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Article abstract

This article questions the paternal logic of José Martí's nationalism, through the works Abdala (1869) and Ismaelillo (1882). Martí's nineteenth-century writing announces the creation of a Cuban nation defined by many in terms of his literary production. However, there remains another Martí, a maternal Martí that escapes our intentions to define and concretize his Work. Beginning with Bracha Ettinger's concept of the "matrixial," I maintain that these texts disintegrate the borders between the national body, the individual, and the writer and that this paternal Martí gives way to a maternal relation.

SARAH SKILLEN

Estranged Mother: José Martí, the Matrixial Father in Exile

Este artículo cuestiona la lógica paterna del nacionalismo de José Martí, a través de Abdala *(1869), un drama político, e* Ismaelillo *(1882), la colección de poemas. La escritura decimonónica de Martí anuncia la creación del estado cubano, que muchos han definido en términos de esa producción literaria. Sin embargo, sigue existiendo otro Martí, un Martí materno que escapa nuestras intenciones de definir y concretar su obra literaria. Partiendo del concepto de la "matriz" de Bracha Ettinger, sostengo que estos textos desintegran las fronteras del cuerpo nacional, del individuo y del escritor, y que el Martí paterno da paso a una relación materna.*

Palabras clave: *maternidad, frontera, relación, el Caribe, legitimidad*

This article questions the paternal logic of José Martí's nationalism, through the works Abdala *(1869) and* Ismaelillo *(1882). Martí's nineteenth-century writing announces the creation of a Cuban nation defined by many in terms of his literary production. However, there remains another Martí, a maternal Martí that escapes our intentions to define and concretize his work. Beginning with Bracha Ettinger's concept of the "matrixial," I maintain that these texts disintegrate the borders between the national body, the individual, and the writer and that this paternal Martí gives way to a maternal relation.*

Keywords: *maternity, borders, relation, the Caribbean, legitimacy*

The political life of José Martí began on October 21st, 1869, when at the age of sixteen, he was arrested and charged with conspiracy against Spanish colonial authority in Cuba for the presence of his signature at the bottom of an unsent letter.[1] This event marks the beginning of an extraordinary life and the immortalization of this man's name and works. While exiled in Spain almost two years later, Martí would describe this experience in *El presidio político en Cuba*, an essay published in 1871:

> Era el 5 de abril de 1870. Meses hacía que había yo cumplido diez y siete años. Mi patria me había arrancado de los brazos de mi madre, y señalado un lugar en su banquete. Yo besé sus manos y las mojé con el llanto de mi orgullo, y ella partió, y me

dejó abandonado a mí mismo. Volvió el día 5 severa, rodeó con una cadena mi pie, me vistió con ropa extraña, cortó mis cabellos y me alargó en la mano un corazón … Mi patria me estrechó en sus brazos, y me besó en la frente, y partió de nuevo, señalándome con la una mano el espacio y con la otra las canteras. (*Obras* 1:53-54)

Martí is ripped from his mother's arms by his *patria*. A word translated as both "country" and "fatherland," it is nevertheless feminine. He kisses *her* hands, and she abandons him to himself; but the reader, at least at first, may wonder whether it is the *madre* or the *patria* whose hands he kisses, who leaves him abandoned to imprisonment and exile? In the following sentences, Martí's kisses are returned as *she* kisses his face, and Martí's reader becomes lost in the "su" that refers either to "mi patria" or to "mi madre." Then again, in Martí's uncanny diction, perhaps the two entities are one. The nation is a motherland that bears Martí, but so too does Martí bear the nation and carry it into being. The reader, like Martí, is confounded by the indecipherable jointness between mother and nation, the womb of creation that is also Martí.

In this article, I argue that José Martí, the father of Cuban independence, may be understood as a maternal father, a reading based on an analysis of *Abdala* (1869), an early political drama, and *Ismaelillo* (1882), an intimate collection of poems, as maternal texts. [2] I maintain that these two largely overlooked texts open a space for us to read an-other Martí that resists the reader's desire to arrive at any definitive encapsulation of Martí and his Work. My interpretation of this early political drama and more famous book of poetry looks to Bracha Ettinger's concept of matrixial borderspaces and borderlinking in order to help us to read a Martí that does not close the borders of the nation, or of his meaning, but instead opens inwards and outwards towards the inhabitation of an-other, the foreigner, the child.[3] The matrixial does not work to strike an opposition between mother and father but rather works as a movement towards the relational position in which the maternal corrupts and corrodes the individuating borders between the self and the other, the borders between islands and nationalisms. This article will demonstrate the way Martí's work is not purely that of paternal creation, but rather a maternal one that announces itself in his poetics. So too, Martí's paternity is neither fixed nor "monolithic,"[4] and neither are paternity nor maternity chained to physiological sex. Instead, they are defined as they stand in terms of relation to the other, to the supposed offspring. Here I will engage José Martí as a mother, an alien mother, a strange and exilic mother, an estranged mother amid birth pains, bringing himself into being with and as the (m)other.

In 1869, before signing his name to the letter that led to his arrest, José Martí wrote and self-published *Abdala,* a dramatic poem in which the young author explores the relationship between mother and country, sacrifice and love (Bejel 32). Later that year, he was arrested, condemned to forced labor, and exiled to Spain. Nearly his entire life from that moment on was lived in exile. Martí first became a father on November 22, 1880, to his son José Francisco Martí, known as Pepito, with his wife, Carmen Zayas Bazán. It is to this son that the collection of poems *Ismaelillo* is dedicated, and it is here that the line between child and creation is blurred. Understood in Spanish, the word *criatura* – meaning both child and creature – is also the creation, the work of art birthed by the author. *Ismaelillo*, then, refers to the son but is also the creation/child of Martí itself.[5] Also complicating the relation between father and creation is the birth of María Mantilla, which occurred on November 27, 1880, only days after Pepito. Historians, academics, and apostles of Martí still debate the possibility that Martí might also have fathered María Mantilla, the daughter of Carmen Miyares de Mantilla, known as Carmita, a married woman and fellow revolutionary spirit who took Martí into her husband's home as a boarder during his exile in New York. While we cannot immediately prove Martí's biological paternity, his spiritual and emotional paternity are beyond question. This is evidenced by the wealth of letters he exchanged with the child he called *mi hijita* and to whom he wrote pages of "fatherly" advice before departing from Cabo Haitiano to Cuba in 1895 (*Obras* 20: 216-20). Upon the birth of María, Martí left New York for Venezuela, where he began writing *Ismaelillo*, which he finished during the voyage back to New York and published in 1882. The following years were filled with travel and labor on behalf of the revolutionary movement in Cuba and amongst the island's exile community. Although he suffered immensely from an ongoing systemic infection caused by the wounds he received during his period of forced labor under Spanish colonial imprisonment, Martí worked tirelessly for the cause of Cuban independence. In what is now the stuff of legend, Martí landed in Cuba in 1895 to take up arms alongside his fellow Cubans, and on May 19, he was felled by a Spanish bullet while charging into battle at Dos Ríos.[6] His mother would not give credence to the news of her son's death, and on May 30, the *New York Herald* published an article dolefully titled "Martí's Mother Thinks He Lives" (Quintana 262).[7]

Although Martí is hailed as "el gran Padre de Cuba" (Oviedo 12), what the maternal makes evident in these works is not a relation of paternity but rather a profound maternal relation, neither tied to the supposed sex of the speaker, but towards an indefinite nation and the child, towards a watery border between Self and Other that can never be adequately shored up. The

mother does not create her child unilaterally but is maternally created alongside the other to whom she is (m)other. Ettinger writes, "Matrixial awareness engenders a disturbing desire for jointness *with* a foreign world, the unknown other, the uncognized, the stranger inside the known other, a stranger who by definition is never a total stranger because it is unthinkingly known" (*Matrixial* 147).[8] These spaces between mother and child are both infinite and imminent in the endless coming together and separating of one and other, confusing these boundaries. This concept of the uncognized world or a non-totalizing knowledge resounds with Édouard Glissant's concepts of opacity and errantry:

> … one who is errant (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides.
> Errant, he challenges and discards the universal – this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something evident and transparent. (Glissant 20)

This world, the opaque world of the other, cannot be conquered, cannot be subjected to a totalizing ontology. It permits only knowledge in relation, a maternal knowing that is non-teleological and non-hierarchical.[9]

As one encounters Martí, one enters an immense congregation of previous readers whose injunction is to perform certain kinds of addresses. A prevalent demand is to produce a faithful reading of Martí – to undertake a "neutral" and/or "organic" study of the man and his works – thereby arriving at an understanding of his totality and/or "essence" (Kirk 17).[10] The maternal precisely undermines the very possibility of this kind of reading, the idea that the totality of Martí's works can be distilled into a singular truth. The maternality of these texts, their jointness with the other, disrupts that very totality. Instead of a homogenous or fixed surface that we may call Martí, there is a fissure. The maternal turns the reader's eye towards the fluid aporias so ubiquitous in Martí's work, which directly contravene a reading of mastery.[11] The matrixial reading that *Abdala* and *Ismaelillo* make possible opens a space in which *other* readings of Martí are possible, where instead of attempting to synthesize a totality of Martí's meaning, we may read matrixially. His writing is already open to this, as it enables and nurtures these heterogeneous readings and encounters that transgress the impenetrable bulwark of his *oeuvre*, and instead look towards his work as labor, as a bringing thought and thought-of-the-nation into being. Enrico Mario Santí argues that we will only begin to honestly write "crítica sobre Martí [cuando] haya dejado de ser un temeroso ejercicio de superstición" (840). He goes on to describe the inclination towards this *other*,

unsuperstitious direction of critique: "No es que Martí no se merezca admiración: su amor por 'Nuestra América' sólo se paga con el nuestro. Pero hay amores que matan, y para un escritor, el peor de todos es el homenaje vacío que petrifique su obra y le condene al silencio" (811). Antonio José Ponte adds to this: "lo escrito por Martí debería arriesgarse a la rotura, a la pérdida, a la pelea de perros de la crítica, para seguir fluyendo. Cien años después de muerto, José Martí debería estar en discusión. A la idea de un Martí que se construye cada día faltaría emparejar la de un Martí rompiéndose" (83). Do we fear that the great author cannot stand up to critique, or that we might tarnish his divine remains? It is precisely the vulnerability of authorial authority that is at stake here.[12]

These two lesser texts, lesser in the sense that they evade the call of majority, alert us to the slippery topography of Martí's writing, the relational valence that undermines its conquest. The maternal text is one in which the reader begets the author in his reading, and so is produced in return, just as the author is produced in concert with his verse.[13] We see this most prominently in Martí's famous words from *Ismaelillo*, where he states: "Hijo soy de mi hijo! Él me rehace!" (*Obras* 16:31). The father, like the author, is made such not by his own, autonomous power but becomes a father in concert with the birth of his creation. The father is not the pure antecedent of the child but is created as a father by the child, a child who is also the written work that undoes the father's paternal authority. Instead, he is remade in a maternal coming-into-being with the other. It is this excessive, maternal relation that punctuates Martí's work.[14] Birth occurs in the chaotic invasion of the other, where the other is the work of art, which is no longer the sole possession of its author.[15] This work is an acknowledgement of the chaos inherent in modernity, which modernity had hoped to overcome through cold rationalism. It is chaos inherent in our relation to the world, in our relation to others, the unconquerable element. Authorial paternity and domination are overcome as the author becomes chaotically inhabited by the other. The maternal, in this sense, is not tied exclusively to sexual difference but is a theory of ethical/political relation that exceeds the binaries of male and female.[16] This is not to say that Martí does not strictly identify male and female roles. He certainly does and often delineates them in explicit terms: "El hombre es rudo e impaciente, y se ama más a sí que a los demás. Y la mujer es tierna, y goza en darse, y es madre desde que nace, y vive de amar a otros" (*Obras* 9: 288). However, the thread of the maternal is not strictly dictated by the maternal organ or by the idea of childbearing as ultimate, female purpose, but is a trembling, fluid thread that evokes the slippage and vulnerability within *Ismaelillo* and also Martí's first self-published work, *Abdala*.

Traditionally, *Ismaelillo* has been read as a kind of document of inheritance, a literary last will and testament in which José Martí would bequeath a new literary style upon his successors and the nation to a proper heir. Written by José Martí as a flight of fancy, it has since been branded as the first strides towards *modernismo*. Read along these lines, *Ismaelillo* is a paternal text whose heirs would be more numerous than grains of sand on the beach, to paraphrase the Biblical story invoked by its title,[17] the greatest of these being Rubén Darío. However, this text is not only foundational in the sense of style but, like other works of the nineteenth century, it functioned to establish the legitimacy and genealogy of the nascent nation. According to Julio Ramos:

> Martí obstinately insisted upon the power of filiation as a legitimate model in and for history ... And notwithstanding the claim that Martí's first book of poetry, *Ismaelillo* (1882), demonstrates the early modernization of Latin American poetry, it in fact casts poetic discourse in the form of an allocution by the father to a son. How, then, is it possible to speak of *broken families*? Martí's insistence on a filial hierarchy must be read as a will to continuity. (Ramos 198)[18]

For Rafael Rojas, the family and state similarly erect their symbolic borders, and it is through correct continuity and legitimacy that such borders and the definition of the Family/State is maintained (Rojas 19-20). Lilian Guerra also writes that José Martí established for the Cuban nation a new parentage, a break from the past that would engender a new, inclusive lineage of Cubans (Guerra 259-60). This new genealogy involved a parentage that was not tainted by colonialism or imperialism: an ideal nation. Jonathan Goldberg adds to this idea of the ideal nation by writing that Martí's language is "inflected to naturalize the fantasy of sons produced by fathers (often without mothers), that is, to naturalize a homosocial/homophobic brotherhood always defended against its own homoerotics" (12).[19] The nation, therefore, depends upon the family, or even solely upon fathers and sons, for its legitimacy. Thus, the task of literature becomes the affirmation of this relation and the nation's legitimate inheritance, rooted in the name of the Father.

However, Martí's *will* to continuity is not sufficient to overcome the turmoil of discontinuity. Emilio Bejel writes that Martí's ideology remains locked within a paradox of masculinity that charges both modernity *and* the "traditional values" of Spanish colonialism with the crime of emasculating Cuban men (*Gay* 16). Martí's resolution of this paradox remains incomplete and unfulfilled. According to Martí's *hombre natural* – a well-known concept that arises later in Martí's writings and political philosophy – this masculine force is endowed with the power to shore up borders and establish national

belonging. At the same time, the effeminate man will always remain open and penetrable. This tension between inside and outside, the affirmation of the nation and the sex's borders, remains unresolved. For Sylvia Molloy, the father-son dyad in *Ismaelillo* sets up a "construct ensuring historical continuance" through "filial feeling" (371). However, Molloy also makes clear that it is not what Martí wishes the reader to see, but rather what he strives to erase that most captivates (370).[20] Throughout *Ismaelillo*, the reader is assaulted by inversions of the paternal order and discontinuity. Santí speculates: "Si el error de la tradición crítica en torno a *Ismaelillo* ha sido de concebir su importancia en términos genéticos – es decir, concibiéndolo como libro influyente – , entonces la inversión genealógica que constituye la poética de *Ismaelillo* habrá de contener, en cifra, la historia de ese error" (839). According to Santí, the poetics of *Ismaelillo* do not support the claim of a will to continuity or the creation of a lineage, but rather signal the inversion or reordering of that hereditary succession.

The thread of maternal relation precisely undermines this movement towards mastery, conquest, and hierarchical genealogy. Instead, it gives life to the very ambiguity and unknowability that is present in the maternal relation, the place where Martí himself is confused by the borders between self and other, mother and nation, father and son. Martí's very first publication, the epic poem *Abdala,* interestingly portrays this confusion. The poem takes place in Nubia, where a young prince watches a foreign army invading his land. He feels the call to war and listens to the sound of battle. However, the battle is not the scene of the poem; in fact, we never leave the private quarters of the prince. The little scholarship that exists on this often-overlooked work focuses on the conflict between Nubia and the invader: its "patriotic message" and foretelling of Martí's death in battle.[21] *Abdala* emerges less a poem about the battle for political independence than it is about a son's obsession with the mother. The text seethes with the maternal anxiety that would be present throughout Martí's life and works.

This self-published play made its debut to readers on January 23, 1869, following a revolutionary outburst in a theater that inflamed Spanish colonial intolerance of revolutionary sentiment, and from which Martí was rescued by his mother's intervention (López 39). In the very first lines of the poem, the young hero, Abdala, spies enemy forces on the horizon and declares:

Y si insulta a los libres un tirano
Veremos en el campo de batalla!
En la Nubia nacidos, por la Nubia
Morir sabremos: hijos de patria,

Por ella moriremos, y el suspiro
Que de mis labios
postrimeros salga,
Para Nubia será, que para Nubia
Nuestra fuerza y valor fueron creados. (Martí, *Obras* 18:14)

What is typically translated as "fatherland" is here a feminine "she," an "ella," that gave life to her soldiers and will give them strength, and for whom they will die. This is Martí's first published proclamation that the brave die for liberty. Abdala's soldiers and senators all gladly agree to march into battle, but it is here that the mother enters the scene:

ESP.: ¿Y tanto amor a este rincón de tierra?
¿Acaso él te protegió en tu infancia?
¿Acaso amante te llevó en su seno?
¿Acaso él fue quien engendró tu audacia
Y tu fuerza? ¡Responde! ¿O fue tu madre?
¿Fue la Nubia?

ABD.: El amor, madre, a la patria
No es el amor ridículo a la tierra,
… ¿Acaso crees
Que hay algo más sublime que la patria?

ESP.:¿Y aunque sublime fuera, acaso debes
Por ella abandonarme? ¿A la batalla
Así correr veloz? ¿Así olvidarte
De la que el ser te dio? ¿Y eso lo manda
la patria? ¡Di! ¿Tampoco te conmueven
La sangre ni la muerte que te aguardan? (*Obras* 18:19-20)

These questions signal the conflict in which Martí finds himself. Is Cuba so sublime that he should die for her? Again, the play of pronouns is interesting. When Abdala speaks of the mother/fatherland, he uses feminine pronouns. The first time Espirta speaks, diminishing "la patria" into just "este rincón de tierra," she uses the masculine pronoun but later switches to the feminine. She asks of her son whether it was this motherland that carried him on her breast and gave him life, and Abdala appears unable or unwilling to answer this question.

Nevertheless, he claims that it is, in fact, this motherland that has awoken life again in him. Espirta gave him life at first, and now the country

would give him life a second time, and with that life, he would die a martyr's death. The border between the mother's body and the body of the nation becomes confused to the point where one wonders: what is land and what is a mother? Why does this dialogue even take place? Why is it so urgent for Abdala, and apparently for Martí himself, to explain to his mother the reasons for his sacrifice? Was Martí so shamed by his mother's appearance at the theater that he felt compelled to make a public response? If this is the case, then it speaks volumes about Martí's excessive maternal anxiety, making *Abdala* less a poem about the call to arms than about overcoming the conflict to relinquish the bonds of maternal love in favor of individuation and combative love.[22] However, this conflict is never won, and the confusion between the borders of mother and nation, or those of love and death, continue to be crossed. Abdala may free his nation from the invader, but he is never free of the maternal juncture.

Part of the resistance to the feminine body, the maternal body, that we see in these discourses is its openness, the holes and perforations that leave it open to foreign invasion, penetration, rape, and pregnancy. Laura Lomas explains that "The term 'imperial modernity' refers to just this state of penetration of a country by a proximate and growing imperial power, the United States. We note how Martí associates the experience of vulnerability with the adjective 'Latino'" (5). The Latino/Cuban/Nubian body is a body assaulted by the other, pierced and plundered by imperial powers, first Spain and then the United States. This is a violable body as opposed to the masculine body, which is conceived as whole and impenetrable, a fortress whose borders are clearly defined and whose points of entry are secured. At one moment in Abdala's dialog with his mother, the young warrior who had just described himself saying "Only a bolt of lightning could detain the strength and valor of the noble Abdala,"[23] finds himself crying in his mother's arms, hoping no one important will see him:

ABD.: Perdona ¡oh madre! Que de ti me aleje
Para partir al campo. ¡Oh! Estas lágrimas
Testigos son de mi ansiedad terrible,
Y el huracán que ruge en mis entrañas.
(*Espirta llora.*)
…
Sólo tiemblo por ti; y aunque mi llanto
No muestro a los guerreros de mi patria,
¡Ve cómo corre por mi faz, ¡oh madre!
Ve cuál por mis mejillas se derrama! (Martí, *Obras* 18:18-19)

His pain is linked with hers, and he envisions the victory of independence in the blood that he will spill upon his mother's robes. His mother is the only witness to his vulnerability.[24] We see an inversion of the mother's blood. It is a private scene, and yet the son inhabits it. Bejel writes that, for Martí, "el proyecto nacional aparece como un discurso en el cual los espacios son distribuidos en base a los roles sexuales o de género … las mujeres están completamente encerradas dentro del marco hogareño mientras que los hombres se ocupan de los asuntos públicos y políticos fuera del hogar" ("*Amistad*" 2). [25] However, the son here turns to the feminine, private space. He partakes of it.

Inversely, the history of *Ismaelillo* tells the story of Martí's paternal anxiety, his fear of and for his procreative power. After writing *Ismaelillo*, Martí grew suddenly ashamed of its tenderness and its extravagance, stating that he could now see that the light that inspired him was madness (Santí 814-15). Santí writes: "A los cuatro años de su publicación en Nueva York todavía confesaba en una carta que tenía 'toda la edición en mis cajones'" (814). The fertile father of the literary creation, a metaphorical son, now jealously guards his offspring from the critical eye of the reader, a masculine desire to maintain control and dominance over his issue, especially, perhaps, if one considers what is known of Martí's medical history. The irons he had worn around his leg during his time as a political prisoner of the Spanish colonial government had left him with a recurring case of sarcoidosis, resulting in numerous surgical procedures, one of which ended in the removal of one of his testes (López 128, and Oviedo 121).[26] A firm believer in potent masculinity, Martí found himself continually battling infirmity and teetering on the edge of castration. *Ismaelillo* then becomes a testament to paternity in question.

As if to affirm fatherly power, the dedication to *Ismaelillo* appears to perform the paternal function of authorization, conferral of the patronym, and the bequest of the work to its heir that Ramos describes:

Hijo:
Espantado de todo me refugio en ti.
Tengo fe en el mejoramiento humano, en la vida futura, en la utilidad de la virtud, y en ti.
Si alguien te dice que estas páginas se parecen a otras páginas, diles que te amo demasiado para profanarte así. Tal como aquí te pinto, tal te han visto mis ojos. Con esos arreos de gala te me has aparecido.
Cuando he cesado de verte en una forma, he cesado de pintarte. Esos riachuelos han pasado por mi corazón.
¡Lleguen al tuyo! (Martí, *Obras* 16:17)

From these first lines, child, father, and the created *thing* become "contaminated," their borders indecipherable (Molloy 371). If the son is the poem, and the poet is created as a poet by the poem, then this dedication acts as a plea and not an inheritance. The maternal father's heart is transversed by "Esos riachuelos," the blood, the umbilical fluid of the son. Martí's creation is not necessarily *of* an-other but rather *with* an-other. The poet and poem are co-constitutive of each other, co-creators of each other's subjectivity, and it is in this way that they are maternal, linked across the matrixial border-space. This is not patriarchal, univocal creation, but a creation *with* the other. Creation and Creator come into being together and in relation, instead of preserving the hierarchical dimension of genealogies, inheritance, and anteriority. A paternal Creator is univocal, singular, autonomous, and god-like in its generative power. The maternal creator emerges and becomes *with,* and alongside the creation, it is created and made maternal with the other. Martí does not become a female father nor a male mother. Instead, he is a maternal, *matrixial*, father in that he is born alongside and in relation. This is his maternal rather than paternal genealogy.

In the Biblical story evoked by the title *Ismaelillo*, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, are unable to bear children. Despite this, God tells Abraham that his descendants will be more numerous than grains of sand on the beach, at which Sarah laughs because she is beyond the childbearing age. In order to fulfill the prophecy, Sarah suggests that Abraham sleep with her slave Hagar. Abraham and Hagar conceive Ishmael, but to everyone's surprise, Sarah becomes pregnant as well and bears Isaac, the legitimate son of Abraham. Concerned for the inheritance of her son and jealous of her rival, Sarah asks Abraham to expel Hagar from their camp, sending her and Ishmael into exile in the desert. Santí describes the similarities between the Biblical allegory and Martí's home life but writes that it is "engañosamente simétrico. Agar e Ismael son desterrados al desierto, pero Carmen y José Francisco regresan *del* desierto *al* oasis, es decir, del destierro de Nueva York a las comodidades de la Cuba colonial" (823).

But which is the oasis? Both Abraham and Hagar lived in the desert, and Martí would not have considered colonial Cuba an oasis, though his wife might have. Martí may have been exiled from Cuba, but his wife was exiled from his household and in part because of another woman. Furthermore, Hagar was not Abraham's wife, and Ishmael was not his legitimate son and heir. Ishmael would not generate his father's nation, and perhaps, neither would José Francisco.

The symmetry between the two stories does not hold up. In his final letter to José Francisco, before departing for Cuba and dying on the

battlefield of Dos Ríos, José Martí wrote: "1º de abril de 1895 / Hijo: / Esta noche salgo para Cuba: salgo sin ti, cuando debieras estar a mi lado. Al salir, pienso en ti. Si desaparezco en el camino, recibirás con esta carta la leontina que usó en vida tu padre. Adiós. Sé justo. / Tu / José Martí" (*Obras* 20: 480). To his son he sends a watch chain. This is interesting, because as the story goes, the watch that José Francisco wore was one that his grandfather, Mariano, had given him and bore the Spanish crest.

Furthermore, while his son receives the watch chain, Martí would send the ring he wore to Carmita, the same ring engraved with the word "Cuba" and made from the irons that Martí wore in a political prison in Cuba when he was a boy. It is, therefore, not José Francisco, despite his status as a legitimate son, who inherits the nation. If he is, in fact, Ishmael, then in this subversive play, Isaac's position remains unspoken. This poetical inversion of legitimacy perhaps stands to benefit María Mantilla, who might here be the absent Isaac, who did inherit the ring and with it "Cuba." The daughter,[27] therefore, exists in her very erasure from this book of poems, and so too does the mother, though she might not be what we expect.[28]

It is Martí who adopts the tender caresses of the creative, sensual, and feminine, a maternal opening towards the inhabitation of an-other, its aporetic presence, and absence. This relation, one in which the foreign invader resides within and crosses these borders between self and other, threatens the desire for a closed, autonomous subject, both that of the self and the nation. Martí's poems allow us to think a trans-subjectivity where two bodies meet upon the matrixial plane, a site where proximity and distance, presence and absence, are blurred. These poems open space for a reimagining of the heroic father of this island whose borders can never be fully shored-up. The poetic *I* gives birth to himself and becomes the mother of himself as well as the child of his son, the *non-I*. *Ismaelillo* is abundant in its scenes of pregnancy and birthing:

Cual si el sol en mi seno
La luz fraguase: –
¡Y estallo, hiervo, vibro,
Alas me nacen!

Suavemente la puerta
Del cuarto se abre,
Y éntranse a él gozosos
Luz, risas, aire. ("Musa traviesa", *Obras* 16: 28)

These wings that are born of him are also the wings of the son who enters into his room/womb.[29] It is the room that is assaulted and invaded by the child's presence. Creation, poetic and maternal, occurs in this room, this nurturing space that is simultaneously closed and open to the violent entrance of the child. Light is born in him and enters unto him. Before this giving of the child over to the light – *dar a luz* – the two existed in opaque relation to one another. The birth of the creation then becomes the birth of the self out of opacity and into apparent transparency (Glissant 111-20), the co-emerging and co-fading subject that becomes illuminated in its contact with the child. Father and son are neither inverted nor conflated, but instead, enter joyfully into maternal contact and embrace. The maternal relation for Ettinger is not one of return to the womb, but a fragilization of the borders between self and other, the uncleft and uncut schism between two subjects. Creation and Creator are dislodged from their patrilineal and hierarchical structures, leaving them floating upon the sea of matrixial relation, a room whose door is closed and yet also open.

Martí gives infinite birth to the poem just as he continually draws his son back into his orbit, absorbing the body of the child from whom he has been separated:

Mi cuerpo, como rosa
Besada, se abre,
Y en su propio perfume
Lánguido exhálase.
Ricas en sangre nueva
Las sienes laten ...
¡Lejos de mí por siempre,
Brazos fragantes! ("Brazos fragantes," *Obras* 16: 23-24)

The maternal father opens (him)self to the child and breaths in the presence of the other. He is bathed in their fragrance, a sense and not an essence of the other he imbibes. This body opens to the other in vulnerability and fragility. It is not sexual but sensually maternal, the fullness of pregnancy, the new blood of the other that fills the body of the self:

Que en la profunda
Sombra se abre,
Donde en solemne
Silencio nacen
Flores eternas
Y colosales. ("Amor errante," *Obras* 16: 41)

This is the scene of an immense and unknowable birth, a pregnancy that is opaque and yet revealed, the swollen belly that all can see, but none can truly fathom. This father becomes a creative and generating matrix that opens outwards and inwards to the child he conceives, "Ved: sentado lo llevo / Sobre mi hombro: / Oculto va, y visible / Para mí solo!" ("Sobre mi hombro," *Obras* 16: 42). It is also this father who carries his son with him into his exile, though this son is present only for him. Only he knows the touch and embrace of a child who is simultaneously absent and present.[30]

The son's loving embrace becomes a kind of solace to the poet in his solitude. It is not a sensual love or sexual Eros, but what Ettinger calls "compassionate Eros," a love unmotivated by the death drive. It is a love directed towards the non-time of birth, non-linear history of being, and presence. It is neither aggressive nor possessive. It asks for nothing but is pure relation.[31] In this compassion, the poet can reach out across the oceans and take the illusory child into his arms. Molloy identifies how the love between father and son disturbs the patrilineal "family model" or "will to continuity":

> Between opposing but reversible male foci of love, the son and the father, the I operates as a shifter, brokering the relation and effectively subverting its rigidity, playing father to the son and son to the father, making the son his father and the father his son … The playful give-and-take, which should be taken most seriously, assures not so much the presence of a "rigid … couple" … as the polymorphous, nonhierarchical exchange of all-male feeling. (372)

Instead of creating a discreet and individuating border between self and other, the border between father and son is disturbed, transmuted by love, or by the fragilization of borders. It is lovingly attacked as the other dispossesses the self of the soundness of its borders.[32] The border as a space of relation allows for Martí's poetry to explore a relationality that overcomes his position as an exile. Despite living half a continent away from his child, Martí imagines a kind of dreamscape where he and his son exist in intimate proximity. His exile is what makes this kind of relationship possible. The maternal relation occurs before the cut, the splitting of self from other. This exile seeps into the space between islands, the space between bodies, the space between m/other/father and child: "Me hablaban de que estás lejos: / ¡Locuras me hablan! / Ellos tienen tu sombra; / ¡Yo tengo tu alma!" (Martí, "Hijo del alma," *Obras* 16: 38). One of the major critiques of Martí's work is the duality of body and soul, and while a specific prioritization of spirit over embodiment might be read here, this book of poetry is undeniably sensual.[33] The body takes precedence everywhere as

arms and bellies and mouths and feet strive to cross the distance imposed by Martí's banishment from Cuba.

The dreamscape of *Ismaelillo* is a different kind of territorial understanding, not of paternal borders but of the maternal threshold, the matrixial borderspace that is perforated and crossed. Martí writes to his son, "Hijo, en tu busca / Cruzo los mares" ("Amor errante," *Obras* 16: 39). The maternal father wanders, errant, in search of his lost child. He crosses oceans, these watery borders that stand between islands. The border once traversed calls for a maternal relation that undoes the paternal call to autonomy, to the surety of borders. The ocean again is a barrier but also a site of contact. The Father of Our America, who at once writes to delineate its borders, is also the maternal father whose abounding relationality probes and perforates the borders that would separate beings in relation.[34] An island appears closed at its borders by the ocean, a barrier that Martí in exile could only cross on pain of death, but the ocean becomes another matrixial plane linking the archipelago through ports and harbors, the penetrable womb of the island. The blurring of these borders through the penetration of the maternal opening towards the other is profoundly imagined in Martí's maternal poetics:

En mi seno desnudo
Déjante el alba; ...
De la noche revuelta
Te echa en las aguas.
Guardiancillo magnánimo,
La no cerrada
Puerta de mi hondo espíritu. ("Hijo del alma," *Obras* 16: 37)

Martí writes of his naked breast, the site where a mother might feed her child, in place of the heart. In this scene, the door into the maternal father's spirit is not closed but open. This door is the site of a matrixial relation, the partially emerging self and other. It is where interiority and exteriority meet and are blended. The self that would seal itself off from the other is opened like a door and admits the entrance of an-other subject across this threshold. The imagery of the child floating on the sea carries itself through this door into the safe harbor of the father's "deep spirit" away from the tumultuous sea. Ettinger writes that transformation through maternal relating is a "passageway composed of transgressive *borderlinks* that transform, simultaneously and differently, co-emerging partial-subjects, partial Others, partial-objects, and tracing elements, and of slippery borderlines between subjective and objective ingredients in the process of becoming thresholds

that allow for floating and transgressions" (*Matrixial 65*). This space, at once infinite as the horizon, is also the space of a maternal drawing-in, co-creating subjectivities that find each-other in the floating transgression of border crossing. These ports of the Caribbean are open, to trade, to a violation, to the amorous caress, and maternal *jouissance*. Martí writes of the son as the "interna tormenta" ("Sobre mi hombro," *Obras* 16: 42). This storm is the pain and pleasure of pregnancy, the storm of the body that takes and inhabits the mother in mutual otherness. It is the open port that is overcome and invaded by this storm.

Finally, it was the storm of the revolution that opened the doors of the island to Martí. Amid crashing waves, Martí, General Máximo Gómez, and four soldiers rowed the last mile to Cuba's shores. Martí's invasion was begun, and here is where Martí ultimately earns the title that many have bestowed upon him: "prophet and visionary."[35] In the first lines of *Abdala*, one of the young prince's soldiers proclaims: "¡Y si mueres luchando, te concede / La corona del mártir de la patria! – " (Martí, *Obras* 18: 17). It is as if even sixteen-year-old Martí dreamed of such a glory, the crown of martyrdom, the ultimate mark of sacrificial love. Octavio Paz writes of Martí's later poem "Dos patrias" (*Obras* 16: 252) as a premonition both of his death and of contemporary poetry, a poem in which "the beginning contains the end" (Paz 99). In this poem, Cuba appears to the poet as a "viuda triste," and he opens the window to her as she, like a cloud, passes in the night sky. This window open to the night mirrors the door which Martí opens to allow the invasion of the child riding on light and clouds in "Musa traviesa." It is the revolutionary invasion of the other towards which Martí opens his "pecho, destrozado está y vacío" ("Dos patrias," *Obras* 16: 252). Paz writes that Martí plays along with the duality of these two women, Cuba and the night, but that "Death, eroticism, revolutionary passion, poetry: the night, the great mother, contains it all … The poet does not raise his voice. He speaks to himself when he speaks to the night and to revolution" (Paz 100-01). This is because Martí *is* also the mother, the night, and the abyss of death that is the womb/tomb bearing revolution. The beginning of the revolution, like birth, contains an end – a container for life and death, a womb. Martí's poetry gives birth to modern poetry and a nation. He presents writing that is at once national writing, the narrative of an island and revolution being born, sailing over the horizon, and into view. Nevertheless, we encounter in these two early works a maternal Martí whose legacy is not ossified, and whose meaning escapes fixation through the maternal flow that disintegrates the island's borders, crosses its frontiers, and opens a window towards the inhabitation of the unknown, unforeseen others.

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NOTES

1 See José Martí (*Obras Completas* 1: 39) and Alfred J. López (55-56).

2 Andrew Parker writes in *The Theorist's Mother*: "motherhood as ethical relation is as applicable to men as to women" (21). For Martí as heroic father of the Cuban nation, read Emilio Bejel, (*Images* 5); Armando García de la Torre (20); *Memoria del Congreso de Escritores Martianos* (34-38); Oscar Montero writes: "The last thing Martí needs is another eulogy" (4); José Miguel Oviedo (11, 119); Antonio José Ponte (83); and Luis Rodríguez-Embil (7-8).

3 The "o" in "other" is not capitalized because it does not indicate the absolute Other, but rather refers to an-other who can be both absolute and corporeal. The hyphen in "an-other" acts as the umbilical cord, the incomplete severance of one from other.

4 Oscar Montero writes that Martí is not only the "monolith" that has since been erected in the wake of his death, but he is also "more fluid and more elusive" (4).

5 Sylvia Molloy describes this as the "contamination between written page and child" (371).

6 See López; John M. Kirk; Laura Lomas*;* Jorge Mañach; Carlos Márquez Sterling (194); Oviedo; Jorge Quintana; Carlos Ripoll; and Luis Rodríguez-Émbil.

7 See Quintana, "MAYO 30 / La madre de José Martí, en una entrevista con el corresponsal del periódico neoyorkino 'The New York Herald', publicada en esta fecha, expone su criterio de estar dudosa de que sea cierta la noticia de la muerte de su hijo. / *MARTÍ'S MOTHER THINKS HE LIVES, EN*: 'The New York Herald', New York, 30 de mayo de 1895, No. 21465, (Pág. 9)" (262).

8 Also see Ettinger, "Copoeisis" (709).

9 See Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace,* "Some of the non-I's foreignness will never yield to the mastery of my phallic recognition, yet we are the witnesses of others-becoming-ours; we share with our strangers an-other space" (110).

10 Also see Montero, "[Otmar] Ette concludes that 'the division between a 'political' Martí and a 'literary' Martí continues to be a central problem in studies on the poet and revolutionary. There is still no organic understanding of the totality of Martí's works, …'" (408). My brief, selective comments on Martí and his works can hardly pretend to provide such an 'organic understanding.' … I have tried to be mindful of the tradition so expertly reconstructed by Ette without presuming to account for all its ambiguities. In any case, there is no innocent return to Martí's text" (3) See Ottmar Ette, "Hasta ahora, no se le había dado mucha importancia a este hecho en las

investigaciones sobre Martí que se limitaban a comparaciones más bien ahistóricas, puramente 'literarias'" (137).

11 Emilio Bejel responds to this idea of neutrality by stating: "Instead of immersing in these political debates, my book's point of departure is the idea that *the history that interposes itself between the visual image and the observer's present is never neutral*. All this means that no single interpretation of Martí's iconography is able to completely control the aporias and contradictions that a critical reading can bring to light. We can critically reread Martí's images due to the fact that they themselves contain the possibility of self-subversion; only through a critical analysis can we be more conscious of their effects on us and acquire agency as members of the human community" (Bejel, *Images* 6).

12 Guillermina De Ferrari writes in *Vulnerable States: Bodies of Memory in Contemporary Caribbean Fiction* that vulnerability may be a way to conceive of embodiment in the Caribbean and the fact that "colonial domination was effectively based on the vulnerability of the material body to the forces of symbolic power" (2).

13 Glissant describes this writing, "The literary text plays the contradictory role of a producer of opacity … Literary textual practice thus represents an opposition between two opacities: the irreducible opacity of the text … and the always evolving opacity of the author or a reader" (115). These two opaque others act upon each other in relation.

14 See Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

15 According to Santí, *Ismaelillo* was a response to the positivist and naturalist philosophies of modernity (838). Ivan A. Schulman writes of *Ismaelillo*: "Chaos – born of the structures and contradictions of modernity in its initial phases – invades and pervades the aesthetic space of *Ismaelillo*" (*Painting* 2-3).

16 Andrew Parker argues that this should not be seen as a male appropriation of a purely female role: "Indeed, if to imagine (male) philosophers as mothers is to assume 'both the appropriation and the disavowal of woman's ability to reproduce life,' it is also to assume that women have nothing of their own to contribute to culture – neither writing nor children" (114). Parker reminds us that "[Levinas cites] Numbers (11:12), where Moses complains to God about the Hebrews' constant complaining: 'Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers?' We grasp here that Moses is their mother, that he did give his people birth" (21). He who was once called Father of the nation, can also carry the nation as child in the womb.

17 See Genesis 22:17. This is the beginning of the story of Abraham, Hagar, Sarah, Ishmael, and Isaac, in which God promises Abraham that despite being childless, his descendants would be as numerous as grains of sand on the seashore or stars in the sky.

18 Ramos writes that modernity posed a problem for Martí and the writers of his time in that it forced upon them the incertitude of their inheritance, of the borders and rightfulness of the Latin American nations that were in this period being drawn out of Spanish colonialism and newly mapped as independent entities (198).

19 See also Sylvia Molloy: "Martí's obsession has been diversely commented on first by Angel Rama and then, most convincingly, by Julio Ramos, who reads Martí's insistence on filiation as a way of setting up a new model of *affiliation*, in Said's sense of the term, as the replacement of one family model by another. That women are excluded from Martí's new family model – this 'rigid and self-sufficient male couple,' as Rama calls it – is, of course, obvious" (372).

20 See Molloy: "An obsessive meditation on progeniture and filiation runs through the pages of José Martí. Of his first book of poetry, *Ismaelillo*, celebrating his three-year-old son, he writes (in French) to his friend Charles Dana, editor of the *New York Sun*: 'I have just published a little book not for profit but as a present for those I love, a present in the name of my son who is my master. The book is the story of my love affair with my son [*mes amours avec mon fils*]: one tires of reading so many stories of love affairs with women'" (370).

21 Emilio Bejel writes: "despite his youth, Martí was already so aware of his political image, given that a year before he was imprisoned he had written the dramatic poem 'Abdala' (Martí 1869) … It would seem that, interpreted from a nationalistic perspective, Martí, from a very young age, had sketched the personal and political destiny that would culminate in his dramatic death in Dos Ríos on May 19, 1895. All this, of course, is a retrospective interpretation of what happened" (*Images* 32).

22 This is described by Roberto Fernández Retamar in "Martí in His (Third) World" as being the love of nation (92).

23 *Obras,* 18: 18. "ABD: ¡Un rayo sólo detener pudiera / El esfuerzo y valor del noble Abdala!"

24 See Ettinger's article "Copoeisis" where she explains, "The I and non-I are wit(h)nessing one another, and by that they become partialised, vulnerable and fragilised" (704).

25 Bejel writes that for Martí women were meant to fulfill a strictly domestic role and that he found "manly women" threatening and repugnant to his vision of the world. Many critics have written on this strict division between the masculine and feminine in Martí's writing. Jacqueline Cruz writes that the woman in José Martí's work is a subordinated subject, the woman as slave to the man, and that Martí defines the difference between the man and the woman as the "la dualidad alma/cuerpo" (Cruz 35). Beatrice Pita references "Vindicación de Cuba" stating "Clearly Martí, here as elsewhere in his writings,

is responding to a strictly delineated and highly romantic division of spheres for the feminine and the masculine – a dichotomy that extends as well to the literary" (139). This dichotomy is often blurred by Martí's writing and many of his letters to Carmita and Maria Mantilla where he instructs them in how to live as decent, genteel, and independent women without need to chain themselves to a man who would only degrade them. This is evidenced most clearly in his final letter to María Mantilla (Martí, *Obras* 20: 236).

26 See also Oviedo (121).

27 Again, María Mantilla is here referred to as a "daughter," allowing for the very real ambiguity surrounding her status and belonging within the life and genealogy of Martí.

28 Santí writes that *Ismaelillo*, although dedicated to the son, is actually a veiled indictment directed at Martí's wife (825). He and Jorge Camacho agree that the unmentioned mother that lurks in the subtext of *Ismaelillo* is Carmen. However, in this movement Martí subtly equates his wife with the slave whom he would cast from his house. She is obliterated from the volume of poems.

29 See Elissa Marder, who writes on Freud's view of the womb as a casket and expands this reading towards a photographic understanding of the womb and fixation.

30 This duality of presence and absence brings to mind Lacan's idea of maternal absence. According to Freudian and Lacanian theories, the mother is understood as lack and absence (of the phallus). Feminist psychoanalysis has worked over the years to either invert or overthrow this paradigm. Ettinger proposes the matrixial as a supplement to the phallic paradigm in which the maternal is not marked by absence but a co-fading with and of the other.

31 Ettinger writes that sexual and compassionate Eros may be mixed in an experiential sense but their drives are different: Ettinger writes of a "Compassionate Eros and sexual libido are different psychic instances. They might intermix, but they nurture different kinds of love. Where sexual libido takes the lead, Thanatos – death drive – is there too, never too far. In that case, the potentiality for compassion is often deformed. By compassionate Eros a non-aggressive Thanatos is revealed. Not death, but the non-life as the not yet emerged, the not yet becoming alive, is accessed and intended" (Ettinger, "Copoeisis" 709).

32 See Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou.

33 For Guillermina De Ferrari, this dichotomy between soul and body comes down to an understanding of Cartesian ontology by which "The model of disembodiment that lies behind what Glissant calls transparency has made possible the dissymmetry by which 'one' *has* a body while the Other *is* a body" (11). See Jacqueline Cruz (35).

34 Ramos writes that Martí's prologues and chronicles were maps that drew the limits of the state and culture. It differentiated between North and Latin America, creating distinctions that would allow for the "autonomization or the specification" of Latin American letters and identities (xxxviii).

35 See Jorge Camacho (3). Also Fernández Retamar, "The Modernity of Martí" (15). Roberto González Echevarría also states that Martí's death adds a "prophetic quality" to much of his writing where he describes his own death (xxiv). Guerra writes that Martí "prophesied" a future threat from Cuba's North American neighbor (2). Also see Schulman, "Void and renewal: José Martí's modernity" (174-75); and Ripoll (27).

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