

No Little Havana: Recreating Cubanness in Sydney Australia

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Signed: _____

Euridice Charón Cardona, May 2008.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which Cuban identity is expressed, understood, maintained and recreated by Cuban migrants in Sydney and the wider Australian society. Initially, the analysis focuses on some of the most visible ethnic markers used by people outside the Cuban community to recreate Cubanness: politics, through the promotion of Cuba as a 'socialist paradise' by leftist Australian organizations and solidarity groups with Cuba; and music and dance, taking as an example the salsa boom in Sydney, and the advertising of Cuba as an exotic tourist destination in Australia.

Throughout the work an argument is developed that the very different demographic configuration of Cubans in Australia has fostered a singular praxis of maintaining their identity. In doing so the study examines why politics does not play a primary role in the recreation of Cubanness in Australia, in contrast to numerically larger and higher profile Cuban settlements. Rather, Cubanness in Sydney has centred more in preserving eating habits, memories of Cuba as a place, listening and dancing to Cuban music, and other practices kept in the domestic space. This is achieved through the Cuban migrants' strategic borrowings from other migrant communities, from food products to people and institutions, such as the Catholic Church being used to maintain the traditional worship of the Virgin of Charity. Finally, the study explores how migrants and outsiders understand the identity of Cubanness in Sydney, and considers the contribution of some major theories of ethnicity and identity to understanding this phenomenon.