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“A REVOLUTION WITHIN A  
REVOLUTION:” THE QUEST FOR  
WOMEN’S LIBERATION IN POST  
REVOLUTIONARY CUBA

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“A REVOLUTION WITHIN A REVOLUTION:”  
THE QUEST FOR WOMEN’S LIBERATION IN POST REVOLUTIONARY CUBA

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A Thesis

Presented To

Eastern Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in History

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By

Mayra Villalobos

Spring 2014

THESIS OF MAYRA VILLALOBOS APPROVED BY

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MASTER'S THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

Women in Cuba endured centuries of gender inequality in a nation known for its history of *machismo*, male domination. Cuban women expressed a desire to improve their status since 1898, when Cuba was granted its independence from Spain, and again in 1930 when a new women's movement mobilized itself in Cuba. But only with the revolutionary regime founded by Fidel Castro in 1959 could women like Celia Sánchez, Vilma Espín, and Haydee Santamaría not only continue to advocate women's suffrage but also pursue equality with Cuban men in the public and private sphere. This thesis examines the development of the women's movement in Revolutionary Cuba following the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, and assesses how revolutionary women fashioned a new identity and new gender roles for themselves thereafter. Moreover, the thesis analyzes how the women's movement was aided by a communist state that forwarded women-friendly rhetoric and legislation but was also hindered by ingrained ideas about gender and the woman's place in society.

### Acknowledgments

This thesis owes much thanks and appreciation to Dr. Joseph Lenti, whom has planted a seed of passion to study Latin American history. In turn, I live as a proud Latina compelled to learn more about Latin American women's movements, particularly Cuba. I am grateful for Dr. Lenti for guiding me through this project, this project would not have been possible without his sincere help.

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# Thesis Introduction

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Vilma Espín considered the Cuban women’s movement as a “genuine revolution,” in the Cuban Revolution because women showed “support for the revolution, even before it had demonstrated its full meaning.”<sup>1</sup> Vilma Espín was credited with founding Cuba’s national female organization, The Federation of Cuban Women, *Federación Mujeres Cubanas*, (hereafter FMC). Espín, along with her comrades Celia Sánchez and Haydee Santamaría, are credited with improving the lives of Cuban women and children in a society recognized for its history of *machismo*. Even Fidel Castro proclaimed in a speech in 1966 in reference to Cuban women’s involvement in the Cuban Revolution that “this phenomenon of women’s participation in the revolution was a revolution within the revolution... the revolution is occurring among the women of our country!”<sup>2</sup> Speaking from the balcony of the Presidential Palace in Havana, Castro asserted that Cuban women were progressing in the revolutionary process. As the crowd screamed and applauded, Castro illuminated the efforts of women and assured his audience that there would be more to come for Cuban women as more jobs and opportunities opened up. This, movement, marked the liberation of women from gender discrimination in Cuba—a nation on the brink of a socialist revolution.

The status that women held immediately after the Cuban Revolution conflicted with Cuba’s socialist transition. Cuba sought to restructure and transform the nation’s former “bourgeois” morality into a modern “socialist” one. The conversion of socialism

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<sup>1</sup>Vilma Espin, interview Jose Estrada Mendez, October 1987 “With No Perceptions,” *Women in Cuba: The Making of the Revolution Within the Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 217.

<sup>2</sup>Fidel Castro, "The Revolution within the Revolution," in *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches & Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin & Others*, edited by Elizabeth Stone, (New York: Pathfinder, 1981). 49.

also included the notion of the “new man” for the development and progress of communism in Cuba. This new transformation meant the historical place of women in Cuban society had to be rewritten.

Generally, feminist women in Latin America fought to preserve motherhood and femininity while at the same time being professionals. Women fought to make life better as mothers and wives. In postrevolutionary Cuba, women altered their notion of “a women’s movement” toward a different perspective. Cuban womanist fought to bring equality for all. Since the status of men in Cuba was greater than women, Cuban women, under the auspices of the Cuban Communist Party, attempted to raise the status of women to be equal with men publicly and domestically. This made Cuban feminism different from that pursued in the U.S. and elsewhere.

### **DEFINING FEMINISM IN CUBAN CONTEXT**

Several scholars have argued that Cuban women rejected the notion of feminism. Aviva Chomsky explains in her book, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, the rejection of feminism and quotes Margaret Randall who perceived feminism as a force that was “dangerous, “disruptive,” and “would ultimately divide the working class.”<sup>3</sup> Debra Evans reasons that “the [Federation of Cuban Women] has never adopted a separatist approach to women’s rights; instead, it maintains the view that women’s equality is inseparable from the advancement of the society as a whole.”<sup>4</sup> Members of the Federation of Cuban Women (hereafter the FMC) claimed to be a “female” organization and not a “feminist”

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Randall, *To Change the World: My Years in Cuba*, (Piscataway : Rutgers University Press, 2009) pp. 103-104 found in Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 142.

<sup>4</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, (New York: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 122.

one because they concerned themselves collectively with social change.<sup>5</sup> Vilma Espín, the leader of the FMC explained that Cuban women did not speak of “U.S feminist style [of] equality.” There was no talk of women’s liberation and women’s emancipation at first following the overthrow of Batista in 1959 because they feared associating their movement with the feminism of the “imperialistic” United States.<sup>6</sup> However, after 1975, Cuban women associated themselves as the movement for women’s liberation in the struggle for equality, but never a feminist organization.

For the purpose of this project, I use terms like “women’s liberation movement,” “womanists,” or “women’s movement,” respectively. I use the term “womanist” in a social perspective because the term defines a women’s place coexisting in a world with men. Alice Walker defined the term in 1979 in her essay, *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose*. Discussion on womanists derived from African-American women, the lower social class, who also suffered gender inequality. They express the desire to be recognized as women, nurturers, workers, and intellectuals without directly attacking men. Walker’s connotation of a “womanist,” is a woman who loves herself (and other woman, sexually or non sexually), loves men sexually or non-sexually. A womanist loves her own femininity, her struggle, women’s strength, and above all motherhood. I use this term because it is similar to the Cuban women’s perceptive on women’s suffrage. Although the formation of a Cuban woman’s movement began with middle class,

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<sup>5</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Vilma Espin, interview Jose Estrada Mendez, October 1987, “With No Perceptions,” in *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 220-224.

educated, but both white and mulatto women, the notion for Cuban women's liberation is very similar to the theory of a "womanist."<sup>7</sup>

Cuban feminism, as Elizabeth Stoner calls it, was different than U.S American feminism despite the fact that the U.S dominated Cuba from 1898-1940. In her book, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform: 1898-1940*, she argued that feminism in Cuba was culturally centered.<sup>8</sup> Still, North American feminism had somewhat of an influence and U.S. feminists attempted to impose their standards of feminine ideology on Cuban women. "US feminists took an interest in the liberation of Cuban women and attempted to impose U.S. standards for feminism," she wrote.<sup>9</sup> Cuban women rejected a U.S. style feminism because they felt it minimized the importance of motherhood, that it did not help resolve the main issues women were asking for in Cuba (poverty, male domination, egalitarian society,) and that it was another form of imperialism. Stoner agreed that "nearly all Cuban feminists insisted upon a reverence for motherhood and a desire to complement men's lives," preserving femininity and making it central to feminism, in a way that distinguished them from their North American counterparts.<sup>10</sup>

In the early months after the defeat of Batista, the liberation of Cuban women started with middle and privileged class women who rose up and represented everyone. Their priority of gender discrimination ignored the racial discrimination that poorer darker skinned women suffered. Certainly there was a class and race difference, but

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<sup>7</sup> Alice Walker, introduction to *In Search for Our Mother's Garden: A Womanist Prose*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), xi-xii.

<sup>8</sup> Lynn K. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform: 1898-1940*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>10</sup> Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, 3.

because Cuba's then womanists were educated they fought not just for themselves but for all women, including peasants and children. In the struggle against machismo, Cubans demanded a reverence for motherhood and viewed it as the only stepping stone to power, but unlike their U.S. counterparts, approved of motherhood and did not see it as a roadblock to political rights. Cuban feminism, according to Stoner, is classified as more of a social feminism and then later progressive feminism. She writes:

Progressive feminism worked to alter aspects of social order and to require the state to take on matters of social welfare and provisions for the poor, but they left in a place class structures, prevailing racist practices, and the patriarchy. Progressive feminists believed that democracy was possible in Cuba and that women were in a position to make significant contributions. They criticized the Church, but they did not attack conventions of male domination, and they believed that new laws would insure social reform. Most of the feminists belonged to this group.<sup>11</sup>

By the 1930s many Cuban women were "revolutionary feminists." These revolutionaries worked to organize labor unions, supported women's issues, and ensured that maternity and labor concerns were addressed in prominent political discussions. Feminine advocates were from the upper or middle class they believed their voices would be heard. Despite class difference they cared and educated the less privileged. The women's movement succeeded in inserting women's rights in the Cuban Constitution of 1940 and legislated gender discrimination laws in the workplace. However, the struggle continued against to those who held strongly to traditional Spanish customs that denigrated women.

The 1930s wave of the women's movement attacked traditional norms, such as: the Catholic Church, Spanish laws, patriarchal privilege, social ordering, and a

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<sup>11</sup> Stoner, 6.

plantation-centered economy.<sup>12</sup> As Stoner explains, Cuban femininity did not campaign for gender equality, nor saw Cuban patriarchy as the “source of women’s oppression.” Instead their goals advocated for recognition of motherhood as “women’s divine right and it justified their exercising political authority in Cuba.”<sup>13</sup> They fought not to replace men in the current patriarchal system but they wanted political representation to better the welfare of women and to revere motherhood.

The liberation of women continued the struggle of women’s suffrage of the 1930s into the Revolution of 1959, but this time with more radical changes. Cuban womanists continued to advocate for motherhood and encouraged other women to practice the *mambisa* tradition. And with the new political system in place under the Castro regime, a new social order brought further opportunities for women. Socialism meant equality for all including women and children. It meant women questioned the previous patriarchal systems and the launch of the struggle against *machismo*, a construct defined in Chapter One. The new wave of “womanists” in Cuba went as far as to attempt to end gender discrimination not only in the workplace but also within the home. The FMC was formed as the women’s national organization that advocated for gender equality, eliminate prostitution, and the advancement of female participation in Cuban society. The efforts of the FMC were so successful that they partook in the creation and the legislating of the Family Code of 1975, which was an attempt to eliminate gender discrimination domestically and publicly. The Family Code also called for husbands and wives to share the domestic housework, including the support and maintenance of raising the children,

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<sup>12</sup> Stoner, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 10.

in order to alleviate the “double-burden” of working women that contributed to gender inequality.

This study assesses the development of the women’s movement in Revolutionary Cuba in two distinctive phases. The first phase, 1959-1974, analyses the Cuban state and focuses on the participation of women in the development and progress of the revolution. The second phase of the Cuban women’s movement began in 1975 with the establishment of the Cuban Family Code. Even during this period, Cuban women did not call themselves feminists. Yet, they benefited by the new laws that enforced the equality of men and women in the public and the private sphere, but mainly focused on bringing gender equality within the family and marriage.

The remainder of this thesis is organized into three chapters, a conclusion and epilogue. Chapter One, “Women in Pre-Revolutionary Cuba: Setting the Stage for a Women’s Movement,” gives a brief historical background of pre-revolutionary women’s involvement in Cuba’s revolutions from its independence from Spain in 1898 until 1959 with the example of Celia Sánchez’s story. Chapter One also emphasizes Spanish colonial customs and family norms.

Chapter Two, “A Revolution in the Making for Women’s Full Participation: 1959-1974,” is a historical narrative about the first phase of the women’s movement. This chapter introduces the three main female leaders of the Cuban Revolution and highlights the agenda for the liberation of Cuban women. I provide two examples from women who lived through the social transformation in Cuba before 1959 and right after. These biographies are suggestive of how Cuban women as a whole attempted to socially transform.

Chapter Three, “The Socialist Morality of the Family Code: Revolutionary Identity and Family Reform,” consists of the second phase of the Cuban women’s movement. This chapter focuses on the causes and development of the Family Code of 1975. It first introduces the goals of the Cuban state and how it attempted to change the Cuban morality into a socialist morality by educating Cubans about socialism and Che Guevara’s notion of the “new man.” In this particular case, women who accepted the revolution were considered transformed into the “new woman.” In this chapter I integrate the short biography of Inocencia Acosta Felipe, who is the perfect example of a transformed revolutionary woman.

Finally, the epilogue addresses the sex tourist exchange within the Cuban tourist industry. The goals of Cuban womanists, the FMC—the Family Code, and the Cuban state show how it failed to maintain equality later after the fall of the Soviet Union after 1991. The era from 1991 and thereafter is considered the Special Period when Cuba drastically underwent an economic crisis. Due to lack of many sources, the Cuban embarked on a special program to restore old hotels and resorts, leisure activities, and beaches to revive its tourist industry. The island relied on its tourist industry as a source of revenue to aid the struggling economy. Though not enough to survive on just the Cuban salary, Cuban women, and men, are lured into prostitution to economically survive and prosper. As the rise of sex tourism grew in Cuba, the principle of the state of eliminating prostitution is one example of a failed attempt to create the communist utopian world.

# Chapter One

## Women in Pre-Revolutionary Cuba: Setting the Stage for a Women's Movement

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The women's movement in prerevolutionary Cuba set the stage for the women's liberation movement in postrevolutionary Cuba. Cuban women proved to men that they too were capable of more than traditional domestic burdens, such as child bearing and housework, by participating in the Cuban Revolution as *guerilleras*. Cuban guerrilleras believed they were continuing to practice their traditional roles as *mambisas*, female guerrilleras. They demonstrated that even though their tasks as women were different they were not inferior to men. By understanding certain Cuban patriarchal conceptions, derived from Spanish colonial customs, helps understand the gender roles prior to the Cuban Revolution, as well the status of women in general in Latin America, that sparked a "revolution within a revolution." In turn, educated and middle class Cubans fought against the inequalities inflicted by the Batista regime, many of them whom participated were middle class Cuban women. This chapter seeks to explain what sparked a women's movement in postrevolutionary Cuba and why.

### **SPANISH COLONIALISM, GENDER, AND FAMILY NORMS**

Many 20<sup>th</sup> century Cubans, as well as many others in Latin American countries, still held fast to the concept of the Spanish *patria potestad*, or the father's privilege.<sup>1</sup> This system allowed men to take control over their wives and children. Women were expected to act submissively, docile, and in a maternal manner. Motherhood became the priority

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Dore, *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 23.

and pride for Latina feminism. These characteristics were embedded by *marianismo*, which refers to the attributes of the Virgin Mary. Like the Virgin, women were expected to suffer in silent, bound to act passively, submit under their fathers and husbands, all traits that exemplified the Virgin Mary.<sup>2</sup> The only acceptable occupation women were allowed to conduct was to help children and the disadvantaged. The Church supervised these tasks through Catholic charity organizations. If women challenged male authority, men had legal right to violently repress them as a punishment. Women were confined in the house conducting household duties while the men worked and hung around the bars with their *compadres*. In Cuba, the women were relegated to the private sphere, the *casa*, and the men to the public, the *calle*.<sup>3</sup> Gender discrimination happened at every level of society but lower class women had to work to make ends meet. Lower class women were under same *patria potestad* standards but they did not have the protection that money and power provided. Impoverished, many lower class women were unwed and worked outside the home.<sup>4</sup>

The sexual division of labor began in Cuba after the emancipation of slaves occurred. Before, of course, slaves did not work for wages and gender discrimination based on sex in the labor field did not exist. Men and women all conducted the same task. It was after the liberation of slaves, “sexual discrimination started only... when women

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<sup>2</sup> The Virgin Mary in the Catholic religion is very essential and symbolic all over Latin America. Catholicism was brought over in Latin America as the dominant religion during the Spanish conquest in the thirteenth hundred. As customary, every woman must resemble and adhere to the life the Virgin Mary lived, which the Spanish called *marianismo*.

<sup>3</sup> Helen Safa, "The Matrifocal Family and Patriarchal Ideology in Cuba and the Caribbean" *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (2005): 320, and Lynn K Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform: 1898-1940*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 14.

and men began competing for wages."<sup>5</sup> Working class women had to tend and support their children. Typically, Latin American working class women had numerous children and gender discrimination became evident in that social class.<sup>6</sup> Gender discrimination did not exist until these working class women began asking for help. The lower class women were burdened more with work, household duties, and motherhood. Unable to carry the entire load themselves, women by the twentieth century demanded help.

In the gender aspect, the ethics of honor also carried unequal balance. A man had honor if he held his position as a father or husband who provided and protected for his family. A man was honorable if he was honest, loyal, and exercised its authority over the family and the entire household in the eyes of society. Women were honorable if they kept passive, kept their virginity until marriage, and as wives they need to be faithful and innocent. To continue being virtuous as a married woman, she also had to maintain her reputation, much in a *marian* way. She was to keep silent, almost invisible in the presence of men. If they acted on the contrary, women were considered blatant and scandalous, and this lack of shame was dishonorable to her and to her entire family. Also, the father's and/or the husband's honor depended on his daughter's and wife's reputation. If the female in his household violated this code either through infidelity, cheating, sex before marriage, or having a child out of wedlock, then the man of the house (and the rest of the males in the family) would be dishonored before the community. This reminded men to keep control over women. On the contrary, if kept hidden, men could violate this code without losing their honor. Men could seduce other women, making the female at

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<sup>5</sup> Muriel Nazzari, "Sex/Gender Arrangements and the Reproduction of Class in the Latin American Past," in *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice 1997*, edited by Elizabeth Dore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Muriel Nazzari, "Sex/Gender Arrangements," (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), 136.

fault if she fell for it; thereby dishonoring the female. Lower class women usually fell for the men's seduction mostly because they had less protection of men and money.

Therefore, women had to be very careful of their reputation because the families' livelihood depended on its honor. Honor; therefore, contributed to gender discrimination in Latin America.

Honor had two types: one of virtue and the other of status. The honor of status, of course, related to social class and the amount of wealth a family contained. If one lost his wealth or descended down on the social ladder, then the family or individual lost its honor as well. Also, a family held honor if the family kept inheriting "pure" Spanish blood. If the family interracially mixed with Islamic, Indian, or African/Afro-Cuban blood then the honor of the family was injured. Hence, Afro-Cuban women were the most discriminated.

### **CUBAN WOMEN IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

The early women's reform movement grew amongst the elite during the 1920s and the 1930s. Cuban women were the first to promote social reforms in Cuba. This movement succeeded in political rights, such as voting, and better social conditions for women. Cubans did not want to challenge male dominance but asked for the "protection of men" to become better mothers through education and welfare. They requested protection to women who had illegitimate children in which allowed mothers to ask for child support.<sup>7</sup> Although full equality and justice was not granted to women yet, this wave of a women's social movement was a start in Cuban history.

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Safa, "The Matrifocal Family and Patriarchal Ideology in Cuba and the Caribbean," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 10, no. 2 (2005): 327 & Lynn K Stoner, *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform: 1898-1940*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 14.

When Batista took power in 1952, he continued the “vicious circle,” that governed Cuba corruptibly favoring foreign investors.<sup>8</sup> Since 1898, the United States had influence and political control over Cuba when Cuba gained independence from Spain. The Teller Amendment, a joint resolution between Cuba and the United States enacted on April 20, 1898, appropriated military influence over Cuba. The Teller Amendment established a U.S. militant surveillance until the U.S. withdrew military occupancy in 1903. The Teller Amendment was succeeded by the Platt Amendment, which established U.S. right to intervene in Cuban relations and protect Cuba from foreign intervention that would threaten Cuban independence. In addition to this promise, the Amendment restricted Cuban sugar trade to prefer U.S. market, and other provisions in which established a U.S. Cuban monopoly over exploiting Cuban soil. These viscous ways cycled under the control of the U.S. as long as the U.S. had standing relations with the current Cuban dictator.<sup>9</sup>

Inequality reigned in the workplace because workingwomen worked longer hours for less pay. Cuban men believed that women should be paid less, which brings in the colonial myth of the “breadwinner wage.” The breadwinner wage meant that men are the natural breadwinners of the family and main financial supporters. In result, working class women sought other economical means for work and additional income. Many women turned to prostitution by the early twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> During the Batista’s regime, Cuba grew immensely and came to be known as the playground and “brothel and

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Revolution Reconsidered*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Helen Safa, “Economic Restructuring and Gender Subordination,” *Rereading Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Political Economy of Gender*, edited by Jennifer Abbassi and Sheryl L. Lytjens, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher’s Inc., 2002), 44-45.

gambling getaway,” for foreign tourists, particularly these from the United States.<sup>11</sup> For wives who worked, they were only seen as supplementary wage earners before 1975 when Cuba implemented the Family Code, which required men to help the women with household duties. This challenged male dominance in Cuba, because women, who now had paid occupations, no longer depended on their husband’s wages.<sup>12</sup> This result will further be discussed as it had other consequences on family and marriage.

The Cuban economy collapsed in 1958 and thousands went unemployed. Panhandling became evident in the cities. Over five thousand homeless women and children roamed the streets of Havana unable to work. Most of the time they were found begging on church steps. Urban slums expanded. Out of necessity, young women sought to make other means in sex work because vices dominated the cities and resort areas. Havana was transformed “into a commercialized vice of all sorts, underwritten by organized crime from the United States and protected by Batista’s police officials.” Illegal drugs, brothels, gambling casinos took over as popular industries. By the end of 1950s over 270 brothels were in full operation and over 11,500 women earned their living as sex workers for tourists, gamblers, and mobs in Havana.<sup>13</sup> Cuban women, “prior to 1959, ...suffered the extreme oppression that is characteristic of countries dominated

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<sup>11</sup> Helen Safa, “Economic Restructuring and Gender Subordination,” (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher’s Inc., 2002),44-45, and Julia Sweig, *Cuba: What Everyone Needs to Know*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Safa, “Economic Restructuring and Gender Subordination,” *Rereading Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, (2002), 46.

<sup>13</sup> Louis A Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 303-306, and Adelina Vazquez, *La Mujer: Una Revolución Dentro La Revolución*, (Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial ORBE 1982), 11-17.

by imperialism.”<sup>14</sup> This brought heavy restraints on women’s rights and contributed to the deterioration of Cuban women’s status.

Cuban women took the opportunity to practice their revolutionary heritage as *mambisas*. Women united in movements and protests in the streets of Havana against Batista for their loss of husbands and disappeared children.<sup>15</sup> Mambisa is the feminine form of *mambises*, who were called by the Spanish to define Cuban rebels in the Cuban War of Independence of 1898. *Mambisas* were upper and middle class women, who were wives and mothers that left their homes, picked up arms, and fought alongside the war with men (with fathers and/or husbands).<sup>16</sup> These revolutionary characteristics and acts of heroism were introduced to young women and daughters in each generation as a tradition. By the mid 1950s during the guerilla raids against Batista, Cuban women added to the tradition that *mambisas* also included women with guns hidden in their skirts, teaching, fund raising for the cause, radio, and publishing revolutionary newspapers.

Cubans, especially those who opposed Batista, suffered tyranny. Those who opposed the Batista regime were taken into custody, tortured, and some disappeared. The North American mafia controlled and owned every casino, most hotels, and the sex tourism industry in Havana. Thousands of children were kidnapped and sold into the sex trade “to lure rich US pedophiles.”<sup>17</sup> Batista let drug trades and child prostitution run

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches and Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin & Others* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Adelina Vazquez, *La Mujer: Una Revolución Dentro La Revolución*, (Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial ORBE 1982), 18-19.

<sup>16</sup> Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005), 62.

<sup>17</sup> Celia Sánchez, personal letters to Nora Peters, quoted in Rich Haney, *Celia Sanchez: The Legend of Cuba’s Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Pub, 2005), 10 & 21.

amok without restrictions. He looked the other way while the United States “raped”<sup>18</sup> Cuba of its riches, as Celia Sánchez described it. For example, the “U.S. businesses owned 90 percent of Cuba’s mines, 80 percent of its public utilities, 50 percent of its railways, 40 percent of its sugar production, and 25 percent of its bank deposits.”<sup>19</sup> U.S businessmen bought lands that were the only source of food survival for peasants. North American mafias harassed peasants in southern province of Cuba where Celia Sánchez was born. Celia Sánchez was born in Media Luna, Oriente where she grew to love the countryside and the peasantry of Cuba. From the words of Celia Sánchez, she stated, “From the very outset of the Batista dictatorship, the Mafia was America’s partner in the rape and robbery of Cuba.”<sup>20</sup>

Sánchez’s motive to fight against Batista was personal because children were disappearing in the eastern province of Cuba where Sánchez grew up. Her roots in this area were far-reaching, and intensely intimate. She was born and raised on a family farm from a middle class family. Her father was the community doctor who provided free health care to his peasant workers. Sánchez, a trained nurse provided care to these peasants in her father’s practice; as a result she grew extremely attached to the peasant workers under their care. So much so that she raised a peasant girl, María Ochoa, as her own. Celia’s María Ochoa became one of many victims of Cuba’s child sex slave industry.

In 1953, Ochoa, at the age of ten, had been missing for days. Several days later one of Celia’s closest friends, who worked in Havana at a high-end casino found Ochoa’s

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<sup>18</sup> Celia Sánchez, personal letters to Nora Peters, quoted in Rich Haney, *Celia Sanchez*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

body in the basement of the casino. She was “used up and thrown away” by a wealthy North American gambler who requested a young girl for the night. Triggered by this tragic situation, Sánchez could tolerate no more abuse. Since the North American Mafia orchestrated this type of crime in which Batista allowed it by not making these vices illegal, Sánchez declared war on both Batista and the Mafia. Since Batista was beholden to U.S. interest, Sánchez essentially had declared war on the U.S. as well. As Sánchez laid her goddaughter’s body to rest, she discovered in María’s clutched hand a gold cross and a broken chain, which Sánchez would carry for the rest of her life as a promise of vengeance. Sánchez said aloud, “I will keep your cross and the broken chain and carry it with me where I must go. I will make them pay for what they did to you and for what they are doing to Cuba. Then I will get your broken chain repaired so I can wear it around my neck to honor you forever.”

Sánchez, alone, organized, educated, and trained peasants to revolt against Batista in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Although without a name, the organization was formed shortly after Sánchez heard of Castro’s Moncada Barracks attack on July 26, 1953. She knew it would be extremely difficult to fight against Batista since the Mafia and the United States fully supported him. But her love for María Ochoa, the countryside, and the peasants compelled her to do something about it.

Sánchez later met Fidel Castro’s Rebel Army in 1957 in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. After their first meeting in November of 1957, Sánchez told Castro that she and her group “would fight to [the] death.”<sup>21</sup> Like Castro and her beloved father, Sánchez was also anti-imperialist and fought for socialist reform. She was the one who

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 11.

nurtured, fed, educated, and organized Castro's guerrilla group. Influenced by Castro from the beginning, Sánchez became one of the key members of the Rebel Army well after 1959 and provoked Cuba's legal reforms. In fact, Sánchez was the primary decision maker in legal policies in the Cuban Communist Party. Often these decisions were for the benefit of women and children.<sup>22</sup> If it were not for Sánchez's courage to fight against the "big monster," there would be no Cuban Revolution. Castro's Rebel Army would have failed in the Sierra Maestra Mountains without the support of Sánchez and her peasant army.<sup>23</sup>

Partaking in the Cuban Revolution particularly increased access to education for women. If women received any education at all prior to Castro's uprising, it was from the Church who taught them the virtues of motherhood. Women were only valued for childbearing and the Church did not want women to know that love was pleasurable. Women were taught that their place belonged in the home doing domestic work and having children: women were not encouraged to use their intellects. These principles contrasted with the *mambisas* movement because they believed that women could work, participate in the cause, and be mothers at the same time. Little by little, through Celia Sánchez, woman's efforts began paying off.<sup>24</sup>

Women from the Rebel Army recruited and trained women in the nation's first female platoon. In honor of Mariana Grajales, Castro and Sánchez fashioned the Mariana Grajales Platoon on September 4, 1958. Mariana Grajales, a conspicuous revolutionary woman during the Ten Years' War, became a legendary hero for all women in Cuba. She

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<sup>22</sup> This will later be discussed in Chapter Two, "A Revolution in the Making For Women's Full Participation: 1959-1974."

<sup>23</sup> Rich Haney, *Celia Sanchez: The Legend of Cuba's Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Pub, 2005), 29.

<sup>24</sup> Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), page 15-16.

resembles the *mambisa* women because she sacrificed almost all of her eleven sons to the cause. It was Mariana who influenced her family to contribute to the rebel forces. She taught her children about the colonial government's injustices to the Afro-Cuban people. Her daughter-in-law, Maria Cabrales, wrote that as soon as Mariana heard the news of the outbreak of the war, she made all her children swear to give their lives for their country. Mariana and her daughters accompanied Mariana's sons when they all joined the rebel army. Mariana then was almost sixty, and she worked in the rebel camps cooking, attending the soldiers, mending their clothes, and acted as a midwife or nurse. Living in the mountains, even after losing several of her sons in battle, Mariana continued to be part of the cause for ten years. She died in 1893 but she became the symbol of the female warrior, or *mambisa*, one who exercised her motherly skills and sacrificed her children, and last years of her life to the cause for *Cuba Libre*, Free Cuba.<sup>25</sup>

Women, who became involved in the Revolution in any way, risked being shunned by friends and especially by family. Many mothers and especially fathers opposed of their daughters joining the rebellion. Many ladies participated in the revolution because many "were motivated to do all these things because they wanted to be part of the changes which they hoped would lead to a better life for the masses of working people and peasants." Women did not yet participate "with a full consciousness of the need for women's equality." Instead, they participated because it was their right and responsibility to establish "equal rights" for all in Cuba.<sup>26</sup>

Even within the Rebel Army, women encountered sexism by their own comrades. However, Castro defended the combatant women. He stated "some of the rebel fighters

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<sup>25</sup> Teresa Prados-Torreira, *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2005), 64-66.

<sup>26</sup> Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 11.

were furious, because they didn't like the idea of a platoon made up of women." He defended them by stating that "they are better fighters" than his own men. Fidel Castro promised, "to involve masses of women," because they have shown themselves capable and passionate fighters. Chauvinism was so bad that the town's people greeted militia women with rocks when they arrived.<sup>27</sup>

The women's movement in prerevolutionary Cuba previewed the radical change that awaited Cuban society, and most importantly the status of Cuban women. After the triumph of 1959, one of the main objectives was to change the norms of the male authoritative society to include women equally. Once Cuba declared itself a communist country, the political ideology for all meant that women had an equal right to participate in society. Since the establishment of the regime, statistics show more women were able to work and enter more professions. Women were given more opportunities even in politics. At home, men, husbands, and fathers still had that mindset of the antique colonial Spanish thinking. Women still had to complete their duties at home as wives and mothers making it difficult for them to work. In order to understand how difficult this was, a brief analysis of the past shows what these gender roles were, what was expected from women especially working women, and how does this feminist movement play into the revolutionary movement. The new government in Cuba knew that people could not change overnight, however, this movement took approximately 15 years to come up with a strategic code to push the rights for the next generation to come.

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<sup>27</sup> Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 7 and Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Revolution Reconsidered*, (2006), 44.

## Chapter Two

# “A Revolution in the Making for Women’s Full Participation: 1959-1975”

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A dramatic change awaited women in terms of liberation following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. General Secretary of the *Federación Mujeres Cubanas* (Federation of Cuban Women), Yolanda Ferrer, expressed this belief stating, “From the first day of the revolution, what it meant to be a female began to change. Prejudice started to lose ground.”<sup>1</sup> Within the Cuban Revolution, women fought to change Spanish Colonial ways of thinking about women being inferior to men. In fact, such a concern was already addressed in the Cuban Constitution of 1940. The constitution declared discrimination illegal based on race or sex. Yet, general equality had not arrived to Cuba by 1959.<sup>2</sup>

Cuban women endured centuries of exploitation prior to 1959. Corruption spread through tourist sectors in the city of Havana in which affected women’s status. Poverty was rampant in Cuba and the majority of Cubans were lower class. There were hundreds of thousands of illiterate women, most of whom worked as domestic servants or in desperate situations as prostitutes. Domestic servants worked long hours for humiliating wages, averaging less than a \$1.50 USD a day. Sex workers earned just one and a half Cuban pesos per service. Tens of thousands of prostitutes filled the city’s tourist regions ready to serve heavy gamblers in casinos or clubs. The primary cause of Cuba’s great

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<sup>1</sup>Yolanda Ferrer, interview by Isabel Moya, “What It Meant to Be Female Began to Change,” *Women in Cuba, The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution: From Santiago de Cuba and the Rebel Army, to the Birth of the Federation of Cuban Women* edited by Mary Alice Waters, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012) 203.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches & Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espín & Others*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 41.

amount of illiteracy persisted from the fact that many Cubans were denied access to education, medical care, and leisure activities. Most women gave birth in their homes because only the privileged had access to hospitals. Only a few worked as secretaries, teachers, clerks, and as nurses. Within the tourist sections of Havana, the North American mafia organized the buying and selling of kidnapped Cuban children to wealthy pedophiles. During the Batista regime women were robbed of these basic necessities: medical care, education, and employment. Thus, thousands of women enthusiastically and courageously joined Castro's Revolution when the opportunity came.<sup>3</sup>

Women who fought alongside Castro constituted the new wave of post revolutionary women's movement in Cuba. The first phase of the Cuban women's movement occurred from 1959 to 1974. The primary objective then was to mobilize women to fully participate in the development of Cuba, which was to continue and progress as a communist state. Cuban revolutionaries recognized Cuba's 1940 Cuban Constitution, and they wanted to work to fully enforce these laws. For example, the constitution provided employment to all regardless of age or sex. Castro was so influenced and inspired by these female revolutionaries that he publicly recognized that the women's movement was a transformation in Cuba because women began to participate in nontraditional employment<sup>4</sup>. For the first time in Cuban history women were trained as technicians, possessed positions as leaders of the Cuban Communist Party, administered federal government secret services, and led some the country's most important social organizations.

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<sup>3</sup> Vilma Espin, *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches & Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin & Others*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 42, & Rich Haney, *Celia Sanchez: The Legend of Cuba's Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Pub, 2005), 25.

<sup>4</sup>Fidel Castro, "A Revolution Within a Revolution," Edited by Elizabeth Stone in *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 32.

After 1959, Cuban women grew stronger by creating an organization called Federación Mujer Cubanas (hereafter FMC) to unite revolutionary women to work for their country. Thousands of women all over Cuba became members of the FMC with the goal to unite, train, and educate all Cuban women in the socialist principles of the revolution. The primary goal was focused on the participation of women in the revolution and to become familiar with socialism. In order to motivate women to contribute, the Cuban government stressed the importance for every Cuban citizen to transform into the “new man,” for the new society Castro was trying to create.<sup>5</sup> In 1963 Castro proclaimed Cuba a communist state, although he and his regime already practiced socialism since his early years as a lawyer.<sup>6</sup> The Cuban Communist Party was established in 1965 to aid in this process. In order for a socialist society to work, every citizen had to contribute to the revolution, which meant that one must abide and believe in the revolution to become a revolutionary. The Federation of Cuban Women, as well as coed political organizations, advocated for political and social change in Cuba. Essentially, the federation became the backbone of this women’s activist movement.

After women gained full participation in society, they experienced inequality and gender discrimination within the home because of traditional expectations. Issues within the family became a burden for women who had a revolutionary obligation to society. Women carried most of the family’s responsibilities alone, thus creating the double burden: work and motherhood. Cuban women then realized that the core of the double

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of the “new man,” and “new women,” will be discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>6</sup> It is not evident when exactly Castro declared himself socialist or communist, but it is evident he practiced socialism or at least civil rights activity during his college years as a law student prior to 1953 when he organized student protests against Batista. On July 26, 1953, Castro attempted to overthrow Batista. In his defense in court, Castro spoke about the inequalities against the Cuban people in his “History Will Absolve Me,” four hour speech on October 16, 1953.

standard problem began in the family with their husbands. There was no gender equality within the home, and to fully execute the practices of socialism this issue needed to be addressed. After fifteen years of struggle, the Family Code was finally instituted in 1975 to address the double standard.<sup>7</sup>

In 1960, women worked a double revolution (feminist and socio-political) in order to fully integrate women's participation in the revolution. The government intervened in the public domain by providing more employment opportunities. Women wanted full integration and full participation in the revolution but they faced pervasive *machismo*, a patriarchal structure that increased inequality and contributed to women's degradation. For example, Monica Reyes, a middle class Cuban women, married and with two children, was in her early twenties in 1959 when she witnessed opposition from men against the revolution. She stated that:

...it is especially true in Cuba, where machismo is carried to extremes...It's a rare man who feels that his wife is a person in her own right, and should have the opportunity to find fulfillment in her work. At the moment it's the social pressure that activates the majority of men into living up to the ideal of the Revolution, but this will eventually work a change in their basic attitudes.<sup>8</sup>

Señora. Reyes, fortunately, had a revolutionary husband, meaning he supported his wife's efforts to attend school and work in politics by hiring a domestic worker to help with her two children. She even witnessed revolutionary men who did not support their wives working. For example, she explained:

Even so, there are a few revolutionaries, and good ones too, who don't hesitate to boast, 'my wife is no working woman.' I've argued with some of them, 'you don't have moral right to ask me to hammer a nail in the wall if you forbid your

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter Three will specifically analyze in depth the provisions the Family Code provided in regards to equality within marriage and domestic relations.

<sup>8</sup> Monica Ramos Reyes, interviewed by Oscar Lewis, "New Developments," in *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 114-116.

own wife to work. My husband is made of flesh and blood just like you. He'd like to have me waiting for him when he comes home, but he lets me work all the same.<sup>9</sup>

This is an example of government intervention in the private sphere due to gender discrimination within the family. In part, government intervention in the public and the private was essential due to communist ideals.

According to communist ideology, each family constitutes a cell in society; therefore, each family is essential to the entire nation. In order for the government to end women's exploitation, reformation must start. This was a new paradigm for the people of Cuba. With these new provisions, the revolution offered potential to women as much as women offered potential to the revolution. The actual phenomenon is that the revolution benefited women because it attempted to end gender discrimination, bring equality, and illuminate the worth and value of *mujeres cubanas* in the revolutionary process. Below are more examples of women who were interviewed before the Family Code was implemented. Their testimonies demonstrate the discrimination they faced by men and the harsh conditions they lived under Batista rule. They are a product of not only Castro's revolution but a product of the women's movement within the revolution. Although from different backgrounds, communism offered a better life and an improved lifestyle for Mónica Reyes and Pilar Gonzáles. Both received help from the federation in one way or another, and resembled the socialist model thereafter.

## ***II. REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN AND THEIR INFLUENCE/ROLES IN THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT***

Celia Sánchez, one of three heroic revolutionary women, was the first to lead the women's struggle for liberation. As a prominent mambisa from 1959, Sánchez became

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<sup>9</sup> Monica Ramos Reyes, "New Developments," *Four Women*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 114-116.

Cuba's female role model because she served as Castro's right hand. She was one of the first females in the Cuban Communist Party along with revolutionary leaders Haydee Santamaría and Vilma Espín, who co-authored the Family Code. With determination these women were the first to lead Cuban women by helping them explore their capabilities and intelligence.

It is evident that women, particularly Celia Sánchez, heavily influenced Fidel Castro. In the movie *Che* by Steven Soderbergh, Sánchez is constantly at Fidel's side during the guerilla wars in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, even in combat. While in jail, following the failed Moncada Barrack attack on July 26, 1953, Castro already admired Sánchez. In fact, says Rich Haney, when Fidel reached the Sierra Maestra in 1957, "Fidel joined *her* revolution, not the other way around."<sup>10</sup> They both admired each other, and promised each other in their letters that would will join platoons in the mountains.<sup>11</sup> Letters from Celia Sánchez to her African-American friend, Nora Peters, revealed to Rich Haney that Sánchez was the major decision maker of the Communist Party. Sometimes, Castro would sit back "and kick his boots while Sánchez drafted laws and worked."<sup>12</sup>

Sánchez's personal drive for the revolution deeply inspired Castro, and in a way felt sympathy for Sánchez's reason to fight against Batista. Sánchez's drive for the revolution comes with a history of compassion for the peasants, women, and children who suffered terribly under the Batista regime.

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<sup>10</sup> Rich Haney, "Celia Cherished Each Fidel's Birthday," *Cubaninsider*, August 13, 2011, <http://cubaninsider.blogspot.com/2011/08/celia-sanchez-today-august-13-2011-is.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Rich Haney, *Celia Sanchez: The Legend of Cuba's Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Pub, 2005), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Rich Haney, "Celia Sanchez & Fidel Castro at Work and Relaxation," *Cubaninsider*, August 12, 2011, <http://cubaninsider.blogspot.com/2011/08/celia-sanchez-fidel-castro-at-work.html>.

What hurt Sánchez to the core and sparked her to fight back against Batista was the murder and the kidnap of her ten-year-old goddaughter, María Ochoa. After she buried Ochoa, Sánchez expressed that she now possessed a revolutionary heart. She assured, “*Vamos a ganar, María. Vamos a ganar.*” (‘We will win María. We will win’).<sup>13</sup> Sánchez did not return home the next day. Instead, she headed straight east of Cuba where she successfully recruited and fashioned her own peasant revolutionary army in the Sierra Maestra, apart from Castro. By this time, Castro was in prison and became well known throughout Cuba for his “History Will Absolve Me” speech.

In the midst of the country’s upheaval, Sánchez created her own revolution to end the tyranny under the Batista regime. Once Fidel heard about Sánchez, they exchanged letters that showed his admiration of Sánchez’s revolutionary heart. Castro praised Sánchez for her work, and stated in one of her letters that, “I close my eyes and what I see is Celia’s Cuba—not Batista’s, not the Mafia’s and not America’s. One day I plan to help you make Celia’s Cuba a reality.” Sánchez even described Castro’s infatuation with her in one of her letters to Nora Roberts. “From the first moment I looked into his eyes,” she wrote, “Nora, I knew that he was in awe of me, maybe worshipful. In retrospect, I guess I felt the same about him”<sup>14</sup> Eventually, Castro and Sánchez met face to face on November 30, 1956.

After they joined forces, Sánchez became Castro’s right hand and remained so even after the triumph of the revolution. Sánchez was the foremost leader of all revolutionary women. Sánchez was appointed in high government positions in which

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<sup>13</sup> Rich Haney, *Celia Sánchez: The Legend of Cuba’s Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 20-25.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Haney, *Celia Sánchez: The Legend of Cuba’s Revolutionary Heart*, (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 63.

men in Cuban history never served. For example, one of her first leadership positions was officially assigned in January of 1959 as Secretary to the Commander in Chief, “and this meant, in practical terms, that the new ministers, formerly members of the revolutionary army, could still rely on her to interpret what Fidel wanted.”<sup>15</sup> Sánchez served as a powerful woman and an inspiration not only to Fidel but to women all over Cuba.

Haydee Santamaria, Sánchez’s comrade, is another legendary rebel woman of Cuba. She first partook in Castro’s Moncada Barracks attack when she, her brother, and her fiancé were captured on July 26, 1953. Santamaría suffered torture by Batista policemen. Blindfolded, she was forced to hear her fiancé’s, Reynoldo Boris Luis Santa Coloma, torment as he was being tortured to death. When officials took off her blindfold, they rubbed her fiancé’s testicles on her face and chest. She was imprisoned, but was released shortly afterwards and met up with Sánchez in the mountains. Santamaría, according to Haney, became the second most important female guerilla fighter after Celia Sánchez.<sup>16</sup>

The third most notable female heroine of the Cuban Revolution is Vilma Espín. Espín played an important role in the women’s movement. Celia Sánchez and Haydee Santamaría worked in the background in political lawmaking, while Espín was the face of the feminist movement. She first participated in the student struggles against Batista in March 10, 1952. In 1952 she “belonged” to the Revolutionary National Movement. She became involved with Oriente National Action, and Revolutionary National Action. As part of Castro’s 26 of July Movement, she became one of the first members as a coordinator in the Oriente Province in April 1957. While Castro was in Mexico as a

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<sup>15</sup> Nancy Stout, *One Day in December: Celia Sanchez and the Cuban Revolution*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013), 328.

<sup>16</sup> Haney, *Celia Sanchez: The Legend of Cuba’s Revolutionary Heart*, (2005), 37-38.

Cuban exile, Espín assumed national responsibilities for the 26 of July Movement. She was responsible for the preparations in the Sierra Maestra Mountains for Castro's arrival of the *Granma* in 1957. In 1958, Espín was wanted by Batista and had to change her name to Monica, and then used the alias Debora when she joined Frank País' Rebel Army and served in the Second Front in Oriente. At that time when women were less suspected as insurgents, they often acted as spies, messengers, and carriers of weapons under their skirts.<sup>17</sup>

After the triumph of the Revolution, Espín fully devoted her life to the cause. She married Raul Castro, who led the Revolutionary Armed Forces from 1959 to 2008. He and Espín had four children together. Espín served as the president of the Federación Mujer Cubana since its founding in 1960 and vice president of the International Federation of Democratic Women since 1973. Above all, she was one of the first females, along with Celia Sánchez, to be a member of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee since its founding in 1965. She has served on the Council of State since 1976, and a member of the Political Bureau since 1980.<sup>18</sup> In 1989, Espín was director of the National Center on Sex Education at its founding as one of her national responsibilities after 1959.

With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in January of 1959, three exceptional female rebels, Vilma Espín, Celia Sánchez, and Haydee Santamaría, helped create Cuba's prominent feminist organization. They personally involved themselves with the revolution carrying dangerous militant tasks. From post-revolutionary Cuba, they set the

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<sup>17</sup> Deborah Shnookal, in introduction to *Thirty Years After the Revolution: Cuban Women Confront the Future*, (Australia: Ocean Press, 1990), xi & Vilma Espin, *Women in Cuba, The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 11-13 and 188.

<sup>18</sup> Deborah Shnookal, in introduction to *Thirty Years After the Revolution: Cuban Women Confront the Future*, (Australia: Ocean Press, 1990), xi.

stage for other women to also participate in the struggle for women's liberation. Sánchez, Santamaría, and Espín are only a few of influential women of Cuba, but certainly the most well known. After 1959, these women helped create laws and created organizations that further improved and enhanced the lives of Cuban women.

### ***III. THE FMC AS THE REVOLUTION WITHIN CASTRO'S REVOLUTION***

On January 1, 1959, the doors opened to a better life economically and politically, bringing independence and social justice for women of Cuba. In some ways the Cuban Revolution had the feared domino effect because it sparked and influenced young adults all over the world in the 1960s. Mexico and the United States, for example, underwent social upheavals during that decade. Within the famous Cuban Revolution, women were more than energetic. They were ready to fully integrate themselves into their country's historical moment. From the influences of revolutionary leaders of the Rebel Army, women continually asked these female rebels what they could do to help. Women asked the leaders of Castro's administration, "How can we show support for the Revolution?" "What is most needed?" Espín and other guerilla leaders in turn trained ambitious women to be teachers to serve in the new schools created by the revolution. Many housewives volunteered, seeing teaching as an opportunity to do more than just domestic work. Women all over Cuba asked to learn more about the revolution and how they could support it. Organization was needed, and this gave birth to an organization that would later become Cuba's largest feminist association. The birth of the federation "arose not so much as a decision of the revolutionary leadership but as a response to the demand from masses of women from different layers of society who were already in action." Because of socialism, said Espín:

The constant struggle to make ends meet disappeared, and with it the antagonism between people competing for the crumbs that could help them escape the tragic destiny that awaited the majority. The revolution opened up new horizons in the economic, political and social fields and amongst its key principles is the defense of equal rights for all human beings.<sup>19</sup>

Espín remembers the first months after 1959 victory. “I remember being struck...by the large number of women, some carrying babies, who took part in demonstrations and street actions. There was strong support for the revolution, even before it had demonstrated its full meaning.”<sup>20</sup> Like Vilma Espín, these young female middle class college students were revolutionized by the contemporary ideals of the era. Revolutionary women quickly took action, encouraging other women to participate in this important revolution. Without even knowing it, these women conceived the women’s revolution within the revolution.

At the beginning of the revolution, women only wanted to participate but they feared being discriminated against. Women were motivated and inspired by *guerilleras* like Celia Sánchez, who fought in combat. Knowing that women were involved in combat, women realized that they too could become involved in one way or another. Vilma Espín expressed that since the revolution was organic, it was a “genuine revolution.” In essence, participation in the revolution was the only thing that mattered. Women advocated for the full integration of women’s participation in the revolution and

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<sup>19</sup> Vilma Espín, interview José Estrada Mendez, October 1987, “With No Perceptions,” *Women in Cuba, The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012) 217 & Vilma Espín, “A Revolution within a Revolution,” interviewed by Claudia *Mujer*, a Brazilian women’s magazine, September 1988, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Vilma Espín, interview José Estrada Mendez, October 1987 “With No Perceptions,” *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 217.

that meant the participation outside the home.<sup>21</sup> It was in the best interest of women to integrate themselves especially to those who fought in the mountains, who lost their children and/or husbands for the cause. Women are central to the family—so it was essential that they became involved with the rest of society. Vilma Espín expressed that if she were to explain the revolution in one word, she would say, “that it’s about participation.”<sup>22</sup>

The FMC grew and became known nationwide. It gained respect from the government and other Latin female organizations too notice. The organization was invited on May 1959 by the Women’s International Democratic Federation to participate in the Congress for the Rights for Women and Children in Santiago, Chile.<sup>23</sup> The event was scheduled for November of that year.

The federation acted quickly to promote its first trip. Members traveled all over Cuba, even to the rural areas, to promote the event. The delegates recruited were housewives, workers, members of political parties, peasant women, and women who fought in the guerrilla war. These committees of women helped with themes to present at the conference. The event was funded by contributions from the entire Cuban population. At that time, some businesses were still privately owned, and many of them donated to cover the cost of the huge mission. About eighty women were sent as Cuba’s first

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<sup>21</sup> Yolanda Ferrer, interview by Isabel Moya, “What It Meant to Be Female Began to Change,” *Women in Cuba*, edited by Mary Alice Waters (2012), 201, and Vilma Espín, interview José Estrada Mendez, October 1987 “With No Preconceptions,” *Women in Cuba*, edited by Mary Alice Waters, (2012), 223-224.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn K. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*, (Durkham: Duke University Press, 1991), 20, and Vilma Espín, interview José Estrada Mendez, October 1987, “With No Preconceptions,” in *Women in Cuba*, (2012) 226.

<sup>23</sup> Vilma Espín, “With No Perceptions,” *Women in Cuba*, 217.

women's delegation. Espín went with the group as the principle leader and president of the organization. "This was how the federation started," said Espín.<sup>24</sup>

The Congress for the Rights of Women and Children of 1959 laid the foundation of the FMC. There, Cuban women learned about other countries' issues regarding gender discrimination and the plight of Cuba's women became worldwide as well. Although Cuba just recently seen the triumph of the Revolution, Cuban women had a lot to talk about. They expressed the impediments they currently faced as revolutionaries, such as gender discrimination. Full of energy, the Cuban delegation was delighted and enchanted to express the triumph of the revolution. These women knew that they were the highlight of the event because their movement had sparked an influence to many young adults worldwide. No other country yet in Latin America was able to defeat an indirect war against the United States. They discussed the women's struggle against the bourgeois class and Batista's regime before the revolution, and they proudly discussed the developing revolution currently at home. As the group's speaker and leader, Espín addressed the future plans women had for the advancement and participation of Cuban women. Cuban women were "able to tell others about what was going on in Cuba, the meaning of this stage of struggle against the dictatorship, the new laws, the revolution that was unfolding."<sup>25</sup> In a way, this was raising consciousness and awareness to the world about women's needs.

The creation of the FMC began to unfold. The eighty delegates came back more inspired and motivated to organize a women's campaign. With the local committees already established, women began building a foundational hierarchy by electing leaders

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid 217-219.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 220.

from each chapter, then leaders from each city all the way up to the national level. This was the foundation of the FMC's local chapters all over Cuba. The federation functioned by voicing opinions within the local chapters. Each week or so, women met in their communities and discussed their issues and concerns. From the local level, these women brought these concerns to the leadership of the cities. From there, the major concerns were brought up for discussion at the national level. Women were passionate to work together wherever needed.

When the federation was formally constituted on August 23, 1960 on National Women's Day, they were already organized and ready to work. It was at this conference the organization was given its name by Fidel Castro. In this inauguration, Castro gave the federation their mission. Castro indicated that, "the task of the Federation of Cuban Women is to organize Cuban women, help them gain access to education and culture, help them advance in every conceivable way... This will give the revolution another point of strength, a new organized force, a tremendous social and revolutionary force."<sup>26</sup> Women began working first by educating women on the revolution's morality and principles. The federation was also assigned to establish children centers for the use of working mothers. It was the FMC's task to "advance in every conceivable way," and to fully contribute to society.

The FMC aimed to improve women's lives so that they could fully cooperate in developing Cuba. The FMC was in charge of "identifying and challenging the problems that face specifically women," and helped in the process of change.<sup>27</sup> For example the FMC, and the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), were in charge to

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<sup>26</sup> Fidel Castro, August 23, 1960, Havana, Cuba. Speech at founding of Federation of Cuban Women.

<sup>27</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, (Singapore: Wile-Blackwell, 2011), <sup>141</sup>.

look after a woman who failed to follow up in their health care appointments.<sup>28</sup> The federation also taught women about menstrual cycles, clean hygiene, and the importance of giving birth in medical centers. Most women were not aware of feminine hygiene in the eastern provinces of Cuba, particularly the peasant women. Fifty five percent of peasant women were illiterate. The federation became the vehicles for women to gather and talk about issues.<sup>29</sup>

The revolution did not end in 1959, as was commonly believed. The real revolution for Cuba was (and still is) to remain free from imperialism and grounded in the socialist/communist principles. That meant society had to change, along with its traditions and past Spanish thinking. The rebel women “epitomized the highest level of devotion to *la patria*, and was often deployed to remind men of their duty, or shame them into it.”<sup>30</sup> Castro and revolutionary women realized that work had to be done to change these political and social aspects of society.

By 1961 the FMC had proven itself to be more than just a feminine movement; it was also a true revolutionary and combatant organization. With the Bay of Pigs invasion that year women from the FMC took action. Apart from having an all-women’s militia force, the FMC women responded by forming a medical emergency unit called Medical Services Auxiliary Corps of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. Castro and Sánchez ordered the FMC to provide medical care for both Cuban combatants and those soldiers who were captured during the invasion. Federation women also provided food at nearby medical stations, as well as serving in a hundred kitchens and three hospitals. Women

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<sup>28</sup> Margaret Randall, *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later*, (New York: Smyrna Press, 1981), 60-62.

<sup>29</sup> Vilma Espín, interview José Estrada Mendez, October 1987, “With No Perceptions,” in *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 220.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, (1981), 7.

were mobilized to carry out tasks for the Cuban forces by supplying food, clothes, and medicine. Inocencia Acosta Felipe joined the militia 1961 and again in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Inocencia was married to a very jealous husband but found a way to train for Civil Defense by giving aid in case of natural disasters or in case of attacks. She remembers being “in mobilization during the October crisis... All we did was gather in one house, on the alert for orders from the CDR sectional office.” She remembers, “It was a very dangerous time, setting us all on edge.”<sup>31</sup> They also filled in on jobs when men left to go fight and protect Playa Girón, the site of the invasion. Since the invasion, Cuban women were compelled to volunteer in whatever way they could to carry out revolutionary activities and to protect their country from falling back into the hands of capitalists and U.S. backed counterrevolutionaries. Those counterrevolutionaries were exiled Cuban elites, who fled Cuba when Castro expropriated many wealthy lands for agriculture and nationalized famous hotels and casinos. For the rest of the year of 1961, the FMC became responsible for educating women on the importance of participating and continuing with the revolution.

The federation became responsible for educating Cuba. First, the FMC created in 1961 a school for young peasant women called Ana Betancourt School. There they taught about sewing, cooking, performing domestic work, child development for teachers in child care careers, and above all reading and writing up to a sixth grade level. That year more than 12,000 peasant women graduated. From there, the FMC launched the Literacy Campaign directed by Celia Sánchez. Monica Reyes, a young middle class woman, was

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<sup>31</sup> Inocencia Acosta Felipe, interview by Ruth M. Lewis and Oscar Lewis, “Getting Involved,” *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 379.

set to leave her family for the first time to volunteer for the Literacy Campaign in 1960.

She expressed joy over joining the revolution:

To me the campaign was such a great thing, such a historic event... It was a beautiful opportunity to experience perhaps one thousandth of the things Fidel had been through. I'd get to know people and be independent of my family for the very first time in my life. All those things were important to me. And then, after eight months to return and be able to say seven or eight men and women know how to read and write because I taught them.<sup>32</sup>

The FMC was responsible for setting up directors, counselors, teachers, assistants, and administrators for schools that benefited equally to all, including children.<sup>33</sup>

The FMC also set up child care centers, or *guarderías*, with an early childhood education curriculum. Daycare was essential because women were still, then, primarily responsible for raising and caring for their children even if they worked outside the home. Before the revolution, there was virtually no affordable childcare, much less free daycare for the lower class. Domestic workers left their children at home with themselves while they worked resulting in all sorts of accidents and casualties. For instance, many children burned after setting their own house on fire by accident. Occasionally, children drowned. Electricity was generally not available in rural areas and candles were used for light. Candles caught clothes or curtains on fire. Castro explained the condition of women who wanted to work. "There are women working who have no place to leave their children. There aren't enough children's circles. The state and the municipality can't change this themselves. Their resources are limited... There are human beings who can organize all

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<sup>32</sup> Monica Ramos Reyes, interview by Oscar Lewis, "Growing Up," *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 67.

<sup>33</sup> Yolanda Ferrer, interview by Isabel Moya, "What It Meant to Be Female Began to Change," *Women in Cuba, The Making of a Revolution Within the Revolution*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012) 211.

the children's circles the working women of Cuba need."<sup>34</sup> Such miserable conditions drove the state and revolutionary women to find a solution. Renee Reyes, a middle class woman, who converted into a revolutionary, sympathetic towards the domestic workers at her home. She said:

In those days I spent a lot of time with the maids of our house, and I enjoyed their company... At the age of seven I knew all about the maids' private lives... I'd go along and we'd go to their homes. I always felt fine there; in the most miserable shacks I was happy. I realized that if a maid had a child, that child was left alone while the maid worked for us, and I hated it when *mama* dawdles over dinner... I suffered a lot for them.<sup>35</sup>

Children circles were established as an educational environment for children.

Castro promised that the centers "should be a place where children are educated, taken care of, where they are treated with love, where they learn."<sup>36</sup> Women were trained to be providers also. Women were also trained abroad to specialize as teachers in early childhood education. Teachers looked after the children's health and nutrition, to help keep them from getting sick. Many peasant women volunteered to be trained as teachers. Others were also trained as cooks, educated on the importance of a healthy diet and nutrition. Establishing children circles was part of the FMC's priorities since it greatly benefitted working mothers. However, centers were created slowly as it was expensive to sustain and pay employees all at the same time. Cuba, by 1960, operated on limited resources due to the embargo, and later the "Blockade" in 1962, imposed by the U.S.

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<sup>34</sup> Fidel Castro, August 23, 1960, Havana, Cuba. Speech at founding of Federation of Cuban Women, and Vilma Espin, interview Jose Estrada Mendez, October 1987, "With No Perceptions," in *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 246-247.

<sup>35</sup> Renee Ramos Reyes, interview by Oscar Lewis, "My Family," in *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Fidel Castro, August 23, 1960, Havana, Cuba. Speech at founding of Federation of Cuban Women & Vilma Espin, interview October 1987, "With No Perceptions," in *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 247-248.

against Cuba.<sup>37</sup> Such acts did not stop Cuban women from spreading the revolution throughout Cuba. Cuba needed to be educated so the rest of the country would not fall back into imperialist hands, and that spared the campaign to end illiteracy. During the Batista regime, education was intentionally denied so the people would not revolt. Based on this rationale, Castro and Sanchez especially made sure that every Cuban received an education.

The FMC focused on ending illiteracy in Cuba. Night schools were established for domestic workers in which childcare centers helped married and single mothers alike to attend night school. The FMC taught many women and men on all levels. Women were encouraged to take classes so they could learn to read, write, and further their education. Most of these campaigns were in the rural parts of Cuba since more than fifty five percent of Cubans in the eastern rural provinces were illiterate. The majority of these illiterates were women.<sup>38</sup>

Public health also became an important task. Many Cubans lacked access to health care, and especially in the rural areas of Cuba. The federation was entrusted to establish medical institutions, and aimed to end major health threats such as polio, gastroenteritis, infant mortality, and malaria. Most of these threats were reduced or eliminated by simple tasks of maintaining a clean environment and having a healthy diet. Mothers were overjoyed to have such help, said Espín, because “the peasants began to see that this meant their children didn’t die, didn’t get infections. Mothers didn’t get sepsis—the blood poisoning that had previously been very common after giving birth. Those were

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<sup>37</sup> Espín, *Women in Cuba*, (New York: Pathfinder, 2012), 248-250.

<sup>38</sup> Espín, “With No Perceptions,” in *Women in Cuba*, (2012), 237.

our first tasks in health care.”<sup>39</sup> The federation also used magazines to spread and educate women on health. The federation’s magazine published their discussions with *Mujeres*.

In addition, federation women also taught about life essentials. Clean hygiene was taught for women’s health, for the home, as well as cooking and preparing meals. Educated women were obliged to teach the importance of giving birth in medical centers. The focus was primarily in the rural and poor communities, where women lacked major medical and important health necessities. Women also taught the importance of farming and egg production, since farming eggs was a huge necessity in Cuba. The federation was much committed to their cause that members stepped in to care for other fellow member’s children and housework so those women could study.<sup>40</sup>

Prostitution in Cuba was legal during the Batista regime and during the early years of Castro’s government, “ending organized prostitution became one of the high priorities to the social tasks.” This task was then assigned to the FMC. Many male and female parents were driven to prostitution due to the harsh economics of Cuba that did not permit them to feed their families. Cuba’s 1960 census showed that fifty-five percent of the Cuban population was illiterate and without education, employment was very limited. The FMC found that many women among the list were prostitutes, and in most cases brothels were located in the poorer parts of cities. In 1959, there were about 30,000 to 40,000 prostitutes in Cuba as a whole. Some of the women were brought up in those conditions—“it was all they knew,” remarked Espín.<sup>41</sup> For example, Pilar López González, an Afro-Cuban citizen, was one who had chose to work in a brothel instead of

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 265-266.

doing domestic work because she earned more as a prostitute. For perspective, a domestic worker earned about \$1.50 pesos a day while a prostitute earned three pesos per service. Even if the prostitute had a pimp, who demanded then half of her earnings, she netted far more in sex work.<sup>42</sup>

The FMC worked with several government agencies to reach out to prostitutes. From 1960 to 1967, the FMC worked alongside Interior Ministry. They approached each situation according to the given area. The literacy campaign, which was occurring simultaneously, was the starting point. Espín visited Santiago de Cuba in 1961 to see what conditions were like. She remembered the horrific conditions prostitutes endured. Many brothels had dirt floors. She described a scene as if you'd entered "Dante's *Inferno*—young women who were mentally retarded, children left naked. An appalling spectacle!"<sup>43</sup> When the literacy campaign began reaching out to these women, they realized there was hope in the situation. They learned that the revolution offered them education, job training, food, and independence. First, they learned to read and write. At the same time they were taught the revolution's socialist principles. Soon they began searching for jobs provided by the revolution.

The FMC established rehabilitation centers for former prostitutes who needed more help, like the mentally ill ones. A medical examination was given to determine who was eligible to go to these schools. Doctors also treated women with diseases in these

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<sup>42</sup> Pilar López Gonzales, interviewed by Oscar Lewis and Maida Donate, "It Was All *Mamás* Fault," in *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 267 & 271.

<sup>43</sup> Espin, "With No Perceptions," in *Women in Cuba*, (2012), 266, & Armando Torres, interviewed by Oscar Lewis in May 1970, "Saved," in *Four Women: Living the Revolution: An oral History of Contemporary Cuba*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 279. Armando Torres was the secretary-general of the Superior Council for Social defense. Torres was influential in instituting therapy and psychotherapy programs for prostitutes.

examinations. In most serious cases where women suffered serious diseases, such as syphilis, women were sent to medical facilities first for treatment. Pilar López was one of the first to be found at the age of nineteen. It was not easy for her to adapt to society since she lived a painful, abusive life. “I was lucky,” she said, “some women have been prostitutes for so long they can’t change. I did it for only a couple of years. Even for a long time I felt tense with people.” She was constantly paranoid someone would discover her as a “whore.” Women were specially trained at these special schools for various duties. For example, many factories, such as the garment factories, were opening up at the time. Pilar then moved on working in a textile factory, and she and her daughters live in their own home. They were given medical help, along with counseling and psychiatric treatment.<sup>44</sup>

Pilar López grew up in a very abusive family. Stricken by poverty, Pilar described her childhood as painful. She claimed to be her mother’s servant since the age of seven. She claimed,

I was a slave at home from the time I was seven... *Mamá* would lie in bed every afternoon while I cleaned the house and washed the clothes... I was scared to death of mama because she was always hitting us... She used to tell me I was born wrong-headed and had a whoring in my blood... If she was washing dishes she’d hit you with the dishpan... Sometimes she left my body black and blue.<sup>45</sup>

Pilar and her family lived in several dangerous neighborhoods where scenes of prostitution, pimping, and police chasing were daily events. Pilar was the oldest of her siblings. She remembers her and her sisters acted out scenes as prostitutes while her

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<sup>44</sup> Espín, “With No Perceptions,” in *Women in Cuba*, (2012), 266 & 268, and Pilar López Gonzáles, interview 1970, “It Was All *Mamás* Fault,” in in *Four Women*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 237.

<sup>45</sup> Pilar López Gonzáles, “It Was All *Mamás* Fault,” in *Four Women*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 238-256.

brother acted as the cop chasing them around: that was normal to them. She never had affection from her parents; in fact, her mother had an affair with her husband's coworker. Her father worked four jobs while Pilar's mother spent all the money on herself instead of buying food to feed Pilar and her seven siblings. At one point her mother forced Pilar to help her conduct an abortion with her own hands. Her mother was seven months pregnant when Pilar had to insert her hands inside her mother and pulled the fetus straight out by the feet. From that moment on, Gonzáles "thought of abortion as a perfectly normal routine."<sup>46</sup>

Like many females during her time, Gonzáles married for economic reasons. Unfortunately, her marriage was not any less painful than her childhood. At age fifteen in 1957, Gonzales married Eleodoro, who was twenty years old. On their honeymoon, he was not affectionate but instead he demanded her to perform oral sex, and was very aggressive their first night in bed. In the midst of her agony, she realized "he was bestial; he treated me like a whore he'd pick up. I'd married just to get away from home, and the monstrous first night made me realize one pays a price for everything one gets in life." The newlywed had to live with Eleodoro's parents, and Gonzáles' mother-in-law was not nice to her. Gonzáles bore her first daughter within a year but soon left because her husband forced her to work right after having her baby. Managing work and caring for a newborn was too much to handle, so Gonzáles separated from her husband. Gonzáles had to pick to work as a domestic servant or as a prostitute since going back to live at her mother's was not an option. Persuaded by a friend, at the age of sixteen, Gonzáles went into prostitution where she became addicted to alcohol and "pills" to forget what she was

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

doing to herself. She used the pseudonym Mercy in a brothel at Pinar del Río. There she often got pregnant, and every time she aborted. She felt so low that she attempted suicide several times. Her morality did not let her think of a future until she personally met the Revolution. “If it hadn’t been for the Revolution,” she stated, “I’d either have killed myself or gone to the dogs.”<sup>47</sup>

Comrades from the ministry who were in charge of rehabilitation program saved Gonzáles from the brothel lifestyle in 1961. One by one, women were being persuaded, not forced into, a fresh start. Pimping became an illegal business after 1959, allowing female sex workers to earn better while working for themselves. The Cuban government believed that it was exploitation of labor for any one who prostituted him or herself under a pimp. Not all sex workers wanted to leave the business, however, forcing the government to bring in the police to shut down brothels and arrest pimps and sex workers by 1961. Women were educated in the principles of the revolution once taken to rehabilitation centers. Volunteer labor was also part of the agenda, where women learned to work in agriculture work like Gonzáles did. Once Gonzáles graduated, she obtained a job in a textile factory and within a month the government provided her with a three-bedroom home. Within two weeks, Gonzáles welcomed her then four-year old daughter, Ana Bárbara, to live with her. Shortly after, Gonzáles joined the FMC and has been a revolutionary ever since.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The socialist movement in Cuba targeted sexist attitudes and gender inequalities. Socialist theory established that everyone is equal regardless of age and gender.

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<sup>47</sup> Pilar Lopez Gonzales, “I Had No Choice,” in *Four Women*, (1977), 260-274.

According to Margaret Randall, the socialist country worked collectively. Family in Cuba is a priority because each family is seen as a cell in the body of society. Each family cell must develop into a “new man” to create new society in order for society to collectively function. A “new man” is a revolutionized person. Each family member must be revolutionized. Cuba’s search for the “new man,” meant integrating equality for all including women and children, which meant liberating women from sexual prejudices.<sup>48</sup>

One of the major goals of the Cuban Revolution was to make lives fair, better, and convenient for working mothers since every Cuban, including mothers, were, and still are, encouraged to work.<sup>49</sup> A women’s liberation group was created to meet the needs of working mothers, thus “the Revolution called out on creating a new society.”<sup>50</sup> The Revolution sought out to overcome gender inequalities by creating “economic opportunities for women, especially the poor women, and socializing many of the domestic tasks.”<sup>51</sup>

In addition to providing a happier and better life, the Cuban government instilled socialist principles as part of the Cuban academic curriculum. They studied the foundation of Karl Marx’s theory of communism, and Lenin’s ideas were prominent as well. According to Karl Marx, the bourgeois sees the women as “an instrument of production,”<sup>52</sup> but fails to recognize them as so “to do away with their status of women as mere instruments of production.” Marx believed that women were capable of working, and if they were capable of working then women should be introduced as part of the

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<sup>48</sup> The notion of the “new man,” and “new women,” will be explained more in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>49</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, (Singapore: Wile-Blackwell, 2011), 142-143.

<sup>50</sup> Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, (2011), 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (New York: Bantam Classic, 1992), 31-32.

community. He believed women shouldn't marry for economic reasons. If women were given the opportunity to work, then they do not have to be dependent from men and/or their husbands. The bourgeois see marriage as a business, but an interpretation of Marx's idea regarding women and marriage can be perceived as prostitution. Monica Reyes' marriage is different, however, she married out of love. Her situation is different because Monica married as the revolution started, and her husband was a revolutionary man who fully supported Monica's participation in the revolution. The Revolution saved Pilar Gonzáles' life by rehabilitating her from prostitution. On the other hand, Inocencia is a perfect example of many women in Cuba who struggled to fully integrate themselves in the revolution. In one way or another, these women embodied the socialist model.

What did the new Cuban regime offer women following the Cuban Revolution? Castro promised free education to all, including women. Those who were teachers, or *brigadistas*, during the revolutionary movement, became professors afterwards. As soon as those students learned a skill, they went on to teach others in their villages. This was a cycle that involved organization, to spread equality amongst all those who were unprivileged. The new society provided free health care in which pregnancy was medically covered and workingwomen received free childcare. Working in unity and practicing equal rights was how Communism functioned. Communism benefited women in Cuba because they were the most socially oppressed, especially the lower class and Afro-Cuban women who frequently who were expected to be submissive within the home.

With such inequality within the home, women realized that their revolutionary expectations had been shattered. When mothers and wives were given more

opportunities in the work field, it became very difficult to balance both housework and fulfill motherly duties. For example, Inocencia Acosta Felipe took three and a half years to ask for a divorce from her husband because she did not know how to live independently: she knew she could not afford to buy food. Once revolutionized, she participated in socialist organizations and was not afraid to live on her own. The government provided her with food and shelter. Though she was lonely, she appreciated her independence. She stated, "I have something I've never had before, peace and freedom, and in that sense I'm very happy."<sup>53</sup> This brought a wife and/or a mother the double standard, which made life extremely difficult. Women experienced sexism and inequality by their husbands: it created a barrier for women to support the revolution. The goal of the FMC was to unite all revolutionary women and become involved in the works of the revolution. Full participation of females meant a lot to revolutionary women because women in general were always limited by social norms.

Practicing equality not only in the public but also domestically was the next objective for Cuba. The Family Code was dedicated to the Cuban women on National Women's Day, March 8 1975. The Family Code served to restructure the family, eliminate gender discrimination, and equality within the home. Most importantly, the Code supported the rise of new feminism of 1959.<sup>54</sup> In a sense, this was an intervention of the Cuban government to restructure the family in the private sphere just as how the government intervened to improve the women situation in the public sphere. This new transformation started with the approval of the Cuban people, and of course the Cuban

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<sup>53</sup> Inocencia Acosta Felipe, "Getting Involved," *Four Women Four Women*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 323, 344-345, 353, & 405.

<sup>54</sup> Fidel Castro, Osvaldo D. Torrodo, et al, "Código de la Familia," *Gaceta Oficial: República de Cuba, Ministerio de Justicia*, (Publicacion Digital: Cuba), accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.gacetaoficial.cu/html/codigo%20de%20lafamilia.html#D2>.

women. The law was constructed on the principles of what would become an example of a socialist state by establishing the full equality of women within the family. The Code is based on socialist morality. It inaugurates judicial norms that administer domestic relations. Family in socialist Cuba is considered the “basic cell of society.”<sup>55</sup> The Family Code persuaded the importance of family unity because each family acted as “a cell of society,” the fundamental construction of Cuban identity and a part of society as a whole. In order to bring equality to women and children, and for society to progress in its new socialist way, the revolution started at home. The decree protected not only equality of women in the home, but eliminated discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children, defines the obligations of parentage, the obligations and rights for each spouse. In addition, it was a tool to alleviate the burden of women who worked in the house asking husbands to help around the house all according to the principles of socialism.

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<sup>55</sup> Communist Party of Cuba, “Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality,” (Cuba, 1975), in *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, edited by Elizabeth Stone, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 79.

# Chapter Three

## The Socialist Morality of the Family Code: Revolutionary Identity and Family Reform: 1975

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The first phase of the women's movement focused on integrating women into Cuba's historical revolution. Once Cuba proclaimed itself a communist state, new socialist ideas meant that new laws and social transformation was necessary. Laws were carefully drafted to legally enforce postrevolutionary morals and customs, and much of the legality was constructed on the fundamentals of socialism, and the concept of the "New Man." Ernesto "Che" Guevara coined the idea of the new man in Cuba, which established the revolutionary Cuban identity. The ideology of the New Man meant that an individual underwent a radical change within a revolutionized state. The revolution created a new culture that transformed the colonial Cuban identity into Guevara's new man. This meant progress for women's equality. The FMC educated Cubans about the revolution and the new man/new woman. Educated women in postrevolutionary Cuba were revolutionary. In turn, these women continued the revolution within the revolution. To bring more equality to Cuban women, the post-revolutionary government had to intervene in the private sphere, and specifically in the Cuban family. Castro's regime created jobs and provided free education to all including women, but women still experienced discrimination at home. The FMC and the Department of Women's Affairs

conducted research to bring to light the core of the problem and calculated that 500,000 women left the labor force between 1969 and 1974 due to “pressure of the home.”<sup>1</sup>

The second phase of the women’s movement in Cuba, by the 1970s, engaged specifically in gendered struggle. The FMC had gained more popularity within the government and with the public as well, as Chapter Two demonstrated. As part of the feminist agenda, equality within the home became a legal mandate. By 1974 the FMC raised enough public and political support to help create a law that benefited women. The law originated from Cuba’s socialist concept of the “New Man.” This law was called *El Código de la Familia Cubana*, the Cuban Family Code, and its principles were aligned to the socialist concept of the “New Man.” Therefore, its objectives served to simultaneously restructure the family, eliminate gender discrimination, and bring equality within the home. Most importantly, the Code supported the rise of the new wave of women’s radicalism of the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will explain and examine the laws that pertain to women’s equality within the family.

### ***SOCIALIST MORALITY: THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY***

The revolutionaries from the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement guerilleros worked to raise the Cuban people’s conscious and transition them into the “New Man,” which meant a new society. To begin, the government focused on the family. The state strongly persuaded all Cubans to abide by socialist principles. Many women were easy to convince, as their lives changed for the better. Most men, on the other hand, were more

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<sup>1</sup> Although working conditions were poor, such as inadequate services, lack of economic incentive, lack of minimal conditions of hygiene and protection at work sites, lack of political work with newly incorporated women on the job, there was an abundance of lack of understanding concerning women’s role in society.

<sup>2</sup> Fidel Castro, Osvaldo D. Torrodo, et al, "Código de la Familia," *Gaceta Oficial: República de Cuba, Ministerio de Justicia*, (Publicación Digital: Cuba, 2008), accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.gacetaoficial.cu/html/codigo%20de%20lafamilia.html#D2>.

difficult to persuade. The typical Cuban man was adamant about keeping traditional Spanish customs. Since women were central to the family and the family is the nucleus of the state, women could help change the family in a revolutionary way, including the husband. However, the state had to change the mindset of the family first in order for the rest of society to be revolutionized. Instilling socialist morality became another big task for the state, and the federation took charge in convincing women to side with the state. It was the next step for equality.

Independent woman, who worked and volunteered for the FMC, taught women about Cuba's interpretation of capitalism. These volunteer workers were advocates of social reform. The Castro regime adopted the principles of Marxism and cited many of Lenin's teachings. Vilma Espín, the president of the FMC worked closely with members of the Cuban Communist Party. According to the *Communist Manifesto*, in a capitalist country the lower middle class (proletariat) and the lower classes have the "absence of family."<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engel believed that the absence of family meant the lack of unity, and this lack of unity amongst the lower class or the family eliminated the potential of an uprising against a capitalist government. The Communist Manifesto was a product of observations of class struggle particularly referred from after the rise of the Industrial Revolution. At the time of the Industrial Revolution, many children worked at a very young age in unsafe environments causing many deaths. Mothers and children workers had no time for family and no access to education. This exploit was a "clap-trap" from the bourgeoisie to maintain power, according to Marx and Engels. According to Karl Marx, women [were] seen as mere "instruments of production that [are] to be

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<sup>3</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 1992), 31.

exploited...[the elite] aimed at is to do away with the status of women.”<sup>4</sup> Working class women were not given enough credit for their performance and their potential to bear children, to cook, to clean, and to work.

Inocencia Acosta Felipe was the epitome of a woman who embodied the marian ideal in Latin America and was transformed into a “New Woman” by the Cuban Revolution. Inocencia married a very jealous man, who did not let her participate in the revolution at first. She was always confined in the kitchen, always conducted domestic work, and was always in company of her husband until she began to meet women in political organizations within her community. Local meetings were influenced by socialism, and they recruited as many men and women. At these meetings, individuals discussed about socialism, equality, and the change socialism was bringing to the Cuban people. Inocencia’s community reached out to her and brought awareness to her about socialism.<sup>5</sup>

Inocencia’s life story in the pre and post-revolution is precisely what Celia Sánchez and Castro fought for. Women like Inocencia had limited employment opportunities and lived in oppressed domestic situations. Inocencia recalled, “Before the Revolution, a servant was like a dog—at the bottom. That’s what I was, a servant, and even my family looked down upon me. At our reunions I always felt inferior.” Her father died in 1924, leaving her mother to care after four girls. Inocencia grew up poor, suffered most of her life, and was perceived different from the rest of her family. Before her parents died at the age of six, she lived in the country where going to school was very difficult because “it was a long ride on horseback.” In 1936, her mother and her siblings

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<sup>4</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1992) 32.

<sup>5</sup> Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 31.

moved to her sister Felicia's house in Colón, where Felicia turned Inocencia and her sisters into servants. Felicia's mistreatments were severe that at one point Inocencia's sister drank poison called *Rompe Roca*, a spray for cattle against ticks. In 1938, Inocencia's older sister, Alicia, died in an automobile accident. A year later, Inocencia's mother died at fifty-nine years old. Inocencia's clothes were not as nice as her family members. She could never afford to go to the beach or any vacation spot in Cuba as her relatives could. The only life she knew was one as a servant that paid \$1.50 a day. It was until after the Revolution Inocencia picked up her education, and fell in love with learning. Inocencia continued to work as a servant after 1959, but being a public servant for the government is different. "I'm no poorer than anyone else and I'm not treated like an inferior." She expressed, "I feel the same as if I were a clerk in a store." A servant in postrevolutionary Cuba was not considered socially degrading. However, Inocencia's story in post-revolutionary Cuba signifies the struggle of women the FMC precisely fought for: gender discrimination, women's participation in the revolution, equality, and domestic issues towards working women.<sup>6</sup>

Women like Inocencia did not have opportunities prior to 1959 because of gender discrimination. Inocencia remembers, "No matter how intelligent a woman was, if she weren't pretty or well connected, she couldn't get along on her ability alone." Now that women were no longer economically dependent on men, one "could work at what you're fitted for, and above all, at what's in keeping your dignity." Inocencia alleged that she "wouldn't have suffered so much in the past if there hadn't been such prejudice." She remembered, "I'd have had a different kind of job, and a pension...I might even

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<sup>6</sup> Inocencia Acosta Felipe, "Getting Involved," *Four Women Four Women*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 323, 344-345 & 353.

remarried and had children instead of having to put up with a husband who didn't give me a single pleasant memory in twenty-three years. That's why I am interested in women's liberation." She felt as a slave her whole life being married to a man, Reinaldo Serrano, "who thought of no one but himself." Before she married him she thought he would be a man who would allow her to say and do what she wanted. "But Reinaldo killed my dreams; the only difference marriage made was to give me an even tougher boss." Arguably, Inocencia married because she was alone and for socio-economic reasons. For Inocencia, a need for a law such as the Family Code was much needed.<sup>7</sup>

Inocencia was a good wife in every sense. On the other hand, Reinaldo resembled the traditional Cuban *machista*. Throughout her marriage, Inocencia was very affectionate, but Reinaldo was not. Although he remained faithful to his wife, her husband would deny her affection. At times, when Inocencia wanted to make love, Reinaldo would excuse himself by creating a fight or saying he had a headache. When Reinaldo had his urges, Inocencia had to give in no matter how she felt. To get out of the home, Inocencia sought employment as a domestic servant, but she was unsuccessful due to the high competition. Inocencia had no freedom, much less financially. When she finally obtained employment her husband kept the paycheck; the bank account was under his name.

Moreover, prejudices against women were severe in the work force. "Things had gotten difficult, with tremendous competition for domestic work," she remembers, "People were beginning to prefer men because they caused fewer complications. The only way I could get out of my situation in a hurry would have been to go back to

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<sup>7</sup> Felipe, "Getting Involved," *Four Women*, (1977), 324.

Felicia's where I didn't have any privacy or even a room of my own. I preferred dying to that... I felt no choice but to accept the inferior position Reinaldo forced on me."<sup>8</sup> At this point in the mid-1960s the Family Code was still years away, and until its realization in 1975 Inocencia would remain stuck.

Concurrently, Cubans were undergoing social and moral changes: transforming more revolutionary and socialist. Cubans did not magically turn socialist overnight. This process took time, effort, training, and education. In contrast, traditional men like Reinaldo held his old customs as Inocencia developed into a new woman. Although Inocencia and her husband were in favor of Fidel Castro and the Revolution, Reinaldo did not support Inocencia's full participation in the revolution. For example, on the famous day of Castro's entrance into Havana, January 8, 1959, Inocencia could not go downtown in her city of Havana to see the parade because her husband did not allow her to go out. Instead, she watched the event on television. Once political meetings were held in her town, including by the FMC organization, Inocencia was prohibited to go because the mass meetings were too far from her house. Inocencia and her husband participated in guard duties together for their neighborhood. Both became members of the Committees for Defense of the Revolution, (CDR).

The Cuban government created the CDR in September 28, 1960 as a way to conduct surveillance and protect city blocks from counterrevolutionaries. Members included men, women, and young adults. Members met and discussed about local issues: meetings were held from a block-to-block bases. Guards protected their blocks from counterrevolutionaries. Inocencia did not participate in active office because her husband

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<sup>8</sup> Felipe, "Getting Involved," *Four Women*, (1977), 357-364.

did not allow it. But she volunteered anyway doing minimal work such as street cleanings and organizing meetings. Gradually, she began working and volunteering more for the CDR, helping set up new committees for each block, and becoming involved although never as a member due to fear from her husband knowing.<sup>9</sup>

Inocencia's hard work was paying off, but her husband still controlled her. He decided whether she would accept job offers and promotions from the FMC or the CDR. Nevertheless, Inocencia continued to volunteer for the CDR. She helped create committees and officials for each block. One day, her neighbor Marta, the district coordinator, came to tell Reinaldo that Inocencia was needed as CDR district directorate. Reinaldo said he would think about it, although Inocencia knew that Reinaldo only wanted her to work at the block level near her home. By mid 1964, Inocencia engaged in many revolutionary activities that she became ambitious to go up in rank. Now as an inspired revolutionary or new woman by 1966, Inocencia accepted her promotion anyway and worked as a district coordinator for three years. By the mid and late 1960s, women began discussions about women's liberation from gender discrimination and gender inequality.

By the late 1960s, women had their own concept of liberation and what it meant to be a woman in a socialist country. Since Inocencia now devoted most of her time working as a revolutionary she grew apart from her husband and eventually gained the courage to divorce him shortly after the implementation of the Family Code of 1975. At first she was not sure if she could survive on her own, but with the new law it provided her with food, affordable rent, free health care and education. Inocencia continued to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 373 & 377.

learn more about communism in her leadership experience. She advocated for women's liberation although she still betrayed some traditional beliefs. For example, they believed that women were not biologically equal to men. She explained her ideas of women's liberation in an interview in 1977. She stated that:

Some women believe that men should help with the dishes, housekeeping, and so on. And some of the men said they usually help their wives with general housecleaning. But I don't like to see a man doing that kind of work, unless a woman is ill. Otherwise, I think it's a woman's duty to organize her housework so she'll have time to engage in revolutionary tasks... When a housewife says she's no better than a servant in her own home, it seems to me she doesn't love her husband or her children or her home. In fact, I think she's disappointed in being a woman... To me, a women's liberation means that a women shouldn't have to submit to a man while he runs around doing whatever he pleases. Also, that women have the right to participate actively in the Revolution and to work outside the home... I don't go along with those who see women's liberation as equality with men. A woman should be free to form her own opinions and make her own decisions, but that doesn't mean she has to act like a man and have a lover today and another tomorrow... The problem is that men, Cuban men anyways, have a one-track mind. They think that when a women has a bit of freedom she only uses it to look for another man...<sup>10</sup>

Inocencia kept some of her traditional morals, but since working as a revolutionary her mind had changed. Inocencia believed that “the new man’ in a socialist country is one who’s freed himself from all the old prejudices, such as subjugation of women and the desire to live for himself alone.” She explained that a “new man” does not devote his entire development to himself but to help others in a communal way. For example, as Inocencia saw it, the “new man” does not build a house for himself, but he gathers his friends and neighbors and says “lets all build better homes for a better community and environment,” or they build a new house for someone who needs it the most so that his or

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 425-426.

her surroundings live “peacefully and well.”<sup>11</sup> She is an example of a type of progressive Cuban, who at the same time embraced motherhood and became revolutionized. Her ideals changed when she became educated with socialism, and Lenin’s teachings.

The FMC worked to change the mindset of women—and the entire country—from an old colonial thinking into a socialist morality. This acknowledged the women’s role and place in society. Women in Cuba, as well as in other parts of Latin America, embraced motherhood as a main priority. Cuban women worked to make the lives of mothers better and easier for them to work and also be mothers. Women wanted to reach their full potential and advancement in the labor force at the same time to make life less stressful to raise their children. In Latin America, women embraced motherhood, but poverty sometimes made one seek other sources of income making it difficult for women to stay at home and raise their children. Women living the double standard lived under enormous social pressure. However, women in Latin America did not want to make women equal to men. Cuban women believed that women biologically cannot operate physically as men, but woman could be equal in a moral aspect. In that sense, women demanded equality. For example, a man cannot give birth, biologically. According to Asunción Lavrin, “Healthy feminism was not the ‘warring feminism’ that demanded for women all the rights of men.”<sup>12</sup> Cuban women sought equality in the household as well as equality in the law, while women were still able to embrace motherhood, with or without a man. Since women were encouraged to work, women wanted to keep their feminine identity precisely as child bearers, but women faced difficult issues by their male partners. This mentality, in part, led to the creation of the Family Code.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 429.

<sup>12</sup> Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay 1890-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 9 & 36.

***FAMILY LAW: THE FAMILY CODE OF 1975***

The Commission on Juridical Studies led by Blas Roca Calderío, the FMC, and the Cuban Communist Party drafted the Family Code before 1974. The Code is considered as Cuba's "fundamental bodies of legislation," because it later became constituted into Cuba's 1974 Constitution.<sup>13</sup> Political committees, including the FMC and the CDR, started discussions in 1974 about the Family Code. Members of the FMC, however, discussed women's issues in Cuba long before that.

Gender discrimination was the main issue at their conferences. For years, each FMC sector conversed about gender inequality, motherhood, children, men, and much of the concerns had to do with injustice and discrimination within the family. In other words, women were asking for something to be done about gender inequality. Eventually, FMC leaders brought these concerns from women all over Cuba to the attention of the Cuban Communist Party which in turn led to the development of the Code. Since the leader of the FMC, Vilma Espín, is a revolutionary comrade to Celia Sánchez and Haydee Santamaria, the first female members of the Cuban Communist Party, took these concerns into great consideration. Carefully, they constructed a new law in favor of women and equality for all.

The Family Code of 1975 was constructed on the principles of what would become an example of a socialist state by establishing the full equality of women within the family. The Code is based on socialist morality. It inaugurated judicial norms that administered domestic relations and assured affection between spouse and children.

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<sup>13</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, second edition, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 9.

Family in socialist Cuba is considered the “basic cell of society.”<sup>14</sup> The Family Code endorsed the importance of family unity because each family acted as “a cell of society,” the fundamental construction of Cuban identity and a part of society as a whole. In order to bring equality to women and children, and for society to progress in its new socialist way, the revolutionary transformation had to start with the family. The decree protected not only equality of women in the home, but it attempted to eliminate discrimination between legitimate and illegitimate children, define the obligations of parentage, and define the obligations and rights for each spouse. In addition, it was a tool to alleviate the burden of women who worked outside the home by encouraging/forcing husbands to equally share the maintenance of the home and care for the children according to the principles of socialism. If men did not comply, the law made divorce the only legal alternative for woman.<sup>15</sup>

### ***EQUALITY IN MARRIAGE***

To begin, the act stressed that the family needed to strengthen its “ties of affection.” Families were urged; especially couples with children, to take family time very seriously and provide affection towards their children. For example, the Code aligned morality and principles of the family with socialism:

ARTICLE 36 - Neither spouse may perform acts of ownership in relation to the marital community property without the prior consent of the other, except for the community claim.

ARTICLE 37 - In all cases not provided for in this Code, the marital community of property shall be governed by the general provisions governing community property.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Communist Party of Cuba, “Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality,” (Cuba, 1975), in *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, edited by Elizabeth Stone, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 79.

<sup>15</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, second edition, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Fidel Castro, “Código de la Familia,” *Gaceta Oficial: República de Cuba, Ministerio de Justicia*, (Publicación Digital: Cuba), accessed February 10, 2014.

This in a sense sent the message that the community owned marital properties, thus obliging mutual effort in both couples to maintain a healthy relationship and raise children as healthy as possible.<sup>17</sup> It was a communal effort to sustain and support a marriage because it was important to the Cuban society as a whole. Overall, the Family Code regulated family institutions, marriage, divorce, paternal relations, adoption, paternal obligations, and the responsibility to raise children in every moral and educative aspect of the socialist society.

The Family Code demanded equality among men and women especially in the household. As part of eliminating gender discrimination, the Code attempted to alleviate women from all the double standard. Starting from Article 24, the law clearly laid its objectives regarding equal domestic relations:

ARTICLE 24 - The marriage is based on equal rights and duties of both spouses. Marriage is a mutual commitment. Each individual is educated on the new basis of what is marriage in regards to socialist morality.

ARTICLE 25 - Spouses must live together, loyalty, consideration and due respect and help each other. The rights and duties established by this Code for spouses, subsist entirely until marriage is legally terminated, for cause but not man-should have a common home.<sup>18</sup>

ARTICLE 26 - Both spouses are required to care for the family they have created and to cooperate with each other in education, upbringing, and guidance of the children according to the principles of socialist morality. Similarly, to the extent of the capabilities and possibilities of each, should be involved in running the household and cooperate better development thereof.

ARTICLE 27 - Spouses are obliged to contribute to meeting the needs of the

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<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches & Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin & Others*, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 27.

<sup>18</sup> This means no cheating. In Latin America machismo degraded and exploited women with physical and emotional abuse. Sometimes men created extramarital lives that included the other wife with children in a separate home. Article 25 seems to halt this old idea. Socialism offers the notion of a new and equal man, which promises to be loyal and equal to his wife. The rest of the articles also support this idea of new a new society, a new way of thinking, thus the need to restructure family.

family they have created with their marriage, each according to his abilities and economic capacity. However, if only one of them that keep the contribution to work at home and care for children, the other spouse alone should contribute to the subsistence expressed, without prejudice to the duty to cooperate in such work and care.<sup>19</sup>

ARTICLE 28 - Both spouses have the right to practice their professions or occupations and are given the duty of reciprocal cooperation and support for this, as well as to pursue studies or knowledge, but in any case will take care of organizing life at home so that such activities are coordinated with the fulfillment of the obligations imposed by this Code.<sup>20</sup>

The Articles was an attempt to eliminate gender discrimination within the family and end machismo. Latin American cultures generally condfind the wife to the home to fulfill wife and motherly duties, and making sure meals were done on time. Most women could not work because having a profession would create a double burden and it was too much of a load for women to carry; it was nearly impossible to do. This article made into law that a husband could not prohibit his wife to have a profession. Allowing women to have a profession also produced more bodies to occupy jobs that were continually developing in Cuba.<sup>21</sup>

The perceived need for men and women to share household duties derived from the fact that women carried the responsibilities alone and that limited them from participating in leadership, obtaining an education, developing a profession, and becoming involved with the community. The Cuban government defended this right when citing Lenin’s idea of the double standard carried by women from his article “A Great Beginning.” Lenin described women as “domestic slaves, because petty housework

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<sup>19</sup> This article highlights the decree where the man/husband is obliged to help around with domestic duties. It means to say that if both spouses work, both spouses have to help each other raising their children, sustaining their marriage, and share the domestic tasks.

<sup>20</sup> Castro, “Codigo de la Familia,” Articles 24-28, *Gaceta Oficial: Republica de Cuba, (Cuba)*, accessed February 10, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution*, 142.

crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labor on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery.” The demand that equally distributed house chores collectively was an attempt to lessen the burden for women and to allow women to fulfill their revolutionary duties for the advancement of Cuba. In addition, making members of the family partake in domestic tasks created an “unavoidable revolutionary obligation of the present time.”<sup>22</sup>

Enforcing this goal hoped to eliminate past norms and specifically bourgeois thinking that still existed in Cuba with respect to the family. Latin American culture traditionally confined women to the house and in the kitchen to fulfill what men believed were women’s jobs, which created gender inequality and discrimination against children born out of wedlock. Communism sought to replace these traditional ways of thinking into norms according to socialist principles of equality.<sup>23</sup>

The Family Code fought sexism in a way that is contradicted traditional Cuban morals and customs. For example, the law focused on bringing equality amongst men and women in the private and public spheres. According to the Code, in every marriage both husband and wife had to sustain the household. Spouses had to provide the educational expenses, raise their children, pay debt together, and pay rent and other interests together. Before, women were in charge of domestic duties including raising the children while men worked and provided the financial means for the family. Both husband and wife became administrators of the house thereafter. In Section 3 Article 34 of the law

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<sup>22</sup> Communist Party of Cuba, “Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality,” (Cuba, 1975), in *Women and the Cuban Revolution*, edited by Elizabeth Stone, (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 99-100.

<sup>23</sup> Castro, “Codigo de la Familia,” *Gaceta Oficial: Republica de Cuba*, (Cuba, 2008), accessed February 11, 2014.

indicated that no single spouse could lord over the other without the consent of the other spouse. Thus, for the first time in Cuba women were legally afforded equality as wives and mothers. The goal of the Code attempted to transform Cubans into the new man, which involved the acceptance of equality amongst men and women.<sup>24</sup>

The Code imposed the regulations on marriage. It is clear that marriage was given to only male and female of over the age of eighteen. There were exceptions to those who wanted to marry under the age of eighteen. The age limit for legal marriage stopped at the age of sixteen for males and was no less than at age fourteen for females, but at this age parental permission is needed. Even though it did not state marriage was not for same sex couples, by law marriage was heterosexual. In addition, marriage granted by a state official was to be legally recognized.<sup>25</sup> If a couple chose to have a religious ceremony, however, only the civil ceremony was legally recognized. In addition, the government provided the wedding party with beer, drinks, and accommodates a hotel for newlyweds for a brief honeymoon.<sup>26</sup>

The Code attempted to grant divorce on an equal basis. Divorce could be brought upon either spouse according to article 53. Article 51 and 52, in the section of Divorce, indicated that divorce would be granted upon mutual agreement if the relationship was evidently ineffectual. The article indicated that if a marriage lost its meaning then it lost its union also for the children and even the community. Either party could initiate the divorce proceedings. Article 52, in the section of divorce, stated that divorce would be

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<sup>24</sup> Margaret Randall and Judy Janda, *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later*, (New York: Smyrna Press, 1981), 38 & 41, and Castro, "Codigo de la Familia, Section 3 Article 34 and Section Four Article 35," *Gaceta Oficial: Republica de Cuba, (Cuba)*.

<sup>25</sup> Castro, "Codigo de la Familia, Article 3, Article 16," *Gaceta Oficial: Republica de Cuba, (Cuba)*.

<sup>26</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, Second edition, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 148.

granted if marriage became meaningless for spouses, children, and society, and ceased to exercise their rights and obligations mention in articles 24-28. That meant since a family was important to society; it was in the best interest of society for the family to function.<sup>27</sup>

In Article 88, the Code indicated that child custody was arranged first by agreement between the parents. If both parents could not come to an agreement, then the court could decide custody based on what was best for the child. Still, both parents were granted parental rights. For example, in Article 89, also indicated in Article 57 and 58, stated that:

Under equal conditions, the court will generally decide that the children be left under the care of the parent in whose company they have been until the disagreement arose. Preference is given to the mother in the case that the children lived with both father and mother, unless special reasons make another solution advisable.<sup>28</sup>

In other words, child custody was preferably given to the mother. This also included children of minor or “special” ages, given these “special provisions,” indicate a child still young with the presumption that the child is yet inseparable from the mother. On the other hand, Article 90 provided that the other parent who did not have custody had visitation rights.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of child support, the Code stated that the parent equally supported the child based on each of the parent’s income. Regardless of who had custody of the child/children, each parent equally had the responsibility to support the children as indicated in Article 59. Article 95 and 96 stated that child support continued even if the

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<sup>27</sup> Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 149.

<sup>28</sup> “Codigo de la Familia,” (1975), Article 89.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

parent lost his or her *patria potestad*, parental rights. Thus, if the mother had custody of the child or children, the father would still be obligated to pay child support.

The Code provided provision for alimony. It stated that alimony was granted to the spouse who “does not have a job and lacks other means of support.” However, the union in the marriage had to last for a year or if the couple had children. The alimony was only temporary up to a year if the children are minor and only six months if there are no minor children.<sup>30</sup> Marital property was equally divided upon divorce as Article 38 provided:

Marital community of property ends with the termination of marriage. The common property is divided equally between the spouses, or, in case of death, between the survivor and the heirs of the deceased. When the marriage is terminated by reason of annulment, the spouse that bad faith had given rise to such cause will not share in the assets of the marital community. Either spouse may waive all or part of their rights in the matrimonial community of property after the marriage extinguished. The waiver shall state so in writing.<sup>31</sup>

If the parties did not come to an agreement, then the court emitted a decision and divided the property/properties based on the best interest of the party who had custody of the children.<sup>32</sup>

The Cuban Family Code of 1975 also recognized the obligation of Cubans to support his or her parents and siblings. The obligation of each family member was coded in Chapter Six under the title “The Obligation to Give Food.” Articles 121-136 indicated that parents could ask for support and maintenance by food, shelter, clothing, and recreation. When supporting a sibling, if they were minors, the sibling was obliged to provide education. If more than one sibling or relative supported a family member, then

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<sup>30</sup> “Codigo de la Familia,” (1975), Article 56.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Article 38.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Article 41.

“payment of the pension shall be in proportion to their respective incomes.”<sup>33</sup> Overall, this section of the Code focused primarily on instances when a relative was unable to maintain and support oneself and did not have access to food.

Before the Family Code passed, an early draft of the Code was given to all Cuban communities to observe, make notes, adjustments, and suggestions. Drafts were given to all regions of Cuba and then down to community levels of society so that all Cubans could have access to the Code. Many FMC community groups gathered together to talk and discuss this new idea. The Family Code became so popular that it affected their future. The Code was finally completed and enacted on International Women’s Day, March 8, 1975.<sup>34</sup>

The Cuban Family Code of 1975 intended to end gender discrimination and bring gender equality. Since the revolution, women were able to work and were thus not unrestrained from choosing who they wanted to marry. Some said “the revolution saved love,” because marrying a man, most of the time, was not for economic necessity. According to Cuba’s new law, men and women were free to love with whom they wanted to love. Many couples in Cuba remained together without being legally married. The Code imposed regulation on adoption, divorce, properties divided on divorce situations, child custody, child support, relations between parents and children, guardian care, parent-child relationship and communication, extinction and suspension of parental rights.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Article 125.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Randall, *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later*, (New York: Smyrna Press, 1981), 37-38.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Stone, *Women and the Cuban Revolution: Speeches and Documents by Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin & Others* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981), 25-26; Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Revolution Reconsidered*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 44.

The Family Code attempted to restructure the family in the private sphere just as the Castro administration attempted to improve women's status in the public sphere. This new transformation started with the approval of the Cuban people, and of course the Cuban women. It took almost a year for the Cuban people to become aware and acknowledge this new change.

Equality in Cuba went was even written into the Cuban Constitution of 1976. Several provisions of the Family Code of 1975 were incorporated in the Constitution. Eliminating gender discrimination became constitutional as the Constitution specifically prohibited discrimination based on gender and sex.<sup>36</sup> Women were granted the same rights as men “in the economic, political, and social fields as well as in family.”<sup>37</sup> The same provision from the Family Code that marriage be equal between the wife and husband became law under Article 35:

Marriage is the voluntary established union between a man and a woman. It is based on full equality of rights and duties for the partners who must see the support of the home and the integral education of their children through a joint effort.

Article 35 of the Constitution repeated the language of Articles 24-28 of the Family Code. In addition, the Constitution elevated to a legal level the assurance of the right of employment to for women, paid maternity leave, access to free children's day care centers, and education. Overall, the Constitution gave enforcement to the Family Code and prescribed punishments to those who did not abide by the law. Overall, the Family Code strived to transform past bourgeois behavior into the “new man” and “new woman,” and eliminate gender discrimination.

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<sup>36</sup> Constitución de la República de Cuba (Cuba: 1976), Article 41.

<sup>37</sup> Constitución de la República de Cuba (Cuba: 1976), Article 43.

# Conclusion

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Before 1959, women endured centuries of exploitation and inequality in the workplace and the Cuban government did not protect their rights. Jobs were limited basically to domestic service, education, and prostitution. Education was not as accessible nor was transportation and healthcare. Fifty-five percent of Cuban women were illiterate and those who knew how to read and write worked as teachers, nurses, secretaries, or clerks. Economic advancement in Cuba was extremely difficult until the Rebel Army on January 1, 1959 who overthrew Fulgencio Batista and his crooked followers.

The new communist regime sought to completely transform Cuba's past bourgeois mentality into a "new man," and/or "new woman" by integrating socialist morality and principles. Cuban womanists took this opportunity to practice their rights not only as *Mambisas*, but rights as human beings. Middle class Cuban women knew the suffering of Cuban peasants, and were especially aware of exploitation of the peasant woman inflicted by the Batista regime. Revolutionaries like Celia Sánchez made sure Cuba became a better place, and the only way was through educating the mass of socialism, equality, and the importance of women participating in society. Minds were molded into revolutionaries, or into a "New Man," or "new woman" as opposed to a *machista* pre-revolutionary man. A "new woman" in post 1959 Cuba meant a revolutionary woman. The new wave of women's ideology also transformed as Cuba transformed into socialist society.

Cuban womanists did not think of women's liberation at first and never really considered themselves part of feminist movement. For Cubans, feminism was deemed imperialist—an ideology that derived from middle class educated women that some

Cubans believed contradicted the principles of communism. Cuban women embraced motherhood, but at the same time believed in the liberation of a women's home because women were only housewives were not given the opportunity to realize their full potentials as workers and thinkers. The identity of the "new woman" simultaneously consisted of a mother, a female worker, and engaged in political activities. The negative women figure was perceived as a housewife, a prerevolutionary woman, and the prostitute.

Cuban revolutionaries from the Rebel Army formed together as a female organization called The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1960 to advocate for women's participation in the revolution and legislate laws that benefited men and women equally. These womanists did not fight to put women on a pedestal but rather to place women on an equal footing with men without directly attacking them. Although the role of a mother was the core of a women's identity, women had much more potential than just being housewives. The FMC fought for the advancement of opportunities for Cuban women under the auspices of the Cuban Communist Party. Laws thereafter were enacted to create an equal environment for both sexes but since machismo society dominated the roles of women, gender inequality was a difficult goal to accomplish.

Did communism bring equality to women? Were the goals of revolutionary Cuba met? The women's revolution in postrevolutionary Cuba attempted to eliminate gender discrimination and gender inequality. Cuban womanists mobilized to create laws to pursue gender equality. At first, women focused on the full participation of women in Cuba. More opportunities were accessible but doing so added extra weight on women's shoulders. Women traditionally carried the double burden of working, raising the

children, and conducting housework in a patriarchal society. When women partook in revolutionary activities it was too much of a burden: women needed help. Finally, the Family Code of 1975 was enacted to alleviate the double burden of the “new woman,” as women suffered gender inequality domestically. By the late 1970s most women had embraced this new identity, although not all did so.

After the enactment of the Family Code of 1975 and its legislation in the Cuban Constitution of 1976, Cuba could only hope to achieve its socialist objectives. For one, the new generation after 1975 grew up educated in socialist ideals. That generation carried out the ideals of socialism. One could distinguish the difference between who was revolutionary, or a “new woman,” and who was still considered a prerevolutionary, or one who clung to colonial thinking. An interview conducted by Helen Safa with Rosa and her daughter Ximena highlighted the difference between a pre-revolutionary and a new woman. Mother and daughter have a conversation about Ximena’s reaction to her husband’s nights at the bar. Helen Safa writes:

Rosa only undertook formal employment after the revolution, while her daughters have worked since they completed school (all siblings completed at least high school). Her daughter, Ximena, was on maternity leave when I first interviewed them and she insisted that her husband not go out alone and take joint responsibility for their child. Rosa objected, noting: “Déjalo que él es hombre, que los hombres son de la calle” (Let him, he’s a man, and men belong on the street). The casa/calle distinction in Cuba dates back to Spanish colonialism and signifies the sharp separation of gender roles, with men dominant in the public sphere and women in the private sphere of the household. Rosa even accepted her husband’s advice when he was living with another woman, although she has not accepted him back as a sexual partner now that he is living back home. Ximena had left her previous *compañero* (a man much her senior), when he would not allow her to work or be active in the community. Ximena believes women and a man are equal, but also different, and was appalled that a man would not give his seat in a bus to a pregnant woman.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Safa, “The Matrifocal Family and Patriarchal Ideology in Cuba and the Caribbean,” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, (2005) 315.

Rosa exemplified the prerevolutionary women Cuban womanists helped to transform because she still acted passive and allowed her husband to act like a vagabond in the street. Ximena exemplifies the new woman because she did not allow her partner to dominate her life and expected him to partake in family roles together.

The question remains as to whether the objectives of the Cuban women's agenda were successful after 1975 up to today. Certainly, ending *machismo* was a difficult task, and according to Debra Evenson old customs and practices persisted, which undermined the objectives of the Family Code. Today, marriage is not common and many women choose consensual relations because women are no longer economically dependent on men. Also, some women do not contribute in carrying out the objectives of the Family Code because some mothers do not force their male children to share household chores<sup>2</sup>. Even professional women dared not challenge tradition. They either took the standard of the double burden, or declined promotions or important high ranking professions so as not to take on more responsibilities.<sup>3</sup> However, not all families denied the practices enacted in the Family Code. Machismo did not entirely end overall, but there were more opportunities for woman than before.

In terms of socioeconomics, equality was not yet accomplished after the Family Code of 1975 was enacted. During the Special Period that began in 1991, an economic gap between Afro-Cubans and white-Cubans brought socioeconomic inequality, especially towards Afro-Cuban women. When Cuba fell into the Special Period, the Cuban government legalized the use of U.S. currency in the early 1990s. The U.S. allowed Cuban immigrants to send no more than \$300 every three months to their

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<sup>2</sup> Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, 146.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

families in Cuba. “Cuban emigrants were predominantly white,” explained Debra Evenson, “the remittances [widened] economic differences between white and black Cubans.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, prostitution rose and even more so with the embargo imposed by the United States. Today, Cuban tourist attractions have many individuals that render their services, as a second job in some cases, to rich tourists as the fastest way for better income. Not all working Cubans work in the sex tourism industry but work selling other goods in the tourism market. Some may sell their art or play music to tourists when they hold careers as engineers, schoolteachers, etc. The epilogue addresses one of the goals that the Cuban state could not accomplish, the abolition of prostitution and sex tourism in Cuba.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 130.

# Epilogue

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The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced what is known in Cuba as the Special Period. This era indicated an economic downfall and eventually a hardship to uphold the principles of the Revolution after 1991. Cuba depended heavily on the Soviet financial aid and some natural resources, such as oil. Russia also helped because they bought the majority of Cuba's cane sugar. The Special Period ended foreign relations between Russia and Cuba further hindering the Cuban economy. In response, Cuba invested heavily in its tourism industry to sustain its economy and was successful in replacing much of the foreign revenue lost with the end of Soviet-Cuban relations. The Cuban government needed to create new ways to increase foreign revenue in the country. The government also turned to investing in food programs and the biotechnology program that included pharmaceutical availability and medical technology.<sup>1</sup> With the rise of Cuba's tourism sector also came the rise of sex tourism. Many women, and many whom were professional women, flocked to the major cities, especially Havana for economic advancement. Sex tourism in Cuba became a "necessary evil" as it attracted elite foreigners who injected foreign money into a cash-strapped economy.

Many studies about sex tourism in Latin America associate sex worker with the term *jinetismo*. A *jinetra* originally meant a jockey, or one who rides on top of a horse, but in Cuba people refer to *jinetras* as hustlers, one who offers services for money.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Florence E. Babb, *The Tourism Encounter: Fashioning Latin American Nations & Histories*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011) 6.

<sup>2</sup> Florence E. Babb, "Sex and Sentiment in Cuban Tourism," *Caribbean Studies* 38, no. 2 (2010): 99; Amalia L Cabezas, "Transnational Sexual Economies—Between Love and Money: Sex, Tourism, and Citizenship in Cuba and the Dominican Republic," *Signs*, 29 (2004): 993.

Since education is free in Cuba, many sex workers are educated. Many sex workers have a profession. For example, some sex workers are engineers but they are *jineteras* at night because sex work affords them much more money than the day jobs. Through the relationships with their clients, sex workers are able to travel, visit places off limits to Cubans, migrate, and pursue find marriage. Tourism provided foreigners “access to areas, services, and goods off limits to Cubans.” So “*Jineteras* connoted not only seeking of money and or resources but also the motivation of survival for doing so.”<sup>3</sup> However, due to the United States’ sanctions, Cuba does not have much access to material goods, such as American advanced technology like Apple computers and iPhones.

#### Sex Work—Economically Essential or A Source of Extra Income?

One of the ways Cubans have access to technology and other goods is through gifts from family who live in the United States, or from relationships developed through tourist encounters. Florence Babb, Alyssa Garcia, Cabezas, and Nadine Fernández all state that sex workers received gifts from their tourist partners and look forward to receiving foreign goods that are not and/or cannot be typically bought in Cuba. Post revolutionary Cuba, “sex and love has provided Cuba a diversion and relief from economic problems,” as well as for some hope for sensual encounters. Cubans also have the desire to be swept away from foreign travelers; they aspire to find love, a romantic relationship, a visa out of Cuba, and hopefully start a new life. So sex work is an option

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<sup>3</sup> Florence E. Babb, “Sex and Sentiment in Cuban Tourism,” *Caribbean Studies*, (2010): 99.

due for desire for more income and to possibly leave the country, which completely undermines the principles of the Revolution previously mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

What are the effects on the Cuban Society?

Because of sex tourism, many Cubans are against tourism. For example, Babb mentions that Cubans think of tourism as a “necessary evil” since with the new reforms the government has allowed “a globalizing capitalist market economy,” small private restaurants, and tourism included which contradicts socialist/communist ideals. However, since the Special Period, Cubans had to find new ways of getting by; they frequently invented new ways to sell items to tourists. The reason it is necessary because tourism brought an economic relief but *mal* (evil) because tourism caused the rise of *jineterismo*/sex tourism.<sup>5</sup>

Alyssa Garcia states in her article that “the state has characterized *jineteras* as morally superficial and lazy, motivated by consumption: the desire to have fancy clothes, enjoy themselves, and go places where Cubans are not allowed.” After 1959 under the Cuban morality, “women’s bodies continued to serve as a way to classify them as failed members of society.”<sup>6</sup> The FMC continues to work to find ways to end “prostitution” and to provide more social programs for women. One way to prevent sex work, the Cuban government began to educate women and instituted women in so called rehabilitations as a way to eliminate prostitution. Certain police forces were in charge on eyeing on women who were suspects of prostitution. The government also “initiated a health campaign that prohibited the practice of prostitution until a woman could see a doctor and have a

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<sup>4</sup> Alyssa Garcia, “Continuous Moral Economies: The State Regulation of Bodies and Sex Work in Cuba,” *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 171-180 & 182.

<sup>5</sup> Florence E. Babb, *The Tourism Encounter*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 31-32.

<sup>6</sup> Alyssa Garcia, “Continuous Moral Economies,” (2010), 175 & 181.

rigorous physical examination. Prostitutes had to undergo required blood tests to ostensibly guarantee minimal health, which also allowed for surveillance and observation.”<sup>7</sup>

### Sex Work and Race

Sex tourism affect Cuban society to the point a stigma on colored female Cubans. The government uses police surveillance to watch for sex workers, and to contain it women of darker skin color and mulattas are targeted and accused of prostitution even if they are not in fact sex workers. Women of darker skin color have the stigma of being called or perceived as prostitutes because most sex workers were of darker skin complexion prior to the Revolution.

Nadine Fernández, in her article, “Back to the Future: Women, Race, and Tourism in Cuba,” also states that to assume a sex worker is to assume a mulatta or an Afro-Cuban.”<sup>8</sup> This stigma makes white Cuban sex workers invisible although it is evident that there are an equal amount of white Cuban sex workers. She uses the example of Loli’s friend Doricel, a white Cuban, who has access to nightclubs. One night Doricel met a Mexican tourist and became his companion during his vacation in Havana. Doricel’s family hoped for marriage out of the relationship though the man left several weeks after meeting her. Dori was only fourteen and the male Mexican tourist was forty. According to the author, Doricel and Loli are also perceived as jineteras because they go out to meet tourists in hopes for an economic advancement in life. Loli’s story was just one of the many stories the author had encountered. The author has met many women who were on

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<sup>7</sup> Garcia, “Continuous Moral Economies,” (2010), 177-178.

<sup>8</sup> Nadine Fernandez, “Back to the Future?: Women, Race, and Tourism in Cuba,” in *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*, by Kamala Kempadoo (Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 1999): 89.

the brink of marriage or were planning on leaving the country with their future husbands. Some women had already established a long romantic relationship with a tourist who financially supports the sex worker, or jinetera. Some perceive this type of work essential since it provides economic opportunities since it is one of the fewest ways to advance in Cuba. However, many jineteras are assumed to be mulattas or Afro-Cuban.

The Cuban government set a system of surveillance throughout tourist cities of Cuba to control the sex tourist activity. In some instances, women who are dressed provocatively in tourist zones could be arrested out of nowhere. Most police alleges the reason for the arrest women are for harassing the tourists, and in Cuba it is a federal offense if a Cuban harasses or assaults a tourist in any way. Sex workers who are caught by the authorities are given only four warning letters, *cartas de advertencia*, before they are sent to rehabilitation for up to four years. However, this does not stop some to go back into sex workers.<sup>9</sup>

Sex tourism is the major source of import for Cuba that by 2000 Cuba served over 2 million tourists bringing \$1.8billion into the economy.<sup>10</sup> Even some argue that the Cuban government secretly approves of sex tourism because it is a high demand for male and female tourist. Foreign women also travel to Cuba to enjoy the company of men, usually Afro-Cuban men.<sup>11</sup> Since working in the tourist industry is basically the only way for economic advancement, a chance to escape the island and to travel, many Cubans are becoming and are acceptable for foreign interaction. Yenisel Rodríguez Pérez, a Cuban journalist, wrote in his article for the *Havana Times* online newspaper that many

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<sup>9</sup> Cabezas, "Transnational Sexual Economies," 1005.

<sup>10</sup> Nadine Fernandez, "Back to the Future?," *Sun, Sex, and Gold*: (1999): 83.

<sup>11</sup> Florence Babb, "Sex and Sentiment in Cuban Tourism," 103.

activities are banned in Cuba, yet many of those illegal statuses are overwhelmingly practiced. He argues, “Sex tourism in Cuba is being instituted as a legitimate economic institution.”<sup>12</sup> In this article, he interviewed a maid who called out for the legalization of prostitution in Cuba; it just brought more jobs for maids, servers, single mothers, single or married men, etc. Many workers do not have to sleep with the tourists; they can just act like hosts or friends taking tourists to places. Instead of trying to eliminate prostitution, the country would be better with regulating and legalizing it like other countries have; the issue will never go away. He considers sex tourism a free market because since it is illegal and many people do it, Cubans make extra and much more income. However, regulating sex tourism can bring backfire if the labor would have to distribute its wages like the rest of the professions.<sup>13</sup> Either way, the tourism industry relies on sex workers to sustain the industry and to appeal to the needs of those foreigners who specifically come for companionship.

Many tourists come to Cuba specifically to have sex and fulfill their fantasies with either Cuban men or Cuban women. Many tourists came especially during the Special Period when Cuba opened up more with the investment of their tourism industry. Even if sex was not what tourists had in mind, the demand for sex while traveling is pretty high and it creates a source of income, a job, and an opportunity for many Cubans to find romance, relationships, and economic advancement, possibly marriage and to travel to other countries. However, Cubans have free access to life’s basic necessities, such as: food, health care, low cost rent and available goods. Arguably, jineteras are not just prostitutes who look for money in exchange for sex. Many jineteras are educated,

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<sup>12</sup> Yenisel Pérez Rodríguez, “Sex Tourism: The Largest Free Market in Cuba,” *Havana Times* (2012) Last modified October 15, 2012, <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=80296>.

<sup>13</sup> Yenisel Pérez Rodríguez, “Sex Tourism,” (2012): <http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=80296>.

few have professions, and they look for companionships, relationships and many other opportunities ordinary Cubans do not have access to. Although the Cuban government is critical about the subject, it has not done much effort since the Special Period to eliminate the problem because it is inseparable to the tourism industry, and many Cubans will not give up that type of income.

Sex tourism in Cuba undermines one of the main principles of the Revolution. Womanists like Vilma Espín worked hard to create opportunities other than sex work for Cuban woman. Sex work was deemed as antisocialist and an unequal sort of employment for women not only because of the stigma prostitution carried but also because society believed that sex work degraded the social class of a human being. With the embargo and blockade in the 1960s imposed by the U.S. and then fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cubans found an opportunity to economically advance in the tourism industry. Sadly, some Cubans today find it easier to prosper in sex work and/or escape the economic depression in Cuba than working on the state's salary. Sex workers make more money than those who do not live in nearby tourist cities and resorts, creating an economic gap between state workers and tourist workers. Sex work thrives in Cuba not because women have been degraded to a prerevolutionary level, but rather because Cuba is so currency poor that any tourism-related activity that demands such compensation is impossible to resist. Still, the prevalence of sex tourism in Cuba fundamentally subverts the goals of female revolutionaries like Celia Sánchez who were inspired into action in part to end the sexual exploitation that had historically plagued Cuban women. Moreover, sex work creates social division amongst the classes, another goal that Cuban revolutionaries strove to achieve in their quest to create a socialist society. With Cuba heavily depending on its

tourism revenue, it cannot attempt to eliminate sex work. Doing so can further economically damage Cuba's economy. Even today, the Cuban government claims that sex tourism does not exist, however, the state has not taken measures to eliminate it.

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