Book Proposal materials by Susana Peña

Field of Study: Ethnic Studies, Sociology, Queer Studies

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Dear Richard Morrison,


During this stigmatized migration, the Cuban state, U.S. media, and Cuban Americans already living in Miami portrayed the new entrants as “undesirables,” identifying “flamboyant” gender transgressive male homosexuals or *locas* as one of the group’s undesirable elements. This book examines the cultures that emerged out of complex intersections between the lived practices of Cuban American gay men and State practices of identification and repression in both Cuba and the U.S.

*Oye Loca* is an interdisciplinary study that draws on a wide variety of sources including: in-depth interviews with Cuban American gay men and cultural activists; participant observation of gay male social centers; archival analysis of documents related to the Mariel resettlement camps and the sponsorship drive for the gay Mariel immigrants; and discourse analysis of gay Latino productions, including printed publicity materials and drag shows.

University of Minnesota Press would be an ideal publisher for this manuscript because of your demonstrated commitment to cutting edge scholarship in GLBT/Queer Studies, Critical American Studies, and Latin American and Caribbean Studies. As you will see from the prospectus, *Oye Loca* builds off of Eithne Luibhéid’s foundational work on immigration and sexuality, *Entry Denied* (2002). In addition, my book contributes to a growing literature that articulates a Queer of Color critique. University of Minnesota has published two of the most important books in this field: Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* (2004) and José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications* (1999). This book is also in dialogue several texts in the Cultural Studies of the Americas series including José Quiroga’s *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005). Finally, my own work was included in the collection, *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (2005), edited by Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú. I believe my book will be an especially strong contribution to the Critical American Studies series edited by George Lipsitz.

The enclosed prospectus includes a detailed description the book manuscript, chapter outlines, manuscript details and a discussion of the intended audiences. In addition, I have included my c.v. and sample chapters.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Book Prospectus

Oye Loca: The Making of Cuban American Gay Male Miami

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Summary

The 1980 Mariel boatlift was a turning point in Miami’s Cuban American and gay histories. During only a few months in 1980, 125,000 Cubans entered the U.S. as part of that massive migration. Many homosexual men and women migrated to the U.S. during the Mariel Boatlift partially as a response to a particularly repressive era in Cuba in relation to homosexuality. The U.S. media, the Cuban State, and Cuban Americans already living in Miami portrayed the new entrants as “undesirables,” identifying “flamboyant” gender transgressive male homosexuals or locas as one of the group’s undesirable elements. As a highly stigmatized and disparaged migration, Mariel challenged the relatively privileged position of Cold War Cuban American immigrants in the U.S. national imaginary. My work begins with this moment of cultural collision. It examines discourses about Mariel that both sensationalized and silenced the gay presence, the challenges faced by homosexual men who entered as part of the boatlift, and the emergent Cuban American gay culture that transformed Miami’s ethnic and sexual landscapes.

“Oye Loca: The Making of Cuban American Gay Male Miami” traces the development of Cuban American gay male culture in Miami, Florida beginning with the Mariel migration. More specifically, it analyzes how that culture emerged out of complex intersections between the lived practices of Cuban American gay men and State practices of identification and repression in both Cuba and the U.S. “Oye Loca” is an interdisciplinary study that draws on a wide variety of sources including: in-depth interviews with Cuban American gay men and cultural activists; participant observation of gay male social centers; archival analysis of documents related to the Mariel resettlement camps and the sponsorship drive for the gay Mariel immigrants; and discourse analysis of gay Latino productions, including printed publicity materials and drag shows. The book’s central questions include: What is the relationship between State identification of homosexual men and their cultural practices? How do migration, sexuality, and racialization intersect in the bodies, experiences, and cultures of Cuban American gay men? How are race, sexuality, nation, and gender articulated by Cuban American gay men? Do these articulations vary according to immigrant generation, race, phenotype, class, and gender identification?

The book begins with an introduction and then is divided into two sections. Part I (Chapters 2 - 3) provides a historical analysis of events surrounding the Mariel boatlift. Focusing on the shifting identifications, mobilizations, and repressions of homosexual men in Cuba and the U.S. in the periods preceding and immediately following the boatlift (1977-early 1980s), this section highlights the ways in which repression of male homosexuals in Cuba and the U.S. was associated with gender transgressions and the relationship between state identification of homosexuals and gay cultures. Part II (Chapters 4 - 7) provides an ethnographic
analysis of Cuban American gay culture in Miami from the 1990s to the present. Discussing the experiences of both Cuban-born and U.S.-born Cuban American gay men, I analyze different aspects of gay culture including constructions of Cuba, use of language, and the production of gendered discourses.

ANOTED TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the introduction, I discuss the tension between the visibility of Cuban gay men and the silencing strategies used to erase and control this population. This tension, which re-emerges throughout the book, is introduced with a preliminary discussion of the 1980 Mariel boatlift within the context of Cuban migration to the U.S. I focus on how gender transgressive male homosexuality figured in the Mariel migration.

Part I: Gay Cuban Miami??: Why Mariel Changed Sex in Miami

Chapter 2: From UMAPs to Save Our Children: Gay Visibility and Repression in Cuba and Miami before the Mariel Boatlift

This chapter deals with critical events in Cuba and the U.S. that set the stage for my analysis of contemporary Cuban American gay male culture. In Cuba, I analyze state practices of homosexual identification and repression that specifically targeted gender transgressive gay men. In the U.S., I discuss the 1977 “Save Our Children” anti-gay rights struggle in (Miami-) Dade County led by Anita Bryant. I discuss a little known group of Latino gay activists (Latinos for Human Rights) that worked with national gay rights organizations in opposition to Bryant’s campaign. In both the Cuban and U.S. contexts, I further examine the tension between gay visibility and the silencing strategies that especially targeted gender transgressive men.

Chapter 3: “Obvious Gays” And the State Gaze: Gay Visibility and Immigration Policy during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift

This chapter examines the experiences of Cuban homosexual men who entered the U.S. during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift. Drawing heavily on archival sources, I analyze how the state gaze—in Cuba and in the U.S.—identified homosexual men during this migration. I use the term gaze to describe both the methods used by the state to identify sexual populations, as well as to highlight the ways in which these identification systems intersected with state interests and desires. In Cuba, the state facilitated the exit of gender transgressive homosexuals (or “obvious” gays), a group already stigmatized by official discourses and state policies. In this case, state interests were served by clearly identifying homosexuals in order to expedite their departure. The U.S. federal government’s role in processing and identifying homosexuals was more complicated. Although Cubans had been accorded preferential treatment because of their symbolic value as people fleeing communism, homosexuals had been formally and categorically excluded by U.S. immigration policy. When the Boatlift began, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service was at a crossroads in relation to homosexual exclusion—moving from a system of excluding homosexuals with medical exclusions to a procedure where only homosexuals who provided an “unsolicited, unambiguous admission of homosexuality” to INS inspectors would be excludable. Because of its massive scale, the Mariel migration also posed procedural challenges to
systematic identification of immigrant characteristics. Finally, given the media attention focused on the Boatlift, the identification of homosexuals posed a public relations dilemma for the U.S. government. I examine these complications by focusing on the ways in which homosexual Cuban men entering the U.S. were seen and not seen by the U.S. state gaze. During the Boatlift, conflicting immigration policies and procedures clashed as men who were both Cuban and visibly gay entered the country under the glare of the media spotlight.

Part II: Cuban American Gay Culture since the 1990s

The short introduction to Part II employs an analysis of Tent City, a 1980 documentary about a Mariel temporary resettlement camp in Miami. The video documents the fleeting subculture of the Mariel gay men and provides texture to my account of this generation’s culture of visibility. I then shift to a discussion of the reception of a screening of Tent City in 2000 at a Miami event commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Mariel. This discussion helps illustrate both how much things have changed since 1980 and how much they have stayed the same. In order to contextualize my ethnography of Cuban American gay male culture, I discuss the literature on Latino/a sexualities, immigration, and an emerging Queer of Color literature that examines the intersections of race, sexuality and gender by centering the experiences of GLBTQ people of color.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Nation and Sexual Identity: Cuban American Gay Men ‘Remember’ Cuba

This chapter, the first with a primarily ethnographic slant, draws on interviews conducted with Cuban American gay men and fieldwork conducted in Cuban American gay social centers during two phases: 1998-1999 and 2004-2005. “Narratives of Nation and Sexual Identity” examines how gay men constructed ‘Cuba’ through narratives of memory, family stories, contact with recent immigrants and (more rarely) visits to the island. Their descriptions vary widely from a Cuba remembered as a romanticized site of sexual pleasure to a Cuba structured around family homophobic and heterosexual demands. The ways in which gay men constructed Cuba and its relation to sexuality had a direct impact on their own ethnic identity and their ability to integrate gay and Cuban American identities. The chapter ends with an analysis of cultural projects such as drag shows and gay Latino publications in which narratives of Cuba and sexuality are articulated and shared.

Chapter 5: Pájaration and Transculturation: Language and Meaning in Miami’s Cuban American Gay Male Worlds

This chapter explores the racial, gender, and sexual politics expressed in the linguistic practices of Cuban American gay men as they draw from U.S. and Cuban-based cultural and linguistic histories to come to grips with their own identities and experiences. I place my analysis of multilingual gay linguistic practices in the context of struggles for language autonomy by Latino/as in the South Florida area and examine how bilingual gay men of Cuban descent use Cuban Spanish, English, and Spanglish in the construction of gay communities. Specifically, I identify several linguistic strategies that Cuban American gay men use to construct their identities and to make sense of their experiences. These linguistic strategies include the creation of bilingual linguistic innovations like “pájaration” that function to center the bilingual, bicultural speaker/listener and to marginalize monolinguals. I argue that while the influence of
English and U.S. based ways of organizing and naming homosexuality is undeniable, transculturation is the most appropriate way of discussing the linguistic strategies that can be observed in Miami.

Chapter 6: Competing Discourses of Masculinity: Locas, Papis, and Muscle Queens

This is the first of two chapters that examine the meanings of gender and gender transgressions in Cuban American gay male culture in the 1990s and beyond. These chapters build on Part I which outlines the equation of male homosexuality with effeminacy and the stigmatization of gender transgression in a transnational context. This chapter highlights the relationship between this stigmatization and gay men’s investment in masculinity. The chapter is organized around three racialized discourses of masculinity that Cuban American gay men must negotiate: locas (the stigmatized gender transgressive homosexuals associated with the Mariel Boatlift), papis (the racialized Latino male), and Muscle Queens (the hypermasculine Anglo gay ideal prominent in 1990s club culture). I use discourses about masculinity to examine the silences about race (and blackness, more specifically) among Cuban American gay men. I demonstrate how racialized notions of masculinity coded in terms of gender/sexuality—and not explicitly in terms of race—function in Cuban American gay men’s self understandings.

Chapter 7: Gender Transgressions and Community Borders

This chapter explores the borders of Cuban American gay male culture as expressed in Cuban American drag performances. In my analysis of these shows, I focus on the content of the production, audience reaction, and the neighborhood context of the venue. While I problematize the centering of drag performance in a study of gay male culture, I argue nonetheless that because of the historic link between male homosexuals and gender transgressions in Cuban and Cuban-American contexts, drag queens or travestis inhabit a simultaneously marginal and privileged place in Cuban American gay male culture. Close analysis of drag performance troupe, Marytrini y Las Divas del Jacuzzi, thus allows me to further expand my discussion of the intersection of race, class, and migration-generation for gay Miami in general. The troupe is lead by a dark-skinned Cuban-born drag queen who migrated to the U.S. in the 1990’s. The troupe’s performances often draw attention to the place of blackness in Miami’s Cuban American community, gay identity and political struggles, and the relationship between drag and transgender identities. This chapter, therefore, explores the construction of race and gender in a Cuban American gay context, the particularities of the most recent generation of Cuban arrivals to Miami, and the growth of a younger pan-ethnic Latino gay audience.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Market/Audience/Existing Literature

This book will be of interest to scholars and students of Latino/a Studies, LBGT/Queer Studies, Ethnic Studies, American Studies, Sociology/Anthropology, Immigration, Cuban and Cuban-American Studies and Latin American Studies.

While several books including Emilio Bejel’s Gay Cuban Nation (Chicago 2001), Marvin Leiner’s Sexual Politics in Cuba (Westview 1994), and Ian Lumsden’s Machos, Maricones, and Gays (Temple 1996) have focused on male homosexuality in the Cuban context, no book length
study has analyzed Cuban American gay male culture in the United States. *Oye Loca* builds on these studies of homosexuality in the Cuban national context, but significantly expands and complicates this discussion by analyzing the impact of immigration on Cuban American gay culture. In addition to analyzing how Cuban and U.S. State practices identified and dealt with homosexual men, I also analyze the impact of race and ethnicity in the construction of an immigrant gay culture in the U.S.

This study also contributes to a growing literature on sexuality and immigration. Key texts in this field include Eithne Luibhéid’s *Entry Denied* (Minnesota 2002) and the edited collections *Queer Mobilizations* (edited by Martin Manalansan and Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, NYU 2002) and *Queer Migrations* (edited by Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú, Minnesota 2005). This study is distinct because it focuses closely on one racial/ethnic population in a particular urban context. By focusing on a particular population, this study allows a more sustained analysis of the relationship between immigration exclusion policies and racial/ethnic gay immigrant cultures.

In order to contextualize my analysis of race, immigration, and sexuality, I place my study in dialogue with an emerging literature on “Queer of Color Critique” that uses a materialist cultural studies approach to analyze the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Scholars such as Roderick Ferguson (*Aberrations in Black*, Minnesota 2004), Martin Manalansan (*Global Divas*, Duke 2003), José Esteban Muñoz (*Disidentifications*, Minnesota 1999), Frances Negrón-Muntaner (*Boricua Pop*, NYU 2004) and Juana Maria Rodriguez (*Queer Latinidad*, NYU 2003) have analyzed the cultures, experiences, and/or representations of queer people of color to provide a grounded analysis of the ways in which these interlocking hierarchies actually function together. *Oye Loca* further complicates this dialogue by focusing on a racial/ethnic group that often understands itself and is understood in a particular U.S. local context as white. Rather than take this white ethnic racialization at face value, this book analyzes how racialization functions precisely through gender and sexual discourses in the absence of explicit racial self-identification.

Much of the literature on Cuban Americans in the U.S. reinforces common stereotypes about this population (they are socially conservative, right wing, reactionaries, homophobic, etc.) and falls into a politicized binary in support or against the Cuban government. This book intervenes in this literature by providing a critical analysis of a Cuban American community that provides a multifaceted view of the often contradictory processes of lived cultures.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

I am currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies at Bowling Green State University. I have received dissertation and postdoctoral fellowships from the Social Science Research Council’s Sexuality Research Fellowship Program. My publications include “‘Obvious’ Gays and the State Gaze: Cuban Gay Visibility and U.S. Immigration Policy during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift,” accepted and under revision in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*; “Visibility and Silence: Mariel and Cuban American Gay Male Experience and Representation” in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, edited by Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú (University of Minnesota, 2005); and “*Oye Loca: Las identidades y la cultura masculina gay cubano-americaná*” in the Cuban journal *Temas* (1998). I received my Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2002.