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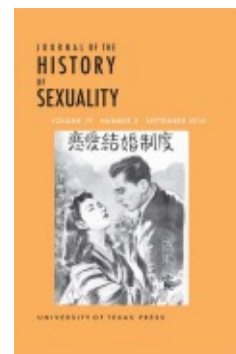
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## **“Obvious Gays” and the State Gaze: Cuban Gay Visibility and U.S. Immigration Policy during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift**

Peña, Susana.

Journal of the History of Sexuality, Volume 16, Number 3, July 2007, pp. 482-514 (Article)

Published by University of Texas Press  
DOI: [10.1353/sex.2007.0072](https://doi.org/10.1353/sex.2007.0072)



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# “Obvious Gays” and the State Gaze: Cuban Gay Visibility and U.S. Immigration Policy during the 1980 Mariel Boatlift

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ON THE DAY ARMANDO WENT to the police station to ask for permission to leave Cuba, he wore the gayest outfit he could find.<sup>1</sup> Having been dissuaded from a career in teaching because he was too “obvious,” Armando had experienced firsthand the ways in which a visible gay man’s life might be limited in Cuba. Although spared the more intense forms of repression faced by others of his generation, Armando had decided to find out if the tumultuous events in Cuba during the summer of 1980—events that would come to be known as the Mariel boatlift—would really lead to the promised authorization to leave the country.

During our interview almost twenty years later, Armando explained how he had purposefully picked out a flowery shirt and a little chain that fit snugly around his neck (“una cadenita bien pegadita al cuello”) for his interview with the Cuban police officials who would decide whether he should receive an exit permit. In 1980 Cuba these fashion choices were seen as gender transgressive, so Armando hoped they would confirm to the police officers that he was a counterrevolutionary homosexual and, therefore, that he would be permitted, if not encouraged, to leave the country. Before this day he had thought his homosexuality was “obvious,” but for this important interview with Cuban officials he did not rely on the

This research was assisted by a postdoctoral fellowship from the Sexuality Research Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council with funds provided by the Ford Foundation and the Scholar in Residence fellowship of the Institute for the Study of Culture and Society (ICS) at Bowling Green State University. I want to thank Rob Buffington; the members of the ICS Sexualities and Borders cluster; Nancy San Martín; the participants of the Conference on Latino/a and Latin American Sexualities; and conference organizers and editors of this special collection, Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Mathew Kuefler, for their thoughtful comments on previous drafts of this article.

<sup>1</sup>“Armando” is a pseudonym.

*Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 16, No. 3, September 2007  
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everyday visibility of his homosexuality: he made sure to perform the *loca*, the gender-transgressive effeminate homosexual man. Armando successfully passed the test. He was identified as socially undesirable, homosexual *escoria* (scum) by the Cuban state—negative labels that facilitated his exit from the country. At age twenty-six Armando crossed the Florida Straits on a ship named the *Spirit of Ecstasy*.

Armando's own ecstasy, however, soon gave way to confusion and instability. He described a chaotic scene in Florida. Mariel entrants were required to have a sponsor (either a family member or a volunteer) in order to be released from state custody. Although Armando had an uncle who was willing to sponsor him, a miscommunication kept him from making contact with that uncle when he arrived in Florida. Consequently, like many Mariel entrants, he was taken to Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, one of several resettlement camps around the country. Although he spent two months there, he recounts that it felt more like two centuries. He does not remember whether he was asked by camp officials about his sexuality. On 4 July 1980, after successfully being connected with his uncle, Armando left Fort Chaffee.

Armando's convincing performance of the ostentatious homosexual facilitated his exit from Cuba, but it was unclear how that same kind of performance might affect his entry into the United States. The clarity with which he recalls his exit interview with Cuban police contrasts sharply with his recollection of how (and if) sexuality was considered in his processing by U.S. authorities. This contrast could be simply explained by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) lack of interest in immigrant sexuality, yet the historical record suggests that the INS was concerned rather than apathetic about such matters. Instead, as this article demonstrates, the U.S. government—from national, state, and local politicians to INS officials and local law enforcement—demonstrated a strong yet inconsistently focused interest in the sexuality of Mariel immigrants.

In the following article, I examine the state's "gaze" in relation to male homosexuals on both sides of the Florida Straits. I use the term *gaze* both to describe the methods used by the state to identify sexual populations as well as to highlight the ways in which these identification systems intersected with the interests and desires of the Cuban and U.S. states.<sup>2</sup> The Cuban state's gaze relied on an assumption of gay identifiability. In practical terms, Cuban officials' interest in homosexuality necessitated a mechanism by which they could identify this population. As Armando's case makes clear, this mechanism

<sup>2</sup>For a seminal discussion of the medical gaze see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith (1963; New York: Vintage Books, 1975). For more on applications of Foucault's work to the study of immigration and sexuality see Eithne Luibhéid, *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

involved openly evaluating visible markers of homosexuality. In contrast, his vague account of his U.S. experience suggests that in the United States, the state's long-standing interest in sexuality conflicted with the special treatment previously accorded Cuban "refugees" under cold war immigration policies. This tension required that U.S. authorities develop a selective gaze that sometimes saw and other times refused to see homosexual Mariel Cubans.

As I trace the migration process of homosexual Cuban men like Armando from Cuba to the United States, I put the state gaze in national context, analyzing how the state defined homosexuals, the identification procedures it used, and its vested interests in identifying homosexuals. In Cuba the state facilitated the exit of visible homosexuals, a group already stigmatized by official discourses and state policies; in effect, clearly identifying homosexuals served the Cuban state's interest in expediting their expulsion. In the United States the federal government's role in processing and identifying homosexuals proved much more complicated.

During the cold war relations between the United States and Cuba were tense. Because of this political acrimony, Cubans as a group had been accorded preferential treatment for their symbolic value as people fleeing communism. However, in the same era homosexuals were formally and categorically excluded by U.S. immigration policy. Even as Armando and other gay-identified Mariel Cubans were traveling by boat to the United States, the country of their destination was recodifying a long-standing immigration policy that explicitly excluded homosexuals.<sup>3</sup> Because of its massive scale, the Mariel migration also posed procedural challenges to any systematic identification of immigrant characteristics. Finally, given the national media attention focused on the boatlift, the identification of homosexuals posed a public relations dilemma for the U.S. government. These complications are clearly seen when focusing on the ways in which homosexual Cuban men entering the United States were seen and not seen by the U.S. state gaze. During the boatlift conflicting immigration policies and procedures clashed as men who were both Cuban and visibly gay entered the country under the glare of the media spotlight.

#### LEAVING CUBA

The series of events now referred to as the Mariel boatlift began on 28 March 1980 when a Cuban bus driver took a busload of passengers into the Peruvian embassy in Havana to seek asylum. A week later, as tensions escalated, Castro announced that anyone seeking asylum would be allowed to leave Cuba and pulled back the troops guarding the embassy. Two days

<sup>3</sup>Most cases of immigrant homosexual exclusion documented in the scholarly literature deal with male homosexuals. Luibhéid's discussion of the case of Sara Quiroz, a Mexican national who was excluded because the INS determined that she was a lesbian, is one exception (*Entry Denied*, 77–101).

after the announcement over ten thousand Cubans had crowded into the embassy with the hope of leaving Cuba.

Between March and April 1980 the more orderly phase of the emigration involved air flights to Costa Rica and eventual resettlement in several countries, including Costa Rica, Peru, Spain, and the United States.<sup>4</sup> The boatlift phase of the emigration began after Castro announced on 20 April 1980 that all Cubans wishing to leave the island would be allowed to depart through the port of Mariel and invited their Cuban American relatives to pick them up. This led to a massive flotilla, and by October 1980 124,776 Cubans had arrived in the United States.

Tense relations between Cuba and the United States had been building since Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution. The nationalization of U.S.-owned property by Cuba, the establishment of an embargo against Cuba by the United States in 1960, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 all contributed to these escalating tensions. Migrants from Cuba to the United States became important symbolic figures manipulated by both sides to prove the superiority of their respective political systems. Early into the Mariel boatlift, the U.S. government and media were able to further a discourse of Cubans desperate to leave an oppressive country and a failed economic system. In order to challenge this discourse, Castro discredited those who wanted to leave and characterized them as undesirables, antisocials, lumpen proletariat, and *escoria* (scum) and added that the United States was "performing a tremendous sanitary service" by accepting them.<sup>5</sup> Cubans on the island who had not declared their desire to leave were encouraged to demonstrate against those who had by participating in *actos de repudio* (acts of repudiation) against the *escoria*. In the United States the media picked up on this characterization. News reports repeatedly affirmed that Castro had emptied his prisons by sending criminals to the United States and that the migrants included members of "undesirable" groups such as mental patients, prostitutes, and homosexuals. Both the U.S. media and South Florida's Cuban American community began commenting on demographic and cultural differences between the Mariel immigrants and previous waves of Cuban immigrants. The perceived racial and class difference of the *Marielitos*, as the refugees were nicknamed, added to their stigmatization and contrasted sharply with the historically preferential treatment of light-skinned immigrants to the United States, a special treatment accorded to previous generations of anticommunist Cuban "refugees."<sup>6</sup> Racialization, class stigma, and sexual deviance were thus

<sup>4</sup>María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959–1994* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 57.

<sup>5</sup>Fidel Castro, "Speech to a Fighting People," speech delivered 1 May 1980, translator unknown, in *Fidel Castro Speeches: Cuba's Internationalist Foreign Policy, 1975–80*, ed. Michael Taber (New York: Pathfinder, 1981), 278.

<sup>6</sup>In the period immediately following the 1980 boatlift, the term *Marielitos* was used, often in a derogatory way, to refer to the Cuban Mariel entrants. The Spanish diminutive *-itos*

embedded in coverage of the Mariel migration, reinforcing the notion that these migrants were no loss to Cuba and posed a potential problem for the United States.<sup>7</sup>

The Cuban government developed a selective process to facilitate the exit of people whom the revolution had already identified as undesirable. By prioritizing “undesirables,” Cuban officials hoped to eliminate what they defined as problem populations from the country and reinforce the official story that disparaged all those who wanted to leave. When Cuban Americans arrived in Cuba with empty boats, hopeful that they would be reunited with family members, they were required to transport not only their relatives but also other people the Cuban government had approved for departure, among them, homosexuals, criminals, and the mentally ill.

After the 1959 Cuban revolution, the homophobia and heterosexism that already existed in Cuba became more systematized and institutionalized.<sup>8</sup> Gender and sexuality explicitly entered political discourse even as vaguely worded laws increasingly targeted gender-transgressive men believed to be homosexual.<sup>9</sup> Male homosexuals, in particular, were targeted

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could refer literally to “those from Mariel” but is also often used to refer to something small. The diminutive can also be used to convey affection or familiarity. In the period during and immediately after the boatlift, the derogatory connotations of the term were most common and reflected the widespread negative perception of this migrant group, including among the Spanish-speaking Cuban Americans who originated its use. With time, the stigmatization of the Mariel migration diminished as more members of that generation and Cuban American activists and scholars challenged negative perceptions of the migration. With this shift in perception, *Marielitos* was redefined as more descriptive than derogatory. Although I use the term here to highlight the racialized and class-based stigmatization of Mariel entrants, elsewhere I use it to mark the distinct identity and experiences of this wave of migrants.

<sup>7</sup>For more on the construction of deviance of Mariel immigrants see Benigno E. Aguirre, “Cuban Mass Migration and the Social Construction of Deviants,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 13 (1994): 155–83; Benigno E. Aguirre, Rogelio Sáenz, and Brian Sinclair James, “Marielitos Ten Years Later: The Scarface Legacy,” *Social Science Quarterly* 78 (1997): 487–507.

<sup>8</sup>Homophobic attitudes and state practices existed in Cuba prior to the 1959 revolution, but a significant qualitative change occurred after 1959. Ian Lumsden argues that after the revolution repression of homosexuals became more systematic and institutionalized, the revolutionary state became more efficient and able to police private behavior, and homosexuals increasingly were persecuted as a group (*Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996], 57–75).

<sup>9</sup>Changes made in laws concerning public scandal (*escándalo público*) adeptly illustrate how the revolutionary government built upon already existing public/legal policies. In the early years of the revolution, the Cuban state continued to use the 1936 penal code. After prolonged study and consideration the code was extensively revised in 1979: at this point, existing laws targeting homosexuals were updated, and new sanctions were added. These revisions give us some sense of the ways in which earlier laws aimed at homosexuals were already being interpreted by the new government. Both the 1936 and 1979 penal codes contained laws against public scandal, but the 1979 version updated older terminology like “active or passive pederasty” with modern equivalents like “homosexual condition.” The revised portion of the law sanctioned anyone who “would make a public display of their homosexual condition or importune or solicit another for [homosexual] purposes” (haga pública ostentación de su

under these laws, and male homosexuality became a visible and publicly discussed vice, whereas lesbianism remained unnamed and invisible.<sup>10</sup> Between 1959 and 1980 male homosexuals suffered a range of consequences from limited career options to detention in street sweeps to incarceration in labor camps. The state had especially targeted gender-transgressive, “ostentatious,” or obvious homosexuals. Long hair, tight pants, colorful shirts, so-called effeminate mannerisms, “inappropriate clothing,” and “extravagant hairstyles” were seen as visible markers of male homosexuality.<sup>11</sup> Such visible markers not only facilitated enforcement of homosexual repression; more broadly, visibility and gender transgressions themselves constituted a central part of the problem identified by the revolution. Even in the severest period of enforcement, Marvin Leiner reminds us, private homosexual expression was never the main target. Rather, “during this period of the camps and public arrests, the major concern, as it had always been, was with the public display of homosexuality.”<sup>12</sup> The gravest crime was not same-sex sexual acts per se but, rather, transgressing gender norms in ways associated with male homosexuality—in other words, appearing visibly or “obviously” gay.

During Mariel this state identification of homosexuality facilitated exit from the country, a situation many aspiring migrants viewed as beneficial. Some Cuban homosexuals were even given the unenviable choice of either serving jail time or leaving the country; it was hoped this ultimatum would

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condición de homosexual o importune o solicite con sus requerimientos a otro). In addition, the 1979 version of the public scandal law increased prison terms and fines and included new sanctions against homosexual public sex, penalizing homosexual acts conducted in public and homosexual sex conducted in private that could be involuntarily seen by others. As the title of the relevant sections of both the 1936 and 1979 penal codes (public scandal) suggests, this law was centrally concerned with visibility. The updates of the law clarified the association between *escándolo público* and homosexuals and expanded sanctions against visible homosexuality. See *Código de defensa social*, 17 de abril de 1936 [1938], ed. Jesus Montero, obispo, 127, La Habana, Cuba, Artículos 486–88, 154; *Código penal*, ley no. 21 de 15 de febrero de 1979, gaceta oficial de 1ro. de marzo de 1979 (La Habana, Cuba: Ministerio de Justicia, 1979), Artículo 359, 193.

<sup>10</sup>Lesbians, masculine women, and women who had sex with women were not free from repression in Cuba. However, I believe that the forms of state persecution directed at homosexual men and lesbians were dramatically different. The visibility of gender-transgressive male homosexuality, in particular, was a concern for the state. The intense focus of the state gaze on gender-transgressive male homosexuals and the public discourse against effeminacy and male homosexuality were explicitly tied to emerging national discourse about a new virile, masculine, Cuban nation and society. My larger project focuses on the dialectical relationship between this state gaze and male homosexual politics of visibility that emerged in Miami, Florida.

<sup>11</sup>For examples of visible markers associated with homosexuality used by the state see Marvin Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994), 31–32; Luis Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 155.

<sup>12</sup>Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 31.

encourage their departure.<sup>13</sup> Others, like Armando, were able to request permission to leave.<sup>14</sup> Drawing on interviews with 180 Mariel entrants, Margarita García concluded that anyone “who went to the police station and declared him or herself to be a homosexual could get an exit permit.”<sup>15</sup> In a speech delivered in May 1980, Castro denied that anyone was being forced to leave the country but added, “We have the right to authorize the exit of the antisocial elements, and that is what we’re doing.”<sup>16</sup>

Accounts of gay men who went through this process confirm that declaring their homosexuality facilitated their exit from the country and reveal the ways in which authorities evaluated homosexuality. For example, in memoirs written shortly after the Mariel boatlift, Antonio Conchez describes how he was initially denied an exit permit because he was identified by the local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution as being a good student and coming from a “decent” family. Facing the challenge presented by good social standing, Conchez “had gone prepared with an eye-catching outfit, my hair messed up and a little bit of makeup on my eyes and face. I also spoke in a fake voice, exaggerating my mannerisms so that they would be convinced that I was a homosexual, and then I talked to them and I pleaded with them to give me that letter.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in *Before Night Falls* author Reinaldo Arenas described his processing at a local police station:

At the police station they asked me if I was a homosexual and I said yes; then they asked me if I was active or passive and I took the precaution

<sup>13</sup>For example, Fidel Toboso-Alfonso reported that he received a notice to report to “the public order” (police station) at his hometown in Guines, Cuba. At the station the police chief gave him the choice of serving four years in a penitentiary for being a homosexual or leaving Cuba as part of the Mariel boatlift. INS officials also indicated that “those forced onto boats by the Cuban government were threatened with four years’ imprisonment unless they left.” Finally, Allen Young reports that *Paris Match* writer Nina Sutton was told that “imprisoned homosexuals were ordered to leave for Florida, and were told that if they did not go they would be given four additional years of imprisonment.” See *Matter of Toboso-Alfonso*, U.S. Department of Justice, Board of Immigration Appeals, 20 I. & N. Dec. 819 (BIA 1990); Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox, 1981), 42; notes on interviews with Mike Tominski, Ray Morris, and James Smith attached to memorandum by Mario A. Rivera to James Giganti, 10 August 1980, “Tent City,” Miami [file no. 2] folder, box 22, Cuban Haitian Task Force (CHTF) Public Affairs File, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Carter Library).

<sup>14</sup>Margarita García, “The Last Days in Cuba: Personal Accounts of the Circumstances of the Exit,” *Migration Today* 11, nos. 4–5 (1983): 13–22; Félix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *With Open Arms: Cuban Migration to the U.S.* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 100–101.

<sup>15</sup>García, “The Last Days,” 20. See also Masud-Piloto, *With Open Arms*, 100–101.

<sup>16</sup>Castro, “Speech to a Fighting People,” 282.

<sup>17</sup>“Yo había ido preparado para la ocasión con una vestimenta diamativa [*sic*], el pelo alborotado y un poco de maquillaje [*sic*] en la cara y los ojos, además hablaba con una voz fingida exagerando los amaneramientos para que convencieran que yo era homosexual y entonces le hablé y le supliqué que me dieran esa carta. Dios entonces permitió que así fuera y me dieron la carta, donde decía que yo era una escoria de la sociedad que no trabajaba ni estudiaba, que había estado preso, que no estaba de acuerdo con el proceso revolucionario y otros horrores y calumnias más” (ibid., 28–29).



of saying that I was passive. . . . The Cuban government did not look upon those who took the active male role as real homosexuals. There were also some women psychologists there. They made me walk in front of them to see if I was queer [*si era loca o no*]. I passed the test, and a lieutenant yelled to another officer, "Send this one directly." This meant that I did not have to go through any further police investigation.<sup>18</sup>

With his *loca* strut for the psychologists and his previous arrest for having caused a "public scandal," Arenas was certified as visibly homosexual and, therefore, allowed to leave the country "just like one more queen" (*como una loca más*).<sup>19</sup>

Evidence suggests that many who did not consider themselves homosexuals claimed to be homosexual in order to leave the country. It is important to remember, however, that even those who had previously identified as homosexual also performed gayness in these exit interviews. When Armando picked out his flowery shirt, Conchez exaggerated his mannerisms, and Arenas strutted for the psychologists, they were deliberately performing the category of flamboyant, effeminate homosexual for state officials. The category of homosexual was reinforced, constructed, and redefined in these interactions. All of these accounts confirm that the officially recognized (and stigmatized) homosexual was a gender-transgressive male whose public behavior was ostentatious and who took the passive sexual role. As men who understood themselves to be homosexual performed this *loca* character, they reflected the official caricature of the homosexual back toward the state that had heightened its stigmatization. Certainly, some degree of condescension is at work here, for the men exaggerated a stereotype that they knew did not encompass who they were or who homosexuals were more broadly. However, even consciously constructed performances entailed real material and political consequences. If the men were convincing, authorities expedited their exit from the country. If they were not convincing, they might be refused an exit permit but marked as wanting to leave—a quite uncomfortable position given the acts of repudiation directed at *escoria* who preferred to emigrate. Their detailed accounts also suggest an ironic display of liberation: these men exaggerated effeminate or ostentatious mannerisms precisely in front of the government officials from whom they would most likely have hidden under normal circumstances.

<sup>18</sup>Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, trans. Dolores M. Koch (New York: Viking, 1993), 281. "Al llegar me preguntaron si yo era homosexual y les dije que sí; me preguntaron si era activo o pasivo, y tuve la precaución de decir que era pasivo. . . . El gobierno cubano no consideraba que los homosexuales activos fueran, en realidad, homosexuales. A mí me hicieron caminar delante de ellos para comprobar si era loca o no; había allí unas mujeres psicólogas. Yo pasé la prueba y el teniente le gritó a otro militar: 'A éste me lo mandas directo.' Aquello quería decir que no tenía que pasar por ningún otro tipo de investigación política" (Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que anochezca* [Barcelona: TusQuets, 1994], 301).

<sup>19</sup>Arenas, *Antes que anochezca*, 302.

At this moment in Cuban history, the state's policy toward homosexuals, while still oppressive, was quite unambiguous. Homosexuals continued to be stigmatized and defined as alien to the Cuban national project. The most socially dangerous homosexual type was further crystallized as the effeminate, gender-transgressive, ostentatious, passive homosexual man. As these accounts illustrate, homosexual men understood the state's categorization scheme. Because this denigrated category was quite clear, they were able to perform the expected role. In other words, because the state had persecuted visible homosexuals and because passive homosexuals were the most despised subgroup, men seeking permission to leave Cuba deliberately claimed the passive role and displayed the outward gender markers that "proved" ostentatious homosexuality to the police.

The interests of the Cuban state and homosexuals wishing to leave Cuba thus coincided in unexpected ways. From the Cuban state's perspective, the opportunity physically to remove homosexuals from the island could both enhance the virile image of the revolutionary nation and prevent possible future resistance from this stigmatized group. The migration of a large number of homosexuals, a minority group also stigmatized in the United States, also helped cast the mass exodus favorably for the revolution. According to the official Cuban discourse, the mass exodus did not prove the failure of the revolution. Instead, the hopeful emigrants were all undesirables, the lumpen dregs of society who did not want to work and were consumed by the vices of capitalism (including homosexuality, crime, and prostitution). By drawing attention to groups also widely stigmatized in the United States, the Cuban state simultaneously further discredited the emigrants, supported its revolutionary image, and generated challenges for future migrants.

Ironically, the interests of the Cuban state aligned with the immediate needs of Cuban homosexuals who wanted to depart. Between 1959 and 1980 emigration from Cuba was increasingly controlled. In addition, expressing a desire to leave the country was seen as a political betrayal. In general, those factors that may have motivated emigration are not so easy to disentangle.<sup>20</sup> Some Cuban homosexuals might have wanted to leave the island because of repression they faced due to their homosexuality. Others might have been more motivated by economic concerns. Regardless of their motivation, Mariel provided a brief opening for those who wished to emigrate. In contrast to previous Cuban state policies toward homosexuals, the identification of homosexuals during Mariel, in effect, provided a desired outcome (at least for those homosexuals who *wanted* to leave) as opposed to a repressive consequence.

<sup>20</sup>For a review of the literature on Latino/a sexual migration and the challenges in evaluating the extent to which sexuality affects choices to emigrate see Susana Peña, "Latina/o Sexualities in Motion," Latino/a Sexualities Research Agenda Project and Institute of Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, University of Connecticut, Ford Foundation, 2007.

ENTERING THE UNITED STATES

Whereas in Cuba the state actively sought to identify homosexuals in order to expel them and homosexuals, in turn, actively identified themselves to the state in order to facilitate their expulsion, in the United States the interests of the state and homosexuals did not line up so neatly, since the purpose and process of identification were inconsistent and often contradictory. Homosexual Cuban immigrants, ostentatious ones at that, presented three major complications for this receiving nation. First, homosexual Cubans embodied many of the existing contradictions and ambiguities of U.S. immigration policies governing homosexuals and Cubans as separate categories. Second, the identification of Cuban homosexuals was complicated by the fact that Mariel Cubans were processed in different ways by a number of federal, state, local, and voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) in a range of locations throughout the United States. These bureaucratic and jurisdictional differences inevitably led to disparate identification procedures. Third, the flood of national media attention that enveloped Mariel further complicated such procedures. The U.S. government was no less interested than Cuba in the public relations impact of the boatlift. For an international audience, it could confirm the failure of Cuban communism and the supremacy of U.S. capitalism: why else would so many desperate Cubans want to come to the United States? At home, the reinforcement of U.S. superiority might also quiet growing uneasiness about a weak national economy. Given the economic downturn in the previous decade and the upcoming presidential election in 1980, the domestic perception of the Mariel immigrants was especially important. Would voters perceive them as valued immigrants who would contribute to the U.S. economy (as they had perceived the “golden exiles” from Cuba who had preceded Mariel), or would they perceive them as undesirable immigrants who threatened national well-being?

IMMIGRATION POLICY CONFLICT: TO EXCLUDE OR TO WELCOME?

Homosexual Mariel Cubans encountered ambiguous and contradictory U.S. immigration policy. On the one hand, since the rise of the cold war, the United States had warmly received Cuban immigrants and exploited their desire to leave Cuba as tangible proof of the failure of communism. On the other hand, the United States had a long-standing—if selectively enforced—ban against homosexual entrants. These two policies clashed on the bodies of gay Cubans.

It was unclear whether Cuban immigrants entering during the Mariel boatlift would be granted the same level of preferential treatment given to previous Cuban immigrants. In fact, few Mariel Cubans were defined as either

political refugees or seekers of asylum.<sup>21</sup> Instead, they were issued “paroles,” and a new category was created for them: “Cuban-Haitian entrant (status pending).” This ambiguous status allowed them physical but not legal entrance into the country and became the foundation for the systematic denial of rights to Mariel Cubans.<sup>22</sup> Also, unlike previous Cuban immigrants who had been processed by the Cuban Refugee Program, this new wave became “the first sizeable group of Cuban immigrants to experience the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s personnel and operations.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, most Mariel Cubans encountered more difficult immigration procedures and policy hurdles than had the post-1959 Cuban immigrants who preceded them.

Homosexual Mariel immigrants faced an additional hurdle because, precisely as they were entering the United States, the INS was in the process of redefining its homosexual exclusion policy. As Eithne Luibhéid explains, homosexuals had been formally excluded from entering the United States since the early 1950s. Beginning in 1952, people identified as homosexual had been issued Class A medical exclusions because they were classified as having a “psychopathic personality.”<sup>24</sup> Between 1965 and 1979 homosexuals were reclassified as “sexual deviates” and still subject to Class A medical exclusions.<sup>25</sup> However, in 1979—six years after the American Psychological Association’s 1973 decision to drop homosexuality as a mental illness from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental*

<sup>21</sup>Only the very earliest arrivals from Cuba in 1980 were defined as refugees and covered under the provisions of the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, a law that allowed for an annual quota of fifty thousand refugees from throughout the world. This quota could be exceeded by the president in consultation with Congress. The 1980 act adopted the United Nations definition of refugee as anyone who has fled his or her country due to persecution or a “well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.” Previously, a refugee had been defined as anyone fleeing a communist country or a Middle Eastern nation. After the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, those fleeing communist countries remained more likely to receive asylum. It soon became clear that the 1980 Refugee Act quota would be quickly exceeded by the scale of the Mariel migration. A small group of early Mariel immigrants were defined as refugees, but cumbersome asylum applications and review procedures quickly proved too time-consuming. Therefore, the majority of Mariel Cubans were defined not as political refugees or asylum seekers but as economic immigrants (Aguirre, “Cuban Mass Migration,” 166).

<sup>22</sup>Mark S. Hamm clarifies this status: “Under the terms of the Refugee Act of 1980, an excludable person paroled in the U.S. . . . [is] considered to have no more rights than someone who is stopped at the border of a country. An excludable person on parole has no rights to a hearing and his parole may be revoked at any time. In contrast, a deportable person is entitled to certain hearing rights under federal law and INS regulation” (*The Abandoned Ones: The Imprisonment and Uprising of the Mariel Boat People* [Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1995], 190 n. 4). For more on the implications of the Cuban-Haitian entrant category and the legal repercussions for incarcerated Mariel immigrants see Mark Dow, *American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 285–301.

<sup>23</sup>Aguirre, “Cuban Mass Migration,” 165.

<sup>24</sup>Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*, 21. For an historical overview of immigration law in relation to sexuality see 31–54.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

*Disorders*—the surgeon general ordered the Public Health Service to stop issuing automatic Class A medical exclusions to homosexuals. This order denied the INS a bureaucratic identification mechanism to facilitate the automatic exclusion of homosexuals.<sup>26</sup>

The INS had yet to react formally to this new directive from the surgeon general when, between April and late September 1980, a sizeable population of gay men and women—Armando among them—entered the United States from Cuba. It was not until September 1980, with the boatlift almost over, that the INS responded with a new policy on homosexual exclusion that effectively bypassed the surgeon general's order. Given the timing of the decision, we can deduce that the INS felt the need to clarify its policy in order to deal with the sudden mass influx of immigrants and increasing media curiosity about homosexuals among the Cuban migrants. On 8 September 1980 Acting INS Commissioner David Crosland sent an agency memo announcing that new procedures would no longer require medical certification from the Public Health Service. According to the new policy, "aliens" were not to be asked about their sexual preference during "primary inspection." However, if "an alien makes an unsolicited, unambiguous oral or written admission of homosexuality" or if "a third party who presents himself or herself for inspection voluntarily states, without prompting or prior questioning, that an alien who arrived in the United States at the same time and is then being processed for admission is a homosexual," then a private, professionally administered "secondary inspection" of the alien would follow. During this secondary inspection, Crosland's memo directed, the alien "shall be asked *only* whether he or she is homosexual. If the answer is 'no,' the alien shall not be detained for further examination as to homosexuality. If the answer is 'yes,' the alien shall be asked to sign a statement to that effect . . . [and] he or she shall be referred to an immigration judge for an exclusion proceeding."<sup>27</sup>

This new policy was perceived as a partial victory by gay rights activists who had been struggling against the INS's broadly construed gay and lesbian exclusion policies. In fact, in a press release the National Gay Task Force called this an "immigration victory for gays" because with the new policy "gay aliens [would] no longer be subject to probing interrogation on their private sexual life by immigration authorities."<sup>28</sup>

For Cuban men whose identification as homosexual had just facilitated their exit from Cuba, avoiding state identification in the United

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>27</sup>Telegraphic message, David Crosland to James Lounsbury, 8 September 1980, Immigration and Naturalization Procedures folder, box 14, CHTF Director's File, Carter Library. For more on clarified immigration procedures see Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*, 23.

<sup>28</sup>Although national gay and lesbian rights activists did acknowledge that a real victory would have entailed dropping homosexual exclusion altogether, they still claimed that as a "practical matter" this new policy was "very close to a total victory." See National Gay Task Force, "Immigration Victory for Gays," press release, 10 September 1980, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Papers #7301, folder 164, box 36, Human Sexuality Collection, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York (hereafter HSC).

States might not have been an obvious strategy. Although the new INS procedures marked an improvement over previous methods in the eyes of national gay rights activists, the new policy did continue to exclude homosexuals who made an “unsolicited, unambiguous” statement to INS inspectors. Nevertheless, while this new policy continued to allow the federal government to exclude homosexuals, it also provided room for plausible deniability that could allow the entrance of “obvious” homosexuals arriving from Cuba. Moreover, those who did make a declaration of their homosexuality during primary inspection could answer that they were not gay in the secondary inspection, and the INS theoretically could not detain them.

During the initial stages of the boatlift itself, the INS homosexual exclusion policy was in flux. However, even after clarification, the U.S. state confronted conflicting imperatives. On the one hand, identifying homosexuals would allow their exclusion—a desired outcome from the department’s point of view, as its new policy made clear. At the same time, the possibility of excluding a large number of Cuban immigrants because of their sexuality posed a practical problem: What would the U.S. government do with a large group of “excludable” homosexuals who could not be returned to their home country?

#### INCONSISTENT IDENTIFICATION: THE STATE GAZE IN PRACTICE

In addition to this policy dilemma, various practical issues on the ground made the Mariel boatlift a logistical nightmare for the agencies charged with processing immigrants. During their first days on U.S. soil, Mariel Cubans underwent bureaucratic processing by federal agencies, local officials, and VOLAGs. Most Mariel Cubans went through a basic process during which authorities consistently identified personal characteristics they considered to be of interest to the state. For example, officials tested the immigrants for venereal disease and tuberculosis and interviewed them about their criminal history. In these first days of processing, the state gaze was refracted through a range of federal agencies, including those concerned with immigration status (INS), law enforcement and security, and public health as well as several VOLAGs charged with resettlement.

While this initial processing was fairly consistent across the Mariel entrant population, subsequent processing varied dramatically, and the route a Mariel entrant followed to immigration sponsorship had a substantial impact on the subsequent intensity of the state’s fractured gaze. Mariel Cubans who were reunited with family sponsors by the VOLAGs within their first seventy-two hours in the United States were held in custody for only a few days and never left South Florida. In contrast, others were held in state custody for months in distant states. After this initial common processing, Mariel Cubans followed one of three routes: (1) direct resettlement in South Florida for those with available sponsors; (2) review at a federal correctional institution (FCI) for

those suspected of having a criminal background; or (3) confinement at a resettlement camp for those without available sponsors. Both homosexuals and nonhomosexuals followed all three routes. However, the focus and intensity of the U.S. state gaze in relation to homosexuality varied considerably, depending on the route.

#### ROUTE 1: SOUTH FLORIDA RESETTLEMENT

The most desirable route for entrants was to locate a family or unrelated volunteer sponsor quickly while they were still in the South Florida area. About half of the Mariel entrants were placed directly with sponsors.<sup>29</sup> Those with family members willing to sponsor them and those who were attractive, nonthreatening candidates for volunteer sponsors were placed more quickly. Less attractive candidates (single men, black men, and “obvious homosexuals”) were more likely to be sent to resettlement camps outside of South Florida.

Given that about half of entering Mariel Cubans were resettled directly out of South Florida, it is likely that many Cuban gays and lesbians were resettled in this way.<sup>30</sup> However, because this group remained in state custody for the least amount of time, we have the least historical information about them. It appears that certain demographic characteristics

<sup>29</sup>Approximately 49.8 percent of arrivals were placed directly with family from one of the processing centers in South Florida. See “A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force,” 1 November 1980, Misc. Informative Materials [1] folder, box 15, 75, CHTF Director’s File, Carter Library.

<sup>30</sup>In my larger work I argue that, although Cuban American homosexual men managed their identities and cultural expressions in relationship to hypervisibility, Cuban American lesbians had to negotiate their identities and cultural expressions in relationship to invisibility. In Cuba gender-transgressive homosexual men were marginalized and persecuted, but they were also culturally intelligible in a way that Cuban lesbians were not. José Quiroga has argued that Cuban male homosexuals had meanings imposed upon them by the Cuban Revolution (such as that male homosexuals were a threat to the virile, masculine revolution), whereas from the point of view of the revolution Cuban lesbians were “apparitional, nonexistent, and inconceivable” (*Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America* [New York: New York University Press, 2000], 124). Disparate forms of persecution might have led more homosexual men than lesbians to be seen by the Cuban state as homosexual and therefore worthy of an exit permit. Although lesbians were part of the Mariel migration, they were not a central focus of the state gaze in the United States either. Gender-transgressive male homosexuals were identified in media reports and government data, but lesbians were rarely mentioned. Even when categories like “homosexuals” that could include both gay men and lesbians were used in government documents, further elaboration usually revealed that the term referred specifically to gay men. One of the most interesting exceptions to this rule is a *Latitudes* cover story on Cuban lesbians awaiting sponsorship at one of the resettlement camps in Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. This story reiterates that media attention had focused on men. It also reveals how the reporter’s definitions and expectations of lesbians were challenged by the women at the camp. For example, when Brooke Jones encountered two women walking together in an embrace, she was surprised that they said they did not identify as lesbian. On the other hand, when interviewing someone who did identify as lesbian, she was surprised that the woman asked for nail polish. In general, Jones described entering the camps “hoping to spot a lesbian” but learning after her interviews that

impacted how quickly VOLAGs found sponsors for Mariel Cubans. For example, race played a major impact on the likelihood of an entrant finding a sponsor. Only 8 to 10 percent of Mariel immigrants processed in Miami were black, while approximately 50 percent of those processed through resettlement camps were black or mulatto.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, blacks comprised 75 percent of Cubans awaiting sponsorship in Fort Chaffee after the consolidation of all resettlement camps in October 1980.<sup>32</sup> Gender and marital status also played a major role; significantly, single males encountered greater difficulties finding a sponsor than families and single females.<sup>33</sup> Although records are lacking, we can hypothesize that highly gender-transgressive homosexual men within this group had an even more difficult time finding a sponsor. Certainly, this was the case in the resettlement camps, where VOLAGs acknowledged their poor placement record for this population. Judging from the records of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force (CHTF), however, the sexuality of successful South Florida resettlement cases did not seem to have concerned the state. There is no evidence that U.S. officials formally identified, enumerated, or differently processed homosexuals among this population.

#### ROUTE 2: FEDERAL CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Mariel Cubans who were suspected of having a criminal background, including those who admitted to homosexuality-related arrests in Cuba, were sent to FCIs for further review. Because U.S. authorities were invested in identifying “criminals” among the Mariel entrant population and because

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“we wouldn’t be able to tell them from the straight women” (“New Life for Cuban Lesbians: New Arrivals Possess Warmth, Vitality, Strength,” *Latitudes: Journal of the International Lesbian & Gay Association Liaison Office* 1, no. 2 [1980]: 4–5, 14–16). This issue of *Latitudes* can be found in Larry Bush Papers #7316, folder 44, box 4, HSC.

<sup>31</sup>After providing the disclaimer that “the sociodemographic data which follows was obtained under somewhat imperfect conditions from many sources [including the INS, the Public Health Service, and each processing center] and would not fulfill all the criteria for a controlled scientific study,” the CHTF report stated that 8 percent of those resettled directly in South Florida were black and 92 percent were white (“A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force,” 70–71). A November 1980 memo stated that “roughly” 10 percent of those resettled directly in South Florida were black and 90 percent were white and added that 50 percent of the camp populations were either black or mulatto. This memo also clarifies that the racial statistics for the camp population are “rough” estimates because “no hard data is available.” See Department of State memorandum, Frederick M. Bohen to Eugene Eidenberg, 6 November 1980, “Monthly Entrant Report for October,” Executive Summaries 10/27/80–11/25/80 folder, box 29, 8–9, CHTF Data Summaries File, Carter Library.

<sup>32</sup>“A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force,” 70–71. See also Department of Health and Human Services memorandum by Frederick M. Bohen to Eugene Eidenberg, 11 December 1980, “Monthly Entrant Report for November,” Executive Summaries 11/25/80–1/5/81 folder, box 29, 15, CHTF Data Summaries File, Carter Library.

<sup>33</sup>Single adult males made up 93 percent of the postconsolidation population at Fort Chaffee.



certain expressions of homosexuality were criminalized in Cuba, this portion of the homosexual Mariel population did fall directly under the state's gaze.

Mariel Cubans who admitted to serving jail time in Cuba were issued a 2-C classification and sent to an FCI for further investigation. Given that admission of homosexuality to state officials had very recently facilitated exit from Cuba for many Mariel Cubans, many of whom believed the United States less repressive of homosexuals than Cuba, it is likely that many homosexual Mariel Cubans did not hide their previous homosexuality-related incarceration from INS officials.<sup>34</sup> A review of information about Mariel Cubans released from the FCI in Talladega, Alabama, suggests that homosexuals comprised a significant portion of the 2-C population.<sup>35</sup> A "fact sheet" explained the procedures that led to the August 1980 "release" of Mariel Cubans either directly to sponsors or to resettlement camps. Before recommending release, INS deportation officers "extensively" interviewed detainees and prepared case files on them that were, in turn, reviewed by an INS attorney who also interviewed each detainee. This file was then reviewed by the INS commissioner's office in Washington and finally by Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti. Based on this review process, 215 detainees were released because they had not committed a serious crime, had not committed a recent crime, had already served a sentence for their crime, and were not considered a threat to society. In order to justify the decision to release the detainees, the fact sheet included a "sample profile of offenses committed in Cuba." Interestingly, two of the ten sample profiles involved arrests in Cuba related to homosexuality.<sup>36</sup> While we do not know if this constitutes a representative sample, this memo at least suggests that a significant number of homosexuals were identified as part of the "criminal element" and segregated upon initial screening.

The sample profiles include brief descriptions of detainees to be released, including age, date, and description of criminal offense. Although brief, the

<sup>34</sup>According to Siro del Castillo, the director of Krome North, one of the South Florida Mariel processing centers located at the INS Krome Detention Center, a distinction was supposed to be made between Cubans who had committed a "blood crime" and those who had been incarcerated for acts not criminalized in the United States. Only those having committed serious crimes were to be held in the FCIs. However, del Castillo lamented that, "in practice, political prisoners, those who declared themselves to be prostitutes, deviants, or criminals to obtain permission to leave Cuba, and those who were 'criminals' only by Cuba's standards, as well as others merely suspected of having a criminal background have been given 2-C classification and detained in the FCI." See notes on interview with Siro del Castillo attached to memorandum by Mario A. Rivera to James Giganti, 10 August 1980, "Tent City," Miami [file no. 2] folder, box 22, CHTF Public Affairs File, Carter Library.

<sup>35</sup>Most Mariel Cubans identified as having prison records were released from FCIs. By November 1980 1,769 remained in FCIs—a much smaller number than the "substantially larger number of Cubans [who] admitted to having prison records in Cuba." See "A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force," 1 November 1980, Misc. Informative Materials [1] folder, box 15, 55, CHTF Director's File, Carter Library.

<sup>36</sup>"Fact Sheet: Release of Detainees from Talladega," draft, Talladega [Federal Correctional Institute] folder, box 9, CHTF Subject File, Carter Library.

descriptions provide considerable insight into the state's concerns about homosexuality. First, authorities were clearly interested in identifying (and not releasing) pedophiles. Both of the aforementioned references to the homosexual detainees attempted to clarify that they were not pedophiles. The first cited a thirty-four-year-old man who had "1971 and 1978 convictions for homosexual acts, never with boys." The other described a thirty-one-year-old "practicing homosexual" who had a 1975 "conviction for corrupting a minor, police said it involved a 16 year old boy, he says no."<sup>37</sup> Second, all profiles included brief reference to possible sponsors for the detainees after release. The thirty-four-year-old man "has aunts and uncles in the United States, who may support him," and the thirty-one-year-old man "has a sister in New Jersey, who will help and support him." The mention of willing family sponsors reinforces the assessment that these Cubans would be accepted into society and would not become part of the population stranded in resettlement centers. Finally, the sample profiles and the description of the evaluation procedure confirm one way in which information related to the homosexuality of Mariel Cubans was recorded by the state. These three-line profiles include references not only to particular crimes but also to sexual identity ("practicing homosexual"). Clearly, the state's gaze, through different registers of evaluation by the INS and the Office of the Attorney General, did identify homosexuals and was concerned with how their homosexuality would impact their incorporation into U.S. society. Such identification, however, was not among the criteria for attempting to exclude them.

### ROUTE 3: RESETTLEMENT CAMPS

Although information about the homosexuality of Cubans detained in FCIs was collected, this information was not necessarily made public and did not capture the media's attention (rapists and murderers were much more alarming "criminals" reported in the news). Homosexual Mariel Cubans who were sent to resettlement camps, on the other hand, did attract media attention. Mariel Cubans who had a difficult time finding sponsors were sent to more distant processing camps scattered throughout the country, including Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, and Fort Walton Beach, Florida. As negative media portrayals of the Mariel immigrants increased and massive numbers of Cubans continued to arrive, volunteer sponsors were harder to come by, and Mariel Cubans were held in state custody for longer periods of time.

The CHTF was aware of media interest in this population and carefully monitored newspaper articles in both national and local publications covering homosexual Mariel Cubans.<sup>38</sup> The task force's final report reflected on

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>For example, see Homosexuals [file no. 2] folder, box 22, CHTF Public Affairs File, Carter Library.

the impact of this media attention: "During the summer months, there was media coverage of the presence of homosexuals among the Cuban entrants. The self-segregation of these homosexuals in the resettlement centers gave them a high visibility which facilitated the media coverage."<sup>39</sup> According to the CHTF, "widespread publicity" increased the difficulty of finding sponsors for the homosexual Mariel Cubans.<sup>40</sup> Federal officials also felt that the visibility of homosexuals contributed to the overall negative perception of the migration. By August 1980 a Harris poll found that 70 to 80 percent of American opinion on Cubans and Haitians was negative, and a Gallup poll reported that 75 percent of Americans believed the Cuban refugee situation was "bad for our country." Responding to these polls in a Department of State memo, Arthur P. Brill, CHTF director of public affairs, identified "reasons for negative public opinion," including "negative performances by Cubans." The last "but certainly not least" cause of the negative public opinion, according to Brill, was the "wide media attention given to the bad performers. The hijackers, rioters, criminals, malcontents, homosexuals, and prostitutes have received the limelight. . . . As a result, the malperformers [*sic*] are giving the impression to the American people that the entrants are not grateful."<sup>41</sup> To challenge this negative impression, the federal government denied any systematic knowledge or identification of homosexual immigrants in the camps. However, because "obvious" homosexuality and gender transgression were obstacles to traditional resettlement, homosexuality had to be taken into account in order to facilitate the processing of homosexual Cubans. Therefore, authorities had to see homosexuals in order to move them out of the media spotlight even as they claimed not to see the homosexuals in order to deny their existence to the media.

The resettlement camp population formed the primary focus of media debates about homosexual Mariel Cubans for a number of reasons.<sup>42</sup> First, they were held in state custody for longer than those resettled directly from South Florida. Second, "obvious gays" or gender-transgressive homosexuals were generally segregated or self-segregated within the camps and were, therefore, more visible to visitors and the press. Finally, "obvious gays," as opposed to less visible homosexuals, were more likely to be detained in the resettlement camps and confined for longer periods of time. As time went

<sup>39</sup>"A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force," 58.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>41</sup>Department of State Memorandum by Arthur P. Brill to Christian R. Holmes, 22 August 1980, "Negative public reaction," Public Affairs-State Department folder, box 27, CHTF Public Affairs File, Carter Library.

<sup>42</sup>Mariel homosexuals housed at the Orange Bowl or Miami's "Tent City" were another focus of these debates. Mariel Cubans held at these sites had suffered "broken sponsorships." In other words, they had already been resettled with either family or volunteer sponsors, but they had either left or been kicked out of their sponsor's home. While the Mariel entrants in general were often stigmatized as a group, broken sponsorship cases represented the most marginalized of the marginal within this population because of their apparent failure to have assimilated into normative U.S. society.

on, the camp populations were increasingly comprised of difficult-to-place Cubans or “special cases.” One category of special cases was male homosexuals and, more specifically, gender-transgressive male homosexuals.

That homosexuals were a recognized category within the resettlement population was not a secret to camp residents, camp officers, and the media. Official denials aside, camp officials were clearly aware of the homosexual population. For example, a newsletter produced by camp residents and staff at Fort Chaffee contained two sections providing health advice related to venereal disease and addressed to homosexual men (“Compañero Gay”) and women (“Amiga Homosexual”) at the camp.<sup>43</sup> In a State Department memo in response to direct questions about the homosexual population, Senior Civilian Coordinator Donald Whitteaker described the presence of “two different types of homosexuals at Fort Chaffee, admitted and closet [*sic*].” According to Whitteaker, the homosexuals were “consenting adults and segregated by their design. Lifestyle is casual and open.”<sup>44</sup> This descriptive response signals the government’s careful attention to the homosexual population.

Before the story of gay Mariel broke in the national media, local newspapers were asking camp workers about the presence of homosexuals as a distinct group within the camps. For example, one newspaper from an area outside Fort Indiantown Gap camp quoted officials who openly discussed male homosexuals at the camp and consistently referred to male homosexuals at the camps as “the faggots.” These officials justified the need to segregate homosexuals in a separate area because of violence between homosexuals and others.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the gay press (including the *Sentinel*, the *Blade*, and the *Advocate*) reported on the gay Mariel story.<sup>46</sup>

Editors and reporters from the national mainstream press also knew about the gay population early on. In a *Columbia Journalism Review* article Michael Massing quotes editors and reporters from *Newsday*, the *New York Times*, and the *Boston Globe* who were clearly aware of the gay presence

<sup>43</sup>“Mensaje de salud,” *La Vida Nueva* (Fort Chaffee newsletter), no. 88, 22 agosto 1980, La Vida Nueva 8/20/80–9/27/80 folder, box 37, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

<sup>44</sup>Department of State memorandum by Donald E. Whitteaker to John Cannon, 2 September 1980, “Security/criminal activities/mental health,” [Fort] Chaffee folder, box 21, CHTF Public Affairs File, Carter Library. Whitteaker also responded to concerns about unaccompanied minors by acknowledging that “there may be some young males or females 18 to 20 years of age that are victims of male and female homosexuals and prostitutes. However, as these are identified, action is taken to protect them by segregating them or moving them to a new area” (3).

<sup>45</sup>In reference to an incident in which a gay man defended himself by knocking out another man with the lid of a garbage can, for example, a soldier explained: “They are faggots but they have man muscles.” See Garry Lenton, “Cuban Gays in Web: Agencies Caught up in Alien Laws, Too,” *Lebanon Sunday Pennsylvanian*, 6 July 1980, 1, 3A, News Clippings 6/27/80–7/19/80 folder, box 39, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

<sup>46</sup>Michael Massing, “The Invisible Cubans,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 19 (1980): 49–51; Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution*, 50–58.

among Mariel migrants, including the presence of segregated homosexual barracks in resettlement camps. Some reporters had even observed same-sex couples walking hand in hand at the camps. Until 7 July 1980, however, the national mainstream media avoided the topic of gay men among the Mariel entrants, did not identify this visible gay presence as a major story, and cited the “unavailability of reliable data” as the reason for this omission.<sup>47</sup> The theme of unreliable data would emerge again and again as state officials attempted to silence the gay Mariel story.

#### HOMOSEXUALITY AND GENDER TRANSGRESSION IN RESETTLEMENT CAMPS: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN JOSÉ IS WEARING A DRESS?

Although an overall demographic picture identifying the sexuality of Mariel Cubans was not available, public health, mental health, and medical professionals working with and for the state constructed their own version of ostensibly scientific, reliable data. Medical professionals, who were less concerned with the public relations impact of their data, identified the presence of homosexuals as a topic of interest and responded to state concerns about the population. As they identified homosexuality as a potential social problem related to issues of public health, they turned their keenest gaze on this semicaptive population.<sup>48</sup>

For example, medical advisor Dr. Harold Ginzburg’s assessment of Mariel Cubans was summarized in a memo from Bill Schroeder to Nick Nichols. The doctor, working with mental health services, constructed three categories of homosexuals. The first category was comprised of Cubans who claimed to be homosexual only in order to leave Cuba and did not engage in homosexual activity in the camps. The second category, “situational homosexuals,” included “heterosexuals, who, while imprisoned, practiced homosexuality, but once released, reverted once again to heterosexuality.” The third category Ginzburg labeled “gays.” Gays were “naturally inclined to homosexuality,” tended to “keep to themselves,” and posed “no threat to society.” Ginzburg expressed concern that “gays” often became victims of violence, even though they did not pose an active threat themselves.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Massing, “The Invisible Cubans,” 50. For an analysis of the treatment of gay Mariel in the mainstream media see Susana Peña, “Visibility and Silence: Mariel and Cuban American Gay Male Experience and Representation,” in *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, US Citizenship, and Border Crossings*, ed. Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantú (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup>For more on the medical gaze see Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*.

<sup>49</sup>Memorandum by Bill Schroeder to Nick Nichols, n.d., “Discussion with Dr. Harold Ginzburg, Mental Health Services,” Mental Health [2] folder, box 38, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library. In addition, Ginzburg was especially concerned with homosexual rape and explained that “in some instances this occurs because some of the men are ‘teasers’ and, in the eyes of the aggressor, warranted the attack. Some rapes occur between two gays in circumstances where they are fighting due to a separation” (2).

In contrast, a controversial report written by another doctor and public health specialist emphasized the disruptive presence of homosexuals in one resettlement camp. The August 1980 “Report on Status of Cuban Refugees at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin” by Rachel Schwartz and Peter Kramer painted a grim picture of camp life that highlighted violent criminals who were not readily discernible from the rest of the population. Schwartz and Kramer repeatedly asserted that homosexuals were an “excludable category, by act of Congress,” even though they were not being moved to exclusion hearings.<sup>50</sup> Like Ginzburg, Schwartz and Kramer expressed concerns about violence, stating that “sexual abuse of homosexuals by heterosexuals is not uncommon, and apparently accounts for a fair amount of violence.”<sup>51</sup>

In a review of the so-called Kramer Report, Ginzburg refuted some of these allegations. For example, while he acknowledged the occurrence of homosexual rape, Ginzburg stated that he was unaware of the statistics Schwartz and Kramer had used to indicate that minors were unaccounted for and that led them to suggest that “these children (teenagers) are hidden in the men’s barracks, where they are used sexually by or otherwise paired with adults.” Ginzburg did agree that homosexual men were “safer” in the family compound and that sexual activity was occurring “between consenting men.” As a rejoinder to the Kramer Report’s sensationalist language, Ginzburg added that “homosexual activities are not criminal offenses in many states in which they involve consenting adults.”<sup>52</sup> The tension between Ginzburg and the authors of the Kramer Report reminds us that the fractured medical gaze directed upon Mariel homosexuals provided overlapping and often contradictory conclusions.

In addition to identifying the homosexual population, the medical gaze also provided a glimpse of the gay cultural practices in the camps—practices that federal bureaucrats preferred to ignore or downplay. For example, Schwartz and Kramer provide a glimpse at the role of gender transgression and cross-dressing in the camps: “Walking around the camp one is likely to encounter attractive young women made-up and dressed in colorful clothing. On careful inspection, however, these women are men. Many of the homosexuals have migrated to the family compound because they feel

<sup>50</sup>“Report on the Status of Cuban Refugees at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin” by Rachel M. Schwartz and Peter D. Kramer, August 1980, Fort McCoy, Wisconsin folder, box 21, 11, 22, CHTF Public Affairs File, Carter Library.

<sup>51</sup>According to them, “jealousy over the homosexual love affairs” also led to stabbings, and homosexual rape was “apparently frequent, at least it [was] commented on frequently in conversation and [was] a constant fear of weaker homosexual youths.” They also described homosexual prostitution in the camps, identifying a “male whorehouse” and a “homosexual whorehouse” (*ibid.*, 11).

<sup>52</sup>“Ginsberg’s [*sic*] Statement,” Fort McCoy [1] folder, box 4, CHTF Subject File, Carter Library.

it is safer. They have created their own subculture.”<sup>53</sup> The Mariel boatlift offered some homosexual men who had suffered the consequences of visibility in Castro’s Cuba an opportunity strategically to flaunt their homosexuality as a way to escape state oppression. Many believed they were coming to a country tolerant of such display. Ironically, many were headed for a nation that had just embarked upon a national Christian backlash against gay liberation, and they had entered it through the city of Miami, where some say that backlash began.<sup>54</sup> This backlash and the potential for assault notwithstanding, inside and outside the camps many embraced the notion that they would no longer have to hide. Gender transgression was one culturally resonant way in which a subpopulation of men who had sex with men and identified as homosexual expressed that identity.

Viewed in this way, the gender transgression of the gay *Marielitos* enacted both political resistance and community formation. However, this visible behavior posed an obstacle to traditional resettlement. For example, David Lewis, a representative of the United States Catholic Conference, explained during an episode of *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report*: “We have a number of individuals at Chaffee whose lifestyles is [*sic*] obviously something that we must be very honest [about] with our sponsors. . . . And if we pick up some facets of their personality which are possibly going to be a surprise to the sponsor, if José, as it turns out, is in fact wearing a dress, it’s obviously very important that we discuss this issue with the sponsor.”<sup>55</sup> As Lewis’s comment suggests, many religious VOLAGs traditionally involved with

<sup>53</sup>Schwartz and Kramer, “Report,” 16. This report has been described as a “briefly publicized, then suppressed, internal HHS [Health and Human Services] evaluation by medical officers” (Mario Rivera, *Decision and Structure: U.S. Refugee Policy in the Mariel Crisis* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1991], 129).

<sup>54</sup>The 1977 Save Our Children campaign led by Christian entertainer and Florida Citrus Commission spokesperson Anita Bryant successfully challenged an antidiscrimination ordinance in Dade County, Florida, drafted specifically to protect gays and lesbians. This campaign marked the beginning of a national backlash against gay rights and gay visibility. Elsewhere I argue that prior to 1980 issues of visibility were centered on social control of male homosexuals and challenges to that social control in both Cuba and the United States. In other words, the Cuban state and Bryant’s publicity campaign both identified visible manifestations of homosexuality as a threat. Bryant, for example, specifically targeted homosexuals who “flaunted” their sexuality. In turn, male homosexuals challenged these discourses with a politics of visibility. See Susana Peña, “From UMAs to Save Our Children: Gay Visibility and Repression in Cuba and Miami before the Mariel Boatlift,” in *Oye Loca: The Making of Cuban American Gay Miami*, book manuscript in progress; see also James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001). For the impact of this struggle on the national gay and lesbian rights movement see Tina Fetner, “Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims,” *Social Problems* 48, no. 3 (2001): 411–28.

<sup>55</sup>Transcripts of “Fort Chaffee,” in *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* (WNET/Thirteen, 1980), 3, located in Public Affairs Releases 9/16/80–1/29/81 folder, box 61, CHTF Administrative File, Carter Library.

resettling refugees were not necessarily well suited to finding sponsors for a dress-wearing José. The situation only intensified as the resettlement camp VOLAGs found sponsors for more Mariel Cubans, leaving the remaining concentration of “problem cases” or “hard-to-place” populations more prone to media visibility.

As the “deviance” of the Mariel Cuban population increasingly became the subject of sensationalist media stories, the state developed an interest in dispersing the spectacle of visible, gender-transgressive homosexuals concentrated in state custody. In order to move the *locas* out of the media spotlight and facilitate their sponsorship, the U.S. state needed precisely to pinpoint gender-transgressive homosexuals in the resettlement camps—ironically, in order to obscure this population from the media’s gaze. However, if the state formally recognized their homosexuality, these migrants could be subject to exclusion hearings based on INS homosexual exclusion policies. In order to navigate these contradictions, the authorities needed to process gender-transgressive homosexuals without officially identifying them as homosexuals at all.

#### MANAGING PUBLIC RELATIONS: THE U.S. MEDIA AND THE GAY MARIEL STORY

The CHTF responded to a 7 July 1980 *Washington Post* report by Warren Brown that twenty thousand Cuban homosexuals remained in the resettlement camps by taking a series of conflicting official positions.<sup>56</sup> In effect, the CHTF claimed that (1) they did not identify homosexuals in the Mariel population; (2) they did not know how many homosexuals there were; (3) they did not involuntarily segregate homosexuals in resettlement camps; and (4) they did not work with gay organizations to resettle gay immigrants from Mariel.<sup>57</sup>

The first position was articulated in a 7 July 1980 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) memorandum issued in direct response to Brown’s article. In the memo FEMA Director John W. Macy asserted: “We have made no attempt to identify or classify these individuals at the reception and processing centers.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, two press guidance sheets issued in September reinforced this position, clarifying that “sexual preference in

<sup>56</sup>Warren Brown, “Cuban Boatlift Drew Thousands of Homosexuals; Thousands of Refugees from Cuba Are Homosexual,” *Washington Post*, 7 July 1980, 1A. Reprinted as Warren Brown, “Gay Refugees Await Sponsors,” *Miami Herald*, 7 July 1980, 1, 10A.

<sup>57</sup>For example, see press guidance sheets dated 7 July 1980, 11 September 1980, and 12 September 1980 in [Reading Material Notebook] [3] folder, box 17, CHTF Director’s File, Carter Library.

<sup>58</sup>FEMA memorandum by John W. Macy to Eugene Eidenberg, 7 July 1980, “Executive Summary—Cuban Refugee Situation,” FEMA Executive Summaries 6/21/80–7/14/80 folder, box 30, CHTF Data Summaries File, Carter Library.



individual Cubans was not asked during INS processing.”<sup>59</sup> While there is no evidence that a definitive, systematic count of homosexuals among the entire Mariel population was ever made, sources suggest that at least some of the refugees were officially asked about their sexuality. At the same time, there seem to have been different processes for identifying gay populations at each resettlement camp and processing center. Within the camps, too, not all men who self-identified as gay revealed as much to government officials.

Evidence suggests that much of the information about the homosexuality of Mariel Cubans was gathered by mental health professionals and VOLAGs rather than by the INS.<sup>60</sup> Other sources, however, indicate that homosexuals were being identified by the INS as possible excludable aliens. For example, in a discussion of the population being held at Fort McCoy, Schwartz and Kramer suggested that homosexuals were being identified during INS interviews. Moving almost seamlessly from a discussion of “criminals” to “homosexuals,” they criticized the federal government’s inability to properly “sort” Mariel Cubans: “In reality much of the information learned about the population did not result in adequate sorting of people. For example despite the rigorous nature of the INS interview numerous criminal types were admitted to the general population of single men. Homosexuality, while initially an excludable category, has been placed in abeyance, but known homosexuals were placed with single male heterosexuals.”<sup>61</sup> Schwartz and Kramer’s assertion that the INS asked Mariel Cubans about their sexuality is substantiated by other sources. As previously mentioned, Ginzburg’s report noted that some Cubans claimed to be homosexual in order to leave Cuba and that “when they arrived in the US they informed INS as such. In nearly all of these instances, their behaviour verified their claim.”<sup>62</sup> Referring to Fort Walton Beach, one of Young’s respondents recalled that “while being processed by American authorities, the more obvious gays in the camp were questioned as to whether they were homosexual. Some men went to these interviews wearing makeup or female clothing. Their being gay was not an obstacle to the processing.”<sup>63</sup>

In addition to reports showing that the INS had asked some Cubans about their sexuality, federal documents also indicate that they had

<sup>59</sup>Press guidance sheet, 12 September 1980.

<sup>60</sup>For example, Siro del Castillo, the director of Krome North, acknowledged that Mariel Cubans were asked about their sexuality by camp psychiatrists and psychologists assisting in their relocation. Since del Castillo’s statement focuses on mental health professionals working with VOLAGs, his assertion does not directly contradict the task force’s public position. See Siro del Castillo, “A Plea to Destigmatize Mariel,” *Caribbean Review* 13, no. 4 (1984): 7.

<sup>61</sup>Schwartz and Kramer, “Report,” 11.

<sup>62</sup>It is unclear here what behavior verified their homosexuality. Throughout various types of government documents, gender transgression was read as synonymous with homosexuality. See Schroeder to Nichols, “Discussion,” 2.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 42.

identified “homosexuals” or “gays” as a significant subgroup within the Mariel population that required special attention. Sometimes a discussion of homosexual migrants was subsumed under an umbrella category such as “undesirables,” “problem populations,” or “hard to place” populations. Sometimes these umbrella categories did not explicitly include homosexuals; at other times they did. For example, in a 22 July 1980 memo CHTF Director Thorne discussed the “problem” of “aliens with troubled backgrounds,” a category that included those for whom there was a “high probability that they could not adjust to our society immediately and could cause serious problems for their sponsors and for their sponsors’ local communities.” In order to clarify which groups were included in this category, Thorne specified that “examples of those troubled backgrounds are homosexuals, rebellious minors, people who have spent considerable time in prison but who would not be judged as felons in our society, borderline mentally disturbed persons, [and] prostitutes.”<sup>64</sup> A CHTF report written toward the end of the boatlift specifically identified “gays” as one of four “problem populations” and devoted an entire section to this group.<sup>65</sup> The assertion that the federal government (including the INS) did not question or identify homosexuals is, therefore, refuted by a range of evidence.

In response to Brown’s estimate that twenty thousand gay Cubans awaited resettlement, federal government officials made their second assertion: they did not know how many homosexuals there were among the camp population, so when forced to estimate they could only guess. A September 1980 press guidance sheet, for example, simply asserted that there was “no exact count” of the number of homosexuals in the camps.<sup>66</sup> However, CHTF documents indicate that the federal government did attempt to count the number of homosexuals in the resettlement camps. Produced in response to Brown’s article, some of these estimates ranged from 200 to 6,800.<sup>67</sup> It was sometimes unclear whether these estimates referred to

<sup>64</sup>Department of State Memorandum by N. G. W. Thorne to Victor H. Palmieri, 22 July 1980, “Report on July 18 Staff Briefing,” Staffing Briefing 7/18/80 folder, box 18, CHTF Director’s File, Carter Library.

<sup>65</sup>The other three groups defined as “problem populations” were the “criminal element,” “mental health,” and “unaccompanied minors” (“A Report of the Cuban-Haitian Task Force,” 55–64).

<sup>66</sup>Press guidance sheet, 11 September 1980. Other sources have argued that the number of homosexuals was overestimated, if not entirely concocted, by the media. For example, Yohel Camayd-Freixas complained of the ongoing effect of the erroneous newspaper figure: “It is interesting to note that this is the only reported estimate—if grossly inaccurate—of a high proportion of homosexuals among the Mariel group. Yet many subsequent articles include the ‘homosexual problem’ as a characteristic of the Mariel group, even though these reports have no objective bases for such claims aside from this erroneous Herald article” (*Crisis in Miami*, Boston Urban Research and Development Group [Boston: Northeast Press, 1988], III-47). In addition, see del Castillo, “A Plea to Destigmatize Mariel,” 7.

<sup>67</sup>For example, an internal memo estimates the homosexual population awaiting resettlement at anywhere between 200 and 1,750. See Macy to Eidenberg, “Executive Summary—Cuban

the total number of homosexuals who had entered as part of Mariel or the number of homosexuals awaiting resettlement. In addition to figures solicited to refute Brown's article, internal documents also included estimates of homosexuals awaiting resettlement solicited by the federal government for other purposes. For example, a document outlining "Questions on Consolidation" requested a count of people with "sexual preference (different)" by 2 August 1980.<sup>68</sup> Spreadsheets enumerating different classes of Mariel Cubans were compiled by different entities involved in resettlement, including the Department of State. A handwritten document found in the CHTF director's files concerning the consolidation of all Mariel Cubans into one resettlement camp and marked "not for release, for internal use only" provided estimates of different groups remaining at each of the resettlement camps, including 260 homosexuals.<sup>69</sup> These estimates were produced by and for administrators managing the resettlement process who needed data to address the problem posed by hard-to-place populations.

These figures are not presented here as accurate counts of the homosexual population. However, they do reveal the state's intent to identify certain homosexuals, usually in order to facilitate their sponsorship. Federal documents also suggest who was held in the crosshairs of the state's gaze. One report, written after consolidation of the population awaiting sponsorship at Fort Chaffee, explained that the homosexuals "remaining in the camp are more difficult to place due to personal characteristics."<sup>70</sup> A September press guidance sheet hinted at what these personal characteristics might be. After clarifying that the INS did not ask about "sexual preference," this document

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Refugee Situation," 2. A semiretraction printed on the day after Brown's article cites a series of conflicting estimates. Judy Weiss from Fort Chaffee asserted that only 94 of the 10,000 Cubans who had passed through her camp were known to be gay; in contrast, Bruce Brockway reported 900 homosexuals in Fort McCoy. Brockway estimated that 6,800 of all detainees were gay; Larry Mahoney of FEMA estimated this number at 4,000. See Ethan Bronner, "Camp Personnel Deny Report of 20,000 Gay Refugees," *Miami Herald*, 8 July 1980, 1, 12A. After the media focus on Mariel homosexuals fomented by Brown's article, the number of homosexuals awaiting resettlement was consistently underestimated. For example, before consolidating those awaiting resettlement into one camp, officials estimated that there were only 260 homosexuals awaiting resettlement. See "Consolidation Data," n.d., Consolidation [file no. 2] folder, box 11, CHTF Director's File, Carter Library. An estimate of 1,000 is offered in "Briefing Materials, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Hearings," 6 March 1981, Briefing Materials Senate Appropriations Committee 3/6/81 folder, box 11, CHTF Director's File, Carter Library. An estimate of 2,500 is proposed in "Fort Chaffee Resettlement Plan," attached to memorandum by Wilford J. Forbush to Jack Svhan, 10 March 1981, Fort Chaffee folder, box 14, CHTF Director's File, Carter Library; and "DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] Role in the Consolidation of Cuban-Haitian Populations into One Camp," draft, 7 August 1980, Consolidation Plans PHS and HHS folder, box 35, 1, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

<sup>68</sup>"Questions on Consolidation: Asked by Cuban Haitian Task Force, Washington," n.d., Consolidation [file no. 2] [1] folder, box 34, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

<sup>69</sup>"Consolidation Data."

<sup>70</sup>"Fort Chaffee Resettlement Plan," 4.

went on to provide an estimate of homosexuals at the camps: “Based on the number of males affecting female grooming and dressing standards in the camp, it’s safe to say that the gay community within the Cuban entrant population reflects the same percentage found in any American community of similar size.”<sup>71</sup> This conflation of homosexuality with gender transgression reflects several things. First, it may carry the assumption that all male homosexuals “affect female grooming.” Second, it may indicate the higher concentration of gender-transgressive homosexuals remaining in the camps. Third, it may reveal the prevalence of gender transgression as a subculture among Cuban homosexuals of this period. Finally, it may betray a selective gaze that registered only gender-transgressive homosexual men as gay. José wearing a dress posed the most significant challenge to VOLAGs that were facilitating resettlement: it was this group that the state really needed to look at if only in order to make them disappear.

The third assertion made by the federal government in response to Brown’s article was that its agencies did not segregate homosexuals in resettlement camps but, rather, that the homosexuals segregated themselves. A September 1980 press guidance sheet explicitly stated that “we do not segregate homosexuals statistically or physically within the reception centers. In the latter, we do know that homosexuals have managed to segregate themselves within some centers. But that is of their choosing, not our design.”<sup>72</sup> At least in some of the camps, homosexual men were kept in separate sections. In most cases, this segregation does appear to have been voluntary, designed by gay Cubans themselves for better protection, as the press guidance sheet maintains.<sup>73</sup> However, imposed segregation was also recommended at Fort Chaffee by several government sources.<sup>74</sup> Also, the Fort Indiantown Gap After Action Report indicates that as early as May 1980 authorities “began to isolate the homosexuals in Area 3.”<sup>75</sup> An article in the *Lebanon Sunday*

<sup>71</sup>Press guidance sheet, 12 September 1980.

<sup>72</sup>Press guidance sheet, 11 September 1980.

<sup>73</sup>In Fort Chaffee, for example, two barracks housing one hundred men each were “given over to the homosexuals” (Massing, “The Invisible Cubans,” 50). Ernie Acosta reported that at Fort Indiantown Gap the “openly gay refugees, . . . campy, flamboyant types who bore the brunt of Castro’s persecution,” were placed in barracks “in the middle of the camp’s single men’s area . . . surrounded by heterosexual refugees who view[ed] the gays with open hostility” (Acosta quoted in Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution*, 54).

<sup>74</sup>For example, see Coordinating Council of Dade County memorandum by Silvia Unzueta to Eduardo J. Padron, 26 August 1980, “To Assess Existing Conditions at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, and Evaluate Consolidation Plans,” Cuban Community folder, box 11, 2, CHTF Director’s File, Carter Library.

<sup>75</sup>“Fort Indiantown Gap after Action Report,” vol. 1, 11 May 1980–15 October 1980, box 32, 67, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library. In October an INS memo recommended that separate facilities and minimal security barracks be used to house “hard-core criminals, insanes [*sic*], riot agitators, juveniles and homosexuals.” See INS Task Force memorandum by Alfred Saucier to William Lang, Jr., 11 October 1980, “Problems at Fort Indiantown Gap—Border Patrol Suggestions,” AA Today folder, box 33, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

*Pennsylvanian* agreed that this segregation was imposed because the residents of areas 3 and 4 were “considered special by base officials. / Special enough to separate them from the rest of the Cuban males and keep them together. / They are the homosexuals.”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, although homosexuals themselves did initiate segregation in some cases, camp officials followed their lead and imposed segregation in others.

Lastly, the CHTF asserted that it was not working with gay organizations to resettle gay Cubans. For instance, a press guidance sheet issued the same day as the *Washington Post* story states that the U.S. government had not formally requested the assistance of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) or other gay organizations and that the resettlement process was being handled solely by VOLAGs.<sup>77</sup> The official position, therefore, was that the federal government did not work with any gay agencies. The truth was that the VOLAGs sometimes enlisted the help of gay organizations in a form of resettlement subcontracting. As early as 7 July 1980 the need for special attention for the resettlement of homosexual migrants was noted by Shepard C. Lowman in a Department of State memo to Victor Palmieri, ambassador at large and U.S. coordinator for refugee affairs. Lowman recommended “premium R&P [reception and placement] grants for hardcore resettlement cases.” In order to facilitate the grants and clarify who would be eligible, “the various categories of special cases would have to be defined with some precision, including aged, drug cases, alcoholism, severe physical handicapped, mental retardation, homosexuality.” Next to this recommendation is a handwritten “No.” Because this memo coincided with the *Washington Post* article, it is possible that the denial of this request was related to Brown’s report, since targeted funding would only have drawn greater media attention.

By mid-1980 gay organizations had already been working diligently to resettle gay Cubans. Most prominent among these was the Universal Fellowship of MCC, which by July had established a Lesbian/Gay Cuban Task Force to aid in the resettlement of refugees who were not being placed by other agencies because of their homosexuality.<sup>78</sup> Over the course of the resettlement period, Metropolitan Community Churches raised \$40,000 to assist gay Mariel Cubans.<sup>79</sup> According to their estimates, they found housing for over ten thousand people.

The MCC did operate through the VOLAG Church World Services and in cooperation with American Baptist churches; therefore, the CHTF

<sup>76</sup>Lenton, “Cuban Gays in Web,” 1A.

<sup>77</sup>The press guidance sheet dated 11 September 1980 responded to the question “Do you think you will be able to resettle homosexuals?” with the answer that gay organizations “have come forward voluntarily.”

<sup>78</sup>“Lesbian and Gay Community Meets to Form Nationwide Network for Aiding Gay and Lesbian Cuban Refugees,” press release, 8 July 1980, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Papers #7301, folder 159, box 36, HSC.

<sup>79</sup>“Resettling Gay Cubans,” *Christian Century* 98 (1981): 504–5.

could claim that they were not directly working with gay organizations.<sup>80</sup> However, the federal government was clearly aware that these organizations were helping in the resettlement effort. CHTF July staff meeting minutes indicate that Church World Services had “agreed to prioritize homosexuals out of Eglin and then out of other camps.”<sup>81</sup> In a 26 September 1980 State Department memo Barbara Lawson also indicated that the federal government and the CHTF were directly involved in the resettlement of gay immigrants. In another memo to CHTF Director Christian Holmes, Lawson referred to the tensions in the camps: “The general Cuban population wanted their quick removal, but resented any effort to generate sponsorship to make this possible. In any event, the Metropolitan Gay Church, through Church World Service, has been working with the Task Force to identify sponsors and resettle the homosexuals.”<sup>82</sup> A Department of Health and Human Services memo on the consolidation of the Mariel migrants at Fort Chaffee further elaborated upon the government’s collaboration with MCC: “MCC has already resettled close to 2000 gay entrants working through the VOLAGS, and has submitted a proposal to the CHTF to resettle the remaining gay entrants at Fort Chaffee.”<sup>83</sup>

By February 1981 a Department of Health and Human Services spreadsheet indicated that the federal government was negotiating not only with the MCC but also with a group identified only as “BACAR,” the National Gay Rights Coalition, and unspecified “gays” in order to facilitate the “special placements” of Mariel Cubans awaiting resettlement.<sup>84</sup> An April 1981 Department of Health and Human Services memo confirmed that the MCC had received a resettlement grant award to resettle 150 “gay” people requiring transitional environments—fifty each in halfway houses in San Francisco, Illinois, and Baltimore, respectively. The *Christian Century* reported that the grant was for \$307,500.<sup>85</sup> According to MCC member Frank Zerrilli, “Many of them [Mariel gays] did not last long with our membership, but quickly found jobs, went to Miami or did other things.”<sup>86</sup>

A close examination of the state’s publicly avowed positions on gay Mariel Cubans and internal records of federal agencies reveals what are perhaps expected contradictions. While the task force claimed that they did not

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>“Minutes from CHTF Staff Meeting,” Monday, 28 July 1980, CHTF–Staff Meeting Minutes folder, box 34, CHTF Fort Indiantown Gap File, Carter Library.

<sup>82</sup>Department of State memorandum by Barbara Lawson to Christian R. Holmes, 26 September 1980, Camp Consolidation [2] folder, box 1, CHTF Subject File, Carter Library.

<sup>83</sup>“Fort Chaffee Resettlement Plan,” 4.

<sup>84</sup>Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Secretary, CHTF, Office of Refugee Resettlement, “Management Tracking System,” 6 February 1981, Camp Consolidation—Press folder, box 11, 1, CHTF Director’s File, Carter Library.

<sup>85</sup>“Resettling Gay Cubans.” According to the MCC, the Baltimore facility was destroyed by arson and never opened.

<sup>86</sup>Frank Zerrilli, email to author, 15 December 2003.

identify, count, or segregate homosexuals and that they were not working with gay organizations, federal authorities did (if inconsistently) identify, count, and segregate homosexuals, and they did end up working with gay agencies to resettle the Mariel Cubans and partially funding their efforts.

In the midst of the smoke-and-mirrors effect produced by the U.S. state's refracted gaze, it was still unclear whether homosexual Cubans identified by the state in either informal or formal ways were going to be allowed to stabilize their status (shifting from parolees to permanent residents) or whether they were going to be "excluded" as a group. As homosexual exclusion policy stood (after its 1980 clarification), anyone who made two back-to-back "unsolicited and unambiguous" declarations of homosexuality could be excluded. Because of this, gay and lesbian organizations working with the Cuban entrants began to demand clarification from the INS about how this policy would be applied and to counsel gay men to be careful what they said to local and federal immigration authorities.

Partly in response to this pressure from gay and lesbian organizations, the INS clarified its position on gay Mariel Cubans five years later. In 1985 the INS explained that gay or lesbian refugees who entered as part of Mariel and were identified as gay or lesbian would "not be excluded from the U.S. based on that information alone."<sup>87</sup> In a letter from INS Deputy Assistant Commissioner R. Michael Miller to representatives of two gay and lesbian organizations, he clarified:

This service realizes that due to a variety of reasons, some "Marielitos" were erroneously identified as being homosexual during initial interviews which occurred shortly after their arrival in the United States.

Information contained in Service records, although given consideration, will not be the sole basis to deny an alien's application for adjustment of status, nor will extraneous documents or statements made by other persons. No alien will be considered ineligible for adjustment of status on the basis of sexual preference unless he/she makes or has made for the record an unequivocal [*sic*], unambiguous declaration that he/she is a homosexual.<sup>88</sup>

This letter reasserted the September 1980 policy that only an unequivocal and unambiguous declaration of homosexuality would be grounds for possible exclusion. The letter also seemed to suggest that a statement such as "I am a homosexual" made by a *Marielito* upon entering the United States was *not* to be interpreted as an unequivocal and unambiguous declaration because "some 'Marielitos' were erroneously identified as being homosexual."

<sup>87</sup>National Gay Task Force, "Cuban Refugees' Status Clarified by Immigration Service," press release, 19 February 1985, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Papers #7301, folder 6, box 37, HSC.

<sup>88</sup>As quoted in National Gay Task Force, "Cuban Refugees' Status Clarified by Immigration Service."

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

When Armando presented himself to Cuban police officials, he wanted to be sure that the Cuban state's gaze would read him as an "obvious," flamboyant, effeminate homosexual. To be identified as *escoria* during that brief moment signified a way out of the country and, in his young eyes, a ticket to a land of freedom and opportunity. In Cuba the state's gaze was relatively consistent during this brief moment. Cuban authorities had a vested interest in identifying an already stigmatized group, "obvious" homosexuals, in order to facilitate their exit or expulsion from the country. The state saw gender-transgressive, ostentatious, passive men as homosexual. Homosexual men understood objectionable manifestations of their sexuality and exaggerated these characteristics for the police. To say that the Cuban state gaze was consistent is not to say that it was necessarily precise. In the case of Mariel, people who had not previously identified as homosexual claimed homosexuality in order to leave the country. Others who did understand themselves as homosexual were not allowed to leave the country because they were not identified by police as homosexual (or homosexual enough) or because other factors restricted their departure, as they nearly did in the case of Arenas.

The U.S. state gaze was neither consistent nor precise. Facing competing imperatives (to welcome victims of communism and to exclude homosexuals), the U.S. state carefully crafted policy clarifications that welcomed Mariel Cubans (although not with the same enthusiasm as previous cohorts) while it maintained a homosexual exclusion policy obfuscated by plausible deniability. Thus, the state had an interest in not seeing or identifying homosexual entrants since, given the tenor of the relationship between Cuba and the United States, returning Cubans to Cuba was an unlikely scenario. Detaining Mariel homosexuals indefinitely, as the United States tried to do with Mariel entrants identified as criminals, proved an expensive and unattractive option. Despite these disincentives, even authorities who pretended not to see the homosexuals were actively engaged in the politics of homosexual visibility precisely because administrative needs required the identification of those who disrupted camp life or posed a challenge to traditional resettlement.

In addition to inconsistent U.S. policies, the state's identification of homosexual entrants was imprecise. Not all men who thought of themselves as homosexuals were visibly identifiable as gay, nor did they all verbally declare their homosexuality to state officials. When the state recognized the need to identify homosexuals in order to facilitate their resettlement, it acknowledged mostly only gender-transgressive, "obvious" gays. As various federal officials attempted to count this population, the imprecision of the gaze was further revealed. Among other problems, it proves impossible to reconcile different government estimates because contradictory figures block any attempt at a coherent and cohesive picture. While



the controversial Brown article cited a figure of 20,000 homosexuals, the federal government produced estimates ranging from 200 to 6,800. We simply do not know with certainty how many gay men arrived as part of the Mariel boatlift. Moreover, these estimates focused on the Mariel migrants who remained in camps, thereby ignoring the existence of gay men and women who had already joined family members. While some data may have existed concerning the number of people who admitted being homosexuals to the INS or were segregated into “gay” sections of the camps, these figures represented only a portion of the gay *Marielitos* because it necessarily excluded those who preferred to lie about their orientation or who would not have been classified by their appearance as gay. The practical impossibility of quantifying the gay Mariel migration also made it easier to mute this issue in the mainstream media. By drawing attention to quantitative failures, federal authorities helped keep the potentially explosive “story” of gay Mariel shrouded in uncertainty. A similar theme was used to avoid excluding all homosexual Mariel Cubans when the possibility of false claims of homosexuality was used to discredit previous declarations to the INS.

Although inconsistent and imprecise, the federal government did at some levels identify individual homosexual entrants and estimate the size of the homosexual subpopulation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the power of state identification practices does not lie in their precision. Luibhéid has convincingly argued that identification and processing by the U.S. immigration service served to construct “the very sexual categories and identities” it sought to regulate.<sup>89</sup> In the case of Mariel immigrants, the disciplinary power was not exercised in the form of precise categories and consistent enforcement but, quite the opposite, through contradictory definitions and spotty threats of enforcement. However, this disciplinary power still served to situate immigrants “within larger relations of power to which they remained subjected after entry.”<sup>90</sup> The process of identification thus constructed subject categories in order to facilitate the control of populations. The processing of immigrants with regard to sexuality provided *Marielitos* with their first socialization into U.S. sexual categories and identities. Whereas in Cuba the distinction between active and passive homosexuality was key (passive homosexuals were the “real” homosexuals and the corrupting force), it is unlikely that U.S. authorities deployed this distinction. However, by the end of the resettlement process, government officials were actively trying to ascertain how many homosexuals remained at the camps, and their figures were based not on homosexual identity or same-sex behavior per se but on gender-transgressive expressions. Ironically, then, although the Cuban and U.S. state gazes were differently grounded, in the end both targeted a similar population—gender-transgressive, “obviously” gay men.

<sup>89</sup>Luibhéid, *Entry Denied*, xi.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

Despite their inconsistencies and imprecision, the fractured gazes of both Cuba and the United States entailed real material consequences for those identified as deviant. For the Mariel *locas*, U.S. identification as homosexual did not necessarily lead to exclusion, but it opened up this possibility and contributed to an ambiguous sociocultural standing in the broader U.S. society.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, the fractured gaze disguised the workings of state power at the level of subjectivity by constantly reiterating subject categories (criminal, homosexual, black) while allowing for apparent openings for members of those categories through its inconsistent applications. Although the worst-case scenario did not materialize in this case (i.e., the exclusion of all Cuban homosexuals who entered as part of Mariel), the state's refracted gaze still wielded power in its flickering recognition of "negative" characteristics.

<sup>91</sup>It is unclear whether Mariel Cubans were excluded due to homosexuality alone. Miller's clarification indicates that Mariel Cubans would not have been excluded based on declarations made upon their arrival. I have not found evidence that any Mariel Cuban was excluded explicitly due to his or her homosexuality. In the months before Mariel, the case of Ruben Lorenzo Prats, a gay Cuban denied citizenship because he was gay, received some media attention locally in Miami. See "Sex and Citizenship Are Not Connected," *Miami News*, 5 April 1980, 14A. After Mariel the Cuban government refused to repatriate any migrants from the United States; thus, the homosexuality "exclusion" would have translated into indefinite detention, a costly endeavor for the federal government. Both the overall size of the Mariel migration and the costs associated with excluding gay entrants might have led to their not being singled out for exclusion.