



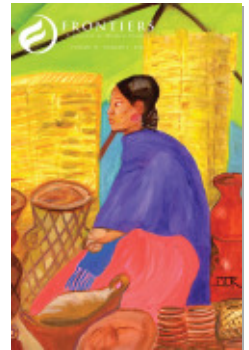
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Garzona Nationalism: The Confluence of Gender, Sexuality, and Citizenship in the Cuban Republic

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Garzona Nationalism

The Confluence of Gender, Sexuality, and Citizenship in the Cuban Republic

KRISTIE SOARES

Although policing the sexual (stigmatizing and outlawing several kinds of non-procreative sex, particularly lesbian and gay sex and prostitution) has something to do with sex, it is also more than sex. Embedded here are powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the nation and about the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship. Not just (any) body can be a citizen anymore.

M. Jacqui Alexander, "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality, and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas"

[I see them] with their boyish haircuts, their aptitude for sports, and their masculine mannerisms, these biologically degenerate types that among women correspond to the perfect *pepillito* [gay man]: *garzonas* [lesbians].

Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo: cuestiones sociales y crítica literaria*

The two epigraphs above are, to the dismay of many, both from feminist thinkers. The first, from well-known Trinidadian scholar M. Jacqui Alexander, outlines the ways that sexuality is not just central to but in fact constitutive of notions of citizenship in the postcolonial Caribbean. The second, from a feminist thinker little known outside her home nation of Cuba, Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, proves Alexander's point in a haunting way. How two women with such differing views can both identify as feminists is the purview of another article, but central to this one is the question of how these two discourses—that citizenship often requires a policing of sexuality and that feminists themselves have often been the enforcers of such regulation—might help us understand both feminism and nationalism as always already in dialogue with one another.

This article examines discourses of lesbian sexuality during the Republican period in Cuba (1920s–30s) to understand how many of our modern un-

derstandings of gender and sexuality, both in the United States and in Latin America, can actually be traced back to this era. Many scholars have argued that the 1920s and 1930s were a fundamental period in the development of a postcolonial Cuban identity.¹ It was during this period that Cuban nationals first attempted to articulate a vision of the Cuban character, while finding themselves plagued simultaneously by the memory of Spanish colonialism—having just gained sovereignty from Spain in 1898—and the threat of American imperialism—manifest in the Platt Amendment of 1901, which gave the United States partial jurisdiction over Cuban affairs. Cuban women, in particular, marked this period with an unprecedented amount of involvement in political and literary circles and saw themselves as an integral part of the development of a postcolonial Cuban identity.

So successful was the activism that Cuban feminists engaged in during this time period that scholars have called the 1940 constitution “perhaps the most progressive charter in the Western Hemisphere” up to that time.² It included, among other things, Article 23, which declared all Cubans equal to one another. Leading up to this momentous constitution were several landmark laws passed on behalf of gender equity, including a 1917 law that gave women control of property, the right to sue, and authority over their children; a 1918 law permitting divorces filed by both women and men and requiring that both be responsible for children after a divorce; the overturning of Article 437 of the Penal Code in 1930, which stated that a man could legally kill his adulterous wife; Decree 589 in 1934, promising equal pay for equal work; and a 1937 maternity law giving women time for breastfeeding during the workday and forbidding hiring discrimination in the case of pregnancy.³ Missing from this list is of course the right to vote, which women obtained in 1933 under the one-hundred-day government of Ramón Grau, which the United States did not recognize.⁴ So successful was Cuba’s feminist movement in these early years that its absence from most narratives of western feminism is both shocking and worrisome. One reason for the relative inattention to early Cuban feminism by US academia is the disconnect that existed between Cuban feminists and US feminists during this time period, with white US feminists refusing to support the Cuban suffrage movement by arguing that Latin American women were not prepared for such a responsibility.⁵ These differences can certainly be attributed at least partially to the emphasis white US feminists placed on dismantling patriarchy and obtaining individual rights—both of which were absent from the more collective Cuban approach.⁶ This is particularly true for the feminist this article concerns itself with, Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, who identified alternately as a “radical” and a “socialist” feminist.⁷ Of course the lack of historical attention these feminists have received is not the fault of US academia alone. Within Cuba their sto-

ries have largely been silenced in favor of a post-1959 version of history, which problematically identifies the “Triumph of the Revolution” as the starting point for narratives of gender equity.

This article, then, looks at the major medium in which feminist dialogues took place during this time period—periodicals.⁸ It explores how discourses of sexuality were actually interwoven with discussions about capitalism and criminology and often navigated what we would now call the essentialism/constructivism (or nature/nurture) divide. It looks specifically at one of the most influential Cuban feminists of the time period—Mariblanca Sabas Alomá—and the way that she produced modern understandings of sexuality through performative self-stagings of her own gender and sexuality (and, to a lesser extent, her whiteness) in both her written work and her public persona. For Sabas Alomá, who was known to be incendiary, this resulted in a vitriolic condemnation of lesbian sexuality, seemingly in contradiction with her feminist stance and rumored lesbian sexuality.

In this, the first article-length study of Sabas Alomá’s treatment of sexuality, I argue that the author’s complicated and often problematic takes on this issue pushes one to ask the following questions about feminist movements both in early-twentieth-century Cuba and in the present-day United States: What happens when the rhetoric we use to argue for gender equity doesn’t seem very equitable? Is it ever acceptable to appeal to oppressive discourses as modes of empowerment? What do we do with the unsavory parts of feminist history that we would rather forget?

This article takes as its starting point the fact that gender and sexuality were deeply constitutive of the postcolonial nation and are still fundamental to modern understandings of citizenship. As such this type of work can help us to understand the genealogy of Cuban feminism and the way that its project was articulated rhetorically alongside nationalism. Beyond that, however, it asks us to interrogate the link between the nation and the feminist project of equity in any context and asks how nationalism might push us to engage in discourses that are in conflict with larger feminist aims. To return to the question at hand: How has the language surrounding equity at times embodied the very inequity it seeks to eradicate?

SEXUAL DEVIANCE, SCIENTIFIC CRIMINOLOGY, AND CAPITALISM

Many have called the first three decades of the twentieth century a “neocolonial period” in Cuba, because it was characterized by corrupt, American-backed governments.⁹ Cuban women’s political involvement during this time often opposed these governments. Among the many women’s organizations

formed and the conferences women organized was the Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres in 1923, which was attended by influential female thinkers such as Ofelia Domínguez Navarro, Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta, and Mariablanca Sabas Alomá. These women debated the most contested issues of the day, including ending prostitution; reforming women's education; and the hot-button topic that would result in many of the delegates, including Sabas Alomá, walking out—equal rights for illegitimate children. In this and subsequent conferences female thinkers would divide over class issues; the role of the Catholic Church; and the schism between liberal, conservative, and radical feminists.¹⁰ Sabas Alomá would consistently position herself against capitalism; against church intervention; and on the side of radical, left-leaning feminists, including members of groups such as Liga Anticlerical, Liga Antimperialista, and Grupo Minorista.¹¹ Although sexuality was certainly a topic of discussion among these intellectual circles, it was not the central concern of any of these organizations, and as such her public declarations on this issue would far exceed those of her contemporaries.

The feminism that we see in the first half of the twentieth century in Cuba might therefore be best described as “national feminism,” in that it attempts to include women in the nationalist ideology so characteristic of newly independent nations.¹² The picture is complicated somewhat, however, by the fact that Sabas Alomá was not a conservative feminist, as many of her colleagues were. She was in fact part of a socialist feminist movement, which sought to create a gender-equitable socialist state. In this way she was interested in incorporating a class critique into her work, which manifested as a critique of the Cuban bourgeoisie. These socialist feminists argued that the bourgeoisie was in the pockets of capitalist American firms such as Woolworth's, which operated branches in Cuba that violated workers' rights and paid insufficient wages. We must view their national feminism in this light, understanding that their discourses of gender and sexuality were tied to this critique of capitalist excess.

The specific discourse we will interrogate is that of *garzonismo*. The term *garzona*—which can be loosely defined somewhere between lesbianism and bachelor womanhood—refers to women who transgress their gender roles.¹³ It is believed to have emerged in response to French author Victor Marguerite's novel *La Garçonne* (1922), which portrays a young woman who engages in same-sex relationships. As such *garzonismo* might be erroneously conflated with lesbianism in a contemporary context, but its actual definition rests at the intersection of gender performance and sexual desire. In the context of Sabas Alomá, however, the term takes on another dimension. The equation that we will see emerging in Sabas Alomá's work throughout this article is, roughly: capitalist = decadent = *garzona*. In her effort to posit a unified feminist move-

ment, the author ends up drawing a parallel between capitalist excess and what she views as sexual self-indulgence. In this way the discourses she appeals to concerning sexual deviance and capitalism cannot be separated.¹⁴

These discourses must also be understood in the context of early-twentieth-century science. In general the 1920s and 1930s were characterized by a growing interest in homosexuality in medical literature and popular opinion throughout Europe and Latin America. Despite the presence of a strong homophobic discourse that “articulated a homosexualization of the enemy,” as seen in Sabas Alomá’s portrayal of antifeminists as lesbians—an interesting contrast to the more contemporary equation of *feminists* as lesbians—it also saw the openings of a discourse that allowed for the free, and sometimes favorable, discussion of homosexuality.¹⁵ In scientific circles the turn of the twentieth century represented an important shift in the understanding of sexual preference. During this time period scholars went from using a “sexual inversion model”—which referred to deviant gender behavior, including but not limited to same-sex relationships—to using a model of “homosexuality”—which focused on sexual object choice.¹⁶ This shift redefined sexual deviancy, as deviants would no longer be identified by gender performance, but rather by sexual preference. For this reason this time period was characterized by changing public views on what we would now call homosexuality.

Sabas Alomá was a product of this time period, during which both discourses existed simultaneously, and as such in her discussion of garzonismo the author appeals to both the sexual inversion and the homosexuality models. On the one hand she generally refers to garzonas in terms of their social roles, not their choice in sexual partner. Like the medical literature of the time period she assumes that a nontraditional social role must be linked to deviant sexual behavior. As George Chauncey Jr. explains, “a woman could not invert any aspect of her gender role without inverting her complete role.”¹⁷ In this sense the masculinized woman that Sabas Alomá refers to as the garzona is a deviant only inasmuch as she does not conform to societal standards of femininity. Her sexual desire is not at issue here, but rather is “only the logical corollary of this inversion.”¹⁸

On the other hand Sabas Alomá also appeals to the homosexuality model. This model was characterized by a view of homosexuality as “the condition of certain identifiable individuals rather than as a form of sinful behavior in which anyone might engage.”¹⁹ Although Sabas Alomá does not explicitly discuss sexual intercourse or preference, she does view garzonas as an identifiable group of people. For her garzonismo is not an event or behavior; it is a national state of emergency caused by women who possess these deviant traits. One cannot slip in and out of garzonismo, but rather one continually inhabits the identity.

This view of garzonismo therefore focuses on the rehabilitation of this group of people, rather than the punishment of specific indiscretions.

In many ways the author's public opinion on homosexuality was also characteristic of the deviance literature of her time period. Many scholars have already commented on her engagement with biological theories, such as those put forth by the predominant Spanish scientist of the time period, Gregorio Marañón.²⁰ Although Sabas Alomá agreed with Marañón's stipulation of garzonas as biologically defective, she distanced herself from the intellectual in her newspaper columns. Unlike Marañón the author asserted that there were social as well as biological explanations for garzonismo and that no link existed between garzonas and feminists.²¹ Sabas Alomá's engagement with the scientific literature did not stop at just Marañón, however. Latin American criminologists were also engaged in a project to determine the causes of crime through scientific study. This positivist criminology incorporated hereditarian and biological explanations for crime (borrowing from Italian criminologists) and environmental explanations (borrowing from French criminologists).²² Socialist criminologists, in particular, used this rhetoric to analyze social deviance, including homosexuality. This style of argumentation parallels Sabas Alomá's own careful mixing of essentialist arguments—those that make a “claim to an eternal female nature”—and constructivist arguments—those that believe “the idea that the meaning of the body is changeable”—to explain garzonismo as the result of both nature and capitalist nurture.²³ Sabas Alomá's negotiation of these factors may therefore indicate her own appeal to the social scientific literature of the early twentieth century.

This deviance literature was famously compiled by the well-known Spanish sociologist Constancio Bernaldo de Quirós in his *Modern Theories of Criminality*, published in 1911. Quirós describes what he calls the “socialistic” theories of criminality—theories that have socialism as their base. He writes of one Italian socialist criminologist, Filippo Turati, who delineates the percentage of criminality caused by biological factors. Quirós states, “if the crimes due to a predominant individual element reach forty percent, we must deduct many exceptions from this figure, and Turati rightly does so, reducing the ratio to about ten percent.”²⁴ As Quirós reveals, Turati produces a theory that combines hereditarian and environmental explanations. For Turati only 10 percent of crime is committed by criminals who possess “a predominant individual element,” meaning a biological predisposition. The other 90 percent of criminals, as he later argues, are produced by social factors, including capitalism. Turati believes that the overthrow of capitalism will make the disappearance of most criminality possible. This statistic—90 percent social and 10 percent biological—echoes Sabas Alomá's own statistic for garzonismo. She

states in “Feminismo contra garzonismo” that only 10 percent of garzonas are the product of biology, and 90 percent are the result of capitalist influence—perhaps an indication of the author’s familiarity with socialist criminological literature and beyond that an affirmation of the inextricability of deviance literature from the study of sexuality during this time period.

It should go without saying, however, that the “scientific” literature used by positivist criminologists was, by modern standards, highly inaccurate. Likewise Sabas Alomá’s own scientific explanations may seem absurd to modern readers. For many criminologists science merely represented a way to corroborate existing theories.²⁵ Their experiments, therefore, generally had little scientific merit. In fact many experiments maintained the guise of objectivity, while simultaneously attempting to propose a cure for criminality. These two main tenets of the positivist criminological movement—maintaining objectivity and producing a cure—correspond with Sabas Alomá’s own project, which intended to both study garzonismo and cure it using feminism and Marxism. The author believed that presenting a convincing case for capitalism’s production of social deviance, specifically in the form of garzonas, could help drive interest in the feminist and Marxist movements.

In positivist criminology the desire for a cure resulted in a science that often appealed to existing social prejudices, as exemplified in certain “scientific” explanations that argued poor classes were more prone to crime than higher social classes. Fernando Ortiz, who has been hailed as the founder of Afro-Cuban studies and a foundational figure in early-twentieth-century nationalism, was himself invested in this project when he studied under Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who wrote the preface to his first book, *Los negros brujos*. In this work Ortiz appeals to Lombroso’s biological determinism, claiming that blacks are more prone to crime than other groups. As Jerome Branche says of Ortiz’s study, “the purportedly scientific intention of the treatise, however, is no doubt compromised by the writer’s confessed concern that his insights serve the interests of the state.”²⁶ Branche draws attention to the fact that Ortiz, like Sabas Alomá, uses the guise of scientific objectivity as a way to legitimize his larger project. As Ortiz’s career developed, of course, he would change his viewpoint radically, instead arguing that blacks represented the cornerstone of Cuban culture. Nonetheless, Ortiz’s original claim that blacks posed a threat to Cuban nationhood, supported by biased scientific research, parallels Sabas Alomá’s own criminalization of garzonas. Despite this Ortiz continues to be hailed in Cuba today as the father of Afro-Cuban studies, whereas Sabas Alomá’s contribution to Cuban feminism is largely underexplored.

In one photograph of the author, which appeared alongside her October 27, 1929, column in *Carteles*, Mariblanca Sabas Alomá is pictured looking over her right shoulder. The photograph is framed so that it seems the author is topless, with only her own arm shielding her breasts from view. Her face portrays sadness, as she looks down melancholically at something out of view and avoids eye contact with the camera. In this photograph Sabas Alomá mirrors many of the conventions of photography used by *Carteles* at the time. The magazine often included images of seminude women, and it was not unusual for women to appear unsmiling in portraits. What sets Sabas Alomá's picture apart from others, however, is the way her picture is positioned in the magazine. Whereas *Carteles* did photograph women in similar poses for advertisements or for the fashion section, it was uncommon for such photos to be included alongside opinion columns. In fact none of Sabas Alomá's fellow columnists—male or female—generally included photographs of themselves alongside their columns during this time period. Sabas Alomá's decision to appear in the above-mentioned photograph in a pose usually reserved for cover models and fashion advertisements sends a message to her readers that she, like these models, upholds the ideals of feminine beauty popular in Cuban society during this time.

Sabas Alomá was one of the first thinkers to proclaim the importance of women to the Cuban nation—a fact that is not unrelated to her decision to appear in this photo beside her column. She spoke to the importance of women not only through poignant journalistic columns in magazine such as *Carteles* but also through the performative self-stagings that scholar Vicky Unruh has argued are representative of this time period in Latin American feminist history. Unruh refers to performance as a bridging of “the theatrical, the cultural, the discursive,” that existed not so much on the stage as in everyday life in the form of a heightened performance of self.²⁷ She notes that “performance activity—even when it shored up gender norms in the face of change—provided these women a far richer repertoire and more malleable site for negotiating their art of living as intellectuals than did reigning models of women's writing.”²⁸ As Unruh argues, the sort of exaggerated drama of which Sabas Alomá takes part in photos such as this one are actually part of her political project. In the case of Sabas Alomá the performative self-stagings that I am interested in looking at are those that corroborate her simultaneously progressive and problematic views on gender and sexuality. That is to say, the sort of gender performance that she undertakes in this topless photograph is another way of emphasizing to her audience the sort of feminism that she espouses.

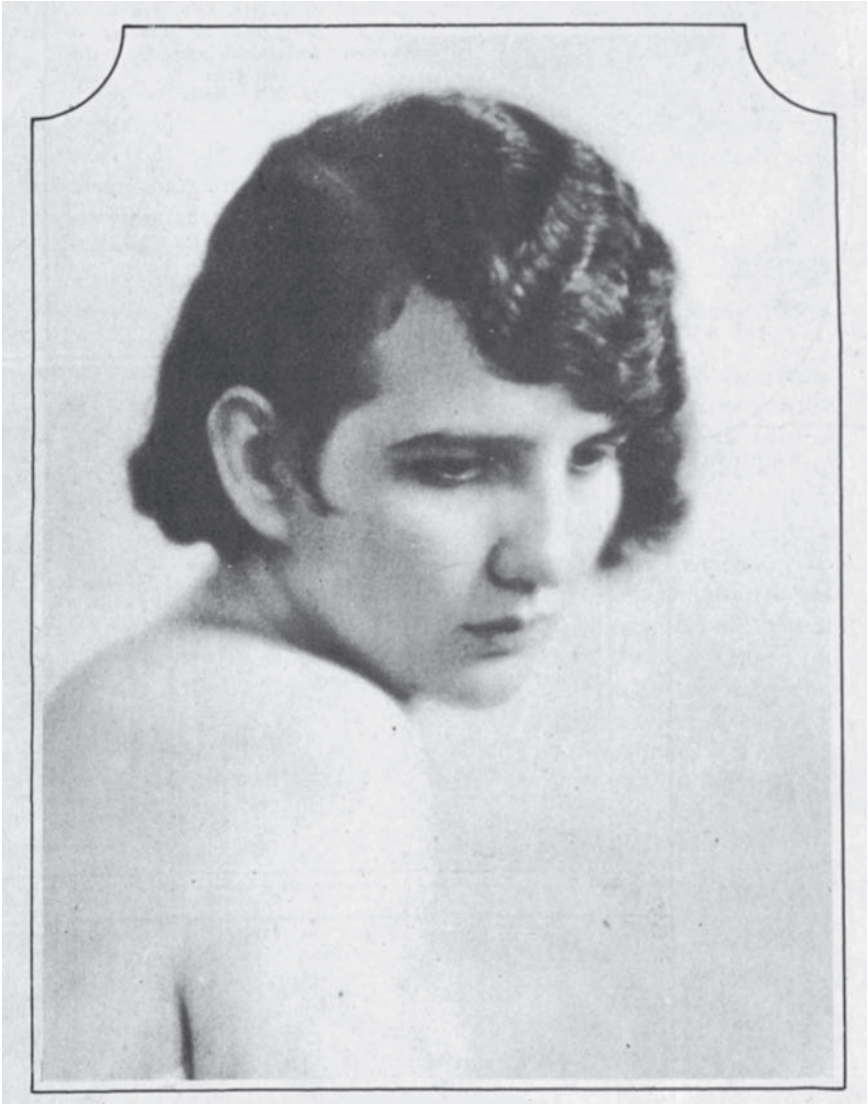


Fig. 1. Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, "La union hace la fuerza," *Carteles* 14, no. 43 (1929): 16. Image courtesy of the University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection.

While it's true that "the central, reoccurring theme in Sabas Alomá's writing is herself," it's important to understand that her vanity is in many ways part of a larger nationalist project.²⁹ As I've mentioned, Sabas Alomá believed that defining a sense of Cuban identity was one way to defend the island

against neocolonial interests. Unlike her contemporaries, such as Fernando Ortiz, Sabas Alomá believed that women played a critical role in developing this identity.³⁰ While it's true that the author took a stance on garzonismo that far exceeded the condemnations made by her colleagues—who, it should be noted, were also largely homophobic—it is also true that her public discussion of women's sexuality provided some of the earliest language for broaching the topic.³¹ In what follows I will examine the author's enactment of gender and sexuality in both her writing and her political life as self-stagings intended as much to strengthen national identity as to lay claim to absolute truths.³² In addition to her performances before the camera, such as the one we've just looked at, I argue that the author engages in a kind of textual performance, in which she strategically enacts various paradigms of gender and sexuality to prove her feminist and nationalist arguments.

Because Sabas Alomá sees garzonismo as a deviation from standard womanhood, a useful place to begin is with her views on the nature of women. Different theorists have disagreed on the author's approach to womanhood. Vicky Unruh claims that Sabas Alomá “actually rejected gender essentialism and argued that masculinity and femininity were categories undergoing radical revision.”³³ For Unruh the author's approach is one that negates biological factors and focuses on societal influences on womanhood. In contrast K. Lynn Stoner argues that by preserving “masculine and feminine functions in Cuban society,” Sabas Alomá “hardly attacked the patriarchy.”³⁴ For Stoner the author ignores changing environmental factors and focuses instead on traditional concepts of gender. Emilio Bejel toes the line between these arguments, stating that Sabas Alomá “unknowingly mixes arguments from diverse discourses that are at odds with each other.”³⁵ My take on Sabas Alomá departs from these views. I argue that, similar to her approach to garzonismo, Sabas Alomá's take on womanhood consciously merges both essentialist and constructivist arguments to fundamentally impact the way gender roles were conceived during this time period.

We can begin by looking at the treatment of this issue in her 1930 *Feminismo: cuestiones sociales y crítica literaria*. Sabas Alomá's oeuvre was largely forgotten by academics and the Cuban government alike until the 2003 republication of this book.³⁶ With this republication Sabas Alomá was revived within Cuba as an early champion of the socialist revolution and its feminist tenets. Of the forty-one essays that make up this collection, almost all deal with the role of womanhood, with only a handful dealing directly with garzonismo. In one essay, “El enemigo de la mujer” (The enemy of woman), Sabas Alomá writes a spirited defense of feminism. She argues that, despite its negative public image, feminism remains the best forum for the liberation of

women. For the author women must be liberated not only from men but also from other women. She writes, “el enemigo de la mujer es la propia mujer” (the enemy of woman is woman herself).³⁷ For Sabas Alomá women are each other’s worst enemies not by nature, but rather as a result of capitalism’s degeneration of society. She argues that capitalism has ruined society to the point where women have begun to move away from the innate positive attributes that qualified them for the feminist struggle.

Sabas Alomá begins by outlining the qualities that she believes to be inherent to womanhood. She speaks of “su sensibilidad, su delicadeza, su ternura, símbolos exquisitos e eternos de la genuina feminidad” (her sensitivity, her gentleness, her tenderness, exquisite and eternal symbols of genuine femininity).³⁸ For the author these characteristics that one might attribute to motherhood are symbols of femininity and should be, she argues, symbols of the feminist movement. She goes on to say that Cuban women, specifically, have the following “virtudes esenciales” (essential virtues): “alto sentido del decoro, amor a la tierra, adhesión consciente a los principios fundamentales de la moral social” (a high sense of decency, love for the land, conscious adherence to the fundamental principles of social morality).³⁹ For the author these essential characteristics of femininity are the ones that distinguish women fit for feminism from those who are not and, as we will later see, real women from garzonas. Despite these positive traits that characterize the Cuban woman, Sabas Alomá believes that the state of Cuban society and of Cuban women is deteriorating. She blames this on capitalism’s influence. She writes, “las instituciones electorales están en franca decadencia, podridas hasta la médula por esos tres miasmas de la democracia que se llaman: *fraude, caciquismo y bravuconería*” (electoral institutions are in a state of decadence, corrupted to the bone marrow by the three miasmas of democracy: fraud, tyranny, and cockiness).⁴⁰ Sabas Alomá believes that capitalism has introduced Cuban society, from its institutions to its women, to a state of decadence. The “gran problema social” (great social problem) is to blame for many of the problems feminists were concerned with during this time period: prostitution, child abuse, the prison system, and other social ills.⁴¹

Ultimately, in “El enemigo de la mujer” (The enemy of woman) Sabas Alomá positions the current state of both the Cuban nation and its women as a result of both nature and nurture. On the one hand she presents strict parameters for what defines “la genuina feminidad” (genuine femininity).⁴² On the other hand she takes a constructivist view when she admits that this femininity is deteriorating because of the capitalist influence, finally concluding that the state of feminism is dependent upon the expulsion of capitalism from Cuba. She states, “resultan incapacitadas las mujeres que no han logrado

despojarse de los prejuicios de la *gran burguesía*” (women who have not been able to strip away the prejudices of the grande bourgeoisie become incapacitated).⁴³ For Sabas Alomá the only way to restore Cuban women to their true states, and therefore to make them once more fit for feminism, is to rehabilitate them through education.

The author further elaborates on this through her discussion of cowardice in “Cobardía Femenina” (Feminine cowardice). In this essay Sabas Alomá argues that cowardice is a trait caused by the degeneration of society. She says that despite the fact that many women possess this trait, it is not inherent to the female character. For the author removing cowardice is akin to removing society’s influence on the essential character of a woman. She writes:

Si aceptamos la preponderancia de los factores extrínsecos sobre los intrínsecos cuando tratamos de determinar el origen probable de la evidente cobardía femenina, naturalmente que tendremos que aceptarla también cuando intentemos ejercitar una acción demoledora contra esta cobardía. Matemáticamente, al *construir* se comienza por la base. Al *destruir* por la armazón exterior.⁴⁴

(If we accept the preponderance of extrinsic factors over intrinsic ones when we try to determine the likely origin of the obvious feminine cowardice, naturally we will have to accept this as well when we try to exercise destructive action against this cowardice. Mathematically, when we *construct* we start from the base. When we *destroy* we start from the exterior frame.)

Here we see how Sabas Alomá attempts to negotiate intrinsic (essentialist) factors with extrinsic (constructivist) factors in her discussion of womanhood. For her the reality of women’s condition cannot be adequately explained without appealing to both explanations. Furthermore, the anecdote to society’s ills requires an appeal to both of these factors as well. It is necessary to undo the extrinsic factors in order to reveal the intrinsic nature of womanhood.

She restates this in her essay “Feminismo Revolucionario” (Revolutionary feminism) when she argues, “El feminismo tiene un postulado fundamental: *hacer más hombres a los hombres, haciendo más mujeres a las mujeres*” (Feminism has one fundamental postulate: to make men more manly, and women more womanly).⁴⁵ The author’s contention that the feminist movement will restore women to their true feminine nature is deeply problematic by modern standards, as is the notion that man’s true gendered nature is suppressed by capitalism and can be freed through feminism. What is interesting about

this line of thought, however, is that it suggests that extrinsic factors can help augment intrinsic qualities. If capitalism can lead women away from their essence, feminism can not only lure them back but also make them womanlier than they were to begin with. As we will see, this notion of gender as somehow malleable or changeable shares important resonances with ideas of gender performativity.

Sabas Alomá brings this issue to life in many of her infamous performative self-stagings, which, as Silvia Molloy argues, make “evident the elusiveness of all constructions of identity, their fundamentally performative nature,” in a way that denaturalizes gender and sexuality.⁴⁶ In one instance, a column written on May 4, 1930, she states, “ya he repetido varias veces que soy la criatura más vanidosa de la tierra ¡y lo peor del caso es que tengo razón para serlo!” (I have already repeated various times that I am the vainest creature on earth. And the worst thing is that I have a reason to be!).⁴⁷ In this excerpt we see Sabas Alomá justifying her vanity, arguing to her readers that such narcissism is warranted, given her good looks. This statement may give us insight into why the author’s gender performance is so inherently linked to her politics. Sabas Alomá’s persistent affirmations of her appearance, through photographs and comments such as this one, blur the line between her political opinions and her real-life gender performance. By including personal portraits and private comments about her beauty in her otherwise political columns, the author opens herself up to her readers as a public persona. In effect she allows readers to believe that not only do they know her political opinions, but they also know something personal about the author herself. It is not surprising, then, when readers infer that the real-life Sabas Alomá embodies the values proclaimed in her columns. To readers her ardent defense of femininity and heterosexuality represents more than a political opinion; it represents a personal truth reflected in the author’s public gender performance.

Other intellectuals took note of Sabas Alomá’s feminine gender performance, such as her editor at *Carteles* magazine, Alfredo T. Quilez. In his prologue to her book *Feminismo* Quilez writes of the author:

Es un contrasentido para aquellos que juzgan por las apariencias. De ademán mesurado, rostro apacible—acusando con harta frecuencia un sello inequívoco de tristeza—y con un verbo invariablemente cadencioso, dulce y expresivo, muy pocos acertarían a adivinar por estos hábitos externos la irresistible energía de carácter que bulle en esta singular campeona del feminismo.⁴⁸

(It is a contradiction for those who judge by appearances. From modest gestures, gentle face—accusing with irritating frequency, a stamp

of unequivocal sadness—and with invariably rhythmical words, sweet and expressive, few would be correct in guessing that with these external habits there is an irresistible strength of character that blisters in this unique champion of feminism.)

Quilez chooses to begin his prologue by describing Sabas Alomá in physical terms. He first highlights her physical traits by using adjectives usually reserved for women—“mesurado” (modest) and “apacible” (gentle). These references to Sabas Alomá’s temperate mannerisms and soft face paint her as ladylike, inasmuch as she does not transgress her gender roles by appearing rough or aggressive. Still, Quilez does acknowledge that what is inside Sabas Alomá is something else entirely. Admitting that she is “un contrasentido para aquellos que juzgan por las apariencias” (a contradiction for those who judge by appearances), Quilez acknowledges that although she appears passive, Sabas Alomá actually possesses a blistering energy. Though Quilez doesn’t necessarily paint this energy in masculine terms, his description of the author does suggest that her feminine outward appearance contradicts her less-than-feminine political involvement. In this way Quilez hints, even if inadvertently, at the ways in which Sabas Alomá’s inner and outward performances of self begin to come into conflict with one another. On the one hand she performs traditional femininity in both her columns and the photos that accompany them. On the other her politics place her in the middle of a male-dominated world, oftentimes fighting against modern gender stereotypes.

One way that Sabas Alomá negotiates this is by understanding gender as existing on a continuum, in which feminism can help one move along the spectrum in one direction or another. In this way Sabas Alomá can be seen as denaturalizing gender, by showing that it can be enacted in varying degrees. This is a move that would not be picked up by the larger feminist community until much later in the twentieth century.⁴⁹ As early as the 1930s, however, Sabas Alomá has already introduced the idea that even if gender has a biological basis, it is still possible to enhance one’s own gender performance.

DISCOURSES OF GARZONISMO

Just as Sabas Alomá goes to great lengths to distinguish real women from decadent women, so does she go to great lengths to distinguish garzonas from these two prior categories. For her garzonismo represents the worst type of corruption by capitalist society. If the decadent woman acts against her natural instinct, then for Sabas Alomá the garzona is the extreme form of this. She dedicates three essays in *Feminismo* to arguing this point.

The question that comes to mind here is: Why does Sabas Alomá seem so invested in discrediting garzonas? Even a cursory reading of her work will elicit this question. To contemporary eyes the ferocity of her prose far outweighs any possible threat that garzonas could have posed to national unity. K. Lynn Stoner speculates on the author's intention by arguing that Sabas Alomá's concern with the topic is a direct response to the images of the "militant woman" that were beginning to characterize feminism at the time period. Although the militant female figure was considered heroic in Cuban culture, Stoner argues that feminists such as Sabas Alomá actually represented "antiheroines" who "suffered harsh consequences not so much for defending women's rights as for living without men."⁵⁰ As Stoner implies, many opponents to feminism tried to discredit it by claiming that feminists were becoming militant or manly. Sabas Alomá worked hard to separate herself from this stereotype because, as a single woman, she likely had to defend her public image against damaging accusations of garzonismo.

Although no study has yet been released that looks specifically at Sabas Alomá's sexuality, contemporary experts on Cuba have certainly toyed with the idea that the author may have been romantically involved with women throughout her lifetime. Those of us who work on Cuban feminism have likely heard the rumors—at conferences and forums, if not in print—that Sabas Alomá was involved with such prominent lesbian and/or queer intellectuals as Gabriela Mistral, though these anecdotes often exist more on the level of hearsay than historical fact.⁵¹ Regardless of whether these speculations have merit, the fact remains because she was a single woman speaking controversially about gender and sexuality, rumors about Sabas Alomá's sexuality unavoidably functioned as paratext to her work.

The question, then, is not whether or not the author was a garzona, but rather how and why the author performed heterosexuality as part of her political project. The truth of her sexual preference does not detract from the fact that she "crafted an overblown femininity and displayed intermittent homophobia as defenses against the denigration of female intellectuals as masculine."⁵² In other words, Sabas Alomá's self-stagings may be an extreme enactment of the personal as political—a justification of the idea that, as Aimee Carrillo Rowe says, "whom we love becomes vital to the theory we produce and how it might be received."⁵³

Sabas Alomá clearly understood that she could not keep her private life separate from her feminist and nationalist goals. To be sure, the author consistently performs her femininity as proof of the politics she proclaims in her columns. Her gender performance reiterates her equation of women (read: non-garzonas) as feminine and garzonas as masculine, in which she is despe-

rately trying to place herself within the first group. Sabas Alomá goes to great lengths to convince her readers that she is both heterosexual and feminine—since the two characteristics are assumed to go together—as if to reassure them that far from being a garzona, she is one of “them.”⁵⁴

One example of the author’s ideas on this issue is her article “Pepillitos y Garzonas,” where she points to the components of garzonismo by describing garzonas as follows: “con sus melenas a lo *boy*, sus habilidades deportivas y sus maneras masculinizadas, esos tipos biológicamente degenerados que corresponden entre las mujeres al perfecto pepillito: las garzonas” (with their boyish haircuts, their aptitude for sports, and their masculine mannerisms, these biologically degenerate types that among women correspond to the perfect *pepillito*: *garzonas*).⁵⁵ Here Sabas Alomá is making a comparison between effeminate men, whom she calls *pepillitos*, and *garzonas*. For her the counterpart of the effeminate man is the masculinized woman. These women possess certain outwardly male characteristics, such as their boyish haircuts—“melenas a lo *boy*.” They also possess certain characteristics that would seem to be caused by their biology. These traits include their propensity for sports and masculine mannerisms. Sabas Alomá argues that these women are “biológicamente degenerados” (biologically degenerate)—an interesting assertion because she chooses to refer to *garzonas* using masculine nouns and adjectives such as “tipos” (types) and “degenerados” (degenerates), rather than their female equivalents “tipas” and “degeneradas.” In doing so, Sabas Alomá is making a claim that *garzonas* are, at least in part, products of a biological defect and simultaneously reinforcing this claim with her use of masculine words.

At the same time the author argues that garzonismo, regardless of its causes, has existed for centuries. For her the phenomenon has existed as long as there have been societal problems. She states, “El garzonismo floreció en los tiempos de Safo y de Victoria Colonna. Es tan viejo como el mundo” (Garzonismo blossomed in the times of Sappho and Victoria Colonna. It is as old as the world).⁵⁶ We see here a retreat from the author’s original contention that capitalism is to blame for the existence of garzonismo. Here she argues that it predates capitalism, dating back to the time of Sappho. Though she is not clear about how prevalent homosexuality may have been during that time period, she does give us a hint when she states, “nació con la ignorancia” (it was born with ignorance).⁵⁷ Sabas Alomá does not argue that garzonismo has existed for centuries because of a biological mutation, but rather because of the deterioration of society that has existed for as long. Capitalism would therefore represent an augmented state of this deterioration.

In a similar move the author later goes to great lengths to distinguish between the threats posed by *garzonas* and *pepillitos*. For her, “La garzona es vi-

ciosa. El pepillito es inútil” (The garzona is vicious. The pepillito is useless).⁵⁸ Whereas pepillitos are indolent playboys who take no responsibility, garzonas pose much more of a danger. In addition to their uselessness to society, garzonas consciously threaten the social order by *choosing* to live a decadent lifestyle. Although Sabas Alomá had previously argued that garzonas are victims of a biological defect, she still blames them for choosing not to overcome that defect. In fact she goes on to say that “en la garzona ha muerto la mujer, ha muerto de la mujer” (in the garzona the woman has died, has been killed).⁵⁹ The garzona, for her, represents a site where woman has both died and been killed. She represents the site of both the biological failure of womanhood and the conscious destruction of it.

In this same essay the author goes on to explain the specific aspects of Cuban society that foster the existence of garzonas. She states, “La garzona es producto del abandono, de la ignorancia, de la injusticia, de la precocidad sexual” (The garzona is the product of abandonment, ignorance, injustice, and sexual precociousness).⁶⁰ It is therefore this same ignorance that characterized the times of Sappho, now present in the form of capitalism, which creates the conditions for garzonismo. In “Feminismo contra garzonismo” (Feminism against garzonismo) she further elaborates by proclaiming that moral laxness is caused by the capitalist system in the form of “la monstruosa diferenciación establecida entre el trabajo y el capital propiciando el excesivo lujo y la excesiva miseria” (the monstrous differentiation established between work and capital contributing to excessive luxury and excessive misery).⁶¹ It is the relationship between work and capital, as seen under capitalism, that makes people prone to self-indulgence. This brings about not only excess but also unhappiness—both of which are characteristics of garzonas. This phenomenon is further augmented in rich women. For the author rich women are more incorporated into the capitalist system than their poor counterparts. They are therefore more likely to become garzonas. She describes the rich woman as “menos preparada para las virtudes del trabajo que sus hermanas las obreras o pequeñas burguesas” (less prepared for the virtues of work than her sisters that are working class or part of the petite bourgeoisie).⁶² We can extrapolate that the author believes there will be more garzonas in the rich sector of society than in the poor sector, though she does not go so far as to say so, nor does she contemplate how this may be reflected in her own colleagues and social circles.

In “Feminismo contra garzonismo” (Feminism against garzonismo) the author makes a final declaration concerning the mix of essentialist and constructivist factors in garzonismo. She starts, “Yo sostengo que sobre el 90 por ciento de nuestras garzonas tropicales influye menos el factor biológico que las pésimas condiciones de educación e instrucción en que se desarrolla la

niñez” (I maintain that in approximately 90 percent of our tropical garzonas the biological factors influence them less than the terrible educational conditions in which our children develop).⁶³ In this statement Sabas Alomá comes to an exact calculation, proclaiming that over 90 percent of garzonismo is caused by societal factors such as education. This statistic presents the author with a final negotiation of both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. She makes this distinction, however, only for her own nation and its neighbors. The author is careful to state that it is only to “garzonas tropicales” (tropical garzonas) that this breakdown applies. She goes on to argue that elsewhere—such as in France, where the effect of World War I has influenced the development of women—the statistic may be different. Nonetheless, in Cuba biology accounts for a relatively small percentage of garzonismo. Capitalism is to blame for the larger problem.

Sabas Alomá furthers this argument in her discussion on reproduction. In “Feminsmo contra garzonismo” (Feminism against garzonismo) the author elaborates on how garzonismo can or cannot be transmitted from mother to child. She argues that if a garzona were to become pregnant, “no nacerá, probablemente, ni la garzona ni el pepillito, porque a estos los forma la que pudiéramos llamar ‘vida exterior’” (the child born would probably be neither a garzona nor a pepillito, because they are formed by what we would call “exterior life”).⁶⁴ In other words, biology itself does not determine that garzonismo is hereditary. Rather, the emergence of a garzona will take place later in life, as a result of the “vida exterior” (exterior life). At the moment of birth the only thing that is certain is that “sí nacerán los *candidatos* que con mayores probabilidades de éxito aspiren a ser catalogados en estas dos humillantes denominaciones” (those that will be born are the *candidates* with the biggest probability of aspiring to be cataloged in these two humiliating designations).⁶⁵ For the author being born the son or daughter of a garzona only makes one a more likely candidate. This can be attributed to the decadent lifestyle in which the child will be raised.

Sabas Alomá eventually argues that regardless of whether garzonismo is caused by biological or social causes, action must be taken to correct it. She states, “¿Taras fisiológicas? Si . . . Muy bien. Pero a ver qué resulta si intentamos lo siguiente: contra las taras fisiológicas, la eficacia de la pedagogía *aplicada*” (Physiological defects? Yes . . . very good. But let us see what happens if we try the following: against physiological defects, the efficacy of applied pedagogy).⁶⁶ In this quote she asserts that it is education, in the form of applied pedagogy, that must correct what capitalism has produced. She argues for rehabilitation not on the basis of a care ethic or notion of sisterhood, but rather on the foundation of preserving the feminist struggle. It is curious that for Sa-

bas Alomá the question of garzonismo can be addressed by the same anticapitalist, profeminist education that she prescribes for many of society's other ills. It seems that for the author garzonismo is just one of many problems to be solved by mitigating against capitalism, and the question of homosexuality is just one more argument she employs in favor of her larger project.

What is perhaps most interesting about Sabas Alomá's ardent denunciation of garzonismo, however, is the power that the author inadvertently grants to garzonas. By maintaining that garzonas present a legitimate threat to womanhood and to Cuban society, the author invests the group with a power generally reserved for male homosexuals. While it had long been argued that male homosexuality presented a threat to the modern state, few intellectuals had seen women as capable of disturbing national identity in the same way.⁶⁷ Many, in fact, maintained that while male homosexuality could be used as a tool of political resistance—at least in the case of the active partner—female homosexuality was actually the result of a female vulnerability to outside influences.⁶⁸ In other words, men could enact homosexuality consciously, but women could only fall prey to it. By exploring the possibility of garzonas—at least in some cases—as capable of choosing or rejecting homosexuality, Sabas Alomá was inadvertently advancing her own project to establish the importance of women to the nation. Ironically, the author's anti-garzona articles would also serve as some of the earliest texts arguing the influence of lesbianism on the Cuban state.

Because garzonismo implies a rigid equation between femininity and heterosexuality, when Sabas Alomá places gender on a spectrum she is, by proxy, placing sexuality on a spectrum as well. Though she doesn't explicitly state this, it follows that if there are varying degrees of femininity, there must also be varying degrees or expressions of homosexuality. The author's own ability to navigate this continuum through performance is proof of its existence. To those who speculated about her sexuality, her ability to maintain normative gender while enacting nonnormative sexuality begins to denaturalize the link between the two. These qualities that she attributes to femininity, all of which readers assume that the author possesses, are undermined by the fact that she can enact them while being both a woman and potentially queer—to use today's language.⁶⁹ When her gender performance is incorporated, her dichotomy is undone: we understand that if a queer woman can possess these attributes, then either they are not genuinely feminine, or the queer woman herself must be understood as feminine. The point, once again, is not whether or not Sabas Alomá was what we would now call queer. The point is that her performance of femininity and heterosexuality was absolutely necessary for the success of her larger political projects.

We cannot forget that for the author strengthening the feminist movement was one way to incorporate women in the project of creating cultural identity, thereby fortifying the anti-neocolonial movement. Sabas Alomá understood that only by performing both femininity and heterosexuality publicly could she avoid accusations of garzonismo and be respected as a leader in the nation-building process. The fact that the author was pushed to rely on these techniques to advance her project says as much about the homophobia of Cuban national identity during this time period as it does about the author's own sexuality. One must wonder if Sabas Alomá's performance of heteronormativity should be understood primarily not as a personal choice, but rather as a requisite for putting forth a national vision.

UNQUESTIONED WHITENESS

I want to end then by addressing the question of race, to suggest that its suspicious absence from the author's proclamations about sexuality is more indicative than incidental. Sabas Alomá's anticapitalist rhetoric certainly brings up questions of race, inasmuch as racial inequality and economic inequality were very much linked in Cuba during this time period. It is true that in the period following the founding of an independent Cuban state in 1902, and the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886, there was little social and economic mobility for black citizens. Tomás Robaina outlines the movements against racial discrimination during this time period in his book *Negro en Cuba: 1902–1958*, highlighting the fact that while black men achieved the right to vote in 1902 (along with all other Cuban males), this was not accompanied by a rise in perceived racial equality. In this way black women, who were most certainly not part of the decadent capitalist class that Sabas Alomá so feverishly critiques, would seem to figure nicely into the author's arguments on the effects of class on gender and sexuality. Still, Sabas Alomá generally avoids talking about race, opting instead to incorporate black and mulatto women into her discussions on womanhood, without pointing toward the role that their racialization might play in these issues.

To understand this omission, we might turn again toward Robaina's work, which demonstrates how the discourse on race and racism was controlled largely by male intellectuals during this time period—from the openly exclusionary discourse of Jorge Mañach to Fernando Ortíz's evolution from anti-black writer to anthropologist of black culture in Cuba. Both the predominant discourses on race and the responses to these discourses—in the form of Partido Independiente de Color and other political organizations—were produced almost entirely by men.⁷⁰ It is little wonder, then, that we see so little discus-

sion of race in Sabas Alomá's treatment of sexuality, since discussions of race and sexuality were often kept separate, with race being the domain of male thinkers and sexuality being the domain of feminists.

Of course the issue is not just that most feminists were not discussing race publicly, but that discussing race publicly was discouraged for everyone. We cannot forget the now famous quote, after all: "The black problem exists only when it is talked about, and that is to play with fire."⁷¹ In many ways the rhetoric of racial equality that circulated around Cuba during the Republic period, based largely on the passage of universal male suffrage in 1901, meant that there was a general opposition among whites toward race-based activism. At its height this culminated in the 1910 Morúa Law, which prevented the establishment of political parties based on race.⁷² Sabas Alomá and most of her feminist colleagues are guilty of perpetuating this opposition to acknowledging race. In fact, as K. Lynn Stoner's archives on the feminist movement during this time period show us, of the approximately one thousand feminists active in Cuba during the Republican era, all were white and middle or upper class.⁷³ In this way Sabas Alomá followed what Alejandro de la Fuente calls the "integration thesis," which assumes that blacks are incorporated into the nationalist (and in this case feminist) agenda, therefore nixing the need for a discussion of race.

We must therefore understand Sabas Alomá's silence on race not as an omission, but rather as a political statement of her belief in color-blind ideology, which scholar Marzia Milazzo defines as that which

contains, among other things, that institutional racism no longer considerably determines life opportunities; that inequality can be understood as an expression of class disparities which transcend racial hierarchies; that economic power is primarily a consequence of individual merit and personal responsibility; and that racial categories should therefore preferably not be invoked.⁷⁴

While Milazzo is referencing South Africa here, she is speaking largely to the racial tensions that exist in a diverse citizenry during periods of increased nationalist rhetoric, such as postapartheid South Africa, post-civil rights era America, and postindependence Cuba. The inclination to speak about class rather than race and the decision not to invoke race in discussions of inequality are therefore not specific to Sabas Alomá or to any other feminist during this time period. Rather they are representative of a larger discourse existing in Cuba during this time, which was itself echoed by otherwise reformist and social justice-oriented intellectuals.

One example of this appears in a 1939 collection entitled *Negras en el con-*

greso de mujeres (Black women in the Women's Congress). Sabas Alomá contributes an essay to this collection, in which she begins by naming some of the issues addressed in the Women's Congress that pertain specifically to black women: inequality between black and white children, legal inequality, racial discrimination, and so on. She does take some steps to position herself with regard to this issue, stating, "Negar la existencia del problema negro es un modo cobarde de eludirlo, un pretexto cómodo para mantenerse al margen de toda constructiva preocupación" (Ignoring the existence of the black problem is a cowardly way of avoiding it, a convenient pretext for keeping oneself at the margins of constructive concern).⁷⁵ Still, Sabas Alomá is unable to understand how her whiteness intersects with her gender. Instead she places the burden on black women for thinking about how racial concerns are also women's concerns. She writes that she is "speaking as a white woman—which for me is not particularly difficult because I'm sure that my whiteness doesn't at all influence my status as a woman."⁷⁶ Sabas Alomá follows the common discourse of the universal subject—which is of course ironic given her gender concerns—which seeks to position whiteness as the default category and understand only other races as racialized. Once again this discourse is not specific to her but is instead representative of an inability to understand what we would now term "intersectionality," which was in fact characteristic of Cuba and the Americas at large during this time period.

As a product of this Sabas Alomá argued for a unified women's movement that excluded not only those with nonnormative gender and sexuality but also women of color by virtue of ignoring their issues and concerns. The inherent racism of Sabas Alomá's work, which claims to be so concerned with class, is by now obvious. Still, focusing on this individual author's personal beliefs draws attention away from the larger issue, which is the way that nonegalitarian discourses shaped egalitarian projects such as feminism during this time period. Sabas Alomá was in many ways a product of a Cuban nationalism that drew its strength from the idea of uniformity, even at the expense of gays and people of color.

CONCLUSIONS

We must ask ourselves what happens when we reinscribe the heterosexist politics of the nation-state onto activist movements. What is at stake when doing feminist work, for example, during time periods of large-scale nationalist rhetoric? How does feminism get molded by these nationalistic—and oftentimes racist and homophobic—discourses? The answers to these questions are complex, as no social movement can exist outside the context of its geographic

and temporal conditions. In the case of Republican-era Cuban feminism it is important not to disregard the advances that were made, as we recognize that through her performative self-stagings Sabas Alomá was successful in introducing discourses that we would now refer to as gender performativity and strategic essentialism—discourses that feminists continue to rely on to this day. As one of the first feminists to speak publicly about sexuality, as well as its intersections with capitalism and the nation, Sabas Alomá is a foundational figure to contemporary feminism in Cuba, Latin America, and beyond.

Perhaps most important, we must acknowledge that academia has come up with more than enough reasons to leave women like these out of the histories we tell. These omissions are often justified by highlighting personal narratives, rather than focusing on how these may also be discursive contributions. In this sense what stands out the most when one studies Sabas Alomá is how unremarkable her discourse is. While she was certainly ahead of her time in arguing for gender equity, the actual rhetorical tools that she used to defend a unified feminist movement are not so distinct from those used in the 1970s in the United States or even from the rhetoric we observe in contemporary struggles for marriage equality. Her appeal toward normativity—in this case gender normativity—was a way of gaining the mass appeal that the fledgling feminist movement so desperately needed. This does not, of course, excuse the homophobic undertones of much of her writing, just as the advances of US feminists in the 1970s do not excuse their exclusionary rhetoric, which often kept out women of color and the gender nonconforming. The same might be said for present-day marriage equality battles, which, despite the admirable goal of equal rights, often rely on the public exclusion of more marginalized members of the LGBTQ community, such as transgender people. My point in drawing these parallels is neither to praise Sabas Alomá for her unmatched political savvy nor to condemn her for her close-mindedness. My point is to draw attention to the ways that feminist discourses, and for that matter all discourses of social equality, are cocreators of the larger rhetorical models of their time period. Our responsibility is to hold them accountable for the consequences of these models, while also being wary of academia's tendency to scapegoat them when these opinions have fallen out of favor. Latin American feminisms, just like the American feminisms that often obscure them in women's studies classrooms, are no exception.

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NOTES

1. Among these scholars is Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, whose book *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) explores the formation of a “Cuban culture” throughout the twentieth century.

2. K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman’s Movement for Legal Reform, 1898–1940* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 181–82.

3. For more on the landmark legal reforms that marked this period in Cuban history, see Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*. Chapter 3 includes a particularly helpful chronological outline of legislation concerning women.

4. Women in Cuba did not actually get to vote in a federal election until 1936, and the amendment was not ratified until 1940.

5. For more on the tensions between Cuban and American feminists see Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 113.

6. I specify “white US feminists” here to draw attention to the conflicts that existed between white women and women of color within the US feminist movement during this time period. Among these is the fight for the Nineteenth Amendment, which in 1920 gave all women the right to vote. Although the rights in the Nineteenth Amendment technically extended to all female citizens of the United States, many have documented how women of color were actually denied the right to vote through poll taxes and eligibility tests. The feminists that K. Lynn Stoner refers to in the citation above are therefore white US feminists, most of whom represented the most visible faces in the feminist movement at that time.

7. Most academics agree that Sabas Alomá should be referred to as a “socialist feminist” because of her membership in Marxist organizations and her reputation for being the “red feminist” (for more on this see K. Lynn Stoner’s and Catherine Davies’s work). Defining Sabas Alomá as “radical” is a more difficult task, however, as authors have disagreed about what constituted radical feminism during this time period in Cuba. For Catherine Davies, Sabas Alomá is a radical feminist in part because she

rethinks gender roles and stands in opposition to the Catholic Church; see *A Place in the Sun? Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (London: Zed Books, 1997). For Emilio Bejel radical feminism must contain the following traits: “redefinition of the traditional family; a separation of sex, gender, and sexual object; a denunciation of inequality, especially that of class; and a progressive representation of homosexual relations”; see *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 48. Because Sabas Alomá does not portray homosexuality in a positive light, Bejel argues that she is a “revolutionary feminist” rather than a radical one. I choose to describe the author as a radical feminist because her major contribution to Cuban sexuality studies, as this article will show, is her willingness to explore various models of female sexual desire, even as she demonizes some while lauding others.

8. As K. Lynn Stoner has noted, expressing political opinions through journalism had been a tradition for Cuban women since the wars on independence at the end of the nineteenth century. See Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 93, for more information.

9. For more information on the political climate of the early twentieth century see Susana A. Montero’s *La narrativa femenina cubana: 1923–1958* (La Habana: Editorial Academia, 1989).

10. For more information on the Primer Congreso Nacional de Mujeres and other meetings of female intellectuals during this time period, see chapter 3, “Feminist Congresses and Organizations,” in Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*. For more information on the differences between various feminisms during this time period, see Julio César González Pagés, *En busca de un espacio—historia de mujeres en Cuba* (La Habana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 2003).

11. Sabas Alomá was one of only two women who signed the Grupo Minorista’s founding manifesto in 1927. For more on this see Vicky Unruh’s *Performing Women and Modern Literary Culture in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 139.

12. Catherine Davies coins the term *national feminism* with reference to this group of women in her book *A Place in the Sun?* (38).

13. There are few sources available that discuss the complexities of the term *garzonismo* in early-twentieth-century Cuba. For more information see chapter 4 of Nina R. Menéndez’s “No Woman Is an Island: Cuban Women’s Fiction in the 1920s and 1930s” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1993).

14. John D’Emilio is often cited among US academics for his groundbreaking work “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” which explores how modern gay identities emerged in the West because of the shift from agrarian societies to urban, industrial centers. See D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Donald Morton (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1996) 263–71. While D’Emilio’s work is certainly relevant to the industrialization of Cuba, his criti-

que is actually quite different from Sabas Alomá's. D'Emilio looks at how capitalism allowed same-sex desire to emerge as an identity category, while Sabas Alomá argues that same-sex desire is in part *created* by capitalist excess.

15. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*. 44.

16. George Chauncey Jr., "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: Medicine and the Changing Conceptualization of Female Deviance," *Salmagundi* 58 (1982): 116.

17. Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion," 121.

18. Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion," 123.

19. Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion," 114.

20. For more information on Sabas Alomá's engagement with Marañón's work, see chapter 4 of Menéndez, "No Woman Is an Island."

21. For a more in-depth explanation of Marañón's theories on sexuality, as well as those of other Spanish scientists of the time period, consult chapter 9 of Beatriz Celaya Carrillo, *La mujer deseante: sexualidad femenina en la cultura y novela españolas* (Newark NJ: Juan de la Cuesta, 2006).

22. For an in-depth explanation of positivist criminology in Latin America at the turn of the century see chapter 2 of Robert Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen in Modern Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

23. Anita Snitow, "A Gender Diary," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marriane Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 16.

24. Constancio Bernardo de Quirós, *Modern Theories of Criminality*, trans. Alfonso de Salvio (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912), 69.

25. For more on how nonscientific practices were used by positivist criminologists at the turn of the century, consult chapter 2 of Buffington, *Criminal and Citizen*.

26. Jerome Branche, *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 215.

27. Unruh, *Performing Women*, 3.

28. Unruh, *Performing Women*, 16.

29. Unruh, *Performing Women*, 138.

30. Nationalist thinking was so overwhelmingly dominated by male thinkers during this time that monographs discussing this period often leave out female thinkers altogether, despite the profound effect that the feminist movement had on the political process. One example of this is Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's *The Cuban Condition*, which takes up Ortíz's *cubanía*, among other things, but does not mention the role of feminist thinkers in articulating *cubanidad*.

31. Emilio Bejel explores the feminist climate in Cuba during this time period in chapter 3 of *Gay Cuban Nation*.

32. This notion of identity as a performance that must be constantly enacted, rather than as an empirical fact, is greatly indebted to feminist thinkers in the latter half of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most well known of these scholars is Judith Butler

in her publication *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Sylvia Molloy takes up this posture in “The Politics of Posing: Translating Decadence in Fin-de-Siècle Latin America,” in *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence*, ed. Liz Constable, Dennis Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 183–97. In it Molloy looks at posing as an act that “makes evident the elusiveness of all constructions of identity, their fundamentally performative nature. It increasingly problematizes gender, its formulations and its divisions: it subverts categories, questions reproductive models, proposes new modes of identification based on recognition of desire more than on cultural pacts, offers (and plays at) new sexual identities” (187). I look at Sabas Alomá’s performance of gender and sexuality in much the same way that Molloy has theorized posing in this prior work.

33. Unruh, *Performing Women*, 148.

34. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 93.

35. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 45.

36. *Feminismo: cuestiones sociales y crítica literaria* was originally published in Cuba by Editorial Hermes in 1930. Following the twelfth Feria Internacional del Libro de la Habana in 2003, it was edited and republished by Editorial Oriente, a branch of the Instituto Cubano del Libro, which is itself overseen by the Ministerio de Cultura de la República de Cuba. Editorial Oriente is headquartered in Sabas Alomá’s birthplace, Santiago de Cuba.

37. Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo: cuestiones sociales y crítica literaria* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2003), 21. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

38. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 22.

39. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 22.

40. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 23.

41. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 24.

42. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 22.

43. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 24.

44. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 76.

45. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 63.

46. Molloy, “Politics of Posing,” 187.

47. Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, “¡Paso a la mujer!” *Carteles* 15, no. 8 (1930): 12, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection.

48. Alfredo T. Quilez, introduction to Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 15.

49. Although it’s difficult to determine when denaturalized views of gender first emerged, they came into mainstream popularity with the appearance of postmodern feminist theories starting in the 1970s.

50. K. Lynn Stoner, “Militant Heroines and the Consecration of the Patriarchal State: The Glorification of Loyalty, Combat, and National Suicide in the Making of Cuban National Identity,” *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 83.

51. There is no documentation of Sabas Alomá publicly proclaiming any sort of lesbian identity in her lifetime. Even if she did have romantic relationships with women, the author would not have identified this way since “lesbianism” did not yet exist as a category in Latin America during the time period on which this article focuses—the 1920s and 1930s. As such those who suspected her homosexuality would have seen her as simultaneously sexually transgressive and gender normative—inasmuch as she did not display the masculine characteristics associated with garzonismo.

52. Unruh, *Performing Women*, 27.

53. Aimee Carrillo Rowe, *Power Lines: On the Subject of Feminist Alliances* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 15.

54. Abel Madero argues that the author’s constant performance of femininity and heterosexuality acts “as a type of boomerang, a weapon that turns against her,” inasmuch as these acts reinforce hegemonic gender norms. See *Del otro lado del espejo: La sexualidad en la construcción de la nación cubana* (La Habana: Casa de las Americas, 2006), 104. I would argue that her appeal to these norms is far more complicated, as she manages to denaturalize femininity and female desire while operating in an otherwise male-dominated nationalist discourse.

55. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 102.

56. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 104.

57. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 104.

58. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 102.

59. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 105.

60. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 103.

61. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 116.

62. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 106.

63. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 116.

64. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 106.

65. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 106.

66. Sabas Alomá, *Feminismo*, 107.

67. Among the intellectuals who did see the threat of female homosexuality was Gregorio Marañón. For more information on Marañón’s treatment of female homosexuality see Nina R. Menéndez, “Garzonas y Feministas in Cuban Women’s Writing of the 1920s: *La vida manda* by Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 174–89.

68. For more information on the differential treatment of male and female homosexuality by social scientists—namely, painting male homosexuality as political resistance and lesbianism as apolitical—see Robert Buffington, “Los Jotos: Contested Visions of Homosexuality in Modern Mexico,” in Balderston and Guy, *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, 118–32.

69. I use the term *queer* in this context precisely because no term existed at the time that acknowledged the distinction between gender and sexuality. I also do so to acknowledge the groundbreaking work done by Licia Fiol-Matta in her reading of Gabriela Mistral's sexuality in *A Queer Mother for the Nation: The State and Gabriela Mistral* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). In this text Fiol-Matta defends her use of the word *queer* to describe Mistral by saying, "*queer* does not signify certainty about Mistral's sexual identity; neither is it dependent on Mistral's having had any clear-cut identity as a lesbian, although it does not discount this possibility either" (xxix).

70. The Partido Independiente de Color was Cuba's first political party organized around the issue of race. Its members were exclusively former slaves. For more information see particularly pp. 46–67 and 143–63 of Tomás Fernández Robaina's *El Negro en Cuba: 1902–1958* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1994). Although Robaina's text was written to chronicle the history of antiracist resistance in Cuba in the early part of the twentieth century, it reads as much as a testament to how male dominated this discussion really was. I do, however, want to acknowledge recent work that complicates this narrative and inserts ways that gender and race were discussed in conjunction with one another during the Republican period. Most notable is Takkara Keosha Brunson's dissertation, "Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender and Citizenship in Republican-era Cuba, 1902–1958" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2011), which recovers an Afro-Cuban middle-class feminist discourse during this time period. Although an analysis of Afro-Cuban feminism is beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that Sabas Alomá's omission of race is characteristic of a specifically white feminism.

71. As quoted in Alejandro De la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

72. Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4.

73. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 78–79.

74. Marzia Milazzo, "Racial Power and Colorblindness: The 'Sad Black Stories' of Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Twenty-First Century Black South African Fiction," *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 36.

75. Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, "Negras en el congreso de mujeres," in *Negras en el congreso de mujeres*, ed. Pinto Albiol and Angel César (La Habana: 1939), Women's Movement in Cuba, 1898–1958: The Stoner Collection on Cuban Feminism, *Archives Unbound*.

76. Sabas Alomá, "Negras en el congreso," 11.