

My very own Cuban-American story of Origin

by: Christy Rodriguez de Conte

Scene 1

The stage is bare. A projector sits upstage center. Distinct nationally fueled items fill the stage. The Cuban pieces might consist of: Sugar cane, Garlic, a door and tire, plantain tree, bongos, etc. The U.S. American pieces might consist of: An American Flag, a Coca-Cola Sign, a gun, a picture of JFK, Elvis in his Cadillac and a copy of the Declaration of Independence. The juxtaposition in identity should be present on stage. Christy sits upstage sketching furiously in her 90's overalls and grunge attire. She has a head camera attached to her head that captures everything she is doing on the large screen. This one-woman show uses physical techniques to maneuver in and out of characters.

A POET

Sketch sketch press press

These images make things clear

The things I fear

Life... existence... me

I hide in my own shadow hallowed in history

A cultural agenda sketched in my head

Of dead men whose names

Claim space in my narrative

If I am the women who came before,

Then where do I begin?

I search to find an origin...

As I walk over the

Concealed stories of the streets

Beats of Kerouacs and Taliwacks

Berate me with your history

This land cultivated by my ancient feet

You claim –with no blame

Or consequence-
No lack of Reverence
“Wake Up” clap, clap
Oh Man!
I am BROWN not BRONZE
A full grown WOMAN
Not a pretty little girl
And though my skin not thick
You insist on slashing
Through its tender shell
One I wear so well
Out of Necessity
As you profit from my identity!
So, if History is a living time of stories
Glories suspended in Rhyme
Racism the Thread that binds
Then how can I recognize In Lak’ech,
You as my other me?
How? How indeed?

Scene 2

Christy shifts out of the poetic trance. She addresses the audience directly.

CHRISTY

I am constantly defending myself. My attire, my decisions, my voice. If you know any Cuban woman you can understand my struggle with this. See if I have to defend everything that may be controversial, well then, I will spend most of my time explaining myself. I find people most often want explanations for my personal identity. Which I find hilarious, because I consider my identity to be pretty self explanatory. I am a butch woman. I wear baggy shorts and wife beaters, drink beer for breakfast and cry unpredictably at any infomercial

or celebrity request for 1 cent a day. Yep that is me. My Roller Derby name was Teddy –Roughskin – oh yeah Dykes play roller derby – go figure. This name reflected my fluffy yet aggressive behavior I tend to lump in with my butch Identity. Yet, somehow, this is perceived as threatening. This representation of woman does not sit well with the popular audience that is constantly witnessing my life.

She holds the camera at the audience. They are projected on the screen.

We are all a part of these questions of identity.

The camera zooms in and out at different people in the audience.

Who...

Are...

You...

Who...

Are...

Any...

Of ...

Us...

The camera zooms back. She looks into the camera.

CHRISTY

Funny though, no one ever asks me “Who I am?” they ask me “What I am?” I have now realized what they really mean by that is: Where were you born? Did you immigrate here, and if so are you an illegal immigrant? Which always jolts me, because I have never really thought of myself or my family as immigrants. In fact, if you were to call my mother an immigrant, she would become furious.

CHRISTY AS “MOM”

I am not from a third world country. We came here on a plane not a raft. Well, your great grandmother, tried to come over here on a door. Thank God they arrested her before she got out too far. Still, we are not like those marielitos that came here in 81. Eso era the lowest of the lows.

CHRISTY

And then my father the, ex history teacher turned attorney, would chime in

CHRISTY AS “DAD”

The thing is, after the revolution Fidel let out a select group of people. That is how your mother and her mother and Abuelita were able to leave. Then around 63, JFK passes the Cuban Adjustment Act, or what I call the “I fucked up Act” to humor all the Cubans in Miami who were rightfully pissed he had left them shit outta luck during the Bay of Pigs.

CHRISTY

This is pretty accurate, I don’t really know many Cubans who like JFK. My father is one of them, he would continue the Democratic bashing.

CHRISTY AS “DAD”

He even gave a huge speech at the old Orange Bowl, it was a load of shit, but whatever. I mean yeah, that was like 1963 no 66. Sure it was difficult. Bito, your mom’s dad-

CHRISTY AS “CHRISTY”

I’d try to join the conversations - Yeah, dad I know my grandfat- steam rolled my dad would continue.

CHRISTY AS “DAD”

He was a pool boy.

CHRISTY

This is where my mom always steps in to quickly justify anything considered, blue collar.

CHRISTY AS “MOM”

Not a pool boy hun, he was a teacher in Cuba. He left before we did. Through Venezuela to New York City. And while we were in Miami, he was in New York working as a bathroom attendant. He was a an entrepreneur of sorts. He saw a need and provided the product. My lunch at the time was 25 cents. Could you even imagine that a quarter for lunch! Dios mio, but anyway. Bito would collect all of his tips and send back rolls of quarters to help support us. Tu te imagina eso, the most pompous man I know, selling combs and mouthwash in a bathroom. Y mi Mama...I must have been eaves dropping. I was very little 7 or 8 years old tops. I remember my mom had gone to work at a factory. The one and only day she worked at a factory. She was one of the first women to graduate from law school in Cuba, in the 1940s, and here she was packing tomatoes in some Hialeah factory. After her first, and last day as factory

worker. I overheard my mother, who was sitting at the kitchen table with Abuelita, say With every tomato I packed I thought of another book I read in school. The day my kids go hungry I'll scrub floors, but until then... and she did, she was a really good realtor, probably would have done real well for herself if the cancer. (*Pausing to regain composure.*) It was 62/63 August/July and we lived in an efficiency. It was an L shape, with a kitchenette on one side and a living room that we all slept in. My mother made sure to have sectionals up, two couches and then Tia 2T had a crib. By December of that year we were buying a house.

CHRISTY

My father would rise up, inhale deeply, and at that point like as if here were standing at the steps of the Freedom Towers in Biscayne bay as thousands of Cuban refugees awaited salvation declare,

CHRISTY AS "DAD"

That shows you how resilient the Cuban people are.

CHRISTY

Yes, sure it does, but don't you think it also speaks to immigration? The value of citizenship in this country?

Breaking character and addressing the audience directly.

CHRISTY

Silence from one of the most talkative persons I have ever met

She pauses slightly

and then she says,

CHRISTY AS "MOM"

I'm not sure I know how that ... We were residents from the moment we walked in stepped foot onto U.S. soil. We were not illegal. The Cuban People Kicked Ass talented and respected. I am not a minority.

CHRISTY

These are my roots. These are my stories. These are the moments that make up my origin. Still these are not the stories that the world sees. These are the stories I have only heard of, yet replay constantly in my dreams.

Scene 3

Christy props the camera on a few suitcases to project her profile on the screen. She opens one, puts on a coat and transforms into Gilda. Taking the suitcase in her hand, she turns to speak.

GILDA

Bueno, es hora de ir nos. It is time to go. Mami has the car packed to go to the airport. Deverdad no tenemos mucho. Very little. I have one bag, my Mami has any article of clothing that might be of value packed in her suitcase. *(looking around to make sure no one is listening.)* She has sewn all of her jewelry into the hems of all of our coats. We need something when we get to America. My daughter, Ileana, has no idea what is going on. She thinks it is a trip, I couldn't break her heart. My son Raul Jr. had a hard time with the move. He is the kind of boy who wants it all. I guess that is why we are moving to America, to have it all. Cono, to have anything. Yo quiero que mi ninita tenga más que este desastre. Quien sabe lo que va a pasar aquí. This is all happening so fast, we have no idea what the future will bring. My Husband left a few months ago. De milagro. The militia was looking for him. Let's just say he doesn't really like this new Fidel Castro and well he has no problem sharing those feelings. He is not alone in his disgust. Some people here are trying to fight him. Claiming that they will take back our country. But have you seen the streets outside. Armed guards marching the streets. Houses just abandoned. Friends vanished. The day my husband left, three men came looking for him at our home. They broke down the door, guns in hand. I threw little Ilianita into the closet with Rauli and closed that door so tight. Ave maria protect them and then I told those bastards to get out. My husband had snuck out the back door and was on his way to the Venezuelan embassy. Those people had only hate in their eyes. No, this is no place to live. Mami packed the deed to the house, but I have no real hope of returning. I am an educated woman, I am one of the first women to graduate law school here in Cuba. I am willing to work hard to overcome obstacles, sin problema. However, I am also smart enough to know when to leave. *(she begins to cry)* I do not want to leave, this is my home. *(she cries harder and then quickly shuts it off.)* I tell myself this is NOT my home, this is simply land. Those children, the man I long to see, that head-strong woman who loads the car at this very moment in the tropical sun, they are my home. They are my future.

(She takes a deep breath grabs her suitcase and begins to dance a waltz. In a choral cantor she chants.)

Las playas de varadero...

Las palmas...

Almas de carinos ancestrio...

La inmigración de nuestra historia...

Scene 4

Christy places the suitcase on the ground and by adjusting a few other set pieces, creates a balance beam. She mounts the beam and does an entire routine on the beam as she delivers this entire scene. She addresses the audience. During this scene the camera is placed at the edge of the balance beam. Mamma G and La Doctora are pre recorded.

CHRISTY

I am an American and my story immigrated with my ancestors - my very own origin story. I know all about George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Sally the whole damn gang, but growing up I always felt some distance between my birthright of American Citizen and my bloodline of Cuban Culture. The family vacations usually consisted of an all american road trip. A strategic loop that would drive us by every monument, historic battleground, log cabin birthplace and theatrical death place of every Historical male figure, white male figure. Hell we even went to Graceland. I have to admit I enjoyed it, but I kept wondering, as I did the first time I ever lived out of the state of FL, where are all the brown people? the more I ask that question, the more I realize the answer. Way at the freakin' bottom. Just above the gays. Lucky me. It was about this time in my life I realized myself that I was brown. It took two professors, a Black woman and a Latina woman, and one master's' thesis to make me realize this. They sat at my defense sipping cafe con leche and chewing croquettas. They were nodding in approval and sizing me up all in one look. Mamma G, a black moon goddess diva artist, smacked her lips.

CHRISTY AS "MAMMA G"

She don't even know. She don't even know!

CHRISTY AS "LA DOCTORA"

Not a clue.

CHRISTY AS "CHRISTY"

What don't I know?

CHRISTY AS "MAMMA G"

Diva, you are moving onto another realm, one where you are not going to get what you have had here. Women like La Doctora here or myself will not be there to - Well as a woman of color?

(Christy almost falls off of the balance beam.)

CHRISTY AS “CHRISTY”

Wait - what - I am not a woman of color.

CHRISTY

The words flew out of my mouth like someone had just insulted my mother. I had never realized that that is what I was. I also never realized how negatively I had been taught to perceive that label.

CHRISTY AS “LA DOCTORA”

Mija, It is not an insult.

CHRISTY AS “MAMMA GAIL”

It is a strategic offering of solidarity. Do you think they want us all together in one room, talking about this? No! They want to separate and silence. This term is not one to shy away from this is your history, as a feminist- and don't even tell me you're not a feminist. I remember being in discussions, and we could see the segregation festering. I would sit there and watch all these women fighting for the cause, organizing, preaching truth and still shit would go down! I'd be there thinkin', white men got us divided fighting amongst ourselves, but why. To keep us distracted, that is why! To keep us from rallying together. That is the purpose of owning being a “woman of color.”

CHRISTY AS “LA DOCTORA”

De veras, you would see Mexican women fighting with black women. Ijole, it was not a good way to move forward. It derailed us instead of uplift us. Mira mija, tu eres una mujer Latina, Cubana is just another sub category. But when it comes down to it, you are brown. So stand up.

CHRISTY AS “CHRISTY”

I do, but they keep knockin me down!

She falls off of the beam.

CHRISTY AS “LA DOCTORA”

Bueno, then you get back up!

Christy mounts the beam again.

CHRISTY AS “MAMMA G”

This world is cyclical. You might be down, but you are going to be back up soon enough. The true test is what you do when you are down. That is the time to organize and strategize, in order to be ready for when you do have the power.

CHRISTY

Those ladies, they knew their shit! And they were right, no matter what I was raised to believe I am a minority, I come from immigrant parents, refugees! My history is not congruent with this nation. In fact my blood was not even on this soil until 1969. Does that mean I do not have a right to this history, this misogynistic white washed tale of heroism?

She dismounts gracefully and sticks the landing.

Scene 5

Using the pieces that are on the stage. Christy begins to play music with each piece. She plays a mixture of Cuban salsa beats and American Rock-N-Roll classics. She speaks in rhythm with the music, allowing the words to be heard and the memorable musical choruses be identified.

CHRISTY

1969

1969

(BIG DRUM BEAT)

1969

My Ancestors breakaway from their fate

A parallel existence of exile’s assimilation and infiltration

A hope for order back home

1981

1981

(BIG DRUM BEAT)

1981

I am born, and thus a new hybrid history.

One drudged over choral barriers and invisible borders

It is the new order

2016

2016

(BIG DRUM BEAT)

2016

A new wave of hyphenated joy

The How and why's out do the Who's and by's

A melted story of origin and bein.

Lights fade out.

THE END