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RUTH BEHAR

## *While Waiting for the Ferry to Cuba*

AFTERTHOUGHTS ABOUT *ADIO KERIDA*

In some ways you might say that my entire life was a kind of preparation for making my documentary, *Adio Kerida* (Goodbye Dear Love). After all, the film is about Cuban Jews and I am a Cuban Jew. Or rather, I'm a Cuban-American Jew or a Jewish Cuban-American. Or, as they say in Miami, I'm a "Juban." I was born a Jew in Cuba and came to the United States as a child. I grew up in New York, where I spoke Spanish at home and learned to speak English in school, and have spent a large part of my life explaining how it is that I am both Cuban and Jewish, since this combination of identities has continually baffled people in the United States, though less so in recent years, thanks to the discovery, at last, of multiculturalism.

Certainly one of my most basic motivations in making *Adio Kerida* was to find my own identity reflected in other Jewish Cubans. I wanted to make visible the way a variety of people negotiate the mix of being Jewish and Cuban. But the story quickly grew more complex than that. In the process of conceiving *Adio Kerida*, I made a strategic political choice. I decided to focus on Cuba's Sephardic Jews, rather than look at the whole Cuban Jewish community, which includes Ashkenazi as well as Sephardic Jews. In other words, rather than look at Jewishness as a single, monolithic category, I chose to call attention to the diversity of the Jewish experience and to challenge the Ashkenazi-centered view of what it means to be a Jew.

In grant proposals I wrote to seek funding for the project, I explained who the Sephardic Jews are in the following way:

Sephardic Jews view themselves as Hispanic people who are connected to both the Arab and African worlds because of their history of cultural and emotional interpenetration with those worlds. They descend from

the Jewish populations expelled by the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century. After the expulsion, they settled in the countries of the Ottoman empire and northern Africa, which welcomed them and made it possible for them to live as Jews among Muslims. "Sepharad" means Spain in Hebrew. Sephardic Jews are notable for having clung with a passion to their nostalgia for Spain and their love for the Spanish language, despite having been forced to leave Spain because of their ethnic and religious identity. They are misunderstood and often discriminated against by the mainstream Eastern European Jewish world, which can only imagine Jewish identity in terms of the novels of Philip Roth and the movies of Woody Allen. Beyond the Jewish world, Sephardic Jews are virtually unknown as a community and they are almost invisible in the contemporary world of literature and the arts. The Cuban Sephardic community, both on and off the island, offers so rare a mix of cultural traditions—Spanish, Turkish, African, Jewish, Cuban, and American—that it remains a mystery and has not yet been portrayed in any depth in literature, art, or film.

My own autobiography motivated me to want to learn more about the Sephardic Jews. Although both my parents were born in Cuba, they brought to their marriage quite distinctly different Jewish traditions. To be less diplomatic about it, let's just say they argued a lot when I was growing up. It took me years to understand that their disagreements were rooted in the cultural split between my mother, the daughter of Ashkenazi immigrants from Poland and Byelorussia, and my father, the son of Sephardic immigrants from Turkey. In my mother's family, my father was known as "el turco," and this was not a term of endearment. Instead, it was a way of referring to my father's hot temper, unforgiving soul, and patriarchal dominance. The Ashkenazi side, who thought of themselves as more rational, tolerant, and modern, viewed those character flaws as elements of a primitive Turkish character. I learned this early in life, because whenever my mother got angry at me she'd say I was just like my father. And my mother's family, in which I largely grew up, always reminded me that with my dark, curly hair, my less than good temper, and my own inability to forgive, I too was more like my relatives on the other side, more like the "turcos."

In retrospect, I realize that I was fortunate to have known more than one way of being Jewish. It allowed me to understand from an early age that Jews were a diasporic people and had always had to find ways to creatively mesh their Jewish identity with the culture of the people they lived

among. On a more critical note, I learned early on that, for reasons that eluded me, the Ashkenazi Jews had gained the upper hand in defining what it meant to be a Jew. When I was growing up, on the first night of Passover we always held our first Seder at the home of my maternal grandparents and ate gefilte fish, matzo ball soup, and boiled chicken. On the second night, always *the second night*, we went to the home of my paternal grandparents and we ate *haroset* made with raisins and dates, egg lemon soup, stuffed tomatoes, and a holiday almond cake dripping with honey; this cuisine, my mother always reminded me, was very delicious but very bad for our figures, and indeed my father's mother was quite fat. Finally, at the end of the eight days of Passover, as if trying to resolve the contradiction of our doubled Jewishness through gastronomic means, my father would insist on taking my mother, my brother and me to El Rincon Criollo on Junction Boulevard for Cuban black beans and palomilla steak with onions.

In short, the Sephardim were mysterious to me, even though as a "halfie" and an ill-tempered soul I was a part of them. I didn't really know who these people, "my people," were. It all came down to the basic fact that being my father's daughter and being Sephardic were inseparable things for me. Inheriting my Sephardic identity from my father was a vexed issue because for many years he and I were locked in a contest of wills. In our life together, my father had either been absolutely furious with me or not speaking to me at all. As a teenager I'd upset him by going to college against his will, and as a grown woman I'd upset him by writing stories about him and my mother that he thought shamed and dishonored them. When I began to travel regularly to Cuba in the 1990s, I further upset him by returning to the country from which he had fled at great risk in the early 1960s, and he viewed my desire to reconnect with Cuba as yet another manifestation of my ingratitude and disrespect.

So naturally, given this history of heartbreak between my Sephardic father and me, I knew I had to make *Adio Kerida* and I had to make it for my father. Although I couldn't convince my father to go to Cuba with me, I would go and make this film for him. I would dedicate it to him, even if I had to do it against his will. I would show him what kind of people we are, we the Sephardic Jews, with our strong tempers and our inability to forgive. For despite the years of conflict with my father, I had never given up my Behar last name, the name I inherited from my father, the Béjar that is still the name of a town in northwestern Spain. And as I embarked on the making of *Adio Kerida*, it is this name that I would find all over Cuba, both among the living Sephardic Jews I met and the many Sephardic

Jews who have departed to the next world and whose tombs abound in the cemeteries of the island.

Once I realized that *Adio Kerida* would be for my father, I hoped that he would appear in the film. But my father vehemently refused. So I proceeded to begin filming in Cuba, until I could convince him to cooperate. One way or another, I was going to get him to be in my film, and this informed the other key strategic political choice I made in the early stages of conceiving *Adio Kerida*. I decided that I would include in my film both Sephardic Jews who remain on the island and Sephardic Jews from Cuba who now reside in the United States. This meant that my film would create a bridge that doesn't yet exist in reality. The Sephardic Jewish community of Cuba is divided by the politics of revolution and exile, and many members of the community who live in the United States are unwilling to return to Cuba or even to be in touch with fellow Sephardic Jews on the island. But at least in my film, these Cuban Sephardic Jews would be shown side by side, embracing their common Sephardic and Cuban heritage.

*Adio Kerida* was the culmination, for me, of a long process of reconnecting with Cuba and of forging ties with the literary, artistic, and intellectual communities of both the island and the Cuban American left in the United States. I have traveled back and forth to Cuba since 1991, going three times a year for brief but intense visits.

I first returned to Cuba in 1979 as a graduate student, in the hope of gaining permission to carry out my dissertation fieldwork in anthropology on the island. This was during the famous moment of the thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations led by then-President Jimmy Carter, when it appeared that normalization of relations would soon take place. After much internal debate, Cuba both released political prisoners and agreed to the family reunification program, which allowed more than a hundred thousand Cuban Americans who left the island in the 1960s to return to visit their families between 1978 and 1979. But then, in 1980, came the Mariel exodus, which took everyone by surprise, leading to the dramatic departure of 120,000 Cubans to the United States. Blame for the mass exodus was placed on the *gusanos*, the so-called worms of the revolution. The returning immigrants came to be viewed as a contaminating force, who returned to Cuba to flaunt the wealth they had obtained as immigrants in the capitalist U.S.A. Relations between the United States and Cuba returned to their previous freeze and Cuban Americans were again viewed as suspect by the official island sectors. My desire, as a Cuban American, to return to the island to do research was no longer looked upon with favor. Unable to go to Cuba, I embarked on a long detour as an anthropologist,

doing research in Spain and then Mexico, before finding myself in Cuba again in the 1990s.

In 1979 it had been impossible to leave the city of Havana without official government permission. Foreign visitors, especially from the United States, were carefully watched. As a Cuban American I was especially suspect and was appointed my own personal spy. At the time I was too innocent to realize that the friendly young man, who always sat next to me on the bus and wanted to know everything about me, was surveying my activities.

When I returned in 1991, I discovered quite another Cuba, a Cuba whose survival now depended on tourists, including those who came from the great enemy to the north, from the same U.S.A. that was maintaining its embargo against the naughty Communist island, and making it illegal, in fact, for Americans to visit Cuba as tourists. This was a Cuba whose survival now also depended on offering a new kind of welcome, including to those Cuban Americans who were not the confident, idealistic Marxists who returned to Cuba with the Antonio Maceo Brigades of the 1970s. By the 1990s the island was extending its welcome even to those wishy-washy Cuban Americans of the left, uncertain liberals who hadn't yet made up their minds about Cuba.

The first years of the 1990s were painful years as Cuba sought to maintain its revolutionary goals while making the transition from being dependent on the former Soviet Union to becoming an independent player in the new global economy. The country was badly in need of hard currency and fell into an economic and moral crisis. On a Cuban television cooking show, Cuban women were shown how to make breaded grapefruit-rind "steaks" for their families to curb the sudden hunger. Contradictions between socialist ideology and everyday social life grew ever more dissonant. By the mid-1990s the U.S. dollar became a legal currency in Cuba. Essential items like soap, detergent, and cooking oil could only be obtained with dollars, yet Cuban salaries were still paid in Cuban pesos. The informal economy expanded as more and more Cubans went hustling for dollars, and tourism, including sex tourism, became a major sector for economic growth.

At the same time, after three decades of suppressing religious observance, the government ceased to penalize any Cubans, including Party members, who openly practiced religion. Increasing numbers of Cubans began to return to Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, and Santería, among other religions, in search of spiritual solace. In turn, with the return of God to Cuba, the island became safe again for Americans to visit.

The Americans began to come in record numbers, bolstered by the fact that the embargo permits Americans to travel to Cuba legally if they are traveling as part of a humanitarian mission to deliver religious assistance.

Not only was religion a legally open door for Americans to cross the border into Cuba, but so too was the larger category of cultural exchange. The charm that Cuba holds for so many American visitors has precisely to do with the fact that Cuba represents a form of utopian dreaming carried out in opposition to American political interests. By the late 1990s numerous Americans were traveling to Cuba in search of the unique independence of Cuban music, art, and literature. Ry Cooder's *Buena Vista Social Club* music CD, followed by Wim Wender's documentary about Cooder's heroic discovery of the lost ancient Cuban mariners, gave new nostalgic attention to Cuba and suggested to Americans that their embargo against Cuba was depriving them of the richness of Cuban culture.

The American market is now flooded with CDs of Cuban music (you can hear them in any Starbucks or Borders), new films about Cuba, novels and memoirs about Cuba, ethnographies of Cuban Santería, photography books about Cuba, and architectural studies of the island. A Cuban revolution is happening in the United States, and it has created an insatiable desire for all things Cuban.

My own return journey to Cuba, which began over a decade ago and is still in progress, unfolded in the midst of all these 1990s developments. As the years passed, and I traveled back and forth to Cuba from Michigan for more than thirty visits, I began to recognize that my return journey, even though it was profoundly personal and spiritual and began long before what I call "the Cuba boom," could not be seen as more or less exalted than the Cuba journeys of Ry Cooder, or the sex tourists, or the gallery curators, or Pastors for Peace, or Jewish Solidarity, not to mention the Cuba journeys of all the other Cuban Americans who were embarking on their own personal and spiritual quests.

I found myself unable to think of Cuba as a field site, and in my first emotional reencounters with the island I turned to poetry, one of my youthful passions, which I'd given up when I went to graduate school. Reconnecting with the Afro-Cuban woman who cared for me as a child and returning to the apartment where I'd spent my early childhood were all deeply moving experiences for me, which became sources for my poetry. But the anthropologist in me wanted to know whether my experiences had any social foundation, and so I became involved in creating a collective tapestry of voices and visions of Cubans of the island and Cubans of the Diaspora who were of my generation and likewise seeking a common cul-

ture and memory. This project turned into an anthology, *Bridges to Cuba* (1995), which I edited, and also led me to forge ties with Ediciones Vigía in Matanzas, an artisan publishing house that encouraged my efforts as a poet and writer and inspired me to start writing in Spanish as well as English.

During these years of visits to Cuba, I attended Jewish services at the synagogues in Havana and also took trips to the provinces to get to know the synagogues and Jewish communities in Cienfuegos, Camaguey, and Santiago de Cuba. But I wasn't in any way trying to study the Jews of Cuba. I myself was still uncertain about what my Jewishness meant to me. I'd spent years of my life studying Catholic cultures in Spain and Mexico and keeping my Jewish identity well hidden so as not to raise any eyebrows, especially since I was so readily accepted in the communities I studied because I am a native Spanish speaker. Although I took pleasure in meeting Jews in Cuba and found it moving to attend services at the Patronato synagogue in Havana, which is just down the street from where I lived as a child, I rarely snapped any pictures or carried out interviews.

I wanted simply to be a Jew in Cuba and not have to explain my identity to anyone. I found that the combination of Cuban pluralistic tolerance and revolutionary secularism made it easy to be a Jew in Cuba. I could openly say I was Jewish to any and every Cuban. This was immensely liberating after my years of *conversa*-like hiding of my Jewishness in Spain and Mexico. In turn, I felt comfortable among the Jews of the island because they were often as uncertain about their Jewishness as I was about mine. Not that Judaism was foreign to me. After all, I went to Hebrew School and can read liturgical Hebrew, and my family observed the major Jewish holidays. But over the years I'd lost touch with my Jewish identity. I was no longer sure what kind of Jew I wanted to be. I found it reassuring to be among Jews in Cuba who didn't quite know what to say or do at Jewish services, to be among Jews who were learning how to be Jews. If there was hope for them, there was hope for me. Later, as my son Gabriel's Bar Mitzvah approached and I decided to learn how to chant Torah along with him, I took pleasure in seeing that the Jews in Cuba, whom I'd gotten to know over the years, were becoming more confident and knowledgeable about their Jewishness too.

The four synagogues in Havana—Chevet Ahim, Adath Israel, El Patronato, and El Centro Hebreo Sefaradí—had never been shut down (although the fifth, the American synagogue, had been allowed to fall into ruins). Yet older people largely attended Jewish services during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Jewish community, once at least fifteen thousand

strong, had been decimated by the Cuban revolution, which undertook to nationalize the many small businesses owned by Jewish Cubans, the majority of whom left in the early 1960s and resettled in Miami and New York. With only a few thousand Jews left on the island, a number that eventually declined to around a thousand, it was difficult to maintain a strong Jewish community. In addition, the Cuban revolution frowned on religious observance of any kind. Jews weren't singled out for persecution because of their ethnicity or faith, but they chose like other Cubans to pull away from religion and to suppress any sense of their own ethnic difference in order to fully integrate themselves into the revolutionary process, which was firmly rooted in nationalism and unity.

But by the 1990s, in the new atmosphere of religious tolerance, Jewish families and Jewish young people began to flock to the synagogues. Most of these Jews were of mixed heritage, and many were discovering their Jewishness for the first time. Motivations for coming out as Jews were diverse. Some were attracted by the possibility of exploring their spirituality because it had previously been taboo. Others were glad for the Sabbath meals that were offered after the services. Yet others, learning that the Israeli government would cover the voyage and resettlement of Jewish Cubans who wanted to leave the island, treated the synagogues as travel agencies that could yield a ticket out of Cuba and to a new life in Israel.

Throughout the revolutionary period, Jewish life had been sustained on the island with the assistance of Jewish organizations in Canada and Latin America, which sent matzoh and wine on Passover and provided other modest but essential help. But it wasn't until the 1990s that major support began to arrive through the American Joint Distribution Committee and B'nai Brith. Helping the Jews of Cuba to survive as Jews became a priority of these Jewish American organizations, which set up "missions" to assist the Jews of Cuba through donations of food, medicine, clothes, and books, as well as through Jewish education, which is most desperately needed in a country where there is not even a single rabbi.

These "missions" had a very strong impact, indeed. By the end of the century, Jewish synagogue life in Cuba was beginning to more closely resemble standard Jewish practice in the United States. The Patronato synagogue, which I'd seen in the early 1990s with a leaking roof that let in the doves, had been restored to its former grandeur and updated with computers and a video screening room. Although the Jewish community in Cuba appeared to be shrinking as a result of elderly deaths and recent immigration to Israel, more and more Jewish American visitors continued to arrive on the island on goodwill missions to save the last of the Jews who

survived Communism. Jewish American visitors became so ubiquitous that it seemed like every Jew in Cuba had at least ten Jewish Americans who wanted to help him or her continue being a Jew in Cuba.

The Jews of Cuba, by the end of the century, had become an exotic tribe. To outsiders, they had come to seem as rare as the Kung of the Kalahari Desert, and as overstudied, overobserved, overphotographed, over-anthropologized, and elusive.

In the midst of this largely Ashkenazi American "discovery" of Jews on the island, I entered the scene with a video camera wanting to make a documentary called *Adio Kerida* about the Sephardic Jews of Cuba, which would be dedicated to my Sephardic Cuban father. But where was I to place myself as a Cuban American Jew of mixed Ashkenazi-Sephardic heritage? It was December 1999, the century was ending, and I felt an immense urgency to begin telling the story I knew about the Jews of Cuba. I thought of following in the footsteps of the filmmaker Dennis O'Rourke and making a kind of Jewish Cuban version of *Cannibal Tours*, focusing my camera on the Jewish American tourists who came on missions to see the Jews of Cuba. I knew I was, to an extent, complicit in their exoticizing gaze, for in the end I too would be returning to the United States. And yet, though I wanted to incorporate a strong touch of irony in my film, it wasn't a tonality I wanted to sustain for the entire piece. There were too many other sentiments, experiences, and forms of knowing I wanted to examine. So I opted instead to show how my own shifting identity, as a returning Cuban Jew, a cultural anthropologist, and a tourist in my native country, opened a window onto a range of diasporic identities.

With minimal funds and little previous filmmaking experience (I'd studied photography and made a short 16 mm film in graduate school), I jumped into the project of *Adio Kerida*, assisted by Gisela Fosado and Umi Vaughan, graduate students in anthropology at the University of Michigan, who were embarking on their own ethnographic research projects in Cuba, in itself yet another phenomenon of the "Cuba boom." (For Anglo-American ethnography departed the island after the embargo, with the sole exception of Oscar Lewis's trilogy, which brought him much suffering. A new generation of young anthropologists is now doing ethnography in Cuba.)

I didn't have a script, and I had only a rough idea of who would be the main protagonists of the story. One thing I knew from the start: the documentary would be called *Adio Kerida*, which is the title of a popular Sephardic song of nineteenth-century origin. *Adio Kerida* was one of the few Sephardic songs I knew by heart and could actually sing. It was

among the few remnants of Sephardic culture that had been passed on to me. And the song spoke of unforgiveness, the quality that my Ashkenazi family had seen as so strongly a Sephardic characteristic. It is, indeed, the bitter lament of a lover who utters an angry good-bye after a beloved's rejection.

I was drawn to the song because I felt it could reference many layers of good-byes, from the bitter good-byes of Sephardic Jews, who were forced to leave their beloved Spain in 1492, to the more recent good-byes of Sephardic Jews who had left Cuba in the 1960s, and yet more poignantly, to the immediate good-byes of those Sephardic Jews who were leaving the island for Israel even as I hurried to interview them for *Adio Kerida*. I also felt the song could reference the desire for return that is so often the other side of exilic departure, and speak to my own desire to find a way to return to Cuba, in contrast to my father's definitive good-bye and unwillingness to look back.

With the lyrics to the "Adio Kerida" song in my head, I went in search of Jewish spaces, the synagogues and Jewish cemeteries where Jews had left traces of their presence on the island. One of the most important epiphanies took place early in the process of filming. As José Levy Tur, the director of the Centro Hebreo Sefaradí, was showing us the nine Torahs brought to Cuba from Turkey by the Sephardic Jews, I could hear live Afro-Cuban music and singing from someplace close by. Interrupting the interview, I asked José Levy where the music was coming from, and he casually told me it was coming from next door, from the space that had once been the main sanctuary of the synagogue. As he explained, the Jewish community was now so small that their religious services had been moved to what had once been the women's meeting room, the room we were in. But what had been the majestic main sanctuary was located next door. Moving to the back of the room, we discovered a peephole through which we could look to the other side and see the musicians, who turned out to be Síntesis, a well-known Afro-Cuban musical group. We then went outside and entered through the main door of the synagogue to the old sanctuary, which was now used as a rehearsal space by Síntesis. They were rehearsing the song "Obbatala," a Santería deity, and I was struck by the way an Afro-Cuban working of spirit now inhabited what had once been a Jewish religious space.

I became fascinated by the idea of Jewish Cuban and Afro-Cuban religiosity existing side by side and realized I could explore this theme in the relationship between José Levy and his daughter, Danayda, who is Afro-Cuban and has been brought up Jewish by him. José Levy's relationship

with his daughter, I saw, offered yet another take on the father-daughter theme, from the perspective of the island. And I was drawn to Danayda's strong sense of herself as Jewish and how she'd negotiated being both Jewish Cuban and Afro-Cuban.

Not long after, while observing the children in the Sunday Hebrew school at the Patronato synagogue, I met an Afro-Cuban boy, Miguelito, whose mother told me he liked to drum Afro-Cuban rhythms on the buckets he uses to take his bath. As soon as I saw him drumming passionately on the buckets, a Jewish star dangling from his neck, I knew that Miguelito had to be in my film. What I couldn't have predicted is that on my last filming trip in summer 2001, he would announce on camera his upcoming departure to Israel with his family. Joyful that he would hopefully soon be able to acquire brand-name drums in Israel, the tears came to his eyes as he spoke of having to say good-bye to his friends and classmates.

Alberto Behar, whose name, curiously, is the same as my father's, had already told another differently painful good-bye story to me. Alberto's revolutionary father, who rejected religion throughout his adult life, asked his son on his deathbed to bury him in the Jewish cemetery. Confronted at the cemetery with the need to say the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, Alberto discovered he didn't know what the Kaddish was. He refused to simply repeat the words senselessly and was haunted for years by his inability to bid his father a proper good-bye. Only by learning to chant Torah was Alberto finally able to bring peace to his heart and say good-bye to his father. Telling this story was such a transformative experience for Alberto that he subsequently pulled together all of his savings and had a tombstone built for his father in the Jewish cemetery outside of Havana.

With these key stories in place, the Cuba section of the documentary began to take shape. In Miami, I looked for other cultural fusions and was immediately attracted to Alberto and Elza Habif, sellers of Turkish good luck charms, whose mirrored store is full of protective eyes. SAMY, a flamboyant gay hairdresser who keeps both a Jewish *hamsa* and a pair of scissors from the Vatican in his salon and whose grandfather, Samuel Cohen, "was like a rabbi," offered some very necessary humor and bold honesty, while the belly dancer Myriam Eli, who merges flamenco, Afro-Cuban, and Turkish traditions, raised key questions about the "boxes" into which identities have to fit in the United States.

My own relatives in Miami offered the closing fragments to the mosaic of Cuban Sephardic identity that has unfolded in the Diaspora. My uncle Enrique, a nouveau street peddler, sells clothes from his truck in the tradition of my grandfather and other Sephardic street peddlers from Turkey.

My aunt Fanny conserves a nightgown that belonged to her grandmother in Turkey and traveled with her mother, my grandmother, from Turkey to Cuba to the United States. And my cousin Isaquito uproariously remembers what it was like to grow up in a Havana tenement on Calle Oficinas, where the Sephardic Jews, the *turcos*, lived upstairs and looked out on the sea, above the prostitutes below, and where sometimes even the nicest of Sephardic Jewish boys succumbed to the temptation of visiting the ladies they delicately referred to in Turkish as *oruspu*.

Finally it came time to go to New York to see if my father would agree to be in my film. Although my father said he would only allow us to film him for fifteen minutes, he had clearly been preparing himself for his interview. He'd hunted down the lyrics to "Adio Kerida" and rehearsed his singing with my mother. When Gisela Fosado turned on the camera, he was clearly moved to be able to sing the song for us, and held his hand to his heart, trembling with emotion. Afterward, he surprised me by walking around the house, giving a kind of tour and pointing out the significance of different objects he'd brought home from his journeys over the years, including a Sephardic cookbook from Istanbul. And I was overjoyed when he agreed to allow us to film him in the Rincon Criollo Restaurant. This was the one setting in which I had dreamed of capturing him, because this is his "little Cuba" and he is always in a good mood there.

It was only later, in the last stages of the editing process, that I realized we needed to balance the Cuban part of my father's scene with the Sephardic part. I also wanted to connect the Cuban cemetery clips, where the Behar name hauntingly surfaces on so many of the tombstones, with cemetery clips in the United States. With a bit of fear, I asked my father if we could film him in the Jewish cemetery in New Jersey where both his parents are buried and where he and my mother wish to be buried when their time comes. He willingly agreed, and I went with Marc Drake, my other key cameraperson and editor, to be filmed with my parents in the cemetery in New Jersey. It was, naturally, for me, an eerie moment, one that reinforces the theme of good-bye, because my parents already know that their final resting place will not be in Cuba but in the United States.

From the beginning, I expected to include my brother Mori in the film. He is such a strong counterpoint to me and is one of the few people who can always make me laugh. When asked to think about being Sephardic, the first association that comes to him is that all the women were very fat. This he then connects jokingly to his dedication to playing the bass, "the big old lady." He hates to travel and can't understand what this anthropology thing is all about. And yet he participates in my film by im-

provising beautiful piano music, most memorably around "Adio Kerida," joining me in my journey through the medium he most adores.

In an early version of *Adio Kerida*, the movie ended with my brother and then cut to the ocean splashing wildly over the Malecón of Havana. But when I showed this version to colleagues and students at Michigan in spring 2001, I was told that I ought to add a scene in Michigan after the scene with my brother in Philadelphia. I decided to create a Michigan scene that would revolve around a poem I'd written called "Prayer," about fears I've experienced often, of getting lost and not finding my way home.

I thought this scene was finished when the Spanish-language version of *Adio Kerida* premiered at the Havana Film Festival in December 2001. But as I watched it several times in Cuba, I realized the scene wasn't yet complete. I came back to a snowy January in Michigan and realized that this snow and the desolation it evoked for me needed to be added to that last section. I also realized that the story of my own "intermarriage" to my husband, David, needed to be told, even if briefly, at the end, so that viewers could see that I too, like the Jews still on the island, had married out, was that kind of Jew who'd crossed the border.

After working on it for more than two years, I tell myself that *Adio Kerida* is done. It has been enthusiastically received by the Jewish Cuban community in Havana and Miami, and most crucially of all, my father likes it. My mother's eating of the mango on camera (my father calls it her "Mango 101") is now part of the folklore of the Jewish Cuban community, as is my father's line about how he'll return to Cuba when the ferry from Key West is operating again.

It's unusual to see a film that is so thoroughly Cuban and Latino and yet focuses on Jewish identity. As a film that is mostly spoken in Spanish, it has a broad appeal for Latinos. The film has been shown already in two important Latino film festivals, in San Antonio and San Diego, and there is continuing interest in the film among Latino viewers. It hasn't been picked up quite so readily yet by Jewish film festivals (though it was shown in the Detroit Jewish film festival and will be shown in the Boston Jewish film festival), and I can only speculate as to whether this has to do with the Sephardic theme (always of lesser interest to Ashkenazi Jewish Americans, who run the festivals, than films about Israel, the Holocaust, and the ultra-Orthodox Lubavitch), or my touch of irony about Jewish American visits to Cuba, or the inclusion of Afro-Cubans and other Jews of mixed heritage in a film about Jews.

Or perhaps my film is Jewish without being quite Jewish enough. It ends on a decidedly Cuban note, with the trio of Cuban musicians on the

famous Havana Malecón improvising a song about the split persona of Ruti/Ruth saying good-bye to Cuba but returning every year to visit the island she left behind before she was old enough to remember it. Maybe this desire for Cuba is something only Jewish Cubans can fully understand. The *kerida*, after all, is Cuba, but “beloved” is spelled in Ladino with a *k* rather than the standard Spanish *querida*, to emphasize that the beloved Cuba is always a fiction, always an imaginary homeland. And I expect that will still be true even if the ferry from Key West to Cuba ever starts operating again.

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