

CHAPTER 1

Can one cease to be Cuban?

Is there such a thing as being an ex-Cuban?

The exuberant Mary was no longer Cuban.

Now she was only, and forever, an exile.

This is why, for the past sixty years of her existence, every morning when waking up, two insistent and simultaneous images came to mind, without the need to think and almost against her will.

That of a broken life—hers—and that of a mythical, bearded figure.

This is why, for the last sixty years of her existence, the exuberant exiled Mary woke up every morning with knowledgeable Shango. That is, lethargic.

The deity of thunder, reincarnated as Saint Barbara, left the exuberant Mary with her low pressures down on the dumps of exile.

Terrified by the banishment from Cuba.

And also often by insomnia.

And lack of sleep is a curious thing, because the exuberant Mary in her Cuban exile was able to take with her—without any kind of inventory problem for subsequent seizure—the little pillow with its corresponding cases that accompanied her at night ever since she was a child, and she always carried with her on her short and long trips so as not to miss her Havana home.

However, her fickle Cuban humor soon changed knowledgeable Shango for knowledgeable Yemoja. And she'd calm down.

The deity of providence, of brotherhood, of the sea, resurrected as Our Lady of Regla, pacified in a motherly manner the exuberant exile.

Although knowledgeable Obatala often drove her to intensity.

The only deity with a masculine and feminine path, revived as the Virgen of Mercy, pure deity, keeper of the white, of thoughts and dreams, carried her in her thoughts and dreams back to the Island to exaltation.

So Havanan.

The exuberant Mary, although Catholic by baptism, European in customs and routine, considered herself something of a *santera*, very mediumistic, and felt it was a gift granted by the African deities who like herself were her Havanan and Cuban friends.

exuberant Lucumis.

The exuberant Mary, despite the fact that she was no longer administratively or painfully Cuban, continued to have—and increased by exile—all the characteristics of the "*Cubanity of Cubanities*."

She was, in the strictest and always most ignored etymological sense of the word, a (Cuban) person. She was the character of a (Cuban) drama, the (Cuban) actor's mask, a (Cuban) voice, a (Cuban) character.

She was almost a stereotype of all that was Cuban.

A Havanan archetype.

But that repeated copy of the Havanan and Cuban came with exile.

Before, she was originally exuberant Mary from Havana.

Just plain Mary.

Just plain Maria.

Some exuberant Marys from Havana suffered the same process of irreconcilable division as that of other Cubans among the exuberant Marys of inside and outside the Island, and insisted in proving that each one exclusively represented the essence of Cuban and Havanan femininity.

As if such a thing existed.

The exuberant Marys of Havana embodied in the most exuberant way the dispute over Cubanness between the exuberant Marys from in and outside the Island.

The exuberant Mary was a treatise on Cubanness with exuberant legs.

Havana exuberant Marys, treatises on Cubanness in a double version—one, for within; the other, for the outside—after the flight of exile.

Although the exuberant Mary in the main aspects of her personality never emigrated from Cuba. And since she was still very much a Cuban megalomaniac, she was convinced that the one who had destroyed her life was a fabulous, bearded being.

Historic.

It is a fairly common procedure to give a name, a face, a body, and in this case a beard, to what is considered the cause of one's own misfortune: thus misfortunes begin

and end with them. All the energy is focused on a single person and the misfortune has limit: it will last as long as that person lasts.

Only those who manage to survive him—very few left; each year less—will realize that it has been a rather ineffective recourse.

The only advantage of this Cuban delusion of grandeur is that not everyone is raised as the cause of the torments of exile. A unique figure is, fabulous, bearded and real.

Known worldwide, inhabitant throughout decades, centuries and even millennia of newspapers, magazines, encyclopedias.

And, especially, television.

Thanks to it, in the rare moments of doubt, it can be verified almost on a daily basis, that this fabulous being really exists.

A fabulous being who believes that he cannot be subjected to the judgment of his peers, because he believes that he has no peers. But he has them, like everyone else: "... habitual wolf, my fellow man," Heberto Padilla would in no time say.

And truth be told, politically the exuberant exiled Mary was to be reckoned with. Intransigent. Irascible. The thing is, quite a few small and anonymous lives of Cuban men and women—although neither the men and even less the women would accept either of the two adjectives—were devastated by the unexpected tropical political and social and economic vicissitudes that plagued Cuban history in the second half of the twentieth century.

And by its protagonists.

Dramatis personae cubanensis.

Revolutionary celebrities who, a few years later, some exiled Cubans saw how they were turned into idols by some of their children or grandchildren.

The wayward.

Rebel youth.

Inside and outside the Island.