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Memorializing La Lupe and Lavoe: Singing Vulgarity, Transnationalism, and Gender

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This essay serves as countermemory, as it reclaims the historical role of two late Latin singers, Guadalupe Victoria Yoli Raimond, known as "La Lupe," and Héctor "Lavoe" Pérez, in the development of Latin music in the United States and in the construction of a Puerto Rican national identity, in the case of Lavoe, and of a Caribbean Latino community in the Diaspora, with respect to La Lupe. Most recently, younger generations of salsa singers such as Yolanda Duke, La India, Marc Anthony, and Van Lester, have "mimetically embodied" La Lupe and Lavoe, respectively, by recreating their singing styles, their repertoires, and their personae. Why are Puerto Ricans and Caribbean Latinos/as memorializing these two particular singers? While also shaped by gender politics, Lavoe and La Lupe's countercultural positionings articulate the complex process of forming oppositional identities whereby their personal lives and stage personae remit audiences, in metonymic ways, to the constructed illegality of being a Latino in the United States. Their respective social marginalities contribute to their canonization as musical and countercultural heroes while simultaneously triggering posthumous performances of countermemory. While Lavoe has been canonized and integrated into the masculine genealogy of Puerto Rican national musical forms, La Lupe's struggles with the industry revealed her structured secondariness as a female interpreter and artist in a male-dominated world.

Transcending the mere reflexivity of music and identity, we also argue that the act and process of memorializing both La Lupe and Lavoe are re-creations and reconstructions of the Puerto Rican/Latino/a imaginary by incorporating the diasporic narrative into the traditional inscriptions of the nation. [Key words: Latin popular music, gender, transnationalism, cultural memory, Héctor Lavoe, La Lupe]
Through countermemory, argues George Lipsitz, oral traditions and popular histories of marginalized, oppressed groups are integrated into official history. Countermemory "looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives" by inscribing "the local, the immediate, and the personal" into the totalizing narratives of official history (1990). This essay serves as countermemory, as it reclaims the historical role of two late Latino singers, Guadalupe Victoria Yoli Raimond, known as "La Lupe," and Héctor "Lavoe" Pérez. Both were central to the development of Latin music in the United States and in the construction of a Puerto Rican national identity, in the case of Lavoe, and of a Caribbean Latino community in the diaspora, with respect to La Lupe.

Countermemory is also implicit in the process of memorializing these singers after their deaths, a popular and collective phenomenon that is the object of our study and has led to the construction of La Lupe and Lavoe as cultural heroes by and for these diasporic communities. Most recently, younger generations of salsa singers, such as Yolanda Duke, La India, Marc Anthony, and Van Lester, have "mimetically embodied" (Taussig 1993) La Lupe and Lavoe, respectively, by recreating their singing styles, their repertoires, and their personae. The recent releases of their music and the resurgence of early salsa from the '70s among young Latinos and, in the case of Héctor Lavoe, the murals and the commercial distribution of T-shirts imprinted with his face, all attest to the ways in which the Puerto Rican and Caribbean Latino/a communities in the diaspora continue to reconstruct their sense of national identities. This constitutes the creation of popular cultural heroes through the (re)inscription of their bodies on public and private surfaces.

If fans memorialized Héctor Lavoe as a cultural hero immediately after his death, and in the public ritual of the funeral itself, La Lupe, who died in oblivion in 1992, has been reclaimed through the recent releases of her music, through the dramatization of her life (El Teatro Rodante Puertorriqueño's La Lupe: Mi Vida, Mi Destino), plans for a Hollywood movie, the renaming of a street in New York as La Lupe's Way, and also through her status as a diva for gay and non-gay audiences and for queer performance artists such as Carmelita Tropicana.

La Lupe was a favorite singer and interpreter of boleros, filin,[feeling], and other diverse musical genres throughout the 1940s and '50s in Cuba. After having performed in local cabarets in Havana, she went to Mexico in 1959 and to New York in 1961. There she performed with salsa and Latin jazz greats such as the late Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaría, and others in the Fania and Tico recording labels. Her performances were controversial, excessive in their anger, violence, and sensuality, and she was well known for major hits such as "La Tirana," "Puro teatro," and "My Life." Problems with drug use, illnesses, and gender politics limited her musical career, and her personal life was marked by much personal tragedy. According to José Quiroga, "her husband fell ill and she lost her life savings paying santeros [Santería priests] and medical bills. And then, when he was cured, he left her" (2000: 166). Later, as a result of an accident, she ended up in a wheelchair, lost her house, and moved with her children to a shelter in New York City (Quiroga 2000: 166). In 1992, she died of a heart attack at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx after having converted to Protestantism and having shifted to singing Gospels and religious hymns.

Héctor Lavoe was born Héctor Juan Pérez in Ponce, Puerto Rico, on September 30, 1946, to Panchita and Luis Pérez. He grew up listening and studying the music of Puerto Rico's most famous folklore and popular musicians and singers, such as...
Ramito, Chuíto el de Bayamón, Odilio González, and Daniel Santos. Salsa, bomba, and plena singers whom he also admired, and who would later influence his singing style, were Cheo Feliciano and Ismael Rivera. In 1960, Lavoe dropped out of school and began singing for local bands in Ponce. Against his father’s wishes Héctor Pérez left for New York City in 1963, when he was only 17 years old. Upon arriving, he quickly started singing with several bands, such as the “New Yorkers,” “Kako and His All-Stars,” and the Tito Puente Orchestra. Soon thereafter, the promoter Franquis christened Héctor with the nickname “Lavoe” which meant “La Voz” [“The Voice”]. Shortly thereafter, Héctor met the South Bronx-born Willie Colón, a young emerging musician who began his salsa career with the support of the late Al Santiago, the former owner, founder, and producer of Alegre Records, one of the first labels to record New York-based salsa music.

On Tuesday afternoon, June 29, 1993, Héctor Lavoe passed away at St. Claire’s Hospital in New York City. Lavoe died of a heart attack, ending his struggle with HIV. Lavoe’s admirers in New York City, Chicago, Puerto Rico, and other urban and (trans)national hubs conducted vigils in his name. In New York City the songs and sounds of Héctor Lavoe’s music emanated from people’s homes, car stereos, and boom boxes, blurring the boundaries between public and private cultures. The popular “La Mega” FM Radio Station in New York City played Lavoe’s music all week long, motivating his followers and admirers to sing and dance, almost in unison, in the streets of La Gran Manzana [the Big Apple].

These acts of memorializing suggest a collective search for the past by Caribbean Latinos/as. Yet, rather than a mythical search fueled by a preterite nostalgia, these instances alternatively reconstitute history in ways in which the disempowered sectors also participate in, and benefit from, a constructed sense of national identity. This identity serves as a central space of belonging, precisely because it has been politically contested by the Puerto Rican colonial dilemma and by the larger marginalization of U.S. Latinos. In this (post)colonial context, popular music serves as an ideal site for constructing alternative spaces of national belonging and of a simultaneous, collective U.S. Latino/a identity. Rafael Cortijo and Ismael Rivera have already exemplified the status of cultural heroes that black musicians and singers have held for the working-class communities in Puerto Rico and in New York.¹ The late singers Daniel Santos, El Anacobero, and Celia Cruz, the Queen of Salsa, have likewise illustrated the continental influence that one musical figure can exert in the lives of millions.² The untimely death of Selena foregrounded the need of the Mexican-American community for a cultural heroine with which the popular sectors could identify. While these singers have been and were systematically kept out of official paradigms of culture and written history, they nevertheless have become myths and legends, even adored as saints and...
The lack of available historical documentation on her life, coupled with the silence surrounding her personal and professional struggles in the Latin music industry, has created an aura of mystery around her. Guillermo Cabrera Infante states that “La Lupe no fue una cantante, La Lupe es una leyenda” [La Lupe was not a singer, La Lupe is a legend] (1993: 19), thus discursively denying her identity as a singer and woman and socially constructing her as a legend. Her life has been described as a “performance,” a series of tragedies fit for a telenovela (soap opera) plot. Her own figure as a performer of feelings and passion has been described as “a turbulent, charismatic, indescribable spitfire called La Lupe” (González-Wippler 1994: 24). She has been discursively represented as “a fiery Cuban-born singer,” and as “vulgar, cheap and offensive” by her most negative critics. Many families censored her television appearances, sending children to bed or turning off the television set whenever she performed. In 1961 the Cuban revolutionary government ordered her to leave the country since lupismo was considered unacceptable as a “school” in revolutionary Cuba. Her first audience in New York in a concert with Rafael Cortijo applauded her, demanding que salga la loca [that the madwoman come on stage]. Others loved her performative excesses, as a Puerto Rican woman from New York attested in an interview: “Cuando iban a dar un show de ella, yo no me lo perdía” [I would never miss any of her shows]. In sum, La Lupe has been constructed as the embodiment of unbound passion, feeling, anger, madness, and sexuality as a result of the persona she created, sparking myriad reactions among many audiences.

In the geocultural space of the Caribbean, from Brazil to New York, La Lupe’s vocality can be defined as a self-tropicalizing gesture (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman, 1997: 1–17). This phenomenon was evident since the beginnings of her career as a singer in Cuba. With the phrase cubana caliente she makes reference to the “hot” rhythms that she brings to her music. While this song may be a form of self-eroticizing for marketing purposes, it is also an encoded, veiled reference to her oppositional and countercultural personae. La Lupe was caliente because of the performative anger against her own body and the excessive erotics on stage, and because of the bodily gestures that reminded the audience of her alleged drug use.

The young Lupe worked as a teacher and also sang as a member of the Trío Los Tropicuba. Interestingly, critics writing about this early period of her career have chosen to foreground the ways in which her musical performances radically departed from the expected behaviors for female singers. It has been said that her husband then, Eulogio Reyes, also a member of Los Tropicuba, commented after her first performance that he “thought she was having an epileptic fit,” a parodic comment that indicates the transgressive style that would continue to characterize her singing. Around 1958–59, she was fired from
In 1967, Lavoe joined Willie Colón’s band, and together they recorded their first album entitled *El Malo*. Critics and musicians claimed that this record lacked the “superior” musicianship and arrangement complexity found in the music performed by more established musicians such as Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez, and Charlie and Eddie Palmieri (Rondón 1980). Regardless of this criticism, the album was a great success. The music performed by Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe consisted of salsa and boogaloo songs, which spoke to a younger generation of Puerto Ricans born and raised in New York City, signifying an element of Nuyorican culture and identity. Their music was distinguished by its brash, urban, or “street” barrio sound and philosophy that departed from the Cuban-influenced musical arrangements performed in ballroom settings.

Describing the artists as “untrained” musicians (outside of the classical musical conservatory), César Miguel Rondón portrays Colón, Lavoe, and many of their contemporaries as musicians who functioned *por el oído y no por el conservatorio* (by ear and not by their conservatory training) (Rondón 1980:50). They further flaunted this unpolished image of themselves in the title track song of Colón and Lavoe’s first album, “El Malo” [“The Bad One”]. In this song Willie Colón and Héctor Lavoe express their social marginality and títere aesthetics through the strident trombone arrangements and the following lyrical commentary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quien se llama El Malo</th>
<th>There is no discussion as to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No hay discusión</td>
<td>Who is the Bad One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Malo de aquí soy yo</td>
<td>The Bad One here is me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porque tengo corazón</td>
<td>Because I have heart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lavoe and Colón, along with Eddie and Charlie Palmieri, Ray Barretto, Joe Cuba, Johnny Colón, Ricardo Ray and Bobby Cruz, Larry Harlow and others were recognized as helping to create the distinctive Nuyorican sound of salsa in their 1960s and 70s Fania label recordings (Rondón 1980). In addition to *El Malo* (1967), Colón and Lavoe’s other popular recordings were *The Hustler* (1968), *La Gran Fuga/ The Big Break* (1971), *Asalto Navideño* Volumes 1 (1971) and 2 (1973), *El Juicio* (1972), and *Lo Mato* (1973), among others. With the success of each album, Lavoe and
colonized and racialized status of their listeners. Their performances reminded racial minorities of their own vulnerability to be always already criminalized by U.S. dominant society and the State. Both of their lives were fraught with personal tragedy and suffering, elements that allowed their Latino audiences to confront their own struggles and marginalization as a result of structured social inequities.

The common use of the epithet caliente [hot] signals multiple layers of social meanings and discursive constructions. For both La Lupe and Lavoe, the self-referential term reclaims the oppositional value of their performed illegality. Both singers were “hot” as a result of their disavowal of middle-class aesthetics and social norms and of their long-term use of drugs. They both played into and acted out the self-eroticizing discourse that was rooted in their well-known “sins of the flesh” and bodily consumption and abuse, thus reinscribing the “hegemonic tropicalizations” to which they were subjected (Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman 1997). For Lavoe, his marginalization and oppositionality were self-constructed as part of the gendered discourse of masculinity that characterized the early salsa period. This discourse, which appropriated the dominant images of ethnic minorities as criminals, should be interpreted as a form of decolonization in both the cultural and economic context and in the struggles of Puerto Rican musicians vis-a-vis the music industry and the debates around salsa. Similarly, La Lupe self-fashioned her own sexuality through her controversial and excessive performances. For her the consequences of this image had more negative repercussions than for Lavoe. The fact that certain sectors censored her performances and considered her sexuality menacing, intimidating, and dangerous, partly explains the oblivion in which she died and her lack of recognition as a singer/artist. While Lavoe was canonized as a salsa artist, La Lupe was systematically marginalized by the industry. Despite their common countercultural status, gender politics shaped and informed the degrees of acceptance and memorialization for these two figures.

Second Section:

Gender Politics

Primer Soneo: Héctor Lavoe

If Lavoe’s transgressive behavior created any animosity, it surely dissipated at the news of his death on June 29, 1993. Lavoe’s fans remember the urban jibaro salsero both as a cultural hero and tragic martyr. They constructed narratives and mythologies around Lavoe’s personal and professional life that represented stories of migration, survival, and national and diasporic formations. Masculinity was so integral to these narrative constructions during his lifetime and after his death, that fans selectively repudiated his
This reclamation positions him as an “authentic” and “true” Puerto Rican and ponceño while further reinscribing him within the constructed masculinity of the national musical canon. The burial performance authenticates Lavoe through this musical tradition, creating a reversion back to homeland references that reaffirm him as a national icon. The performance of plenas at the funeral likewise contests the threatened masculinity of Lavoe triggered by AIDS, upholding the hegemonic heterosexuality behind this gender construct. Although deemed El cantante de la salsa, in the process of being memorialized, Lavoe, unlike Ismael Rivera who was recognized as a performer of plena music, crosses genres from salsa into plena. This crossing highlights the agency exercised by the diaspora through collective memory and the role of racial ideology in reconstructing meaning, historical events, and figures. Besides historical reconstruction, this crossing may be attributed to the arrangements that constitute salsa music in New York City. Because salsa is not a rhythm, but “a way of making music,” encompassing various genre elements, including plena, the reconstruction of Lavoe as plenero may also be attributed to his incorporation of plena music and lyrics into his live salsa performances. In addition, the hypermasculine musical arrangements, visual discourses, and song lyrics of 1960s and ‘70s salsa doubly contribute to the gendered aspects of his memorialization (Aparicio 1998). Overall, the fluidity of historical meanings demonstrates how collective memory functions to mitigate racial, class, and gender boundaries while also claiming them.

Segundo Soneo: La Lupe

“Yo soy dueña del cantar”

In New York in the early ‘60s, La Lupe appeared in La Barraca, where Johnny Pacheco and Mongo Santamaría, among others, would see her. Mongo invited her to sing coro with his band, and she joined him at Birdland and later recorded with him. A relationship with Tito Puente soon followed as he allowed her to sing as a soloist, and their collaboration will mark her professional identity relationally to him, a phenomenon that has characterized the career of other Latina singers such as Graciela, La India, and Yolanda Duke. La Lupe has stated that Puente “had a lot to do with my growth in popularity. He did not create me. I have my own talent. But he was instrumental in my becoming famous here. The man had faith in me” (González-Wippler 1984: 26). When Tito Puente in 1968 fired La Lupe from his band, he was also instrumental in her gradual disappearance from the salsa scene. He asked José Curbelo, a famous manager who represented all the big stars, not to hire her or other musicians to play with her. “Donde cante esa negra yo no trabajo” [I won’t play wherever that black woman sings], said Puente to Curbelo. Yet Maisonave,
José Esteban Muñoz have explored this reception and influence. La Lupe's chusma style, according to Muñoz, can be seen as a pioneering form of performative art. In the world of sabor, in the world of Latin music, she is la dueña de la salsa (owner of salsa) (1977). Through the recuperative rhetoric of poetic enumeration, La Lupe reclaims the centrality, ownership, and authority that the industry took away from her. It is ironic—or perhaps consciously orchestrated—that in the opening commentaries to the song, La Lupe reminds listeners that “estamos en la familia de Masucci” [we are part of the Masucci family], thus explaining her own vexed location as an outcast member of Fania’s family. This song can be read as an oppositional response to that particular economic relationship with Fania that eventually pushed her out of circulation. In an interview, La Lupe explains that after Tico Records was sold to Jerry Masucci

that was the end, ahí se jodió La Lupe, Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri and a thousand others. Because forget it, we didn’t even cut any records.... Finally, when we started to cut records in 1977 (so that we didn’t sue him, you understand), he did not give us any publicity.... The one album I made with Masucci in 1977, entitled “One of a Kind” was never promoted. And it was good. Modesty aparte. He just never bothered with it. And later, in 1980, when I used to go to his studio to make records, I would be told that I had to hurry up and finish because there were other people waiting to use the studio. That was really humiliating. After a while, I got tired of this treatment and I decided to go to Puerto Rico. That was in 1980 (González-Wippler 1984: 27).

When La Lupe sings that she is the voice and the owner of song and the chorus repeats “dueña del cantar” back to her in the soneo section, she is symbolically asserting the right of women singers and of female voices to be equally heard, integrated into the canon of salsa music, and remunerated accordingly.

Her feminist stance was also evident in the particular style of singing that she brought to every song. In Cuba, she had become famous for singing Spanish translations of U.S. composers like Paul Anka, a repertoire that must have satisfied the intercultural desires of the many Anglo tourists and businessmen who vacationed and played in Havana. However, this was not a simple case of colonial
These words accentuate the memory of her absence, rather than of her presence and career. Gender played a major part in her eventual marginalization from the musical industry, her dwindling presence on stage, and the lack of recognition of her singing and art by both contemporary critics and musicians. However, the performance of countermemory continues to incarnate these two figures, resurrecting their cultural value and significance within the Latino musical imaginary. It is not a coincidence that younger salseras and salseros have mimetically embodied La Lupe and Lavoe, respectively.

Third Section: Transnationalism and Diaspora

Primer Soneo: La Lupe

On Saturday, February 10, 1996, at the Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Yolanda Duke, a Dominican-born singer, performed with Tito Puente and his Band at the Latin Jazz Summit. Since she was not included in the concert’s publicity nor was she the big name that everyone came to see, the unsuspecting, mostly Anglo audience may have dismissed La Duke’s presence as filler, a seemingly generous gesture on the part of Tito Puente, the Mambo King, who was introducing her vocal talents to a national audience. Yet for many Caribbean Latinos there, what was most significant about “La Duke” was that she consciously enacted and embodied La Lupe. Yolanda Duke’s voice, as chilla as La Lupe’s characteristic timbre, filled the auditorium with the echoes of a sound associated with the brassy harshness of early salsa of the late ’60s and early ’70s, the sounds of the barrio, rather than with the suave jazzy sounds that middle-class audiences expected during that evening’s concert. La Duke, whose very own name phonetically evokes La Lupe in assonantal rhyme, imitated her “flashy costumes and energetic style” by wearing tight black stretch pants, a flashy and glittery blouse with bright, tropical colors, and a pair of red, plastic platform shoes. In combination with her brightly-dyed neon-blonde, short hair, and a facial make-up that reminded us of La Lupe’s puta [whore-like] looks, La Duke’s mimetic embodiment of the Afro-Cuban singer opens up a number of issues regarding women’s presence and canon formation in the Latin music industry, cultural and transcultural representations and mediations of Latino culture in the United States, and issues of countermemory and gender as these are articulated in the Puerto Rican and Caribbean Latino communities.

Some believe that neither Yolanda Duke nor La India—who has also paid homage to La Lupe in her songs, performative gestures, and dedications—can truly have the impact that La Lupe had on her audiences. This stance suggests that La Lupe is a
Anthony, Van Lester, and Domingo Quiñónez. These masculine simulations of “restored behaviors” (Roach 1996) may represent a symbolic form and link to the past of musical lineage and history that entails respect for elders, predecessors, and ancestors, and are grounded in a spiritual, historical, and musical repertoire and male tradition that transcends temporal and spatial conditions.

The style and forms that these restored behaviors embody—be they oral history, song, dance, mural art, or ritual ceremonies—articulate the complexity of enacting translocal narratives of identity and memory. The previous analysis of Héctor Lavoe’s burial ceremony demonstrated the encoded memories and gendered nationalisms embodied in this collective ritual. The ensuing struggle that followed over Lavoe’s corpse and his eventual repatriation illuminate the ways in which identity is still very much contingent on place. Lavoe, however, acts as a floating trans-Boricua who traverses disparate geographical locales, while also engaging multiple discourses regarding Puerto Rican nationalisms, identities, and historical agency. In the process, Lavoe materializes as a “performed effigy” (Roach 1996) of Diasporican alterity, trans-Boricua memories, and cultural histories, and a metonymic symbol of Latinidad.

Maurice Halbwachs, the German sociologist, considers the materiality of collective memory through popular culture as a process that is encoded by the social position of groups. The styles and forms of collective memory by socially marginalized communities are often fashioned by popular cultural mediums and icons available to them. That is, popular culture is the repertory from which many communities draw in order to engage in strategies of countermemory. Following the scholarship of Halbwachs, Paul Connerton reminds us of the importance of material mappings and enactments of memory: “Physical objects provide us with images of permanence and stability; [referencing] a socially specific framework [of collective memory]... We conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us” (1989:37, emphasis added). If “our memories are located within the mental and material spaces of the group” (Connerton ibid), the collective mappings of Lavoe are simultaneously laced with masculinity, countermemory and (trans)nationalism. This takes on “an aesthetic politics of representation” where Lavoe is enacted as a national hero, a trans-Boricua, and a metonymic symbol of Latinidad, collectively helping to assemble a diasporic public sphere where opposing aesthetic values and imaginations are discussed and contested (Werbner 2000: 6).

Nevertheless, the semiotic signification of Lavoe—as national property and
that reflected upon life in New York and also a dose of jibarito [country], of Puerto Rican in him. Héctor’s gift was his New York brash, in your face style with that pristine crystal clear voice that he had. Héctor’s style was more a mixture of emigrant Boricua and N[uyorican]” (Blades 1993).

The fact that Lavoe articulated both Puerto Rican and New York identities and musical styles simultaneously alludes to the complexities that constitute the diasporality of his musical performances and identities. Héctor’s orality and singing style became transmigratory with his movement to New York City, making his Nuyorican brashness inseparable from his “jibaro-ness.” Rather than just seeing a Puerto Rican jibaro singing in New York, Héctor became a Nuyorican who transformed his identity from Héctor Pérez to Héctor Lavoe in New York City.

**Coro (a dos voces)**

Like music itself, musicians and singers — their bodies, singing styles, repertoires, and personae — become contested sites for the construction of national identity. A brief comparison between La Lupe and Lavoe suggests that gender politics inform the processes of canonization and marginalization for many singers. La Lupe’s systematic exclusion from the development of salsa music, defined by the male-dominated industry and music historians, stands in sharp contrast to the almost mythical canonization of Héctor Lavoe as “el Cantante,” the major voice representative of Nuyorican salsa as much as of Island culture. While both singers, given their diasporic locations, destabilized traditional notions of national boundaries and reconstituted their audiences in transnational ways, Lavoe’s visibility and memorialization reveal that national spaces are literally inscribed by masculine identities, a gendered construction informed by class struggles and by the colonial conditions of the Puerto Rican diaspora. In contrast, the memorializing of La Lupe by her audiences in New York, by gay listeners, and by Latina feminists, reveals the creation of an alternative, interlatino collective identity that transcends La Lupe’s Cuban national origins. Yet this transnational identity, which revolves around struggles of gender and sexuality, was articulated through the staging of her performative excesses and, mostly, through her body. Lavoe’s death and the ensuing struggle over his corpse and burial also illuminate the ways in which identity is still very much contingent on place, geographically speaking, and on the materiality of collective memory in popular culture. Most outstanding about Lavoe’s figure is his dynamic role as a transmigrant, a role that suggests a redefinition of the diaspora as a community that produces new cultural forms that are then mainstreamed as “authentic” by the country of origin. Thus, diasporas do not just reproduce culture, they are also spaces of dynamic cultures in the making and of countermemory.