



FIGURE I.1. GUANTÁNAMO BAY AND CUBA. CARTOGRAPHY BY BILL NELSON.

INTRODUCTION

BORDERLANDS

To the iguanas, especially to Princess, cats, banana rats, hummingbirds, our dear friend the sea, and even the pesky, noisy woodpeckers: I wish to thank you for your companionship and for bringing light into our lives in such a dark place as Guantánamo

Mansoor Adayfi, *Don't Forget Us Here:
Lost and Found at Guantánamo*

It's impossible to write about The Base
Without comparing yourself to its victims

José Ramón Sánchez, "Los quilos"

Iguanas, cats, banana rats, hummingbirds, the sea, and woodpeckers. That Yemeni writer Mansoor Adayfi, who was held without charge for fourteen years at the American military prison at Guantánamo Bay, should close his memoir by extending thanks to these companions comes as a surprise. Adayfi was, after all, held at one of the most notorious detention sites of the twenty-first century, a site whose legal contortions and human rights abuses have outraged advocates, activists and scholars since the US government's hurried and clandestine opening of detention camps at its naval base in eastern Cuba in January 2002. It is a site, moreover, where the Cuban government has vigorously protested what it considers to be the United States' illegal occupation of the territory, enabled by a lease in perpetuity granted through the unequal negotiations of the Cuban-American Treaty of Relations in 1903, and where a heavily guarded and land-mined fence line prohibits passage between Cuba and the base. And yet, in acknowledging the comfort he drew from the presence of creatures who know no borders, and from "our dear friend" (366) the Caribbean Sea that marks a limit to the base just as it surrounds the island of Cuba, Adayfi acknowledges an alterna-

tive Guantánamo, of sympathies, solidarities, and sharing of both space and experience. José Ramón Sánchez, a poet living near the base in the Cuban city of Guantánamo, weaves similar sympathies into his more than one hundred poems about the base, the long shadow it has cast over the region's history, and the impossibility of seeing it firsthand, as well as the solitudes that bind Cubans to men detained at the base even as their lives are vastly different. As Sánchez writes in "Impossible," the project of the poet moved by sympathy but restrained by politics becomes to "write second-hand poetry," to "take the words of others, images others saw for me" (*Black Arrow* 21).

For the past two decades, Guantánamo has been a battleground for two deeply consequential, if partially metaphorical, wars. One is Cuba's long-entrenched so-called war on imperialism that, since the early 1960s, has underpinned the David versus Goliath metaphor of the country's relations with the United States, and has justified decades of militarized social programs and defensive measures in the name of revolution. The other—more immediately recognizable for its relation to Guantánamo—is the President George W. Bush-era war on terror, whose divisions and detritus linger stubbornly into the present day. Nevertheless, despite the endurance of both wars and the centrality of Guantánamo Bay Naval Base to each of them, they are not Guantánamo's only story, nor are they the focus of this book. Instead, *A New No-Man's-Land* traces a Guantánamo that persists despite the enmities that have engulfed it: Guantánamo as a literary and artistic region, as a natural environment, and as a human experience, where the force of multiple hostilities on contested ground is met by articulations of survival, solidarity, and care.

The forty-five square miles of Naval Station Guantánamo Bay, as the leased territory known as GITMO is officially named, have since 2002 been inhabited by populations of vastly distinct experiences, housed in close proximity to one another: detainees originally from over thirty countries primarily in Europe and the Middle East, often captured in Afghanistan or Pakistan; military personnel and military families from the United States; contract workers from Caribbean countries, particularly Jamaica, as well as from the Philippines; and, in the shorter term, lawyers and journalists from across the globe. Cubans reside at the base, as workers who chose to stay after diplomatic relations with the United States ended in 1961, and as refugees who have crossed the mined and surveilled Guantánamo Bay to seek asylum. Many more Cubans live

with the base as they inhabit a broader Guantánamo, particularly the border towns of Caimanera and Boquerón, once economically connected to the base, but now restricted zones secured by the Cuban military. Acknowledging these experiences and the differences among and within them, this book approaches Guantánamo as both the naval base and its geographic extensions into Cuban territory, and as a borderland region whose inhabitants often have in common limited access to power and self-representation, mobility restricted by geography if not captivity, and immersion in political languages that have ascribed rigid roles as “enemy combatant” or “patriot,” “revolutionary” or “dissident.” This is, moreover, a borderland region that, while physically isolated in its locale at the eastern edge of Cuba, extends a network of familial, linguistic, and cultural connections into the Caribbean and—given the multiple colonial and imperial histories that converge in the region—across much of the world.

The Guantánamo base is as notorious for its *sui generis* legal status as for its *de facto* territorial separation: initially presented by the Bush government’s lawyers as beyond the reach of the US Constitution, and cut off from Cuba and otherwise reachable only by military-operated air and sea transport, it met former secretary of state Donald Rumsfeld’s reported criterion of “the legal equivalent of outer space.”¹ Cuba’s Guantánamo province, while deeply tied to the base and its labor economy until the 1960s, has since then lived only the aftereffects of the former relationship, its border towns in particular designated as high-security zones with restricted access from elsewhere in Cuba. At the same time, even as its economic and institutional entities are part of tightly structured national networks, its six-hundred-mile distance from the economic and cultural metropolis of Havana has bequeathed it its own form of isolation. To read these two Guantánamos as one—which is the project of this book, and its referent when it names “Guantánamo” as a borderland region, rather than either the base, the province, or the provincial capital Guantánamo City—is to trace connections and affinities in the face of both complete physical separation and vast asymmetries.

Asymmetries are simultaneously the steepest challenge and the source of deepest texture to mapping Guantánamo as a borderland region, just as they often are to comparative work writ large.² I regard as asymmetrical those relationships that take shape in this region—across the fence line dividing the base from Cuba, and within the base and the

detention camps themselves—which are marked far less by their minimal similarities than by their vast differences, differences marked as much by scale as by content alone. This understanding of asymmetry draws initially, ironically—and, indeed, with horror—on the term *asymmetric warfare*, common in the field of international relations. Steven D. Smith has summarized the term, with reference to scholarly and military sources, as “any warfare where the opposing combatants are at opposite ends of a political or tactical spectrum of unequal abilities or means to engage on equal footing”; specifically, where combatants are “unequal in military power, politics, population or technology” (2). While the tactics of *asymmetric warfare*, and related terms such as *guerilla warfare* and *irregular warfare*, have long histories, the recent use of this particular term coincides with the post-9/11 conflict and the centrality to it of non-state actors, among them, ostensibly, Guantánamo’s so-called unlawful enemy combatants. And yet the most localized use of this term in relation to Guantánamo is also its most chilling: in response to the suicides of three detainees in June 2006, Rear Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr., then commander of Joint Task Force Guantánamo, is reported to have said: “I believe this was not an act of desperation, but an act of asymmetrical warfare waged against us.”³

International relations scholars, notably Christine Sylvester, have brought to the fore the human dimensions of “asymmetrical warfare,” observing that the nonconventional subject positions from which it is waged bring with them a host of experiences unacknowledged in this and other kinds of warfare (1). The asymmetrical relationships that this book explores, however, align most closely with what Lisa Lowe has read as “intimacies” across four continents. Lowe’s “intimacies” are relations forged in the aftermaths of colonial projects, rarely involving geographic closeness but aligning experiences that are necessarily particular in their local details; they must be traced across distinct archives to discern their “constellation of asymmetrical and unevenly legible intimacies” (18). Guantánamo’s compassionate asymmetries approximate, too, the late nineteenth-century anticolonial friendships, “minor narratives of cross-cultural collaboration between oppressors and oppressed,” which Leela Gandhi approaches as “innovative border crossing, visible in small, defiant flights from the fetters of belonging toward the unknown destinations of radical alterity” (6–7). At the same time, the peculiarities and constraints of the Guantánamo borderland region, in particular

the spatial organization of its detention camps and the impassibility of the fence line, produce variations on “intimacy” and “friendship.” Some, like relationships between guards and cellmates, are born of a stiflingly close physical proximity, while others, like those between Cubans and detainees, are rooted in the absolute impossibility of communication.

Asymmetries in the archive of texts and art that maps the Guantánamo borderland region are multiple. While not all have as their axis the fence line between Cuba and the base, some of the most prominent are inevitably governed by the stark differences between writing as a citizen of a deeply regulated and invigilated late socialist state, with an established if highly prescriptive and underresourced infrastructure of cultural institutions, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a temporary and often involuntary resident of a US-controlled territory, chosen precisely for its precarious relationship to the US Constitution but conscripted into a dubious program of patriotic defense.

A first asymmetry in the archive of what I am calling the Guantánamo region is one of scale. In short, and perhaps surprisingly, the corpus of Cuban creative work contributing to a borderland reading of Guantánamo is scant in comparison to such work produced on the base itself, notwithstanding the far smaller and more transient population of the latter. Despite its enduring presence in Guantánamo Province, Cubans have no access to the base, very little information about its operations, and few incentives to discuss it publicly or draw it into the sphere of national culture. In the post-9/11 period, Cuban state media published little on the plight of detainees at Guantánamo, even as major newspapers in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East reported consistently on the legal issues and human rights questions emerging from operations at the detention centers at the base. While the Cuban national film industry has on occasion, over the six decades since its institutionalization, referenced the base directly and indirectly—notably in José Massip’s *Guantánamo* (1965) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Guantánamera* (1995)—as have some nationally prominent literary figures, the topic has largely been left to a small number of writers, artists, and filmmakers in Guantánamo Province. It is these who, in poetry, short fiction, art, and film, articulate peculiarly local engagements with the base’s presence, and with the local histories of fraught neighborliness and clandestine migration that this presence has generated.

Related to the asymmetrical scale of the corpus of work from each

side of the Guantánamo fence line is a similar asymmetry in the visibility and accessibility of each corpus. Despite the chaotic and extrajudicial nature of its founding, the purportedly clandestine imperative of its operations and the no doubt remaining “known unknowns” surrounding these, Joint Task Force Guantánamo has at various points in its existence been surprisingly, and perhaps paradoxically, solicitous in its claims to transparency. As Rebecca A. Adelman observes in a 2013 article, Joint Task Force Guantánamo has published photographs of its facilities, offered admittedly pre-scripted press tours, and maintained its own relatively robust internet presence through a website whose home page announces the commitment to “safe, humane and legal detention operations” (Adelman, “Safe, Humane”). These heavily curated gestures at rendering detention operations visible have been abundantly supplemented by the thousands of pages of military and legal documentation—some unclassified and some released as part of unauthorized WikiLeaks “document dumps”—as well as by testimonies, lists, and summaries collated by such vitally important advocacy efforts as those of Witness to Guantánamo; the Guantánamo Testimonials Project at the Center for Study of Human Rights in the Americas at the University of California, Davis; Healing and Recovery After Trauma; the *New York Times*’ “Guantánamo Docket”; the Center for Constitutional Rights; and British journalist Andy Worthington’s “Guantánamo Files,” as well as by the growing corpus of published memoirs written by former detainees. Cuba’s Guantánamo, on the other hand—particularly inasmuch as its forms of expression depart from, or simply fail to echo, the anti-imperialist narrative that the revolutionary government has championed since the early 1960s—is much less accessible. Cuban writers have long had limited access to the internet, and literary and artistic work produced on the island—particularly in its nonmetropolitan areas, among them Guantánamo Province—circulates sparsely in international contexts. Moreover, individuals’ experiences of living near the base have largely been co-opted into the collective narrative of the Cuban Revolution, in its national dimension as well as its local version: that of a Guantánamo region whose proximity to the US base brought moral ruin to surrounding towns before the revolution’s triumph, and subsequently delivered economic devastation and threats of potential violence. In a particularly sinister vein, the Cuban government’s repression of its own citizens—those who have attempted to seek asylum at the base as well as the

political dissidents incarcerated in the barely acknowledged provincial prisons situated only tens of miles from the base's notorious detention centers—is largely absent from the state-sanctioned record and instead emerges piecemeal from Cuba's highly imperiled independent journalists, exiled activists, and scattered references in fiction and poetry. Cuban Guantánamo's is, consequently, a scant archive, dwarfed by the copious documentation, reportage, and witness accounting pertaining to the detention centers on the base.

A not dissimilar asymmetry presents itself in the legibility, and related legitimacy, of the naval base and detention center's textual and visual record vis-à-vis that of Cuban Guantánamo. There is in the former a pendulum-like play between extremes of surplus and scarcity. On the one hand, what Joseph R. Slaughter, recalling Ranajit Guha, has termed the "bloodless prose of counterinsurgency" ("Life, Story, Violence" 469) and "the massive (and growing) public archive of documentary texts from the U.S. 'war on terror'" (469) has been so prolific in terms of sheer page count, with the WikiLeaks Guantánamo-related document dump of 2011 alone including over seven hundred documents, that its legibility is compromised, inasmuch as it demands practices of reading that renounce concision and coherence. On the other hand, much of this documentation—excluding that released by WikiLeaks, atypical and legally problematic for its lack of redactions—has been heavily censored in the form in which it is publicly available. The writing and art of detainees while held at Guantánamo have been subjected to myriad, externally imposed constraints on their legibility, ranging from the confiscation and classification of detainee poetry, especially that published in reduced and carefully screened form in Marc Falkoff's *Poems from Guantánamo* (2008), to Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary*, a long set of letters published in 2015 after years of legal wrangling, with entire pages blacked out, and detainee artwork first exhibited in New York in late 2017, only to invite a military ruling that no more such work be permitted to leave the detention centers. While accessibility and the local scale of distribution, rather than legibility, is the primary obstacle to reading many of the texts in what I am calling Guantánamo's Cuban archive, the bars to legibility posed by censorship of writing and art by detainees at the naval base have sinister analogs on the other side of the border. Setting aside the practices of self-censorship that Antonio José Ponte, among others, has traced through the six decades of the revolu-

tionary regime, expression of opposition to the Cuban government has been overtly suppressed, often through the incarceration of its authors and a public discrediting of their personal and political writing. This finely calibrated discrediting, bolstered by a watertight surveillance state and the readily wielded accusation of collaboration with the US government and intelligence services, forecloses avenues to verification of many dissidents' claims, such that they are deprived of legibility and legitimacy. Indeed, dissident writing, like most dissident activity in Cuba, is so expertly cast as illegitimate by Cuban institutions, both political and cultural, that to read it alongside less audacious, and thereby more institutionally commended, Cuban work, entails suspending documented verifiability as a criterion, and trusting the word of those whom state power has the means to vilify. It is in this spirit that I count among Cuban Guantánamo's textual production the newsletters of dissidents and political prisoners, printed and distributed in Guantánamo Province without government authorization, some later uploaded to the internet and others held in the personal collections of now-exiled contributors.

With regard to their disciplinary location, or more specifically, the area studies within the purview of which they have fallen, the base and Cuban Guantánamo are different and asymmetrical. The base has been addressed abundantly from within American studies, even as much scholarly work in this field—by Naomi Paik, Jonathan Hansen and Jana K. Lipman, for example—has extended to broader theoretical questions and geographies. Similarly, while the prolific legal scholarship on the detention centers brings to bear international law, most notably with regard to the Geneva Conventions, it must of necessity do so in tandem with the various aspects of US constitutional law that have been upheld, twisted, and breached over the decades of the prisons' existence. By contrast, both Cuba's Guantánamo Province and the US base itself have registered only lightly in Latin American, Caribbean, and even Cuban studies. Peter Hulme's wide-ranging *Cuba's Wild East: A Literary Geography of Oriente* (2011) traces the "literary geography" of Guantánamo and Cuba's other eastern provinces, from the first war for independence from Spain—the Ten Years' War (1868–1878)—to the detention camps opened in 2002. Hulme is one of very few to read detainees' writing together with that of Cubans, and his reflections on the camps' infiltration by Cuban animal life have been an inspiration for this book. Jana K. Lipman's definitive labor history of the US base, *Guantánamo: A Work-*

ing-Class History Between Empire and Revolution (2009), with its analysis of Cuban commuter workers' experiences in the years preceding and immediately following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, is unambiguously grounded in its claim that "Guantánamo is in Cuba" and is a cornerstone of my own study. The migrant crisis of the early 1990s, during which over thirty-four thousand Cubans and fourteen thousand Haitians were held at the base awaiting entry to the United States, has been the focus of considerable scholarship, notably by Elizabeth Campisi and Holly Ackerman. There has more generally, however, been a marked reluctance to extend the scope of Cuban studies, as practiced primarily outside Cuba, to Guantánamo. It is one of the more ambitious aspirations of this book that the compassionate relationships it traces, while unquestionably a product of the *sui generis* space that is Guantánamo, might offer models for understanding in a broader Cuba, rent apart as it has been by over sixty years of struggle—nominally revolutionary, but especially harrowing for those who have assumed positions of counterrevolutionary dissent.

A final asymmetry, and in many ways the one that is most ethically challenging, does not have the border between the base and Cuba as its axis, but rather has dividing lines intersecting throughout the region. This is the asymmetry—indeed, the incommensurability—of what I would name simply, echoing Judith Butler's reading of Guantánamo detainees' poetry, as suffering.⁴ As has now been abundantly documented, in personal memoirs, legal briefings, leaked memoranda, and US government investigatory reports, many men held at Guantánamo, particularly in the first three years of the detention centers' existence, were physically and psychologically tortured—in ways that, despite contortionist attempts on the US government's part to tweak definitions of torture, were unequivocally just that. The myriad aspects of detention at Guantánamo that represent barely imaginable cruelty—indefinite detention without charge, restrictions and deprivations of what in one particularly dark period were termed "comfort items," no information or contact with the world outside the camps, even as distant family members despaired and, in many cases, passed away—appear orders of magnitude apart from the experiences of others in that same space. It is in some ways jarring, then, to see, for example, the cellblock guards being described as bored by their experience, reports on elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among former Guantánamo guards circulating alongside investigative

journalism about the long-term psychological trauma endured by released detainees, listings in the naval station's community newspaper for support groups directed at the nonetheless very real issues that deployed military personnel face, and, in Cuban poetry from the Guantánamo region, the no doubt well-meaning equation of the geographic and existential isolation of the poet to the experience of detainees.⁵ More closely resonant with experiences of detainees at the base's camps are the reports of mistreatment and deprivation in the prisons of Cuba's Guantánamo Province that this book addresses, particularly when the latter are considered as part of longer history of the Cuban Revolution's repressions of its opponents that runs through decades of political imprisonment as recorded in the testimonial writings of, for example, Reinaldo Arenas, Jorge Valls, and Armando Valladares; to the Black Spring of 2003 in which seventy-five dissidents were jailed; to the more recent imprisonment of hundreds of citizens following public protests on July 11, 2021, on charges that Amnesty International has maintained are inconsistent with international law.⁶

With the fraught implications of Guantánamo's asymmetries, incommensurables, and opacities in mind, I hope to hold comparison in the balance for the coincidences, and indeed the sharing, it enlightens. It is around unanticipated commonalities among parties to vastly asymmetrical relationships that compassion forms in the Guantánamo region—commonalities sometimes recognized as such and at other times merely sensed or hoped for, sometimes discovered through direct and physical encounters, and at others through purely imaginary ones. It is the instances of compassion that grow from the rare common grounds of deeply asymmetrical relationships that, in my reading, sustain a Guantánamo that is fundamentally anti-war, in the specific senses in which war has converged on that space. Despite and because of the differences that constitute such relationships, therefore, and in the undergrowth of the intense hostilities that have long governed Guantánamo as a political space, there emerge small gestures of curiosity, kindness, and goodwill that are woven into the poetry, narrative, art, and photography of those who inhabit the Guantánamo region.

Crucially, and to return briefly to Adayfi's iguanas, gestures of compassion on the part of Guantánamo's human inhabitants take shape in an environment that, while it is governed at a political and rhetorical level by the divisions of warfare, is ecologically unrestrained. Not only is

this an area shielded, like that around many military bases, from infrastructural development and consequently, in this very limited sense, unspoiled, it is also, and inevitably, one whose many man-made barriers—a mined fence line, cellblock walls, multiple checkpoints—are brazenly disregarded by the region’s animal inhabitants and are minimal disruptions on the natural landscape writ large. As José Ramón Sánchez writes of the banana rats and iguanas native to this region, in his poem “Animal Planet,” they are “oblivious to the President’s orders” (*Black Arrow* 51). It is often the natural world that sparks compassion within Guantánamo’s asymmetrical human relationships: just as wild animals who respect no borders, and the Caribbean Sea that encircles not the base but the entire island of Cuba, appear as figures of freedom and escape, they also model, and offer impetus for, understanding one’s own experience in the terms of others who occupy the same space. It is in this sense that Guantánamo’s compassionate asymmetries, as I want to call them, become part of a larger, ecocritical concern with how, as in Rachel Price’s reading of contemporary Cuban art, the local bypasses the national to reflect, instead, the planetary.⁷

GUANTÁNAMO AND CUBA’S WAR ON IMPERIALISM

Between 1903, when land at Guantánamo was leased in perpetuity from the government of the new Cuban republic to the United States under the highly contested terms of the Platt Amendment, and 1959, when Castro took power at the head of Cuba’s revolutionary government, Naval Station Guantánamo Bay grew from a coaling station to an active and well-supported base, housing large military and civilian populations. Jonathan Hansen’s *Guantánamo: An American History* traces the base’s development during this period, noting how the scant population of the first two decades of the twentieth century grew to a more stable community in the 1920s and 1930s, rising quickly in numbers, activity and infrastructure during World War II. By 1943, Hansen notes, “some ten thousand Cubans, Jamaicans and West Indians labored on the base alongside four thousand U.S. servicemen and civilians” (181), an expansion that “created the footprint of office buildings, warehouses, jetties, airstrips, magazines, and residential neighborhoods still visible today” (182).

The 1940s and 1950s represent not only the peak of the base’s population and activity but also of its porosity in terms of contact with Cuba.

The base depended heavily on Cuban workers for much of its nonmilitary operation, via a contract labor force that, as Jana K. Lipman has studied, was obliged to accept precarious terms and low wages, and that significantly altered the economic basis of neighboring Cuban towns (*Guantánamo* 38–60). While fences and guard posts separated the US military zone from Cuba during this period, movement from one side to the other was nevertheless frequent and relatively unencumbered. Americans from the base often spent their free time in Cuba, with the result that in the 1940s and 1950s the border town of Caimanera and the city of Guantánamo gained reputations as hotbeds of prostitution and other forms of economic exploitation, ills that have since figured largely in local Cuban scholarship, particularly that of Guantánamo- and Caimanera-based historians José Sánchez Guerra and Ofelia García Campuzano.

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959, however, put an end to most movement between the base and Cuba. It did not do so immediately, but after several years of increasing hostility at the local level that paralleled that within Cuba-US relations more broadly, with the base becoming a site of deep suspicion for Cuban government officials as they frequently suspected it of harboring potential counterrevolutionary insurgents and of facilitating armed attack. Lipman observes, “In the early 1960s, anxiety, suspicion, and military aggression defined U.S.-Cuban relations, and these tensions manifested themselves along the border between the base and Guantánamo” (182). Both the Cuban and US militaries “reinforced barbed wire fences, initiated military patrols, erected twin watchtowers, and planted massive minefields” (162), defenses that, as Cuban historians Felipa Suárez and Pilar Quesada have noted, would be supplemented in future decades as the threat of aggression from the base was supplanted by that of Cuban citizens attempting to reach it to claim asylum. After 1959, the Cuban government refused to cash checks it received for the lease of the base, and in 1961 it created an elite new unit of the national army termed “la Brigada de la Frontera,” or the “Border Brigade,” charged with guarding the increasingly fortified fence line between the base and Cuba. Nevertheless, until 1964, approximately three thousand workers continued to commute daily from Cuba to the base, under strict control by both sides. In that year, after a series of confrontations centered around the base as a result of which Castro cut off the water supply, the US government ordered that all commuter

workers either return, unemployed, to Cuba, or remain on the base, although, as Lipman notes, “a final 750 workers retained their positions as commuters and remarkably did not have to choose” (183), a status quo that remained in place until the retirement of the last commuter in 2012.

Cuban hostility toward the presence of the US base at Guantánamo, perceived as an acute example of US exploitative usurpation, grew in tandem with the anti-imperialist stance that was to define the Cuban Revolution for most of its more than six decades in power, and with the power that a language of “war on imperialism” was to wield within Cuban political speech and society, permeating the discourse of social mobilization that underpinned the revolutionary endeavor. “War” as a rhetorical tool was at the forefront of the Castro brothers’ efforts to build and sustain a revolution from 1959 on. In the climate of the Cold War, it was under the general rallying cry of a war on US imperialism that the particular political rhetoric of the Cuban Revolution evolved, underpinned by an expectation that citizens always be engaged in battle, mentally if not physically. That this war was at the core of Cuban revolutionary thought was proclaimed most resonantly in the closing line of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s 1966 address to the Tricontinental Conference: “Our every act is a war cry against imperialism” (362), although the stage had been set during Castro’s first days in power. Speaking to audiences in the cities of Santiago, Camagüey, and Santa Clara in the first week of 1959, despite diplomatic relations with the United States still being in place, Castro made frequent mention of empire, although his referents were principally non-state-specific metaphors of empire such as “the empire of corruption, exploitation, abuse and injustice” (“Discurso pronunciado . . . el 4 de enero de 1959”). No matter their ostensible topic, Castro’s speeches in the years after the Bay of Pigs invasion of April 1961—a turning point in the Cuban government’s defensive stance, after it had successfully warded off, and publicly humiliated, US-backed Cuban counterrevolutionary attackers deployed to depose it—were liberally peppered with the words *war* and *imperialism*, and had defense against US aggression as their clear referent.⁸

In subsequent decades, the “war” against the imperial enemy, and readiness against an always imminent invasion, emerged as the pretext for the revolution’s defense strategies, social innovations, and surveillance programs—and, indeed, for its very existence, as Antonio José Ponte has posited.⁹ Differentiating between the various ways in which

the idea of war operates in Cuba, Antoni Kapcia lists among the mechanisms that allowed the revolution's ideology to become persuasively meaningful "the sense of shared siege from 1961; the actual struggles (of 1961, the 1961–66 *lucha contra bandidos* and then Angola) and the imagined 'struggles' of repeated campaigns, defensive mobilizations and crises" (78–79). Richard Fagen sees the beginnings of the transformation of political culture in Cuba in the so-called wars on illiteracy and vice that opened the revolution's first decade. Fagen and, more recently, Ana Serra, draw attention to the military terminology and iconography with which Cuba's 1961 literacy campaign, in particular, was imbued: its volunteers were organized into brigades; its headquarters were in former army facilities; its motto was "Study, Work, Rifle." As Serra discusses, an iconic photograph from December 1961 shows literacy volunteers returning from the mountains, mission accomplished, holding giant pencils to stand in for guns (34–35).

The military genesis of the literacy campaign was, furthermore, an occasion for Castro not merely to orchestrate the performance of the relationship between war and language but also to authorize it for subsequent years. Mary Louise Pratt has located language at the core of violent military actions: "Where there is violence," she writes, "language is nearly always present, supplying meanings and alibis and inflicting injuries of its own" (1516). In a speech delivered as a Mother's Day address to the families of departing literacy volunteers on May 14, 1961, reprinted in translation in Fagen's *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba*, Castro made this move in reverse, placing warfare at the center of linguistic action, specifically in the case of the literacy campaign but by implication in the broader practice of revolution. Cuba, he declared, has two armies: "One armed with rifles and cannons to defend the work of the revolution, and one armed with books to advance the revolution" (Fagen 181). It is this second army that is "fighting a longer and far more difficult battle" (181), and, indeed, the vocabulary coined for this particular war was to have a long legacy in Cuba. In the rhetoric of its leaders, Cuba has been waging wars on many fronts for more than five decades, the campaign against illiteracy making way for the subsequent decades' metaphorical militarization of public speech and collective life, from the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, designed to rid Cuba of the last vestiges of capitalism, to the Battle of Ideas launched in 1999 with the aim of renewing public commitment to the revolution, particularly in the areas

of construction and education.¹⁰ Until the end of his presidency—and, indeed, until his death—references to war with the “illegal empire” peppered Castro’s writings and speeches. His successors Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz-Canel, although less prone to long speeches, have deployed similar terms, with Raúl, for example, waging a “battle against crime and corruption” and Díaz-Canel urging Cuba to fend off “an intense and profound aggression on the part of the empire.”¹¹

The language of a “war on imperialism” that has provided terms for social initiatives in Cuba is intimately connected to the US occupation of the military base at Guantánamo, even though this occupation may have been invoked less insistently than other incidences of perceived imperialist aggression, such as the trade embargo on Cuba (the longest-standing target of Castro’s outrage, and described on a billboard outside Havana’s airport as “the longest genocide in history”), favorable migration policies for Cubans, and alleged Central Intelligence Agency support for Cuban dissidents.¹² Jana K. Lipman has argued persuasively, in fact, that between 2002 and 2007 the print version of the daily newspaper *Granma* reported on the prison camps with less frequency and ideological coherence than it did on Cubans, rather than foreigners, being harmed and unlawfully imprisoned at the hands of the United States (Lipman, “Where’s Guantánamo in *Granma*?”). Accounting from a different perspective for what she considers to be “comparatively little discussion of the military base in public discourse in Cuba” (“There’s Always Something about Cuba” 346), Dara E. Goldman has identified a paradox in which the affront that is the US occupation of the base is overshadowed by pervasive discourses of nationalist isolation that cannot accommodate the presence of the enemy on national soil (*Out of Bounds* 136). Cuban public discourse since 1959, Goldman continues, has defined the United States as a threat from outside, symbolized by the ninety miles’ width of the Florida Straits that are a reminder of the distance between the two countries, and their separateness from one another. Having constructed Cuba as an “insular national space” (*Out of Bounds* 136), Goldman writes, this discourse cannot conceptually accommodate Guantánamo Bay Naval Base as a US presence within national borders.

The Castro brothers’ reluctance to escalate tensions over Guantánamo, either by making it a priority in their anti-imperialist propaganda, or by initiating military confrontation, and to channel their political energies instead to other hostile positions held by the United States, has

been read as largely pragmatic. Lipman notes that in the early 1960s, “despite international solidarity with anti-imperial, decolonization movements, Castro recognized that ousting GTMO was not worth a direct military conflict with the United States” (*Guantánamo* 146) and quotes Castro’s predecessor as Cuban president, Osvaldo Dorticós, as dismissing concerns that Cuba would attack the naval base with “we are audacious and valiant, but we are not stupid” (146). This is consistent with the Statement by the Government of Cuba to the National and International Community issued forty years later, on January 11, 2002, in response to news that “enemy combatants” from the US invasion of Afghanistan would be held at Naval Station Guantánamo Bay. The Cuban government was initially and briefly supportive of this unilateral decision on the part of the United States and its statement, translated and reprinted in Castro’s collection *Guantánamo: Why the Illegal US Base Should Be Returned to Cuba*, notes the “atmosphere of mutual respect” prevailing between each country’s official at the border (155) and offers assistance with US efforts to deal with terrorism. In its statement, the Cuban government reiterates that “despite the fact that we hold different positions as to the most efficient way to eradicate terrorism, the difference between Cuba and the United States lies in the method and not the need to put an end to that scourge . . . we are willing to cooperate with the medical services required as well as with sanitation programs in the surrounding areas under our control” (157–58). Although the statement closes with the more familiar exhortation that “the illegally occupied territory of Guantánamo should be returned to Cuba!” (155), it makes clear that “a basic principle of Cuba’s policy toward this bizarre and potentially dangerous problem between Cuba and the United States, which is decades long, has been to avoid making our claim a major issue, nor even an especially important issue, among the multiple and grave differences between our two nations” (155).

Cuban acquiescence to the US holding of detainees at the base was short-lived. In January 2005, after the exposure of abusive interrogation practices at the base’s prisons, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a public statement calling for the United States to end its torture practices at Guantánamo, reminding the US government that the treaty under which it leases the base, and which the Cuban government considers illegal anyway, allows for the base’s use as a coaling and naval station but not the transfer there of foreign prisoners of war

(Castro, *Guantánamo* 160). The statement charges the US government with “a gross violation of human rights and numerous international treaties and conventions” (160), a claim consistent with over sixty years of unrelenting outrage at the occupation of the base. Just as in a November 1960 visit to address base commuter workers in the border town of Caimanera, Castro rehearsed the terms of the Platt Amendment that “curtailed our independence” (“Discurso pronunciado . . . el 13 de noviembre de 1960”), forty-seven years later, in a five-part essay titled “The Empire and the Independent Island,” published in Spanish in the state-controlled daily newspaper *Granma* in 2007 and reprinted in an English version in *Guantánamo*, Castro retraces a similar script, drawing a clear line from the imperialist overreach of 1902, to the many acts of perceived aggression targeted at Cuba from the United States during the revolution, to the holding of detainees without charge at the naval base in the post-9/11 years. He concludes that Guantánamo is unnecessary to the United States from a military perspective, given that the United States’ technical power is strong enough to transport war to “wherever best suits the empire” (49). Castro surmises that the United States needs the base to “humiliate” Cuba just as it humiliates men at the illegal post-9/11 detention camps, an attempt against which Cuba “will continue to be in a state of combat readiness” (49).¹³ Speaking to the Cuban National Assembly a year later, Raúl Castro also condemned human rights violations at the naval base “on territory usurped from our country” (“Discurso pronunciado por el General del Ejército Raúl Castro Ruz”), nevertheless invoking the revolution’s continuing victory against the embargo and other imperial aggressions, while on January 11, 2022, Díaz-Canel marked the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the detention centers with a condemnation on Twitter of abuses perpetrated there (@DiazCanelB). The Castro brothers and their successor have recognized, and condemned, the way in which consecutive US administrations have exploited Guantánamo Bay’s anomalous legal status in the service of an egregious war on terror. They have, however, insisted on the consonance of this exploitation with a longer history of imperialist aggression of which the occupation of the naval base is one among several examples, and against which Cuba has long been waging its own war on imperialism.

Even though the Cuban government has shied away from direct confrontation with the United States over Guantánamo, it has been in

the interests of its rhetorical war on imperialism to insist that the base is illegally occupied and to maintain it as a heavily patrolled military zone and the limit line of symbolic defense. Indeed, the Castro brothers' actions, speeches, and writings regarding the naval base demonstrate its importance to the genesis and perpetuation of a war on imperialism that has manifested itself primarily in language and has for decades served to fuel collective outrage within and outside Cuba. Even their pragmatic decision not to press their claim to the base either legally or militarily reflects, I would propose, their preference for keeping war at the level of rhetoric, and an understanding of this rhetoric's power to sustain the social project of a revolution: outrage has long been a staple of Castro speeches, and the contested lease on Guantánamo Bay Naval Base has since the first days of the Cuban Revolution given this outrage specific focus and force.

GUANTÁNAMO AND THE WAR ON TERROR

The so-called war on terror, although translated into milder terms during President Barack Obama's tenure and ostensibly brought to a definite end with President Joseph Biden's withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021, has a more recent and globally visible connection to Guantánamo than does Cuba's war on imperialism. It is, nevertheless, a term similarly dependent, for its power to define hostilities and mobilize support, on the war metaphors that Lori Hartman-Mahmud has read as organizing and simplifying cross-cultural contexts to the detriment of their nuance and complexity. Indeed, recalling George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's seminal work on metaphor as foregrounding similarity at the expense of difference, and James Geary's more recent revisiting of this, the term *war on terror* summarily displaced alternative languages and paradigms that might have constituted a response to the attacks of 9/11, just as Cuba's war on imperialism marshalled collective support for the revolutionary agenda along a binary of right versus wrong. And like Cuba's "war," scaled to a revolutionary temporality whose primary tense is a yet-to-be-achieved future of victory, the war on terror is embedded in temporal measures whose endpoints are unknowable: a lease "in perpetuity," the interminability of "terror," the "indefinite" time frame of detentions that in some cases have lasted more than twenty years.

The war on terror, as first invoked by President George W. Bush in

a resonant speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, following the hijacking of four airplanes and attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center that claimed almost three thousand lives, was resolute in its zeal but gravely imprecise in its linguistic and temporal dimensions. Of the many categorical slippages that came to define this “war,” one of the most striking is the abstraction of the designated enemy, severed from identification with either a state power or a group of human actors: within the course of Bush’s address to Congress, the US enemy was first named as Al-Qaeda, expanding then to “every terrorist group of global reach” and, finally and most potently, to, merely, “terror” (68), diametrically opposed not to the people or territory of the United States but to “freedom” itself (65). Among the numerous scholars to have reflected on the warping of language in response to 9/11, Adriana Cavarero, in *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* (2008), remarked that the war on terror “mounts a direct challenge to the political lexicon of modernity” (2). Three presidencies and almost twenty years after the act of naming of this “war,” in *Subtle Tools: The Dismantling of American Democracy from the War on Terror to Donald Trump* (2021), Karen J. Greenberg considers it the founding act in the “degradation of language” (4) that, along with other insidious practices, would systematically and perhaps irreversibly undermine American democracy for the twenty-first century.

Marc Redfield, in his study of a “rhetoric of terror” that that has marked political speech from the French Revolution to the Bush administration, notes that President Bush’s invocation of a war on terror “respects and exaggerates the complications of conventional declarations of war and gives them an extra twist” (56). Not a formal declaration, the naming and inception of this “war” stand, rather, as a performative speech act that “troubles the difference between real and fictional, literal and figurative” (59), generating ambiguity on the US Supreme Court as to whether the United States was “actually ‘at war’ in the sense of Vietnam, Korea and the two World Wars rather than in the sense of the ‘war on drugs,’ which is, and always has been, primarily a law enforcement effort” (59).¹⁴ Sealing its effectively undefeatable slipperiness as a category, the possibility of this war’s ending stretches out indefinitely, as the enemy’s indeterminacy rules out its definitive elimination. In Redfield’s words, “The war, having no object except the abstraction ‘terrorism’ or ‘terror,’ is limitless and endless” (56).

Indeed, the war on terror extended through George W. Bush’s pres-

idential term and successive administrations, becoming known colloquially as a “long war,” an “endless war,” and a “forever war” (Greenberg, *Subtle Tools* 17). President Barack Obama began his first term in January 2009 pledging to close the Guantánamo detention camps, and made public efforts to change the specific terminology and the implicit temporal framework of the war on terror. His remarks at the National Defense University in May 2013 heralded a seemingly significant shift in counterterrorism policy and a renewed but ultimately doomed effort to close the Guantánamo prison. “Under domestic law, and international law,” President Obama insisted, “the United States is at war with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and their associated forces,” rather than with “terror” (“Remarks by the President”). Furthermore, he continued, “this war, like all wars, must end,” rather than extending indefinitely as Bush-era terms and practices had appeared to permit. Even in posing an explicit challenge to the war’s boundlessness, however, this speech allowed “terror” itself to persist at once as an entity and a threat, calling for the creation of “new tools to prevent terror.” Ultimately, as Greenberg has traced, just as the Obama administration’s new language of “overseas contingency operations” and “unprivileged enemy belligerents” remained “disappointingly imprecise” (21), so too were its aims of closing Guantánamo and fully withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan unrealized. President Donald Trump, in Greenberg’s words, “revived the terms that his predecessor had attempted to excise from the national security lexicon” (*Subtle Tools* 25), revoked Obama’s executive order to close the Guantánamo detention centers, and, in a memorable boast about Guantánamo immediately before being elected to office, promised to “load it up with some bad dudes” (25). While President Joseph Biden’s withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan stands as the largest-scale effort yet to end the war on terror, the last days of this “war” remain to be seen; in *Never-Ending War on Terror* (2021), Alex Lubin doubts that there will, in fact, be last days. Commenting on the global and seemingly intractable permeation of the language and insidious practices of the war on terror into twenty years of “policing, counterinsurgency, surveillance, and state violence” (115), and the absence of clarity as to “how to dismantle the war’s meanings and feelings, which are so embedded in everyday life that they are hardly recognizable” (109), Lubin deems this war a story with “no conclusion” (109).

With the multiple ambiguities that cloud its location and legal

status, Guantánamo Bay Naval Base lends itself peculiarly well to the rhetorical boundlessness and ill-defined reach of the war on terror as well as to its dubious standing in US and international law. Amy Kaplan, whose 2005 article “Where Is Guantánamo?” remains one of the more comprehensive and influential analyses of how legal anomaly and imperialist overreach have defined the site since the early twentieth century, has argued that “the temporal dimensions of Guantánamo’s location make it a chillingly appropriate place for the indefinite detention of unnamed enemies in what the administration calls a perpetual war against terror” (837). Kaplan argues that “the legal space of Guantánamo today has been shaped and remains haunted by its imperial history” (833). She traces this history from the Platt Amendment, which in 1903 “legislated U.S. domination” (835) of the new Cuban republic, through the Insular Cases of 1902–1922, which allowed for “a two-tiered, uneven application of the Constitution” (841) in territories ruled by the United States beyond its national borders, to *Rasul v. Bush* (2004), where the US Supreme Court ruled that federal courts have jurisdiction over the US naval base even as it “carefully avoided the question of whether noncitizens in Guantánamo Bay have access to constitutional protections and rights” (841). Even as Guantánamo is not an anomaly but “one island in a global penal archipelago where the United States indefinitely detains, secretly transports, and tortures uncounted prisoners from all over the world” (831), it is intractably rooted in the United States’ long-standing imperial enterprises in the Caribbean, such that “the global dimensions of Guantánamo cannot be understood separately from its seemingly bizarre location in Cuba” (831).

In *The Least Worst Place: Guantánamo’s First 100 Days* (2009), Karen J. Greenberg traces the ostensible rationale that, as the winter of 2001 approached and prisons near Afghanistan’s battlefields proved to be dangerously inadequate for the detention of captives, led to Guantánamo’s selection from a number of possible holding sites. The interagency group seeking a new site judged Cuba’s hostile relationship with the United States to be an advantage, as the base’s perimeter was well-guarded and there was “no need to consider the opinions of a foreign government” (7). The notion of legal limbo was particularly attractive, for “it opened up the door to a much wider set of questions about the kinds of legal exceptions that might be permissible on the island base” (7). In the early years of the camp, before a series of Supreme Court decisions that estab-

lished habeas corpus rights for detainees, beginning with *Rasul v. Bush* (2004) and ending with *Boumediène v. Bush* (2007), the US government considered itself bound, as Judith Butler puts it in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004), “by no legal guidelines other than those fabricated for the occasion” (xv). The executive branch, Butler writes, had “effectively set up its own judiciary function, one that overrides the separation of power, the writ of habeas corpus (guaranteed, it seems, by Guantánamo Bay’s geographical location outside the borders of the United States, on Cuban land, but not under Cuban rule), and the entitlement to due process” (63).

The hastily erected camps at the US naval base became an indefinite holding place for men and youths whose identities were unknown to their guards—for whom, Greenberg recounts, “the names of the detainees were a mystery, as were their countries of origin, their ages, the languages they spoke, and what they had done to warrant transfer to Guantanamo” (*Least Worst Place* 81). Over the years it emerged that the captives were of widely varying provenance and involvement in anti-US activities: far from all speaking Arabic, as the cue-card-equipped guards had anticipated (81), they spoke as many as seventeen different languages and were citizens or residents of forty nations (Kaplan 840). Of the 779 men to have been held at the naval base on suspicion of terrorist involvement from 2002 on, 39 remained twenty years later, with the majority of releases occurring during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Many of the men released, as a series of memoirs by ex-detainees and statements by their former captors attests, appear to have been found in the wrong place at the wrong time. That a mission against “terror” should have yielded so broad and incoherent a haul of enemies should not surprise given the scope set for it from the outset, nor should the terminological contortions that the detentions at Guantánamo occasioned, most prominent among them the neologisms *enemy combatant*, *illegal enemy combatant*, and *unprivileged enemy belligerent*, that have occluded the “prisoner of war” status for which rights are clearly set out in the Geneva Conventions.¹⁵ The lexicon of the war on terror is underpinned by the peculiarities of the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base, where jurisdiction and sovereignty are separate and, despite the trappings of American life that have sustained generations of military families, a hostile state—Cuba—lies at the border.

CREATING AT GUANTÁNAMO

Cuba's war on imperialism, and the United States' war on terror, at over sixty and over twenty years old, respectively, may seem increasingly obsolete in this third decade of the twenty-first century. They are, nevertheless, wars whose human collateral remains at Guantánamo—just as the Cold War anachronism of a fence line dividing versions of extreme state control (communism, socialism, the Cuban Revolution) from versions of freedom (the dream of democracy, political rights, and economic prosperity that draws migrants to the United States) lingers there, despite the glaring paradox of a US military that is “honor-bound to defend freedom” but oversees ongoing detentions without charge. The hostilities that have converged at Guantánamo have largely eclipsed its representation as a space of more positive affect, unsurprisingly given the reach and intensity of these hostilities and the very limited possibility for such expression, and yet the endurance, and the resilience, of small-scale gestures of compassion, care, and concern are a persistent undercurrent in the crushing tides of rhetorical posturing and antihuman violence. Such gestures are performed primarily by individuals distancing themselves more or less overtly from the rigid and forcibly collective patriotisms that have co-opted Guantánamo as a scene of war, and are largely manifest in creative expression broadly understood: poetry, fiction, art, and memoir, certainly, but also journalism, film, photography, oral history, advocacy taking the form of both legal action and public protest, and environmental activism. In the context of Guantánamo, these individuals are identified, with varying levels of coercion, as current and former detainees; cellblock guards, military linguists, and chaplains; newspaper reporters, photojournalists, and documentarians; artists, writers, and filmmakers in the capacities that Cuba's long-established professionalization of creative labor allows; and political prisoners, activists, and lawyers.

My attempt to elucidate individual gestures of care that push at the dominant narratives of war at Guantánamo builds on Barbara Harlow's “Extraordinary Renditions: Tales of Guantánamo, a Review Article” (2011). Harlow assembled what was by then an already substantial corpus of works that stand as “extraordinary renditions”—her term for “a putative, self-styled literary sub-genre” (2) that “borrows ungenerously and paraphrastically from just one of the many euphemisms that emerged during the Bush administration” (2). Encompassing memoirs,

stage plays, novels, documentaries, poetry, scholarship, and journalism, the driving interest of Harlow's essay is the role of the "literary," broadly defined, in serving "the aim of closing Guantánamo for good" (1). The "literary," she insists, "must assume . . . its own expanded sense of purpose, an advocacy, even adversarial, role" (3). My own reading not only expands Harlow's corpus to work published in subsequent decades but also addresses the specificity of gestures of care that while they may certainly contribute to a concerted, political effort to "close Guantánamo for good," and may, at times, be present in texts from the same corpus, unfold at a smaller scale, among individuals who rarely consider themselves to be agents of change. I also bring into this corpus work from Cuba, long neglected as a force in Guantánamo advocacy despite its physical proximity to and political stake in what happens at the base.

Writing and art by detainees is particularly rich in its recording of localized gestures of care. These have circulated increasingly outside Guantánamo since the mid-2000s, in the form of work produced at the camps themselves and made public, often in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, by American and British lawyers working in a pro bono capacity on detainees' habeas cases, and of post-release memoirs of former detainees. The initial landmark publication in the first category is *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, an anthology of twenty-two poems written clandestinely on the cellblocks, often on scraps of paper and Styrofoam cups in the absence of adequate materials, and passed through many layers of confiscation and censorship before their publication by the University of Iowa Press, in an edition edited by lawyer Marc Falkoff, in 2007. The second is *Guantánamo Diary*, the narrative account of Mohamedou Ould Slahi's abduction, detention, and torture, written for his lawyers Nancy Hollander and Theresa Duncan, shared in a heavily redacted version with editor Larry Siems, and published by Little, Brown and Company in 2015, which issued a version carefully "restored" after Slahi's release from Guantánamo in 2016. The third is artwork produced in programs of formal instruction at the Guantánamo camps in the later years of their existence, gifted by detainees to their lawyers. With the title *Art from Guantánamo*, this artwork was first exhibited under the curation of Erin Thompson for display at the President's Gallery of John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York in late 2017, and subsequently reproduced in print and online formats. The archive of detainees' post-release memoirs, often produced

in collaboration with journalists and professional writers, numbers over ten: dating back to British-Pakistani Moazzam Begg's *Enemy Combatant: A British Muslim's Journey to Guantánamo and Back* (2006) and with the publication of Mansoor Adayfi's *Don't Forget Us Here: Lost and Found at Guantánamo* (2021), it is still growing. Dispersed around the globe, often not repatriated but sent to third countries with which they have little linguistic or cultural affinity, former detainees have gained a scant if increasing presence as authors of op-ed pieces in major newspapers, and as the subjects of investigative reporting. While the writing and art of detainees, whether produced at the camps or post release, is unsurprisingly wide-ranging in its form, tone, and subject matter, it is striking for the almost total absence, across the corpus as a whole, of rancor, violence, or the strident hostility that has governed political languages at Guantánamo. It tends, rather, toward the pacific, conciliatory, and curious. As such, it is a powerful foundation of Guantánamo's alternative corpus.

Personnel posted to Guantánamo by the US military, either while part of the Joint Task Force that assumed operation of the detention centers there in 2002 or as members of the base's longer established US Navy community, have also recorded quiet gestures of compassion toward detainees, despite the rigid lines of rhetorical and physical separation that structure their respective roles. In 2005, military linguist Eric Saar and military chaplain James Yee each published accounts of their experience at Guantánamo, while civilian Pashtun-language translator Mahvish Rukhsana Khan published her *My Guantanamo Diary: The Detainees and the Stories They Told Me* three years later. Saar, Yee, and Khan each recount how the constitutive intermediacy of the roles of translator and chaplain was recast as a position of betrayal of the larger mission of American patriotism; a recasting in the face of which, nevertheless, none of them was able to renounce recognition of, and sympathy for, detainees' humanity and decency. A small number of cellblock guards, largely drawn from military police units and with little experience with ostensibly high-value detainees such as those held at Guantánamo, have placed on record the friendships and mutual respect they established with some of those they had been told would be the worst of the worst. They have done so in memoirs, magazine articles and, in the case of former guard Chris Arendt, in a collaboration with artists Amber Ginsburg and Aaron Hughes, the *Tea Project*, in which participants drink

tea together from cups artistically engraved like those at Guantánamo. Guards' conversions to Islam as a result of their encounters with Muslim detainees as well as post-release reunions often filmed and posted online are part of a landscape of care that subtly undermines the more hostile scene of Guantánamo.

Although they are more transitory residents of Guantánamo, present there as observers of rather than participants in detention operations, many individual lawyers, journalists, and artist-activists have extended forms of care across power lines at the base, most particularly to detainees whose lives they are charged with representing in various ways. That pro bono lawyers have established trusting, respectful relationships with their detainee clients is evident not only in successful legal representation but also in a broader concern for well-being that has attended to physical comfort, contact with families, and friendships enduring after release. This is borne out, for example, in the memoir *Eight O'Clock Ferry to the Windward Side* (2007) by Clive Stafford Smith, British lawyer and founder of the London-based nonprofit Reprieve, and in the lawyers' stories collected in Mark P. Denbeaux and Jonathan Hafetz's edited volume *The Guantánamo Lawyers: Inside a Prison, Outside the Law* (2009). Similarly, the very act of keeping Guantánamo in the public eye over a more than twenty-year period is a gesture of care assumed by several journalists, unquestionably chief among them Carol Rosenberg, of the *Miami Herald* and subsequently the *New York Times*, whose articles were collected by the *Miami Herald* and published as *Guantánamo Bay: The Pentagon's Alcatraz of the Caribbean* (2016). Rosenberg has provided continuous, creative, and comprehensive coverage not only of prison operations and legal proceedings at the base but also of individual detainees in the daily rituals to which they have become habituated as they age in the more "open" environment of the late 2010s; of young US soldiers posted as guards to a tropical destination that in many cases turns out to be soul-destroying; and of communities already established at the base in the more tranquil years before 2002. Photographers and artists permitted to visit the base during the periods of lower entry restriction that preceded the Trump presidency have similarly participated in the generation of a compassionate Guantánamo, even as their work has been subject to strict oversight from military authorities at the base. Notable among these are Edmund Clark, whose *Guantánamo: If the Light Goes Out* (2011) is a series of plates documenting Guantánamo's different ver-

sions of home; Molly Crabapple who, following a visit to Guantánamo in 2013, published drawings of US Army personnel, detainees, courtroom scenes, and the abandoned cages of Camp X-Ray; and Janet Hamlin, the court artist whose *Sketching Guantánamo: Court Sketches of the Military Tribunals, 2006–2013* (2013) approaches detainees and families of 9/11 victims, in separate areas of the same courtroom, from similar perspectives. Distinctive in its geographical and conceptual reach is the work of Debi Cornwall, whose *Welcome to Camp America* (2017) photographs the spaces occupied by detainees, military personnel, and their families at Guantánamo, and individual detainees in their post-release environments. Cornwall extends the military-imposed restrictions on photographing faces at Guantánamo to images shot far beyond the base, as a commentary on the many levels of constraint that detention imposes, even in its aftermath.

Harlow broadens her corpus beyond work issuing from time spent at Guantánamo to the writing, art, journalism, and filmmaking of individuals who, although physically distanced from the base, have nevertheless engaged closely with the stories and plight of detainees. The ten-plus years since her article's publication have seen further collaborations with detainees, especially those whose post-release lives have proven to be deeply unstable. Among these is Mohammed el-Gharani, a Chadian teenager detained at Guantánamo for eight years and largely itinerant in the years following his release, whom New York-based artist Laurie Anderson "telepresented" as a live image as part of her *Habeas Corpus* exhibit and performance at the New York Armory in 2015, and whose story French journalists Jérôme Tubiana and Alexandre Franc have told in the graphic novel *Guantánamo Kid: The True Story of Mohammed El-Gharani* (2019). *Life after Guantánamo: Exiled in Kazakhstan*, a documentary made for *VICE News* in 2015 and narrated by journalist Simon Ostrovksy, profiles Lotfi bin Ali, a Tunisian held without charge at Guantánamo for twelve years and resettled in Kazakhstan in 2014, where his inability to speak either Kazakh or Russian, to work, marry, or start a family, severely exacerbated the challenges of his existence, as did his unanswered requests for adequate healthcare for a heart condition, from which he died in early 2021. Mohamedou Ould Slahi's story, together with that of Steve Wood, Slahi's former guard and later friend and convert to Islam, has been retold in numerous forms, among them in Ben Taub's Pulitzer Prize-winning *New Yorker* essay "Guantánamo's

Darkest Secret” (2019); Laurence Topham’s short documentary film *My Brother’s Keeper* (2020); the feature film *The Mauritanian* (2021), directed by Kevin MacDonald and starring household names Tahar Rahim, Jodie Foster, and Benedict Cumberbatch; and the documentary *Guantánamo Diary Revisited* (2022), in which investigative journalist John Goetz sets out to find Slahi’s former interrogators. Attentive engagements with detainees still at Guantánamo have become more numerous since the publication of Slahi’s *Guantánamo Diary*, serving as willed endeavors to humanize lives that in official accounts are still recorded as numbers. The six-part Radiolab miniseries *The Other Latif*, for example, is journalist Latif Nasser’s story of his Moroccan namesake Abdul Latif Nasser, detained at Guantánamo in 2002 and, despite having been cleared for release in 2016, held until his became the first Biden-era repatriation in July 2021. *A Ship from Guantánamo* (2021) is Dara Kell and Veena Rao’s six-minute film about the intricate model ships built by Yemeni Moath Al-Alwi, one of Guantánamo’s first detainees and one of the forty remaining there at the time of the film’s release.

The lines of individual care extending to and from Guantánamo Cubans touch the lives of detainees more obliquely, with José Ramón Sánchez’s poetry being by far the most explicit attempt to investigate, describe, and inhabit the experience of detainees. Despite being hampered by not only the scant and somewhat arbitrary nature of internationally available information about detainees but also by the vagaries of access to relevant reading materials, journalism, the internet, and mobility more broadly from his Guantánamo City home, Sánchez’s poems extend their imaginative reach to the physical space of detainees’ cells, their inner experience of captivity, and their relationship to poetry. Others creating from Cuban Guantánamo map different paths of compassion. Daniel Ross’s award-winning independent film, *La espera* (The Wait, 2022), traces the acute pain of a lonely widower against a broader landscape of Cuba’s border with the base, the protagonist’s solitude disrupted by the explosions of land mines that migrants inadvertently detonate as they attempt to reach the base, the appearance on his doorstep of their discarded shoes, and the arbitrary acts of violence the Cuban Border Brigade perpetrates in its purported defense of the revolution. Compassion surfaces in short stories by Ana Luz García Calzada and Roberto de Jesús Quiñones for the migrants who, since the mid-1960s, have risked and often lost their lives attempting to cross the heavily mined Guantánamo

Bay to seek asylum at the base; in the art of Alexander Beatón and Pedro Gutiérrez, for residents of the town of Caimanera, isolated and stultified by their proximity to the base; in a story by Leandro Estupiñán Zaldívar, for young soldiers charged with guarding the fence line between Cuba and the base, ostensibly against US attacks but more urgently against migrants from surrounding communities; and in editorials in the dissident publication *Porvenir*, for prisoners held by Cuban authorities in the province of Guantánamo.

This book traces the asymmetrical and unpredictable paths that individual gestures of care take at Guantánamo with a framework of five nouns, each accommodating differing interpretations, forms of engagement, and locations within what I understand as a tenuously cohesive region—a no-man’s-land less in the sense in which British playwright Harold Pinter’s 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech deploys the term with reference to the extralegal location of the detention centers, than as what Federica Pedriali, looking to the no-man’s-lands of World War I, has called a “zone of exclusion managed by two warring sides” (150). “Borderlands,” the noun heading this introductory chapter, represents a first attempt to reconsider Guantánamo as something more than two separate spaces, controlled by two mutually hostile governments, and physically divided by the fence line and the land-mined areas around it. Echoing the title of the widely influential work of Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), the chapter is, rather, an invitation to contemplate Guantánamo’s fence line, as Anzaldúa does the Río Bravo del Norte/Rio Grande, from “both shores at once” (100), and to approach these shores—or the Cuban and US sides of the fence line—in terms of what Priscilla Solis Ybarra, reading Anzaldúa, has termed a “bioregion,” whose subjects live in “direct connection to the animal world and the natural environment” (Solis Ybarra 286).

Chapter 1, “Translation,” is motivated by a line former detainee Ibrahim al-Rubaish wrote during his time at Guantánamo in the poem “Ode to the Sea.” “Doesn’t Cuba, the vanquished, translate its stories for you?” (66) the poet asks, imagining Cuba, the Caribbean Sea, and a detention cell together as a Guantánamo in which stories—as experience, as narrative, as history—can be rendered intelligible in new languages. Al-Rubaish’s poem was included in Marc Falkoff’s English-language collection *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak* (2007), its original Arabic subsequently remaining classified; it per-

sists only in translated forms, with plausible alternatives for the word *vanquished* left to speculation. A second poem in Falkoff's collection, however, namely Mohammed el-Gharani's "First Poem of My Life," describes Cuba as "an afflicted isle" (39), and includes footnotes by the translator, Flagg Miller, who situates "afflicted" in relation to "a discourse of resistance that has a Palestinian tenor" (40). *Vanquished* and *afflicted* are expressions of political solidarity with Cuba that misalign in their correspondence to the future-orientated rhetoric of Cuba's revolution, which always anticipates victory. The sharing of experience that falls short in the form of political solidarity flows more smoothly, however, in namings of a natural environment common to Guantánamo's inhabitants, particularly the Caribbean Sea. The sea is the addressee of al-Rubaish's poem and assumes a complexly dominant, and deeply anthropomorphized, role in former detainee Mansoor Adayfi's memoir, *Don't Forget Us Here: Lost and Found at Guantánamo*, as well as in the collection of detainee art first exhibited in New York in 2017–2018, *Art from Guantánamo*. A sea that, in al-Rubaish's phrasing, "cruelly guards" ("Ode to the Sea" 66) while also offering what Adayfi calls "hope for our future freedom" (*Don't Forget Us Here* 63) reanimates the paradox of insularity that was central to Cuban poetry and cultural criticism in the twentieth century, and paves this alternative route toward a coherent regional unity. The two Cuban poets this chapter discusses have no direct familiarity with either detainees at the base or one another, and yet their writing, too, maps the contours of a Guantánamo whose natural environment defies its political divisions. In *The Black Arrow*, José Ramón Sánchez insists on proximity between detainees and the poetic subject in Cuba, imagining the spatial arrangements of a cell, the psychological toll of indefinite detention, and the physiological effects of torture. His most intensely liberating poem, "Secret//NoForn," is formatted as a redaction of a leaked US military intelligence document. In replacing once-classified information with lines from the most celebrated poetry of Cuba's Guantánamo province, Regino E. Botti's *El mar y la montaña* (1921), it overwrites justifications for confinement with the vast expanse, and implied freedom, of the region's land and sea. In the poems of *Con el alma cautiva* (2007), the oft-jailed Cuban dissident poet Néstor Rodríguez Lobaina looks out from his cell to seek comfort in a larger, natural world, and in doing so suggests uncanny continuities among experiences of detention, and sources of solace, in the Guantánamo region

as a whole. Read together, these texts suggest that while the urgency of human rights abuses at the detention centers, and to a lesser extent the United States' continued presence at the base, have ensured a global reach for Guantánamo, local alliances and affinities, on a much smaller scale, have served to undermine large-scale hostility and secure solace for individuals.

Chapter 2, "Guards," explores the radical challenge to power structures imposed by US and Cuban military authorities at and around Guantánamo that is posed by certain guards, be these on patrol on the base's cellblocks or along the Cuban side of the fence line. Both the US war on terror and Cuba's war on imperialism established the "enemy" as a rigid category, and charged their militaries with defending against it. In the constrained space of the cellblocks at the base's detention camps, young men and women, often from military police units, spend their days and nights with the "enemy," and while some insist on maintaining the distinction between "us" and "them," or "good" and "evil," that governs the camps, others form slow, mutually respecting friendships with individual detainees. As reported in the memoirs a number of former detainees have published since their release, as well as in books and interviews by former members of the US military, these friendships often begin in the common ground of confinement—despite the immeasurably less restrictive circumstances of guards, they cannot depart at will—and develop more fully as shared interests, histories, and experiences come to light. Particularly in the memoirs of Moazzam Begg and Mohamedou Ould Slahi, encounters coalesce around interests in reading classical literature, generally posited as an uncontentious meeting place, removed from the realities and hierarchies of the camps; similar histories of colonialist and racist aggression that emerge in conversations detainees have with Black or Puerto Rican guards, whom they almost uniformly describe as the most compassionate soldiers on the cellblocks; and a deep respect on the part of some guards for the Muslim faith that they see sustaining many detainees, a faith to which some guards eventually convert. These intimate, compassionate relationships that form across deeply entrenched hierarchies extend as a model to relationships between guards and "enemies" on the Cuban side of the fence line, where border guards are on the alert for ever-less-plausible attacks from US forces at the base, and for Cuban migrants attempting the highly perilous escape route from Guantánamo Province to the base. Long

figured by the Cuban government as “counterrevolutionaries,” aspiring migrants expose the deep complexities of hostility within Cuban society and, in Cuban authors’ and filmmakers’ reluctance to condemn them, forms of compassion and acceptance akin to those that certain guards extend to detainees at the base.

Chapter 3, “Home,” addresses the temporary, involuntary, or constrained nature of residency at Guantánamo for many people and its interplay with indefinite, short-term, and permanent temporalities, and traces the spatial, social, and aesthetic strategies with which the region’s inhabitants have made home there. While in scholarship on incarceration the cell has been presented as a potentially domestic space, the leaked *Camp Delta Standard Operating Procedures* (2004) regulate this space and the so-called comfort items permitted in it in such a way as to approximate more closely the calculated defamiliarization of torture rooms that Elaine Scarry described in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Memoirs by former detainees David Hicks and Ahmed Errachidi detail the spatial dimensions and living conditions of cells at Guantánamo through persistent contrasts with their distant homes and with what a human’s—as opposed to an animal’s—living space should be. Resisting this recalibration of home, however, Errachidi describes claiming a social space from which to extend hospitality to other detainees and beings, thus resituating the cell as a tentative, if much diminished, domestic space. Within the same forty-five square miles of the base, military families lead lives that have been touted as safe, close-knit, and traditional, harking back to ideals of small-town America. The archives of their community newspaper, the *Guantánamo Bay Gazette*, whose post-9/11 issues this chapter examines, convey concerted attempts to uphold ideals of home in the face of global scrutiny of Guantánamo, and the close proximity of ostensibly dangerous detainees. Despite its overwhelming focus on military families, the *Guantánamo Bay Gazette* sheds light on a small and ever-diminishing community of base residents with a particular claim to this space as home: “Special Category Residents,” Cubans who commuted to work at the base in the early 1960s and chose to remain there when hostilities increased. The home this now-elderly community has created, with considerable economic assistance from the US Navy, bears much in common with Cuban exile communities in southern Florida, and yet is territorially continuous with the country left behind. In its final section,

this chapter turns to figurations of home in and on behalf of the Cuban border town of Caimanera, whose status as “the first line of defense against imperialism” has rendered it exceptional in the national context, its proximity to the base overshadowing its communal and economic life. Documentary films about Guantánamo from the 1960s and more recently—José Massip’s *Guantánamo* (1965) and Hernando Calvo Ospina’s *Todo Guantánamo es nuestro* (2016)—reiterate the defiant stance of a home usurped, only to be rendered whole if the base is returned to Cuba. The artwork of Alexander Beatón and Pedro Gutiérrez, however, particularly the multimedia installation *El camino de la estrategia* (2013) (*The Way of Strategy*, 2014), explores less contestatory ways of living in the shadow of the base—under a rubric of *convivencia*, or living together, that I read as offering broader models for making home at Guantánamo.

Chapter 4, “The Future,” looks to visions of a future at and for Guantánamo. More than 20 years into the establishment of the detention camps, more than 60 into the Cuban Revolution, and 120 since the initiation of the United States’ lease in perpetuity, the question “what comes next?” still hangs in the balance. With the “indefinite” time frame of detention at the base’s camps, and the ever-deferred fulfilment of the Cuban revolutionary project as its primary temporal references, this chapter explores contemplations of the future by and on behalf of the Guantánamo region’s inhabitants, as it relates to their experience in a present of both the detention camps and revolutionary Cuba. Detainees speaking and writing from the camps have expressed fear that “indefinite” means “forever,” and former detainees writing post-release—among them Murat Kurnaz, Lakhdar Boumediène, and Mustafa Ait Idir—describe various experiences of lingering in the present, hesitant, and mistrustful toward what might lie in a long-term future. Advocacy groups and investigative journalists have documented the post-release lives of former detainees as economically and socially precarious, often unfolding in countries to which they had no previous connection and wracked by the physical and psychological aftermath of Guantánamo, and the photographic work of Debi Cornwall, in *Welcome to Camp America* (2017), represents former detainees in their post-release spatial settings, as a tribute to their pasts and a gesture toward repair. The chapter’s second section turns in part to textual material produced at Guantánamo before 9/11, in the two-year period between 1994 and 1996 when the base was used as a holding place for Cuban and Haitian refugees seeking asylum in the United States. *El*

futuro is a handwritten journal produced by and for Spanish-speaking refugees at the camps as they contemplated a deeply uncertain future, their strategic translations into English of certain articles, and frequent inclusion of the Statue of Liberty among their detailed hand-drawings, attesting to their hopes for a future elsewhere. Alongside *El futuro* I read the almost-synonymous title *Porvenir*, a journal specific to the Cuban province of Guantánamo and initiated in 2008 as part of the politically dissident movement Alianza Democrática Oriental, charged with promoting independent, non-state journalism in Cuba. Through short and locally focused feature articles, open letters to Cuban authorities and international human rights organizations, reports on conditions in the prisons of Guantánamo Province and lists of those held there, *Porvenir* insists on a vision of Cuba's future rooted—like that of the earlier *El futuro*—in democratic principles. This chapter closes with three quite distinct imaginings of a post-conflict naval base, generated by artists and a scholar resident in the United States that stand as a form of anticipatory commemoration, or symbolic repair for conflict still underway. The first of these, *Reparations for Guantánamo's Torture Survivors*—written by Aaron Hughes and Amber Ginsburg in collaboration with advocacy groups HearT, CAGE, Witness Against Torture, and Chicago Torture Justice Memorials, and included in the 2022 DePaul Art Museum exhibit *Remaking the Exceptional: Tea, Torture and Reparations | Chicago to Guantánamo*—is a performative text that commands into being acknowledgement, apology, and reparation for abuses at Guantánamo. The second, American artist Ian Alan Paul's *Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History*, is a project that poses online as a museum and memorial to a defunct detention center, forcing into existence a present that is markedly more conciliatory and equitable than the current one. The third is a proposal by the conservation biologist Joe Roman to make the base an ecological research center, collaboratively managed by Cuba and the United States in an imagined moment of vastly improved relations. Together, these various perspectives on the aftermath of the present moment push at the urgent question of how to imagine, or better still inhabit, a future while acknowledging, and coming to terms with, what will then be the past; asking, in resonance with a much broader field of post-conflict contexts, what a repaired, restorative future might look like.

Alexander Beatón gave the title *Susurros* (Whispers) to his digital photography exhibit, shown by the Provincial Arts Council of



FIGURE 1.2. ALEXANDER BEATÓN, 1898 . . . *BONSÁI*. REPRINTED COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

Guantánamo, Cuba, in 2021. Its twenty images juxtapose a small-scale replica of the watchtowers that line the perimeter of the base with everyday objects common in eastern Cuba but also present in US rural and popular culture: a baseball, a set of dominoes, a straw hat, a bale of barbed wire in the shape of a bonsai tree (fig. I.2). In lingering on these reminders of things that are mundane and shared, present with but not dominated by the symbol of vigilance that is the watchtower, the *Susurros* exhibit insinuated that, beneath the bombast and bluster of Cuban and American government rhetoric, there are simpler, more harmonious ways to experience the relationship between the base and Cuba. Even as actions at the US naval base have become notorious for their egregious departure from international concerns, such insinuations have grown in the creative expression of detainees and others at the naval base, and of writers, artists, and filmmakers in the Cuban province that surrounds it. Together, they trace a new “Guantánamo,” a no-man’s-land over which no state, and no lexicon of hostility, holds sway; one that is governed, rather, by curiosity, consideration, and a will to coexist.