



**Family  
and Identity in  
Contemporary Cuban  
and Puerto Rican  
Drama**

Camilla Stevens

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recalls Bianca, the repressed lesbian in *Quíntuples*. At the end of the film, Sofía's decision to leave the family home and to move in with another woman hints at her homosexuality. The failed marriage between Gustavo, the proudest and most conservative sibling, and his more open-minded and pragmatic wife, Pilar, has produced a bond of friendship and partnership.<sup>42</sup> Unlike Marqués's destructive solutions to cultural change, these relationships that foreground subjectivities constituted by migration, sexuality, and fellowship are indicative of the many possible organizers of Puerto Rico's collective identity.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the legacy of social and economic problems and deep political divisions led many writers to reminisce about what seemed to be a more stable era. Nevertheless, as in *Linda Sara*, this nostalgia never emerges as unproblematized or overly facile. Like in Rodríguez Juliá's album of family photographs, *Linda Sara* visually pays homage to Puerto Rican history at the same time that words and actions deconstruct this idealized past. In the theater, plays like *Hotel Melancolía* and *Callando amores* are nostalgic in their desire to preserve tradition and cultural identity, but they also suggest that the Puerto Rican historical archive be open to reinterpretations of old identity stories and the invention of new ones. By positing the translocality and the "queerness" of *puertorriqueñidad*, plays like *Quíntuples* and *El gran circo eukraniano* offer ways to conceive of identity beyond the discourses of colonialism and nationalism. Although these plays regard paternalist constructions of the family and the nation with suspicion, they do reveal some yearning for the sense of community and stability of the past implicit in earlier portrayals of the national family. In the context of postmodernity, however, it is understood that there are no originary good old days to which to return or any totalizing definitions of Puerto Rico's past, present, or future collective experience. The families represented onstage in recent Puerto Rican drama instead guide audiences to imagine a collective identity informed by difference and change.

## Scene 2



### Ties That Bind

#### Staging the New Family in Revolutionary Cuba

The 1959 Revolution led by Fidel Castro set the Cuban family and nation on a new course. If in prerevolutionary plays generational conflict highlights a Cuban identity repressed by political authoritarianism and neo-colonialism, then the Revolution's quest to build a socialist society and the ideal citizen—the "new man"—further exemplifies the imperfect or mutable quality of the Cuban character. The Revolution thus adds another layer to a national identity characterized by transculturation, a process by which contact between various cultures produces a distinct, syncretic culture.<sup>1</sup> While the revolutionary goal of reshaping Cuban identity exposes its constructedness, the idea that the "new" way to be Cuban would rectify a mistaken, bourgeois identity also suggests a fixed (static and perfected) identity envisioned within Marxist terms. In revolutionary society, to be Cuban is to show *conciencia*, the socialist values of dedication, selflessness, cooperation, and loyalty. Mass organizations, schools, the media, and the workplace form this new Cuban identity and redirect loyalties from the family, the Catholic Church, Afro-Cuban religions, and other components of traditional Cuban culture to the nation—now synonymous with the Communist state.

In an effort to change people's consciousness and create a socialist culture, Castro's government has also invested in cultural projects. The theater, for example, has served for many years as a public arena for discussing the problems encountered in constructing a new nation. As a part of

this building process, it has been crucial for the Revolution to imbue the family, the basic cell of society, with socialist values. This chapter argues that the family play in post-1959 Cuba both assumes the didactic goal of enacting the changing role of the family in revolutionary society and operates as a barometer of the Revolution's performance, serving as a space from which playwrights examine critically the status of their nation. *La emboscada* [The ambush] by Roberto Orihuela and *Ni un sí ni un no* [No arguments] by Abelardo Estorino stage the formation of new socialist subjectivities in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. These plays participate in the state's project of transforming traditional conceptions of the family and clarifying the role of the family in the Revolution. The collapse of the Soviet bloc (1989–91), however, has forced the Cuban government to focus on economic survival and on refashioning a political ideology that distances itself from Marxist-Leninist socialism. Thus plays from this period, such as *Manteca* [Lard] by Alberto Pedro Torriente and *Vereda tropical* [Tropical path] by Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez, portray the family in a much more fragile state than in the earlier works. These later plays reveal the toll the Revolution has taken on the family unit and a turn toward familial self-sufficiency. If the state is no longer in the paternalist position of being able to provide for "la gran familia cubana," or the nation, then it must allow individual families increased autonomy. At the same time, a more open cultural climate in the 1990s enabled dramatists to express more contentious views of the Revolution.

The relative use of realism in family plays by Orihuela, Estorino, Pedro, and Cuartas provides diverse ways of communicating with the spectator/reader. Although the regime has never enacted a formal policy stipulating a revolutionary aesthetic such as social realism, most plays from the late 1960s through the late 1980s use realism to represent current Cuban themes from the perspective of legitimizing the Revolution. In recent years, though, some playwrights have employed the more experimental techniques rejected in the late 1960s to criticize the government subtly and evade censorship. Conversely, plays that depict Cuba's contemporary problems too directly may meet with more official resistance. In the use of realism, then, we can see how Cuban playwrights negotiate with shifting contextual factors, including what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "field of cultural production," in order to send their messages, whether supportive or critical of the Revolution. For Bourdieu,

"to speak of 'field' is to recall that literary works are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws" (163). In Cuba's social universe, the fields of literature and culture are inextricably linked with state socialist institutions.

### A New Family for a New Cuba

When Fidel Castro and the 26 of July revolutionary movement triumphantly reached Havana on January 1, 1959, they moved swiftly to effect radical political and economic changes. By 1961, Castro had strained relations with the United States and many middle- and upper-class Cubans by signing an agrarian reform act that expropriated farmlands over a thousand acres and prohibited foreign ownership of land, by nationalizing all U.S. business and commercial property, and by signing a trade agreement in which the Soviets would supply the island with crude oil and other products for Cuban sugar.<sup>2</sup> In this same year, the United States broke diplomatic relations with the island, and Cuban troops defeated the invasion of anti-Castro exiles—supported and trained by the United States—at Playa Girón. With the Revolution, Cuba had finally achieved the national sovereignty and self-determination so fundamental to its concept of national identity.

The notion of a new Cuban citizen played an important role in the ideology that fueled the early years of the Revolution. Rather than following the socialist precept that cultural change must follow the construction of a solid economic foundation, the revolutionary leaders sought to forge a Communist *conciencia* simultaneously with the material base of their society.<sup>3</sup> Ernesto "Che" Guevara, a major figure in the revolutionary vanguard, provided the concept of the *hombre nuevo* [new man] that would guide the creation of revolutionary *conciencia*.<sup>4</sup> Che's theory of a new citizen emerges from several speeches and essays. In "The Duty of a Revolutionary Doctor" (1960), for example, he calls specifically for medical professionals to join the revolutionary movement and generally for Cubans to examine their lives "with critical zeal in order to reach the conclusion that almost everything that we thought and felt before the Revolution should be filed and a new type of human being should be created" (258). In a 1965 essay, Guevara alludes to how the new Cuban must be constructed: "it is necessary to develop a consciousness in which values acquire new categories. Society as a whole must become a



gigantic school" ("Socialism" 159). The state will educate the new men and women, but Cubans must also commit to a process of self-education to rid themselves of defects of the past. The new Cuban, affirms Guevara, will reject the past by redefining concepts such as individualism to reflect revolutionary values ("Duty" 260). Thus collective advancement rather than personal gain will motivate the new citizen, providing him or her with "great inner wealth and many more responsibilities" ("Socialism" 167). In short, Guevara and other revolutionary leaders envisioned a new socialist ethic that would transform Cuban society by liberating the island of capitalist cultural ills such as materialism, selfishness, elitism, corruption, sexism, and racism. This ideological idealism motivated the revolutionary movement's initial goals of dismantling the capitalist system and introducing socialist values and institutions.

The failure to meet the all-important goal of a 10-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970, however, forced the Revolution to take a more pragmatic turn. In this decade, Cuba solidified its relationship with the Soviet Union by adopting a similar political and economic system, by signing trade and aid agreements with the superpower, and by sending troops to Africa to support Marxist internationalism. At the same time, to correct the overcentralization that had developed during the crucial first years of the Revolution, the regime emphasized popular participation in decision making and made reforms to give mass organizations more power. These changes institutionalized the Revolution and culminated in the 1976 constitution. The 1974 national meeting of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas [Federation of Cuban Women] (FMC) and the subsequent involvement of this organization in drafting the Cuban Family Code exemplifies how the government encouraged mass participation in resolving problems that had evolved in the transition from a bourgeois Republic to a socialist state.

Women's integration into the Revolution began in the early 1960s with their participation in literacy campaigns, counterrevolutionary militias, and Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution] (CDR). The economic mobilization of the late 1960s involved women in the national economy on a massive level for the first time. As many studies have shown, rapidly changing gender roles strained the traditional Cuban family to the breaking point. Alfred Padula and Lois Smith point out how the Revolution put pressure on women who were "now called upon to excel at work, to volunteer, to

study, to participate in sports and politics, and to raise families—to be super women" (79).<sup>5</sup> Conjugal tensions mounted as many men resisted adapting their role in the family to help with housework and child rearing. The increased participation of the state in the socialization and education of children through day care, boarding schools, and government-sponsored recreational activities also altered family relations by weakening the formerly powerful roles of the patriarch and matriarch. Parents were expected, in turn, to become further involved in the Revolution by studying at night school or working in distant provinces and foreign countries.<sup>6</sup> Participation in revolutionary activities forced behavioral changes that impacted Cuban family life, but, as we will see, prerevolutionary attitudes toward gender roles persisted.

In 1974, the Cuban government presented a draft of the new Cuban Family Code that began a nationwide discussion on the changing relationships between husband and wife and parents and children at meetings of the FMC and the Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos [Confederation of Cuban Workers] (CTC), at block meetings, and on the streets. The code, adopted on February 14, 1975, implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of creating a new Cuban family. In contrast to some Marxist views of the family, by labeling the family "the elementary cell of society," the code recognizes its beneficial role in the socialization of new generations (Cuba Council of Ministers 217).<sup>7</sup> The code also implies that, realistically, the state cannot fully socialize the household through laundries, cafeterias, and day care. Therefore, it must regulate family relations so that the domestic sphere reflects socialist principles.<sup>8</sup> Article 26 of the code illustrates well the revolutionary vision of the family and the relationship between the sexes: "Both partners must care for the family they have created and each must cooperate with each other in the education, upbringing, and guidance of the children according to the principles of socialist morality. They must participate, to the extent of their capacity or possibilities, in the running of the home, and cooperate so that it will develop in the best possible way" (Cuba Council of Ministers 222). Furthermore, the code stipulates that both partners must share housework and child care even when one of them stays at home and the other provides the family's financial support. Cuban couples must agree to the above article, as well as several others, as a part of their marriage contract. Although the code has undoubtedly made a great impact on Cuban society, cinematic and theatrical representations of Cuban families suggest

that the process of creating a Cuban family that embodies the *conciencia* of the new Cuban is slow, because social attitudes toward gender roles and the family are resistant to change.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, the Cuban government overestimated the degree of revolutionary zeal that a supposedly "malleable" young generation formed under socialism would display.<sup>10</sup> In 1980, over 10,000 Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in hopes of receiving political asylum, forcing Castro to allow a mass departure of refugees from the port of Mariel. Of the 125,000 Cubans who left, 41 percent were under the age of twenty-seven, which placed the success of political socialization of young people in doubt (Fernández, "Youth in Cuba" 198). The mass departure also contradicts official representations of a united socialist national family. The visit of 100,000 exiled Cubans in 1979 might have contributed to the exodus because it made the island population more aware of its limited access to consumer goods (Skidmore and Smith 274).

To alleviate the people's impatience for a higher standard of living, and in an effort to enhance economic performance, the government responded by permitting some market-type activities. By 1986, however, Castro ended the experiment with market mechanisms because it sparked inequalities and corruption. Abolishing the markets formed part of a government campaign to rectify negative trends such as bureaucratic inefficiency, profiteering, and lackluster political participation. The rectification campaign also attempted to re-ignite revolutionary fervor by calling for ideological purification and the return of moral incentives and volunteerism. Even though the regime showed some flexibility and tolerance for contending perspectives, it is doubtful that invoking Guevarian ideals had much resonance with young people.

To complicate matters, the ideological collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union placed Cuba in a politically and economically unstable position. Cuba entered what Castro has called the "Special Period in Times of Peace" in which the rapidly deteriorating economy—upon the breakup of the Soviet Union, the island lost about \$6 billion in annual subsidies and a very favorable trade policy—has forced Cubans to endure strict austerity measures. The state can no longer provide some basic necessities and social services, and it has become harder to justify deprivations in the name of socialist principles. For political survival, yet still within the parameters of an authoritarian regime, Castro has softened some of the con-

stitution's totalitarian features.<sup>11</sup> As the father figure of the paternalist state, Castro must entrust his children, "la gran familia cubana," with more autonomy. Consequently, the family, as Smith and Padula explain, "is again emerging as the preeminent social institution in Cuba. Family networks will grow in importance as food and other resources become scarce. They are already serving as the fulcrum of nascent resistance to the Castro regime" (*Sex and Revolution* 167). What kind of Cuban family and nation will emerge from the crisis of the Special Period remains to be seen, but the postrevolutionary generation's critical view of the regime suggests major changes on the horizon.

### Theater and Revolutionary Culture

Louis Althusser's theory on how the state achieves social control locates both the family and the theater in what he calls an ideological state apparatus. These are institutions (cultural, religious, political, and so forth) that control subjects through ideology as opposed to state apparatuses such as the army, the police, and prisons that operate through violence (Althusser 145). Cuban plays that focus on the family to depict the conflict of coexisting prerevolutionary and new socialist values, then, represent a particularly potent tool in shaping a new national family. In order for cultural activities such as theater to make an impact on people's revolutionary consciousness, however, the Cuban government first had to create a popular culture. Its initial task was to eradicate illiteracy, as this would not only create an audience for the new Cuban art but would also benefit the entire revolutionary process. In 1961, society literally became the giant classroom Guevara had envisioned, for an estimated 270,000 volunteers divided in different programs worked in all areas of the country to raise Cuba's adult literacy to 96 percent (Pérez 358–59).<sup>12</sup> The state next sought to democratize culture by making it accessible to all. For many years, government-funded, neighborhood Casas de Cultura have offered free cultural activities, such as classes in photography, art, and dance, and have sponsored art exhibits and theatrical and musical performances. Mass organizations such as unions have also encouraged adult participation in amateur theater and in music and dance groups.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, to facilitate the work of the intellectual vanguard, within the first three years of the Revolution important cultural institutions such ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Arts and Indus-



try), Casa de las Américas [House of the Americas], Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba [Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba] (UNEAC), and a national school of fine arts, the Cubanacán, were established.

As the infrastructure of cultural institutions developed, so did a cultural policy that made it difficult for artists to address critically the changing nature of the nation and the family. In a 1961 speech to intellectuals, Castro stated that culture should be the patrimony of the people, and he called on the intelligentsia to support the Revolution. His famous statement, "Dentro de la Revolución, todo. Fuera de la Revolución, nada" (Castro 18) [Within the Revolution everything. Outside the Revolution, nothing], addressed the problem of artistic freedom. A shift in cultural policy took place between the early 1960s and the 1970s, and by 1968 the line between what was "within" the Revolution and "against" the Revolution had become rigid. Officials cracked down on writers such as Antón Arrufat and Heberto Padilla for the "counterrevolutionary" nature of their work, and some went so far as to advocate socialist realism as the appropriate revolutionary aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> At the 1971 First National Congress on Education, Castro lashed out against "pseudo-leftist" intellectuals and homosexuals, and statements from the 1975 First Congress of the Communist Party reinforced a hard line on the political purpose of culture. Revolutionary cultural policy has been volatile and has changed in accordance with how editorial committees define "against" the Revolution. Moreover, the degree of confidence of the revolutionary regime itself determines what is considered counterrevolutionary. The ambiguity of what constitutes an appropriately revolutionary stance is the policy's greatest strength because it forces artists to censor themselves.

Gerardo Mosquera affirms that, at the end of the 1970s, a new generation of artists formed in the postrevolutionary period broke with the dogmatism of the cultural politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s (60). Furthermore, the relationship between artists and intellectuals and the bureaucrats of cultural institutions has become less tense in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1988 UNEAC congress proposed cutting bureaucratization in the artistic sphere, creating more dialogue between the official cultural apparatus and Cuban writers, and distancing the UNEAC from the Communist Party (P. T. Johnson 157). The congress reflected a political climate more open to pluralist visions of the Revolution. Arturo Arango maintains that Cuba's release from its ideological bond with the Soviet Union has further contributed to a new sense of freedom (125).

Cuba's profound domestic crisis—the Special Period—to some extent has forced government officials to be more lenient with critical interpretations of Cuban society because of the gap between the media's "official" representation of the situation and reality.

Rather than producing art oriented toward forming the new Cuban's revolutionary *conciencia*, in the 1980s and 1990s artistic works are more apt to examine the imperfections of the new national family formed by the Revolution. Less focused on direct communication and functionality, writers are freer to experiment with language and form and to write on topics not explicitly revolutionary. Conversely, they have been able to address formerly taboo topics more directly, such as homosexuality in Senel Paz's story "El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo" [The wolf, the forest, and the new man] (1991), which was the basis for the screenplay of the successful film *Fresa y chocolate* [Strawberry and chocolate], directed by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea and Juan Carlos Tabío (1993). Writers who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s and had experienced the disjunction between official history and their daily life experiences were uninspired by the values embodied by the Guevarian *hombre nuevo*, "a profoundly humanistic ideal which subsequently exposed them to empty slogans and schemas, clichés devoid of any real meaning" (Mateo Palmer 161–62). Many of these artists display a postmodern mistrust of the mythical *hombre nuevo* and the master narrative of scientific communism, an obligatory subject in school they have renamed "ciencia ficción" [science fiction] (Mosquera 61). While young artists may feel frustrated with the regime and the failings of socialism, their commitment to Cuba shows in their special interest in national culture and history. Moreover, their postmodernism is unique to their national experience, because many of their works still communicate faith in history and the utopia of social justice (Mateo Palmer 166).

On numerous levels, theatrical performance chronicles the different phases I have outlined in the creation of a new Cuban society and culture: euphoric idealism, pragmatism and orthodoxy, and decentralization and self-sufficiency. During the first decade of the Revolution, state sponsorship finally offered playwrights and theater groups the support to produce a national theater movement. In these early years characterized by experimentation and creativity, the Cuban stage saw productions of classic and avant-garde plays by international dramatists, as well as works by a new generation of Cuban authors.<sup>15</sup> By 1967, however, the climate of

ideological orthodoxy had permeated the theater, and plays that did not represent a recognizable social reality came under suspicion as decadent, elitist, and potentially counterrevolutionary. This oppressive environment hampered the staging and publication of works by some of Cuba's best playwrights, such as Antón Arrufat, Virgilio Piñera, and José Triana. At the same time, at the 1967 Primer Seminario Nacional de Teatro [First National Theater Seminar], theater practitioners examined the role of their art form in a budding socialist society. Rine Leal writes: "acogieron el principio de que el arte [. . .] esté al alcance del pueblo, pero no a través de lo populachero o el paternalismo. El nacimiento de un teatro popular (realmente del pueblo) se ligó al surgimiento de públicos masivos, y muy especialmente a la formación integral del hombre nuevo" (152) [they embraced the principle that art [. . .] should be within the reach of the people, but not fall into vulgarity or paternalism. The birth of a popular theater (truly of the people) was linked to the emergence of massive audiences, and very particularly to the integral formation of the new man]. In this spirit, Sergio Corrieri initiated the Cuban Teatro Nuevo [Cuban New Theater] movement by founding Grupo Teatro Escambray in 1968. This movement offered artists a forum for exploring, from a prorevolutionary stance, the changing identity of the Cuban nation.

Like the New Dramatists movement (NDP) in Puerto Rico during the 1960s and 1970s and similar popular theater movements in other Latin American countries, the Cuban groups abandoned the proscenium stage in search of new spaces and audiences for their collectively created pieces. Specifically, the label "Teatro Nuevo" in Cuba applies to a popular, anti-bourgeois theater that emerged from an interactive relationship between the theater groups and their public. Corrieri's group worked in a province in the remote Escambray mountains, as did Flora Lauten's Teatro La Yaya. Other groups performed in working-class neighborhoods in urban Havana and Santiago de Cuba. Teatro Nuevo plays dealt with immediate issues relevant to the island's socialist transformation: land reform, the struggle against counterrevolutionaries, the changing role of women, and the clash between new and old morals and behaviors.<sup>16</sup> By using a particular area as a base, the groups oftentimes had prolonged relationships with their public and became invested in resolving the problems they represented in their plays. This linked their interest in improving their art with the development of a strong revolutionary *conciencia*. Likewise, by involving peasants, workers, and students as actors, the

plays not only engaged the audience in a critical reflection on the difficulties of constructing a new society but also allowed those affected the most by the changes literally to become "actors" in the revolutionary process of creating a new Cuban citizen, family, and nation.

The Teatro Nuevo movement participated effectively in officially sanctioned cultural production because the artists evidently understood what Bourdieu calls a "space of possibles," that is, "all that one must have in the back of one's mind in order to be in the game" (176). The movement coincided in large part with the period of ideological orthodoxy now referred to as the "Quinquenio Gris" [Gray Five Years] (1971–76). To be in the game during the 1970s, the theater produced accessible art for the masses from a socialist perspective. The purpose of the Teatro Nuevo movement was to gain a larger audience, as Leal puts it, to turn Cuba into "una inmensa plaza teatral" (151) [an immense theatrical space]. The Revolution would receive ideological validation through theatrical performances, assuming that the public grasped the play's message. Such a grasp, as Bourdieu argues, depends on the divergence between the level of emission (the complexity of the code required to access the work) and the level of reception (the degree to which the public masters the code required for understanding the work) (224–25). By writing plays with clear conflicts and using uncomplicated forms and colloquial language, Cuban playwrights from the late 1960s to the 1980s kept the level of reception high and the level of emission low. In Bourdiean terms, the plays produced cultural capital (forms of cultural knowledge, in this case, socialist competency) because the audiences had to be trained to decipher them. In this regard, the works served as a form of consciousness-raising as they instructed the spectator on how to become a good member of the new family of socialism.

Teatro Nuevo represents the most innovative Cuban theater in the ideologically charged climate of the 1970s, for few memorable works were produced outside of the movement.<sup>17</sup> The 1981 graduation of the first class from the Instituto Superior de Arte [Higher Institute of Art] (ISA) marked the beginning of a new theater generation. The students' creative reinterpretations of Cuban classics contrasted with the overuse of realism, popular language, schematic formulas, and didactic messages that had invaded the island's stages. Institutional reorganizations further contributed to a livelier theater movement. In 1989, the theater wing of the Consejo Nacional de Artes Escénicas [National Council of Scenic



Arts] (CNAE) initiated a system that funds, for a limited duration, projects proposed by artists who wish to work together on developing a creative vision. By freeing artists from being permanent members of a group, the CNAE shifts "the emphasis from building theatrical institutions to making available the resources for creating theatre" (Martin 54).<sup>18</sup> The autonomy from cultural state apparatuses and the flexibility of working in different collectives have fostered creativity and have produced more diverse theatrical representations of the new Cuban family and nation.

Rather than focusing on immediate social conflicts, in the 1980s plays have included complex character sketches, individual problems, and the study of connections between Cuba's past and present.<sup>19</sup> In addition, Lilian Manzor-Coats and Inés María Martiatu Terry note how new theater collectives such as Flora Lauten's Teatro Buendía and Víctor Varela's Teatro del Obstáculo "began a theatrical renovation which transformed theatre into a public forum for an audience that felt 'marginalized': young people. These young people, having lived through the achievements of the Revolution, demanded a form of expression that was different from those characteristic of the 'official voice of the revolution'" (39). The unresolved conflicts, ambiguity, and violence in recent performances by such groups effectively dare to suggest that socialism does not exempt the new Cuban from alienation and frustration (Correa 77). In the 1990s, playwrights continued to renovate theatrical form and content through a postmodern poetics of fragmentation with respect to history, myth, language, and dramatic structure. Rosa Ileana Boudet also notes a synthesis of diverse theater traditions, as well as the use of metaphor and parody ("New Playwrights" 32). These new approaches reveal a shift in the field of cultural production. On the one hand, audiences are better educated and can decipher more complex codes, and on the other, the space of possibles has wider parameters, which allows the artists more liberty to express their ideas in singular ways. The survival of Cuban theater in spite of the difficult conditions for performances in the Special Period—the lack of materials, electrical blackouts, and the problem of transportation—testifies to its strength and commitment to staging the problems of national and cultural identity. In spite of dire economic conditions, the interaction between the theater and the Revolution is as rich and complex as it ever has been.

For the past four decades, government officials have used education, the arts, and new revolutionary laws to shape attitudes and behaviors in

accordance with socialist principles. The family structure, resistant to change, has been a crucial target in this project of forming a new Cuban citizen and nation. In order to instruct proper revolutionary behavior and perhaps diffuse further conflicts, earlier plays were didactic and performed conflicts with which audiences could identify. The family torn apart by conflicting values in Roberto Orihuela's *La emboscada*, for example, implies the need for a new socialist family. Corrieri signals a different type of revolutionary theater in which playwrights shift their focus from those having difficulty integrating into the Revolution to "los problemas que tenían aquellos que estaban haciendo la Revolución" (Luzuriaga 52) [the problems faced by those participating in the Revolution]. *Ni un sí ni un no* by Abelardo Estorino exemplifies this approach by addressing one of the challenges faced in forming a new society, the changing gender roles and their effects on the family. The fragile state of the family in plays such as *Manteca* by Alberto Pedro Torriente and *Vereda tropical* by Joaquín Cuartas Rodríguez, in contrast, raises questions about the Revolution itself, and its shortcomings in creating a new Cuba. These playwrights embody a critical stance "within" the Revolution, that is, a more nuanced position no longer immediately labeled as counter-revolutionary. In all four plays, the playwrights' approach to the theme of family provides important clues about Cuban cultural politics and the Revolution's distinct stages in shaping the new national family.

#### The Family of Socialism: New Loyalties in Revolutionary Cuba

Teatro Escambray first performed Roberto Orihuela's play *La emboscada* in 1978.<sup>20</sup> The play subsequently shared the 1979 UNEAC prize for drama and has received several notable stagings, including a 1980 production at the annual Theater Festival in Havana and a 1981 free version by Flora Lauten's students at the ISA. Although *La emboscada* marks the close of the Teatro Nuevo era, it pays homage to an important issue from an earlier historical moment during which the Revolution and the Teatro Nuevo movement intersected. Corrieri and his group went to the Escambray Mountains in search of a new audience to involve in the revolutionary process. The region had proved to be a difficult area to integrate into the Revolution and was the seat of organized counterrevolutionary activity from 1960 to 1965. *La emboscada*, which takes place in this context, enacts the inevitable clash between two brothers, one a member of the revolutionary army (Lorenzo) and the other, a counterrevolutionary

(Jacinto). On the surface, the conflict and dramatic structure appear simple, and the didactic message of the play is unmistakable: family loyalties should take second place to one's commitment to the Revolution. Orihuela's play, however, goes beyond sketching a Manichean fraternal conflict to explore carefully a convulsive, transformational moment for the family in revolutionary Cuba.

The works of Orihuela and Teatro Escambray dramatists reached a wide audience during the most repressive period for the arts since the Revolution. Corrieri states that if theater is to fulfill what he considers its double function, to entertain and provoke critical reflection, "tiene que haber una comunicación colectiva" (Luzariaga 56) [there must be collective communication]. The Revolution demanded a popular theater that communicated its ideology to the masses. Successful playwrights (that is, those who did not encounter trouble staging their work in the politicized climate of the 1970s) understood this code and expressed revolutionary ideology in such a way that a broad public was able to read it. For some critics, the accessibility (simple form) and instructive content make the artistic value of these plays limited. A Brechtian approach to realism, however, makes some works more transcendent than others, for some of these plays achieve collective communication without sacrificing innovative techniques.

In his essay "The Popular and the Realistic," Brecht uses the term "popular" to refer to "a people that is making history and altering the world and itself" (108).<sup>21</sup> For Brecht, the popular and the realistic go hand in hand: "It is in the interest of the people, the broad working masses, that literature should give them truthful representations of life; and truthful representations of life are in fact only of use to the broad working masses, the people; so that they have to be suggestive and intelligible to them, i.e. popular" (107). Brecht's realism does not ascribe to the conventions of a particular model of realism, such as the detailed representations of reality in nineteenth-century novels. For Brecht, realism entails laying bare the mechanisms of society that oppress the masses and "writing from the standpoint of the class which has the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society" (109). Brecht argues that realistic/popular representations of society can and should be achieved by diverse approaches because reality constantly changes, thus "to represent it the means of representation must alter too" (110).

In revolutionary Cuba, the theater movement has suffered because

some believed that avant-garde works necessarily alienate popular audiences. Brecht, in contrast, suggests that as long as the work is realist, that is, truthful, its form can be as inventive as the playwright would like and the people will understand it. Although revolutionary playwrights have produced few experimental pieces, by seeking out popular audiences and making them the subject, as well as sometimes the performers of plays, the Teatro Nuevo movement added a new dimension to Cuban theater. In the spirit of Brecht, Teatro Nuevo plays both dramatized the changing reality of revolutionary Cuba and contributed to forming the new society under construction. The most memorable works have been those like Orihuela's *La emboscada*, which poses a nuanced revolutionary conflict in a thought-provoking manner.

The development of the dramatic action in *La emboscada* suits the dynamism of the epoch it depicts. The brief episodic scenes have the cinematic quality of capturing simultaneous events in different locations. They break the classic unities of time and place and propel the action forward quickly, just as the Revolution set in motion rapid changes in society. In the play, a rural family feels the effects of these changes as their family falls apart. Lorenzo, a *miliciano* [militiaman], discovers that his brother, Jacinto, has rebelled against the government, and Zoila (their mother) makes him promise that he will not act against his brother. This places Lorenzo in a difficult position when the Capitán asks him to lead a mission against his brother's band of rebels. Although Lorenzo is the ideal person to lead the attack, as he is the most familiar with the terrain, he refuses because of his pledge to his mother. His friend Camilo offers to lead the operation in his place. In the meantime, one of Jacinto's principal collaborators, Pancho (his cousin), has ceased his subversive activities and has denounced Jacinto to the authorities. The play reaches its climax when Jacinto and his *bandidos* murder Pancho and his wife, Prima. Family loyalties break down further when Lorenzo discovers that the rebels also have killed Camilo. These events catapult Lorenzo into action. He reveals a new level of commitment to the revolutionary family by avenging Camilo's death and leading the ambush in which Jacinto is killed: "¡El que quiera vengar a un hermano, que me siga!" (97) [Whoever wants to avenge a brother, let him follow me!].

Orihuela complicates the dramatic structure by placing virtually identical scenes at the beginning and end of the play. In scenes 1 and 30, a divided stage shows the rebels marching in circles on one side and



*milicianos* planning an ambush on the other. Scenes 2 and 3, which lead to the confrontation between the two groups, are replayed almost identically in scenes 31 and 32. In the early scenes, however, the audience does not know that the rebel leader, El Muerto, is Jacinto's alias, and it does not know that the body Lorenzo finds after the attack is his brother. Throughout the play, there are clues that lead the audience to realize that it has witnessed the play's ending in the opening scenes. By framing the play's conventional rising-falling action with these scenes, Orihuela hands the audience an active interpretive role. Knowing the outcome allows the spectator to consider analytically the steps that led to it and invites the audience to speculate on possible different courses of action. Consequently, viewers may examine critically how they participate in the revolutionary changes going on around them.

Orihuela creates the spaces in which the play's action takes place by rearranging basic objects and pieces of furniture that one would find in a rural home or military camp. Lighting changes and flexible props such as stools, a table, and a bunk bed designate shifts between scenes in the homes of Zoila and Pancho, military camps, and *bandido* hideouts. Unlike the set dominated by a realistically constructed house that signifies oppression in earlier Cuban plays, the absence of an onstage house fits the play's theme of forming a new Cuban family. This period of change suggests homelessness, for the family has been torn apart by the Revolution and must rebuild in the context of a socialist society. *La emboscada* implies that various levels of family need to become more interconnected as the Revolution develops. In the play, two families are related by blood: the immediate family of Zoila and her children and their extended family, which includes Pancho and Prima and other relatives. Strong community ties also form a kind of extended family. In this relatively remote area, family and community allegiances have hampered implementing revolutionary values and policies. Lorenzo's place in the army, however, has exposed him to a new kind of family bound by socialist ideology. Pancho, Prima, Camilo, and even Jacinto ultimately die because Lorenzo's loyalties are caught between a family of blood relations and a family of revolutionary *compañeros*. Through Lorenzo's predicament, the play suggests the need to redirect one's allegiance from the individual family to the larger family of the socialist nation.

How Zoila, Lorenzo, and Jacinto view the family highlights their position with respect to the Revolution. Zoila serves as an audience for

Lorenzo's and Jacinto's opposing stances on the revolutionary government. She rejects both positions because they pit family members against each other: "usted tendrá sus ideas y el tendrá las suyas, pero antes que todo, ustedes son hermanos. La familia está ante to las cosas, ante to los gobiernos, sean buenos o malos. ¡La familia es sagrada!" (20) [you'll have your ideas, and he'll have his own, but first and foremost, you're brothers. Family comes first, before any government, whether it be good or bad. Family is sacred!]. Nevertheless, the play shows that the family is subject to change, that it is not sacred or impervious to the historical process. As a widow with seven children and a sick father to care for, Zoila wants whatever is best for her family: "Lo que tiene que pasar es que ustedes se acuerden que los dos son hermanos y que debían jalar pal mismo lao, pal lao que beneficie a la familia" (28–29) [What must happen is that you remember that you two are brothers. You should work on the same side, the side that benefits the family]. In a country mobilized for mass transformations, Zoila's profamily stance represents a reactionary mentality. From a Marxist perspective, trying to obtain what is good for the family encourages its members to think in individual terms. In doing so, it weakens the bond between the individual and the collectivity and becomes an obstacle in the process of constructing the socialist nation. Thus Zoila's supposed "neutrality" is almost as detrimental to the Revolution as an outright counterrevolutionary standpoint. Through Zoila, *La emboscada* encourages its audience not to remain passive spectators to the Revolution.

The characterization of the brothers makes it clear which position the play would have its audience emulate. The audience learns that both Lorenzo and Jacinto were involved in the movement to topple the Batista dictatorship, but Jacinto distanced himself from the Revolution when its Marxist orientation became clear. Personal gain motivated Jacinto's participation in the Revolution; therefore he is unsatisfied with his rewards: "Fuimos nosotros los que tumbamos a Batista, los que nos jodimos. Pues bien, es a nosotros a los que nos toca la mayor parte de las cosas que se repartan. Pero no, ¿qué hicieron? Los cachitos de tierra pa' los guajiros y to lo otro pa'l estado" (50) [We were the ones who overthrew Batista, the ones who busted our asses. Well then, we should be the ones to get the largest share. But no, what did they do? The small pieces of land for the *guajiros*, and all the rest for the state]. The Revolution has not fulfilled his modest materialist dreams of owning enough land to pay others to



work on it, as well as possessing some oxen, a truck, and a house. Instead of climbing the socioeconomic ladder as he had hoped, Jacinto finds himself in the middle of a revolution that seeks to destroy class distinctions. Jacinto, like many other campesinos, lacks revolutionary *conciencia*, and his exclamation, “¡El comunismo es del carajo! ¡To es pal gobierno: las tierras, las casas, los hijos, las mujeres, to se lo cogen!” (52) [Communism is shit! Everything is for the government: land, houses, children, women, they take everything!] echoes the ideological confusion and anxiety produced by political change in the Escambray zone in the early 1960s. In spite of its hyperbolic tone, Jacinto’s statement contains some truth because the revolutionary government does socialize the private sphere of the home, altering gender roles and the relationship between parents and children. For Jacinto and Zoila, then, who have lived in an isolated area neglected by the government and the church, state intervention represents a threat to the family, the only social institution that organizes the lives of campesinos.<sup>22</sup>

Lorenzo, in contrast, sees the ideological change as beneficial for his family and others. He has learned to read thanks to the Revolution, and he shows a growing revolutionary *conciencia*. In his opinion, “La revolución nos dio la tierra y no a nosotros solos, sino a to’l mundo; a to’l que la trabajaba. La revolución se hizo pa’que los muertos de hambre como nosotros vivieran como personas, no pa’que to’l que estuvo alzado se hiciera rico” (28) [The Revolution gave us land and not just to us, but to everybody; to everyone who worked on it. The Revolution was fought so that the dirt poor like us could live like people, not for those who revolted to become rich]. Moreover, Lorenzo points out that Jacinto’s dream of paying others to work on his land would perpetuate the same oppressive economic system against which they both rebelled. Unlike Zoila and Jacinto, who focus on their own family’s well-being, Lorenzo insists that they think about other people as well. Lorenzo’s collectivistic thinking manifests the social consciousness of a developing *hombre nuevo*.

Exposing the process of forming a new Cuban—with all its uncertainties and errors—moves *La emboscada* beyond an overly schematic conflict between the brothers, or on a more general level, between old and new Cuba. Whereas Jacinto and Zoila are representative of plays that portray characters having difficulty integrating into the Revolution, Lorenzo exemplifies works that investigate the conflicts that arise for those involved in building a new nation. The references in *La emboscada*

to the errors of the Instituto de Reforma Agraria [Institute of Agrarian Reform] (INRA) in implementing agrarian reform show, as Guevara admits, that “socialism is young and makes mistakes” (“Socialism” 165). Similarly, Lorenzo, when pressed by Jacinto to define Communism, admits that he does not entirely understand the ideology of the Revolution: “¡Yo qué coño sé! ¡A mí las cosas de la política no me entran en la cabeza! Pero tengo los ojos bien abiertos y miro” (52) [What the hell do I know! I don’t get politics! But my eyes are wide open, and I can see]. Like the Revolution, Lorenzo learns as he gains experience. Jacinto’s rebellion and Lorenzo’s subsequent pledge to Zoila place him in a situation in which he must define what he understands as revolutionary behavior. Lorenzo concludes that he cannot help with the operation against his brother:

Mire, capitán, yo quisiera ayudar, pero si yo engañara a la vieja, si yo ahora les ayudo a ustedes, ¿con qué cara iba a mirar después a mi madre? Yo creo que pa’ser revolucionario lo primero es respetarse uno mismo, si yo ahora les ayudara estaría incumpliendo algo que prometí por la memoria de mi padre, dejaría de tenerme respeto, dejaría de ser revolucionario. (75)

[Look, Captain, I’d like to help, but if I betray my old lady, if I help you now, how could I face her afterward? I think that to be a revolutionary you’ve got to respect yourself; if I help you now, I’d be breaking a promise I made in memory of my father, I’d lose respect for myself, and I’d no longer be a revolutionary.]

Orihuela sets up a moral dilemma because self-respect undoubtedly constitutes an admirable revolutionary quality. On the other hand, Lorenzo’s loyalty to his family shames him in front of his *compañeros*. Lorenzo’s problem raises several unanswered questions: If Lorenzo had not made the pledge to his mother, would he have fought his brother? What would Lorenzo have done if the Capitán had ordered him to lead the attack against Jacinto? Should Lorenzo have been less loyal to his own family for the benefit of the common good?

The play answers this final question by showing how kin relationships fall apart and by offering an alternative family. In the beginning, Jacinto relies on knowing that, although Lorenzo is in the army, “él no se va a virar contra mí, es mi hermano” (27) [he’s not going to turn against me, he’s my brother]. Jacinto, however, does not expect himself to respect the same rules and turns against his blood relations. When Jacinto finds out

that his cousin Pancho has accepted money from the INRA, he tells him that he has orders to burn the homes of any campesino who accepts help from the government. He warns: "No cojas mucho a cuenta de la familia, Pancho, que se me puede olvidar que somos parientes" (72) [Don't count too much on the family, Pancho, because I could forget we're relatives]. Jacinto does disregard their kinship, and after he kills Pancho, Prima cries: "¡Tú lo mataste, ya tú no eres familia . . . !" (90) [You've killed him, you're no longer family . . . !]. At the same time that these traditional family relationships based on blood ties break down, a new revolutionary family is being born. Various scenes highlight the camaraderie of Lorenzo's military *compañeros*, and as the Capitán explains to Lorenzo, "Aquí todos somos hermanos. En ocasiones más hermanos que los que llevan nuestra propia sangre" (36) [We're all brothers here. Sometimes closer than those who share blood]. Lorenzo understands this only after Jacinto betrays their family and Camilo is killed by the *bandidos*. Consequently, when Zoila seeks his support, rather than comforting her over the impending ambush he will lead against his brother, Lorenzo shows her Camilo's body and says: "Llore, vieja, llore por Camilo; ese es el hijo suyo que merece esas lágrimas" (97) [Cry, mother, cry for Camilo; he's the son who deserves those tears]. In the final line of the play, Lorenzo identifies another dead body: "Sí, era mi hermano" (101) [Yes, he was my brother]. Significantly, Lorenzo uses the past tense to refer to Jacinto not only because he is dead but because he no longer considers him a brother.

*La emboscada* reflects a Brechtian approach to realism in its realistic, that is, truthful, construction of the character Lorenzo. Rather than the embodiment of a rigid ideological position, he is a character who makes errors and learns. Orihuela's model of the *hombre nuevo* is flawed and unfinished, which enriches the basic conflict between the brothers and presents a far more challenging dramatic conflict for the audience to interpret. Typical of the theater of the period, however, the play's revolutionary message is clear. It asks its audience to abandon the individualism characteristic of capitalism in favor of the Guevarian ideal of collectivism. This entails a socialist redefinition of the family in which the individual household is "socialized" to benefit the collectivity, the larger family of the Revolution. In terms suggested by Edward Said, in this play a new Cuban identity emerges as affiliative ties (identification through culture) replace filial (heritage or descent) ones (16–24).

Performances of *La emboscada* by different theater groups in the late

1970s and early 1980s mark the close of the Teatro Nuevo movement and the emergence of a new generation of artists interested in taking Cuban drama in new directions. Although I have argued that the form and content in *La emboscada* is far from simplistic, its didactic lesson is clear. Raquel Carrió notes that the 1981 interpretation of the play by the ISA's graduating class offered "un nuevo camino, una experiencia que lograba sintetizar, con un nuevo lenguaje, las búsquedas más fértiles de la escena nacional durante dos décadas de teatro revolucionario" (2) [a new path, an experience that synthesized with a new language the most fruitful quests of the national stage during two decades of revolutionary theater]. The new version used richer images and less revolutionary discourse to communicate with an increasingly complex and demanding audience (Carrió 3–4). In the late 1960s, the Teatro Nuevo groups found the uninitiated audience they had been looking for, and by the end of the 1970s this audience reached a level of sophistication ready for new representations of Cuban reality. This shift coincided with the end of the orthodoxy of the Quinquenio Gris and an opening in cultural policy. In Bourdiean terms, the ISA's production was able to raise the level of emission, first, because the Teatro Nuevo movement had helped elevate the level of reception, and second, because the space of possibles had been altered. *La emboscada* captures the rupture of the individual bourgeois family institution and the birth of a larger national family bound by socialism rather than blood. At the same time, the play's flexibility, seen in its contrasting performances, presages fresh approaches to representing this new family and society under construction.

#### Gender Relations in the New Family

From the chaotic early years of the Revolution portrayed in *La emboscada*, the scene of Abelardo Estorino's *Ni un sí ni un no* (1980) shifts to the institutionalization of the new socialist system in the 1970s. While Orihuela's play signals the dawning of a new Cuban family, Estorino's piece addresses the challenges encountered in instilling egalitarian, socialist values in this family. Like the ISA's groundbreaking production of *La emboscada*, *Ni un sí ni un no*, staged by Cuba's most prestigious theater collective, Teatro Estudio, and directed by Estorino, experiments with realist forms.<sup>23</sup> This break with realism, along with the play's urban setting in Havana, marks a departure for Estorino, but in the themes of marriage, machismo, and family, *Ni un sí ni un no* is well within the play-



wright's typical dramatic universe. The play traces the evolving relationship of a young couple, Él [He] and Ella [She], in the 1970s. His father and her mother, as well as two "others" who play alternate romantic partners for Él and Ella, round out the cast and provide more perspectives on the issue of sexual equality.

In *Ni un sí ni un no*, Estorino's examination of the impact of changing gender roles on the family in revolutionary Cuba posits a dialectic notion of Cuban identity. By employing metatheatrical and Brechtian techniques, Estorino questions Cuban values and traditions associated with family relations assumed to be immutable and given, suggesting that the only essential quality of Cuban identity, or *cubanía*, is its constant transformation. To stage this changeable reality, the theater must reject superficial, realist representations inclined toward resolution and finality. Describing the play, Estorino states: "La obra trata la transformación, el movimiento anímico, vivo, dinámico de esos personajes y la estructura de la obra va transformándose de la misma forma. Están imbricados el contenido y la forma que no puede ser de otra manera" (qtd. in Martínez Tabares, "Morir" 29) [The play is about the transformation, the psychic, live, and dynamic movement of those characters and the structure of the play transforms itself in the same way. The content and the form are inextricably imbricated]. In its focus on the transformation of Cuban family values, *Ni un sí ni un no* enacts the spirit of Cuba's 1975 Family Code, the preamble of which states that discriminatory bourgeois norms "must be replaced by others fully in keeping with the principles of equality and the realities of our socialist society, which is *constantly dynamically advancing*" (Cuba Council of Ministers 217, my emphasis).

The first scene of *Ni un sí ni un no* establishes the play's central problem by linking the themes of transformation and gender. As Él sorts rice for dinner, he recites passages from Engel's *Anti-Dürhing* (1878), a materialist interpretation of Hegelian dialectics. Él reads: "... 'de la humanidad, o nuestra propia actividad mental, se nos ofrece en primer lugar el cuadro infinito de un tejido de relaciones, de acciones y reacciones en las que nada queda como era...' (290) [... concerning humanity, or our own mental activity, we are first given the infinite picture of a web of relationships, actions and reactions in which nothing remains as it was ...]. This dialectical vision of the world leads him to ponder how his relationship with his wife has changed. Él illustrates his reading by throwing grains of rice on the floor, assigning them a gender, and proclaiming: "Este macho crecerá, éste no se transformará, machos desper-

diciados, lanzados al piso de una cocina en el Vedado donde no tendrán oportunidad de cumplir el proceso dialéctico de la naturaleza" (290) [This male will grow, this other one won't; wasted men, thrown to a Vedado kitchen floor where they won't have the chance to realize the dialectical process of nature]. While Él's musings are lighthearted, it becomes apparent when his wife comes home that their relationship is strained precisely because his attitude toward gender roles has not evolved enough to meet her expectations of a new Cuban husband. In contrast, he believes she has changed too much. The two-act play, therefore, begins near the end of their story, for they are no longer the same people they married eight years ago, and divorce seems imminent. The rest of the play backtracks and shows the evolution of their relationship. We witness their wedding, their early years of marriage, how they grow apart and meet new love interests, their separation, and finally, what appears to be a reconciliation.<sup>24</sup> Metatheatrical scenes in which the actors step out of character to discuss the play or to experiment with different modes of representation break up the linearity of the story.

In line with the thematic focus on the new family, Estorino abandons the well-made family drama to experiment with new ways to represent the story of Él and Ella. In this regard, Estorino implicitly questions the efficacy of realism in portraying a world in transition and challenges the Cuban theater movement to resist superficial *costumbrista* [folkloric] representations of Cuban society. He strays from the typical orderly unfolding of the plot with flashbacks, improvisation, and characters who wander in and out of scenes or step out of their roles to discuss the play's structure and action. The stage directions indicate that scene and costume changes, as well as the shift between character and actor, should be made visible. The house, a standard fixture in realist theater and a traditional site for representing the family, also highlights the play's artifice. On the one hand, the kitchen is so authentic that it includes food, utensils, and running water; on the other hand, the walls move when the actors bump into them, and smashed plates lose their dramatic effect because they are made of cardboard. Estorino plays with realist conventions, dismantling them to underscore that what the audience views onstage is a constructed and changeable world rather than a seamless representation of a fixed reality. This has the Brechtian effect of distancing the spectators emotionally from the play and encouraging them to consider analytically the attitudes and events represented onstage.

Various uses of metatheater serve to expose gender stereotypes and



encourage the audience to examine male-female relationships. Él and Ella's decision to pull down the walls of their flimsy house signifies a rejection of the vestiges of the family formed with prerevolutionary values. If Él and Ella's marriage was built on a shaky foundation, then they must tear it down and build a new revolutionary family. Tearing down the set also parallels laying bare realist conventions, as the following dialogue indicates:

Él. Hicimos bien en echar abajo las paredes.

Ella. Sí, que nada sea falso.

Él. Ni las paredes ni los personajes.

La Madre. Que todo sea real, como la vida.

Ella. Como la vida y el arte. (297)

[He. We did well in ripping down the walls.

She. Yes, nothing should be fake.

He. Neither walls nor characters.

The Mother. Everything should be real, just like life.

She. Like in life and art.]

The play mixes different levels of fiction and reality to highlight the connections between life and art, suggesting that the roles we play in life may be as constructed as those in the theater and that art expresses many truths about life. Self-conscious performances in the style of old movies and *comedias costumbristas* [comedies of manners] parody superficial and stereotypical representations of *cubanía*. *El Otro* [The Other Man] suggests that they do "una escena cubana de verdad" (317) [an authentic Cuban scene], and the actors improvise two scenes that highlight *machista* behavior, one that exaggerates the sexual banter and linguistic characteristics of Afro-Cuban types and another in which a jealous husband chides his wife for leaving the house. In the context of the play's goal of altering sexist attitudes, these scenes should strike the audience as outmoded representations of Cuban culture. A more overtly didactic use of metatheater is seen when the actors step out of their roles to comment on the characters. The actors who play Él and Ella, for example, note how much their characters have changed:

Él. ¿Pero te fijaste bien cómo son?

Ella. *Eran* más jóvenes.

Él. Me refiero a las actitudes. No se parecen en nada a los de la cocina. (301)

[He. But did you really notice how they are?

She. They *were* younger.

He. I mean their attitudes. They don't seem at all like the ones in the kitchen.]

Similarly, when the characters stop to redirect the action of the play, they underscore, as Él puts it, that "Ningún libreto es definitivo" (381) [No text is final]. Just as the actors stray from the script, the play suggests that spectators reject prescribed sex roles and create new ones suitable for Cuba's revolutionary context.

Él and Ella's relationship embodies the changing script of Cuban identity. The characters are representative of a generation of Cubans who have had to negotiate between the traditional values of their parents and the new force of the Revolution that has entered the private family space to inculcate socialist values. This is most visible in a recording of the Family Code, which plays over the pantomime wedding of Él and Ella. A scene from early in their marriage, however, hardly shows a revolutionary couple. Ella, pregnant, fetches water and turns the television on and off for her pajama-clad husband. Ella depends on her mother for decision making, and when Él receives orders to leave for a military mobilization, she insists on going to stay with her because she is fearful of staying home alone. These behaviors change, however, because in her husband's absence, Ella is obliged to become more independent; instead of staying at her mother's house to avoid being alone at night, she volunteers to participate in a special night course in pediatrics.

The relationship between Él and Ella is never the same after he returns from military service. Él seems pleased with Ella's new endeavors, and he surprises her as well by having learned to do his own laundry. They appear to be a maturing new Cuban couple until Él exposes a double standard when Ella announces that she must leave for class: "Me parece bien que quieras superarte. [. . .] Pero debes atender a tu marido. ¿Está claro? Por lo tanto, hoy no vas a clases, porque yo acabo de llegar de una movilización y he estado fuera cuarenta y cinco días. Y tu deber es atenderme" (332) [I think it's good that you want to improve yourself. [. . .] But you should take care of your husband. Is that clear? So, today you aren't going to class, because I just came back from a mobilization and I've been away for forty-five days. And it's your duty to take care of me]. She tells him that he should be a true revolutionary and accept her commitment, but he replies: "¿Revolucionario de qué, chica? Esto es un asunto de



marido y mujer. ¿Qué tiene que ver la Revolución en la cama?" (332) [What kind of revolutionary, girl? This is a matter between husband and wife. What does the Revolution have to do with us when we're in bed?].

Throughout the play, Él and Ella's work and study responsibilities reveal that the Revolution really does enter the bedroom because they have less free time to spend with each other. The integration of women in the revolutionary process has altered traditional characteristics of family roles and relations, because as a student, a worker, and a wife, Ella cannot attend to her husband and the home as a traditional Cuban wife would. They have come to share household tasks, and Él prides himself on being a "marido evolucionado" (291) [evolved husband]. His reference to the Family Code, however, has an empty ring to it: "Yo soy un humilde esposo que acata el Código de Familia porque ha entendido la igualdad de derechos y deberes de ambos cónyuges" (294) [I'm a humble husband who obeys the Family Code because he's understood the equal rights and duties of both spouses]. Él has not evolved as quickly as Ella, and her achievements outside of the home create tension within it.

Not only do Él and Ella feel the effects of the Revolution on their married life, they also must contend with the influence of their parents, who embody prerevolutionary culturally defined male and female roles. The play's title—*Ni un sí ni un no*—refers to traditional authoritarian families in which the wife obeyed the husband without question. El Padre says that with Candita, his wife, "no tuvimos ni un sí ni un no. Yo decía, y ella decía: así es" (306) [we never had an argument. I would say something, and she would agree: that's the way it is]. El Padre upholds a sexual/spiritual dichotomy by praising her subservience and lack of sexual instincts: "No era una mujer, era una santa" (297) [She wasn't a woman, she was a saint]. In contrast, El Padre is a stereotypical *machista* dominated by his sexual drive. He attempts to instill male chauvinist behavior in his son by advising him to never marry the woman he successfully seduces. When La Madre finds out that Ella is pregnant, however, she acts swiftly to save her daughter's reputation by pushing her to marry and to lie about the due date: "Y cuando nazca, ¡sietemesino! Y si hay que ponerlo en la incubadora, lo ponemos, aunque pese doce libras" (309) [And when he's born, we'll say: premature! And if we have to put him in the incubator, we'll do so, even if he weighs twelve pounds]. Rather than break a cycle of marriages built on material values and lies instead of love and respect, the mother draws on her protective instincts

and sets up her daughter's marriage to be just as unhappy as her own has been. La Madre's unquestioning perpetuation of cultural attitudes, such as the social stigma of an unwed mother, is consistent with El Padre's philosophy of parenting: "Yo eduqué a mis hijos como me educaron mis padres y mi hijo educará a los suyos como lo eduqué a él. Y así seguirá la historia" (356) [I educated my children as my parents educated me, and my son will educate his own as I raised him. And that's how history will continue].

The Family Code, in contrast, aspires to redirect inherited attitudes and in fact grants full rights and equal status to all children, whether legitimate or not. Through Él and Ella, Estorino shows how the Revolution has attempted to modify the cultural codes passed through generations. Ella says her mother educated her one way but that she turned out another because "a mí no me educó sólo ella, sino también el trabajo, la escuela, el cine, los libros, las concentraciones y la milicia" (356) [she's not the only one who educated me. Work, school, movies, books, political gatherings and the military also played their role]. Similarly, El Padre watches in disbelief as Él ignores his advice and takes responsibility for the pregnancy, marries Ella, and, above all, washes his own socks. At times, how Él and Ella handle their relationship baffles their parents, which suggests that the couple learned revolutionary values mostly outside of the home. As Ella explains to El Padre: "Esta es otra época, con otras leyes y con otros conceptos morales, igual que hay otras modas y otra música. Y el que no lo vea así está momificado" (356) [These are other times, with other laws and other morals, just like there are new fashion trends and music. And whoever doesn't see this is mummified].

Ultimately, El Padre and La Madre learn from the younger generation, and the play portrays the formerly private space of the multigenerational family adjusting to the new revolutionary ethics advocated by the state. Although La Madre initially appears to be a typical bourgeois mother, the play shows her willingly participating in the Revolution, and she approves of the advances in women's rights. By the play's end, she has learned not to meddle in her daughter's affairs, and she stops deferring her own happiness and fulfillment by remarrying. Her class-consciousness has changed as well, because her new husband is a mason, whereas earlier she encouraged her daughter not to marry a working-class man. On the surface, El Padre never stops resisting the Revolution, which, in his opinion, robbed him of his business and is destroying his son's macho

sensibilities. In a vulnerable moment, however, El Padre reveals that he has cancer and admits that he came to appreciate some benefits of the Revolution, but to save pride, he did not publicly acknowledge his change of perspective: "Yo cambiaba y me daba cuenta, pero seguía viviendo y repitiendo las mismas palabras. Me daba pena que me vieran cambiar, me parecía una debilidad, y los hombres deben ser firmes, dicen" (379) [I realized that I had started to change, but I kept living and repeating the same words. I felt bad about letting them see me change, it seemed like a weakness, and men must be firm, or so they say]. Now, El Padre admits to his son that he approves of Ella and that he is pleased with the opportunities in education, work, and travel that the Revolution has provided his son.

In the play's final scene, Él and Ella also unmask themselves by removing the carnival costumes they were wearing when they first met and recognizing the people they have become rather than the couple they once were. They had found the costumes while dividing up their things in preparation for their divorce. Nevertheless, they do not become another statistic in the skyrocketing divorce rate of the 1970s, for, as Salvador Arias notes, their conflict is transcended dialectically (21). After pursuing others—El Otro and La Otra—whose personalities and values are ironically similar to the younger versions of Él and Ella, the couple reunites with a deeper understanding of the transformational nature of relationships. Thus Estorino ends his piece optimistically, suggesting to audience members that the dialectical resolution of the conflicts in their own home can lead to revolutionary *conciencia* as opposed to divorce and family instability. The recognition scene and subsequent happy ending has the flavor of a Golden Age *comedia*, which Estorino accentuates by summing up the moral of the play in verse. When Él suggests storing the costumes, Ella says not to bother because they will constantly play new roles in life. Él wonders whether anything is unchangeable or eternal, and Ella replies: "¡Claro que sí! / El deseo de cambiar, / Cuando una historia termina / Otra está por empezar" (394) [Of course! / The desire to change / When one story ends / Another one is about to begin]. As if to prove this point, Estorino avoids the closed dramatic structure of realism by ending the play with a new beginning, as Él and Ella reunite as a stronger couple and El Otro and La Otra prepare to perform the same scene that opened the play. By challenging the notion of timeless national characteristics that include the values of the prerevolutionary Cuban family, *Ni un sí ni un no* implies that the great web of relationships that constitutes the Cuban

national family will continue to evolve in consonance with changing social and economic realities. In form and in content, Estorino's play strives to represent *cubanía* as a process.

#### Endangered Species: Socialism and the New Family

In Cuban plays from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s by Rolando Ferrer, Virgilio Piñera, Abelardo Estorino, and José Triana, children rebel against their parents in an effort to redefine the family and the nation. *La embo-scada* and *Ni un sí ni un no* center on this young generation in the 1960s and 1970s and their mission to build a revolutionary society. As young people gain revolutionary *conciencia*, they confront the problems that emerge in forming a new Cuba and negotiate with the resistant values of an older, prerevolutionary generation. Plays of the 1990s, by contrast, invert this generational conflict. In *Vereda tropical* (1994) by Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez, women nearly in their sixties play steadfast revolutionaries, and the characters who doubt the Revolution are their children and grandchildren. The play treats the aging of the Revolution in the context of Cuba's Special Period. Given the resurgence of experimental theater in the late 1980s and 1990s, the realist detail of Cuartas's piece "le da cierto aire de teatro de una época anterior" (Monleón 112) [gives it an air of theater from another epoch]. Ironically, after years of a cultural policy that favored staging tangible social realities over artistic experimentation, the play's frank portrayal of the difficulties the new Cuban family has faced following the breakup of the Soviet Union may have resulted in censorship. In 1994, *Vereda tropical* and Abilio Estévez's *La noche* shared the prestigious Tirso de Molina prize for Hispanic theater. Nevertheless, *Vereda tropical* has been neither published nor produced in Cuba, and its title has scarcely been mentioned in Cuban theater publications. It is possible that the play remains unstaged in Cuba because Cuartas does not work in a subsidized theater collective or because the play is simply too difficult to produce in Cuba's current economic conditions, but its unperformed status might very well relate to the play's portrait of the socialist family in decline.<sup>25</sup> *Vereda tropical* suggests that not only has the Revolution failed to erase traces of the prerevolutionary family but that the new family, built over the foundation of the older model, is on shaky ground as well.

The central character in *Vereda tropical* is fifty-eight-year-old Buena- vista Rufino Ruiz (Bururú). She lives in a *solar* [tenement house] in Havana with her mother, Engracia (eighty); her daughter, Caridad (thirty-



eight); and her granddaughter, Purita (twenty). Each time the city suffers a blackout, their elderly neighbor Romualdito sings the song "Vereda tropical" to fight the sensation that he is alone in the world, as he puts it: "El último ser de una especie que se extingue" (47–48) [The last member of a species on the brink of extinction]. With the Special Period as its backdrop, *Vereda tropical* reveals socialism and the new Cuban family to be endangered species. Faced with losing her family, Bururú must reconcile her revolutionary idealism with the ideological and economic crises in Cuba. Each act proves to be a downward spiral for Bururú: she breaks her leg in a blackout at the end of the first act, and in the second, her home catches fire (Romualdito is killed), and Gladis La Jabá, her mortal enemy from Miami, returns home. In the third act, Bururú is disappointed by love and discovers that her commitment to the Revolution has alienated her from her family. The play ends with Bururú alone in the dark singing "Vereda tropical," aware that she will indeed become extinct if she does not adapt to the changing face of Cuban reality.

Through the daily life of the characters, the play dramatizes the economic realities of an island that has suffered a trade embargo for over forty years and has recently lost its main subsidizer and trading partner. Bururú's crumbling home visually evokes the deterioration of the socialist family and nation in Cuba. Realistically constructed onstage, the living space that Bururú shares with her three family members constitutes a sign of national economic hardship. Their home is so cramped that there is not enough space for a rocking chair to rock, the kitchen is outfitted poorly, and they have no bathroom of their own. Due to the island's lack of construction materials and replacement parts, it is unlikely that the characters will be able to move or improve their quarters. If Romualdito dies, they could expand into his space but, typical of the play's dark humor, Caridad laments: "(*Suspiro.*) Pero el viejo tiene buena salud, aunque de la cabeza está un poco mal, ya sabes" (16) [(*Sigh.*) But the old man's in good health, even though he's a little confused in the head, you know]. Energy shortages have caused everyday tasks to become complicated. Oil lamps clutter the house because of long, scheduled blackouts, and Engracia, speaking to Caridad, describes crossing the city as an arduous odyssey: "al regreso no había guagua y cuando se apareció una la empujadera fue grande, ni porque es vieja la respetan. No, y se rompió a las cuatro paradas. Mi nieta, he tenido que caminar 20 cuadras" (30) [on the way back there were no buses, and when one finally came, there was

a lot of pushing and shoving—they don't even respect old ladies. No, and then it broke down after four stops. My dear, I had to walk 20 blocks]. Other indications of Cuba's dire situation mentioned by the characters include medical and food shortages. The Cuban pesos the women earn are virtually worthless, and Caridad understands that to survive, they need to find a creative way to earn dollars.

While the younger generation scrambles to gain capital in a changing socialist system, Bururú is unfailingly supportive of the Revolution and stoically suffers the brunt of the economic crisis. As a woman of African heritage and a single mother, Bururú represents those who have benefited the most from the Revolution's advances in eliminating sexual and racial discrimination and its achievements in socializing medical care, day care, and education. Her faith in the socialist system, therefore, is well-founded, and with Bururú, Cuartas creates a memorable character that embodies the new Cuban. Indeed, she differs notably from the dependent and self-abnegating middle-class Cuban mother we have seen in pre-revolutionary plays by Ferrer, Estorino, and Piñera. Before the Revolution, Bururú was a maid; now she is a community leader who has held a position in the Ministerio de Cultura for twenty-five years.

Bururú has been an exemplary revolutionary. On the wall facing the public, a gigantic picture of Che Guevara surrounded by medals and diplomas dominates the family's cramped home. Antolín, her gentleman caller, is duly impressed: "Usted tiene toda su vida colgada de la pared, Bururú" (45) [You've got your whole life hanging on the wall, Bururú]. On the wall, one can read the history of the Revolution in Bururú's life, from her participation in the underground movement against Batista to her efforts in the 10 million-ton harvest in 1970, her work in Africa, and her devotion to the neighborhood CDR. The many diplomas recognizing her blood donations suggest that she has literally sacrificed her life for the Revolution, even, as Antolín points out, in the current period of poor alimentation. Bururú's wall, a living example of Guevara's doctrine of volunteerism and moral incentives, contrasts with the material impoverishment of the home. The Revolution is the focus of meaning and commitment in Bururú's life, and, given how her quality of life has improved from the creation of a more egalitarian society, it is easy to understand her revolutionary zeal. But for Caridad and Purita, born after the Revolution, it is more difficult to justify problems such as material shortages and the lack of personal freedom.



Marching down the street dressed in their *miliciano* uniforms, Bururú and her sixty-year-old friend Adarcisa present a striking image of the aging Revolution. Unlike the works we have seen thus far, here characters between the ages of fifty-eight and eighty dominate the action of the play. The builders of the Revolution have aged, and the younger generation brings with it a new attitude toward the revolutionary society. Elderly widows populate the shooting range, honing their skills should they need to defend their nation, while Caridad and Purita socialize with friends. The older generation gladly does its patriotic duty and participates in Preparación Combativa [Combat Preparedness] sessions, but the instructor does not bother to appear. Adarcisa complains about his flimsy excuse and the general lack of desire to serve the Revolution: “¡Gripe, gripe! ¿Te has fijado cómo últimamente todo el mundo se enferma o busca alguna excusa para no cumplir?” (21) [The flu! Have you noticed lately how everyone gets sick or looks for an excuse not to do their part?]. Worse than indifference is the lack of respect young people show toward symbols of national pride. On their way home, Adarcisa and Bururú encounter the decapitated bust of José de la Luz y Caballero, an important nineteenth-century Cuban educator, in the dilapidated park they had built doing voluntary work. Disheartened by the vandalism and the economic crisis, Adarcisa wonders if, “después de tantos años de lucha todo se está haciendo sal y agua” (21) [after fighting for so many years, everything is slipping through our fingers]. After all, it looks as if the nation is selling out to capitalism: “Ya tú ves todas las empresas y corporaciones que se han inventado, ¡y como llaman a los capitalistas a invertir! Chica, ni las putas que existieron en el barrio de San Isidro llamaban tanto a los machos” (21) [You can already see all of the companies and corporations that have sprung up. And the way they kiss up to the capitalists! Girl, not even the whores from the San Isidro neighborhood pestered men as much].<sup>26</sup> They rally their spirits by remembering the good old days and cheerfully shouting out the names of North American companies nationalized by the Cubans. Later, they erect a new bust, showing the perseverance ingrained in their generation.

To younger Cubans, Bururú's and Adarcisa's enthusiasm for the Revolution seems anachronistic. Bururú's family brings a generation gap into relief when Bururú returns from Preparación Combativa to find Caridad in bed with Pititi, the son of Gladis la Jabá. Their families had been friends until Gladis la Jabá betrayed the Revolution fourteen years

earlier by leaving Cuba on the Mariel boatlift. Unlike her mother, Caridad holds no grudge against the family, and she tells Bururú that the neighborhood will welcome Gladis la Jabá back because of the dollars she will bring. She laughs when Bururú retorts: “No va a ser. La gente no se arrastra por un dólar, la gente tiene dignidad” (30) [It's not going to be like that. People aren't won over by a dollar, people have dignity]. Caridad knows that in Cuba's current circumstances, dignity is not most people's main concern and points out: “el que no se dedica a algún negocio o a algún trapicheo no vive hoy en Cuba, chica” (50) [if you don't find some business or money making scheme, you can't live in Cuba these days, girl]. Nevertheless, any business involved with U.S. dollars is immoral from Bururú's perspective, and she waits for official channels to improve her situation. She expects that any day she will receive a new apartment in return for her many years of service to the Revolution. Caridad, in contrast, complains, “Bururú. Siempre ha sido como una línea recta. Pero el mundo es redondo, coño; el mundo es redondo. No cuadrado” (39) [Bururú. She has always been straight as an arrow. But the world is round, damnit; the world is round, not square]. Their different world-views reach a climax when Bururú discovers that Caridad has received gifts of shoes and clothing from Gladis la Jabá and Caridad tells her that she plans to marry Pititi and move with Purita to an apartment his mother has bought for them.

Bururú has never confronted Caridad's and Purita's progressive distancing from the family, because over the years she has perfected the art of daydreaming as a means of avoiding unpleasant realities. The set includes a space to the side of the apartment marked with a sign stating: “El Lugar donde se sueña” (12) [The place where one dreams]. In this magical space, Bururú lies on a pink hammock between two phosphorescent palm trees and watches her dreams play out. One of her long-term fantasies involves her relationship with Caridad's father. When she conjures him up, he appears as a handsome white chauffeur, and they dance. She has created a whole mythology about their relationship and his heroic death fighting against Batista in order to deny that Caridad was the product of a brief affair. This subconscious desire for a traditional family headed by a (white) male offers a vision of the family more in line with bourgeois ideals than the revolutionary family represented in the play. The fantasy therefore seems to suggest that the Revolution cannot erase traditional models of the prerevolutionary family and that Cuba's new family and



nation have more links with the past than some revolutionaries would like to admit.

In another dream, Bururú's wish for Purita to become a doctor mixes with her anxiety about the Special Period and Gladis la Jabá's visit. In this fantasy, Purita announces that she has won the Nobel Prize for discovering the vaccine for AIDS and that she plans to give all the rights to her discovery to the revolutionary government. Bururú exclaims: "Purita, mi nieta, salvaste a Cuba. Mija, salimos del periodo especial gracias a ti. Ya no necesitaremos los dólares de la gusanera. Ya no van a dejar venir a Cuba a Gladis la Jabá. (*Purita se retira. Bururú queda sola en la hamaca, meciéndose con alegría.*)" (35) [My dear, we made it out of the Special Period thanks to you. Now we don't need the money from the traitor exiles. Now they aren't going to let Gladis la Jabá come to Cuba. (*Purita leaves. Bururú remains alone in the hammock, rocking happily.*)<sup>27</sup> Bururú resolves another problem in a humorous fantasy in which Caridad rejects Pititi in favor of an exemplary revolutionary worker. She tells Bururú:

Caridad. Mamá, nunca más va a tener que ver a Pititi en cuero en tu cama. Te lo prometo.

Bururú. Gracias, hija, un hombre en cuero no es nada edificante.

Caridad. (*Amorosa.*) Mamá, haré lo que tú digas. (53–54)

[Caridad. Mom, you're never going to have to see Pititi naked in your bed again. I promise.

Bururú. Thank you, dear, a naked man is never edifying.

Caridad. (*Lovingly.*) Mom, I'll do whatever you say.]

In reality, Caridad does not obey her mother, and Purita has doubts about a medical career. Bururú's conflicted fantasies help her ignore the fact that her household embodies neither the ideal prerevolutionary family nor the exemplary new family.

As Bururú's misfortunes add up, it becomes harder for her to evade reality, and she begins to recognize how she has alienated her family. She breaks her leg, her house is damaged in a fire, Gladis la Jabá comes home in a blaze of material glory, and she discovers that Antolín is interested in Adarcisa, not in her.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps worst of all, the union awards her yet another medal and treats her to a dinner for six instead of a much-anticipated new apartment. The realization that her family is slipping away, however, truly jolts Bururú from her dreamworld. When Caridad announces that she and Purita are moving out, Purita delivers Bururú an-

other shock by telling her that she has decided to leave medical school to work at a hotel. Bururú cannot believe that Purita does not want to become part of a tradition that has been a source of pride for the Revolution: "Vas a ser Premio Nobel. Además, además, tenemos uno de los porcentajes de mortalidad infantil más bajos del mundo. Tenemos los médicos de la familia. Tenemos más maestros por habitante que cualquier país del mundo. (*Desesperada.*) Tenemos . . ." (130) [You're going to be a Nobel Prize winner. Besides, besides, we have one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. We have family doctors. We have more teachers per capita than in any other country in the world. (*Desperate.*) We have . . .]. But Bururú's frantic list of the Revolution's accomplishments means little to young people who cannot afford to buy shoes. In Cuba's skewed economy, Purita points out that she can earn more from tips in a hotel than as a doctor: "Una profesional suelta el piojo y lo que gana no le alcanza ni para un ajustador. La empleada de un hotel come bien y con las propinas se viste mejor que la profesional" (130) [A professional works her ass off and what she earns can't even buy a bra. A hotel maid eats and dresses better than a professional]. The character Purita is representative of what Enrique Baloyra calls an "internal brain drain" in which over-qualified professionals and technicians seek jobs in the dollarized sector of the economy (36). For Purita's generation, the satisfaction from having gained revolutionary *conciencia* does not match the desire for a higher standard of living. In general, according to this play's perspective, the state's ideological orientation has not been as effective shaping the behavior of young people as it was with Bururú's generation. Consequently, the image of the family in recent plays such as *Vereda tropical* contradicts any official rhetoric of a united socialist family and nation.

In the meantime, Engracia has considered moving to a retirement home where she can live in greater comfort. She tells Bururú that the home is like a five-star hotel: "No te falta el buen desayuno, ni la merienda, hay televisor en colores, excursiones, y te dije, hasta un grupo de teatro, un médico que viene a verte" (68) [You never miss a good breakfast, or lunch. They have a color television, excursions—there's even a theater group and an on-call doctor]. It is heartbreaking for Bururú to accept the fact that she cannot take care of her mother adequately, and the realization that her family is leaving leads her to renounce her illusions. She physically destroys her dream space and announces that there are no more dreams left in Cuba. Engracia asks, "Y ¿quién te dijo a ti, hija, que

un país vive de sueños? Vive de realidades, y las realidades siempre son duras" (132) [And who told you, my dear, that a country lives on dreams? They live on realities, and realities are always tough]. Bururú understands the difficult reality of everyday survival in Cuba, but what she must confront is the rigidity of her worldview and the changing nature of Cuban socialism. Ultimately, her hard work and devotion to the Revolution have given her dignity, but to avoid extinction, the play implies that she and the revolutionary government must find new ways to hold the national family together.

Although the pressures of the Special Period strain Bururú's family, Engracia stands by her daughter, and together they will weather the economic crisis. In the end, old-fashioned mother's advice guides Bururú rather than revolutionary principles. This empowerment of the private sphere, a return to a source of knowledge long considered detrimental to the official indoctrination of revolutionary *conciencia*, suggests that the older models of the family that have persisted in Cuba may contain values useful to the new family. It also constitutes a sign of the times, for the loss of Cuba's main ideological referent, along with the economic emergency, has forced the socialist state to step back and allow alternative ways for Cubans to resolve problems. The regime's antireligious stance, for example, has eased because the state knows that the island needs the support of other institutions in this time of crisis. Engracia assures Bururú that God will reward her goodness. This confuses Bururú, who points out that for thirty-five years the Revolution has said that God does not exist. Engracia replies: "(*Sonriendo con gran sabiduría.*) Eso también está cambiando, Bururú. También está cambiando. Mi madre, que en paz descansa, siempre decía aquello de que todo lo que pasa conviene" (133) [(*Smiling with great wisdom.*) That's also changing, Bururú, that too. My mother, God rest her soul, always said that everything happens for a reason]. Again, motherly advice evokes generational continuity and underscores how the Revolution might draw upon traditional Cuban resources to resolve the national crisis of the Special Period.

Crisis management and experimentation have characterized the operational mode of the Cuban regime and helped ensure its longevity. To preserve her family, Bururú must adapt to the changing times. The new family will survive, but as Estorino argues in *Ni un sí ni un no*, it will constantly take on new forms; likewise, *Vereda tropical* makes evident that in the changing Cuban family, different models of family coexist.

Engracia tells Bururú, "A veces en las familias tienen que pasar cosas así. Las familias son como los países, que de vez en cuando necesitan un sacudión" (134) [Sometimes families have to go through things like this. Families are like countries; sometimes they need a little upheaval]. In the shake-up of the family dramatized in this play, we have seen utopian dreams dashed, a socialist aperture toward capitalism, and young people motivated by consumerism rather than by revolutionary ideals. The presence of multiple generations in Bururú's family reveals the persistence of some values and traditions from an epoch that the Revolution had purportedly eradicated. The prize-winning play's failure to generate interest suggests that, similar to Triana's experience with *La noche de los asesinos* (1966), perhaps Cuban officials found that *Vereda tropical* did not maintain a sharp enough contrast between past and present national families.

#### Of Lard and Family: Surviving the Special Period

Alberto Pedro Torriente's *Manteca* (1993) is a darkly humorous play that, in the tradition of Piñera and Triana, combines realism with elements of the theater of the absurd and Artaudian cruelty to form a distinctly Cuban representation of the family. Like *Vereda tropical*, *Manteca* treats a new family's endurance of the Special Period, but the play's synthesis of styles and discursive density make its presentation of this crisis much more ambiguous than the *costumbrista* realism of the other work. As in Cuartas's piece, *Manteca* challenges the Revolution's perennially optimistic rhetoric by showing some of the negative effects of the current socioeconomic crisis on the Cuban family; consequently, the play was initially censored. The theater collective Teatro Mío eventually played *Manteca* over fifty times to audiences that reportedly greeted the play "with passion, heated applause, and raucous laughter" (Martínez Tabares, "*Manteca*" 46).<sup>29</sup> Akin to Brecht's view of realism as truthful, for Pedro, sincerity defines the most revolutionary plays. He affirms that "si las obras no consiguen generar una fricción con la sociedad en que vivimos, si no se provoca un rozamiento, un conflicto con la época, entonces algo funciona mal en esa escritura" ("Todo esto" 77) [if the plays don't generate friction with the society in which we live, if they don't provoke disagreement or conflict with the period, then something is not working in that writing]. Despite the play's challenging form, or indeed, perhaps because of it, *Manteca* clearly struck a chord with audi-



ences eager to experience honest portrayals of the difficult circumstances in which they live.

As in *Vereda tropical*, the family theme in *Manteca* serves to assess the island's changing national identity after the demise of Marxist socialism. Because of Cuba's relationship with the United States during the first half of the twentieth century and its ties with the Soviet bloc in the second, Pedro argues that Cuba has not fulfilled the potential of its unique identity: "I think we have not yet become all that we are, with all the dignity that is required" (Martínez Tabares, "Theater" 63). In *Manteca*, the characters turn to the family, not the state, as a means of surviving Cuba's economic crisis. This reliance on kinship and appealing to one's own "metonymically introduces into the discourse, from another angle, the focus on Cubanity (*cubanía*)" (Muguercia, "The Gift" 56-57). That is, according to this play, to orient themselves in a world undergoing great ideological shifts and to achieve self-sufficiency, Cubans must look to themselves for answers. In this regard, the play's scrutiny of the Cuban family and national identity forms part of an artistic trend in the 1990s that counters the precariousness of the present by examining national values and traditions.

The dramatic action of *Manteca* is uncomplicated. To alleviate the shortage of food, three adult siblings, Pucho, Celestino, and Dulce, have shut themselves in their fifth-story apartment in Havana to raise an illegally purchased pig. It is New Year's Eve, the day they have agreed to slaughter the pig, and they have trouble doing the deed because the animal has become like one of the family. When Celestino does kill the pig, they realize that they must raise another because it has come to represent a utopia that provides them with a sense of purpose. Part of the play's dramatic tension derives from the fact that the action that the siblings have to take does not become clear until well into the play. Their unwillingness to act, a strong odor permeating the apartment, and the presence of a knife create a somewhat menacing ambience.

The majority of the one-act play, however, does not treat violence. It consists of the siblings' daily rituals of survival and their conversation, which is often entertaining. Dialogue rather than action dominates the play and includes logical comments about their absurd situation; rationally expressed memories of the past; bizarre proclamations about Cuba, the world, and themselves; intertextual references; and the rhythmic enumeration of, among other things, English verbs and days of the week.

Over their disconnected conversations, the song "Manteca" intermittently blares throughout the play. The abusive music contributes to the anxiety of the cloistered atmosphere of an apartment so cluttered that it looks like a storehouse of junk.<sup>30</sup> The trio of siblings, their ritualized daily activities, and the possibility of a bloody sacrifice in *Manteca* obviously recall the murderous siblings in José Triana's *La noche de los asesinos*.<sup>31</sup> Here, however, the survival of "la gran familia cubana" depends on the siblings coming together to reconstruct what's left of their family, whereas in Triana's play, the children wish to destroy their family unit in hopes that a less oppressive version might emerge. Nonetheless, as in the earlier play, the incarcerating atmosphere of the family apartment in *Manteca* suggests the repression of personal freedom in revolutionary Cuban society, which highlights the similarities between the pre- and postrevolutionary families.

The economic crisis has brought three very dissimilar siblings to live together in the small apartment their parents have left them. Celestino is a macho Communist who has married a woman he met while studying engineering in Leningrad. He refers to the breakup of the Soviet Union as the "desastre" (171) [disaster] and insists that, to him, Russia will always be the Soviet Union. Pucho is a gay, frustrated writer who has lost his position as a university professor for introducing taboo subjects in his classroom. The brothers' antithetical personalities make their relationship tense, and at one point Pucho comments, "No es fácil convivir con un hermano como tú" (181) [It isn't easy living with a brother like you (31)]. He adds that he is only living with Celestino because he has no other option. Dulce is a domestic motherly type who tries to smooth things over between her brothers; she amusingly delivers offbeat comments about the world in a tone of conventional wisdom. Overall, in spite of their differences, the siblings show concern for one another and cooperate to make the best of their situation.

Life in the apartment has a ritualistic, timeless quality. The passage of time acquires meaning only inasmuch as it relates to sustenance. The beginning of a New Year, for example, is meaningful only because it is when the siblings plan to slaughter the pig. On a daily basis, the siblings ask each other if it is an odd or an even day because this determines when they leave their home to wait in line for rations: "Hay que estar los días impares, de madrugada, con los recipientes" (175) [You've got to be there first thing in the morning on odd-numbered days, with your containers

(26)]. Thus days of the week matter only in terms of portioning their rice adequately. Dispensing rations becomes a ritual for Dulce, who sorts rice, divides the daily bread into three servings, and passes out glasses of sugar water. Repetitive tasks also occupy Celestino's and Pucho's time: Celestino repairs makeshift objects, and Pucho searches for an essential lost page of his novel. Even Celestino's attempts to commit suicide are on their way to becoming a ritual to fill time. He informs Pucho and Dulce that he would like to be run over by a truck, but they point out that he has already tried this twice before, at the same corner, in front of the same truck driven by the same driver. The incongruity of Celestino's suicide attempt and the detached logic with which the siblings treat the pathetic act make it almost seem funny. The play's dark humor recalls Piñera's treatment of the family in *Aire frío*. Just as Luz Marina understands the absurdity of waiting in her stifling family home for *aire frío*, or change, as the siblings in *Manteca* portion, fix, search, and, most of all, wait for the pig to fatten, they are struck by the absurdity of their situation: "Estamos criando un puerco en los umbrales del año dos mil, a escondidas, en un edificio de apartamentos, desafiando las leyes sanitarias que han hecho posible el florecimiento de las ciudades del planeta, porque necesitamos proteínas, proteínas y manteca" (186) [We're raising a pig on the threshold of the year 2000, secretly, in an apartment building, defying the sanitary laws which have made it possible for the cities of the planet to flourish, because we need protein, protein and lard (34)].

This family's isolation in their battle for survival, by extension, embodies the situation of the Cuban nation. Pucho's bewildered questions, "¿En qué acabará todo esto? ¿Hasta donde vamos a llegar?" (177) [Where will this all end? What is it all coming too? (28)], refer to his family's plight as well as to the ideological vacuum and economic crisis Cuba faces with the loss of Soviet support. As unstable as the Revolution's early years were in terms of Cuba's position in the world, especially after Castro declared himself a Marxist, Dulce associates stability with the good old days when the Soviet Union became part of Cuba's extended national family. She remembers fondly Nikita Khrushchev and the missiles, the circus, and the canned meat sent to Cuba by the Soviets: "Aquella carne que tenía una vaca pintada en la latica y que la gente decía que era un oso y que aquello era carne de oso, aquella carne que nos salvó, cuando ningún país quería mandarnos nada, aquella carne a mí me caía bien" (173) [That meat with the cow painted on the wrapper, that people

said was a bear, and that the meat was bear meat; that meat that saved us, because no country wanted to send us anything—I really liked that meat (24)]. Although Castro has led a uniquely Cuban revolution, the Soviets provided an anchor that helped Cubans define their place in the world order. The certainty of having Soviets as allies and the North Americans as enemies, even if it meant teetering on the brink of a nuclear war, seemed to Dulce a more stable time: "Cuando la crisis esa de los cohetes, como le llaman, estábamos mejor. Al amanecer podíamos ser barridos de la faz de la tierra, pero estábamos juntos todos aquí. Mamá, papá, nosotros, mis hijos, la familia" (192) [When that missile crisis, as they call it, happened, we were much better off. When daybreak came we could have been wiped off the face of the earth, as they say, but all of us were together right here: Mama, Papa, the three of us, my children, the whole family (38–39)]. Dulce also identifies stability with a different kind of family than the one she is living with now, which suggests that the Revolution has altered the family in important ways.

For Martínez Tabares, "*Manteca* defends the space of the family as the individual's last recourse and refuge from the arduous and relentless process of transformation opened up by the Revolution" ("*Manteca*" 45). I would argue, however, that the Special Period marks a return to the family as a refuge from state intervention only because the state can no longer support "la gran familia cubana." As we have seen in other plays, the Revolution's attempt to create a socialist family has greatly affected this institution by modifying relationships between parents and children and between husbands and wives. Through the family, playwrights have explored how the regime has attempted to instill revolutionary values in Cuban society and to what extent it has been successful. In the case of *Manteca*, all that is left of the new Cuban family is a fragment: two brothers and a sister. After the initial years of installing a socialist system in Cuba, the Revolution looked abroad in the 1970s and became involved in Marxist movements in other countries. Dulce maintains that with the geographical dispersion of the Cuban family, "empezó la locura" (192) [the craziness started (39)]. In Dulce's case, service to the Revolution has destroyed her marriage and weakened her ties with her sons: "Un hijo en Africa y otro en el Polo Norte. Y no puedo culparlos porque el primero que empezó fue mi marido. Por eso se acabó nuestro matrimonio, porque vivía más tiempo en el lugar donde lo mandaron que en su propia casa y por supuesto allá encontró otra y por allá se quedó" (191–92) [A son in



Africa and another at the North Pole. And I can't blame them because the first one to get started was my husband. That's why our marriage ended, because he spent more time in the place they sent him than in his own home, and of course he met another woman and ended up staying there (38)]. Celestino's marriage has also ended in divorce. He married a woman from the Soviet Union and brought her to Cuba. Although their children seemed to grow up comfortably Cuban—they rejected their mother's borscht in favor of their Cuban grandmother's black beans—their mother never adapted to her new country, and she left Celestino and took the children back to the Soviet Union. With these divorces, the death of the siblings' parents, and no mention of other relatives, only a piece of the family remains.

Celestino's failed marriage evokes the end of Cuba's Soviet romance and the beginning of a period of great uncertainty for the island. The characters in *Manteca* are very aware of how the fall of Marxist socialism has ushered in a period of shifting world borders and alliances, as well as renewed national and ethnic movements. Dulce's chaotic enumeration of these changes matches the disorienting feeling of the epoch:

Y los bosnioherzegovinos bomba viene y bomba va. Y vaya sangre y venga sangre. Y de África ni hablar. Con tanta vaca suelta que hay en la India. Y ahora en Alemania, ni negros, ni turcos. ¿Habrán podido tumbar aquella estatua? Vamos a ver, porque están los vietnamitas, los chinos y los coreanos. (176)

[And the Bosnians, bombs here and bombs there, blood flowing every which way. And don't even talk about Africa. And all of those cows running loose in India. And now in Germany: no blacks, no Turks. So they were able to knock down that statue? Let's see now, there're Vietnamese, Chinese, and Koreans over there. . . (27)]

Whatever the future of Communism may be, for Celestino, one thing is certain, its collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union signifies more than a simple transition to capitalism: "Mucha gente piensa: 'Se acabó el comunismo y para la tienda,' lo que no saben es que lo que viene si no es fascismo se parece bastante" (188) [A lot of people think, "Communism's finished, let's go Capitalist," but the way it looks, if what's coming isn't fascism it sure looks a lot like it]. Likewise, Pucho's comments reveal his concern about recent waves of racism, xenophobia, and fundamentalism.

*Manteca* portrays the worldwide tendency to decentralize through a renewed autonomy of the individual Cuban family. After decades of experimenting with the construction of a new society based on collectivist ideals, Dulce concludes: "Al final con lo único que cuentas es con tus padres, tus hijos, tus hermanos, con tu sangre" (189) [In the end the only people you can count on are your parents, your children, your brothers, your blood (37)]. As the state cannot provide for the nation in this period of scarcity, citizens have turned to their own individual families to find creative ways to survive the economic crisis.<sup>32</sup> In light of the food shortages, it is fitting that in *Manteca*, a pig, which recalls the tradition of a family gathered together for holiday pig roasts, has reunited what remains of the siblings' family.<sup>33</sup> The totemized pig objectifies their kinship and recalls a more primitive existence in which basic survival determined human groupings. The ritualistic quality of the siblings' daily tasks and the spilled blood of the pig, which constitutes a visual image of blood ties, adds to the ambience of primal survival. As Dulce affirms, the pig underscores the primacy of the family: "Ese animalito mantuvo unida a la familia y la familia es lo principal" (191) [This little animal kept the family together and the family is the main thing (38)]. This change in priorities in which loyalty to one's family takes precedence over commitments to the collectivity implies a more lenient approach to difference and individuality in Cuban society. As Pucho says, "El integracionismo es exclusivo" (189) [Integration is exclusivist (37)]. The regime's project of integrating Cubans in the Revolution has required sameness; the new Cuban family has included those who emulate revolutionary qualities, and Pucho's homosexuality automatically has excluded him from this national family. In the 1990s, the Revolution can ill afford to exclude members of the Cuban family. This is evident in the fact that the regime has allowed exiles to visit in order for Cuba to gain U.S. dollars. This opening toward a more diverse Cuban family, one that includes components new to both traditional and new families, coincides with a reexamination of all things Cuban.

Part of Cuba's survival depends on its resourcefulness and adaptability. In the post-Soviet period, the Revolution has had to de-emphasize the Marxist foundation of the Cuban constitution and tone down the official rhetoric that alienates young people. In addition, the regime has understood the importance of maintaining a strong national identity and a sense of cultural belonging in order for Cubans to draw from their own

experiences to find ways to resolve their problems. Rather than looking to the state or to another country, Cubans must now look to the family for answers. In *Manteca*, the siblings implicitly reflect on national identity when they discuss Cuba's place in the world. For instance, Dulce's amusing theory of how the world is dominated by those countries that had dinosaurs refers to Cuba's problematic lack of oil: "Y aquellos que tuvieron dinosaurios siempre han hecho de los otros lo que les ha dado la gana, como esos siete que siempre se están volviendo a reunir por allá, por Europa" (170) [The world's divided into countries who had dinosaurs and countries who didn't have them. And the countries who had dinosaurs always did what they wanted with the others, like those seven countries always busy having meetings over there in Europe (22)]. Whereas Dulce defines Cuba by its lack of natural resources, Celestino distinguishes Cuba from other countries affirmatively. For example, while thinking of his ex-wife in Russia, he defends Cuba's brand of Communism: "Yo soy de aquí. Allá ella con sus mundos y sus problemas. ¡Yo soy de aquí! ¡Comunista de aquí! Sí, comunista. Cada día soy más comunista, más comunista de aquí" (188) [I'm from here. She's over there with her worlds and her problems. I'm from here! A communist over here, yes, a communist, every day I'm more of a communist, more of a communist from here (36)].

In the play, some of the characteristics that describe this "aquí," however, include machismo, racism, and intolerance. Dulce's humorous remark about Cuban men being incapable of monogamy and Celestino's obsession with failing to stop his ex-wife from taking the kids—"No tuve cojones, no tuve cojones!" (174) [I didn't have the balls, I didn't have the balls! (25)]—parody the aggressive virility of Cuban men. Celestino repeats "cojones" so many times it begins to lose its shocking effect, and Pucho further deflates his exaggerated masculinity by suggesting that all his bravado may be a cover-up for repressed homosexuality. The play underscores that the Revolution has not welcomed homosexuals in the new Cuban family/society. Pucho has lost his job and has trouble publishing, and Celestino has felt obligated to look out for him because he has known that Pucho could get into trouble with the authorities. Celestino's refusal to pose nude for an artist friend of Pucho's makes fun of Cuban male anxiety about homoeroticism. The pose planned by the artist—Celestino, naked, with a crown of laurel on his head and a hammer and sickle in his hand—also expresses the challenge of being an art-

ist in a Communist society. Dulce's exaggerated surprise at the fact that the artist is black parodies obvious racial stereotypes: "¡Qué pena, un muchacho tan decente y tan fino, a pesar de su color! Si cuando lo vi por primera vez, pensé que era un deportista, un basquetbolista de esos, y en cuanto habló me dio una vergüenza porque era artista. ¡Un artista a pesar de su tamaño y su color!" (180) [What a shame, such a decent and elegant young man, in spite of his color. Sure, when I saw him for the first time, I thought he was an athlete—one of those basketball players—and the minute he opened his mouth I felt so ashamed because he was an artist. An artist in spite of his size and his color! (29)].<sup>34</sup> The play also mentions the Cuban inclination for socializing and celebration and alludes to a jocular but satirical attitude summed up as *malicia*, which is similar to *choteo*, the national habit of mocking figures of authority and serious occasions. *Manteca* parodies some of these supposedly Cuban attitudes and prejudices to encourage Cubans, in this moment of self-examination, to rely on humor, tolerance, and camaraderie to survive this difficult period.

Without Soviet support, Cuba has looked hard at itself to determine the best ways it can secure a stable economy without betraying the principles of the Revolution. *Manteca* represents this recent search for self-sufficiency in its examination of *cubanía*, in its portrayal of the desire to define Cuba's place in the world, and in its focus on the renewed responsibilities of the individual family. The siblings' decision to raise another pig maintains their illusions of utopia and holds the family together. They do, however, brainstorm about other ways to survive. Pucho proposes the capitalist venture of selling the slaughtered pig and, with the profits, making sweets to sell outside of children's hospitals. Dulce is more creative and imagines a fifth-story garden paradise in which they would cultivate their own fruits and vegetables in large pots in their apartment. Martínez Tabares affirms that these other options show "the need in Cuban society for personal initiatives, for individual involvement in the search for paths out of the crisis and solutions that will move the country forward" ("*Manteca*" 45–46). That is, in contrast to the socialist ideal of a collective revolutionary family, the state must entrust unique groupings of individual families with more liberty to determine their destiny.

*Manteca* suggests that as the dominance of the state in Cuban society weakens, another new Cuban family emerges that is more comfortable



with heterogeneity and that seeks innovative solutions to difficult national problems. At the same time, on an aesthetic level, Pedro's playful absurdist techniques signal a new trend in the arts that permits more diverse explorations of the Cuban family and nation. Just as the family must become more self-sufficient, officials have granted more autonomy to the arts because they cannot afford to fund them and because they understand the importance of allowing an outlet for Cubans to express their discontent with the island's present circumstances. Since the Revolution, Cuban playwrights have had to negotiate with a space of possibilities that has shifted in accordance with a rather slippery revolutionary cultural policy. Therefore, in portraying Cuban social realities, the diverse approaches of the playwrights examined in this chapter have varied in motivation and in responses from government officials and the public. Each play, however, examines how Cuban identity has evolved since the Revolution by emphasizing changes in the family. Che Guevara, a central figure in the project of revolutionizing Cuba, maintained that the construction of socialism and the birth of the new Cuban was an ongoing process: "His [the new man's] image is as yet unfinished; in fact, it will never be finished, for the process advances parallel to the development of new economic forms" ("Man" 160). From *La emboscada*, which teaches its audience that the bonds of socialism are stronger than blood ties, to *Manteca*, which reaffirms kinship as a mode to strengthen the revolutionary family in a time of great uncertainty, the theater has performed the constantly changing identity of the Cuban family and nation.

## Exít



### From the House to the Stage

#### Haunted Family Scenarios in Cuban and Puerto Rican Drama

"It has become an essential ritual of our societies to scrutinize the countenance of the family at regular intervals in order to decipher our destiny, glimpsing in the death of family an impending return to barbarism, the letting go of our reasons for living; or indeed, in order to reassure ourselves at the sight of its inexhaustible capacity for survival."

—Jacques Donzelot

*Family and Identity in Contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican Identity* is a study of variants on one theme: the story of national identity embodied by family conflicts. Although this book follows a trajectory that is not strictly chronological, by focusing on two crucial moments of the production of family plays I am able to trace not the progress but the historical articulation of the concepts of nation and identity in the theater. The theater, as Martin Esslin observes, "is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself" (101). I have argued that the dynamic of national theatrical self-reflection is particularly evident when plays present audiences with family scenarios. The contiguous spaces of the stage, frequently configured as a family home, and the auditorium compel spectators to ponder questions of affiliation, encouraging them to identify or dis-identify with the "national family" represented onstage.

In plays from the 1950s and 1960s, the physical space of the house, which stands for the nation, attains a protagonism that rivals its human