual friends. I asked him about it and he confirmed it.

compensation is given to those who never sacrificed for the revolution over those who did. The following chapter will discuss the tension between past and present internationalism, and the return of materialism in Cuban society.

Currently many Cubans are willing to serve on missions, not out of revolutionary conviction, but because of the money they will earn and the access to goods not otherwise available. This contrast between the internationalism of "before" and "now" marks a return to materialism in Cuban society, predominantly among the youth, and an end to the romanticism surrounding some of the earlier campaigns of the revolution. It also conveys how Cuban internationalism has changed from what were both military and humanitarian missions, to now almost exclusively humanitarian. Cuba no longer sends troops abroad to help incipient revolutionary causes around the globe. Without Soviet aid, it basically cannot afford to. A more in depth discussion of this is included in the following chapter.

El Palestino is troubled by the changing tide in Cuban society. He is proud of the altruistic service he and the others provided at no tangible benefit to themselves, but at the same time seems to laments the fact that current internationalists are rewarded economically for their work, while he and the others were not. Numerous informants, veterans and civilians alike, mentioned this disjuncture in how internationalism was imagined and practiced before and now. For El Palestino, the "moral" rewards of internationalism are in the past and no longer form a part of internationalism today: "How they admired us back then," he said, implying that "they" – ordinary Cubans – no longer admire internationalists.

More than a critique against the ideological transformation from the advancement of social causes to material and individual gain, El Palestino's nostalgia for an altruistic

and "moral" past also corresponds with a generational divide between old(er) Cubans who remember what it was like before the revolution or were raised with the revolution, and the young who were raised during and since the Special Period: "Nostalgia is an essential, narrative, function of language that orders events temporally…in positing a 'once was' in relation to a 'now' it creates a frame for meaning" (Stewart 1988: 227). Like the young in most places the majority of youth in Cuba are not concerned with past revolutionary accomplishments, and are instead more interested in the latest movie, music, and nice clothes. Internationalism and the intervention in Angola is simply another history lesson they aren't interested in, revolutionary propaganda that they feel no longer serves their goals and objectives, part of an antiquated past. According to El Palestino, the youth in Cuba today don't understand sacrifice and have it easy, and want too many material things without realizing the value of these items and what possessing them represents in hard work and sacrifice.

On other occasions he told me about his upbringing. He has a similar hard-luck story to many who were born a few years before the revolution, particularly in the provinces. He grew up poor and uneducated in the eastern side of the island, but after the revolution he returned to school as a young adult and completed a *técnico medio* (technical degree). Consequently, he is grateful to the revolution for giving him the opportunity to improve his lot in life, and for the chance at mobility. He migrated to Matanzas as a teenager and brought two of his siblings with him. But his economic and social struggles growing up put him at odds with the younger generations in Cuba who have grown up taking certain government safety nets for granted, like the ability to read, monetary assistance for the unemployed, or having access to medical care.

As someone who has always been loyal to the revolution, a heartbreaking inconsistency in his life is the fact that his son legally left Cuba to live in Miami a few years ago. His son's departure came as a shock to him because he thought his son would stay in Cuba forever. Politics aside, he simply misses his son terribly. El Palestino feels the need to justify his son's actions by explaining that he left because his wife's family claimed all of them as a family unit and he was not going to separate the family. Not because his son was unhappy with his life in Cuba.

After initially sending videos home of how great everything was going in Miami, the son has recently started to admit that the reality is much different. With less than a high school education he has found it difficult to hold down a well-paying job and he has been laid off from various posts, including a driver for an elderly home, air conditioner repairman, and maintenance worker for a Florida university. El Palestino worries about his son's ability to take care of himself and family, and criticizes the U.S. government for not providing more basic care.

When I've spoken with the son in Miami he has confessed that it has been tough and not what he had expected: "You know how things are here," he tells me. As with many immigrants, he reminisces about returning home and how good things were in the past. After being in Miami for almost four years, he finally went back to Cuba for a short visit with his family. He told El Palestino about how grim things were for him economically and confessed that most everything he and his wife had, including the gifts he brought to Cuba, were purchased on credit, and he owes a significant amount of money and is finding it hard to stay afloat.

After his son returned to Miami, El Palestino told his friends in the neighborhood about his son's experience, in part as a way to defend the Cuban system. But most of his friends and even his extended family did not believe El Palestino nor his son, and chalked it up to El Palestino being a communist or his son being cheap. A couple of mutual friends of ours asked me if it could be possible that his son not have any money living in the U.S.? Especially, since everyone else who has left for Miami has money and is wildly successful? I answer, as I always do, that not only is it possible, but more than likely probable. But as usual, my response is not something the average Cuban wants to hear. They like and need the "happily ever after" in Miami fairytale.

El Palestino is frustrated by the situation and he wishes he could help his son. He tells me that he's worried for his son because he has seen first hand how difficult it can be to live under a capitalist system with no civil society and government safety nets. His point of reference is not with Miami, but with war-torn Angola, and as a result he has a certain insight that escapes typical Cubans that have never left the island.

The Ethnographer and Her Informant

As scholars have noted, both ethnographer and informant are changed by the relationship that develops in the process of working together (Behar 1993; Frank 2000 Mintz 1989). The many days and nights of conversations we have shared during this undertaking, as well as the fact that he is a major focus of this study, have become a part of El Palestino's memories of Angola. In turn, the memories of the various men I worked with have become a part of my own memories (Kotre 1996). In his narration El Palestino incorporated me in his commentary – talking to me directly during the recording, asking me questions, and included our association as partners working together on this project as

part of his memories of Angola. I have gone back to Cuba and seen him every year since finishing the greater part of my field research in 2007, and inevitably he tells me he saw a report about Angola on TV and thought about me and wished he could tell me about it.

While I conducted research, there were moments when I would forget what I was doing, and why I had ever started researching this topic in the first place, but all my main informants would remind me of its relevance. The fact that I was there, had traveled from so far, and gone to so much trouble to ask them about their experiences validated their experience. And in turn, they validated my research. So if at first they asked me why I was interested in the topic, because some people did, by the end of our time together, they were stressing to me the merit of revisiting and remembering this historic moment of which they were a part.

By the same token, my relationships with my main informants, including El Palestino have also changed and moved me. I will further discuss the transformative nature of anthropology for the ethnographer in Chapter VII**.**

Movie Night

Months after I had recorded his story, the Cuban film about Angola, *Caravana,* was playing on television (see Chapter II). El Palestino and I made plans for me to go over to his house to watch the film together. When I arrived, his wife, three of his grandchildren, and his brother-in-law were also there and joined us. El Palestino confessed that he had never actually seen the whole movie all the way through, and it had been years since he last saw parts of it.

We all sat around his living room, and as soon as the first scene with the Angolan countryside came onscreen, it was obvious El Palestino was visibly moved. He became

emotional, trying to guess what would happen next in the film's plot – an explosive in the road, an ambush, or the death of a character. He repeated how it was very realistic, down to the smallest detail, like the pet monkey kept by one of the characters. Everybody could be an enemy, from the animals to the people. "Those are *los malos* (the bad guys)," he explained to his family, and "those are *los buenos* (the good guys)." In one scene a Cuban attempts to rape an Angolan woman. El Palestino informed us that the film is also portraying the abuses committed by the Cubans and how they were disciplined for their offenses.

At another point in the film, the Cubans launch a successful offensive that had the enemy on the retreat. El Palestino turned to his wife and said: "*Se jodieron esos negros!"* (Those blacks just got screwed!). She responded: "*Mira como corren esos negros!*" (Look at how those black guys run!).

During another scene with an Angolan woman, El Palestino's wife exclaimed:

"*Milagro que tiene ropa puesta*" (It's a miracle she has clothes on).

"*No, porque esas son las civilizadas*" (No, because those are the civilized women), he clarified. At that point she turned to me and asked, ¿"*Él ya te dijo que ellas se ponían mierda en la cabeza*?" (Did he tell you already that the women put shit on their head?).

A while later, the movie was still on, and El Palestino's wife started to tell me how horrible it was when El Palestino left. She knew when he was summoned that it would be for Angola even though he was not told where he was going until the last minute. She recalled how he just up and left with little time for goodbyes, one day he was there, and the next he was gone. It was right before the New Year she tells me,

around thirty years ago, and he wasn't able to spend New Year's Eve with them. She was so worried for him, and worried about becoming a widow with three small children.

El Palestino jumped in to the conversation and declared that he did not want to die during the war, but he also tried not to worry about what he couldn't control. As a result, he wasn't afraid of dying. He knew that if the worse were to happen, the state would provide for his children. He compares it to the good care his grandson currently receives from the government. He and his wife are raising a grandson who is mentally challenged. His youngest son, the boy's father, and the boy's mother did not want to assume responsibility after learning their child was challenged. El Palestino and his wife took him in and care for him. Although they seem a little tired having to start all over again as "parents" now in their 60's, they have assumed the responsibility lovingly. The boy is in special education classes, has a tutor, and is given a special diet because of his mental deficiency. The state, El Palestino says, would have helped his wife raise their three children as a widow in much the same way.

Reacting to a different scene, he and his wife began discussing how many men came back "*tarrudo*" (cuckold). Apparently many of the men did not learn they had been cheated on until they were back home with their wife. Sometimes the wife wouldn't say anything about her new lover/mate until the husband had been back for months.

"How long before she told you?" I asked El Palestino, jokingly.

They laughed and El Palestino's brother-in-law revealed that indeed his sister cheated on El Palestino with a family friend that came over all the time while El Palestino was away in Angola. El Palestino's wife got visibly upset at her brother and yelled at him for even suggesting such a thing, adamantly denying it, stating that it was an older

sister who had been unfaithful to her husband. It was all in good fun, before the conversation took a serious note.

One of the final scenes has a Cuban soldier dying. El Palestino's wife looked over to me: "*Perdimos muchos cubanos allá*" (We lost a lot of Cubans there). Especially at the beginning of the war. But she argues, after Cuba became involved in Angola the United States never again invaded Cuba like they had in Playa Girón: "*Ellos sabían lo que teníamos*" (They knew what we were capable of).[143] Pointing at the screen she proudly tells her grandchildren who are still awake watching, "You see that war they are showing, *tu abuelo estuvo allá"* (your grandfather was there).

The above exchange reinforces the themes regarding race that I have discussed in the previous chapter. It also gives clear examples of what I refer to as *cuentos de negros* – the way blacks are often referred to in everyday conversation. In this case extended to the international context of Angola. Moreover, it exemplifies the conflicting emotions and nostalgia related to service in Angola. As historian Richard Gott describes: "Cuban soldiers come home from Angola, as Spanish soldiers had once returned from fighting in Morocco, to form a group of nostalgic veterans with biter-sweet memories of their service in Africa tending increasingly forgotten memorials to their fallen comrades in towns throughout the island" (Gott 2004: 279).

On a final note, I would like to put forth some difficulties in documenting a life story and the relationship that results between ethnographer and informant. One problem

[143] The Bay of Pigs invasion, which took place at Girón beach, was an embarrassing defeat for the United States who assumed incorrectly that the Cuban people would rise up against the revolutionary government upon the arrival of Cuban exile invaders.

I encountered was having to betray my convictions and listening to beliefs that I disagree with on a personal level, like the racially prejudiced observations in the *cuentos de negros*. At what moment during an interview, during a conversation, during an inchoate relationship between a subject and myself should I interject my own opinions? And in not so doing, how am I complicit in this way of thinking and speaking about people of color or women? How do we make the transition from ethnographer and informant to friends? Particularly when the relationship has been established with me as the listener, and the informant as the one who shares his memories and beliefs. Is it ever acceptable for the ethnographer to dominate the conversation? Is the researcher ever "off the clock?" I will revisit these dilemmas further in Chapter VII.

The next chapter documents various partial life stories that demonstrate the variety of experiences of the Angolan war veterans. Present concerns about Cuban society and their own place in history as internationalists are embedded and accessible in these past memories. As with El Palestino's narrative, the accounts depicted in the following chapter provide insight into significant cultural and national trends.

CHAPTER V
WAR NARRATIVES – INTERNATIONALISM THEN AND NOW, DEATH, SPIRITUALITY, AND ALTRUISM

This chapter presents an assortment of war narratives that deal with themes mentioned in the preceding chapters, such as exchanges with "the other," but they also narrate memories that emphasize different sentiments, emotions and experiences. These narratives stress personal and life themes of choice, pride, loss, love of country, spirituality, and the historical significance of the events that encompassed them. In so doing, I explore decisive social processes in Cuban society in the last couple of decades, particularly how internationalism forms a part of the cultural and ideological shift in Cuba between altruism and materialism; between internationalism "before" and "during" the Special Period.

Before and After – Cuba's Changing Image

Conversations in Cuba frequently incorporate comparisons of "*antes y después*" (before and after). The "what" in the "before and after" equation is rarely mentioned, but understood to be the Cuban Revolution. Consequently, its common to hear people say things like, "before my family owned a butcher shop" or "before my family lived in a home with a dirt floor," and its easy to deduce it means before the Cuban Revolution because of the context.

In the last few years there has been an addition to this play of words to include "*antes y durante*" (before and during). In this case, the before and during is in relation to

the Special Period.[144] The Special Period has become equally as important a disjuncture in the island's trajectory as the revolution, marking a time before when life was remembered to be relatively good, and during when things took a sharp and desperate turn for the worse. The "during" and "after" the Special Period is still being sorted out, as some people refer to it in the past, while others claim that the present in Cuba is an ongoing and never-ending Special Period.

The time before the Special Period can be considered the zenith of the Cuban Revolution. On the international stage, Cuba was either loved or hated, but irregardless it was a key international player. The revolution and its charismatic leader, Fidel Castro, and its martyr, Che Guevara, were both wildly popular and polemic figures around the world. For some Cuba was an example to follow, an alternative for emerging nations and individuals wishing to escape the paths of government corruption, the exploitative downside of capitalism, or the severity of European communism. As a founding member of the Non-Aligned movement, and provider of political, economic, humanitarian, and military support to emerging nations in the form of Cuban internationalism, Castro's Cuba enjoyed political clout and global leverage.

Many Cubans I have spoken to ideally evoke a time before the Special Period when the country was open to them, when goods from Russia and other Soviet Bloc countries were in abundance, and hotels in Varadero and other beach areas were accessible to them with Cuban pesos. The average salary was enough to maintain a family, and higher education paid off economically. They remember a society in general that was more decent, with greater unity, solidarity, and a collective spirit. Even well into the 1980s and not just during the earlier years of the revolution. Men and women in

[144] See Chapter I for an explanation of the Special Period.

their early thirties remember a happy childhood watching *Muñequitos Russos* (Russian Cartoons). A childhood which was comfortable in regards to material wealth, and one in which they do not recall paucity.[145] As one informant told me, "*Cuba antes reía*" (Before Cuba laughed/smiled).

But that was before the economic chaos of the Special Period and the subsequent aperture to elements of a free-market style economy. The end of Soviet support marked "Cuba's venture into a sort of never-never land between communism and capitalism" that not only drastically changed life on the island, but also the image and self-image of Cuba and Cubans domestically and abroad (Chávez 2005: 1). The legalization of the dollar and the return of tourism as a means for the country to stay afloat financially has resulted in inverted social roles in which members of previously lower status or marginalized occupations, such as chamber maids, bartenders, and hustlers, often have greater social leverage and economic power than medical doctors, professors, and engineers. Until recent changes by Raúl Castro, the best hotels and nightlife were off limits to Cubans and only for foreign use. But even following the changes enacted by Raúl, these luxuries remain out of reach for the majority of Cubans because of the dual economy that has rendered the national peso virtually worthless.[146]

In addition, the fall of the Soviet Union has seen a worldwide amnesia regarding the dilemmas of the Cold War (Young 1993). Cuba's political and ideological authority has faded, and many who initially supported Castro have long been disillusioned with the overall results of the revolution. In general, communism and socialism are considered

[145] One can find many of these Russian Cartoons translated into Spanish on Youtube. There is also a Blog online dedicated to Russian Cartoons where nostalgic thirty-something Cubans living abroad reminisce about their youth in pre-Special Period Cuba: http://munequitosrusos.blogspot.com/2007/03/canciones-infantiles.html.
[146] See Chapter I for an explanation of Cuba's two-currency system.

failed theories, and for the most part are now preceded by the word "post" in academic literature.[147] This is not to say that people around the globe are no longer interested in Castro or the Cuban Revolution, quite the contrary. In recent years there has been an explosion in all things Cuban, yet the way Cuba is imagined domestically and abroad has changed in the last two decades. Even among those who are not in opposition to the government, there is recognition that the core principals of the revolution were betrayed in order to survive. And the way in which the revolution's future is discussed is rarely in terms of an enduring state of affairs, but rather one whose survival is inextricably linked with that of its aging statesmen.

The discussions I've had with Cubans of before and during the Special Period remind me of similar conversations I have had with adults in different parts of the world, predominantly older adults, and thoughts that I find myself frequently having as I get older: the "everything-was-better-before" or the "youth-today-don't-know how-easy-they-have-it" type conversations. Perhaps there is an aspect of this, since the men who served in Angola are roughly between the ages of forty and seventy years old. But age and nostalgia are only half the story.

Other authors have documented an ideological shift engendered by the Special Period beginning in the early 1990's, both in terms of how Cubans view themselves, and

[147] The current resurgence of socialism in Latin America, including the democratic elections of leftist, socialist and former socialist presidents throughout the region, such as: Evo Morales in Bolvia; Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his successor Dilma Roussef in Brazil, former president Michelle Bachelet Jeria in Chile, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Mauricio Funes in El Salvador, Álvaro Colom in Guatemala, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua; Fernando Armindo Lugo Méndez in Paraguay; and the contested defeat of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico and controversial ousting of elected president Manuel Zelaya Rosales in Honduras, as well as most notably, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, are obvious exceptions to this idea. However, the resurgence of the Left in Latin America is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and the longevity, success, failure, and long-term effects of this trend remains to be seen.

how the country is viewed internationally. As scholar Raúl Rubio suggests, "the Revolution has evolved into a concoction of a continued mythical journey, based on the project it set out to establish in 1959, and a survival-based venture into the global consumer market (2005: 162). The imagery of this altered revolution is promoted, sold, and consumed by foreigners: "Cuba has become associated with an 'exotic' aesthetic that [is] largely a construction of outsiders' perceptions, desires, and appropriations" (Whitfield 2008: 20). Ana Maria Dopico argues that the widely circulated photographic and cinematographic imagery of a dilapidated and outmoded Havana have become hegemonic since the 1990's, and in every "wrinkled face" there is the "promise [of] human intensity" and fantasies of "recolonization" (2002: 452).

Writing about the "Cuba boom" in literary fiction, Esther Whitfield explains how the consumption of Special Period literature is primarily meant for people not living on the island, and instead an international market:

> Most Cuban writers, certainly those practitioners of a 'special period genre'– engage in a form of strategic exoticism that allows them to both appease and critically undermine demands for clichéd representations of Cuba (2008: 20).

In souvenir shops on the island, kitsch imagery of Cuba and the Cuban revolution – young Fidel with a cigar in his mouth or Che playing golf in Varadero – are marketed for tourists in the form of books, postcards, t-shirts, and key chains. The recent global popularity of Che Guevara's image illustrates the revolutionary-chic commercialism that has developed since the Special Period. However, as Denise Blum argues, the Che phenomenon is not so much an example of revolutionary recognition or affinity, but rather of "liberation marketing" that appeals to the boredom and conformity in capitalist

societies. Che's rebel image is sold void of real social critique: "In essence, we rebel by celebrating different consumer products" (2005: 127).

The self-image of Cubans living on the island has been molded by events during the Special Period that have left them unable to recover economically. The national peso was devalued by the legalization of the dollar, rendering the salary of ordinary Cubans obsolete, and placing them at an economic disadvantage with any foreigner who visits the island. Cuban self-image is typically one of poverty in relation to the rest of the world. It is usually assumed that a foreigner is better off economically and in a position to give monetary assistance to a Cuban. In tourist areas especially, Cubans will ask for money, soap, and clothing from foreigners, and many foreigners travel to Cuba specifically with material items to handout to Cubans they assume are in need.

The dichotomy set up between "Cuban" and "tourist," as discussed in the Introduction, is an expression of this Cuban self-complex. The tourist is viewed as special, having exclusive privileges in the country and able to afford most things outside the realm of the average Cuban. I have even heard children say that they want to be "*un turista*" (a tourist) when they grow up.[148] In essence, Cuba's self-image has changed from social vanguard and provider of international aid to pauper state.

[148] I would argue that this dichotomy is more acute in cities that rely heavily on tourism, like Havana and Matanzas. A criticism I heard in the provincial towns was that *Habaneros* or *Matanceros* who work in tourism become "beggars" and no longer want to work or study to earn a living. People in the *campo* (countryside) and small provinces tend to have more access to food and other goods to sell and be self-reliant. This does not mean that they are not materialistic or less interested in economic gain than city dwellers, but rather that because of geography, they are not as directly dependant on foreigners to make a living. I was surprised at the abundance of food during my visits to the smaller provinces, especially considering how the lack of food is the biggest complaint in the larger cities. People in the countryside also insisted more on picking up the tab for a meal and had the means with which to do so. Whereas in the larger cities it is almost always assumed that the foreigner will pay the bill. (*Habaneros* and *Matanceros*, are people from Havana and Matanzas, respectively).

The return of materialism to the island is also a part of the shift in Cuban identity; particularly among the youth who hunger for brand name clothing and the latest technology. In her study on male sex workers in Havana, anthropologist Gisela Fosado documents how there was agreement among Cubans that since the Special Period began "Cubans in general were becoming more and more *dolarizados* (dollarized, commercialized)" (2005: 64). As a result, "love no longer exists in Cuba," and romantic relationships are obscured by ambiguity and "ulterior motives" (Ibid: 63).

Thus, reference to "before" and "during" the Special Period forms part of the larger Cuban self-image crisis in which Cubans are caught between the fantasies and desires of international consumerism, their own economic reality, and growing materialism in Cuba.

Internationalism with Interés

The way internationalism is discussed has also been affected by the ideological change that has occurred over the last twenty years, being framed in sequential terms. Veterans told me repeatedly how the internationalism of today is not the same as the internationalism before the Special Period. "Before," they received little or no economic or material compensation for their service. It was viewed as a compulsory service of a good revolutionary, a national mission regardless of whether or not they believed in the cause they were fighting for. The consensus then is one of internationalism going from an altruistic, ideological, or even moral activity "before," to one that has been dishonored, having lost its true purpose.[149]

[149] Many internationalists did find a way to make money while in Africa, but did not do so openly. According to people I spoke with, those that went in the later years of the intervention had more opportunity to make money, especially trading and selling illicit items on the black market.

Currently there are various humanitarian Cuban internationalist missions all over the globe, particularly in the developing world (See Chapter I). Most consisting of medical/healthcare workers – "Peace corps type" missions: "The Castro regime has been unusually successful at human resource development, to the extent that it can afford to export trained personnel. Also, it can do so at low cost" (Eckstein 1985: 383). Although these missions offer the volunteers an opportunity to serve their country and help other people, the missions are also a means for Cubans and their families to earn more money and have access to goods and "luxury" items not easily available in the country. Thus, people vie heavily for internationalist missions abroad, not so much out of revolutionary solidarity, but rather for the economic compensation they receive.

Internationalists are given a daily allowance to use while abroad. Most will try to spend less than this amount in order to save the rest. In addition, medical internationalists receive their monthly salary in Cuban pesos, approximately MN $500 - 800 pesos for a doctor, as well as a convertible dollar stipend of approximately CUC $50, both of which are deposited into a bank account every month while the person in on a mission. They receive the lump sum upon their return.[150] While abroad they can also purchase and send back electro-domestic appliances, such DVD players, plasma screen TVs, computers, MP3 players, fax machines, and printers in *cajas* (boxes) free of charge up until a certain amount, or for a low amount if they pass the weight and dimensional limits. Internationalists in the fields of education and sports do not receive a monthly

[150] These amounts are the most current (October - November 2010), and only for those in the medical field. I've heard different monthly CUC stipend amounts, both higher and lower than this amount, but this amount is about average. MN $500-800 pesos is approximately US $20-38 dollars, and CUC $50 convertible dollars is approximately US $62 dollars.

salary in CUC, only their regular peso salary and the amount they can save from the daily allowance. Moreover, they have to pay to send their *cajas* back home.[151]

One couple I know who served together for five years in South America were able to completely remodel, furnish and decorate their home, and purchase all the standard domestic appliances with the money they earned. Including the lump sum they received upon their return, and the amount they saved from their daily stipend, they accumulated CUC $24,000 and have invested the money in short and long term interest gaining savings accounts in Cuba. With that amount of money, as long as the political and economic system were to remain the same, they will be able to live a very comfortable retirement.

This couple was lucky that both were in the health field and were able to serve together. Not all families fair so well. There is still sacrifice involved in internationalism despite the economic compensation, but the sacrifice involves being away from one's family – children, spouse, parents – for one to five years. Many marriages have ended because of internationalism, and family members have had to make alternative arrangements for raising small children, like having grandparents take care of them while a parent is abroad.

Some Cubans complain that the best health service workforce is being sent abroad, leaving Cubans with many recent graduates and inexperienced staff. Yet interestingly, the racial make-up of current medical professionals abroad is such that

[151] Medical internationalism pays much better than other types of internationalist. Most people seem to think that all internationalists are making "good money," and don't necessarily distinguish between the different types of missions. In general, missions are viewed as a lucrative opportunity.

typically underprivileged groups, i.e. blacks, mulattos, and women, are benefiting from the monetary compensation of internationalism:

> "The fact that Cuba's medical profession is unique in its gender and racial parity means that international missions are providing groups that have been disadvantaged in the dual economy access to the dollar economy and a higher standard of living. Importantly, this is a step towards mediating the devaluation of professional salaries that has been a source of tremendous discontent and emigration since dollarization was institutionalized over a decade ago" (Blue 2010).

Thus, internationalism continues to provide an opportunity for blacks and women to be viewed as national heroes, but now economic improvement not otherwise available.

Most Cubans support and even applaud the internationalists' hard efforts abroad to provide for themselves and their family at home, but earlier veterans, like El Palestino, who were not able to do so, are conflicted about the internationalism of today. For some, the monetary compensation available to present day internationalists causes a tension between those that went on past missions for mostly humanitarian or ideological reasons, and those currently completing missions who are paid for their abilities and service. In his account in Chapter IV El Palestino stresses the point that he did not profit from his service and that no one owes him anything. This sentiment is echoed by other Angola veterans who also make comparisons with the altruistic nature of their service in relation to contemporary internationalism. The memories in the rest of this chapter incorporate elements of validation for their service that traverse the monetary as they find meaning in their experience.

Sites of Memory

Present research brings to light the significance of the state in the creation of a national history by focusing on the importance of cemeteries and commemorations as sites of memory or visual representations of national memory (Feeley-Harnik 1991; Gillis

1994; White 1995). Special attention is given to how the dead are commemorated, particularly, the state's role in the creation, arrangement, design, and regulation of public spaces in the form of graves, museums, monuments, and other war memorials (White 1995).

In Cuba, visual representations of the country's military past and present can be found all over the island. Examples include the massive iron statue of independence general Antonio Maceo on his horse in Santiago, the murals to Che Guevara at the *Plaza de la Revolución* and in Santa Clara, and the statue of José Martí with bare-breasted liberty in the Central Plaza in Matanzas. Various museums exhibit military artifacts – tanks, canons, and the boat on which Fidel and his men arrived from Mexico at the start of the revolution, the *Granma*. An announcement at the entrance to a town or province salutes the heroics of the place and its inhabitants in the revolutionary struggle. These sites of memory are overwhelmingly military, and as such, heavily masculine. Cuba has a long history of military martyrs embodied in the many graves and monuments throughout the country, commemorated on every national holiday, and publicly exalted by school children on revolutionary anniversaries.

National and provincial cemeteries that house the remains of members of the armed forces and their families are visual representations of the self-sacrificing character of the ideal revolutionary soldier, including the internationalist, who has paid the highest price in defense of the motherland. Each cemetery has a pantheon dedicated to those men: *el Panteón de los Caídos por la Defensa* (The Pantheon for Those Who have Fallen in Defense), and larger cemeteries have a section specifically for internationalist combatants. It is in these sites that death is remembered and their reason for dying

sanctioned. In the next section El Habanero and I go for a tour in Havana's central cemetery as he confronts his own mortality and close calls among the catacombs that house remains of those who did not return.

Vine Para Virar – Visiting Cemeteries with El Habanero

I hadn't been in Havana nor seen El Habanero for months. When I finally met up with him, he looked like he always did – elegantly dressed, relaxed in the heat, and smoking a cigarette. I asked El Habanero if he would accompany me to Colón Cemetery in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana. The cemetery dates back to the late 1800's and is one of the largest, most elaborate cemeteries in the world. We had a hard time finding the tombs of the internationalists, but were lucky to find a very helpful cemetery worker. The old man took us to where the internationalists are buried.

The old man unlocked a gated section of the mausoleum that led to an area below where there were rows and rows of wall niches. The section was entitled *Combatientes Internacionalistas* (Internationalist Combatants). Each niche has a small picture of the deceased with their name and ranking – military soldier, retired, or civil. Another section of the mausoleum is dedicated to the *desaparecidos* (missing), and each plaque has a picture of the person and the name of the country in which they went missing, for example Angola, Ethiopia, and South Africa.



Figure 5.1 Niches for Internationalist Combatants, Colón Cemetery, Havana



Figure 5.2 Corridor for Internationalist Combatants, Colón Cemetery, Havana

It was an impressive sight, and the experience of seeing physically in front of me the amount of people from Havana that had given their life in defense of the *patria*

(homeland) was very moving. It was especially moving to witness it with El Habanero. For him it was much more personal, more real than it could ever be for me: "*Y pensar que yo pudiera haber regresado así*" (And to think that I could have returned like this), he says, looking at the rows of little boxes and niches.

The cemetery curator took us over to another level that had coffin sized wall tombs. El Habanero explained to me that these were the first casualties to arrive, but after so many years of engagement in Angola, they stopped returning any remains until the very end of the war, in some cases years after the person had died. By then most of the remains had to be cremated or all that was found were bones and other small fragments.

I stopped and stared at one of the tombs that caught my attention, tomb number 223. There were flowers in front of the tomb and a large picture of the fallen soldier with an engraving next to it. The man in the picture is in camouflage, with dark sunglasses and the ubiquitous mustache - so many of the veterans from the pictures I've seen wore similar mustaches in Angola – the popular style at the time in the 1970's and 1980's. The man in the picture looks full of life, his rifle by his side, young, and ready for adventure. To the side there is a dedication from his father: "To my beloved captain, from someone who will never forget you, your father, *Hasta la Victoria Siempre*"[152] – date of death, Republic of Angola.

[152] *"Hasta la Victoria Siempre"* is usually left untranslated in Che paraphernalia around the world. It comes from Che's "farewell" letter to Fidel Castro from April 1, 1965. In this letter, Che resigns his various posts in the revolutionary government. It was supposed to have been read to the Cuban populace only in the event of Che's death during his internationalist mission in the Congo. However, Fidel read the letter while Che was still alive in Africa. It is widely speculated that in so doing, Fidel effectively closed the door on Che returning to Cuba, and therefore forcing him to take on more missions abroad – which eventually lead to his death in Bolivia. It is believed that the two men had a falling out over Fidel's alignment with the Soviets, and Che's



Figure 5.3 My Beloved Captain, Colón Cemetery, Havana

The old man took us to another room dedicated to all members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) and their families. Rows of small boxes contain the bones of the deceased. "To think we all end up this way," El Habanero told me, "just bones. It doesn't make sense to worry about the small things in life since we will all end up here." The old man laughed in agreement, adding this is why "*me disparo un poco de ron cada vez que pueda*" (drink a shot of rum every chance I get). El Habanero adds, "and be with a *niñita* (girl/woman) every chance you get, especially one that looks like

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open criticism towards them. All this is speculation of course, and there is no concrete eveidece either way. The phrase "*Hasta la Victoria Siempre"* roughly translates to "Until (the final) victory, always." But because it comes from the valediction of the farewell letter: "*Hasta la victoria, siempre, ¡Patria o Muerte! Te abraza con todo fervor revolucionario, Che*" (Until victory, always, Homeland or Death!, I embrace you with all my revolutionary fervor, Che), the "*siempre*" (always) in the phrase could also be taken as the standard closing of any letter, as in "Yours truly" "sincerely," or "always, Che." In any case, in the above text I left it in the original Spanish because I do not feel the various English translations: "Onward toward victory, forever," "Always towards victory," "until the victory, always" – capture the appropriate sentiment of the phrase.

her," he says, referring to me. The old man concurs, adding that women have to enter through the eyes first.

I smile, its nice to be appreciated. But I also know that being surrounded by death makes one grateful just to be alive, and for the beauty and simplicity of life – a drink and the love of a woman, every once in a while – that about sums it up.

We thank the cemetery worker for his impromptu tour and I hand him over a couple of *chavito*s (convertible dollars) as a tip. El Habanero and I get in the car and he tells me he is going to take me to the most famous grave in the cemetery. We make our way over to the tomb of *la Milagrosa* (The Miraculous Woman). As the story goes, the woman buried in the tomb died along with her newborn during childbirth. The baby was buried at her feet, but years later when the tomb was opened for the disinterment they found the remains of the baby had moved from the foot of the grave to the arms of the mother. Since then people from all over Cuba and the world have traveled to the gravesite to ask La Milagrosa for a miracle.

The grave is adorned with flowers, hand written petitions from hopefuls and letters of appreciation from those who got their wish. El Habanero tells me that one must approach the tomb on the right side, knock three times, make a request, promise her something in return and then back away from the grave on the left side, never turning one's back on it. I do as he says and wish to meet the love of my life soon, and promise to bring her back something nice in return.

We got back in the car and discuss our trip to another province. I had asked him if he would go with me so I wouldn't have to make the trip alone. It would be a weekend trip, but I made it clear that it was for research purposes only and that I would find him

his own room in which to stay. He agreed, but as usual, keeps open the possibility of something romantic occurring between us. That's just who he is, a naturally flirtatious man, but I have known him long enough to know he would never hurt me, or force himself on me. It's just not his style.

We went to his house first so he could pack clothing and toiletries for the trip. He introduced me to his older sister who is twenty years his senior and has darker skin. She offered us coffee, and started telling me how wonderful her brother was. As the youngest he was the favorite. "He was the most beautiful baby when he was born, *casi parecía blanco*" (he almost looked white), she informed me. El Habanero has told me a similar sentiment before, stating that he and I would have beautiful children together because of our skin colors – they would be almost white.

Back in the car, we started the long trip to the other province. During the drive we talked about his experiences in Angola, and I asked him why Cuba went to Angola in the first place? He responded: "to help the Angolans because Angola made a request to Fidel Castro asking for help."

"Would Cuba help anybody?" I continued

"Yes, Cuba gives help to everybody, but military help is only given to certain governments that ask for it." El Habanero believes that at the time the Cuban people were supportive of the endeavor in Angola, but now the public would probably not be because of the current economic situation of the country. It would be a hard sell to ask Cubans to become so involved abroad with all the current economic problems. At the time of the intervention, the Soviet Union was still aiding Cuba economically and politically, and goods and foods were readily available.

In Angola he was sent everywhere, to the north, the south, and the capital, Luanda. He confesses that he was stressed all the time while he was there, always nervous, believing that at any moment he could die. "The caravans were the worst," he continued, "knowing that around the next curve in the road you could be shot." El Habanero pointed to a place in the road ahead of us to illustrate his point, "right there – look – in that next curve we could be attacked."

What got him through the experience, he explained, was his determination to return home: "*Vine para virar*" (I came to return), he says slowly, stressing each syllable of each word. Death was not an option for him; he was determined to return to his previous life, and that thought got him through his mission. El Habanero believes he willed himself back home alive. The admission sounds very different from the man who told me he went to Angola almost on whim because everyone else had gone.

I told him how I enjoyed listening to his stories and reminded him of one of the first stories he told me a couple of years earlier when we had first met, regarding why he had been unfaithful to his wife. He smiles and tells me I have a good memory. "I still have to make up for fifty-two encounters," he informs me.

"You'll be missing out on three days for going on this trip with me," I remind him, "so it will be fifty-five when you get back."

"Who knows, I might make up for three in one day!" he responds without missing a beat. We both laugh. "When we get back to Havana, I'm going to start writing a book about my life."



Figure 5.4 Pantheon for those who have fallen in defense, Local Cemetery, Pinar del Río



Figure 5.5 Pantheon for those who have fallen in defense, Local Cemetery, Matanzas

Death and Martyrdom



Figure 5.6 Commemoration Plaque, Cienfuegos[153]

Officially, 2,077 Cubans died in Angola, mostly from accidents and diseases. However, Cubans I interviewed tend to believe the number is greater.[154] As Edward George states: "The question of how many casualties the Cubans suffered in Angola is the single most contentious issue of the Angolan operation" (2005: 162). Other authors suggest figures ranging from 3,400 to a high of 12,000 (Adams 2005: 292; Hatzky 2004).

[153] Translation of plaque: "The remains of the heroic combatants fallen during fulfillment of internationalist missions were exposed in this location on December 7, 1989. The people marched before their coffins and accompanied them until their burial on December 7, 1990."
[154] Previously the Cuban government recognized 2016 and in later years adjusted this number.

Given that Cuban soldiers typically were not put in the front lines and were confined to barracks, it is possible that casualties were low (George 2005: 267).[155]

The remains of Cubans were buried in Angolan soil in the location where they were killed or in mass graves alongside members of the Angolan army. It was only after the decision was made to withdraw the troops from Angola that the bodies were recovered. Dog tags had been meticulously kept with the information of who and where a particular combatant was buried to return at a later date to recover the body. This was a monumental effort, especially considering the size of Angola, one that required the expertise of Cuban forensic teams that were dispersed throughout the country (George 2005: 267-8).

The last of the bodies/remains were taken back to Cuba in November, and in early December the government declared two national days of mourning. Commemorations ceremonies from each province honoring those who had died in Angola were broadcast on national television. Officially this brought an end to the Angolan chapter, and unbeknownst at the time, the country would be in the throes of the Special Period a few months later. For family members whose loved ones had died at the beginning of the intervention the wait to finally mourn their relative in body had been a long one.

Collective memory involves collective forgetting, collectively forgetting the awful, unimaginable aspects of war in order to collectively commemorate war (Casey 1987). Death becomes "the legitimizing myth of national sacrifice …transform[s] the horror of the war into resplendent national mythology" (Mosse 1990). Historian Lynn Stoner traces how:

[155] The figure does not include those who were wounded or missing in action. For more on this topic, see George: 2005.

> Cubans have eulogized women who have defended their nation with their own lives and with those of their husbands and children…. Their martyrdom has served as a model of sacrifice unto death for all citizens to follow (2003: 71).

As stated previously, this sentiment of citizenship/nationalism by death, martyrdom, and suicide has transcended the various governments that have been in place since the time of independence until the present, and includes women like the slave revolt leader, Carlota, for whom the initial intervention in Angola was named, and the woman we meet in the next chapter.

A Fallen Soldier

I was already dreading the encounter I would have on the drive over to the small apartment. I had a bad feeling about it; I didn't want to come face to face with parents who had lost a son in Angola. But I forced myself to go, dragging my feet, trying to confront my own conducting-ethnography-fears, hoping the drive would take longer than I knew it would. I made contact with the couple through their nephew, who I knew quite well, and they had agreed to talk to me about the loss of their son in Angola.

An elderly woman opened the door and despite the awkwardness in the room, greeted me warmly. On the wall hung a large picture of Che Guevara. I walked over to the father, and gave him and then his wife a kiss on the cheek. The father had striking, kind blue eyes and white hair, and the mother was a portly woman, also with white hair, large glasses, and no teeth. They sat down, staring at me, waiting for me to say something.

I began by telling them about my study, and myself and inquired if I could ask them questions relating to the death of their son. They nodded, still silent, their bodies tense, uncomfortable, just as mine was. I didn't know how to proceed. As the words

escaped my mouth, loud, resonating in the silence of the room, "*¿Cómo fue eso, perder a su hijo*?" (What was that like, losing your son?), I couldn't believe what I was saying. How could I be so stupid?

"*¿Cómo crees que fue*?" (How do you think it was?), the mother swiftly responded. I deserved that answer.

Now embarrassed, feeling even more awkward and inane, but with no real ability to retreat, I continued by asking what year he passed away. The mother spoke again, informing me that her son left right after the new year in the beginning of January, 1977, and by mid-February he was already dead. Less than two months. They received one letter from him during that time in which he told them that he was doing all right. And that was it. After that letter they received notice of his death. The military explained to them that their son had apparently contracted hepatitis years before, unbeknownst to all of them, including the son and both parents. And that soon after arriving in Angola he contracted malaria. This combination of past hepatitis and malaria killed him quickly – *cirrosis hepática* (cirrhosis of the liver) was the official cause of death. The mother raised her hands and made a face of uncertainty, "that's what they told me."

The mother continued her son's story, saying he had volunteered, underwent training for one month, and then was sent on a mission, "not to fight, but on a mission," she reiterated. In other words, he didn't know in what capacity he was being sent; there was no full disclosure. But he was very "*emocionado*" (excited) about going and couldn't wait to get there. The mother could not tell me what was happening in Angola at the time, but she insisted that Cuba would send help to any country that needed it.

She asked if I wanted to see his picture, and sent her adult daughter to bring out the portrait – a black and white headshot hanging in another room. Her son had shaggy dark hair, typical of the 1970's, clear blue eyes, the same as his father, and a dazzling smile. He was beautiful. His eyes stared back at me, so young, full of life, and it was hard imagining never being able to see that face again if he were my son. I felt a jolt of anger.

During the conversation she repeated the official cause of death – *cirrosis hepática* – over and over, as stated on the piece of paper, the notice they received regarding his death. There was bitterness in her voice, as would be reasonably expected, even after all these years. Her body too expressed the resentment, hands coming down hard on the sofa: "Cirrhosis of the liver," she said, shrugging.

I mentioned how I had gone to see their son's grave earlier with their nephew. The mother told me that her son's body was not brought home until 1991. "Fourteen years," I mumbled. I asked if the government gave them any assistance for the loss of their son? They had: a television set at subsidized (good worker's) price, and his son (their grandson) who was a baby when his father died, received a pension until he was of legal age – sixteen. A few years back she and her husband started receiving their son's pension. "Every anniversary they always do beautiful activities for the parents and families of internationalists." Close relatives are invited to reunions, commemorations in honor of their lost ones, and special trips on the anniversary of when the remains of the Cubans that served in Angola were brought home, December 7th. In all, they told me, thirteen members of their family had participated as internationalists abroad.

"What do you think of internationalism and the war now, after all these years?" I asked.

"I would send him again to fight for *pueblos oprimidos* (oppressed people). And I would send more sons too, if I had them, *y así es como le digo a los estudiantes del pre* (and that's what I say to the high school students). Every year she and her husband talk to high school students in history classes at the local high school about internationalism, sharing their son's story. I nod, but inside I can't understand her answer. Why? Why would anybody send a son to die, let alone more sons to die? I wouldn't. I wasn't sure if that was just the answer she was used to giving the high school students and anybody else who came to the house, or if she actually meant it. Maybe she actually did believe it after all these years of missing her son, what else could a grieving mother say?

I thanked them both for their time and for *compartiendo* (sharing) their son's memory with me. As I was about to leave, the father, who had been pretty much silent the entire time took my hand and looked at me with those beautiful blue eyes, the same ones he had passed on to his dead son, and started to say, "*Bueno, quiero que sepas que agradezco mucho tu visita…*" (Well, I want you to know that I very much appreciate your visit…). Unable to continue, he stopped mid-sentence, gasping for air, his blue eyes now red from the tears that were flowing. I hugged and kissed him knowing that it offered no comfort, no condolence, no closure, nothing, how could it? But it was the only thing I could think of doing. Nothing could make up for losing his son, not all the TVs, reunions, or parades in the world.

The mother immediately got up from the couch and lifted her hand to her head making a he's-crazy sign, don't-pay-any-attention-to-him gesture. There were a million questions in my head that I would never ask. I felt horrible. I just wanted to leave.

They told me to come back anytime. I smiled and thanked them once more.

"I would send him and other sons again," the mother repeated as I left.[156]

Angry and confused by her words, I could understand the idea of war and of believing, truly believing, that war is the only alternative left to resolving an unjust situation, but yet I could not reconcile that sentiment with losing a child, a husband, a father, any loved one. Perhaps I've seen how war rarely changes anything, all those lives lost for nothing. But could I, should I, really say "for nothing?" What else could a mother say or believe? Her loss had to be, needed to be, for something, a greater cause, the continuing battle against oppression, oppressed people, the nation, *¡Patria o Muerte, Venceremos!* (Homeland or Death, We Shall Overcome!).

Adventure

Barring a material gain from their service as internationalists, the narratives in the following sections focus on the spiritual and moral rewards of early internationalism. As Justin Pearce suggest:

> Through such narratives, people remind themselves and one another that the cause for which they suffered and fought was a just one, its adherents morally superior to their enemies even if they ultimately lost their war (2010: 24).

[156] This sentiment echoes that of Mariana Grajales Coello, considered "*La Madre de la Patria*" (Mother of the Cuban Nation) and mother of Antonio Maceo Grajales, independence leader (See Chapter I). Mariana "sent her husband and eleven sons off to fight for independence. Though only two sons survived, she said her only regret was not having more sons to give to her homeland" (Bardach 2009: 198).

I once stayed in the home of a medical doctor, a friend of a friend in his mid-forties. He was a white Cuban with dark hair and a thick mustache, the type that most of the veterans sported when they were in Angola, except that he still had his. While I was in their home, his wife spent most of the time maintaining the cleanliness of the apartment, *tirando agua* (throwing water) or *baldeando* (washing down) the floor with a fury. Their apartment was in Vedado, the once upper class neighborhood of Havana. These old apartment buildings can sometimes be deceiving. On the outside they are falling apart, but the exterior can betray the beauty of the individual apartments inside.

The doctor went to Angola as a young man straight out of medical school. For him it was an adventure, the only time in his life he has been out of the country. He proudly showed me his black and white pictures. And unlike some of the other veterans I have spoken with, he didn't have to search for them for very long to find them. A younger, thinner version of him stared back from the photos, in military fatigues, a cocky stance, and with the same thick mustache adorning his face.

He went as part of the medical team, and never saw action. He tended the injured soldiers and handled the dead. As a new doctor, he mostly saw routine cases and was never exposed to the more severely wounded, which he readily admits might have disturbed him. He knew that others were traumatized by the experience of being in Angola, but since he was not exposed to the worst aspects of war, he was not. Quite the contrary, he remembered his time there rather fondly and did not regret going.

Pride

Samuel, a large, burly man from the Eastern side of the island told me he stayed in Angola for 26 months towards the end of the intervention. For those two years he

lived inside a tank. His bad back is "*mi memoria*" (my memory) of Angola. Despite the back pain, his military experience was also "*mi vida*" (my life). He tells me being in that tank was one of the main highlights of his life. He felt he was born to do it, born to be in that tank, and doesn't remember a time when he was happier. He felt proud of what he accomplished there, and thought fondly of his time living in the tight quarters of the tank.

El Bicho Más Malo

A neighbor is waiting for me to get back from an errand. He has brought me his pictures from his tenure in Angola and stories to share. When I arrive he shows me the many black and white pictures from when he was in Angola during 1983-1986. In the pictures he looks very young, and sporting what seems to be the compulsory mustache. One of the pictures shows him standing next to a large sack of yucca and papayas. He also brought his dog tags to show me.

He was a reservist and knew what he was getting into when he volunteered to go since many of his friends had already gone. He wanted to go because all his friends and family had completed missions. According to him very few people said no when asked to go, not because they were forced to or because it would look bad if they didn't go, but because they wanted to go: "100% of the people that were there wanted to be."

For him it is still a source of great pride. He accomplished four goals he had set out for himself: "I always wanted to go to another country, and I also wanted to know what war was like. I went on a plane and I went on a boat. Some people have never done any of those things."

Apart from the four specific goals he mentioned above, he stated that he was also proud of helping another country and other people obtain their "*libertad*" (freedom). He

explained to me how the Portuguese had exploited the Angolans, and how the people had nothing even though it was a large and rich country with many natural resources of which to take advantage. He recounted how the Angolans sometimes applauded a Cuban caravan as they arrived, or even tossed flowers at them because the people were very grateful. UNITA was terrorizing the people, especially the women, particularly the *mulatas*: "*Cometían atrocidades contra las mulaticas que eran más bonitas, las pocas, porque la mayoría de las mujeres eran feas, no había como entrarles*" (They committed atrocities against the *mulaticas* who were prettier, the few, because the majority of women were ugly, there was nothing attractive about them).[157]

He never got sick while he was there, just two days of diarrhea, and that was it. He did not come back traumatized because he really didn't see much action while stationed mostly in the south of the country. He felt the Cuban public was supportive when he got back, and he had a positive experience when he returned. According to him, the Cuban government is supportive of veterans, and they helped out family members who had lost loved ones in Angola by giving them needed goods. "*No para compensar, sino para ayudar*" (Not to compensate, but to help).

He told me he would go again on any type of internationalist mission because he liked making a difference in someone's life, enjoyed helping others, and helping them gain their freedom. "I would go to Venezuela, Iraq, wherever, even at my age, married and with children." He felt he was still doing "internationalism" by helping reconstruct the homes recently destroyed by the hurricane in the region.[158]

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[157] He uses the term "*mulaticas*" in the diminutive in order to express endearment towards those women.

[158] This informant used the word "internationalism" when referring to public service work he has done after the hurricanes – perhaps because we were talking about internationalism. There is not

His experience abroad made him grateful for what he has: "others have nothing. Cubans might not have much, but they don't go hungry. *Lo poco que tengo es por la revolución, me formé con la revolución"* (The little I have is because of the revolution, I grew up with the revolution). As a result he wants to give back to other that are less fortunate. He believes that Cubans that live close to the tourist centers, like Havana and Matanzas, are more *interesados* (materialistic), whereas in the countryside where he lives people are more honest, good, and still care for one another, and helping other people.

"*El Cubano es el bicho más malo en el mundo*" (Cubans are the worst creature on earth), he told me proudly. Cubans are adventurous, up for anything, crazy – in a good sense.

El Pinareño - Saldar Una Deuda a la Humanidad

It is carnival[159] time in Pinar del Río and I've been sitting on the porch talking to El Pinareño[160] observing as the crowds of people go back and forth to where the kiosks are dispensing food, beer and other drinks. El Pinareño's wife and teenage daughter come out to join us on the porch to watch the nighttime activities. A drunken man, probably around fifty-something, stumbles over and asks if we've seen Arianna. The wife tells him that Arianna had gone in "that" direction looking for him. He mumbles something in disapproval but follows in that same direction. A short time later, a haggard looking woman with short hair, few teeth, and probably also pushing fifty but aged

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a specific word for domestic public service, but typically it is referred to as: "*trabajo voluntario*" (volunteer work), "*prestar servicio*" (lend service), or "*mano de obra extra*" (extra workforce).

[159] Since the revolution carnival is no longer tied to the Catholic calendar – "Fat Tuesday," Ash Wednesday, and Lent. Cities celebrate carnival during different months. It's a source of national and regional pride, income, as well as enjoyment for many. As with any public festivity, however, carnival is not for everyone, some people refuse to partake in the activities believing it to be a plebeian spectacle or dangerous with a high likelihood of crime – often attributed to *negros* (blacks).

[160] Pinareño – A man from the province of Pinar del Río.

beyond her years, asks if we have seen the drunken man. The wife nods and points to the opposite direction saying that he had been by asking for her.

"Yuck," Arianna exclaims, "I can't stand him, he's driving me crazy, and he won't leave me alone!" The truth is she doesn't look all together there mentally. She leaves in what she thinks is the opposite direction, but is really the same direction in which the man had gone. The wife and daughter giggle after she leaves, and they let me in on the joke, explaining that Arianna is the town prostitute and carnival is her most prolific season. She has been working non-stop day and night. According to neighborhood gossip and Arianna herself, she was working under the bridge the night before and the men lining up for her services had been calling "*último*" (last in line) as they do in the stores, state offices, and anywhere there is a line. Apparently she charges MN $5 pesos for oral copulation, and MN $10 pesos for a special trick she does with her toothless mouth. While vomiting all morning long, she had boasted to servicing at least two hundred men in this fashion the night before.

Domestic prostitution in Cuba is something one rarely reads about in academic literature. So much focus is placed by non-Cuban academics[161] on Cuban *jinteras* (prostitutes),[162] the mostly young and beautiful women (and men) that serve the international cliental that come to Cuba in search of sex tourism and fulfilling their Caribbean fantasies, in exchange for cash, hard-to-come-by goods, and with any luck, a ticket out of the country. But very little, if anything at all, has been written about women

[161] Including myself, see Almer, Marisabel, "Masculinity for Sale: A Study of Male Prostitutes in Varadero, Cuba," University of California, Santa Diego, 1998, Master's Thesis.
[162] *Jinetera*(*o*) is the popular word for a prostitute or hustler. It derives from the word *jinete* (horse jockey) and refers to people that "ride" or hustle tourists.

like Arianna, the ladies of the night that serve the domestic market and charge in Cuban pesos rather than convertible dollars.

El Pinareño and I had been talking about Angola before the incident with Arianna. He is very eloquent, and probably one of the most highly formally educated men that I have spoken with that served in Angola. He has a *licenciatura* (bachelor's degree) and taught math, biology, and other sciences at the university level. He is also one of those men that is always right, knows most everything, and is the best at everything. He is into health and fitness and the skilled crafts. He loves to show me, and other guests to his home, his muscular forearms, still tight and larger than most men half his age, from when he trained competitively as an athlete. His wife, a stunning *trigueña* with jet-black hair, emerald eyes, and a perfect dimple on each cheek, is much younger than him.[163] They are unmistakably madly and devotedly in love with each other after twenty years of marriage.

Their behavior is that which would make any single person looking for love on Valentine's Day feel green with envy. El Pinareño can't seem to keep his hands off his beautiful wife, even in front of company, playfully patting her plump behind or drawing her close to him and announcing that he would give her more babies in an instant, if only she gave him the okay, even though their children, from previous unions, are fully grown. "Isn't my wife beautiful?" he asks me. "*Linda*," (beautiful), I respond, smiling and

[163] *Trigueño/a* has no English equivalent, and it's meaning in Spanish depends on the country or region. In Cuba, *trigueño/a* refers to someone whose skin color is not as pale as a (stereo) typical Anglo-Saxon but not as dark as a *mulato* or *negro* (black). "*Trigueño*" comes from the word *trigo* (wheat) and it refers to the color of skin, a yellowish/brownish tan. Typically it is not used to refer to somebody of obvious African descent, but rather someone who might be considered "indigenous" – although this is an equally ambiguous and subjective term. Regardless, it is all based on coloring, skin color and hair texture, and not to what particular ethnic or racial group one's parents belong.

envious. He is equally proud of their only daughter together, who looks like a younger version of the mother except with even more perfect dimples on her cheeks, and publicly raves about her beauty and talent as well.

In contrast to the love, joy, and commitment he has to his family, he doesn't have the same devotion to the current political system. He says he was eight years old when *El Caballo* (The Horse)[164] came into power, and now he is in his mid-fifties, "*¡y mira como me tiene!*" (and look how he has me!), referring to the limitations placed on entrepreneurship. He would like to have the opportunity to see if he could succeed in a different type of economic system, although he acknowledges that it might be too late already because of his age. El Pinareño is the type of man that likes to defy himself, see what he can accomplish, and he feels restricted under the current system.

It was that personality trait that in part took him to Angola during the early to mid-1980s. "*Me reté,*" (I challenged myself), he tells me when I ask why he accepted a mission abroad. He had seen other people he knew go and come back, so why couldn't he? As with my other informants, he admits that there was a bit of machismo involved. At the time he was in his thirties and he readily admits that he didn't think it through. If it were now, he wouldn't go.

Having said that, he also felt pressured to go. He claims most everyone did, that nobody really wanted to serve, but they had to. He was reminded by people around him – colleagues, family, and military officers calling him up for duty – that he had a career, and that if he refused to go, it might not be there for much longer: "*Me ponen entre la espada y la pared, escojo la espada porque la siento más que la pared*" (If they put me

[164] *El Caballo* is one of the many colorful sobriquets for Fidel Castro that I have heard used over the years. Others include, *Patillas* (Sideburns), *El Bambú* (The Bamboo), *Tu Tío* (Your Uncle), or simply touching one's chin in reference to Fidel's world-famous beard.

between a sword and the wall, I choose the sword because I feel it more than the wall). In other words, if placed in a no-win situation, he would rather react and be active, rather than doing nothing and remaining passive.[165]

He was in Angola for: "*ochocientos treinta y dos (832) noches y los días que le corresponden*" (eight hundred and thirty-two nights and their corresponding days), and the date of his departure was significant because he left in mid-December on the day that would later become his wedding anniversary. Because of his education, El Pinareño was sent to man computerized weaponry and as a result was at a distance to the action on the ground. He spent most of the time in the south fighting against South African forces in Savimbi territory. He said it was a very difficult experience; he witnessed many atrocities committed on all sides, especially towards the young women and girls. And he remembers that many of "the Angolans" themselves betrayed the Cubans inciting even more distrust towards the people they were supposed to be helping. The lumping together of all "Angolans," despite the fact that there were three factions and Cubans were supporting one of these factions, was a common occurrence in the memories of the informants. In general, they did not specify that a particular political group turned against them, but rather that "Angolans" as a whole could not be trusted.

El Pinareño is a great storyteller, but the particulars are not so important to him, his memories seem more about conveying a certain feeling or overall experience rather than providing specifics. As with his age, which fluctuates between 53, 55, and 58, he changes other details. One day he tells me that very few people in his company died, and

[165] I did a literal translation of the saying because he plays with the words in the second part as I explain above. Figuratively, however, the saying refers to being in a difficult or delicate situation where there are no good options. The saying refers to being caught between an opponent's sword and cornered against a wall. Possible figurative translations include: "Between the devil and the deep blue sea," "Between Scylla and Charybdis," and "Between a rock and a hard place."

on another day he tells me that at least half of them did, so I'm not sure what to make of it except that memories are fuzzy, and perhaps he wants to personalize his belief regarding the death toll in Angola. El Pinareño does not believe the official number of deaths for Cubans, a little over two thousand, and he imagines there were many more.

The men in his unit were much younger than him, in their late teens and early twenties, and most he felt died for unnecessary reasons, such as visiting brothels, or going into the *quimbos* (villages) looking for women. He recounts the story of four Cubans that were killed in a *quimbo* by Angolan men that were upset that the Cubans were taking their women. According to him those four Cubans were able to kill twelve Angolans before they were killed.

There was no solidarity between Cubans and Angolans. The only solidarity, El Pinareño explains, was at the political level, between the governments, but not at the popular level. During the time he served on the mission, he believed in the idea of internationalism, of solidarity with other oppressed people, but through the years he no longer agrees with that ideology. He feels it was all a farce, mostly about politics and perhaps about money. Even though he doesn't believe Cuba got much economic benefit out of the arrangement considering the wealth Angola has in natural resources, diamonds, and oil: "Overall, Cuba got nothing."

Towards the end of the intervention, under the leadership of General Ochoa he thought some Cubans did exploit the situation for profit, including the drug trafficking for which Ochoa was convicted. I asked him if he believed Fidel knew about the drug trafficking and he shook his head emphatically: "There is a lot of bad press in Miami and

the Cubans there give him way too much power and authority, but there are so many things he [Fidel] would be surprised at if he knew, completely surprised."

Referring to Ochoa's trial that was televised live to the public, he continues, "Those of us who grew up with him [Castro] can read his facial expressions and body language, and we knew the outcome was going to be bad. Everything came out in that trial, grown men se *mearon* (peed) in their pants." El Pinareño feels the verdict had to have been that way, because Fidel couldn't allow that level of corruption. But he thinks Ochoa was "a man with his pants on" because at the end of the trial he said, "*Viva Fidel, Viva la Revolución*" (Long live Fidel and the Revolution) and led his own firing squad.

El Pinareño is the only informant who really tries to explain at a socio-cultural level what was going on domestically in Angola at the time: "The whole thing [the intervention] was very difficult because Angola was going from a feudalistic society to a socialist one." Wanting to make sure that his pupil understood what he was talking about, the former professor asks me, "Do you know what feudalism and socialism are?" I nod. His educational background noticeably influences how he expresses himself. Some veterans I have spoken with weren't able to tell me much more than Cuba went to help an oppressed nation, but he analyzes the engagement, the politics and economics behind it all at a deeper level. "Well, they were going from feudalism to utopian socialism." He pauses, and adds, "All socialism is utopian."

I ask him if he regrets going and he tells me, "no, no me arrepiento" (no, I do not regret it). I can sense the emotion in his words when he speaks. Despite any issues he might have with the government, the horrors that he witnessed, and the dubious politics of international warfare, he sees his past internationalist mission as "*un gesto muy bonito*"

(a beautiful gesture), an opportunity to "*ayudar ese pueblo*" (help those people), and "*completamente altruista*" (completely altruistic). He compares the Cuban experience to other "great altruistic acts," for instance, when the U.S. public supported Cuba in their efforts to have Elián González returned to his father living in Cuba.[166]

He explains further: "I'm not very patriotic, and I'm not in agreement with everything here, but I do feel a part of the human race, and therefore I felt I owed something, and this was my way to *saldar una deuda a la humanidad* (pay off an outstanding debt to humanity)." Thus, despite his earlier claim that it had all been a farce, even El Pinareño needs to feel that there was value to his sacrifice.

El Santero – Religion, Race, and Spiritual Diaspora

The following life history adds a spiritual component to the experience of war and internationalism, while demonstrating the inconsistencies and complexities of racial dissonance. As such, his story provides a space in which to explore the ways in which racial, national, and religious identities converge.

For El Santero, the mission in Angola was a life-altering moment, not only for the reasons that other informants mentioned – the long lasting impacts of being involved in a war – but rather, his experience made him a religious man.[167] His encounter with *un muerto* (a spirit)[168] triggered his conversion to *Santería*.[169] He went to Angola because

[166] Elián González is a Cuban boy that caused a lot of controversy in 2000 when he was found floating in an inner tube off the Florida coast. His mother and most of the other passengers that left Cuba on a small boat perished in the crossing. His father in Cuba wanted his son back, while distant relatives in Miami wanted the boy to remain in their custody. After months of endless media coverage, then Attorney General Janet Reno, ordered that Elián be taken by federal authorities from his relatives' house in Miami and be reunited with his father who had made the trip from Cuba to the U.S. to plead his case. Opinion polls at the time showed that more Americans felt the boy should be reunited with his father than stay with relatives in the U.S.
[167] A male practitioner of *Santería*. See footnote below for definition of *Santería*.
[168] *Un muerto* literally means a "dead person," but in this context it refers to a spirit entity.

he had to go – it was destined for him to be there – predetermined in order to become a believer.

His religious conversion commenced during a routine cross-country expedition with other men from his troop. At the time he was a non-believer who did not practice any religion. In one of the *quimbos* (villages)[170] he and some others came across a very large *tambor* (traditional drum) with a small footbridge leading up to it. Underneath the footbridge was a burial place where the skeletal remains of those from the village were housed. Without hesitation, El Santero walked up the footbridge and started playing the drum for a laugh. The next sensation he remembers was of flying through the air, bouncing and rebounding in all directions like a rubber ball, and finally falling on the ground below. He felt no control over his body and started speaking in a strange language.

The troop leader, who had witnessed the scene, picked him up and put him in a jeep and drove out towards the *manigua* (forest/tropical forest). The troop leader opened his shirt and showed El Santero the necklace he was wearing with the colors of his *santo* (deity)[171] and also opened his backpack to reveal how most of it was filled with the figurines of other *santos*. He explained to him that he was a practitioner of Santería. As such, he understood what had happened to him – *un muerto* had become upset with him

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[169] *Santería* is a syncretic religion of African/Yoruba origin and Roman Catholicism practiced in Cuba and other parts of Latin America, and because of mass immigration, across the globe. It is also referred to as *Regla de Ocha*.

[170] "*Quimbo*" is an Angolan word for village. I believe it is from the Kimbundu language, but considering that Angola has more than forty languages and dialects I am not sure. Instead of using the Spanish equivalent – *aldea* – this was the word the veterans repeatedly used to refer to villages since it was the term used while they were there. I have seen it spelled with a "k" "*kimbo*," but I am retaining the Spanish spelling with a "qu" "*quimbo*."

[171] *Santo* literally means (saint). But in this context, the African deities in Santería are referred to as *santos* or *orishas*, and they are also known as the various saints from the Catholic tradition. Each *santo/orisha* has his/her corresponding representation in the Catholic tradition.

for playing the drum without permission. While El Santero had been bouncing through the air, the troop leader heard the spirit say that El Santero had been "*un payaso atrevido* y *descarado*" (a bold and shameless clown) for playing the drum. And precisely for those reasons, "*por donde él fuera iba con él*" (wherever he went he would follow).

The troop leader told him he must gather *huesos y un poco de tierra* (bones and some soil) to take back with him for the *muerto*. Dubious and confused about what he was hearing, El Santero ignored the troop leader's explanation, "*Vámonos, no estoy pa' eso*" (Let's go, I'm not up for this), he told him, and instead tried to find other rationales for what had happened to him. They got back in the jeep and immediately came upon an ambush from which they barely escaped with their lives. The attack and narrow escape frightened and convinced him to do as the troop leader had said. They went back to the *quimbo* where he gathered skeletal remains and soil. He kept them until his return to Cuba, and placed them in his *rincón de muertos* (corner for the dead) – where they are to this very day.[172]

The *muerto* was true to his word and followed him back and has never left him. After returning from his first tour of duty in the late-1970s, El Santero felt enormous relief that he had survived and was back in Cuba. But the trip home was short lived. He was starting to immerse himself in the study of Santería when there was a knock at the door. He was told to report for duty the following day. He knew it was to go back to Angola.

Sexuality and the Scent of French Perfume

[172] *Santería* is not a centralized religious institution with building structures like other religions, i.e. a church or a temple. Therefore, a practitioner uses his/her home to carry out ritual practices. The home is a typical home, but the *Santero*/*a* will dedicate a room, a corner, or some part of the home to place all the ritual objects for worship. A *rincón de muerto* is such a space.

He and his fellow companions departed Havana by plane for the Soviet Union dressed as civilians. From there they changed from their civilian clothes to soldier's uniform and boarded a plane to Luanda. Another two years abroad.

El Santero had similar experiences and exchanges with "the other" in Angola as the other men I interviewed. For instance, he explained how Angolans kept the heart or testicles of fallen Cuban soldiers during battles because they believed those organs gave the Cubans their courage. He says he witnessed Angolan cannibalism and head hunting, the eating of their enemies and the shrinking of their heads. Likewise, he talked about Angolan sexuality in terms of deviancy, backwardness, and disease. He told me Angolans had "sex like animals," and it was acceptable to have sex in front of the children and to have multiple wives.

He recalled a friend who contracted a disease that caused his testicles to desiccate, and there was nothing the Cuban doctors could do for him. A shaman from the village suggested a cure for his friend and placed him in a hut with many women, "*si no habían por lo menos veinte mujeres, no había ninguna*," (if there weren't at least twenty women, there weren't any), all of them naked, "*y esas negras lo restregaban todo*" (and those black women rubbed him everywhere). This went on for a long time until finally his friend's penis started to become erect, and one of the women mounted him. At this point El Santero said he left, not wanting to witness the rest of it. His friend was cured. The next day the shaman brought a young virgin to the friend and told him that she had only watched the night before but had not participated, but to take her then in order to prove he was cured. El Santero left again not wanting to be a bystander but apparently his friend was cured.

He observed both male and female circumcision, the latter of which he found particularly shocking. He recounted a time he and his friends watched through a concealed opening a group of little girls being circumcised in a hut. The little girls were asked to lie down and open their legs "as if they were going to give birth" and in "cold blood" had their clitoris removed. "Do you know what that would be like, to have no sensation whatsoever?" he asked me. The women conducting the ritual would use "*lo que sea*" (whatever was available) to carry out the procedure and then they would apply excrement on the wound. According to him, some of the "lucky" girls wound up at a Cuban medical clinic and were given penicillin, because those who did not often died.

He spoke of Angolan sexuality in much the same way the other informants did, that is as deviant. Most informants told me anecdotes about other people – "friends" – but would deny that they themselves were involved with anybody. However, El Santero is one of the few men I talked to that readily admitted being romantically involved with an Angolan woman.

El Santero had a relationship with a "beautiful *mulatica.*"[173] Her father was a white Angolan of Portuguese decent and her mother was a black Cape Verdean. Before things progressed further with the *mulatica*, the girl's father asked him to "*tirar as calças*" (remove his pants) to prove whether he was a man or a boy, in other words, to see if he was circumcised.[174] Since he was, the father insisted that El Santero have sexual relations with his daughter while he stayed in the room to confirm that they had

[173] The diminutive ending for *mulatica* in this context shows endearment."
[174] *Tirar as calças* is in Portuguese. Some of the terms in this section and the following sections are in Portuguese or in one of the many indigenous "Angolan" languages, and not in Spanish. The veterans remember some Portuguese and Angolan words and incorporate them in their stories with a sense of pride.

relations.[175] He didn't feel comfortable with the request and asked the father to leave. He and the *mulatica* continued their relationship, but the father never asked him to marry his daughter. Eventually he left the area where he was stationed and the relationship with the *mulatica* ended. He didn't provide any more details and didn't tell me whether he would have married her had the father asked.

In contrast to what some of the other veterans observed, El Santero said that Cubans and Angolans did socialize with each other, but that it was mostly limited to marginalized environments, like brothels and other spaces where Cubans were not supposed to be. These risky exchanges resulted in the death of many Cubans because they were out pre-dawn, in unprotected zones, and generally in vulnerable positions. Thus, Angolan/Cuban fraternizing is associated with danger and possible death.

Similarly, El Santero has anecdotes about lack of hygiene and smell – specifically about how it was common to see Angolan adults urinating and defecating in the streets, and that this practice was something they taught their children. As a result, the street and the people had a peculiar bad smell. But in contrast to the other stories I heard, El Santero actually has an account about a positive, intoxicating smell he discovered in Angola – French perfume.

He was introduced to French perfume during his second tour of duty and wanted to take a bottle back with him to Cuba. It was the late 1970s, and internationalists were not allowed to take back material goods with them since their participation abroad was understood to be a selfless act done for ideological reasons and not for material gain.

[175] It is not customary in Cuba to circumcise boys, and as a result most Cuban males are not. But El Santero said he had a freak accident as a child that caused an emergency circumcision. He was playing in a *palangana* (washbasin) and somehow got his penis stuck in it and was taken to the hospital where they had to remove his foreskin in order to release him.

What little they could take home had to be accompanied with a certificate stating that it was given to them as a gift in appreciation for their services, and not purchased or stolen. It was only in the later years of the intervention that Cubans were able to take back a variety of goods. Consequently, he had to devise a plan in order to smuggle the perfume out.

Before his departure he went to see a local man from whom one could get "everything" and asked him for a *caneca* (container/flask).[176] He filled the flask with perfume, shaved his private parts, and taped the flask near his genitalia. He made the entire trip back to Cuba with the container of perfume strapped to his body. Upon his arrival, a Cuban nurse performed a quick physical on him to determine he didn't have any tropical diseases. During the exam, she couldn't help but comment on how nicely he smelled. El Santero, who had his hand bandaged from an explosive, told her that it was the delicious scent of Angolan bandages.[177] She believed him, impressed with Angolan bandages, and was able to sneak the perfume into Cuba. "The perfume lasted a long time," he told me, "but little by little I gave it away to friends until there was nothing." Thus, in contrast to the other informants, El Santero brought home a pleasant scent from Angola, different from anything he had ever experience before, and one he wanted to share and make last instead of forget.

El Muerto – Spiritual Diaspora

As stated above, the *muerto* that he encountered in the *quimbo* in Angola never left El Santero. He followed him back to Cuba and is still with him today. While in

[176] He used the Portuguese word instead of the Spanish.
[177] The following paragraphs explain the significance of the explosion suffered by El Santero.

Angola, the *muerto* warned him about impending danger on numerous occasions, and it is because of him that El Santero believes he is still alive.

On the day before his troop was about to prepare for a major battle against the South Africans, an explosive he was carrying detonated in his hand. The blast injured him enough to send him to the infirmary for a few days, but not enough to seriously wound him. As he lay on the ground bleeding, the *muerto* said to him: "I did this to you." While he was telling me this story, El Santero held his pointer finger up to show me how it was still crooked and the nail is lumped together in the middle. He was fortunate to be recovering in the infirmary while the rest of his troop went ahead to battle with the South Africans: "*muchos se quedaron*" (many did not return).

Once back in Cuba, El Santero became more involved in Afro-Cuban religions at the bequest of the *muerto*. Through the years El Santero has learned a good deal about the spirit that promised never to leave his side. The spirit's mother was *mandinga* (Mandinka/Mandingo)[178] and his father was *kongo* (Kongo),[179] and the spirit is *carabalí* (Calabar).[180] The *muerto* lived in Angola near the border of Zambia and Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo).

According to El Santero and his family, who have all seen him, he wears a "*tapa rabo*" (loincloth), has colorful straw-like decorations on his ankles and biceps, and has tribal markings on his face and chest. The spirit is a *Palero* (a male practitioner of Palo

[178] Refers to an ethnolinguistic group from West Africa.
[179] Refers to a Bantu ethnolinguistic group that inhabited the region that includes present-day Angola and the two Congo states.
[180] Refers to a port town in present-day Nigeria from where many slaves departed to the Americas. One of the main ethnic groups living in that area were the Igbo, but the term is used often as a generalization to describe the many who left from that zone.

Monte), and he has a taste for *rafi* and *wembá*, traditional/ritual *Palo Monte* drinks made from various plants, herbs, vegetables, gunpowder, and other elements.[181]

El Santero has rarely seen the *muerto* himself, not more than a couple of times because: "*Él pasa por mí*" (He possesses me). Thus, it has mostly been his wife and children who have seen him. His wife, a corpulent fake blonde with a bubbly personality and high pitched feminine voice, explained to me how the spirit behaved in the early years when he first arrived from Cuba with El Santero: "*Él era muy bruto al principio hablaba sólo en su lengua que era algún dialecto de portugués y imbundu*" (He was very ignorant at first, only speaking in his native tongue which is a Portuguese and Imbundo dialect). For years she has been trying to teach him not to be so "rude" and "uncultured," as well as how to speak Spanish. She confirmed what he looks like, including the loincloth and tribal markings. At times the wife has chosen to ignore him when he appears because she just does not want to deal with him or wants to continue sleeping and he usually comes at night. When she told me this, El Santero smiled and said, "*el negro* (the spirit) doesn't like to be ignored."

It seems that on one occasion, the *muerto* told El Santero that his son was sneaking out of the house at night. When El Santero confronted his son about this, he denied it saying the *muerto* was lying. The next day, the spirit pushed the son in the staircase at school. Angrily, he asked him, "So, I'm a liar?" and pushed him again. After

[181] *Palo Monte*, also known as *Regla de Palo Monte*, *Regla Palo Monte*, *Regla de Palo*, or *Regla de Congo*, is an Afro-Cuban religion/belief system originating from the Bantu ethnolinguistic group. Its essential components revolve around ceremonial rituals, animal sacrifice, and the belief in spirit entities associated with certain *prendas* (sacred receptacles) that house the *muertos* or spirits), such as the *nganga*, *nkisi*, *fundamento*, *caldero*, and the *cazuela* (Fuentes Guerra 2005).

this confrontation, the son confessed the truth about the situation to his father. El Santero uses this story as an example of how the spirit will not be ignored.

Through the years, the spirit has given El Santero many *pruebas* (tests) to prove his faith. He has taken various religious steps because of the *muerto*. He became initiated in *Santería*, and his *santo* (orisha) is *Changó*.[182] The spirit has told him that his family, including his wife and two children, has to become initiated in *Santería*.[183] In addition to this, the spirit told him he had to *rayarse* (be initiated) in *Palo Monte*.[184] Initiation in *Regla Palo Monte* consists of a series of superficial cuts on the hands, sides of the chest, back, tongue and other body parts. He has been initiated with seven *rayas* (lines), which is the equivalent in *Palo Monte* for *Changó*. He is also a practitioner of Cuban Spiritism, and has been *desarrollando* (developing) the *muerto* for clairvoyant capacities in order to communicate with other spirits.[185] Lastly, El Santero also identifies

[182] The African deities in Santería, referred to as *santos* or *orishas*, are also known as the various saints from the Catholic tradition. *Changó* is the deity of thunder and lightening, and male virility in Santería. His corresponding counterpart/disguise in the Catholic system is the female *Santa Bárbara* (Saint Barbara).

[183] Currently his daughter, who is around ten years old, attends a nearby Methodist church. El Santero does not like the small Protestant churches that have sprung up everywhere since Pope John Paul II visited the island in 1998 and there was a loosening of state oppositions to institutionalized religion. But he does not put up much of a fuss since "it's the same god" [as in Catholicism]. The Methodists do not like the fact that he is a Santero. But he told me that he showed them his Sacred Heart of Jesus stamp that he carries with him and told them he believed in all the saints, and that after that they seemed fine with him. I didn't say anything, but I know that in general Protestants frown upon the veneration that Catholics show towards the saints, even more so when they are linked to African deities, so they are probably not completely accepting of him but are reserving their criticism to themselves.

[184] *Rayarse* literally means to cut or scratch oneself, but I have translated it to be initiated because that's what it is referring to in this context. In the sentence that follows above, I explain that part of the initiating ritual is to cut oneself. *Raya* can also mean (a line).

[185] Spiritism, or French Spiritism is based on the work of French philosopher Allan Kardec (pseudonym for Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail) and it centers around the belief of the existence of spirits and the ability of people to communicate with them. Cuban Spiritism or *espiritismo cruzado* (crossbred Spiritism) has incorporated African elements, including the use of *comisiones* (commissions), such as: *la comisión africana, árabe, del espacio, gitana, y médica*, (the African, Arab, Space, Gypsy, and Medical commissions), among others. The most important spirits in the

as a *brujo* (witch), but he insists that he only uses his skills for good acts with positive outcomes, and not to inflict harm on others.[186]

For instance he will do *limpiezas* (cleanings) to help a person rid him/herself of some negative aspect in their life, but he will not do *brujería mala* (bad witchcraft), such as *amarrando* (tying) a person. *Amarrando*, is a means to make someone fall in love with another person. It consists of using the person's hair, photograph, body fluids, nails, etc., to literally "tie" that person to another. For this charm to be broken "blood has to be spilled" – the person tied has to stab or shoot the other, and see the person's blood before the spell is broken. Hence, El Santero refuses to do this type of work since he claims that one does not have to believe in order for the spell to work.

The spirit has continued to warn him about imminent events and has protected him from harm. A few years back, the spirit told him to *consultarse* (a divination rite), which is a process of understanding the present and foretelling the future with the use of shells. Although he was feeling fine and had no symptoms, the *consulta* revealed that he had a cancer in his body. He went to the doctor who discovered a malignant *flotante* (floating) tumor in his bladder. He was soon scheduled for an operation, but during the procedure several interesting events occurred.

El Santero was taken to the operating room where he was given an epidural that numbed him from the waist down but allowed him to be conscious. The doctors were in their scrubs ready to operate but for some unknown reason they did not commence, and instead just stood there, unable to begin. The anesthesiologist that was at his side leaned

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African commission are those from the Congo who were brought over as slaves. Since El Santero also practices *Santería* and *Palo Monte*, he works more closely with the African commission.

[186] I have chosen to translate this word as "witch" even though, *brujo*, is in the masculine. Male translations of "witch", such as "warlock" and "sorcerer" do not have the same connotation.

close to him, showed him his necklace with the colors of his *santo* and asked him if he knew how to pray? "Why?" El Santero asked. The anesthesiologist responded, "*Me hice Santo hace quince años y no han podido comenzar a operar porque tienes como diez negros sentados en la barriga, vamos a rezar un poco para ver si se puede comenzar tu operación*" (I became initiated in Santería fifteen years ago and they have not been able to start operating because you have about ten spirits sitting on your stomach, let's pray a little to see if your operation can commence). They started to pray and the *negros* descended from his stomach one by one and the doctors began operating.[187]

As the operation went ahead, another surgeon entered the operating room to observe. The surgeon in charge of the procedure was an urologist, but the doctor that entered the room to observe was one of the best oncologists in Cuba, and someone whom El Santero knew well but had not seen in years. The oncologist recognized his friend, and insisted he take over the operation. He removed the tumor and more of the surrounding area than would have the urologist, a decision that probably saved his life. El Santero credits this intervention to the *muerto*, his *santos*, and with the fact that he is still cancer free after all these years.

As he was being rolled out of the operating room on the gurney, the *camillero* (gurney transporter) smiled at him and showed him how he was pushing the gurney with only one finger, "*La camilla va sola, hay una pila de negros que están llevando la camilla*" (The gurney is moving on its own, there are a bunch of spirits pushing the

[187] *Negros* here refers to the spirits *de la comisión africana* (of the African commission) in Cuban Spiritism. The anesthesiologist, although he showed him his necklace to attest that he was a *Santero*, acted like a practitioner of Spiritism because *tenía vista* (had sight) and was able to see the *negros*.

gurney).[188] Back in the recovery room, his family and his religious family – his *madrina y hermanos* (godmother and brothers) were waiting for him.[189]

El Santero believes that one way in which the intervention in Angola changed Cuba was through religion. For instance, in his own religious practices he incorporates traditions he saw used in Angola. In Cuba the *santo* is washed in a plastic washbasin, but he only uses *pozuelos de barro* (clay pots) and does not present the *santo* in porcelain containers because that's what he witnessed in Africa. He feels the traditions of African derived religions have been lost in Cuba because of the lack of new African influences since the end of slavery. This has led to modifications and adaptations. In Angola, he explains, nothing has changed. The traditions from yesteryear have been kept and passed on. Thus, the rituals are older and more pure in Angola than in Cuba.[190] El Santero says that by bringing back these older traditions and re-incorporating them into his religious practice, the intervention has had a direct effect on Cuba and Cubans.

Every Jack has His Jill

While I was at his house one afternoon, El Santero brought out his old uniform from Angola to show me, along with his many medals. "*Esto es una reliquia*" (This is an old relic), he laughed, looking at his uniform. In his other hand he had black and white

[188] The gurney transporter also "had sight" because he was able to see the spirits that were pushing the gurney. According to some practitioners of Santería and other Afro-Cuban religions I spoke with, many hospital workers are *creyentes* (believers) because they work with disease and death: *ellos buscan resguarde para evitar recoger lo malo* (they look for protection to avoid picking up anything negative).

[189] The *madrina* (godmother), *madrina de santo* (godmother for a particular saint), or *padrino* (godfather), is the person that sponsors or teaches another about *Santería*, a particular deity, and the necessary rituals and traditions. *Hermanos* literally means "brothers" but in this context it refers to spiritual brothers, in other words, the people that have been instructed by the same *madrina* or *padrino*.

[190] For the opposite view, see Chapter VI.

pictures he took while he was there. He looked about the same, just a slightly younger and thinner version of himself.

He had various pictures of rural Angola and *quimbos* throughout the countryside. There was one picture of a plane exploding in mid-air with white smoke surrounding it. Another picture was of an Angolan man on a gurney, clearly in pain and in shock, with a small rocket projectile that had not exploded protruding from his thigh. As part of the bomb disposal unit, El Santero was asked to assist in the operation to try to remove the projectile safely. They were able to remove the projectile, but the man was left without any thigh muscle in his leg. There were also a few pictures of him in a hospital bed on sick leave after the *muerto* caused the accident in order to protect him.

As is the case with most families in Cuba, El Santero's house is made up of various generations living under the same roof. While I was over at El Santero's house, his father came back from a walk. He makes sure to walk every day even though he can barely hear, and he greets me sweetly every time I go to their house. The father is in his mid-90's, with baby blue eyes and white hair. He has dual citizenship from Cuba and Spain, and the Spanish embassy gives him CUC $16/month. At the end of the year he gets a large gift box with cheese, food, clothing and other provisions.[191] He was born in the north of Spain, and although he could leave Cuba whenever he wants because of the dual citizenship, he has never wanted to.

I ask El Santero to show me a picture of his deceased mother. He brings out a large black and white portrait of a beautiful *trigueña* with dark hair and dark eyes.[192] He

[191] Each autonomous region from Spain, i.e. Andalusia, Asturias, Catalonia, Galicia, has their own branch through the Spanish embassy and they distribute the monthly pension and "*jabas*" (gift bags/boxes) at the end of the year to citizens from their particular region.
[192]See previous section for a definition of *trigueño*.

looks more like his mother than his father. I ask him if his mother was of color, a light skinned *mulata*, and he adamantly says no, that she was a *trigueña*. El Santero auto-identifies as white.[193]

Later in the evening he asks me if I had any plans for that night. I tell him that I was thinking of going to the *Casa de la Cultura* (Cultural Center) for a dance.[194] "No," he tells me, "don't go there, too many…" and he rubs the back of his hand with his pointer finger. I recognize the gesture because it is extremely common in Cuba, to rub the back of the hand or the arm with the finger or fingers on the other hand. It is a silent sign to refer to *negros* (blacks).[195] I am surprised by the comment and ask if he doesn't see a contradiction in what he is saying, after all, he is deeply involved in Afro-Cuban religions.

"No," he responds, "*que estemos juntos pero no revueltos, cada oveja con su pareja, y no me digas que Dios los hace y el diablo los junta*" (together but not scrambled, every Jack has his Jill, and don't tell me that birds of a feather should flock together), he says, stating three adages in a row.[196] All three phrases basically refer to the same theme – that one should stick with one's own kind, and not get too involved with others that are different. In this case, that would be *blancos y negros* (whites and blacks).

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[193] I usually let people auto-identify themselves racially/color. I do not like reading studies where the author imposes his/her racial categories on another person or culture. If I had to give an opinion however, El Santero is olive skinned, and in the U.S. would probably be considered to belong to an "ethnic" group – i.e. Italian American, Hispanic, Arab, or of color rather than being considered "white/Anglo-Saxon."

[194] Most provinces have a *Casa de la Cultura* that organize various public activities, like dances, competitions, art exhibits, etc.

[195] In this context *negros* refers to blacks, not spirits.

[196] Only the first one is a literal translation. For the other two I thought it better to translate to well known sayings in English that carry the same connotation. The second adage, "*cada oveja con su pareja*" literally means (every sheep has its partner) and it rhymes in Spanish. The third phrase, "*Dios los hace y el diablo los junta"* literally means that (god makes them [people], but the devil brings them together).

It is important to reiterate that he is talking about *negros* specifically, not mulattos. White Cubans make a distinction between a *negro* and a *mulato,* and mulattos themselves feel they are different from *negros*. There is a racial hierarchy expressed in terms of skin color, where lighter skin mulattos fair better than darker skinned *negros* (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993).

I ask El Santero to explain further why he feels that blacks and whites should not mix? He says he does not like the "*chabacanería"* (tastelessness) that blacks have culturally, the "*guapería*" (bravado), the trying to be better and tougher than everyone else. He continues saying that he does not like the lack of respect they show to everyone, even when one is out with a girlfriend/wife, the least a man could do was respect a woman who is out with another man. One can look at "another man's woman," he says, but not touch.

He recounts the time he went to an Afro-Cuban religious inheritance event, and "there were two…" – he stays silent, rubbing the back of the hand with his pointer finger to refer to blacks – "…and they started to drink. After two drinks they think they are thirteen stories tall. One of them, can you believe he had the *frescura* (nerve) of trying to put his hand on my wife's behind?" He says he didn't allow it to happen, he just saw their intention, and he pulls out his fist to show me how he slugged one of the two men. "This brought him back down to size" – and he puts his hand somewhere between his hip and knees to show me how it was closer to the ground, no longer thirteen stories high: "*él quedó así de grande*" (he became about that big).

A few days later I meet up with El Santero and his *madrina de santo* (religious godmother/sponsor) at her house. She is a white woman in her late 50's. She invites me

into her home and shows me the altar she has set up for her *santos* in her *rincón de muertos*. She and El Santero tell me how: "*los blancos le van a quitar esta religión [Santería] a los negros, porque somos más inteligentes y la mayoría de los que vienen a iniciarse a Cuba son blancos*" (whites are going to take away this religion [*Santería*] from blacks, because we are more intelligent and the majority of those that come to Cuba to become initiated are whites). As they say this I think of all the Canadians, Germans, French, and Americans that travel to Cuba to become initiated in *Santería*, many are indeed white. Katherine Hagedorn documents the phenomenon of *santurism* (religious tourism), where mainly white people from all over the world, especially Europe, the U.S., and Canada, travel to Cuba for tourism and to be initiated in *Santería* (Hagedorn 2001: 9). El Santero's *madrina* tells me that whites feel more comfortable with whites, so therefore there is high demand for white *Santeros* to work with white foreigners. Similarly, other Santeros told me that the Africans that go to Cuba to study, tend to be Christian and look down upon those who practice Santería. Thus, according to El Santero and his religious family, new connections are being made with white practitioners rather than black.

Despite his involvement in Afro-Cuban religions, the close interpersonal and spiritual relationships he has with Afro-Cubans, and even though he has shared most of his adult life with an African spirit, El Santero sees himself as very different and better than *negros* (blacks). Perhaps El Santero is correct in saying that one way the intervention in Angola affected Cuba was through religion. The intervention brought him, a white man, to *Santería* and other Afro-Cuban religions. In so doing it changed at an individual level the face of *Santería* on the island. In addition, he brought back

traditions he had seen practiced in Angola and incorporated them into his rituals. If El Santero incorporated Angolan practices into his rituals, it stands to reason that others did as well. Thus, how *Santería* is practiced in Cuba, even if only minimally, was also changed.

The intervention also brought a *muerto*, the spirit of a dead African, to Cuba. As such, the *muerto* is another member, albeit a spiritual one, among the many in the modern African diaspora to Cuba.

Although many of his anecdotes are similar to the ones I heard from other internationalists, El Santero offers an entirely different perspective of his time in Angola. This is a direct result of his relation to the *muerto* and his conversion to *Santería*. His experience adds a spiritual component not found in the other stories, one that leads to a better understanding of the specifics of Afro-Cuban religion and how the intervention in Angola changed aspects of its practice on the island. But it also examines the racial dynamics of white Cuban involvement in this traditionally black space. The complex and subtle contradictions of Cuban race relations are played out at the micro-level in the connection between El Santero and the *muerto*, and in his position as a practitioner/representative of *Santería*.

The next chapter explores the memories of non-combatants; ordinary Cubans who did not directly partake in the intervention. Their memories serve to highlight the tension between early and contemporary internationalism, as well as that between those that went and those who did not.

CHAPTER VI
REMINISCING – MEMORIES OF NON PARTICIPANTS

In this section I share a series of vignettes from non-participants, civilians and military, who remember the war in Angola but did not participate. I chose the vignette because the interaction with some subjects was not always extended. Yet these brief encounters were often as revealing and informative as longer interviews. These concise kernels of descriptive ethnography capture the essence of Cuban contemporary life, while still weighing in on the central themes regarding memory, the manner in which race is referenced in everyday speech, and how their own personal memories are reconciled with the memories of those who did go.

A Waste

I stayed in *El Maestro's* (the Teacher's) apartment for a few days before departing from Havana. He is a very petite, delicate, and effeminate man, with fair skin, and gold-rimmed glasses. He apologizes for not offering to help me up the stairs with my heavy luggage, because he has a heart attack. Not heart attack in the past tense, as in "I had a heart attack," but in the present, "*tengo un infarto*" (I have a heart attack), and while he says this he holds his small hand against his heart. With his other hand he shows me, and my heavy luggage, the way up the three flights of stairs.

At the top of the steps I enter into one of the most beautiful apartments I have ever seen. Everything is white and immaculate, and full of antique furniture and porcelain figurines. The view from the balcony is gorgeous – a picturesque scene of an

afternoon in Havana. I am fortunate to get a room, he tells me, because the rooms in his apartment are usually rented out on most days because he has many friends all over the world; return guests that come to stay with him.

After I settle into my room he offers me coffee, fruit, and some conversation. He reminisces about the Special Period and what a challenge it was with the numerous blackouts endured. Everyone stopped questioning them after a while, "*no cogían lucha*" (they didn't fight it), he said, using a popular Cuban saying which means that you do not bother to contest something you cannot change, but rather just take it as a given and make the best of a bad situation. He and his fellow neighbors would gather on the sidewalk below and together they would attempt to keep cool in the heat without fans or air conditioning, and sing Mexican *rancheras* (a genre of Mexican music) until the lights returned. Although things have improved since the Special Period, he says, "something has to change, *es un pueblo muy sufrido*" (the people have long-suffered).

When he was younger, El Maestro was urged to serve in Angola. Instead he pretended to be crazy, and for one very long week he was a nervous wreck trying to avoid being sent. At the recruitment center, the would-be soldiers were asked to remove all their clothing for a medical exam. He found it insulting and degrading to be made to stand completely naked in front of others. Despite this humiliation, his mental instability ruse worked, and he was not asked to serve. "It was not right for Cubans to have been sent to fight in Angola." There were so many Cuban lives that were wasted, and so many others came back as amputees.

As a retired teacher, he tells me of one former student in particular who died shortly before returning home from Angola. According to El Maestro, the soldiers were

given a vaccine before arriving in Cuba in order to avoid bringing back any diseases they might have acquired abroad. The former student survived his tour of duty in Angola only to die from a bad reaction to the vaccine. "He was so beautiful and everyone loved him, it was such a waste to die like that."

Earth

The tall, lanky *Jabao*[197] (light skinned mulatto) practices Cuban Spiritism and is an expert on Afro-Cuban religions. He explains to me that although people from all over Cuba were sent to Angola, the majority of them were Cubans of color. Among those that he knew that served, there were a few that were serious practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions. They wanted to partake in religious rituals while in Angola in order to "*fortalecerse*" (strengthen themselves). Most were unable to because they were viewed as foreigners and soldiers rather than as spiritual brethren or fellow religious community members.

Some of his friends tried making contacts with high elders or priests but were incapable because those in prominent positions were "*herméticamente cerrados*" (hermetically sealed). According to El Jabao, the religious authorities in Angola are mysterious and hard to reach even for their own people, let alone for a foreigner.

Some of his practitioner friends brought back "tierra" (earth/dirt) from Angola to have dirt from Africa – the spiritual homeland of the religions they practice – for their altars and spiritual spaces in their home.

[197] The term *jabao* is used to describe a light skinned mulatto who looks almost white, but usually has "*pelo malo*" (bad hair) – a derogatory term in both English and Spanish used to describe someone who has "black" or afro-textured hair. It is thought that the term *jabao* originally comes from the Spanish word for "*jabón*" (soap) and that it suggests the idea that the *jabao* has washed most of his "blackness" off. However, I would say most people are unaware of these origins of the term and simply use it to describe someone in the Cuban color scheme.

Love Waits

At a little girl's birthday party I am introduced to her grandmother, a woman in her mid-40's whose once beautiful face has been ravaged by the tropical sun. Deep, thick wrinkles surround her striking green eyes, which are more pronounced because of the contrast of her tan skin and black hair. Yet her prematurely aged face sits atop a figure that many younger women would kill for. Next to her is sitting her equally striking 20-something year-old son.

She and I are talking about love. Her boyfriend is much younger than her and she prefers it that way because younger men keep her young too, they are not jaded like older men or men her age. Age and time do not matter when it comes to love, and she gives me the example of her parents. Her mother waited for her father for two years while he was sent to Angola.

I ask her why her father had been in Angola and she replies, "For the war over there." Her son, who has been listening to us, chimes in: "Yeah, the war over there." When I ask them what the war had been about, neither of them seem to know, they just knew there had been a war and their father was sent. I don't press the issue even though I find it somewhat surprising that a person wouldn't know why their father was sent off to war and why their mother had to be alone for two years, but many people have little interest in war and past revolutionary projects.

That's besides the point, "Love waits for everything," she reiterates.

Seca

An older white lady tells me that she knew a beautiful black couple that lived in an apartment above hers during the 1980's. The husband had been sent to Angola, but

shortly after his return his wife started to get ill. The wife became "*seca*" (very skinny), and eventually both the husband and wife died. At the time the older lady says she didn't know what the disease was, but now thinking back it was clear that it was AIDS.

Para Resolver

El Flaco (skinny male) is a divorced single dad. He is raising his daughter alone because his ex-wife is completing an internationalist mission in Venezuela as a healthcare worker. He understands why his former spouse went abroad – to make money and buy goods. His ex-wife has already sent home clothes, a VCR and Disney movies for their daughter to watch, and is making plans to send back a plasma screen TV. Regardless, the thought of raising his daughter alone for three years is daunting to El Flaco.

El Flaco is white and his ex is a *mulata*, and their little girl is an adorable 7 year-old, whom according to El Flaco, is lucky she got "good hair."[198] She is used to eating her father's bad cooking and going to school in the standard primary school burgundy red uniform with lopsided, messy pigtails while the other girls who live with their mothers have flawless "updo" hairstyles with bows, headbands, and other feminine hair accessories.

He tells me that internationalism is very different today than internationalism in the past. Before it didn't "resolve" anything, but nowadays if a person carries out their mission they can improve their economic situation back home. At the time, he refused to go to Angola, and believes he was penalized for not going. Nothing was done outright, but he felt that doors were closed for him after declining to volunteer. For example, he felt it hindered him in his academic career, and believes that if he had gone to Angola he

[198] "Good hair" and "bad hair" are terms in both Spanish and English used to describe someone without or with black/or afro-textured hair.

would have been allowed to take his studies further and would currently have a better position. Instead, he was denied entrance at the university level.[199]

El Flaco worries that his daughter will be permanently affected by not having her mother in her life for three years. He fears he will not be able to teach her what only a mother can teach a little girl; after all, he is a man. But he understands why his ex-wife is making the immense sacrifice of being away from her daughter, "*para resolver*" (to make money).[200]

El Doctor

El Doctor (the Doctor), at least that is what they call him in this small town –I'm not really sure what kind of "doctor" he is, I suspect he is just a very well read man, although he might be a medical doctor too – I never confirm either way. Some of the neighbors tell me I should speak with him because he might be able to give me some good ideas – he knows everything about everything they say.

He comes by the smaller towns once a week or so to check up on his various projects. After all the suspense about this man, I finally meet him. He is your typical "book worm," straight out of a cartoon, nerdy glasses and all. He asks me lots of

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[199] This is a point of contention among the veterans and civilians I interviewed. Some people I spoke with stated that recruitment was voluntary, while others state it was forced. From what I gathered recruitment policies depended upon the rank of the soldier, revolutionary commitment, the need and level of engagement at the time in Angola, and the personality of the individual person. There were various Cubans that I spoke with, as is evidenced in this section, that felt perfectly comfortable refusing to serve and accepted whatever consequences – such as limited social mobility and work opportunities. Others however have stated that they had no choice in the matter, or were more ambivalent about why they decided to go. There were also those Cubans who were very willing to volunteer. One thing I consistently heard is that those men who had to complete their military service, usually around age 17-19, did not have a choice and if asked to do so, had to complete their service in Angola.

[200] *Para resolver* is a much used saying that literally means: "to resolve" things, and is usually used in the context of resolving the economic shortcomings in the country. In other words, it refers to finding a way to get food, clothing, and other basic and/or "luxury" goods and to basically attempt to maintain some sort of economic security.

questions about my project and wants to know what kind of numbers I will be running. I tell him that I do not rely as much on statistics, as say, a sociologist might. He interrupts and tells me I need numbers. He suggests the best project regarding Cuba and Angola would be to take pictures and measurements of blacks in Cuba and in Angola and measure how the width of their nose has changed.

I stop listening to El Doctor.

He stops by to see me a few days later and tells me that after our conversation the other day he saw a TV special on the 30th anniversary commemoration of the intervention in Angola and he thought of me – "had I seen them?" Obviously he had not seen them or even registered that they were on until he met me. Yes, I respond, I have been watching and taping as many of the segments as I could, but I thank him for mentioning it.

A Home in Exchange

The taxi driver tells me that he has never been on a plane, let alone traveled outside the county. "Not even when you were in the military," I ask?[201] He responds that no, the war in Angola was during his time in the service and he did not want to go "*allá*" (over there), and he gestures despairingly with his hand to a far-off place. When I ask him why he answers: ¿"*Pa' que me voy a morir por esos otros países*?" (Why should I die for those other countries?) Serving in Angola was voluntary and he refused to go because he didn't think it was worth it.

He tells me the house across from his own was given to the widow of a soldier who had fought and died in Angola. The soldier had been very young at the time of his death and his equally young widow was given a new home as partial reparation for the

[201] Military service is mandatory for all males, with exceptions granted for physical or mental illness, and other physical impairments. Therefore, it is safe to assume that most men have been in the military.

loss she had suffered. He said other families got a car if they had lost someone in Angola, and he knew personally of at least two families that received homes.

I tell him that at least the families were given something in exchange for the sacrifice of their son or husband, but that nothing could ever make up for the loss of a life. He turns his head around while driving, looks me in the eyes, nods in agreement, and keeps driving.

Opportunity of a Lifetime

The old lady is sitting in a wheelchair on her porch. She rarely gets out but the woman who cares for her insists that she go out a couple of times a week to get a little sun on her pale, frail legs. People walk by and most of them say hello, "*adiós*" (goodbye/hello), and ask how she is doing.[202] "*Bien*," she responds, "*dentro de lo que cabe*" (Good, all things considered).

Her son, who is now in his 50's, and is often confused with a foreigner because of his blonde hair, green eyes, and red neck, volunteered to go to Angola when he was younger. He did not volunteer because he wanted to go, but rather because he was worried that if he did not go he would look "*antirrevolucionario*" (antirevolutionary). As "luck" would have it, he suffered from severe allergies and mild asthma, and as a result he could not go. At hearing the news her son felt enormous relief, but kept it to himself.

The recruiter, however, told her son he felt bad for him because he was missing out on an opportunity of a lifetime.

El Trigueñito

[202] *Adiós* means goodbye in Spanish, but in Cuba it is used as a general greeting, especially when walking by people will yell out "*adiós*" as both a hello and a goodbye.

El Trigueñito[203] is a bus driver and mechanic. He can usually be found in greasy overalls, underneath someone's car. He has mischievous eyes, and the rare mustache that fits perfectly on his face. The few times that he has shaved it off he looks strange, uncomfortable, perhaps too bare, so he always grows it back.

Years ago he had the opportunity to study mechanical engineering in East Germany, but in order to do so he needed to be excused from completing the mandatory military service in Cuba. His request was denied and as a result he was not able to study in Europe and instead commenced his term in the service. Six months later he was asked to go to Angola. He refused. In part out of spite because of his lost opportunity to study abroad, but mostly he turned it down because, as he says, he is willing to fight any day "*por esto*" (for this) he says pointing to the ground with both hands, "*porque es mío*" (because it is mine). "*¿Pero por esos negros allá*?" (But for those blacks over there?), he shakes his head emphatically he would not. "*Dicen que esos negros allá mataban a los mismos Cubanos*" (They say those blacks over there killed the very same Cubans [that were helping them]). For those people, he was not willing to risk his life.

A friend of his had volunteered to go to Angola despite the fact that he was an only son. He was in Angola for three days when he stepped on a land mine and was blown to pieces. Nothing was left of his friend, not even his clothing, bones, nothing.

[203] *Trigueño*/*a* has no English equivalent, and it's meaning in Spanish depends on country/region. In Cuba, *trigueño* refers to someone whose skin color is not as pale as a (stereo) typical Anglo-Saxon but not as dark as a *mulato* or *negro* (black). "*Trigueño*" comes from the word *trigo* (wheat) and it refers to the color of skin, a yellowish/brownish tan. Typically it is not used to refer to somebody of obvious African descent, but rather someone who might be considered "indigenous" – although this is an equally ambiguous and subjective term. Regardless, it is all based on coloring, skin color and hair texture, and not from what particular ethnic or racial group one's parents might have belonged. *Trigueñito* is in the diminutive to show endearment.

According to El Trigueñito few family members were compensated for the loss of a loved one – maybe "three percent" he guesses, but the rest were not. Of those that returned, most "*regresaban locos*" (returned crazy). He had heard from others that so many veterans came home insane because of a drug or injection the soldiers were given before returning home to kill any disease they might have gotten in Africa. "Whatever it was," they came back crazy, he says.

He admitted that it wasn't that way for everyone, for some people it went well and they were able to (make money) "*hicieron negocios*,"[204] but that for most of his friends that went it was a horrible experience.

"This is what you want to study?" he asks me discouragingly. "Yes," I answer. "*Nadie te va a hablar*" (no one is going to talk to you). Most people he knew did not want to talk about it, most of the people that went simply never wanted to bring it up.

"*No te creas*" (don't be so sure), I respond, even though I know that to some degree he is right, there are people that simply are not willing to talk. But, I tell him, "you would be surprised by how many do." El Trigueñito looks at me frustrated, and drops the conversation.

AIDS

Leidi is walking home from work, her short dark hair offsets her all white nurse's outfit – white top, pants, socks, and shoes. She emerges a short while later freshly bathed, in a tank top and short shorts, and like most Cubans, not the least bit self-conscious about her very corpulent frame. Although she has never mentioned it to me

[204] *Hacer negocios* literally means "to do business," but it's used to refer to making money in general, usually in a black market business.

personally, I know from other neighbors that she is a lesbian, and they have pointed out her petite partner to me on the street.

Leidi is a thirty-something medical nurse and co-director of an AIDS sanatorium. According to Leidi, AIDS spread differently in Cuba than in other places, originating among the heterosexual population before spreading to homosexuals.[205] In Cuba AIDS is not a drug related problem because most of the drug use is "*polvo*" (dust/cocaine), or marijuana, not intravenous drugs, and in any case there is a strong anti-drug campaign that curbs drug use in general. Currently there is a higher rate of HIV infection among "*hombres que tienen sexo con otros hombres – HSH*" (men who have sex with other men – MSM): "All over the world they are trying to switch to this term since so many men avoid the homosexual term, Leidi clarifies." Even though she personally feels that any man that sleeps with a man is a homosexual and believes that most people would agree, she is aware that MSMs do not identify as such and for that reason the healthcare community uses the new term.

She continues saying that the highest growing number of HIV positive cases is seen among women who sleep with MSMs. Leidi states that most of the people that are HIV positive on the island are people "*de baja cultura*" (lower class/low education) even

[205] Currently, Cuba has one of the lowest AIDS rates in the world, and the lowest in Latin America and the Caribbean http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/7505-06.pdf; http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/7796-02.pdf. This is due to their aggressive campaign to isolate the disease since its inception in the mid 1980's. From the beginning the disease was treated as a health risk, an infectious threat, there was mandatory, random testing and anyone who tested positive for HIV and AIDS were quarantined from the rest of society in sanatoriums. At present however, HIV testing is voluntary, and HIV infected people can choose to live in a sanatorium or live at home after receiving six months of intensive therapy and instruction on how to live and prevent the spread of the disease before being sent back to their communities. In these medical facilities patients receive the best medical care available and specialized diets. Many of the patients that were interned at the start of the epidemic when the quarantine was mandatory and permanent lost their homes so they continue to live in the clinics. For more on AIDS see Chapter III.

though she recognizes that people from all walks of life, including doctors, lawyers, and engineers, have gotten the disease. Currently, Havana and Matanzas have the highest rates of AIDS in Cuba because of the high concentration of tourists in those areas mingling with the locals.[206] Overall the rate of AIDS has risen all over the island, and she believes that in places like Santiago, in the Eastern side of the island, the rate is probably higher than is currently considered because there are so many people there "*de baja cultura*" and more promiscuity.[207] Although Leidi loves her patients, she tells me that she feels that AIDS is a disease that one gets because of a consciously bad decision, one chooses to have sexual relations without thinking of the consequences.

When I ask her to explain more about the earlier years of AIDS in the country she tells me that AIDS started because of Angola. She says that many people that went came back infected. And she knew personally of one female friend who was infected by her husband upon returning from Angola. I ask her why she thought that was considering that Angola had one of the lowest rates of AIDS at the time because of the long civil war.[208] She responds, "well, in all those places, Cubans just weren't there [Angola], they were in South Africa, and South Africa has one of the highest rates of AIDS." She's

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[206][206] In general Cubans tend to associate the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, especially AIDS, with foreigners, and not fellow Cubans. There is an unspoken belief that AIDS is a foreign problem and that Cubans infected with the disease are getting treatment and would not be engaging in unprotected sex. Condom use among Cubans having sex with Cubans tends to be very lax, both for the reason just stated and because of "machismo" (sexism) in which men prefer to have sex without condoms. Condoms are handed out free of charge or at extremely low, subsidized prices in the pharmacies, so lack of availability is not an issue. But most Cuban males will complain that they "do not feel good" or "do not fit," in particular when they are made in China – of the stereotype of Asians having a smaller penis and hence, smaller condoms that do not fit properly on Cuban males.

[207] The Eastern side of the island also has the highest rate of Cubans of color, which again stresses how blacks, low education, and/or lower class are conflated. This also demonstrates the stereotypes of promiscuity and sexual deviance with blacks – black Cubans in this case.

[208] http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/Countries/africa/angola_profile.pdf; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS_in_Angola; "Angola Sees AIDS as Post-War Threat," November 11, 2008 http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/2299801.

right, South Africa does have one of the highest rates of AIDS in Africa, but I have never heard anyone tell me AIDS originated in Cuba because of those returning from South Africa, but rather Angola. White South Africans were the adversary, yet black Angolans are blamed for the spread of AIDS in Cuba.

The Humanitarian

Albertico is an exceedingly good-looking man. When he looks at me with his green eyes it's hard to concentrate on anything else. Despite his handsome appearance other neighbors have already warned me about him: "*Es un animal*" (He's an animal), they say – he beats his wife and his sister, and the arguments are heard by the entire neighborhood.

When I ask him why he never went to Angola he tells me that he "*se negó*" (refused). He would never fight in a war. Perhaps, he says, if it had been a humanitarian mission, somewhere where he could improve the situation, directly help people, then he might have gone, but not for a war.

Amongst Their Own

The beautiful young woman, stylishly dressed in mostly white, gracefully maneuvers the uneven streets and potholes with her petite frame, weaving in and out of the pedestrian traffic with ease. She is a *Santera*, and she and her family have practiced the religion for generations.[209] They live in a predominantly black part of town where many foreigners go to become initiated in Santería in Cuba. As we walk around town she points out an African-American girl on the street and tells me that she is a North

[209] A female practitioner of Santería – a syncretic religion of African/Yoruba origin and Roman Catholicism practiced in Cuba and other parts of Latin America, and because of mass immigration, across the globe. It is also referred to as the *Regla de Ocha*. See Chapter V for more information on Santería.

American[210] who is in Cuba studying to be a doctor. During her years studying medicine on the island she has become initiated in *Santería*. La Santera explains to me that many African-Americans go to Cuba in search of connecting to their African roots and Santería often provides a deeper, spiritual, concrete link to a mostly unknown past. More and more whites, La Santera continues, from Canada, the U.S., and Europe are going to the island for the same religious purpose. Cuba has been primarily responsible for exporting the religion to New York, Miami, and so many other cities in the U.S.

She tells me that many people prefer Cuba for religious purposes rather than to anywhere in Africa because Africa has "*una mala reputación*" (a bad reputation). Moreover, in Africa the religions have continued to evolve, whereas in Cuba, because of the break in African influence, older rituals and traditions that have been lost in Africa still remain in Cuba despite syncretism with Catholicism.

La Santera is too young to have gone to Angola herself, but she remembers hearing stories from relatives that went: most of the Cubans that went to Angola did not mix with Africans because they were worried "*que les iban a hacer algo, siempre les estaban haciendo cosas, traicionándolos*" (that they would do something to them, they were always doing things, betraying them). As soldiers, it was very difficult to socialize and to get to know the civilian population. The Angolans couldn't be trusted, she says, and as a result, "*los Cubanos se quedaban entre su gente*" (the Cubans stayed amongst their own people).

Sweet Potato

[210] As in most of Latin America, U.S. citizens are often referred to as *norteamericanos* (North Americans), rather than Americans, since Latin Americans considered themselves "*Americanos*" as well, and rightfully so.

El Académico (The Academic) is telling me how unequal the exchange was between the Angolans that went to live and study in Cuba in comparison to the Cubans that were sent to Angola. He knew Angolans that had studied medicine free of cost in Cuba and were now "*millonarios y dueños de hospitales*" (millionaires and hospital owners). The higher education they received in Cuba made them ideal candidates for immigration to other countries all over the world. But these same Angolans: "*no querían saber de los Cubanos*" (didn't want anything to do with Cubans). "*Vinieron aquí con taparrabos y se fueron con títulos*" (they came here wearing loincloth and left with degrees).

There is obvious resentment in his comment, the bitterness of an unfair exchange. I've heard this type of comment before, including from other Cubans of color like El Académico. Some people believe that Fidel spent too much money, effort and human lives for his image internationally, rather than worrying about his own people. He leans in close, flashing a playful smile: "If you were my wife, I couldn't give you *boniato*" (sweet potato) and another woman *bistec* (steak), you wouldn't put up with it for very long."

The Pacifist

Luis is a non-state taxi driver, which means he can only offer his services to fellow Cubans and not foreigners.[211] In smaller provinces this distinction is often blurred since there are not that many licensed cabs available. Luis is a tall, attractive, and gentle man, he is one of the few Cubans males I have heard openly acknowledge that he is happily married and very much in love with his wife. Originally Luis had picked me up

[211] Only licensed state taxi drivers can legally have foreigners as passengers. Those found with foreigners as passengers without a state license can be fined and/or have their car impounded.

thinking I was Cuban, but when he realized I was a foreigner, it made him nervous. As a result he stopped picking me up for a while, and only recently has started to again. When he was younger he was called up for service in Angola five times but he didn't want to go. "What was I going to do in another country fighting for people I don't even know?" Moreover, "*Yo soy un pacifista*" (I'm a pacifist), he adds, using his hands to emphasize that he wants nothing to do with anything.

While he is telling me this I notice that he is nervous again. He tells me he is concerned that someone might find out he is talking to me about Angola, and questions whether he should be telling me anything at all. He is one of the most nervous people I have talked to, and I wonder if he has a personal reason to be that way, or if it is also just part of his personality – perhaps he is just naturally more nervous than others. Some informants have been guarded when answering questions about the topic of Angola, whereas others who are natural story tellers have gladly talked about it. But none have been as panicky as Luis.

Later that night I wake up from a nightmare. My conversation with Luis disturbed me, his fear has rubbed off on me, and I feel anxious that I won't be able to complete my research. Maybe I am having a bit of an anxiety attack myself. It takes me a couple of days to shake off the feeling of nervousness and unease. After that I see Luis a few more times, but I worry about asking him for a ride at the taxi stand because I do not want to put him in an awkward situation. After a couple of weeks he asks me if I need a ride. I tell him I am going to the grocery store, and climb into his old 1950's American car. He seems relaxed again, calm, everything back to normal.

¿Para Morir Allá?

El Bodeguero (the Grocer) is a very hard-working man. He has three other jobs besides this one and is always in constant movement, sweating like a madman on his trusty bicycle. Eventually he gave up all his jobs because he had a heart attack in his 40's, probably from all the stress.

He tells me that he was of age to go to Angola, but he chose not to go. When I ask him why, he answers: "*¿Estás loca*?" (are you crazy?) "*¿para morir por allá*?" (to die over there?).

Never Asked

I sit in a park watching the world go by while I wait to meet up with *El León* (the Lion). He is an old man, still very tall with a strong frame and big hands, but nothing I am sure compared to how he must have looked when he was younger and his size and strength earned him his nickname. I try to envision what a beautiful sight he must have been in his prime, but I feel a little sad bearing witness to how cruel the passage of time is to all of us.

El León was born in the 1930's and worked his entire life as an *estibador* (longshoreman) at the port. It was there that he got his nickname, tirelessly loading and unloading cargo from the ships that docked at the seaport. He is *abakua,*[212] a member of an all male secret society, and a *Santero.*[213] His *santo* (saint/deity) is *Changó,*[214] the god of thunder, lightening, and male virility.

[212] A society based on a system of beliefs of African origin. *Abakua* is also known as a *Ñañigo*.
[213] A male practitioner of Santería.
[214] The African deities in Santería, referred to as *santos* or *orishas*, are also known as the various saints from the Catholic tradition. *Changó* is the deity of thunder and lightening, and male virility in *Santería*. His corresponding counterpart/disguise in the Catholic system is, interestingly, the female *Santa Bárbara* (Saint Barbara).

A young white man approaches us and tells El León that he is in good company, referring to me, and invites us for a drink. He ignores him and eventually the young man goes away. After he has left, El León leans over and tells me that the young man "*está medio loco*" (a little crazy), and he points and wiggles his finger towards his head as he says this.

El León asks if I've had lunch and invites me to eat at one of the local collective dining rooms where workers, pregnant women, and senior citizens can eat free of charge. The food is sparse but tasty, and everyone brings his or her own spoon and cup. Since I didn't know I would be eating here ahead of time, he and I share his utensils. He cleans his spoon with his handkerchief before handing it to me to eat, and we drink from his yellow plastic cup. People stare. We make an odd couple, an old black man and a young white foreigner.[215]

After lunch we go back to the park and the young man approaches us for a second time. He tells us he merely wants to invite us for a soda, without any "*interés*" (ulterior motive). Both of us decline. It is obvious the young man is a hustler and he wants to get to me. I've seen him hanging out around the park trying to approach other tourists. The thought occurs to me that he and I aren't really all that different – we are both hunting – him foreigners and me locals, and on this particular day I am hunting a lion.

El León never went to Angola, although because of his job he saw firsthand all the armaments that were sent – rifles, tanks, machine guns, and even portable homes. "I packed them myself," he tells me proudly. He knew the exact year the intervention in

[215] In Cuba, and the rest of Latin America, I am considered white because of the color of my skin, regardless of my cultural background. In the United States I am initially considered "white" also because of the color of my skin, but once people hear my name or cultural background, I am no longer regarded as "white," but rather as Latina, Hispanic, or brown. I auto identify as Latina.

Angola started, towards the end of 1975, perhaps because he had witnessed it on the docks. Most people I've talked to who never went think it started in the 1980's.

He doesn't know if he would have gone to Angola if given the chance. He would have rather traveled to other places first other than Angola. "Everybody would like to travel, anybody who tells you differently is lying." Maybe he would have gone to Angola, maybe not, he says, it would have depended on how he was feeling at the time. But no one asked if he wanted to go.

Day of Mourning

Ana remembers when the remains of all the fallen soldiers were brought home. Interment boxes, some small, some large, were put on display with the picture of the dead soldier in front. None of the boxes were ever opened publicly and she and others wondered if there were really any remains inside or if they were just empty and nothing was ever found of the person. Ana confesses to me that she cried watching the various memorial services from the different provinces that were broadcast on national television. She personally did not have a close family member or friend die in Angola, but she mourned for everyone who did.

Entre Más Feo y Más Bembón

El Viejo (The Old Man) tells me that he would have liked to have gone to Angola, but as a career military officer he had other projects going on at the time and he didn't want to give them up: "My superiors told me I was needed in the country [Cuba] to do other projects." He did not go into the specifics about these other projects, but personally, I think he might have been too old to go. I ask to see his *carné* (identification card). He hands it over to me, and before I can read it, he proudly tells me he is eighty

years old. This would mean that he would have been fifty years old when the intervention in Angola started in 1975, and since I do not know the cutoff age, especially for a higher-ranking official, I can't confirm my suspicion.

He tells me there were other factors as well as to why he didn't go. He was called for possible duty, along with other men, during the first mission in Africa in the Congo in 1965. But those chosen were selected because of their skin color. There was a blonde haired, blue-eyed soldier that desperately wanted to go but he was not allowed because he would have been too noticeable since he was white and not black. El Viejo too was not chosen because he was not black enough. As he explains, the men were selected based on how "black" they looked: "*entre más bembón y más feo mejor*" (the more thick-lipped and the uglier the better). He further elaborates by saying "y *con la bemba así*" (and with lips like this) and he protrudes his lips and lower jaw out in an exaggerated caricature of a black man. "¡*Y fe-o-o-o-o*!" (and u-u-u-u-gly!), he elongates the word in emphasis.

Thus, according to him, he was not chosen to go to the Congo because he is mixed – his mother was black and his father was white, and therefore, he was not thick-lipped or ugly enough, in other words "black enough," to go. He has "good hair," as he himself refers to his still dark wavy hair, and he says he looks more *indio* (indigenous) than *negro* (black). I remember from my readings about Che Guevara's column in the Congo that most of the soldiers who went were indeed black, so as they wouldn't be so obvious (Guevara 2000). What is disputed, however, was if this policy was initiated by Guevarra and Castro, or by the African guerrilla leaders. Later this policy was changed. But El Viejo is equating blackness with ugliness, and clearly doesn't see himself as black at all since one parent was white. He tells me there were a lot of people that couldn't go

in those early missions even if they wanted to, like he did, because of their coloring. And for him, by the time the intervention started in Angola, he was already busy with other projects.

His brother and two sons, on the other hand, did go to Angola later and they were all proud to be internationalists. He spoke beautifully and eloquently about Cuban internationalism, stating that Cuba has always had an internationalist spirit. Foreigners helped Cuba during the wars of independence against the Spanish, so Cuba has always believed it important to help others, particularly to help other countries free themselves of exploitive governments. Angola and all of Africa were colonies and they wanted and needed independence.

A few days later El Viejo and I were talking again, this time about homosexuality, tourism, and the introduction of AIDS in Cuba. He tells me that AIDS started in Cuba through tourism. Foreigners brought the disease to the island. However, there was another disease, similar to AIDS that was brought by the men returning from Angola. According to him, this disease causes African women to have more heat "*entre las piernas*" (between their legs). Their private parts are much hotter in temperature than Cuban women. Cuban men who had relations with Angolan women contracted the disease because they lacked immunity, and eventually they brought it back to Cuba. This disease originated in monkeys and was passed to humans from African men that had sexual relations with infected monkeys. The disease made the person very ill, and like AIDS there was no cure for it.

I ask him again if it wasn't AIDS because it sounded like similar origination theories regarding AIDS. He tells me no, that this disease had its own name, "*fuego del*

infierno" (hell's fire). "Hell's fire," I repeat trying to digest and make sense of what he is saying.

I look up and see the same young hustler from the park, the one that came up to talk to El León and me a few days earlier. Our eyes meet – recognition. I can't help but laugh to myself thinking of what the hustler must be thinking. Here I am hanging out with another old man – maybe he thinks I have a fetish for old, black, Cuban males. I wonder if the hustler sees any similarities between us? I do. We are both tracking people, trying to get them to trust us, like us, and spend time with us. I do not want them to spend money on me like the hustler does, yet on some occasions they have. Despite some similarities I believe we are different because I don't insist or harass, and I'm not trying to take anything of value from them, except their memories.

El Cubano se Acostumbra a Todo

Manolo was packed and ready to be sent to Angola. At the last minute everything was called off. They got word that Cuba was pulling out and no further troops would be sent. He didn't say if he was relieved or not upon hearing the news, he knew he would have gone and that was it. The whole thing was "*un desastre, desastre, desastre*," (a disaster). He keeps saying it over and over, as if by repeating it multiple times I might actually understand the severity of the disaster the intervention in Angola had been.

He had many friends that were "young and strong" that had died over there. Some people refused, but most didn't question it and just went out of a sense of duty: "*como cumpliendo otro deber como el trabajo*" (like fulfilling any other duty like work): "*El Cubano se acostumbra a todo*" (Cubans adapt to anything).

Me Gusta Esto

I stop my Hyundai rental car by the side of the road to pick up a young cadet. Members of the military are not supposed to be seen riding in tourist cars in full uniform but he doesn't seem to care. I often pick up hitchhikers whenever there is room in the car, especially when I am going to Havana – I always manage to get lost no matter how many times I drive around the city. That has more to do with me than the city – I'm directionally challenged.

The young cadet has a facial deformity but he is not the least bit self-conscious, in fact he is very playful. He has a deep, masculine voice when he speaks, and he tells me he had been waiting in the sun for hours for someone to pick him up. He looks over to see how I am driving, one hand on the wheel, the other on the stick shift. "You look very comfortable driving," he tells me, "most women are *aferadas* (cling to) the wheel." I tell him I have been driving for quite a few years.

He asks me all sorts of questions about myself – where I am from, what do I do, and if I like being in Cuba? I enjoy the temporary role reversal since usually I am the one asking the questions, and I give him all the answers: I am from Los Angeles, I am a graduate student in anthropology, and I love, absolutely love being in Cuba.

He is very young, probably in his early 20's, so I know there is no chance he went to Angola. Instead I ask him if he's seen the TV specials commemorating the intervention in Angola. He says that yes, it is the 30th anniversary. "Of what?" I ask. He doesn't seem to know what to say, and just says, "*de la guerra*" (of the war). "Over what?," I continue, and he can't really explain and just stumbles out an answer about it being a war. He is not the first or the last person, especially young person, I meet that doesn't quite know what happened in Angola or the rest of Africa. This isn't a complete

surprise, youth everywhere tend to be disinterested in the hero worship of the past – too busy living the present and planning their future. However, he's career military, so perhaps he should be a little more interested.

"I would not have wanted to go if it had been during my time," he tells me. "I would fight for Cuba, my own country, but I would not want to fight for somewhere else." "*Me gusta esto*" (I like this), he says, referring to Cuba and life on the island, "I wouldn't want to live anywhere else."

Slaves

Caridad is an older black woman, the matriarch of her large biological family and her *cabildo/casa* (spiritual family) as well.[216] Various people come in and out of her house while I am there. They greet Caridad as Cubans do with a kiss on the cheek, and greet the *orisha* (deity) by crouching, kissing their fingertips, and placing their hands on the floor in front of the alter set up in her home. We are talking about the *cabild*o, and she tells me that the religious traditions have stayed the same throughout the years since the end of the slave trade. Members of the *cabildo* insist on leaving everything the same, not changing anything, whereas some of the younger *cabildos* are changing the traditions.

While she talks about change, the purity of religious rituals, and how the end of slavery cut off the island from Africa, I share with her a thought that I have been thinking about for the past few days. I notice that when people mention Africa and African traditions, the connection is always to the very distant past, almost exclusively to past religious, musical, or dietary influences. This despite the fact that there have been various recent and contemporary links or re-connections to Africa, particularly in the case

[216] A *cabildo,* also referred to as a *casa* (house), is a religious fraternal association in *Santería*.

of Angola, yet no one I have spoken with makes this connection or comments on any current relations with Africa.

Caridad quickly replies simply that recent events in Africa are "*política no la cultura, lo social*" (politics not culture, the social). And no one wants to get involved in the political. Moreover, she continues, Cubans and Angolans are completely different. Her sister went to Angola as part of an Afro-Cuban religious dance troupe, and she told Caridad when she returned that Cubans and Angolans had nothing to do with one another. The Angolans spoke a similar "dialect" and in some aspects they were able to understand each other. But at another level there was no meeting ground. Her sister told her that the women over there were "*esclavas*" (slaves), whereas in Cuba they were not. For instance in Angola a man would have three or four women in one home, whereas in Cuba no woman would put up with that. According to her, most Cuban women wouldn't even put up with infidelity, let alone polygamy. She concludes by saying that Cuban women have "*progresado*" (progressed).

Friendly Fire

Yenisleidy is telling me how she knew a man from her hometown that was very annoying, one of those people that relentlessly picks on or harasses others. He went to Angola and there he started picking on someone in his own division. He just wouldn't let up. Certain people can only take that sort of abuse for so long before they react, she says.

One day, the man who was picked on just snapped, took his gun, and shot and killed the annoying man. Yenisleidy knew how bad this man was, how infuriating he was, and she understood why someone from his own battalion would want to turn on him.

No One Will Tell You the Truth

Bernal always sounds mad. He is one of those people that usually yells instead of speaks, and rarely seems to be in a good mood. He likes to complain about everything – it's too hot, it's raining, there isn't enough food, there is nothing to watch on TV, everything is too expensive, etc., etc. Compared to most Cubans, he lives fairly well. His family in the United States has sent him money over the years, so he has a beautiful house, most household comforts that a large number of Cubans do not have, like a VCR, DVD, washing machine, air conditioning, a microwave, two refrigerators, an MP3 player, and a car.

I like to tease him often and I ask if there isn't enough food to eat why is he so *gordo* (fat)?[217] Or I tell him if he just quits smoking the two packs of cigarettes a day - at MN $7-10/pesos per pack – he might have some extra cash.[218] He barks back answers about the food quality being bad and that being the reason why he is overweight not because he overeats, and that he can quit smoking whenever he wants to, but he just doesn't want to because he is stressed all the time.

On this particular day we are talking about my dissertation project. He tells me that no one will be honest about Angola and none of the information I get will be the truth because everybody is afraid to talk. For instance, he knows a man that is "*un loco*" (crazy) in an adventurous way – always up for anything – that went to Angola. His friend

[217] Most Cubans are brutally honest, so if you are overweight they will say it to your face. To be overweight is usually seen as a sign of health, of being well fed, so being called *gordo/a* (fat) doesn't have the same "baggage" it carries in the United States, where it seems to be more of a judgment on your character. Regardless, this was something I had a hard time with when I first started going to Cuba. I am not very overweight, but I am certainly on the thick side, so I've been called *gorda* and "healthy" more times than I care to remember. But now I just accept it for what it is, a matter of fact, and feel comfortable saying it to other people.
[218] MN – *moneda nacional* – the Cuban peso.

got up to the higher ranks in the military because of his performance and daring. During one battle against the South Africans, the Cubans were supposed to take control of a hill. The higher-ranking officials decided amongst them to send in those who were going through the mandatory military service first. In other words, they sent the non-career and non-volunteers at the front of the line, rather than the career military.

Eventually after a long, hard fought battle, they took the hill. The higher rank officers got the recognition, but the younger servicemen paid the ultimate price. "See, no one will tell you these types of things," Bernal snaps at me.

The Island of Youth

I'm trying to buy a ferry ticket to travel to the Island of Youth.[219] I might have to pay a little extra because I do no have a reservation and there are no "dollar"/CUC[220] seats left. A woman comes up to me and asks if I need help. I explain my situation to her and she proceeds to help me. She and her brother rent a room in their house to tourists on the island, so she gives me his information so I can contact him when I arrive.

The woman has a very Cuban first name, Mirtha, and a very English last name. She tells me her family is originally from the English speaking Caribbean. As she smiles, I notice how the white eye shadow she wears on her eyelids contrasts perfectly with her flawless black skin and almond-shaped eyes. Her hair is tightly pulled back in braids, accentuating the beauty of her face.

Mirtha and I spend quite a bit of time together waiting to hear if there will be any further tickets available on the ferry. The ladies at the ticket area have to process all the people with reservations first, before announcing what's available. I ask her about the

[219] See Chapter 6 for more history on the Island of Youth and the foreign students who lived there.
[220] Cuban convertible peso.

history of the Island of Youth in regards to all the foreigners that lived and studied there. She tells me that many Africans, somewhere around 18,000 students, from several different countries lived there. Yet in relation to the size of the foreign population they did not interact as much with the Cubans. As a result, even though there was some mixing between the visitors and Cubans, they did not leave a mark in terms of descendants as they could have.

It was hard for the Africans to blend with the Cubans because of their hygiene, Mirtha explains. She thought maybe it was something they ate over there, some plant possibly, that made them smell differently. It was a very strong odor, "*era chocante*" (shockingly unpleasant). Mirtha makes a point of stressing how clean Cubans are and how they do not take to someone who smells or doesn't take care of personal hygiene. The African students must have noticed right away, because they started washing, and using available toiletries and eventually it was no longer a problem.

According to her it was easy to differentiate between the different Africans, especially after interacting with them for so many years. The Ethiopians were beautiful, especially the women, the Ghanaians were "*negros, negros, altos y flacos*" (black, black, tall and skinny), and the Nigerians had cuts on their faces that meant something to them. She said there were also a few Koreans, only around 400 or so, and they didn't mix with the Cubans at all. All the foreign students were required to work in the fields as part of their education and community building, "*pero tú sabes como es eso*" (but you know how that is). It was mostly "*trabajo simbólico*" (symbolic work) because in the fields you can't see anything so everyone was just hanging out and not really doing anything.

Some of the students didn't live in the school housing and instead lived with an adoptive Cuban "mother" or "father," or with a girlfriend. Some of the students arrived in Cuba when they were very young and stayed 10-12 years, while others went as orphans, and some stayed only a short time to earn a higher degree. She knew one girl that was adopted by her friend's family in Cuba and now lives in England and has "English children – what a strange twist of faith"

Before the Special Period, making a living on the island was easier, but during the Special Period, things changed, she continues. The Africans had some money during the Special Period, and this monetary difference went to their head. Mirtha believes that even though it was only for a short time that they were in Cuba during the Special Period, they began to think they were better than the Cubans.

The main point of the educational exchange was for students to receive formal training and return to their country and be someone, not just "*otro ignorante de la selva*" (another ignorant from the jungle). But when it came time to return to their country of origin, some did not want to leave Cuba. They had gotten very used to Cuban food and culture. They had to deport them. Mirtha sympathized with them, saying it was a culture shock to arrive in Cuba, and then a second culture shock after spending such formative years in Cuba to have to re-adjust to life in Africa. But eventually, she said, they were born there, so they would adjust to the return.

Humanidad es Patria

The former military man started training as a pilot in the Soviet Union right when the Soviet Union was ceasing to exist. Bad timing. He was just one helicopter ride away from going to Luanda. He had hoped to make it to the pilot training school the Cubans

had set up in Angola because it was where the best fighter pilots went. The entry to the landing strip required the pilots to maneuver their plane to a sideways entrance. But none of this came to fruition for the former pilot, because by the time he got to the USSR, everyone was pulling out of Angola. He was on one of two helicopters that were preparing for departure when they were told that the troops would be withdrawing soon. Only one of the two helicopters went, and it wasn't his. He always felt bad about that.

El Piloto (The Pilot) tells me that at first the Cuban military thought it would be a good idea to send pilots for their third and final years of instruction to fight in Angola, but he said, "you can do this with the army and navy, but you can't with pilots." The South Africans did not have to do anything because the novice Cuban pilots would simply get in the line of fire; their radar was no match for the inexperience of the pilots. Many new pilots died this way until the policy was changed.

One of the most emotionally moving days in his life, he confesses, was when Namibia gained its independence from South Africa. He was in the Soviet Union when it happened, everyone in the military base started celebrating ahead of time after midnight. The Namibians that were present came up to him and the other Cubans that were there saying, "*gracias primo*," (thank you cousin). As he recounts this, his eyes tear up and his voice cracks. He tells me that Africans, like the Angolans and Namibians, called the Cubans their "*primos*," not as a general term of endearment with everybody, because they only used this with the Cubans, but because of the affection and solidarity they felt with the Cubans.

Now in his late 30's, El Piloto is completing a doctorate in engineering, and his formal education shows in the way he discusses internationalism and the intervention in

Angola. He tells me the intervention started because the MPLA asked the Cuban government to help them with the independence process, since the CIA was aiding Holden Roberto and the FNLA and UNITA. In what seems like a page straight out of García Marquez's account of the time, the Pilot describes how the Angolans and Cubans got along very well, there were barely any dissimilarities between the two groups, and often it was difficult to tell the difference between who was Cuban and who was Angolan.

This familial bond was not shared with the FNLA and UNITA members, who belonged to different ethnic groups that were not on good terms with the Cubans. UNITA in particular was very violent. They would kill their enemies in a brutal manner, for instance with a technique called the "*chaleco*" (vest), in which they would cut the sides of the persons stomach and put the hands through the openings, leaving the soldier to die a slow, painful death. El Piloto said the *chaleco* was especially done to Cubans, in addition to having their testicles and penis cut off.

As a result of the violence demonstrated by UNITA soldiers, the Angolans were grateful to the Cubans because they had more war ethic, not that they were perfect and didn't commit any crimes, but rather most who did were punished. Regardless, at night, the Cubans were very vulnerable to attack from the same Angolans who supported them during the day. In other words, it was difficult to know whom to trust.

A couple of days later El Piloto and I are talking again, but this time about death. He gives me a special edition newspaper from 1989 that includes a list of all the those

who died in Angola.[221] I asked him if he believes the official number of deaths was accurate, and he tells me that 7,000 sounded about right. I correct him and tell him that officially it is only 2,016. He seems a bit surprised by this and starts counting the names in the newspaper to confirm what I have told him, the number is a little over 2,000. "That's too low," he tells me. I ask him what number he believes to be the correct number and he tells me around 7,000. "10,000 would be too high, people would notice that, but 7,000, that seems reasonable."

The following Monday El Piloto and I are talking again, this time about nationalism and internationalism. "A national project is necessary for a country, especially a poor country like Cuba in order to gain economic and political viability." He continues by saying that a national project, despite any problems that it might bring to a country, has the possibility of bringing economic equality and opportunity to the people of the country. I express my reservations, saying that I had never seen such a place, and that it sounded more idealistic than realistic. He responds by telling me that he was trying to offer a solution to the problems, rather than just simply stating what doesn't work. I nod in agreement because he's right, I'm not offering any solutions, and it is much easier to point out what is wrong about almost any situation, rather than offer a method to deal with the problem.

He continues stating that sometimes a civil war is necessary to further a nationalist cause. Even in Angola, despite the fact that it was caught in a civil war for years, even after the Cubans departed, he still felt it was worth it. "Civil wars are sometimes needed to cleanse or bring a country together." I responded by saying that

[221] Suplemento Especial, La Habana, viernes 8 de diciembre de 1989, Año 31 de la Revolución. Relación de los Compañeros Caídos y Desaparecidos en Cumplimiento de Misiones Internacionalistas.

perhaps I saw more the negative consequences of wars in general, and that it always seemed to me that certain segments of society – a certain class, political or ethic groups – were excluded from the national project. El Piloto countered by saying that his idea for a national project was defined by a common culture that would both be inclusive, yet eliminate some of the regionalism he felt could be a problem for national unity.

For example, he said, a common Cuban trait that was part of the national project is internationalism: "One has to have a strong sense of national identity in order to go help others across the globe. Few other countries are able to do this – send doctors and other internationalists all over the world." This national characteristic of internationalism was what engendered Cuba's ability to send tens of thousands of doctors to places like Pakistan, where it is cold, or to put up with any inconveniences, and the same could be said of the intervention in Angola. Thus, their national identity, of which internationalism plays a central role, gives Cubans the ability to promote service to other countries abroad.

El Piloto ends by telling me that Fidel is mostly a nationalist, so he isn't following a socialist project but rather a nationalist one which includes internationalism as a core principal. This common humanitarianism is what makes Cuba, Cuba. As Fidel says, the Pilot reminds me, "*Humanidad es Patria*" (Humanity is Homeland).

Discussion

The preceding vignettes include the voices of non-participants from different walks of life. The people on these pages did not participate in the intervention in Angola for a variety of reasons, yet their particular set of circumstances and their current political affiliation – for, against, and in most cases ambivalence – shape how they feel and

remember the intervention in Angola: “These rememberings of the past, I will suggest, are closely linked to people’s present-day political affiliations” (Pearce 2010: 2).

Some were too young or too old to participate, a few are women who would not have participated as soldiers but remained behind as loved ones went away to war, others were ready and willing but bad timing prevented them from going, whereas some simply refused to accept the call to be internationalists.

For the most part these stories stand-alone and reinforce what has already been discussed in the previous chapters. And at the same time offer distinctive snapshots of Cuban life and ethos – a potpourri of different people, places, memories, and opinions. However, there are several themes that come out in the vignettes that I would like to discuss and expound upon further.

As noted previously, there tends to be a cultural and physical distance placed between Cubans and “those Angolans over there” when discussing events regarding the intervention. Non-combatants discuss Angolans in terms of backwardness, lack of hygiene, sexual deviance, and a general lack of brotherly solidarity. What is interesting is that these opinions are based not on any concrete experience – face to face contact with Angolans – but rather from second-hand accounts of the stories they head from veterans through the years. Thus, despite the pervasiveness of official memory promoted in journalist accounts, books, speeches, and films that emphasize a commonality and fraternity between Angolans and Cubans, the widespread personal/popular memory rejects these notions. Cubans, regardless of skin color or ethnic ancestry, do not view Angolans as equal to or even similar to them. For Cubans, Angolans are oppressed, not just in economic terms or by colonial powers, but by their own antiquated culture and

traditions that keep them down. In essence, Cubans view themselves as more "evolved" than their Angolan counterparts. Although the memories are from the past, the discussions about and attitudes towards Angolans are in the present. Cubans discuss Angolans – how they are, what they do, etc. – in the present tense. Thus, for Cubans, Angolans are trapped in time, never evolving, never changing.

Non-participants heard the same stories I heard from veterans of ungrateful Angolans that betrayed them, both on the battlefield and years later, by disassociating with Cuba politically. Consequently, Cubans talk of helping them become "somebody," or how the Angolans arrived from the "jungle" in "loin cloth" and became educated professionals, only to turn around and use it towards personal gain rather than give back to the Cubans that had been there for them. As I was often told, Angola is a very rich country today with sought after oil reserves, yet the government wants little to do with Cuba and does not offer aid in return now that Cuba is the one in need.

These feelings of resentment extend to the numerous foreigners currently studying in Cuba. In general, Cubans who work or study at universities complain that foreigners do not socialize with them and comes across as arrogant. Moreover, as one former professor told me, the majority of Africans that study in Cuba tend to be Christians or Muslim, and look down on Cubans, particularly black Cubans, who practice Santería because the religion is seen as archaic. In contrast, foreigners from other parts of the world go to Cuba to embrace the various Afro-Cuban religions. Consequently, in the eyes of many Cubans, there is a greater void between them and the Africans currently on the island.

One consequence of the resentment stemming from policies that favor foreigners is the often repeated displeasure that Fidel Castro has been more interested in the Cuban Revolution's reputation in international circles, rather than in Cuba and in what Cubans are experiencing at home (as discussed in Chapter III). Thus, foreigners are often provided aid and receive better and special treatment at the expense of the Cuban people. This is all done in the name of revolutionary sacrifice, international solidarity, and as a way to achieve the revolutionary ideal of "being like el Che."[222] But the obvious reality is, not every Cuban wants to or is willing to make this sacrifice, as is evidenced by the resentment of some of the people recounting their stories in this chapter.

There is a sense of unfairness in the constant request for personal sacrifice with very little in return. A current example involves the high number of healthcare workers completing missions in Venezuela. Cubans complain that their healthcare is being shortchanged because the best doctors and nurses are being sent to Venezuela, leaving only recent, inexperienced graduates to take care of the domestic population. Therefore, for those that question the government's motives, internationalism does little to help the nation and its citizens, and ultimately only serves to give Fidel a good name abroad as a champion of the oppressed worldwide at the expense of average Cuban citizens.

Another concern that comes up frequently in the memories of non-combatants is that of death and dying. Those who declined the offer to go abroad state they based the decision in large part on the very real possibility of not returning. They were not willing to become martyrs for people from another nation, and for a cause they did not believe in. Moreover, they had heard from returnees about betrayal and lack of loyalty on behalf of

[222] Primary school children are encouraged to emulate Che Guevara and during school activities will say: "*Pioneros por el comunismo, seremos como el Che*" (Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che).

the very same Angolans that were supposed to be their partners. Add to this the issue of mystery regarding the official death count and causes of death. Few accept the official number, 2016, believing it to be more, and most do not mention someone they knew dying as a result of the official cause most cited – tropical disease. Rather, non-combatants relate similar stories of casualties as the veterans. For example, as a result of the impropriety of going out at night or in unprotected areas in search of women, at the hands of enemy armies like UNITA, betrayal by the Angolans they were there to help, as well as the use of vaccines/medication before returning home.

The discussion of diseases in Angola usually included AIDS, and how AIDS was introduced in Cuba by infected internationalists returning home. Sanctioned accounts mention how the first case of AIDS in Cuba was either from a soldier returning from Mozambique or Angola, yet most I spoke with told me Angola. In regards to the disease, it seems Africa and Angola are conflated, and the introduction of AIDS in the country is associated with those returning from Angola/Africa. Thus, although the disease was not stigmatized as a homosexual disease in Cuba since the first affected were heterosexuals, to some degree it was initially stigmatized as an African or black disease. The account by Leidi further illustrates this point how AIDS is linked to blackness, the Eastern side of the island where there is a majority black population, and the presumed promiscuity of blacks.

Another unresolved question is whether the missions were voluntary or forced. Most I spoke with said going was voluntary, however they also admitted they were aware that it would be to their social and political detriment to refuse, as is any "antirevolutionary" practice, like not working extra hours, volunteering, or going to

official rallies. Yet as is shown in these accounts, many people did refuse and accepted whatever consequences, usually entailing not being able to rise up the preferred career or academic ladder. This inability to improve one's social condition led to disappointment and resentment on the one hand, but relief and satisfaction at making the "right" choice, especially in light of what ultimately happened in Angola. When the topic of volunteering is brought up, there is some tension between those who volunteered – whether because they were young, idealistic, in want of adventure, or because they felt forced to "volunteer" – and those who refused to go. Both groups believe they were right or justified in the decision they made years ago.

Paradoxically, the stories of refusal to participate in an internationalist mission underscore a love of country. The men state quite frankly that they are willing to fight and die in defense of Cuba – their home, their country, and people – any day, but not for another place and people with which they have no connection. They are very patriotic; love their homeland, but contest internationalism as a means by which to prove national loyalty. Despite the years of propaganda to the contrary, internationalism for these men remains "an alien ideology unintegrated into consciousness and practice except in a wholly superficial manner" (Verdery 1991: 427). Hence, the negation of internationalism as an important aspect of Cuban nationalism and a challenge to official memory, exposing the government's long enduring inability to find legitimizes for a segment of the population.

The themes put forward in the vignettes underscore the notion of the political versus the social, as Caridad so aptly put it. "*La política*" (politics) is something that Cubans in general want to avoid. Oftentimes one will hear Cubans say they aren't

interested or involved in politics and don't want to discuss anything political. The political is seen as something outside the social sphere – therefore in the Cuban case, the personal is not political. Cubans will insist on this separation, making statements like, "*no me gusta la política*" (I don't like politics) or "*no quiero hablar de la política*" (I don't want to talk about politics). As Goldfarb and Heinen argue, the personal is not political in socialist societies because the home and family become the only refuge or divider space where the intrusive state does not interfere. Thus, the private sphere, or women's sphere, becomes important in a way that it is not in non-socialist countries (Goldfarb: 1997; Heinen: 1997).

Subsequently, the sixteen-year exchange with Angola and ongoing internationalist missions that continue to bring Africans to the island are considered political, and therefore not a popular topic of discussion. The only connection to the African continent that is apolitical involves the distance past – the slave trade that brought hundreds of thousands of slaves to Cuba and the religious traditions that stemmed from this forced migration. Thus, in order to avoid discussion of politics, any link to Africa remains in the far distant past and does not include the more recent internationalist connections.

As can be expected, the experiences of those who chose not to participate contrast with those of the men who wanted to and were willing to serve but because of timing were unable to do so. These men lament missing out on what they believe would have been a transformative and worthwhile endeavor, yet like El Piloto and El Viejo, they are very proud to talk about their other revolutionary ventures. El Piloto's account is the closest to the national memory found in the speeches of Fidel Castro and García

Márquez's writings. But his support of a unifying national project of which internationalism is a part, displays a strategic savvy behind his words.

One viewpoint I noticed was that non-combatants by choice, those who refused to go, were the most negative towards my project – they were by far the ones who told me no one would be willing to talk to me, that I would be lied to, or simply that it wasn't an important or interesting topic. In general, they were more guarded. In contrast, veterans with few exceptions thought it was a great topic, one that was timely and needed to be done, and were happy to share their experiences – pleased that someone was finally asking and was interested in that part of their life.

Likewise, as discussed in the preceding chapter, there is tension when discussing "early" versus "contemporary" internationalism. Contemporary missions are viewed as a short-term opportunity to "*resolver*" – to solve one's economic problems. In contrast, early internationalism, like the effort in Angola, is discussed in terms of being more "real," a more true or sincere form of internationalism – a selfless act to help others with little or no economic and material gain for the effort. It made one a better citizen, a better revolutionary, or simply gave one great stories to tell of an adventurous past.

In these vignettes, one can see how for some Cubans early internationalism is a source of pride, an exemplary example of a distinctive Cuban national characteristic – "*el cubano se acostumbra a todo*" – the assertion that Cubans have the ability to endure anything, the capacity to handle whatever is thrown their way, and make the most of a bad situation while keeping a sense of humor. It is a willingness to help others, a humanitarian streak combined with a mixture of insanity, bravado, and total resilience. This commonly referred to national characteristic, living proof of the model citizen or a

defense mechanism against the enduring scarcity, is both an affront and a testament to the revolution.

The memories provide an example of how personal memory is mediated through public memory. The people spoke about their experiences as non-combatants, but the memories of those who were involved in the intervention as well as official memory form a part of their own recollections, they speak with authority regarding what happened over there. Essentially they recall an event they did not live through and experience themselves.

On a final note, the people I interviewed often turned the tables on me and I was the one being asked the questions. What was my project about? Why did I want to study this topic? What was the purpose? I enjoyed this role reversal, although the questions being asked of me were tough to answer at times, and really made me think about my topic and its relevance. I will discuss in more detail my experiences with reciprocal ethnography in the penultimate chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER VII
ETHNOGRAPHER'S JOURNAL – MEMORIES FROM THE FIELD

The previous chapters have discussed how key informants were impacted by the experience of working on this research project. This penultimate chapter analyzes a selection of the ethnographer's private memories from the field and the writing process as a reminder of the difficulty of conducting, and limitations of, any ethnography (Behar 1996; Mintz 1989). Several authors have underscored the significance of including the personal into the ethnographic account in order for the reader to assess what informs the study: "The investigator must do his best to make clear what he thinks he is like so that readers may better judge his interpretation of the life of another" (Mintz 1989). The reflections include a discussion of choices made regarding field site and topic, problems and concerns encountered throughout the endeavor, and fragmented thoughts on the transformative effect of ethnography. The exploration of personal elements within the field record reveal a conflicted ethnographer, one who has not yet come to terms with the totality of the experience. An anthropologist emerges who was transformed not just by the relationships with her informants, but also by a set of personal circumstances that have made her a transnational actor herself.

Memory

My father, who in his old age has most-likely forgotten what he had for breakfast this morning, remembers his youth in Cuba with such impressive detail, including the

addresses of friends and family, the names of childhood acquaintances and their siblings, and a whole assortment of mundane minutia, that it seems his memory had to stop working in 1970, around the time my eldest brother was born, in order to leave space for those priceless memories to remain intact. I entered what would much later become my field site, Cuba, over a decade ago as a curious double Hyphenated-American hoping to meet the Cuban side of the family, travel to somewhere considered exotic, and find who-knows-what now in her father's previous homeland. It was so long ago and so much has happened since, that I barely remember what my expectations were. Any memories from that first trip have surely been reconstructed and re-imagined in much the same way the memories of my informants have been, perhaps to fit whatever needs I have of understanding my present life trajectory.

What I do recall from that first trip is that when I got off the plane in Havana, and when I finally made it to Zaragoza 49, my father's final home in Matanzas, everything seemed familiar. It was as if I had inherited my father's memories, or maybe just heard them enough times that it resulted in a feeling of déjà vu. These experiences, including my father's stroke that causes him to lose most of his short-term memory, is what made me develop an interest in the study of memories. There were sidetracks, detours, missed opportunities along the way, and my life might just as easily have taken a different path, one that did not include Cuba, the doctorate, and the writing of the first, let alone last, chapter of this dissertation. But it didn't. So that is what I tell myself, how I explain some of the choices I've made, part of the associations I've made regarding my scholarly path.

In the last few years I've seen two other close relatives start to lose their memory much worse than my father, not just short-term, but "long ago," cherished, and obvious memories, like one's address and why one left the house this morning. This gives me cause for concern that I might someday also lose my memories too. I find myself doing mind agility exercises, like brushing my teeth with my left hand, taking fish oil, and using non-aluminum deodorant, hoping to minimize the risk of Alzheimer's.

It is such a horrible thought, that I can barely put my mind around it. I cannot believe that I could really one day forget the unforgettable, like my first kiss with Nick in 8th grade, carnival in Rio, swimming with a whale shark in the Galapagos, and most recently, the birth of my daughter. Could I really forget all those moments, or even one of them, and if I did, does it matter? Does it matter that those things happened to me, or is García Márquez correct in stating that life is more about what and how one remembers, in order to recount it? But what if one cannot recount because one can't recall, then what?

When I got home after my daughter was born, I wrote an email to a friend explaining how horrible the birth experience had been for me, a complete disappointment. I believe I used the words "worst" and "of my life" in the message. But now, seven months later, sure, it was a rough forty-seven hours, but I've had worse, like the first forty-eight after the baby got home and the wailing and sleepless nights began. I am aware that my memories of those two days have progressed in seven months. I can remember the feeling of disappointment and horror of the earlier memories, but I also remember the whole event differently, realizing now how common my experience was. I retold the story recently and I tried to re-instill those earlier negative feelings, but it was

useless. The physical pain was no longer so raw. I'm sure if I absolutely had to recount those details I could, but I no longer wanted to focus on those. Newer memories, other details, were more interesting to tell.

What will I remember of the birth of my daughter in twenty years? Will I still remember all the painful and anguish filled moments, or will they mostly have faded away to minor and unimportant footnotes, overshadowed by the memories of her infancy, childhood, and adolescence? And what of previous "worst-of-my-life" and "best-of" moments, before and after the birth, how will I remember them in relation? How much of what I tell depends on the audience present, the person(s) doing the asking, and the reason I am telling the story?

I feel very much for my informants' desire to have their stories told, to have what they did mean something, to be admired, to have people listen. The need to feel special, if not universal, is very common, especially in our modern world. As I listened to the veterans' memories many thoughts would come up. For instance, how interesting it would be to have recorded the soldiers within a few hours after their arrival in Angola or their return to Cuba. Did they realize instantly the significance of the different smells of the two countries, or was this a realization that came later, once the immediacy of the situation at hand had been over, after years of reflection, or of telling and retelling the story? How would the memories they retold be different if I did not have to introduce myself as a University of Michigan student with pre-approved discussion points as mandated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), if for instance, I were a fly on the wall?

At times during the reading and writing for the dissertation I would get what seemed to be moments of clarity where I felt I had a comfortable grasp of the concepts regarding the study of memory, and the relevance of my project, only to lose them a few minutes later. Ultimately, after all the research, reading and writing, all I have is a tentative understanding of memory – how we sort them, retrieve them, construct them, alter them, remember them, retell them, store them, forget them, choose them among the many, what they mean, what we can discern or learn from them, and what they say about the past, present, and future of any society – and the interplay between what we intuitively call personal memory, public memory, and historic accounts.

Americans with Wings

The first time I had gone up to see Basilo's *palomar* he told me he wanted to show me two of his special pigeons, "*las Americanas*" (American females). He talked about one of his American pigeons with such pride that I couldn't help but share his enthusiasm to see the bird. He went inside the coop and brought out a… well… a pigeon. I tried to feign awe at the sight of the dime-a-dozen, "rat with wings" pigeon that is considered vermin in most U.S. cities, while Basilo showed me what he believed to be it's impressive coloring.

I asked him why he referred to her as the American, and he said it was because her grandfather had been an American pigeon who had gotten terribly lost at sea, and had somehow found it's way to Cuba. They found the name and address of a *palomero* from Miami on the pigeon's identification ring. Basilo had written to the *palomero* to tell him where his pigeon was, and they had corresponded a few times after that. The pigeon he held in his hand, "*la Americana*," was the lost pigeon's granddaughter.

I didn't say anything at the time, but in my mind I was making all sorts of connections with my own pedigree. I thought it was curious that Basilo referred to the pigeon as an American despite the fact that the pigeon had been born and raised in Cuba, and had three Cuban grandparents. Yet when it came to me, he referred to me as the American, even though I had two Cuban grandparents and a Cuban father. Following that logic, I should have been known as "*la Cubana*" (the Cuban) or even "*la Colombiana*" (the Colombian) but certainly not "*la Americana*." I stared at that plain "American" pigeon, and wondered at life's coincidences. She was living in Cuba because her father had traveled across the ocean and found a new home in Basilo's pigeon coop, and I was living in the United States because my father had also traveled across the ocean and found a new home in Los Angeles. I thought about borders, the fluidity of borders, and the total lack of awareness that animals had for these manmade concepts, and the freedom to transcend political boundaries and spaces.

Situational Research

In her research during the civil war in Mozambique, Carolyn Nordstrom's carried out what she calls "runway research" in Mozambique, conducting many of her interviews in airport runways throughout the country. Working off this idea I gained a lot of insight on day-to-day occurrences in Cuba conducting different types of situational research: "front porch," "sidewalk," "rocking chair," or "pigeon coop" ethnography. This was something that could be done in Cuba and not Boston because of the layout of the streets and the amount of human traffic, even in the smaller provincial towns in Cuba. I would sit on a rocking chair in a front porch, on the sidewalk itself, or high up in local pigeon coups, and wait for people to come to me. Cubans have a tendency to be very open about

personal things, even intimate information. This despite the fact that people will mention how you can never really know whom anybody is because of the long history of undercover state informants. It was during these encounters that I heard much of the local gossip, the news on the street, and discussions over whatever tensions, concerns, and reassurances were on peoples' minds at the moment. I would follow-up these chance meetings with subsequent conversations whenever possible.

Similarly some of my research also included collective and reciprocal ethnography. As noted in Chapter IV, because of the lack of viable housing, many family members often live in the same home, each one laying claim to a small space in a home divided numerous times. It is simply not feasible to always find an empty, enclosed, private room to have a discussion. And even if there were, if I were to ask a man to join me alone in a separate room or the two of us to go out for a chat, it could be misinterpreted for a variety of reasons. At the risk of generalization, no jealous Cuban wife or girlfriend would ever accept this, and most heterosexual Cuban men would take this action as an invitation for romance.

Therefore, these dynamics of audience encourage not only an element of storytelling in day-to-day conversations, but also one of collective research or collective ethnography. This situation was both frustrating and enriching, depending on the context and the outcome, and something I struggled with constantly. At times it was constructive because a "co-ethnographer" would ask a follow-up question that I would not have felt comfortable asking, didn't think to ask, or did not have the insight to ask. One such time I remember interviewing a father with his two grown daughters present. His wife was in the yard doing laundry. I could interview because the daughters were present, the wife

would not have left him completely alone with me. While I was interviewing him, the daughters would remind him of other stories they remembered him telling before, and he would in turn share them with me. The daughters were also hearing about some of his experiences for the first time and were surprised to learn these things about their father. It was a side of him, a time in his life, they previously knew little about.

One of the daughters said that when he initially returned from Angola they had been so little that they didn't know to ask anything, and they never brought up again growing up. Taking advantage of the interview opportunity, the daughters inquired more about this moment in their father's life, and asked him question they had previously silenced. This family dynamic added an interesting layer of disclosure that would not otherwise have occurred had the father and I been alone. Conversely, maybe there were memories the dad might have felt more comfortable sharing without his daughters present.

On the subject of collective ethnography, the situation with one of my female informants was an interesting one. She and I are the same age, and because of early motherhood, she was forced to quit school before she would have liked. Despite this, she maintained an interest in psychology, her predilection before her life took an unexpected turn. Consequently her involvement in my research offered her an opportunity to reengage herself with an academic pursuit, something she took to with amazing zest. As soon as I explained my research interest and she understood what I was hoping to accomplish, she rattled off a laundry list of possible veterans, and quickly went about presenting them to me. At times, her initial introduction served to bypass some of the

desconfianza (distrust) of talking to an American about a politically sensitive subject. As such, on those occasions, she acted as cultural broker between the men and myself.

Her involvement would also reduce some of the sexual tension that could and did exist between some of the men and myself because it added a third person to the equation – someone else, someone familiar with them, who might find out of their behavior towards me, any sexual advances they might make that they wouldn't want anyone to find out about. But it most certainly also affected what the men were willing to discuss with me, perhaps mainly in regards to their romantic and sexual relationships while abroad, out of concern that she might learn of the details.

She would talk to me about the project continually, trying to analyze what had been discussed in our presence. Although I enjoyed our collective contribution to the project, there were moments where I became aware of the power dynamics of the ethnographic relationship. I felt she would overstep the boundaries of this association and it seemed it was "our" research, rather than "my" research project. As Behar observed in her own conflicted relationship with an informant:

> I was also forced to realize the extent to which the ethnographic relation is based on power, for indeed, I had felt uncomfortable when an 'informant' – particularly another, less-privileged, woman – was assertive and aggressive, rather than complicitous and cooperative as informants 'should' be (1993: 6).

Thus, I was at odds with myself over her participation. She introduced me to several informants, yet I also knew I had to meet with them without her presence. Even though the association with her could add a level of comfort, it could also hinder the interaction because she was a neighbor, and people don't necessarily want their neighbors knowing intimate memories and reflections. At the same time I felt conflicted in

curtailing her involvement because she was enjoying herself so much, finally having a chance to "finish" what she hadn't been able to do – her studies. On several occasions she told me she wished she could have completed her studies and felt she had intellectual aptitude that had not been developed because of early motherhood.

Moreover, I enjoyed the camaraderie with her, bouncing ideas back and forth and going over what we had talked about the night before. This type of reminiscing is both a social and verbal activity done together (Casey 1987: 104). I also took pleasure in the female bonding. She was one of the few females among the mostly all-male informants. This example of collective anthropology exemplifies how the ethnographic experience alters both subject and ethnographer. "Our" project, the work we did together, the hours of interviewing her late at night, and of interviewing other people has become as much a part of her life as it has mine.

Despite all this, there were times when having an audience, even one extra person present, would sometimes make me feel self-conscious and silly. I felt like I was giving a presentation, rather than having a conversation or interviewing someone. The awkwardness did not allow a good rapport to develop. In Boston, most of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, befitting of a large U.S. city with lots of open spaces and a greater need for personal space. In some instances however, when I was feeling doubtful of where to take the interview, or I was just having a bad day, I would think fondly of the safety in numbers offered in collective research.

There seems to be an assumption that the information gathered in an interview is more sincere when ethnographer and subject are alone, that the presence of others might negatively limit or sway what is discussed. This might indeed be the case often, but it

would be wrong to assume that it always is. Just as it might be limiting, the presence of other listeners might offer encouragement, inspiration, and safety for other informants in certain contexts. Each situation is different, and the information gathered will likewise also be different depending on a variety of multiple factors. Ultimately the variability of the "retrieval environment" is an unavoidable component of ethnography (Schrauf 1997: 447), resulting in the endless possibilities of knowledge gained.

Lastly, there were also occurrences of reciprocal ethnography. I was asked almost as much about my life as I asked others about theirs, everything from basic information about life in the U.S. to very personal information. Usually I was glad to offer such information since I normally feel comfortable opening up to other people, even people I do not know very well. Nonetheless, how much information to share, to whom, when to share it, and when to hold back are aspects of the profession that are constantly negotiated during field research. This was especially the case as the relationship with a subject became more complicated, blurring the lines between ethnographer, informant, and friend.

Complicity

A troubling aspect of conducting research was putting aside my views to respectfully listen to opinions that I disagreed with personally, and even considered racist or sexist in order to understand the situation from the informant's standpoint. There were many times I had to bite my tongue in order not to protest a comment I opposed. But the objective was to learn about the consequences of the Angolan intervention on Cuban culture, not to hear myself give a lesson on political correctness. I was hearing the

comments of people who had their guard down, who trusted me with their thoughts in all their complexity and contradictions.

Additionally I wondered how my light skin affected the responses I got from informants – particularly from non-black Cubans? How did my silence, in conjunction with my phenotype, encourage some of the pejorative statements I heard against *negros* (blacks)? Although I feel conflicted about this, I am also aware that my skin color in part made possible this type of frankness that another anthropologist might not have. I remember speaking to two black-American scholars in Florida who also studied Cuba, and we discussed precisely just that. They had not had that type of experience in Cuba, quite the contrary, and were surprised by the information I presented. They had experienced Cuba and Cubans to be extremely aware and sensitive to racial discrimination and the verbal expression of such, much more so than the average American. The three of us discussed the benefits of doing joint or team projects in the field, and I came away from that conversation acutely aware of how different ethnologists are able to access different groups and subgroups of people and opinions based on the sum of who they are. As Zora Neale Hurston once said:

> Nothing that God ever made is the same thing to more than one person. That is natural. There is no single face in nature because every eye that looks upon it, sees it from its own angle (Behar 1995).

Despite the feelings of complicity in what I consider to be narrow-minded sentiments, I was able to develop friendships with some of my main subjects. In so doing, further increasing my feelings of ambivalence. In part I did what I had always done, justify this type of negative commentary as a long-standing and unfortunate part of Cuban, and by and large, Latin American culture. In the U.S., I would not have

continued a conversation with someone who spoke in such a way about minorities, but I expected and accepted these types of comments as endemic to the context of field research in Cuba, and Caribbean dynamics in general, based on previous experiences with extended family and while traveling in Latin America. It is as if I have different sets of expectations and gages with which I judge racism in North Americans and Latin Americans, and the bar is set much higher for North Americans. Why? I'm not exactly sure since the Americas, both North and South, share a similar history in regards to slavery. But I suppose it has to do with some combination of the history of U.S. exploitation and involvement in Latin America as well as my own minority status in the U.S., and all the baggage that comes with that status.

Emotional Rollercoaster

If I had to describe my field experience in general I would have to say it was an emotional rollercoaster. On one end of the spectrum there were moments of pure joy when I got the slightest grain of useful information, and on the other moments of depression and anxiety when I felt days pass without any progress. These extremes were partnered with feelings of self-doubt, fear, boredom, sadness, and happiness.

The sometimes-emotional or traumatic stories of my informants affected me. I typically would try to sway the conversation away from narratives of war atrocities because they are not unique to the Angolan intervention or civil war, and are common to all conflicts – heartbreaking carnage committed on all sides with both military and civilian casualties. But on occasions it was clear that this was what the subject needed to get off his chest, or in other cases these memories were intermingled with the many others, impossible to discern one from the other. For many veterans it was the first time

they were talking about Angola in years. With some veterans I felt like a priest receiving confession. I only had to say the magical word Angola, and a barrage of unceasing words would come out of their mouth like a current of water released from a damn that had been overflowing for too long. There were times where I could not get a word in, I would let them speak, give their "confession," and only then, could I begin asking questions and asking them to expand upon what had been said. Similarly in her own research in Angola, journalist Lara Pawson questioned whether this type of confession should be given to her or someone else: "…often leading me to wonder whether as a journalist – not a counselor or psychotherapist – I am really the right person to be doing the questioning" (Pawson 2007). In any case, listening to these stories was difficult, and I was torn from morbidly wanting to know more, and wanting to run away from such a horrible reality for other people in the world.

Additionally, there were other emotions due specifically to the political situation in Cuba and to the strained relationship between the island and the U.S. For the most part I feel and felt very comfortable in Cuba and any difficulty I encountered was largely due to the fact that I went during the Bush administration, which as I have stated previously, was a low point in U.S. – Cuba relations. Regardless, there were moments where I was reminded that as a foreigner, I was not going unnoticed. To say I was being watched would probably be an exaggeration, and I hardly think I am deserving of such attention, but I was certainly being checked up on once in a while. I was made aware that my arrivals were reported to the local CDR and to local immigration authorities, and in a couple of cases informants I spoke with were questioned about my visit after I left. Both my then future husband and I were also questioned on separate occasions regarding my

stays in Cuba, but after providing an explanation of my study and later marriage plans, no further action was followed.

Similarly in the U.S., the Bush administration infringed on civil liberties by giving the National Security Agency more freedom to monitor the domestic email and telephone conversations of regular Americans. The Department of State has Cuba on its State Sponsor of Terrorism list. As a result, I was concerned that as someone who frequently traveled back and forth between the United States and Cuba my case would be looked into. I noticed that I began writing certain key words like "Cuba" in code in my emails, worried that it could be flagged, or not saying the name of the country out loud in phone conversations. I found myself censoring my field notes, concerned about maintaining anonymity. I also started having nightmares and insomnia because I was worried that what I was doing would be misinterpreted somehow and I would not be allowed to return to Cuba, either from the U.S. or the Cuban side.

The situation served to illustrate various points, including the government surveillance that everyday Cubans live and contend with. But also how the loss of civil liberties in the U.S. since 9-11 has gone largely unnoticed and unchallenged. Lastly the situation exemplifies the hostility between the U.S. and Cuba, and how researchers, artists, journalists, athletes, and other professionals hoping to bridge the gap between the two countries, often pay the price.

These sentiments only intensified for me once I started doing the paper work to bring my husband to the U.S. The fear of losing Cuba – the ability to travel to and from and see my husband and his family, as well as my extended family there – was and is overwhelming. Cuba is not <u>just</u> a field site to me; it is my second home.

Periodically, I also had to battle bouts of self-doubt and insecurity. I would convince myself that I was incapable of finishing the project, or that I was the wrong person to take on this topic, that I shouldn't be in a doctoral program in the first place, etc., etc. – all sorts of mind games that have haunted me since my first year in graduate school. I felt annoying, like I was bothering people, asking them the same intrusive questions. I also became tired, bored, and lazy, as well as motivated, and inspired. Every so often I thought about changing my dissertation theme, thinking anything else would have been easier or better – a study of *palomeros* or the growing Pentecostal movement – anything other than what I had chosen.

Having spoken with other students in person or in writing support groups online, I know that all these feelings are characteristic of graduate school. But in including this discussion in the dissertation, I want to draw attention to how the field experience only intensifies the feelings of self-doubt. Additionally, working with and through these emotions is fundamental to fieldwork. Barbara Merhoff once wrote: "You study what is happening to others by understanding what is going on in yourself. And you yourself become the data gathering instrument" (Behar 1995). She and other anthropologists have contemplated how the experience of conducting fieldwork, and subsequently turning this information into a written text is a transformative experience for both subject and ethnographer (Behar 1996; Frank 2000; Mintz 1973).

On a final point, how much is too much information? What should be included or excluded from the written account? I considered excluding the fact that I got married in the field from the dissertation, but to do so would have been disingenuous. After all, the marriage played a major role in my subject positionality in how I entered and left the

field, and in the evolving relationship to my field site. But at what point is divulging personal information considered maudlin and unscholarly? Where is the fine line between intellectual illumination and emotional pornography drawn?

Cuban Soap Opera

The "*novela*" (soap opera) is a national passion in Cuba, and for the last few years on television both a Cuban and a Brazilian soap opera dominate the airwaves. Cuban and Brazilian produced soap operas are played on alternating nights, and people are glued to their seats watching, everything else takes second place. As you walk down the street literally everyone on the block is watching the same show, and you can hear the dialogue come in and out of range from the various TVs on the block as you make your way on the street.

At the end of 2005 I started what would become my own Cuban soap opera, and those living in the *reparto* (neighborhood) in which I would periodically reside were tuning in to watch how the soap opera would end. It had all the elements of a good story – hometown boy meets foreigner, they fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after in *la yuma* (United States). The plot twist was that this was one Cuban that wasn't dreaming and making plans to leave. Instead, he was satisfied with his life, and was making plans for his future in Cuba not abroad. I came along and complicated things. After all, happily ever after only exists in soap operas, fairytales and Hollywood movies.

To many of his friends, it was the perfect ending, the dream of so many young and not so young Cuban men. They asked if I had female friends that wanted to come to Cuba and get married, hoping that luck would strike twice. One single friend of mine from the U.S. did go to the wedding, and it has been so strange to see how intensely a few

of my husband's friends have placed their hopes on marrying her and leaving the country, as how it happened for him. They ask me about her, still, almost five years later, ask me when she is coming back, ask me to send her little gifts and messages, ask me to sell her on the idea of what a good husband they will make, how hard working they are, what good lovers they are, etc., etc. But they barely know her name, and could care less about her, they just want what she can give them – a visa to the U.S. Questions about her marriage status and whether or not she is willing to go back and marry a Cuba has gone on for years now and it illustrates both the fantasy elements and desperation of those bent on leaving the country.

But to my husband the whole idea of leaving the country permanently, as is the case when you migrate to the U.S. from Cuba,[223] was something of a nightmare – the idea of being torn away from everything and everyone he knew – but it was also a chance to help his family economically. I will not go into all the details now because it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but looking back now on the whole thing, five years after we met, a stable marriage and a child between us – there was so much ignorance and fantasy involved in the decision, I can only compare it to a soap opera.

The amount of misinformation that a good number of Cubans have about life in the U.S., and to a lesser degree perhaps, the rest of the world, is both fascinating and frustrating. But so many Cubans talk about leaving for the U.S. as if they will be completely reborn – smokers will quit smoking, drinkers will quit drinking, people who have never wanted to work, will suddenly work, and not to mention how many times I've

[223] Those who migrate to Europe do not have to do so "permanently," they can come and go as they please, and continue to own land and maintain residency in Cuba. But because of the lack of political relations between the U.S. and Cuba, and all the negative history, this is not the case for those leaving to the U.S.

heard that minimum wage in the U.S. hovers around $20 an hour, and let's not forget all those nice, childless elderly couples who give away money or businesses, and all sorts of economic handouts to a Cuban relative living abroad. Some of this is based on the fact that Cubans who enter illegally to the U.S. have it "easy" in comparison to all the other illegal immigrants in the country – they are given monetary assistance for at least a year after their arrival, Medicare, and U.S. residency after a year. I always tell my husband that I should have gotten him as far as Mexico, and then had him cross over illegally and declare asylum because then we would have gotten financial assistance for a year.

But another part of the fantasy mentality is the immigrant culture in general and one that is common to immigrants from all over the world – you cannot go off somewhere to start a new life and be the only one not to succeed, especially since everyone else you know who left has supposedly made it big. Nor do you want to worry your family back home. Part of it is also the fantasy any of us cling to when things are going wrong, that safe little story we tell ourselves of escape from the reality of who we are and what our life is like. For my friend it's going off to live in the south of Italy, for me it is Rio de Janeiro. But another aspect of the fantasy is part of Cuban culture – the Cuban storyteller I refer to in Chapter IV – where exaggeration, boasting, and entertainment take front and center stage.

I remember asking my husband if he was sure about the whole thing, about leaving, and I told him how difficult it would be, and I warned him that life in the U.S. wasn't how people said it was. I remember his response so clearly, "*cualquier lugar es mejor que Cuba*" (any place is better than Cuba). I laughed at his comment then, and now, almost four years since he left, and having traveled to other places within and

outside the U.S., he knows that I was right in my response, "no, not everywhere is better than Cuba." Having said that, you cannot always compare yourself "down" – I should be happy because people elsewhere have it worse. Or the contrary, you can't always compare yourself "up" – I will never feel truly realized until I am a millionaire. But it seems humans cannot escape comparisons with people living elsewhere. Expectations, life goals, what one holds dear, and what one wants, misses, and yearns for change, they become more nuanced, and most everything in life is more complex than a simple better or worse equation.

It is this perspective that I heard in many of the veterans with whom I spoke – a perspective that is sometimes lacking in Cubans who have not spent time abroad, and have only heard the fantasies from their relatives abroad. That doesn't mean that spending time abroad necessarily made them patriotic or not desire something else than Cuba has to offer, because there are plenty of former Angolan war veterans living in Hialeah, Florida, but it simply means that those I interviewed had a more multi-faceted outlook on life, and life in Cuba.

Going Native

While doing research on the Angolan community in Boston, I went to a graduate student party where there were Angolans present as well as one Cuban. The Cuban was telling me about a doctoral student at another university who had done research in Angola. She ended up living there for almost three years and had given birth in Luanda to a child by an Angolan man. At the time, she was back in the States and trying to finish her degree as a single mother. According to him, her professors were furious with her

because she had "gone native." He thought what she had done was unacceptable, and asked me what I thought.

I knew whom he was referring to, having communicated with her via email, although never having met in person. I told him that she probably knew Angola and Angolan culture better than most students who had completed the required six to twelve month stint in the field, and left it that, not feeling comfortable talking about another woman's personal life. But I wondered how much any of this would be an issue if she were a man? Male anthropologists and diplomats have a long tradition of bringing back "native" wives, and for the most part, it raises few eyebrows. And if they engendered a child while in the field, for the most part, no one has to be aware of this. But when a female anthropologist gets married or has a baby during her graduate training, especially in the field and with a "native," it is frowned upon and becomes departmental gossip. But the reality is life happens, and continues to happen while in the field. Can the field experience be divorced from "regular" life back home? Is a single, male anthropologist entering the field for a year expected to be celibate? How about a female? As women, are we punished or chastised more when we do not put amorous emotions and sexuality on hold while doing research? Few scholars tried to seriously consider these questions and analyze how the anthropologist's sexuality affects the "production of anthropological knowledge" (Latham 1997; Kulick).

Blurred Relations

Relations in the field were complicated, blurring the lines between friendship and *interés* (ulterior motives). The truth is that several of the men I interviewed confused my interest in their experience in Angola or Cuba with a romantic or sexual interest in them.

I knew that often they spoke to me because they found me attractive. And even though I made it clear this was not my intention, it was a continuous element in our exchanges. Although it proved useful at times to find willing participants, physical attraction could also hinder the information gathering. For instance, the man might always try to bring back the conversation to a possible relationship between us, or a prospective informant might choose not to participate because he did not want to upset a significant other. Or perhaps he would not be willing to share certain aspects of his life with me, particularly about his sexuality, not wanting to offend me.

El Habanero always made it clear he was interested in me. He didn't use it as a condition of support for the project; he felt it was an important topic that needed to be told regardless of whatever happened between us. But he also told me that he would continue to pursue me despite my repeated denials, "*por el amor al deporte*" (for the love of the sport). There was constant playful banter between us – he would make a proposition, I would tell him he was too old for me, and he would reply that I should try him out to see if he was really too old. It was a game between us. And in between the flirtatious language there were also serious discussions on the topic of Angola. Often these innuendo-filled exchanges were enjoyable to me because they are typical of Cuba – Cubans tend to be very playful in their day-to-day language – making an otherwise ordinary exchange pleasant.

In general I knew these innuendos were harmless, a different way of relating to someone, and for the most part I never felt intimidated or threatened. As a rule I feel very comfortable in Cuba in regards to crime and violence. There is much less crime there than anywhere else I have lived or traveled to. That does not mean that violent

crimes like murder and rape do not occur, because they do. I do not have official numbers, but from everything I have heard and experienced they do not occur nearly as often as in Los Angeles or in other Latin American cities where I have spent considerable time living. And with near total gun control, crimes do not escalate as they do in countries that permit gun use or where arms are rampant. In general, tourist are "gold" and most Cubans will think twice before committing a serious offense against them because they know the punishment will be more severe than if it were committed against a fellow Cuban.

Of course at other times this type of banter could get annoying if it never moved beyond that, or if the man was not really interested in my topic, but only interested in me. This happened most notably on two occasions, one with an early informant in Los Angeles, a Cuban-American who had served in Angola (this was before I decided to focus the study only to those residing on the island), who insisted our second meeting take place in a hotel. He became angry and belligerent when I reminded him that my interest in him was as a research subject and nothing else. I promptly cancelled the second meeting and never contacted him again.

The other time was with a man in his 80's in Cuba. After having several good sessions together discussing relevant topics, he decided to drink excessively the following time we met. He became so inebriated that he started to touch and grab me inappropriately. Perhaps this was precisely why he drank that night – to work up the courage to be more forward – regardless, I'll never know. In this situation I did not feel physically threatened because of his age, his size in relation to mine, and his intoxication

level, I could easily overpower him, plus we were in a public setting. But it was annoying and humiliating to have to fight off an octogenarian in public.

In Boston things were different. I did fear for my safety at times. Not because of the Angolan men directly – but because I was in a large U.S. city. Being from another large U.S. city myself, and the victim or witness to multiple crimes, including gang beatings, stabbings, theft, drive-bys, arson, sexual violence, and being followed home more times than I care to remember, I knew that the threat of violence was real. On some occasions I had to go on the subway or walk in an unknown neighborhoods late at night to meet with someone, and this made me nervous, worried about being mugged or the victim of an attack. Unlike Cuba where I feel relatively safe walking the streets at night alone, in the U.S., I do not feel special protection because I am a foreigner. On the contrary, being a tourist in Boston made me feel more vulnerable to a possible crime against me.

The Angolan men that I interviewed in Boston were perfect gentleman and on the few occasions that they made it clear there was an interest in me, they respected my wishes and did not push the issue further. In the end I had no reason to fear for my safety with them. But that is not to say that initially, before getting to know them better, I didn't worry about the fact that I was alone with men I did not know. Unlike many of the men I interviewed in Cuba, these men were younger since they had been children when they left Angola, so they were mostly in their thirties and forties. They were also on average tall and strong men who could easily overpower me.

The case with one informant, El Angolano, in Boston was complicated. We initially met over the phone, and we had several long phone conversations and interviews

before we actually met in person. I had already met his family in Cuba before that first meeting. With him there had never been playful language or back-and-forth banter, our conversations always had to do with Angola or Cuba. We did talk about my graduate studies and how they were going, and my struggles with the preliminary examination since he also had an advanced degree and could relate. He encouraged me. When we finally did meet during a preliminary field visit, he received me at the airport in Boston with a beautiful bouquet of flowers – a pleasant surprise, but a strong signal of his intentions. Sure enough, later in the evening after completing a recorded interview and deciding on a schedule to follow further interviews, he made his romantic intentions known. This was a very difficult and frustrating situation because I felt I had been very clear about my intentions all along. As far as I thought, there was no room for confusion. But clearly this was not the case for him and he felt our long conversations revealed a deeper connection between us.

In any case, my initial response was to flee, I left Boston on that trip much earlier than planned, and I thought the solution was never to contact him again, as I had done with the informant in Los Angeles. But El Angolano was too valuable to me as an informant. Despite the confusion, he was very committed to the project, is an intelligent man with great insight on the topic, plus he had a fascinating personal history. So despite my trepidation, I contacted him again after some time had passed. Eventually we worked through everything, and he understood that my interest in him was purely for research. But this was a long and painful process – it took a while for me to trust him again and feel comfortable being alone with him. Now we are actually good friends, I went to his wedding, and he is friends with my husband. He was a wonderful guide and help to me

during field research in Boston in 2007, and he gave my husband advice and support on dealing with leaving Cuba and his new life as an immigrant in the U.S.

The situation with El Angolano was difficult to navigate. I have glossed over it somewhat, but it was a long, painful process to get back to a fruitful, working relationship. The fact that we both got married helped immensely – by committing to other people, anything more was out of the question. I am grateful that we were able to work it out, and that I did not just give up and run away from the situation, because that would have been easier to do. It proved the value in insisting on a resolution, however complicated, because he was a very important part of this project.

I also wonder how much the Cuban stories affected how I saw the Angolan men? I had been listening to Cubans tell me that Angolans were bad, backstabbers, untrustworthy, etc., for years. Some of that had to rub off on me. On one particular occasion in 2006, I went to visit El Angolano in Boston for continued research and to attend his wedding. He went to pick me up with his older brother and a friend. At the time I had known El Angolano for a couple of years, and after working everything out with him, I trusted his judgment, but I did not know the other two. There I was, a "white" woman getting into a car with three large, black men, two of who were strangers. The warnings of the Cubans about Angolans, coupled with U.S. and Latino negative stereotypes about black men in general, not to mention my own mistrust of men in general out of personal experience, all raced through my head. While driving, El Angolano took a detour through a back alley, and my initial thought was to panic – "where were they taking me," I thought to myself. But it turned out to be a shortcut to the tuxedo shop where rented tuxes for the wedding were ready for pick up. I was quietly

embarrassed at how quickly I had jumped to a negative conclusion about these three Angolan men.

Throughout this dissertation I have mentioned how some of my subjects ultimately became my friends. On the subject of evolving and complicated relationships, how do ethnographer and subject make this transition from informant to friend? When should the transition from ethnographer mode to friendship start and end? Should it even be done at all, and can it ever happen? How does a relationship that is based mostly on listening on behalf of the ethnographer evolve to one of mutual and reciprocal listening and sharing? An easy answer would be after the research is completed. But the reality, as always, is much more complicated and difficult to isolate.

Feminist Anthropology

The above section about my experience with male participants illustrates some of the difficulties of being a woman in the field. There are concerns that female ethnographers specifically have to contend with, such as fear for personal safety, unwanted sexual advancements, and not being taken as seriously as a male peer. But doing field research despite these issues and including them in the analysis is a crucial aspect of feminist anthropology. The struggles, problems, and concerns encountered in the field form a valuable part of the ethnographic record.

Another major concern of feminist ethnography is the dilemma of "giving voice" and the subsequent debate regarding the "authenticity" of this voice and the power differential between ethnographer and subject. According to Geyla Frank, the idea of giving voice stems from a desire to incorporate different voices and perspectives from marginalized or underrepresented groups into public discourse and the academy (Frank

2000: 17). Thus, giving voice within feminist ethnography attempts to provide a literary space for those belonging to traditionally marginalized groups, for example women, the disabled, people of color – to offer an alternative representation and regain control over the literary production of their own and other alternate identities.

The term giving voice implies an unequal and simple power relation between the anthropologists and the informants. But as various authors have shown, the reality is more complex, and power is exchanged and redefined between participants and anthropologist throughout the entire ethnographic process (Behar 1995; Frank 2000).

A further dilemma with giving voice stems from a question of "authenticity," and the believability of the author to provide the reader with an "accurate" representation, or voice, as possible. The question of authenticity is complicated by the subject position of the anthropologist – in other words, the author's proximity to the subject and her own status as a minority in academia. Is the anthropologist a "native," or can the author claim marginalized status and thereby gain an illusion of legitimacy?

Specifically in regards to this study, can women only give other women a voice? Should I, a female anthropologist attempt to represent the mostly male informants in this study? As a light skinned person who is considered "white" in Cuba, but "brown" in the United States, should I be the person "giving voice" to Cubans of color? And finally, as a thirty-something year old, can I accurately portray the experiences of mostly men in their fifties and sixties? And what about the black Angolans in Boston? In the case of Cuba I can claim some sort of authority due to cultural and linguistic heritage and lineage, but I cannot do the same with the Angolans I interacted with. I am fluent in Portuguese, but not any native Angolan language, and I am not of Angolan heritage. This

example further problemitizes the notion that a marginalized identity gives the anthropologist an understanding of other types of marginalization or oppression. The answer to these questions can be found in Visweswaran's call to an egalitarian exchange in which the anthropologist "speaks with" and does not "speak for" the group she is representing (Visweswaran 1994: 100).

Anthropology has traditionally been the study of mostly men and women by men, and subsequently feminist anthropologists stressed the importance of studying fellow women. By being a woman whose study focuses on men, representing the male voice of the Cuban military intervention in Angola, and to a lesser degree of the Angolan men who were sent to Cuba, my study is outside the traditional scope of anthropology and is an attempt at feminist anthropology.

As stated throughout, this study takes as a phenomenological approach and focuses on how events in Angola and Cuba were/are perceived by those involved. In their anthology on feminist oral history, Anderson and Jack observe how traditionally men have mostly documented activities and events, while feelings and attitudes associated with these moments are largely ignored or excluded (Berger Gluck and Patai 1991). So the focus on feelings, and specifically the feelings and emotions of men, is rare, and I contend an innovative illustration of feminist anthropology.

On a final note regarding feminist ethnography, despite the overwhelming focus of men in my study, women played a critical role in the research. Various women led me to male informants – their spouse, brothers, sons, fathers, cousins, uncles, neighbors, or acquaintances. Thus, as stated above, women played an active role in the project as cultural brokers, even if they were not the major focus of the finished product.

Reflections on Politics

Cubans do not like to talk about *la politica* (politics), and some of the issues regarding politics have specifically to do with U.S. – Cuba relations, and not just Cuba. The desire to return home, even with the current government and not waiting for the government to change before visiting, is not a popular sentiment among the aging guard of the Cuban-American community, of whom many have never returned vowing to not step foot in Cuba until there is a government transition. But this isn't the case with newer generations of Cuban exiles, particularly since the 1990's.

I have seen first hand how expectations and opinions change, and how unsatisfied and fickle we humans can be. Not only in the case of my husband who thought anyplace was better than Cuba, and no longer thinks so, but there are a number of other Cubans we know who have returned to stay in Cuba after living in Miami for a few years, and many more who have wanted to but were unable to do so because of the political situation between the two countries.[224] This is not such an issue for those Cubans who move to Europe; they are allowed the freedom of movement between Cuba and Europe, as well as to maintain their home on the island. But those who leave for the U.S. are forced to give up everything, and if they return they are jailed for a time until the government is convinced they have not returned to do espionage or sabotage the country. Additionally they are told they will not be allowed to work in certain sectors, like tourism, that have

[224] Journalist Ann Louise Bardach also mentions this rarely talked about trend: "Every year, a small but significant number of exiles return to live in Cuba – something one might call *reverse balseros*. Most return because their expectations were unrealistic or because they found life in the U.S. a daunting challenge. In Cuba, life is harshly constrained, but the bare basics of food, health, and education are assured. In the U.S. they have to work. Among the returnees have been two elderly aunts of the late exile leader Jorge Mas Canosa, who schemed for years to get them out. After a brief period in the U.S., the two aunts decided the hustle and bustle of Miami was not for them and returned to their seaside hometown in central Cuba" (2009: 220).

decent salaries for Cuba. If U.S. – Cuba relations were different, I wonder how many people would remain moving between both places, rather than outright leaving Cuba for Miami.

It would be interesting to write about those who attempt to return to live in Cuba after being unsatisfied with what life was like in the U.S. They are not the majority by any means, but from anecdotal evidence the number is probably higher than people would expect.

In regards to academia, omission about *la política* in Cuban studies is almost impossible. Every academic piece I have read on revolutionary Cuba mentions the economic and political inclination of the current government. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. I think all anthropological studies should at least mention the current government situation in the country in which they are working, rather than just plugging in the latest theoretical trend, but this isn't always the case (Behar 1999). Anthropologists can study kinship or semiotics in a particular culture in isolation and are not asked to go into detail about the political and governmental situation in the country. This does not happen with Cuba – the communist government and economic situation take forefront in any study whether it is religion, music, or environmental policy.

Moreover, the author is practically forced to choose sides – in various monographs the authors mention their own trajectory with the revolution, usually about how they agreed with the revolution in their youth, but after seeing the long-term results were disenchanted. With what other country or government does this happen, and more specifically <u>usually</u> happen? I appreciate the personal elements and I think as stated previously, it is crucial in order to understand the author's intent in the discussion of the

text, but having said that, why is it practically mandatory in the case of Cuba and not with other places and people?

I presented a paper regarding Cuban collective memory regarding the military mission in Angola during a graduate seminar at Florida International University, and the panel discussant questioned why I had not stated my political inclination regarding the Cuban Revolution upfront – I had not stated whether I was for or against the revolution – this from a distinguished and noted scholar. Why was I the only one singled out? Why wasn't the scholar from France who presented on Ethiopian Rastafarians asked about her political leanings? I protested stating that it was precisely because of that attitude that, with some noted exceptions, academic writings on Cuba from U.S.-based authors tended to fall into a moral trap of right and wrong, winners and losers in the Cold War, rather than attempting to analyze the effects of a particular moment on a group of people. Thus, the question of race in Cuba, for instance, often becomes about whether or not the communist government, read Fidel Castro, is racist, instead of focusing on how communist policies have affected race relations in Cuba among Cubans and not exclusively on the leadership. Focusing on the political situation in Cuba is not always useful, especially when interviewing "regular" people, in this case veterans, and not high ranking officers; as this study on the Angolan intervention demonstrate. People are more complex; there are greater ambiguities and complexities than is allowed for in the outdated and dichotomous arguments of Cold War politics. Moreover, there is rarely a discussion on how publishing practices, publishing firms, and journal classifications also affect the need to politicize Cuban studies, particularly in the U.S.

Returning to politics and choosing sides, people I have spoken with in both the U.S. and Cuba, not just the academic in Florida, want me to answer whether or not things are better or worse in one place or another. The answer isn't so simple; it depends on what "things" any individual values and their life expectations. Take for example the word "freedom." In the U.S. people say that Americans have the freedom to do and think what they want. But usually I think this "freedom" has more to do with having the money to do and think what they want. In Cuba, Cubans have repeatedly told me there is more freedom in Cuba than in the U.S. When I ask what they mean, they tell me that Cubans have the freedom to walk around at night and alone without fear of being killed since the violent crime rate is so low. Yet, when they talk about Fidel, they tend to lower their voice. So what definition of freedom is correct? I don't know, and I wish I could have both, but I do not.

No place is perfect, I always say, and there is good and bad in every system. It seems there is a tendency to glorify or demonize either the U.S. or Cuba in order to criticize or defend the other. In any case, its not for me to decide whether one place or system is better than the other, that's is the concern of each person or family and their decision to do what is best for themselves. The politics involved in doing research in Cuba as a North American ethnographer, and later publishing this research in the U.S. is a facet that has to be taken into account and should not be omitted or dismissed. But this is very different from having to choose sides – communist or capitalist.

Having said all that, I can't escape the fact that I am making a political statement just by documenting the memories of Cuban internationalists and the Angolans who went to Cuba. As historian Angela Campos concludes in her work on Portuguese soldiers: "By

listening to each ex-combatant's story, I am in a way positioning myself on their side, there is almost an implicit complicity" (Campos 2008: 124). Thus in writing a historic ethnography on Cuban internationalism, I have made a political decision by supporting the idea that the experiences of these men is an important one that should not be erased, disregarded or forgotten. Considering an "alternative" Cuban history, like I do in the Introduction, positing foreign involvement in Cuba since independence as a long tradition of internationalism and including José Martí as an internationalist is certainly a controversial position to take.

Never-Ending Field

An interesting aspect of my field research was the different ways in which I entered, left, and was present in the field. At first while conducting mostly preliminary research, I was a single woman. This status had its own consequences as documented above. When my extended research stays began, I was in my early thirties, and still single. But within a few months, because it all happened so fast, I found myself to be a married ethnographer, and married to a Cuban man in a relatively small town. Because of the marriage I was subsequently known to a lot of people I didn't know in that locale. Complete strangers stopped me in the street and asked me about my husband and his family. My marital status affected how people viewed me, and equally as important, how I viewed myself.

Before it had been all about me, and how I related to my male informants, but after the wedding, I felt accountable to my husband as well. Although he understood my research and that I needed to interview mostly men for my topic, I did not want to do something he would consider inappropriate. Add to that the dynamics with his family

and friends in a small town. When I got back from talking to someone, my husband would tell me that I had been seen in X place with Y person by one of his "informants." It did not bother me, but being from a large city it was a strange sensation to know that there were plenty of eyes on me keeping tabs.

I was recently in Cuba on a family visit for my daughter to meet her paternal grandparents and extended family. I saw some of my former informants, but this time as a mother. I felt so far removed from the person who started graduate school, and even further removed from the person I was when I first went to Cuba in my early twenties. Nothing was the same, not even the simplest thing like leaving the house. What had been so brainless before was now about not forgetting anything that the baby might need. I thought about how different my research would have been if I were to have done it as a mother with a child in the field. The dynamics of that type of investigation would be so different from what I experienced. Would I have even chosen the same topic? Probably not, I probably would have chosen a more child friendly topic. How does the fact that not all, but at least in our department, most, graduate students are single and young affect the type of research that is conducted? While on this family visit I pondered a variety of further research topics that now interest me as a mother that did not interest me in the least bit previously.

Before I married a Cuban national and my daughter was born, my relationship to Cuba had been looking back to the past, my ancestors, my aging relatives, my father's past life during his youth in Cuba. But now the present and future are also included in the equation. The present because we are in constant communication with my husband's family and the baby's godmother via email, text messages, old fashioned letters, and

phone calls. And the future because I know we will continue this type of contact and family visits as much as possible for the sake of my daughter. I do not want her growing up like I did, having little contact with my grandparents in Cuba and Colombia, always wishing I had known them better. Overall I view this recent and direct connection to contemporary Cuba as a positive result of my time in the field. However, as stated previously, concerns regarding Cuba are now compounded. The consequences are greater – I stand to lose much more than a place of study if I were unable to return. Whereas typically an ethnographer can mark the time before, during, and after the field, for me it is comparable to a never-ending field experience.

It feels as if I am living in more than one place at once, constantly keeping up with what is going on in Cuba as well as in the U.S. And not just the international headlines regarding Cuba, but micro-level detail, the latest gossip on the block – who is dating whom, what neighbor is being unfaithful, and who "*perdió la barriga*" (miscarried). Technology allows for easy mobility and contact between the family in Cuba and myself, even despite the fact that in Cuba access to the Internet and cell phones are limited. I have become a transnational actor myself, "having multiple ties and interactions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec 1999: 447). In some ways it only continues what I have always known and done – linking relatives living in different parts of the country and world. But now the connection is through a descendant rather than an ancestor, anticipatory rather than nostalgic.

In the final and concluding chapter I will summarize the main arguments of this research project. Additionally I will suggest areas for further investigation that compliment the findings included in the dissertation.

CHAPTER VIII
FINAL WORDS

In the last few years, the Cuban government has been involved in a project to rescue the previously silenced memories regarding the military involvement in Angola and other parts of Africa in order to promote Cuban heroism during the Angolan intervention as a source of revolutionary pride in light of ongoing economic problems on the island. This is evidenced by the English translation of Che's Congo diaries, Piero Glejeises' monograph based on access he gained to the Cuban military archives, internet websites dedicated to the intervention, and the recent commemorations and documentaries concerning the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the mission. Initially I reasoned that the memory of Cuban veterans from the African interventions, particularly the prolonged presence in Angola, had turned on itself to become a point of resistance against the socialist state by highlighting the failures of the revolution. But once I started doing more interviews, I realized that the memories of the veterans were more complicated and nuanced than I had originally considered.

Even the internationalists that said they regretted participating the minute they arrived in Angola, or stated that the whole thing was "bad," "awful," or "terrible," had to come to terms with their actions. They had to make sense of what occurred both in the context of their "personal" life, but also in the greater context of Cuban society and changing world politics. Most veterans seem to accept what they went through, and

remember their role as an unselfish and altruistic action, the helping of fellow humans who were exploited, and an action of which they were proud, regardless of what happened after the end of Cuban involvement. But these feelings of altruism, and how they make sense of their experience as internationalist are mediated and challenged by larger ideological forces, a generational divide, and a changing Cuban self-image.

Findings and Conclusions

I will summarize some of the key point in the study before offering suggestions for further research that might compliment this study. The introductory chapter provides background information about the subject matter and the research methodology. I take issue with two tendencies that to a great extent form part of the literature and visual representation on contemporary Cuba. The first is the impression that revolutionary Cuba is trapped in the past, cut off, and completely isolated from the rest of the world. But throughout the last fifty years, Cuba has engaged the international community and Cuban internationalism, including the educational exchanges that continue to bring students from all over the world to Cuba, is just one example. The second tendency is the merging of the capital, Havana, with the rest of the country since most studies are limited to Havana. In so doing local nuances are often missed. For that reason I wanted to include research completed in other provinces.

Conducting research in Cuba presents many challenges, particularly as an American researcher form the U.S. during the George W. Bush administration when diplomatic relations between the two countries were at an all time low. On a personal level, conducting research in Cuba has always been cause for conflicting emotions in me because of my connections to the island as a Cuban-American, and the variability of

factors that come along with that identity. The ethnographic material on the previous pages is situated specifically during the time that I was there between 2005 and early 2007. Noteworthy events during that time that influenced the milieu in which I was conducting research included the shift from gas based products to electrical appliances as part of the "Year of the Electrical Revolution in Cuba," as well as long-time head of state Fidel Castro's mysterious illness and the historic transitions of power to his younger brother Raúl. Lastly, despite the problems with the notion, there are elements of salvage anthropology in this study because of the age of some of the participants and the global amnesia regarding the Cold War.

The concept of internationalism in Cuba was introduced after the Cuban Revolution as part of socialist dogma. Proletarian internationalism emphasized class solidarity over nationalism, and in Cuba this idea was linked with that of the "new man" and the call for struggle and heroic everyday acts on the part of the citizens. Internationalism then became a way to achieve this revolutionary ideal. An alternative history posits that Cuba has always had an internationalist spirit, even in the colonial era, and foreigners, like Henry Reeve, Antonio Maceo, Tania La Guerrillera, and those who were influenced abroad, like José Martí, form a part of this tradition.

In Angola, insurgent groups had been fighting against the Portuguese for independence since the 1940's, and as with most Third World insurgencies of the time, Angolan independence became caught up in Cold War politics. Unlike the other Portuguese colonies, there were several internal factions vying for control of the country, and the leaders from the three main rebel groups, the FNLA, UNITA, and the MPLA, strategically aligned their movement with foreign sponsors who could provide financial

and military assistance. The MPLA, who had met with Cuban representatives years before, requested Cuban military assistance, and what perhaps was meant to be a shorter involvement turned into a nearly sixteen-year engagement culminating in one of the largest land battles in Africa at Cuito Cuanavale. The still disputed battle led to Cuban troop withdrawal and the end of apartheid South Africa, overlapping with the Soviet Union's unraveling, and the commencement of the Cuban economic crisis that would come to be known as the Special Period.

Scholars have largely ignored this episode in the Cold War, and writings on the subject tend to focus on the reasoning behind Cuba's involvement, especially concerning debate over Cuba acting as a Soviet proxy, or politically partial memoirs. Other accounts mostly privilege the memories of high-ranking officers, diplomats, and government leaders. By and large the voices of low ranking soldiers, and the effects of the war and the race-based ideology behind the intervention have not been documented.

In the second chapter I do a close analysis of official Cuban memory regarding the intervention based mostly on speeches by Fidel Castro, the writings of famed Colombian author, Gabriel García Marquéz, and other contemporary examples of public memory. The Cuban government strategically highlighted the historical similarities between the two countries, such as a shared colonial history, similar revolutionary trajectories, and ancestral blood ties, in order to promote a transnational memory. Important to this policy was the idea of Cuba as a "Latinafrican" nation, and as the intervention went on, the partnering with African liberation movements, including Nelson Mandela's ANC party, in the celebrated defeat against apartheid South Africa.

Central to the dissertation is the interrelationship between national and individual memory and the making of history. A person's memories are mediated through public memory and one's own subjectivity, and public memories are always being contested by marginalized, counter, and contending memories. The making of history is dependant on the relationship between all these factors and control over the means of historical production. Because of the initial downplaying of the intervention in Angola, and the overshadowing of its conclusion by historical disjunctures, like the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of apartheid in South Africa, the history of this exceptional south-south exchange largely remains to be agreed upon and written. In many ways, the details are still being worked out in the discussion sites of Internet forums, hidden in the classified archives in Angola, Cuba, South Africa, the US, and the former Soviet Union, and in the contested memories and counter-memories of the soldiers, officers, politicians, leaders, and civilians involved in the war. What face the accepted history on the endeavor ultimately takes will be influenced not only by local and domestic memories and means of production, but mediated by myriad factors including international ideologies, publishing trends, and perspective audience interests. The memories of ordinary soldiers and citizens, like those included in this dissertation are particularly vulnerable to global trends that will fail to legitimize the recollections of their experiences.

Our memories are a complex practice of remembering, reconstructing, de-defining, re-imagining, and, re-examining the past. By privileging a phenomenological approach to explore the wartime narratives presented in Chapter III, I demonstrate the inconsistencies between personal and public memories; in particular memories dealing

with odor, savagery, backwardness, and deviant sexuality that set in opposition Cubans and Angolans. I argue that the memories are an extension of *cuentos de negros,* the derogatory manner of referencing blackness in general, applied to an international context. The chapter considers the history of racial politics in Cuba, the discrepancy between foreign and domestic racial policy in Cuba, and draws parallels between the fight for civil rights in Cuba and the U.S.

Chapter IV presents the life history of El Palestino, a revolutionary internationalist whose memories of the intervention make the relevant events and sentiments of his era more accessible. I document my own struggles with how to best present another person's life on paper, including the blurring of storytelling, memory, and the life history method, the variability of the retrieval environment, concerns about the transcription, translation, and editing of the recording, as well as questions about representation and authority. Ultimately, like other anthropologists, I conclude that despite the criticism, the life history continues to be an invaluable tool in anthropology for understanding culture.

Since the beginning of the Special Period two decades ago, decisions were taken by the government in order to stay afloat economically after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These included the legalization of the dollar, which rendered the Cuban peso worthless, and other market elements like opening up the country to tourism, that have resulted in a return of materialism to the island, especially among the young. The cultural and ideological shift and references to "before" and "during" the Special Period, form part of the larger Cuban self-image crisis in which Cubans are caught between the fantasies and desires of international consumerism and their own economic reality.

Internationalism is also discussed in terms of early, altruistic internationalism, and the internationalism of today that is seen as having ulterior motives. This chapter reviews a collection of war narratives that emphasize different personal life themes, including death, altruism, pride, and spirituality, and coming to terms with their service in the time before materialistic gains.

Chapter VI presents an assortment of vignettes from those who did not participate directly in the intervention in Angola. The memories are from ordinary civilians, people too young to remember, those who wanted to go but could not, and those who refused service. Concise and descriptive, the stories of non-combatants address the intervention while capturing the essence of Cuban contemporary life. The final chapter takes into account my own memories from fieldwork and the writing experience, and addresses the limitations and transformative elements of ethnography.

My overarching goal for this project was to gain a better, more nuanced understanding of contemporary Cuban society, by getting at the heart of this one transnational event in its history. Internationalism then provides the entry point to explore Cuban culture – race relations on the island, foreign policy, the ongoing effects of the end of the Cold War and the Special Period, historicity, and the making and erasing of a transnational memory regarding the intervention in Angola.

Omissions and Areas for Further Research

I want to briefly take a few lines to assess my own work, including omissions and some suggestions for further research. The most obvious omissions in this study are the voices of females, the internationalists who went to Angola, and the women who stayed behind – the daughters, wives, and mothers of male internationalists – and the effects of

internationalism on the Cuban family. When I first conceived of this project years ago after my initial conversation with Enrique, I had wanted to learn more about the Cuban women's experience in Angola. Instead I completed a study that focused almost exclusively on males, and former military males at that. In part this happened because I had a harder time accessing female internationalists, but also as my research went along I started to selectively limit whom it was I wanted to include in my project, and I actively decided on males involved in the military mission in Angola specifically, the longest operation, and not other missions in Africa.

This brings me to the second exclusion, which are the memories and counter-memories of Cuban veterans in Miami and outside of Cuba. Adding these voices would most certainly add another level of analysis, but it would no longer be a study of Cubans living on the island. I have purposely decided to study and am interested in Cubans who have chosen to stay and live in Cuba or have not left for whatever reason, and not as much in the diaspora, because then I feel I would have to get more involved in U.S. politics, immigration policy, and the dynamics of the Cuban exile community, which was never my intent.

The final omission I would like to touch upon is the Angolan side, both those who went to Cuba, as well as the Angolans who remained in Angola during the intervention, and the continued civil war. Angola is a huge country and certain regions were more affected by the civil war and Cuban and foreign involvement than others. I did research members of the Angolan community who had lived and studied in Cuba for decades before immigration to various parts in Europe, the U.S., and back to Angola. I had originally intended to include these results in the dissertation, but because of space

limitations I was unable to, but I hope to turn the results of that investigation into a future project.

Cuba's involvement in Angola was the longest and most extensive, but Cuba sent internationalists all over the world, including Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua. Thus, it would be fruitful to widen the pool of internationalists by geographic area, time period, and type of mission. In talking to veterans from the 1977 military mission in Ethiopia, they made similar racially related derogatory comments regarding Ethiopians. The intervention in Ethiopia was the most controversial for Cuba – at the time fellow members of the Non-Aligned Movement denounced Cuban involvement. Another area that could be explored concerns the humanitarian missions in Angola. From anecdotal evidence and the work of historian Christine Hatzky, it is appears that the experiences of those involved in the humanitarian missions differ from those involved militarily because they were able to engage with the local inhabitants on a more personal level outside of military/enemy dynamics (2004). Lastly, a study on the real influence of Angolan students who studied on the Island of Youth on the current political government, oil and business interest, as well as high-level management positions seems very interesting and promising (Müller 2010).

Final Words

A recent discussion on a Lusophone-Africa website about an upcoming book regarding the battle of Cuito Cuanavale sparked off a flurry of commentary and opinion. For researchers lately, especially in Europe, there has been a boom of interest regarding Cuba's involvement in Africa. The ramifications of this south-south exchange have largely been overlooked, but it is clear that in the next coming years various works will

be published on the intervention. Ultimately, the history that will be written about this time period, what memories will be forgotten, erased, contested, marginalized remembered, commemorated and by whom, remains to be seen.

EPILOGUE

In late 2010, the word on *radio bemba* in Cuba was that Raúl Castro was not doing a good job. Several Cubans I spoke to told me that people were getting restless and there had been physical protests that had to be brought under control by the police. As one Cuban told me, "*Todo lo que Raúl ha hecho es mierda, por eso tuvieron que traer al otro de vuelta*" (Everything Raúl has done is shit, that's why they had to bring back the other one). How they brought back the other one, Fidel Castro, from what seemed like eminent death is unclear and nothing short of a miracle. The retired former leader has recuperated from a mysterious stomach ailment speculated to be cancer, and has taken his place again, if not quite in center stage, very close to it. He made his first public appearance in early September 2010 after four years of near seclusion, wearing not the Adidas warm-up suit that he had been sporting during his recovery, but in a clearly symbolic gesture, his olive green military uniform.

The changes to the economy announced in the *Gaceta Official de Cuba* (Cuban Official Gazette) in early November, had everyone worried. The general announcement included the layoffs of 500,000 state employees set for January 2011. Those laid off are expected to find work in agriculture, construction, the private sector, or are eligible for retirement. Additionally the implementation of a new taxation system was made public, with monthly and yearly tax brackets for those who run a small business. Licenses will be required for all sorts of private sector services and activities, including can and bottle

recyclers. Individuals will be allowed to have employees for the first time in decades. For some it is seen as baby steps towards a more capitalist economy, while others see it as a way for the cash-strapped country to amass money.

The plan to control what has previously gone unregulated has been received with fear, confusion, and resentment. Those who have been working in the private sector for years – manicurists, hair stylists, decorators, food and garment makers, movie renters, artisans, and repairmen – are used to running their small, independent business without having to pay anything outright to the government. Whatever profit was made was theirs to keep. As a result, many have said they rather not apply for the required license, stop working, or simply underreport their earnings in order to escape the higher tax bracket. Others complained that if the government wants to tax these activities, then the state should make it easier and less expensive for Cubans to purchase the necessary materials to run their own business – for example, the ingredients to make cakes, pizza, and other pastries, or the materials needed to make artisan crafts, including leather, glue, and paint. They also worry about the imminent corruption of state inspectors that will surely be collecting bribes in exchange for silence regarding the origin of said materials that can mostly be found on the black market.

On November 5th, 2010, the 35th anniversary of the start of the Cuban intervention in Angola was largely overshadowed by the tragic news that a *Cubana* airlines plane departing from Santiago to Havana crashed. All sixty-eight passengers aboard were killed, including forty Cubans and twenty-eight foreigners. Poor weather due to Hurricane Tomas was to blame.

Yet on television and in conversation, reference to Angola seemed palpably different than it had just a couple of years before. I was surprised to hear Angola mentioned without me having to bring it up, even in regular conversations with people that did not know me, and much less knew about my topic of study. Angola's growing economic wealth and political leverage as one of the world's largest producers of oil is getting noticed. Currently Angola produces 800,000 barrels a day, second only to Nigeria in sub-Saharan Africa, but this is set to increase with newly found offshore sites. Conservative estimates put the oil reserve at around 10-20 billion barrels. International petroleum companies are vying each other for a piece of the Angolan pie. Everyone, it seems, wants to be in Angola, developers, investors, and petrodollars have made Luanda the most expensive city in the world.[225]

Overhearing a conversation of a group of Cuban men, I was taken aback by the subject of the conversation. They were talking about the ascent in economic status of present-day Angola. "*Tú sabes quienes tienen mucho dinero ahora*?" (You know who has a lot of money now?), one man asked the group. "*Los Angolanos*" (The Angolans), he replied, answering his own question. He spoke about a mutual friend of theirs who stayed in Angola and married a local woman. "He is now rich," he said: "*Le pagan como $45 la hora*" (He is paid like $45 an hour), and everywhere there are "*sacos de dinero*" (sacks of money) to be made.

In a separate conversation El Palestino told me a similar story, "*Angola esta lleno de dinero*" (Angola is full of money). He told me he spoke to a Cuban friend of his who also had stayed in Angola and was on a recent trip back to Cuba. The man told El Palestino that Angola was very wealthy because of the oil. I told El Palestino that I was

[225] http://www.straitstimes.com/BreakingNews/Money/Story/STIStory_547117.html.

reading articles in the news about direct flights being established between Houston and Luanda, the amount of foreign workers in Luanda because of the oil boom, as well as the effort to bring back refugees that had fled the country during the civil war and were living in the capital or neighboring countries. "Luanda is very wealthy," he told me again, "but outside Luanda people still wear *tapa rabos* (loin cloth) and there is so much misery." He said this as if he had recently come back from a visit to Angola, rather than over thirty years ago.

On television many of the same documentary specials regarding Cuba's crucial role in Angola's independence were broadcast for the 35th anniversary of the intervention. But there were several original news reports that only barely touched upon Cuban involvement. One I saw did not even mention Cuba's past involvement in Angola at all. It seems that Raúl is less interested in dwelling in past glories than his predecessor. Instead, these specials highlighted Angola's oil money and ascending economy, and equally as important Cuba's current association to this wealth. The video images showed men near oil wells in hard hats, and Raúl Castro in a suit, meeting and shaking hands with Angolan president, José Eduardo Dos Santos. Rather than mentioning Cuba's involvement in Angola's past as a poverty-stricken, war-torn country, and Cuba's involvement in that past, the news focus on Angola's present and future, and Cuba's role as a trading partner and beneficiary of their burgeoning wealth.

Raúl has repeatedly stressed during public speeches that because of the economic crisis worldwide Cubans had to prepare themselves for austerity measures. Moreover, he has emphasized the need for a far-reaching overhaul to the stagnant economy and unproductive workforce. These measures include the announced layoffs and the addition

of the tax code. Many Cubans believe that the economy is in its present state because Cuba never industrialized the economy with the Soviet aid they received during the Cold War, and instead used the money to help other countries like Angola. Thus, it is no surprise that the television reports regarding Angola under Raúl's rule downplays the past since the past did not serve to develop Cuba. They are in line with the younger Castro's way of thinking and plans for the Cuban economy. But the irony regarding Angola for those who remember the intervention cannot be missed. Once in a position to provide military aid around the world, Cuba is now in need of accepting help from anywhere it is offered, including its former beneficiary.

El Palestino and I were with a group of acquaintances discussing the possible effects of the implementation of the new tax code recently announced by the Cuban government. As usual, El Palestino defended the new law stating that Cubans wanted to keep all the social benefits they currently have from the government and complained when there were scarcities, but were not willing to pay for anything. The others present became upset at his rationale and called him crazy. They gave examples of people they knew who were saying they were going out of business, even though the laws will not to take effect until January. It would be impossible, they protested, to pay all the fees and a variable annual tax on top of everything else. But El Palestino refused to back down arguing that most countries in the world taxed their citizens.

The two women present looked at me in disgust, shaking their heads. One woman said under her breath that she could not stand El Palestino, while the other one whispered, "*siempre tiene que ganar*" (he always has to win). I had purchased chocolate earlier that

morning knowing that I would have company, and I took one out to give to El Palestino. "You don't have to give him one, he's annoying, don't give him one," one of the women said to me. I smiled in the knowledge that El Palestino rubs many people the wrong way. "I know," I said, "but he's my friend, my very good friend."

Chocolate in exchange for memories; a thoroughly unequal exchange. But one for which I am eternally grateful, and if it wasn't for him and all the others in these pages who so generously shared their memories with me, I would never be writing these final words.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SECTION ON ANGOLAN INTERVENTION IN TENTH GRADE TEXTBOOK

English Translation

Cuban History c-#182

Topic: Proletariat internationalism as a permanent principal of Cuban foreign policy.

Affected Zones:

Senegambia

Angola

November 11, 1975, Angolan independence: Cabinda

Cuban and Angolan troops detain the South African offensive

Reinforcements of men and resources that guaranteed Cuban victory in Cuito Cuanavale

M16-23 broke our heart

A war that involved everyone and that continued the historic experience of our people throughout more than 100 years of struggle

400,000 Cubans participated in different missions. 2077 offered their lives, the mission lasted 15 years.

Original in Spanish

Historia de Cuba c-#182

Asunto: El internacionalismo proletario como principio permanente de la política exterior de Cuba.

Zonas de procedencia

Senegambia

Angola

11 de noviembre de 1975, independencia de Angola: Cabinda

Tropas cubanas y angolanas detienen la ofensiva surafricana

Refuerzos en medios y hombres garantizaron la victoria de Cuba en Cuito Cuanavale

M16-23 nos partieron el corazón

Guerra de todo el pueblo que resume la experiencia histórica de nuestro pueblo a lo largo de más de 100 años de lucha

400,000 Cubanos participaron en diferentes misiones. 2077 ofrecieron sus vidas, 15 años duró la misión.

APPENDIX B

EL PALESTINO'S LIFE STORY – ORIGINAL SPANISH

An Oral History – Examples of Early Internationalism

Marisabel: Tú me hablaste una vez de la historia de Cuba, que el internacionalismo no es nuevo.

El Palestino: Yo te dije que nosotros podemos hablar de, vamos a hablar de la guerra de independencia, y como yo te he dicho siempre, nosotros somos un país internacionalista. ¿Por qué? Porque hemos ayudado, no desde ahora, siempre, toda una vida, hemos ayudado a los demás. No sólo a los Cubanos, sino cuando la guerra de España, no recuerdo bien, pero alrededor de cuatrocientos
combatientes combatieron en la guerra de España. Aquí en Matanzas hubo unos cuantos combatientes.

"Ayudamos Granada. Hemos ayudado a Perú cuando el terremoto en el Perú. Todo eso gratis. De Argelia podemos decir se acaba la guerra contra Francia, y desde el año '61, si mal no recuerdo, nosotros mandamos los primeros médicos que salieron de Cuba. Salieron a Argelia a ayudar todos allí. Ayudamos a Guinea, Angola, Etiopía, ayudamos a Namibia, al Congo. A África podemos decir que mandamos en aquellos años que yo fui en el '75-'76, ya nosotros habíamos dado esa ayuda internacionalista.

"Como tú sabes tenemos tres cientos mil médicos repartidos en diferentes regiones del planeta, digamos en África, Asia. Incluso hasta en el Pacifico, a Timor Oriental, un país del Pacifico, tenemos ciento y pico médicos en este momento allí.

"Así que el internacionalismo ha sido por parte de nosotros. Ahora por parte de otros hombres, nosotros tuvimos aquí en la guerra de independencia a Carlos Roloff, que

nos ayudó, y llegó a ser general. Tuvimos al norteamericano Henry Reeve, quien nos ayudo en la guerra de independencia, un médico norteamericano. Tuvimos Máximo Gómez, generalísimo Máximo Gómez, Dominicano, jefe del ejercito de la guerra de independencia.

"A ver si me recuerdo a otros hombres que ayudaron a nosotros. Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, hombre mundial porque no fue de aquí de Cuba. Sino que Ernesto, el Che, América lo mató en un diluvio, pero vino a ayudarnos a nosotros. Son innumerables las personas que nos ayudaron a nosotros. Tania la Guerrillera, porque tenemos también que hablar de las mujeres. Tania desarrolló un papel fundamental en la lucha con el Che.

"Y cuando hablamos de lucha, la lucha del internacionalismo, no sólo es como te decía de cubanos, sino, incluso de problemas que ya ni recuerdo, por que son muchas cosas, y ya no tengo la memoria. Pero muchos de nuestros patriotas, José Martí, el periódico Patria, un periódico fundado por Martí, él lo funda en Tampa. ¿Estás viendo?

"José Martí. Maceo, mucho hijos del pueblo Jamaicano apoyaron a Antonio Maceo. Cuando él se encontraba en Jamaica cuando la guerra, que ya Maceo no podía atender a su esposa, ella fue para Jamaica, y allí ella miraba la guerra.

"Y así muchas cosas, muchas cosas, lo que pasa es que son cosas que te las digo porque a mí me gusta mucho la historia, pero no recuerdo porque son muchas cosas. Si tú hubieras querido, tú a lo mejor puedes analizar más. Hay personas que sí pueden, pero yo no porque es mucho.

Cuban Internationalism

Marisabel: ¿Entonces cómo es que Angola forma parte de esto, del internacionalismo Cubano?

El Palestino: Entonces lo que yo te decía, en el caso mió, que pienso que es el caso de todos los cubanos es el mismo caso, ¿cómo puedo decir que no? Yo fui una gente que me eduqué, prácticamente, en un proceso revolucionario, donde el primer principio revolucionario es el internacionalismo. Me eduqué de esa forma, entonces ese sentimiento es un sentimiento que tenemos nosotros los revolucionarios.

"Se forma la guerra de Angola por la independencia. Le da la independencia Portugal a Angola. Otros gobiernos [estaban] muy interesados en las riquezas de Angola, empezando por el régimen norteamericano. Tenía [los EEUU] como un país que pudiera intervenir Sur África. Al intervenir Sur África allí, invaden a Angola. Angola tenía un grupo, prácticamente eran los guerrilleros, Angola se defendía. Pero últimamente no podían, no podía, no es que él [Agostinho Neto] quisiera hacerlo, sino es que tenía que hacerlo, porque no podía, era una gente muy joven y no podían [defenderse]. Entonces, llama por nosotros, conociendo el internacionalismo de nuestro pueblo, y nos enviaron a Angola.

"Cuando alguien manda a pedir nuestra ayuda, porque después del triunfo de la independencia de Angola no fue la primer gente quien nosotros mandamos. Ya teníamos metido el pie. Los primeros combatientes que fueron a Angola eran negros. Y nuestras mujeres, muchas mujeres Cubanas, estuvieron en la lucha del pueblo, de la guerrilla Angolana. Incluso la ministra de la industria ligera era Cubana, de Santiago de Cuba. Ella estuvo en la guerrilla enseñándole a las mujeres a combatir. La OMA – La Organización de Mujeres Angolanas – fueron patrocinadas por nuestras mujeres.

"Cuando hablamos de lucha del pueblo Angolano también hablamos de los pioneros, de los niños. Los niños allí jugaron un tremendo papel. Si mal no recuerdo, en

nuestro campamento nosotros teníamos a uno o dos niños. Incluso, nosotros teníamos un sargento mayor de la compañía de nosotros que era maestro aquí en Cuba y le daba clases a los niños. Logramos abrir una escuela allí. Los niños chiquitos, niños, niños, cogían las armas para defender al movimiento revolucionario para la independencia de Angola.

"Independientemente los Angolanos son patriotas, aman a su patria, su bandera y a su escudo. Los verdaderos Angolanos. Por todo lo que pasaron, fueron colonia de Portugal por quinientos años, y fueron cincuenta años de sangre, de lucha por quitarse ese imperialismo que tanto los oprimió y acabo con ellos. Fíjate si yo te puedo decir a que altura, hasta donde llegaron esos Portugueses a oprimir ese pueblo, que cuando nosotros llegábamos todo el mundo se tiraba para la calle y nos dejaban la acera a nosotros porque nosotros éramos blancos! Nosotros teníamos que decirles, 'no, ustedes son mujeres, ustedes las mujeres, y los niños y los ancianos deben juntos con nosotros caminar por la acera. Y nos decían que ellos solo hacían eso porque estaban educados por los portugueses. Ya cuando nosotros veníamos para acá, tenían otro concepto de nosotros.

Saying War Is Easy, Being In One Is Not

El Palestino: Nosotros salimos para Angola en el '75. Fuimos en diciembre del '75 y llegamos a Angola en enero del '76. Llegamos a Luanda. Allí se veían todos los barbarismos que habían hecho los contrarios al proceso de Agostinho Neto. Como era tirar cadáveres para el agua, como era usar granadas para entrar por las puertas, las ventanas para matar a las personas, a desanimarlos. De allí seguimos a Lobito, una ciudad portuaria que se encuentra en el sur de Angola. Allí desembarcamos el 25 de enero del '76. De allí veíamos los acontecimientos de la guerra – los muertos, la destrucción mayormente. La guerra toda es una destrucción, el pueblo muriéndose de

hambre, enfermedades, heridos, un desastre, un desastre. Decir 'guerra', eso es fácil, pero estar en la guerra, no es fácil, por todas las cosas que tú ves.

"El enemigo por la noche era una cosa y por el día otra. Por la noche era el enemigo del MPLA y por el día mucho de ellos estaban normal en su casa, y tú creías que eran del MPLA y eran tu enemigo.

Marisabel: ¿Por qué tú crees que eran así?

El Palestino: Porque era una forma de no ser descubierto. Porque por la noche tú sales, haces tus trastadas, vienes para la casa y nadie se imagina nada. Llegó un momento que la gente de Savimbi decía que el que se llevara los testículos de un cubano, eso era un trofeo de guerra para ese soldado. Yo pienso que eso no sólo se lo hacían a los cubanos, yo pienso que iban a cualquier muerto, se los cortaban y allí está. Después decían que eran cubanos. ¿Cómo tú vas a saber este es cubano, este no? ¿Tú entiendes? Hacían eso.

"Allí nos trasladamos al pueblo, Jua. Allí empezamos a ver todos los fenómenos de la guerra. Incluso yo conocí – y creo que no es algo mal dicho por mi parte, sino es ver, vivir como viví yo – dos Angolanas que se comieron a un cubano. Vi los muslos que los tenían en el refrigerador. Ya parecía que la otra parte se la habían comido. Dos Angolanas, dos mujeres. Porque habían caníbales, la gente esa que comían personas, y ese cubano según cayó herido y ellas lo aprovecharon para comérselo. Vi eso, que eso como único se puede ver es en un país totalmente subdesarrollado, inhumano. Yo no sé ni cuantas cosas pudiéramos medir una persona que haga un salvajismo de eso, un barbarismo. Sí, un barbarismo, porque ya a la altura que está la humanidad no es para que se vea una cosa de esas.

"Entonces allí seguimos a Catonga, más al sur todavía de Angola. Allí también conocí, todo el hambre, la miseria, el atraso a pesar de las tribus. No solo había un pueblo nuclear, eran separados en si mismo por las tribus de allí – el Mismila, el Mbundu, el Kimbundu, el Kwanyama, y toda esa gente así. A partir de allí, en las mismas carreteras, tú entrabas en una ciudad, como Huila, antiguamente Lubango, cualquier entrada a Huila veías un letrero en la carretera que decía, que de allí para allá, si eras Mismila, con la Mismila.

"Entonces, si iba a pasar un Mbundu o un Kimbundu a la ciudad a buscar comida o algo que le interesara – ropa – tenía que pedir permiso al hombre más viejo de la tribu, que es el que autorizaba a esa persona entrar al pueblo. Tenían muchas separaciones. Por eso cuando el triunfo de la revolución en Angola, decía el líder rebelde que un sólo *povo*, una sola nación, de Cunene a Cabinda un sólo pueblo, una sola nación. Es decir que tiene un solo pueblo y una sola nación. Y está porque las ideas revolucionarias de él y todos sus dirigentes era unir, sencillamente por todas esas formas tribales que tenía la población Angolana, era unir todo el pueblo angolano. Unidos todos, a pesar de las creencias, y de todas esas cosas. Porque tú puedes creer, pero no puedes separarte de tu gente. ¿De quienes? De los Angolanos.

"Yo te estuve hablando ahora de tribus, ahora te puedo decir de grupos políticos que habían allí. Cuando yo, estaba el MPLA, que era el de Agostinho Neto. Estaba el FLEC, que era de la gente de Zaire, la gente de Mobutu, que era un tipo, un político, que también estaban metidos allí. Y fíjate cual era el interés del imperio, que toda esa gente, que ese hombre, José Samuel, era el igual de Mobutu. Mobutu, que era el presidente del Congo, de Zaire, que es el Congo, pero que antes era Zaire. Entonces estaba UNITA, que

era un movimiento que era de Savimbi, un hombre Angolano, un grupo Angolano, pero que estaban en contra del proceso revolucionario Angolano, en contra del MPLA, y estaba con intereses del imperio. Ese hombre costó trabajo, nos costó trabajo a nosotros, nos dio lucha a nosotros, y le dio lucha después cuando nos fuimos al gobierno Angolano. Ya lo mataron. Lo casaron y lo mataron. Lo mataron, se acabó Jonas Savimbi, y se acabó la guerra, ya, después el Angolano vive en paz.

"Aquello era difícil, me imagino, porque era una crueldad, el barbarismo, el atraso. Yo me recuerdo una vez que estábamos en un lugar que le decían, Bairros de Almeida, eso se llamaba Chibia. En Chibia una noche nosotros estábamos allí en el campamento del jefe y entró un loco como a las dos de la mañana. Nosotros, figúrate, entra un hombre a las dos de la mañana allí pudiera ser un enemigo. Estaba buscando comida en los calderos. Era el hambre que tenía, a lo mejor se volvió loco del hambre que pasó.

"Nosotros lo entregamos al comité. El comité allí sería a la altura de la policía. Lo mataron a palo, porque decían que si andaba allí era enemigo. Eso causó rechazo de nuestra parte. Fuimos allí y yo le dije, 'Ese hombre está enfermo. ¿Cómo ustedes van a hacer eso'? Dice que ellos no sabían eso. Dígole, 'A los presos no se le da golpes. Se mete preso, se investiga, y luego se toman las mediadas que hayan que tomar, pero medidas que estén dentro de la ley, de los estatutos. No se pueden matar'. Pero es que ellos le tienen mucho odio a los enemigos.

"Allí mismo en Chibia, yo vi otro barbarismo heredado de ese mismo sistema. Yo iba para, Cuanhama, eso está a cuatrocientos sesenta kilómetros de Huíla, donde yo me encontraba. Iba en una rastra repartiendo pan, carne, y eso. Y me encontré en Chibia

para adelante, como a un kilómetro, llegando casi, me encontré un niño que le brincó un portugués por arriba y el corazón calló como a un metro y pico así del cuerpecito de él, la cabeza por otro lado. Lo desbarató.

"Y yo le caí atrás, y le dije, 'Mataste a ese niño'! 'No, que no fui *eu'*. Le dije, 'Fuiste tú porque allí el único carro que pasó por allí fuiste tú, así que fuiste tú'. Entonces le cogí la chapa al carro y dije, 'Mira, yo no estoy en autoridad, yo soy militar y nosotros no cogemos presos, y yo no tengo autoridad angolana para detenerte, esa no es mi función aquí. Pero sí se lo voy a decir al comité que tú lo mataste'. Seguí, y les informé a los del gobierno lo que había pasado. Cuando yo regresé del comité de Chibia, que fue el mismo lugar que mataron al loco, díceme que no lo habían encontrado, que no habían hecho un testimonio.

"Es decir, son cosas que vive uno que están en contra de los principios del humanismo. Y eso es lo que fortalece a todas estas personas que tengan sentimientos. Toda aquella personas que tenga sentimientos sale fortalecía cuando ve esas cosas, esos desastres, y eso es lo que, como digo, fortalece los sentimientos como cristiano, como persona, fortalece a mis principios revolucionarios. Por eso cuando sale por allí un internacionalista, tú eres un internacionalista cuando tú ves todas esas cosas. Esas cosas que no son justas, esas cosas que van en contra los seres humanos. Nosotros los seres humanos tenemos que vivir como somos, como humanos, no como animales. Es que incluso, los mismos animales, unos a otros, se quieren, se respetan. Pudiera ser una bronca entre un animal y otro, pero se respetan. ¿Ya ves? Entonces, eso es lo que le da a nosotros los cubanos, luchar no por nosotros, sino por los demás. Esas palabras de Fidel,

que Fidel dice que puedes cambiar todo lo que haya que cambiar, es así. Esa siempre ha sido la lucha de nosotros.

"Yo fui una de la gente que menos tiempo estuvo allí [Angola], yo estuve trece meses en ese proceso. Estuve un mes aquí en Cuba preparándome para cuando llegara allí – como eran las cosas, el idioma, el dilema, que me tenía que cuidar – porque íbamos a guerra, no íbamos a un baile, era una guerra. Y también nos cuidamos de alguna enfermedad, como allí había mucho paludismo, fiebre amarilla. Allí no hay enfermeras y la fiebre no se quitaba, y estás en el medio de la selva. ¿Cómo te la quitas? Allí hay una enfermedad que mata a la gente, es como decir un SIDA, y eso es incurable.

"Entonces fui trece meses allí. Nosotros mayormente no éramos una unidad de combate, sí estábamos en zonas de combate, pero nosotros mayormente éramos una unidad de transporte del ejército. Nosotros llevábamos la logística, como la ropa, comida, combustible. Nosotros no estábamos directamente en las unidades de combate, pero sí nos movíamos para todas las unidades en todos los lugares.

"En aquel entonces Namibia era colonia de Sur África, y cuando la misión cubana, conjuntamente con la dirección del gobierno Angolano, se reúnen en Cunene para el traspaso de los intereses y de la invasión, porque Angola fue invadido por ellos [Sur África], dice un general Africano, 'nosotros hace quince días que los estamos esperando a ustedes'. Hay un general de nosotros que le contesto, 'Sí, pero hace quince días que nosotros estamos moviendo rastras de minas que ustedes pusieron en la carretera para que no pasáramos, recogiendo todas esas minas para nosotros poder pasar'.

"Yo tuve una…una… amiga mía, angolana, una mujer de treinta y pico años, una mujer muy limpia, muy limpiecita sin embargo olía mal. ¿Por qué olía mal? Porque allí

las campesinas, la mujer de campo, ellas tenían, o tienen, no, pienso que tenían porque eso era su subdesarrollo, ella no está desarrollada pero debe de tener ya otro cambio, eso hace treinta años. Esa mujer tenía tres niñas y un niño, y ella no era rica, era pobre, pobre, pobre. Ella pedía todos los días para que yo le diera pan para los niños. Yo repartía a las unidades pero yo hablaba con la gente del matadero, y decía, 'dame acá un hígado'. Me comía dos o tres bisteces. Yo salía a las ocho de la mañana y muchas veces regresaba a las doce de la noche. Eran cuatro cientos y pico de kilómetros, y por todas las unidades repartiendo.

"Para mí yo cogía cuatro, seis, siete bisteces, y el resto yo se lo daba a ella. Así era casi diario, y ella nos tuvo mucho en consideración. Entonces yo le decía, no me acuerdo ni como se llama, y yo le decía a ella, 'Yo quisiera que mi mujer y mis hijos te conocieran. ¿Tú no tienes foto?' Ella me decía que no, que ella no tenía foto. Sino le dije, 'Me hace falta que le cortes una trencita a la niña y me la des para yo llevársela a mi mujer e hijos.

Esa trenza esta hecha de mierda de vaca, de una leche de un palo que hecha mucha leche – es cremosa pero pega, nosotros la cogíamos para pegar las cartas – y leche de cabra. Entonces ella hacía una pasta con la leche de cabra, la leche del palo ese, y la mierda de vaca. La mierda era para darle cuerpo a la pasta aquella. Entonces ella le tejía la trencita a la niña, muy bonita, pero ¿olía a qué? A mierda!

"El día que yo le dije – ¿cómo se llamaba ella, carajo?, no me acuerdo como se llamaba – 'Me voy mamá'. Esa mujer lloraba. Me abrazaba y lloraba porque había quedado soltera porque le habían matado el marido, y esa mujer lloraba que qué iba hacer ahora porque yo le daba todos los días para los niños y ellos comían muchas veces una

lata de sardinas, y ellos comían. Me daba una lástima ver aquella mujer luchando por la vida, luchando por los hijos. Vivía en el atraso. Y yo me considero una persona de buen corazón, a lo mejor no. El día que me iba jugué con una tijera para cortarle la trenza, pero no porque la niña se iba a ver fea si le daba el tijerazo.

"Mi impresión es que es un país totalmente con un… muy rico, Angola es RICO! Allí hay minas de oro donde quieras. Sin embargo no coincide la riqueza con la pobreza. Allí los pobres… eso es una pobreza que eso es horrible, horrible. Pero todo está dado porque las minas que se explotaron en Angola, las explotaron las grandes compañías internacionales. Si había una Angolana [mina], eso no llega al pobre, eso sería para los ricos nada más. Allí había una pobreza indiscriminada, un subdesarrollo enorme. La gente no sabía leer, no sabía escribir, no sabía nada, nada, nada. Eso es una realidad y yo la viví allí en guerra.

"Yo recuerdo una ves que nosotros fuimos en diciembre del '76 a atender con la gente de la embajada de Cuba Angola, fuimos a atender a los combatientes en Cunene que estaban en la presa de Cunene. Yo recuerdo que cuando llegamos allí, que había un atraso tan grande porque aquella región la tenía los Kwanyamas. Los Kwanyamas son una tribu que ni hablan. Su idioma es señales tanto con la mano, con la cabeza, como el chiflado, hacer algún gesto, con eso ellos están diciendo algo pero a su forma. Oficialmente ellos como tribu no tienen un dialecto original de ellos. Suerte que había un soldado que era marido de una mujer de esas allí. Y ya la mujer decía algunas palabras. Entonces ella fue el interpreté.

"Hay pobreza también en el pueblo, pero donde está la pobreza es afuera de la ciudad. Allí [Angola] hay industria y muchas ciudades modernas, incluso más modernas

que aquí en Cuba. Luanda está lindísima, linda, linda, linda, LINDA! No tiene que envidiarle a Nueva York. No te voy a decir que es igual a Nueva York, pero así de moderno. No me estoy refiriendo a los habitantes ni nada de eso, pero lindísmo, las calles limpiecitas y todo. Pero no salgas de allí a medio kilómetro! Las ciudades todas tienen desarrollo. ¿Dónde está la pobreza? Hay pobreza en el pueblo, ¿pero dónde está la pobreza? Fuera de la ciudad. Hay pobreza. Tú veías todas esas cosas – la gente con taparrabo, con arcos y flechas. Allí veías a una mujer con taparrabo! ¿Dime tú? ¡Increíble!

"Mujeres que tú veías con las manos toscas – ¡mujeres! Entonces tú las veías, las feas pobres, pero tenían aquella cosa de ser una gente limpia, educada, pero una educación que está dentro del nivel de ella, dentro de su quimbo. Pero cuando entra el desarrollo, ¿que es lo que necesita el país, cualquier país sea rico o pobre? Necesita al hombre, lo necesita para que trabaje, para que pague para los otros, entonces allí tú los ves [los hombres] comiendo *fúnji*, tomando, ¿cómo le decían ellos?, un vinito que hacían de fruta y maíz, no me acuerdo como se llamaba.

"Entonces esa es la vida, el atraso, la falta de nivel de la gente, de los mismo que dirigían ese país que no querían que ellos avanzaran. ¿Cómo un régimen inhumano puede tener a sus pies y tenerlo como nada al hombre? No enseñarle nada, no dejar que se desarrolle, porque el hombre cuando se desarrolla, cuando el hombre empieza a desarrollarse empieza a pensar, a pensar como vivir, como encaminarse, tener todo lo que no pudo tener atrás. Entonces ya cuando el hombre es así ya tú no lo puedes dominar. Tú tienes que mostrar que tú eres bueno, porque si le demuestras que tú eres malo o tú sigues con tu forma opresiva, te odian y te hacen la guerra.

"Hay gente ya con cierto nivel, pero eso no es fácil encontrarlo. Son muchos los Angolanos que han venido aquí a Cuba y se han hecho hasta médico porque siguen estudiando. Cuba por muchos años tenía niños huérfanos aquí que se educaron. Allí hay mucha incultura, mucha, demasiada. No hay comparación, cuando tú ves allí un campesino, porque aquí cualquier campesino aquí en Cuba, mucho de ellos tienen hasta carro y son masetones. Allí es distinto, el campesino no tiene nada.

"Son las costumbres. Por ejemplo, en la época que yo fui allí, había una familia que tenía una niña bonita que esa si se alimentaba bien porque esa se vendía. Si la niña le decía al papá, 'Papá yo tengo novio'. 'Está bien', pero cuando el tipo le decía, 'Me voy a casar con tu hija', el papá le decía, 'Pues mira, esa niña mía vale tanto'.

"Yo conocía un policía que dio seis kwanzas por su mujer. Seis kwanzas son como doscientos dólares aquí o seis mil pesos. La kwanza tiene poco valor, son alrededor de cuarenta y tres por un dólar. Dio como veinticinco reses o algo así, más el dinero por la mujer. Ella era jovencita. Él era policía, era Angolano pero era soldado de la banda de música de los portugueses. Cuando se fueron los portugueses, él se queda en Angola, y pasa a la policía de Angola. Él nos llevaba cuando cambiábamos dinero, él era el chofer. Entonces tiene a su mujer con sus dos hijos. Esa mujer sí ya no en estaba en tapa rabo ni nada de eso! Esa mujer, ¿tú llegaste a usar o recuerda la plataforma?

Marisabel: Sí.

El Palestino: ¿Tú te acuerdas de ellas?

Marisabel: Sí.

El Palestino: Tú eras una niña.

Marisabel: Yo tengo zapatos plataformas.

El Palestino: ¿Sí? ¡Oye! Eso no se usa.

Marisabel: Se están usando otra vez.

El Palestino: Bueno, ahora se están usando unos grandes. Sí, están usándose. Bueno, cuando eso salía la plataforma, y aquí en Cuba tú veías a toda la gente en plataforma el día entero, todas las mujeres en plataforma, y ella andaba en plataforma, y bien vestida y perfumada, un perfume francés. Tú pasabas al lado de la negra aquella y era una blanca de paseo, una blanca de Cuba de paseo. Pero ya esa no era la negra del campo. Él la trajo del campo, pero ya la negra esa se civilizó.

"Entonces él [el policía] me hacía los cuentos. Si por la casualidad de la vida ella le pedía el divorcio, el padre de ella tenía que devolverle todo lo que le dio por ella. Ahora si él fuera a pedir el divorcio, lo perdiera todo. Allí hay fieles e infieles también, eso es normal, pero generalmente la mujeres allí son muy fieles. Bueno, así era la cosa, mucha incultura, mucho atraso, hambre, necesidades, calamidades, falta de educación, falta de humanismo.

The Return Home – Internationalism and a Revolutionary

Marisabel: ¿Cómo tú recuerdes ese tiempo, ese momento, hoy en día?

El Palestino: Valió la pena. Primero, Cuba no hubiese sido Cuba si Cuba no le hubiera prestado esa ayuda internacionalista que le prestó a Angola. Cuba hubiese perdido los principios del internacionalismo, pero Cuba nunca lo ha perdido. Cuba nunca lo perdió porque arrancó con Argelia, estuvo en Angola, Etiopia, y todo, y todavía Cuba tiene un ejercito regado por el mundo, en este caso de médicos, deportistas, porque los tiempos cambian.

"Yo sí lo veo de esa forma y eso, a mi persona, sí me fortaleció. En primer lugar, hay unas palabras del Che, y lideres revolucionarios, que el escalón más alto que podía tener el hombre, a pesar de ser revolucionario, era ser internacionalista, porque para el Che el internacionalismo era una cosa vital para él, y para el hombre. Para el hombre de lucha, el hombre revolucionario, sea de un país u otro, no solamente en Cuba, el revolucionario está en todos los países del mundo. Se manifiestan de una forma u otra, por ejemplo en el Perú el partido revolucionario es el partido de izquierda. Ya en Chile no, en Chile hay otra cosa. Generalmente la izquierda es la gente revolucionaria en cualquier país.

"Y eso [experiencia en Angola] me enseñó a mí muchas cosas, me enseñó a conocer como piensa el hombre fuera de mi país, como piensa otra gente. Como piensas tú, por ejemplo, que no eres Cubana, que eres Americana. ¿Estás viendo? Me ayudó mucho. Tú ves que tú me estás entrevistando, me estás haciendo entrevistas desde …!coño!… y yo aprendo de ti. Yo estoy aprendiendo de ti, porque primero yo veo tu sentimientos, veo tus sentimientos que no son sentimientos malos, son unos sentimientos humanos, que entiende bien las cosas. Hay quien entiende las de Cuba a la forma que le dicen. Pero hay aquellas personas que están en contra de tus ideas pero conociéndose, estudia, no las manifiesta, no las ve a la forma tuya, pero las conoce.

"Así que sí, yo pienso que realmente me ayudó. Cuando yo conocí a la gente, conocí a la vida de la gente de Namibia, no mucho, pero conocí a la gente de Namibia, como piensan esos cristianos, como lucharon, cuantas cosas, cuantos agradecimientos a nuestra era, nuestra causa, y por el cual nosotros los ayudamos. Estuve en Guinea, vi la gente de Guinea, se veía el pueblo, como nos veía a nosotros.

"Yo me voy a morir pero tengo mi consciencia tranquilita que no le hice daño a nadie, que ayudé, que ninguno de nosotros le puso un dedo a un Angolano, nunca. A uno nada más se le ocurrió y abusó de una Angolana y lo fusilaron. Ochoa [lo] mandó a fusilar, y lo mandó a fusilar por haber matado a una Angolana. No sé exactamente, pero que la mató la mató, le costó la vida, y Ochoa mandó a fusilar.

"Después Ochoa fue una gente que se desvío totalmente, no contra la revolución cubana, pero contra principios de la revolución, que es [el] respeto y eso. Y el tipo tenía hasta negocios con colmillos de elefantes, con drogas, de todo, y lo fusilaron. Nosotros nunca le pusimos un dedo a nadie, y nunca trajimos nada, nada, nada porque a nosotros no nos deben nada, el agradecimiento y nada más. A mí Angola no me debe nada. A mí Angola no me debe nada.

"Ni el estado nos dio nada. Hoy tú vas a Angola y el gobierno Angolano te da, pero en aquel entonces no daban na'. Primero porque no había desarrollo, no tenía nada. Así que nosotros fuimos bastante de malas.

Marisabel: Cuando tú regresaste, ¿cómo te sentías, qué hiciste?

El Palestino: Por su costumbre, el Angolano, te hablo del campesino, de la gente sin cultura, ellos se lavan las manos, los pies, y la cara. Y el resto nada. Tenían una peste, en verdad es peste. Es que la persona de color realmente tiene peste. Es un olor un poco extraño, un grajo un poco extraño.

"Entonces yo salí y ya después de un año mirando todo aquello, todas esas cosas, la peste, la no sé que. Yo me fui en barco, estuve navegando veinticinco días, pero vine en avión. Ya en avión son catorce horas nada más. Cuando nosotros veníamos por Puerto Rico ya se veía, aunque no estábamos en tierra, pero se veía, no sé o es idea que

yo me hacía, pero era otro ambiente todo el avión, ya tú respirabas algo diferente. Porque bueno, corría en primer lugar el aire acondicionado del avión, el oxígeno, la comida, un caramelito, una aeromoza que pasaba al lado tuyo – cuando aquello yo nada más tenía treinta y tres añitos, estaba atorado! Así que no sé, cuando veníamos por Puerto Rico ya veíamos las cosas, no sé, un poco más, no sé.

"Eran como las cinco de la tarde y había caído mucho agua aquí, entonces se veía un sol después de un agua que cae el sol así que lindo, ya tenía unas ganas de estar aquí, de llegar a mi casa ya. Llegando a la Habana cuando el avión aterrizó, que lindo estaba aquello. Habían unos charcos en la pista cuando el avión llegó, todo el agua salía volando.

"Cuando yo llegué a la Habana yo veía los niños tan lindos, unas cosas así, para mí que brillaban, que los habían fregado o algo. Un olorcito más rico aquellos niños. Aunque fueran muy limpios y eso eran lindos. Pa' mí los cubanos son lindos. Pa' mí los cubanos son lindos y están bien vestidos siempre, verdad que son lindos.

"Porque para tú conocer la vida, el que es de Cuba tiene que salir de Cuba. Si tú te quedas en Cuba, tú te crees que Cuba es un desastre! No! Sale de Cuba para que tú veas! Incluso en países más adelantados que nosotros tienen ese problema, porque Cuba está todo el mundo en uniforme todos los días, aquí en Cuba no hay un niño que no trae uniforme, ni uno sólo. Tú vas por ahí un país de esos, como Angola, y pobrecitos, descalzos, sin un zapatico.

"Entonces cuando vi a mis hijos, ¡ay que cosa más linda! Habían más de quinientas personas esperándome allí. Cuando regresé la gente me recibían como si yo era un dios, me estaban esperando. En el trabajo mi hicieron una fiesta, con como trece

cajas de cerveza y puerco asado. Como nos admiraban a nosotros cuando aquello. Éramos dos, yo y otro tipo. Nos pusieron una mesa para la familia mía y la del otro compañero. Una mesa! Y alrededor todas las mesas con todos los trabajadores. Todo el mundo tomando cerveza! Aquello fue lo más grande de la vida! Lo más grande de la vida!

"Pero yo me fui a Angola escondido. Cuando aquello era secreto. Yo tenía un pasaporte que era para Angola, pero acaso de eso tenías que brincar a Zaire, ver como tú llegabas a la embajada de Zaire, y de Zaire ir a la Unión Soviética. Y de allí te decían a donde tú ibas o lo que tenías que hacer, pero era escondido.

"Ya eso son cosas desclasificadas, que tiene mucho valor, pero que ya no es secreto del estado. Cuando yo fui para Angola me citaron seis oficiales del ejercito aquí. Como yo también era de alta militar, el primero me preguntó, ¿'Usted sabe porque ha venido aquí'? Yo dije que sí. A mí nunca me habían citado. Dice el oficial, ¿'Usted está dispuesto a cumplir alguna misión fuera de Cuba'? Dije, 'Ahora mismo'. Esas fueron mis palabras, 'Ahora mismo'.

"Dice, 'Tenga preparado ropa interior, cepillo, y pasta, en cualquier momento usted es llamado. Y me llamaron el 4 o 6 de diciembre del '75. Me metí el 31 de diciembre todo movilizado! No vi más a mi familia, a mis hijos que estaban chiquiticos hasta el '77, hasta el 8 de marzo del '77.

"Me dijeron una misión fuera de Cuba. 'Ahora mismo'. Y sin ningún interés de nada. Yo fui internacionalista sin interés. Soy militante del partido, sin interés. Y nadie me puso una pistola en el pecho para que hiciera eso. No, no, no, fui por mi voluntad, por mi consciencia y formación revolucionaria. Es que hay gente que están equivocados.

Esa palabra ‘revolucionario’ encierra tantas cosas – responsabilidad, patriotismo, sacrificio. ¿Que implica la palabra? Sacrificio. No puede haber una persona revolucionaria que tenga el carro del año o tener un millón de pesos. No, el revolucionario no es así, el revolucionario es sacrificio nada más. Sí puedes tener dinero si trabajaste, honradamente.

“Ser revolucionario es mucho sacrificio. Eso mismo, cuando fuimos a Angola cuando muchos se quedaron aquí, ya estábamos sacrificando, poniendo el pecho para que no me mataran, me podían matar, porque no fui a pasear ni nada de eso. Fui a una guerra. Eso es sacrificio, eso es internacionalismo, eso es hacer por los demás, eso es amor a la patria. Yo soy Cubano, amo a mi Cuba, tenga problemas o no, pero soy Cubano, y amo a mi patria, donde yo nací, donde me crié, donde conozco a la gente, donde hablo la misma idioma con mi gente. El revolucionario tiene que ser principalmente patriota, es mi patria, la quiero. Tú pudieses ser un contrarrevolucionario pero seguir Cubano. Pero hay mucha gente que dice, ‘Yo soy Cubano pero yo no me quedo aquí’. Pudo haber sido por pendejo, por cobarde. Es mi patria, aquí nací, aquí me muero.

APPENDIX C

MAP OF CUBA



APPENDIX D

MAP OF ANGOLA



Map No. 3727 Rev. 4 UNITED NATIONS August 2006

Department of Field Support Cartographic Section

APPENDIX E

INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Participants	Phenotype		
	Black/Mulatto	White	Total
Angolan Intervention Veteran	14	7	21
Ethiopian Intervention Veteran	2	2	4
Angolan-Cuban	9	0	9
Family and friends of veterans/non-combatants			>100

APPENDIX F

RACIAL STATISTICS IN CUBA

1) CIA Statebook:

Population: 11,477,459 (July 2010 estimate)

Ethnic groups:

White 65.1%; Mulatto and Mestizo 24.8%; Black 10.1% (2002 census)

https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html

2) AfroCuba Web:

Some observers estimate that over 70% of the Cubans inside Cuba are of African descent. Both the Cuban government and analysts at the US State Department and the CIA used to agree on a number around 63%. In the 2002 census, the proportions were reversed, which any one walking down any street in Cuba will find absurd - this came about because the Cuban government allowed for self-identification, something no longer accepted internationally, as among UN demographers. Yet these numbers are used to justify racial mixes in many settings, such as professional schools or in the tourism business, where light skinned Cubans hold the preponderance.

http://afrocubaweb.com/raceident.htm

3) Statistics from Bardach monograph:

Black 11/%, Mixed Race or Mulatto 51%; White 38%

(Bardach 2010: 218)

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