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**Contested Spaces in the Caribbean
and the Américas**

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**CONTESTED SPACES IN THE CARIBBEAN AND
THE AMÉRICAS**
SPECIAL ISSUE

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INTRODUCTION: CONTESTED SPACES IN THE CARIBBEAN AND THE AMÉRICAS

Aparajita Sagar and Marcia Stephenson

Letting the mind play over concepts such as Gloria Anzaldúa's "borderlands," Antonio Benitez-Rojo's "the repeating island," Paul Gilroy's "black Atlantic," Carole Boyce-Davies's "migratory subjectivities," Nelly Richard's "cultural peripheries," and Nestor García Canclini's "strategies for entering and exiting modernity," one might sense the remarkable suppleness of the paradigms of space and diaspora that have emerged in the Caribbean and the Américas. The material impact of spatial metaphors is evident when we consider the familiar Western reading of the Antilles as "small islands," with all the associations that image carries of glittering gems strung into a necklace. In itself, this image, which continues to be reworked in memorable ways by Caribbean writers, shows how formidable an impact spatial imaginings can have on the material; the conceptual slippage from the smallness of the islands to the smallness and auxiliary nature of their history and culture is too well-known to need further comment here.

To take another compelling spatial image, this time from indigenous cultures in the Américas, we might turn to the concept of "Pachakuti." Like many Andean terms, "Pachakuti" radically conceptualizes space while referring to two opposing but complementary concepts: that of upheaval and renovation. According to sociologist Silvia

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TENDERNESS: A MEDIATOR OF IDENTITY AND GENDER

as one of the many pragmatics of the polis, in the form of policies, politics, and power.

Discussions about nineteenth-century bourgeois romantic love and tenderness as culture are very different from more contemporary discussions about love as politics, revolution, and misogyny. Writing about love and tenderness during revolutionary periods and inside the perimeters of the revolutionary states is a state matter; and gender troubles. Although women's rights have always been constituted as nation's rights and feminism has always been a double jeopardy—hermeneutically and politically, a theoretical condition at the service of the state (or proscribed)—in revolutionary states maleness itself, the eponymous figure of male leadership, is made to preside over the fullness of the space. Pictures of leaders hang on the walls of homes and sometimes at the centers of living rooms. Their images are constituted as authorities ruling over public and private as lovers, fathers, leaders, and even movie stars. The figure of Che Guevara, for instance, has occupied that place; he has become a lay saint, an auratic man presiding over private and public spheres, in homes, buses, and buildings.²

In *Women, Guerrillas, and Love*, I disengage spheres and collapse categories to show how heterosexual love is used as a pretext or metaphor for homosocial love. By making a distinction between the erotic and the patriotic, the heterosexual from homosexual affect, and by merging borders and margins such as ethnicities, gender, and sexualities with symbols that represent the collectivity, I will show how socialism united homosocial affect and political narratives of representation with bureaucracies. It is within this working hypothesis that I read the testimonials of guerrilla fighters, such as Omar Cabezas and Che Guevara, and compare them to women's narratives, where women did not represent loved ones but dead ones—women as corpses. I argue that the rigidity of the body that might constitute the tumescence of the sexual organs during the kind of compulsory heterosexual intercourse, which symbolizes the masculine act of creating the radical nation-state, in women just represents the death and stiffness of that project.

To collapse the representations of women with those of the collectivity—which is often referred to as “the people,” “the masses,” “the social classes,” “the political base,” or “the troops”—is to speak about the small voices of history, about the non- about the common (the people)

Tenderness as Travesty

tion, as an identity, is primarily a popular rather than a national or class question. The process of languaging is like cleaning up a closet, taking words from one shelf or signifying system and putting them on another, abducting them because they can act as synonyms to represent the non-, the liminal, and what is beyond well grounded categories, its opposites—man, white, Western, heterosexual, elite.

The Oxford dictionary refers to “travesty” as disguise, change in habit or garments. But I will use the term “travesty,” which is often used in performance theories, to signify inversion in order to examine the process of languaging. I am taking the sense of parody, caricature, burlesque, and grotesque away from the area of gender and into the epistemological site. Hence, in languaging, transvestitism or travesty suggest how transparent concepts such as man, white, Western, heterosexual, elite, or their opposites, i.e., woman, black, non-Western, queer, and people—can be quickly rendered opaque. Transvestitism could either be a metaphor for the multiplicity of identities, or the *reductio ad absurdum* of cultural propositions or “subjective understandings.”

The capacity of concepts to act as a travesty of other concepts is exactly what Wynter, who draws from Gregory Bateson, calls an “abduction system,” that is, “the lateral extension of abstract components of description . . . Metaphor, dream, parable, allegory, the whole of art, the whole of science, the whole of religion, the whole of poetry, totemism . . . the organization of facts in comparative anatomy—all these are instances or aggregates of instances of abduction within the human mental sphere” (“Beyond” 89–90). You take it from one shelf (signifying system) and place it in another.

In radical epistemologies, tenderness plays a similar hermeneutical role. It travels from female to male ontologies. For one, it is located on the *nec plus ultra*, dividing male/female from male/male behavior. Women are tender; men are reasonable. This divide is naturalized and made to stand as a reason/nonreason divide, or as a reason/nature divide. Tenderness (and in general all the domain of affect) has been restricted to the domestic sphere and locked up within compulsive heterosexuality. This is one of the outstanding products of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Reason, as the opposite of nature, is to tenderness as it is to instincts, to body, to nature, and to all the languagings and worldlings we are playing with—blacks, women, queers, the popular. As Pierre Macheray maintains, homologues are not particular but

systemic (qtd. in Wynter, "Beyond" 64). Tenderness may lead to romantic unbound passion, which borders on one extreme with madness and on the other with apes. Often times, hysterical women and blacks constitute the extreme ends of the passion spectrum.

Tenderness is intangible. Like passion, which lies at the borderline of the instinctive and the aesthetic sublime, tenderness must be abducted and relocated within the masculine economies and put at the services of the construction of the state. But having a concept travel from the feminine to the masculine is not an easy task because it requires one to read against the grain, and such an epistemological shift requires several maneuverings. First, it requires one to explain logically the transfer of tenderness from the field of domesticity to that of politics—that is, how tenderness becomes a travesty of solidarity. Second, it requires one to explain how tenderness, which originally served the economies of compulsive heterosexuality, is now used to explain the masculine economies of state construction and insurgency building by creating and legitimating bonding among males. Third, one needs to explain how tenderness, which is the most legitimate currency of compulsive heterosexuality, is abducted and used as an analogue of homosexuality in homosociality or vice versa. But because homosexuality is still located within the *nec plus ultra*, one also needs to show why tenderness in male bonding works only within the homosocial and not within the homosexual. This explains why revolutionary epistemologies do interpret male bonding amongst leaders as queer. Male tenderness is rarely confused with any form of homoerotic love. Yet one is forced to explain how tenderness, which is often viewed as a feminine attribute, is adopted by men. How the concept travels can be explained through a huge hermeneutic riddle that passes through theories of performance as mimicry and transvestitism. Tenderness becomes a male attribute after it is abducted and redeemed to serve reason (that of the state) and ratios in the name of the fatherland.

Discipline, Sacrifice, Solidarity => Tenderness

I intend to unravel this hermeneutic riddle by analyzing tenderness as love for the fatherland. Although love seems to underscore gender differences, women usually express their love within the confines of their home, but men express their love in the public domain.

More important, discipline and sacrifice among men are mediated by a mental control of physical endurance. Men expect a disciplined leader to embody the idea of the new man. "The new man is in the future. . . . The new man has gone beyond his tired legs. The new man has gone beyond hunger, beyond rain, beyond mosquitoes, beyond loneliness. The new man is there in that supereffort. There where the average man starts to give more than the average man. To give more than the typical man" (Rodríguez, *Women* 87).

In this anaphoric construction, the poetics of the new man are reified. The New Man is "the man who gives everything for others" (Rodríguez, *Women* 87). The New Man is one who sacrifices, one who is disciplined and pushes himself beyond his limits by locating himself in the *nec plus ultra* of affect. The first step is then "to keep on pushing oneself, to overcome bodily discomfort because that is defined as discipline, and discipline will come to be an exercise in giving, and giving, a synonym of tendresse (love)" (Rodríguez, *Women* 45).

For that reason alone, discipline and love, in turn, make up the components of a role model of leadership—that which people imitate and follow—to express their love for the fatherland. The epic hero is then immediately grounded on imitation, mimicry, and performance. A huge billboard in one of the main intersections dividing government from governed headquarters in Havana asks: "What do we want our children and youth to be?" The answer is, we want them to be like El Che. But what about women? Women cannot be like him because they cannot be like men. But if they are not, then they must be forced into docility through mimetism or expelled from the terrain of war, and therefore from the terrain of heroism where the new fatherland is being engendered. In the new cartographies of the revolutionary fatherland, women come to occupy the same exclusionary positions in the *nec plus ultra* as they did in the languaging of the "subjective understanding" in the liberal discourse. Besides, in gender, mimicry (what in sexual discourse corresponds to androgyny) troubles.

Looking at the mimicry of the leader, or what passes for gender equality, from a different perspective, we come to realize that it is affected through a transvestitism of tenderness as love, which mediates between narratives of insurgency, war, politics, state, and domesticity. We already indicated that in narratives of insurgency, which are romantic narratives of state construction, tenderness appears as a travesty of

two other terms, namely discipline and sacrifice. These two terms, in turn, are made to represent a third mediating term called solidarity. In narratives of insurgency, men are permitted to love other men in order to express male solidarity, which is often viewed as their love for the fatherland. Here is how it works. Men must love their fellow men because they are their companions in arms. Tenderness is first and foremost solidarity and discipline; subsequently, it becomes the cement firming up the homosocial relations within insurgency. And it is in this logic entwining tenderness, discipline, solidarity, and insurgency where gender equality becomes a travesty. Gender equality is not predicated so much in women being like men, imitating the leaders, but the reverse, men being like women. Thanks to tenderness, the new man obtains the attributes of a woman: “. . . the new man was being born with the freshness of the mountains. A man—it might seem incredible—but an open, an unegotistical man, no longer petty—a tender man who sacrifices himself for others, a man who gives everything for others, who suffers when others suffer and who also laughs when others laugh” (Rodríguez, *Women* 87). This is, “[i]n short, the definition of a woman” (Rodríguez, *Women* 46). Tenderness is thus abducted from the area of compulsive heterosexuality and placed in the security area of male bonding as homosociality. During insurgency, the allowed public performance of male tenderness is the condition of male homosociality, that which is being acted out. But what is being acted out? What is being acted out is tenderness between men as solidarity. They are acting out the love of men for men via the fatherland; that is, they are acting out the real taboo, public love between men. A homoerotic economy subtends the construction of the new revolutionary patriarchal state. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes:

“Homosocial” is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously meant to be distinguished from “homosexual.” In fact, it is applied to such activities as “male bonding,” which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. To draw the “homosocial” back into the orbit of “desire,” of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum

between homosocial and homosexual—a continuum whose visibility, for men, in our society, is radically disrupted (1–2).

An analysis of mimicry, as gender construction through the performance of public male affect, simultaneously hails and forbids male eroticism and female subordination. Tenderness between men is then, again, a travesty of the political exclusion of women. Tenderness in insurgent narratives becomes a very complex game in which women strive to love their country through the love of men, which in turn is accessed through occluding the empirical evidence of male bonding as tenderness and of underscoring the tenderness between men as patriotism. For men, it seems as though patriotism becomes the decoy to love and to support, to mentor and to play with each other in public.

Epilogue

Politics is a social relation. It is a mode of being together. Epistemologies and aesthetics are the spheres or domains in which the controlling reason and the uncontrolled emotions are housed. They are the two big technologies of governing and of governance. Epistemologies and aesthetics stabilize and legitimize affect, social relations, the mode of being together in the polis and politics. But they also function as barriers in order to justify the distinction between blacks, women, men, and the elite, as they keep the distinction between fine and coarse, refined and uncouth, or any other binary oppositions.

Aesthetic as epistemology is then a measure of value—nothing more and nothing less than cultural value. Aesthetics is the measuring gauge establishing the ratio: how much of reason, of beauty, of non-goes into affect. It also measures the due ratios of tenderness relative to due patriotism, which translate into the ratios of life opportunities, self-realization, and creativity for all of those who are situated in the *nec plus ultra*. These are ratios that work within the social imaginary and the rules of operation of the social imaginary—classarchy, ethnarchy, genderarchy. Mimicry then can be interpreted as denial and negation, at least as a partial erasure of self. What rules then is culture, cultural conceptions, and systems based on acceptance, where the persuading powers of the hegemonic work so that people acknowledge and naturalize the contra-natural and continue implementing

power relations.

I want to finish this essay with a long quote from Wynter, which states that these determinations are

Modes of social cohesion and domination, modes that work invisibly, like fate, not only to structure the hierarchical categories of the . . . system, but also to coerce individuals and groups into the categories for which they have been deterministically selected by the ruling value system, by the internalized ruling conception. . . . The system of capital accumulation is not only carried out through labor activity, but through the life activities of the popular groups as workers, as consumers, or merely as signifiers of non-value, that is, those like Matthew Bondsman who serve as the "refuse" of the system, as the symbolic inversion of norm value, the liminal category that defines the norm from which social value is reckoned and the mode of measurement of the consumption ratio legitimated. . . . the model whose dynamic needs to lock each category into its relative place so that the social system can serve as the empirical abduction system of the mode of distribution of differential rewards based on a hierarchical identity system. . . . whose mode of coercion and oppression are outside the explanatory power of the labor conceptual frame. ("Beyond" 77)

Tenderness performs such a role in the construction of male and female identities within revolutionary epistemologies.

Notes

1. For a contrast between these two positions see Kirkpatrick and also Rodríguez, *House, Garden, Nation*.
2. For a more extended discussion of the subject, see Rodríguez, *Women, Guerrillas, and Love*.

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