

**A Woman's Place:  
The Cuban Revolution and Gender Inequality in the Home**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis is an empirical study of changes in Cuban women's public and private lives from the 1959 Revolution to 1990. It describes the colonial gender ideology that has influenced present-day male and female relations, behaviors, and gender roles, and has perpetuated sexual stereotypes. It also discusses how this ideology has prevented women's full equality in the home and gives examples from interviews, films, and literature to show where these inequalities in the home are still evident.

The interviews, films, and literature utilized in this study represent both Cuban and North American perceptions of women's status in Cuban society and in the home. In using these sources, the author is able to examine Cuban women's post-revolutionary roles, relations, and experiences in the most balanced way possible without first-hand travel to Cuba. The author includes Cuban women's (and a few men's) voices as much as possible through the use of previously conducted interviews.

This study concludes that Cuban gender inequality still exists in both the public and the private spheres, though more acutely in the private, and that this is the result primarily of the perpetuation of Spanish gender ideology. This ideology has placed women in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men and has assigned men and women unequal roles in society and the home. Women traditionally have been associated with *la casa* (the home) and men with *la calle* (the street), which has made it difficult for women to escape their domestic obligations.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1959, Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba through a military coup and began his revolutionary crusade to reshape Cuba into a socialist society. A large part of the planning, execution, and success of this crusade not only involved women but directly depended upon them. In the 1950s, Castro began to employ women as couriers, fund-raisers, spies, and soldiers—all part of his plan to overthrow Fulgencio Batista. Then, after he seized power in 1959, Castro began to use women as volunteer teachers, nurses, and social workers to carry out the necessary task of educating the Cuban people and improving their quality of life.

By involving women in the revolutionary process during the 1950s, Castro had already initiated the transition to socialism. But in order to create a *full* transition to socialism, Castro believed that it was necessary to make healthcare free to all Cubans, to decrease the illiteracy rate, to educate the uneducated, to eliminate racism and other prejudices, and above all, to make men and women equal.<sup>1</sup> These tasks required economic as well as ideological changes. Without economic changes, the country would continue on its path of economic stagnation, which would prevent Castro from building new schools and hospitals, implementing healthcare and labor reforms, incorporating women into the work force, and creating many of the other structural changes necessary for the new Cuban society. Additionally, a lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Isabel Holgado Fernández, *No es fácil: Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria* (Barcelona, Spain: Icaria Antrazyt, 2000): 12. Also Lourdes Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*: Women in Cuba," *Women, War, and Revolution*, eds. Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1980): 183.

ideological changes would prevent Cuban society from eliminating racial and sexual prejudices and gender inequality, because people would continue to think and behave as they always had. Liberating women required Castro not only to attack the problem of women's inequality in the work force, in politics, and in education by creating resources and organizations for women, but also to abolish the ideology of male supremacy<sup>2</sup> that influenced gender relations and women's status in the home.<sup>3</sup> Attacking the "woman problem" from all angles would allow men and women to coexist at a level where they could contribute equally to the solution of national problems—a poor economy, a low literacy level, high unemployment, the ideology of male supremacy, and the unfair division of labor in the home. After all, the main reason for Castro to liberate Cuban women from their traditional sex role was to free them to serve.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. Focus of Research

Within the framework of Castro's socialist agenda lay proposed solutions to women's political, economic, and social inequality: 1) "[...the] integration of women into the labor force, 2) [the] development of female resources by means of education, and 3) the mobilization of women to struggle for the general goals of socialist

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<sup>2</sup> The "ideology of male supremacy" is another term for *machismo*, which encompasses a wide range of sex-role stereotypes of women and men and has several different connotations, among which are: 1) the application of the double standard, which makes men's behavior (sexual or not) more acceptable than women's in the same context, 2) the expression of exaggerated male aggressiveness and female submissiveness, and 3) the stereotype that women belong in the home and men in the streets. In other words, it is a man's role to rule inside and outside the home—politically, economically, and sexually.

<sup>3</sup> Casal "Revolution and *Conciencia*" 184-185.

<sup>4</sup> Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan M. Rigdon, Four Women Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977) x.

construction [...]”<sup>5</sup> These solutions were intended to address women’s inequality in the public sphere, but it would not be until the mid-1970s that Castro attempted to address the problem of women’s inequality in the domestic sphere (the home). For the most part, Castro and the Cuban Revolution have succeeded in granting greater equality to women in the public sphere, but inequality still exists in one important area of women’s lives: the family. Although the Cuban Revolution of 1959 gave Cuban women more political power, more opportunities to work outside of the home, and a better education, the Revolution has not significantly improved women’s position within the home or family relations. Vestiges of the gender ideology inherited from Spanish colonization continue to perpetuate male-female inequality in the Cuban home and account for the paternalistic nature of the Cuban government and the organizations that it supports.

## **B. Methodology**

The methodology used to prepare this thesis includes a review of literature, films, and interviews published both in Cuba and in North America in the last three decades. Because I did not travel to Cuba personally to conduct interviews, this study relies in part on interviews conducted by North American and Cuban scholars who traveled to Cuba in the 1970s and 80s.<sup>6</sup> It also relies on Cuban films, speeches, laws, and censuses. Due to the paucity of Cuban works dealing with gender ideology and

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<sup>5</sup> Casal “Revolution and *Conciencia*” 184.

<sup>6</sup> These interviews are the most recent available. Isabel Holgado Fernández’s work, published in Cuba, also presents the testimonies of over sixty Havana women.

gender relations, most of the secondary sources in the Works Cited were published in North America. This fact, however, does not make their content any less significant. It only makes clear what Sueann Caulfield has said: “Gender analysis has not been as central a concern...in Latin America” as it has been in North America.<sup>7</sup> Still, thirteen of the sources used to prepare this thesis were published in Cuba, and most of these use gender as a category of analysis. If one were able to visit *La Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba*, one would certainly encounter other useful sources, but many of these are not available in the United States.

Another approach to this thesis would be to interview Cuban men and women living in the United States about the effect that the Revolution has had on Cuban women.<sup>8</sup> However, most of these men and women have not lived in Cuba for several years due to their political convictions and may not have lived in Cuba long enough after the Revolution to witness the changes that this paper will discuss. Additionally, Cubans living in the U.S. have been influenced by American culture and would present an outsider’s perspective rather than an insider’s perspective.

With consideration of these factors, I have tried to approach this study in a fair and balanced manner. This study does not criticize the Cuban government for its shortcomings, nor does it view Cuban women as victims. It simply attempts to show that Cuban gender inequality in the home still exists forty years after the Revolution

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<sup>7</sup> Sueann Caulfield, “The History of Gender in the Historiography of Latin America,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81.3-4 (2001): 450.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Fox interviewed Cuban émigré men in the U.S., but no women. Fox, “Honor, Shame, and Women’s Liberation in Cuba: Views of Working-Class Émigré Men,” *Male and Female in Latin America*, by Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

and that this is in large part due to gender ideology's slow rate of change. This study is unique for its examination of women's status within and outside the Cuban household, because it shows that Cuban gender inequality exists, it identifies specifically the roots of this inequality (ideology and the economy), and it then presents evidence of this inequality in literature, films, and interviews. This is unlike what previous Cuban women's studies have done. Some previous studies showed that gender inequality still existed after the Revolution but failed to present sound evidence of this inequality in the home or perhaps relied entirely on interviews or literature and disregarded films. Other studies addressed the source of gender inequality as the struggling Cuban economy or the pervasiveness of old attitudes and sex-role stereotypes but did not go so far as to explain what these attitudes and stereotypes encompassed or to show that they are still visible in Cuban gender relations today. The literature review, which comprises the first chapter of this thesis, will identify the studies mentioned here and discuss them in more detail.

### **C. Theoretical Framework**

The preparation of this thesis began in the spring of 2002, when I stumbled upon this topic in one of my graduate seminars. In the process of writing a term paper on a similar subject, I became intrigued by the idea that women living in a socialist society are, at least theoretically, equal with men. Under socialism, the government offers all of the same political, economic, and social freedoms and rights to women as it does to men, and no individual has any more rights or privileges than another. This means that men and women earn equal pay for equal work, have equal

access to education and healthcare, and have the same opportunities to participate in government and political activities. It *should* also mean (but often does not) that men and women living in a socialist state have equal status in the home, equal participation in the rearing of children, and equal responsibility in housework.

What I discovered in the Cuban case, however, is that equality in the public sphere does not guarantee equality in the private sphere. The way that men and women behave and relate to one another in the home is greatly influenced by the way that they have been conditioned by society to think and to act, and this is not always consistent with socialist ideals. Society<sup>9</sup> conditions male and female children from an early age to think and to act in gender-appropriate ways.<sup>10</sup> Once adults, says Mirta de la Torre Mulhare, Cuban men and women tend to follow the dominant mode of behavior for their gender. These modes of behavior are not equal. In the home, the male is the authority figure, and the female is the nurturer.<sup>11</sup> As will be demonstrated in this thesis, this is true in Cuba even today.

The fact that inequality in the home still exists, even after forty years of revolution, is important in that it shows that Cuba has not fully transformed itself into the kind of socialist state envisioned by Castro in 1959. Cuban women and men, for the most part, continue to fulfill their traditional gender roles in the home, which places women in a subordinate position vis-à-vis men. The purpose of this thesis,

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<sup>9</sup> I realize that the term “society” has a number of different meanings, but what I am referring to are the societal institutions that participate in the socialization of children—church, family, school, and government.

<sup>10</sup> See Mirta de la Torre Mulhare, “Sexual Ideology in Pre-Castro Cuba: A Cultural Analysis,” Diss. (Univ of Pittsburgh, 1969): 182; 220-221; 231-235.

<sup>11</sup> De la Torre 124-135.

however, is not to develop a theory about *why* this is happening, but simply to show that it *is* happening. Therefore, this is an empirical study about the changes that have been made in women's public lives and the changes that have yet to be made in their private lives. Literature, films, and interviews will attest to the continued inequality between men and women in the Cuban family.

The reason that this study focuses on women is that the position of women, whether within the home or within society, not only affects society as a whole but also characterizes it. According to Margaret Leahy, the position of women in a society represents a "coherent structure in which all the elements [of social relations] are integrated": ideology, the role of the family, the role of society, the role of the economy, and the parameters of acceptable social activities and roles.<sup>12</sup> Their position affects three crucial aspects in any society's survival: reproduction, subsistence, and defense. International studies suggest that the more involved women are economically (in the work force), the more their power in decision-making and their equality in the home will increase, the more fertility rates will decrease, and the higher their aspirations for their children will be. This is thought by scholars to occur because a woman's economic power most strongly influences her power to make decisions and her status in society.<sup>13</sup> Based on this analysis, we can conclude that since most Cuban women are not economically active (65 percent),<sup>14</sup> for this reason

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<sup>12</sup> Margaret Leahy, Development Strategies and the Status of Women (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986): 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ratna Ghosh, Introduction, Women in the Family and the Economy, Eds. George Kurian and Ratna Ghosh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981): xii.

<sup>14</sup> Teresa Valdés and Enrique Gomariz, Mujeres Latinoamericanas en Cifras: Cuba (Madrid:

they have less power than men in the home and in society. It also leads to the conclusion that a full transition to socialism has not yet occurred in Cuba. The 1959 Revolution sought to change this, but it has not succeeded. Nevertheless, Cuba represents a rather unique case, of a totalitarian socialist government intent upon gender equality. It merits a more detailed analysis.

#### **D. Chapter Summaries**

The opening chapter of this thesis, **Chapter Two**, will review a few of the key scholarly texts related to Cuban women, the family, and gender relations, and will organize these texts into three categories based on their relation to the research questions. It will also relate the research trends in this area of study since 1974—the year in which the groundbreaking work by Verena Stolcke was published—and until 2000, when the most current source used in this section was published.

**Chapter Three** of this thesis will examine the history of Cuban gender ideology, including a discussion of its origins and what it embodies on a theoretical level. This chapter will critically review a few key sources on Cuban gender ideology in order to establish the framework for the following chapters. These sources will show what nineteenth-century Cubans—particularly white elites—perceived to be ‘proper’ and ‘improper’ male and female behavior and relations and how these perceptions affected men and women’s position in society.

The focus of **Chapter Four** turns toward the political, economic, and social status of Cuban women before and after the Revolution of 1959. It will present statistical information from the 1953 census and from secondary sources that attest to the changes that occurred in women's public lives between 1952 and 1974. Women's under-representation in politics, their scanty existence in the workforce, their low educational level, and their limited access to childcare and other social services all improved after 1959.

In **Chapter Five**, the focus will be Cuban gender relations in the 1969 to 1974 period. The time period in this chapter overlaps slightly with the time period in Chapter Three, because 1969 corresponds to the year in which the first study on twentieth-century gender relations was published. 1974, on the other hand, represents the year before the Cuban government intervened in gender and family relations. Analyzing gender relations in this time period will show the extent to which nineteenth-century gender ideology has been adopted and internalized by twentieth-century Cuban men and women. It will also show how this ideology affected representations of gender relations in film and literature.

The final chapter, **Chapter Six**, will analyze the extent to which the Revolution changed Cuban women's private lives between 1975 and 1990. This chapter will discuss how the Cuban government attempted, and ultimately failed, to improve women's status in the home and family relations through the Family Code of 1975. To do this, it will examine the sexual division of labor in the home, the causes and rates of divorce, parent-child relations, and women's fertility choices.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before 1974, very few studies on Cuban women existed.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the whole field of Latin American women's studies was extremely underdeveloped.<sup>16</sup> But in 1974, one of the first comprehensive studies of Cuban women emerged: Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba by Verena Stolcke. Though this work focuses specifically on nineteenth-century Cuban women, it paved the way for other women's studies, not only about Cuban women but also about women in other Latin American countries. From 1974 onward, says Sueann Caulfield, there has been a steady flow in work that focuses on Latin American women and "a great surge of studies that use gender as a category of analysis."<sup>17</sup> The result of this abundance of women's studies in recent years has been an increased difficulty in sorting through and organizing these works by theoretical approaches, methodologies, and themes.

What this chapter proposes to do, consequently, is to organize those works that have justified the preparation of this thesis into three categories. These three categories are based on the manner in which I formulated my ideas for this study and on the research questions that I asked along the way. The first category, then, will include those studies that provide evidence of the continued existence of gender inequality in Cuba, both in the private and in the public spheres. These studies demonstrate that Cuban women, several years after the Revolution, still do not share the same status, rights, and freedoms as Cuban men in the home and are not

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<sup>15</sup> Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, Sex and Revolution (New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1996): viii.

<sup>16</sup> Caulfield 449; also Leahy 4.

<sup>17</sup> Caulfield 449.

represented equally in politics or in the workforce. The second category, which builds off the first, is comprised of studies that explain the origins of these inequalities. Some of the works that fall into this second category attribute gender inequalities to economic problems, and others attribute it to the pervasiveness of nineteenth-century gender ideology in Cuban society. Finally, the third category of works used to justify this thesis includes those works that describe Cuban gender ideology in the nineteenth century; that is, works that describe the ideals of masculine and feminine behaviors and relations and how these ideals are intended to play out in Cuban society.

To begin, this chapter must mention two sources that do not fall into one of these three categories but that played an instrumental role in the research process and that are essential for all Cuban women's studies. These sources are K. Lynn Stoner's annotated bibliographies Cuban and Cuban-American Women and Latinas of the Americas, which provide a comprehensive list of sources on Cuban women and the family and served as points of departure for my research.<sup>18</sup> Latinas of the Americas organizes sources by country, time period, and subject matter, whereas Cuban and Cuban-American Women organizes sources primarily by time period. While both of these bibliographies survey a large quantity of works on Cuban women and the family, Cuban and Cuban-American Women contains more recent studies and

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<sup>18</sup> K. Lynn Stoner and Luís Hipólito, eds., Cuban and Cuban-American Women: An Annotated Bibliography (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000); and K. Lynn Stoner, Latinas of the Americas: A Source Book (New York: Garland, 1989).

provides abstracts for each work included. No study of Cuban women should begin without first consulting these two works.

Moving on to the first category under review in this chapter, one will find several useful sources that attest to the continued existence of Cuban gender inequalities in and outside of the home. The most important of these sources include: Isabel Holgado Fernández's *No es fácil: Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria* (Barcelona: Icaria Antrazyt, 2000), Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula's *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1996), Maxine Molyneaux's *State, Gender, and Institutional Change in Cuba's 'Special Period'* (London: Univ of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996), Inés Reza Moreira's [et. al.] *Análisis de las investigaciones sobre la familia cubana, 1970-1987* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990), Helen Safa's *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), and Lisandro Pérez's "The Family in Cuba" (*The Family in Latin America*, eds. Man Singh Das and Clinton J. Jesser. Sahibabad, India: Vikas, 1980). Other useful sources to consider are: the U.N.'s *Cinco estudios sobre la situación económica de la mujer en América Latina* (Santiago de Chile: U.N., 1983), Oscar Lewis's [et. al.] *Four Women Living the Revolution* (Urbana: Univ of Illinois Press, 1977), Inger Holt-Seeland's *Women of Cuba* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1981), Margaret Randall's *Cuban Women Now* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1974), and Mayda Álvarez's *Mujer y poder en Cuba* (La Habana: FMC and UNICEF, 1999).

The sources mentioned here represent a number of different academic disciplines, and each approaches Cuban gender inequality from a different angle. Some studies emphasize inequalities in the private sphere, others emphasize inequalities in the public sphere, and others emphasize both equally. What is important to note about the sources comprising this first category, however, is that they all make clear the fact that gender inequalities in and outside of the home still exist. While inequalities in the public sphere are important, this study as a whole will pay more attention to inequalities in the private sphere, as these have proven more difficult for the Cuban government to correct.

Aside from the Family Code of 1975 and the Constitution of 1976, the Cuban government has not passed any other recent laws or regulations aimed at equalizing gender relations within the home. This stands in stark contrast to the large number of labor and health laws that the government has created to equalize men and women's roles and statuses in the public sphere. For instance, the Cuban government passed the Maternity Law in 1974 to counter employers' discriminatory hiring practices and to protect women from dismissal in case of pregnancy.<sup>19</sup> Then in 1979, the government passed a new social security law that offered women improved pensions and retirement benefits.<sup>20</sup> But in the private sphere (the family), the Cuban government "has done nothing to resolve the sexual division of labor in the household, the double burden experienced by workingwomen, or the inequality of the

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<sup>19</sup> Safa, The Myth of the Male Breadwinner 150-151; Valdés and Gomáriz 91.

<sup>20</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 106.

sexes [...]. It has only perpetuated the equation of females with the home and males with the street.”<sup>21</sup> This, argues Isabel Holgado Fernández, has not only caused Cuban women to remain in a position of inferiority but it has also contributed to the high divorce rate, the climbing rate of teenage pregnancies and female-headed households, and the general deterioration of the Cuban family.<sup>22</sup> As a result of the government’s inaction, Cuban women’s status in the public sphere has improved to a far greater extent than it has in the private sphere.

In the home, Cuban women continue to bear the primary responsibility for childcare and household chores, and few men share equally in these responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> This unequal division of labor in the home gives Cuban women less free time than men and causes what is known as the “second shift”.<sup>24</sup> It also means that men typically devote less time than their wives to raising their children.<sup>25</sup> One study shows that Cuban workingwomen have 2 hours, 42 minutes of free time per day, while men have 4 hours, 4 minutes.<sup>26</sup> This difference in free time is attributed to women’s domestic responsibilities and gives them less time than men to devote to activities outside of the home.

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<sup>21</sup> Holgado 325.

<sup>22</sup> Holgado 325.

<sup>23</sup> Azicri, “Women’s Development” 39; Diana Sedal Yanes, “*Mujer cubana: Participación y funciones familiares*”, *Repertorio Americano* n.e. 11 (Jan-June 2001): 72, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Azicri, “Women’s Development” 38. The “second shift” or the “double shift” is the combination of both domestic and outside work, and it is typical of workingwomen. See also Valdés and Gomáriz 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> Sedal 76.

<sup>26</sup> Azicri, “Women’s Development” 39. Also Valdés and Gomáriz 50.

Though Cuban women's status has not improved significantly in the home since the Revolution, some scholars argue that their gains in the public sphere should not be overlooked.<sup>27</sup> In terms of their educational level, Cuban women have progressed tremendously since the pre-revolutionary period, when few women attended school beyond the secondary grades. Cuban women today comprise nearly half of all students enrolled at the secondary and university levels.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, in politics, women are represented far more equally than they were in 1953, when very few women held or ran for political offices. Additionally, more women are economically active today than they were before the Revolution, and they occupy fields that previously were only occupied by men, such as medicine, law, engineering, and business. Finally, a far greater number of support services, such as daycare centers and communal Laundromats, are available to women.<sup>29</sup> These support services have facilitated women's incorporation into the workforce and their participation in activities outside the homes, such as labor unions and political organizations.

But women's gains in the public sphere have regressed in recent years due to the economic crisis that began in the early 1990s. This period, known as the Special Period, has created unemployment; government cuts in education, daycare services, housing, and healthcare; increased taxes on food, clothing, and other luxury items;

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<sup>27</sup> Leahy 96.

<sup>28</sup> Valdés and Gomáriz 60; 64. 48 percent of secondary school students and 42.5 percent of university students were women in 1989. However, when one reviews the number of women who actually graduate from these levels, the numbers are much lower: 39 percent from secondary school and 4.5 percent from the university. See page 54.

<sup>29</sup> Safa, The Myth of the Male Breadwinner 28.

and a limited availability of household appliances.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the Cuban family has had to take on many of the economic and social functions previously performed by the government, which has placed a great strain on parents, children, and women in particular.<sup>31</sup> Shortages of food, water, electricity, appliances, housing, and public transportation not only have affected women's labor force participation but they have also made activities like cooking, cleaning, and traveling more time-consuming and expensive.<sup>32</sup>

Contrary to the improvement in Cuban women's public lives, many scholars contend that inequalities in the public sphere still exist, particularly in politics and in the workforce. In politics, for example, women have yet to reach equal representation in the branches of local and national government and hold few seats in the upper echelons.<sup>33</sup> In the work force, women continue to occupy jobs that have often been considered "appropriate" for women, like teaching, social services, and clerical work.<sup>34</sup> Nearly 300 jobs have been declared "dangerous" for pregnant women due to their use of heavy physical labor or their risk of injury. Pregnant women are prohibited from occupying these jobs, and women who are not pregnant are

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<sup>30</sup> Holgado 36; Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*" 189-190.

<sup>31</sup> Holgado 131; Safa, *The Myth* 166; Leahy 113; Fox 36; Valdés and Gomáriz 94, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 32; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution* 120.

<sup>33</sup> Valdés and Gomáriz 96-97. In 1987, 5 percent of Ministers, 9 percent of Vice-Ministers, and 24 percent of Directors of the State were women. In the legislative branch, women represented only 23 percent of the National Assembly, 24 percent of the Provincial Assemblies, and 13 percent of the Municipal Assemblies in 1992. See also Mayda Álvarez, *Mujer y poder en Cuba* (La Habana: UNICEF, 1999): 7.

<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Wall Bingham and Susan Hill Gross, *Women in Latin America* (St. Louis Park, MN: Glenghurst Publications, 1985): 113. Also Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution* 102.

discouraged from filling them.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, 44 percent of women are employed but they occupy only 5 percent of managerial and director positions.<sup>36</sup> As a percentage of the workforce, women comprise 37 percent, while men comprise 63 percent.<sup>37</sup> Some scholars even go so far as to say that the public forms of patriarchy that are found in male-dominated labor unions, political parties, and occupations are the central sites of women's oppression, not the family as this study contends.<sup>38</sup> Certainly, female political and work-force participation rates give this impression, but other scholars still argue that Cuban women face the greatest oppression in the family.<sup>39</sup> One cannot deny, however, that Cuban women continue to face discrimination in politics and in the workforce and that they are underrepresented in both.<sup>40</sup>

Cuban scholars debate the origins of gender inequalities, both in the public and in the private sphere. One group of scholars explains gender inequalities through economic problems, and another group explains them through ideological problems. Scholars belonging to the first group claim that Cuban men and women would be more equal on all levels if it were not for Cuba's economic problems, which became

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<sup>35</sup> Azicri, "Women's Development" 42. Also, Valdés and Gomáriz 84, 90.

<sup>36</sup> Fox 31; Valdés and Gomáriz. The percentage of women employed is for 1993, and the percentage of females as managers and directors is for 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Mariana Ravenet Ramírez [et. al.], *La mujer rural y urbana* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1989): 29. These numbers are for 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 185; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution* 182; and Virginia Navarra, *Women's Work, Men's Work* (Boston: M. Boyars, 1980): 43-44.

<sup>39</sup> Isabel Largaña and John Dumoulin, *Hacia una concepción científica de la emancipación de la mujer* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983): 10, 53.

<sup>40</sup> Fox 32; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution* 105.

more acute in the early 1990s.<sup>41</sup> Some of these problems include the housing shortage, the struggling agricultural sector, the lack of funding for daycare services, unemployment, and the limited availability of timesaving household appliances.<sup>42</sup> These economic problems have diverted the regime's attention away from gender and women's issues and toward economic survival.

Contrary to economic problems, the other group of scholars contends that Cuba's gender inequalities stem from the ideology inherited from colonial Spain. This is the argument that this thesis supports. From childhood through adulthood, Cubans are taught the "common virtues" of the sexes, including appropriate behaviors and gender roles within and outside of the home.<sup>43</sup> The ideology of masculine and feminine behaviors and roles directs Cuban men and women's treatment of and relationships with one another to such an extent that no aspect of their lives is left untouched by it.<sup>44</sup> Marital relations, laws, and societal institutions are all influenced by gender ideology.<sup>45</sup> Because it is so pervasive and because it is passed down from generation to generation, gender ideology is very difficult to change.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Cuban men identify more closely with their economic role in the public sphere, while Cuban women identify primarily with their roles in the private sphere as mothers and wives.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> See Hugh S. Thomas [et. al.], *La revolución cubana: 25 años después* (Madrid: Playor, 1985): 110.

<sup>42</sup> Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*" 189-190.

<sup>43</sup> Fox 286.

<sup>44</sup> De la Torre 269.

<sup>45</sup> U.N. 154, 185.

<sup>46</sup> Pérez 261.

<sup>47</sup> Helen I. Safa, "Economic Restructuring and Gender Subordination," Latin American Perspectives

Though many studies explain gender inequalities through ideology, few actually define what is embodied in this ideology. A small number of works, however, explain the characteristics of Cuban gender ideology and how this ideology is acted out in men and women's behaviors and relations.<sup>48</sup> These works tend to agree that Cuban society views males as providers, protectors, and sexual aggressors and females as dependents, nurturers, and virgins.<sup>49</sup> The effects of this ideology are numerous. In the home, women depend on their spouses financially, bear and raise their children, look after the house, and bow to their husbands and children's needs. Men support the family financially, control the family budget, and expect service from their wives.<sup>50</sup> Outside of the home, women are viewed as vulnerable, indecisive, and intellectually limited, therefore requiring protection and guidance from men. Men, on the other hand, control the streets and are independent, authoritative, and strong.<sup>51</sup> These differences in Cuban men and women's private and public roles reflect centuries of sex role stereotypes and attitudes that have placed women in a subordinate and inferior position.<sup>52</sup>

Changing these stereotypes and attitudes not only requires a conscious effort by the Cuban people but also an effort by the Cuban government to eradicate patriarchal notions of what are appropriate and inappropriate masculine and feminine

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22.2 (Spring 1995): 48.

<sup>48</sup> These studies include: De la Torre Mulhare's "Sexual Ideology in Pre-Castro Cuba", Holgado's *No es fácil*, and Lourdes Fernández Rius's "Roles de género y mujeres académicas", *Ciencias Sociales* 88 (2000): 63-75.

<sup>49</sup> Fernández Rius 65.

<sup>50</sup> De la Torre 248-250.

<sup>51</sup> Fernández Rius 72.

<sup>52</sup> Holgado 136.

activities. In this regard, Cuban scholars have found that some Cuban men and women, particularly the older generations, fall into old patterns of behavior and act out those tasks that traditionally have been assigned to their sex. For instance, women often do not involve their sons in household chores or delegate household responsibilities to their husbands. Instead, they take an extra burden upon themselves.<sup>53</sup> Cuban men and women also educate their sons and daughters according to different models, whereby boys “are encouraged within the family to develop an awareness as social producers” and “girls continue to be oriented to the role of wife and mother.”<sup>54</sup> Actions such as these only serve to perpetuate the problem of gender inequality in Cuba.

Where the government is concerned, scholars have noted that the government has made little progress in transforming Cuban society’s perceptions of male and female roles. Many governmental policies continue to reinforce gender inequalities. For instance, Cuban women (but not men) are restricted from certain occupations, and women (not men) are allowed leave from work when their children are sick or when they are pregnant. Also, the government offers domestic classes to women on how to care for sick children, how to make their homes more attractive, and how to knit and sew. It also gives them special preferences in grocery stores and food lines.<sup>55</sup> These programs perpetuate the idea that women, not men, are in charge of maintaining the

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<sup>53</sup> Vilma Espín Guillois, Cuban Women Confront the Future (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1991): 77.

<sup>54</sup> Espín, Cuban Women 70.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Kaufman Purcell, “Modernizing Women for a Modern Society,” Male and Female in Latin America ed. by Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 1973): 267-268. See also Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 104-106; 124.

home and do nothing to change Cuban men and women's perceptions of their roles in society.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the government's shortcomings in public policy, the Cuban government has also neglected to expand the body of research on the family and to use existing research to shape public policy. Vilma Espín, president of the Federation of Cuban Women, admits that the government has not fully utilized social research to improve family conditions. Only recently (1990) did the government create a "Family Study Group" to study and analyze family problems in more detail and to incorporate the group's findings into public policy.<sup>57</sup> Still, it is uncertain whether or not the Family Study Group has served its purpose or whether other groups like it have been formed. Before 1990, however, the government had directed very few studies on the Cuban family, aside from demographic studies that failed to provide any real analysis or conclusions of family life.<sup>58</sup> Based on the sources used in this study, however, it seems that more useful and comprehensive family studies are emerging in Cuba.

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<sup>56</sup> Holgado 325-326.

<sup>57</sup> Espín, Cuban Women 75-76.

<sup>58</sup> Inés Reza Moreira [et. al.], Análisis de las investigaciones sobre la familia cubana (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990): 9-10.

### III. THE HISTORY OF CUBAN GENDER IDEOLOGY

[...] A creature whose main goal in life is that of nurturing and protecting her family can easily remain faithful to one man. Not only should a man expect faithfulness but he must demand it, since it is natural to the physiology of the normal female. An unfaithful female, one who places sexual pleasure over maternal nurture, is unnatural, lowly, 'bad.'<sup>59</sup>

The idea that Cuban women are nurturing, protective, and faithful comprises only one small part of the multi-faceted gender ideology that exists in Cuba today. This gender ideology, dating from Spanish colonial society, not only affects the way that men and women think about themselves and others but also affects the entire Cuban social, political, and economic structure. Speaking about gender ideology often creates problems, as the term itself has many definitions and allows for several interpretations. Additionally, its roots are often difficult to find, and they extend into many areas of society—such as educational, economic, and political institutions—and of an individual's life—work and family, to name two. But, according to Elizabeth Kuznesof, studying gender ideology is an important part of “seeing women's [and men's] legal position, employment, and life chances within the context of social life in general and within the context of class and race relations and a specific historical time and place in particular.”<sup>60</sup> Many Latin American historical studies in the past have made the mistake of separating gender and gender relations from their analyses of events that are occurring in society as a whole. The result has been the production

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<sup>59</sup> De la Torre 149.

<sup>60</sup> Elizabeth Kuznesof, “The Construction of Gender in Colonial Latin America,” Colonial Latin American Review 1.1-2 (1992): 254.

of studies that separate gender, gender relations, and gender ideology from the societies in which they are very much embedded.<sup>61</sup>

One way to avoid this shortcoming is to contextualize gender, gender relations, and gender ideology within a society's social, economic, and political structures. Due to the brevity of this study, however, this study will not be able to focus on gender within all three of these types of structures. Instead, Cuban gender ideology will be contextualized within modern male-female relations, particularly those between husband and wife in the institution of the family. This contextualization, however, will be quite problematic, for it requires the definition of gender and gender ideology, the identification of the roots and characteristics of present-day Cuban gender ideologies, and the examination of how Cuban men and women "think about gender and gendered experiences."<sup>62</sup> One may accomplish this last task by reviewing interviews with Cuban men and women, personal letters and journal entries, and literature and films that illustrate Cuban gender ideology in male-female relations. This chapter will rely upon studies conducted by Cuban scholars in which Cuban gender ideology surfaces, such as interviews, literature, and film.

With regards to defining gender and gender ideology, this chapter will not attempt to create its own definition—as this task in itself could constitute an entire essay—but will turn to the definitions already created by prominent scholars such as Sueann Caulfield and Elizabeth Kuznesof. The term "gender", as stated by Sueann

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<sup>61</sup> Kuznesof 254.

<sup>62</sup> Kuznesof 254.

Caulfield, “is a [broad] analytical category that includes consideration of how female and male subjects are socially constructed and positioned and how representations of femininity and masculinity structure institutional power.”<sup>63</sup> This definition of gender directly relates to the history of gender ideology in Cuba, because, as will be demonstrated, ideas about gender and gendered experiences<sup>64</sup> not only mold Cuban men and women into “males” and “females” but also determine where and how they fit into Cuban society, how they are portrayed in films and literature, and how they relate to one another.

With these definitions of gender and gender ideology in mind, one should proceed next to the identification of the origins and the characteristics of present-day Cuban gender ideologies, which will comprise the first section of this chapter. To do this, scholars can turn to the well-known work of anthropologist Verena Stolcke, who wrote one of the first historical studies to examine the “intersection of race, gender, and class in the maintenance of social hierarchy” in nineteenth-century Cuba.<sup>65</sup> Isabel Holgado Fernández’s recent work, No es fácil: Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria, and a related work on Puerto Rico also clearly illustrate the characteristics of modern Cuban gender ideologies. After the section on the origins and characteristics of Cuban gender ideology, the next two sections of this chapter consist of a discussion of the concepts of honor and shame (section two) and a theoretical discussion of gender ideology (section three).

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<sup>63</sup> Caulfield 454.

<sup>64</sup> This is Elizabeth Kuznesof’s definition of gender ideology; see page 254.

<sup>65</sup> Caulfield 463; referring here to Stolcke’s work Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba (London: Cambridge Univ Press, 1974).

## A. Origins of Modern Cuban Gender Ideology

As in other areas of Latin America, gender ideology strongly affected the organization and hierarchy of nineteenth-century Cuban social, political, and economic institutions. Ideas about men and women's "proper" roles in Cuban society, along with ideas about whites and blacks' roles and the upper- and lower-classes' roles, determined who could participate in Cuban social, political, and economic institutions, to what extent they could participate, and in what instances. In Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba, anthropologist Verena Stolcke examines race relations in the bonds of marriage and concubinage and shows how "[...] a family's honor depended on its success in controlling the sexual behavior of its female members, and [how] honor had a racial definition."<sup>66</sup> White, upper-class ideologies of gender, race, and class controlled Cuban men and women's actions and most personal decisions, such as choosing a marriage partner. And it was women, blacks, and members of the lower classes who felt this domination most intensely.

Beginning with the Royal Pragmatic of 1776, Cuban marriages were severely restricted.<sup>67</sup> The basis of this restriction lay primarily in the white male elite's racial ideology, which placed "white" Cubans (or people with light skin) above blacks in

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<sup>66</sup> Cited in Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, Dulcinea in the Factory (Durham and London: Duke Univ Press, 2000): 28.

<sup>67</sup> A description of the Royal Pragmatic may be found in Silvia Marina Arrom, The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857 (Stanford: Stanford Univ Press, 1985): footnote 51, p 305, and p 148. The Royal Pragmatic attempted to prevent marriages between unequals by requiring parental consent in marriages between minors. However, "[...] parental consent was required only for whites and Indians, not in general for Blacks or those of mixed race, unless they distinguished themselves in some way. In 1781, the requirement was extended to mestizos with 1 Spanish parent." See also Stolcke 11.

the social hierarchy. Whites thought of themselves as being purer, more intelligent, more domesticated, and more honorable than blacks.<sup>68</sup> Most blacks, after all, were slaves or domestic servants during the greater part of the 1800s, which meant that they were under the white man's control. As Stolcke describes the situation, nineteenth-century Cuba's social stability depended on the fact that slaves and their offspring "be kept in their place and subordinated."<sup>69</sup> To maintain black subordination, whites had to marry within the white community and had to avoid racial mixing.

The Cuban elite's fear of the "darkening" and thus the "staining" of the white race led Spanish officials in the colonial period to strongly enforce isogamic marriages, or marriages between social equals. The primary way that Spanish officials enforced isogamic marriages was by issuing marriage laws like the Royal Pragmatic, which required either parental or state consent before marriage was permitted. From 1776 to roughly 1805, parental consent was required for all marriages that involved white children under age 25, particularly if the children belonged to the elite. Civil authorities only intervened when sons or daughters challenged their parents' decisions. After 1805, however, "interracial marriages became...the direct province of the civil authorities,"<sup>70</sup> and *all* white marriages, regardless of the couple's social status, had to be approved by the State.<sup>71</sup> The 1805 decree on interracial marriages was the result of attempts made by white elites to

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<sup>68</sup> Stolcke 15-17. See also Eileen Findlay, *Imposing Decency* (Durham and London: Duke Univ Press, 1999): 23-24, for a similar description of elite racial ideology in Puerto Rico.

<sup>69</sup> Stolcke 16.

marry colored partners (blacks and mulattos), which the State felt put the stability of Cuban society in jeopardy.<sup>72</sup>

The regulation of marriages by parents and the State is significant to the formation of Cuban gender ideologies because family honor and national order relied upon men and women's relationships. As already stated, the favored relationship in nineteenth-century Cuba was one between social equals—that is, two people who belonged to the same social class and were of the same race. This type of relationship preserved the purity of a family's bloodline and kept blacks from upsetting white domination. A mother's court testimony reveals the importance of isogamic relationships to families and to the State; she says, "this is a country where because of its exceptional circumstances it is necessary that the dividing line between the white and the African race be very clearly marked; for any tolerance... will bring dishonour to the white families, upheaval and disorder to the country, if not extermination to its inhabitants."<sup>73</sup> In short, interracial relations were viewed as dangerous. As Stolcke confirms, "If one member of a family were to contract an unsuitable marriage, this was sufficient to damage permanently the social prestige of the whole family."<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it was in the family's best interest to protect its sons

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<sup>70</sup> Stolcke 13.

<sup>71</sup> Theoretically, *all* whites were supposed to obtain state permission to marry. In reality, however, Spanish officials were only concerned with protecting people of nobility from interracial unions. See Stolcke p 28.

<sup>72</sup> Stolcke 13.

<sup>73</sup> Stolcke 16.

<sup>74</sup> Stolcke 20.

and daughters from making decisions that could negatively affect the family and society as a whole.

Around the 1840s, purity of blood ceased to be an issue in controlling Cuban marriages,<sup>75</sup> and such things as premarital sex, wealth, occupation, and conduct came to the forefront of Cubans' concerns about all marriages, including those between whites and blacks.<sup>76</sup> White elites, of course, still pursued racially endogamous marriages in order to preserve their reputation and purity, but there was a greater emphasis on virginity, chastity, and social status. This was because "miscegenation made it increasingly difficult to maintain separate racial groupings."<sup>77</sup> Instead of requiring their sons' and daughters' suitors to be white, nineteenth-century Cuban parents required their daughters' male suitors to be "of good conduct" and their sons' brides "to be modest and respectable. Any doubt about [the bride's] sexual integrity made her ineligible in the eyes of any decent family."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, if parents had any hope at all of marrying their daughters off to a respectable man, it was necessary to keep a close eye on their daughters' activities and to protect their sexual innocence.<sup>79</sup> For men, sexual integrity before marriage was less important, because it was understood that men were sexually promiscuous by nature.<sup>80</sup> Thus, parents did not monitor and protect their sons as they did their daughters. While women needed

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<sup>75</sup> Stolcke 18.

<sup>76</sup> Stolcke 22-24.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneaux, Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America (Durham and London: Duke Univ Press, 2000): 3.

<sup>78</sup> Stolcke 87.

<sup>79</sup> Stolcke 108.

<sup>80</sup> Stolcke 111.

the control and protection of their parents, or sometimes the state, men did not. This sexual double standard not only affected the way that men and women related to each other but also the extent to which they participated in public life. Women, being vulnerable and weak, stayed at home under close guard; men, being promiscuous and independent, roamed the streets.

For its acknowledgment and thorough examination of the intersection between gender, class, and race, Stolcke's work made an important contribution to women's history. Sueann Caulfield calls Marriage, Class, and Colour a "path-breaking" historical study for its depiction of how Cubans' ideas about gender, class, and race maintained the social hierarchy and how sexuality and marriage were of central importance to religious and secular authorities.<sup>81</sup> Stolcke's study also inspired later Latin American and North American women's history and is referred to often in Cuban women's and family studies, such as those by Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula<sup>82</sup> and Man Singh Das and Clinton J. Jesser<sup>83</sup>—both of which are well known among Cuban scholars.

Though Stolcke's work was important to Latin American scholars in the 1980s and 1990s, other studies like it have emerged recently. However, most of the recent historical studies—which examine gender, race, and class as Stolcke did—focus on other areas of Latin America, like Columbia and Puerto Rico. Some of these newer studies fall into the category of women's history; others fall into labor history,

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<sup>81</sup> Caulfield 463.

<sup>82</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution (New York: Oxford Univ Press, 1996).

<sup>83</sup> Singh Das and Jesser, The Family in Latin America (Sahibabad: Vikas, 1980).

and still others into social history.<sup>84</sup> Two examples of such studies are Ann Farnsworth-Alvear's Dulcinea in the Factory (2000) and Eileen Suárez Findlay's Imposing Decency (1999). Though Farnsworth-Alvear's study is categorized either as "women's studies" or as "labor studies" and Findlay's study as "gender studies", their works are quite similar. Both works, in examining the limits of "proper" male and female behavior, tie together gender, race, and class.

Findlay's work, however, relates more closely to Stolcke's work, because she uses the same types of sources (civil court testimonies, laws, and government reports), and she shows how Puerto Rican elites' gender ideology supported the confinement of women to the home. Like gender ideologies in Cuba, nineteenth-century gender ideologies in Puerto Rico reveal how families and the state "depended...on the sexual restriction of 'their' women in the creation of a home and family over which they exercised control."<sup>85</sup> Puerto Rican women, like Cuban women, were expected to be sexually respectable both before and during marriage, or their families' honor and their own respectability would be tainted. To ensure women's respectability, Puerto Rican parents carefully supervised their daughters' activities outside the home. According to author Eileen Suárez Findlay, the

sexual regulation of 'respectable' women was crucial in defining racial identity, maintaining familial and economic social positions, and confirming male dominance. [...] Respectable [Puerto Rican] women were required to be virginal before marriage and unswervingly faithful to their husbands once married, which demanded that women be

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<sup>84</sup> Caulfield 471.

<sup>85</sup> Findlay 25.

carefully guarded against outside male incursions and placed under constant surveillance.<sup>86</sup>

The sexual regulation of Puerto Rican women through surveillance and through women's detainment in the home helped to create and maintain gender roles and sexual norms.<sup>87</sup> While women were expected to be sexually pure before marriage and faithful after marriage, "men were afforded a bit more flexibility."<sup>88</sup> The same was true for men and women in Cuba. Female honor and virtue was highly valued and, thus, guarded, while male promiscuousness and infidelity was accepted and even ignored.<sup>89</sup> These facts, in turn, formed the foundation for twentieth-century male-female relations and determined Cuban men and women's roles in society.

## B. Concepts of Honor and Shame

Two very important concepts embodied in Cuban gender ideology deserve more discussion. These are the concepts of honor (*honor*) and shame (*vergüenza*). One can trace the concepts of honor and shame back to the Spanish conquest in Latin America and can find similar notions of "proper" feminine and masculine behavior in southern Europe, the Middle East, and northern Africa.<sup>90</sup> In nineteenth-century Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America, "concepts of honor were based on gendered and

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<sup>86</sup> Findlay 24.

<sup>87</sup> Findlay 48.

<sup>88</sup> Findlay 27.

<sup>89</sup> Stolcke 111.

<sup>90</sup> Evelyn P. Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of *Machismo* in Latin America", Male and Female in Latin America, ed. by Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: Univ of Pittsburgh Press, 1973): 91.

racialized beliefs about social ordering, appropriate behavior, and personal worth.”<sup>91</sup>

In this context, *honor* had two different meanings: status and virtue.<sup>92</sup> *Honor* as status relates to a family or an individual’s purity of blood, ancestral ties, and occupation—all of which cannot be changed or erased. People having the whitest skin, the closest ties to Spanish ancestors, and the lowest participation in manual labor occupied the highest ranks in society and therefore had the greatest honor.<sup>93</sup>

But *honor* was also linked to a person or a family’s reputation or virtue, which was based on proper conduct.<sup>94</sup> This type of honor was defined differently according to gender. As Muriel Nazzari states,

The men of a family were honorable when they were manly, honest, and loyal, and exercised their authority over family and subordinates wisely. Women’s honor was mostly related to their sexual conduct: they should retain their virginity until they married, and as wives they should be chaste and faithful. They should also be concerned with their reputation, and discreet in the presence of men.<sup>95</sup>

Cubans who followed these codes of honor were praised as being decent and respectable, and so called *gente decente*.<sup>96</sup> But Cubans who deviated from these codes of behavior were considered shameless and dishonored their families.

Though men were certainly required to conform to these honor codes, they had much more flexibility in deviating from them than women. Women were under

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<sup>91</sup> Findlay 20.

<sup>92</sup> Muriel Nazzari, “Sex/Gender Arrangements”, *Gender Politics in Latin America*, ed. Elizabeth Dore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997): 136.

<sup>93</sup> Findlay 22-23. Other factors that could make a person more honorable include money, good manners, a respectable lifestyle, and stylish dress.

<sup>94</sup> Ann Twinam, “Honor, Sexuality, and Illegitimacy”, *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. by Asunción Lavrín (Lincoln: Univ of NE Press, 1989): 123.

<sup>95</sup> Nazzari 136.

<sup>96</sup> Nazzari 137.

extreme pressure to conform to the codes, because it was through them that their families and society were reproduced and sustained. Protecting a woman's honor meant protecting her family's honor, and it required her to bear children of a "desirable" race who would inherit the family's genes, honor, and wealth.<sup>97</sup> When a woman broke the chain of honor by losing her virginity or bearing an illegitimate child, the woman, the child, and the family's future were adversely affected. The woman, her child, and her family not only lost reputation and honor, but her child lost social and occupational mobility.<sup>98</sup>

*Vergüenza* is slightly more difficult to define than *honor*, because it refers to a person's sensitivity to the opinion of others, which includes "a consciousness of the public opinion and judgment of the whole community."<sup>99</sup> As maintained by Geoffrey E. Fox, Cuban men were supposed to have *vergüenza*, but it is a trait that was much more important for women to possess.<sup>100</sup> Because women's actions, especially their sexual activity, were under constant surveillance and scrutiny by their community and family, it was important that they be mindful of the way that the community and their family would perceive their actions. An honorable woman—who was often an upper class white woman—tried to avoid human contacts that might expose her to dishonor or shame. These women, consequently, stayed at home, where they had no chance of staining their good reputation. Dishonorable women—who included slaves, prostitutes, and lower-class women—were already considered to be *sin vergüenza*

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<sup>97</sup> Findlay 25.

<sup>98</sup> Twinam 124.

<sup>99</sup> Fox 276.

<sup>100</sup> Fox 276.

(without shame) and thus did not have to restrict their human contacts.<sup>101</sup> It was these women who were most often found outside of the home, in the streets.

### C. Cuban Gender Ideology in Theory

About the time that Verena Stolcke published her path-breaking book, “gender” was becoming a popular topic among North American social historians.<sup>102</sup> “By the mid- to late- 1980s,” says Sueann Caulfield, “most North American social historians used the term ‘gender’ and many engaged feminist theory in their discussions of differences in the everyday lives of women and men.”<sup>103</sup> These social historians began to make use of Michel Foucault’s theories “to investigate the ways in which gender and sexuality were construed and used to establish social and political power and to bolster state institutions.”<sup>104</sup> One of the most well known social historians to use Foucauldian theory in such a way is Joan Scott. For both North American and Latin American women’s and gender studies, Joan Scott’s work, particularly her essay “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, has allowed historians to use gender as a category of analysis—one that includes both men *and* women—and to broaden the scope of women’s studies.<sup>105</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, however, Scott’s other work, entitled Gender and the Politics of

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<sup>101</sup> Fox 276-277.

<sup>102</sup> Caulfield 471.

<sup>103</sup> Caulfield 471.

<sup>104</sup> Caulfield 474.

<sup>105</sup> Caulfield 454; Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, American Historical Review 91.5 (1988).

History, will better illustrate the way that gender and gender ideology socially construct and position men and women within society—in this case, Cuban society.

In Gender and the Politics of History, Scott emphasizes the importance of gender, which she defines as “knowledge about sexual difference,” in the recording of history. History records changes in the relations between men and women and also in the social organization of the sexes. At the same time, history plays an important role in the production of knowledge about sexual difference. The way that historians record information as well as *what* they record influences the way that men and women think about themselves and one other.<sup>106</sup> As a result, history has the potential to create sexual stereotypes and to cause sexual discrimination. Scott warns historians of this danger when she states:

By assuming that women have inherent characteristics and objective identities consistently and predictably different from men’s, and that these generate definably female needs and interests, historians imply that sexual difference is a natural rather than a social phenomenon. [...] Women’s history written from this position...ends up endorsing the ideas of unalterable sexual difference that are used to justify discrimination.<sup>107</sup>

To avoid this mistake, Scott suggests that historians recognize and address “*how* hierarchies such as those of gender are constructed or legitimized”<sup>108</sup> and in whose interest is it to construct or legitimate such hierarchies.

Scott also recommends that historians be aware of the inseparability of politics and gender and how their interrelatedness has shaped patterns of authority,

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<sup>106</sup> Joan Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia Univ Press, 1999): 2.

<sup>107</sup> Scott 4.

<sup>108</sup> Scott 4.

especially in the home. According to Sandra McGee Deutsch, “[...] People in all social ranks have comprehended, interpreted, and justified authority relations in society by referring to what is close to them and readily understandable, namely authority relations in the home.”<sup>109</sup> In other words, patterns of authority in the public sphere are based on and linked to patterns of authority in the private sphere, and this, Scott cautions, may undermine the process of social and political change.<sup>110</sup>

An example of a work that follows Scott’s call to examine how politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics is Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America, by Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneaux.<sup>111</sup> The purpose of this work is “to analyze how...state politics affected gender relations and how gender conditioned state formation in Latin America from the late colony to the twenty-first century.”<sup>112</sup> What Dore and Molyneaux conclude is that nineteenth-century state policies (such as secularization and the privatization of land) that aimed to equalize gender relations actually had a more negative than positive effect on Latin American women. Inheritance laws and the state’s regulation of marriage and sexuality tended to reinforce women’s subordination to their husbands and fathers and worked to undermine their economic security.<sup>113</sup> This was certainly true in nineteenth-century, even twentieth-century, Cuba, where women were “protected” by

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<sup>109</sup> Sandra McGee Deutsch, “Gender and Socio-political Change in Twentieth-Century Latin America”, Hispanic American Historical Review 71.2 (1991): 260.

<sup>110</sup> Deutsch 260.

<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Dore and Maxine Molyneaux, Hidden Histories of Gender and the State (Durham and London: Duke Univ Press, 2000): 3.

<sup>112</sup> Dore and Molyneaux 3.

<sup>113</sup> Dore and Molyneaux 17, 19.

the state and their families. As a result of the state and families' over-protectiveness, Dore and Molyneaux argue that women's progress has not been as great as some historians believe. Traditional patterns of authority still exist.

#### **D. Conclusion**

Ideas about Cuban men and women's gender roles, behavior, and position in Cuban social, political, and economic institutions originated in early modern Spain, were brought to the New World, and extend into the present day. *Honor* and *vergüenza* were two important concepts that guided Cuban men and women's behavior and determined their gendered roles in nineteenth-century Cuban society. These concepts, in turn, influenced parental and state regulation of marriage and sexuality, male-female relations, and men and women's participation in social, political, and economic institutions. Parents and the state discouraged, even prevented, interracial marriages and kept women under close surveillance to protect their virginity. These protective measures, along with changes in inheritance laws, in some ways served to increase Cuban women's subordination to patriarchal authority in and outside of the home.

#### IV. CUBAN WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE, 1952-1974

The gender ideology that developed during the nineteenth century has influenced the way that men and women think about and relate to one another in the twentieth century. Nineteenth-century gender ideology has also been the source of many twentieth-century sex role stereotypes, the unfair division of labor and power in the home, and the continued existence of male-female inequality in the public sphere. For this reason, one must recognize that while Fidel Castro and his regime have made some improvements in the lives of women during the last forty years, they have had less success altering the Cuban people's views, attitudes, and stereotypes about men and women, including their own. To prove that this is true, this thesis will briefly examine the educational, political, and economic situation of Cuban women before and after the 1959 Revolution. A comparison between the state of Cuban woman before the Revolution and the state of women after the Revolution not only shows the successes and failures of the Revolution itself but also the degree to which the women's lives have changed throughout its fruition. The years of Fulgencio Batista's presidency (1952-1959) serve as a good starting point for this type of examination, because these were the years in which the Revolution was being conceptualized, in which Cuba was still a capitalist country, and in which very conservative and traditional views of women's place in society existed. This time period is also one in which the latest pre-Revolutionary census was printed (1953).

To illustrate women's educational, political, and economic situation in the pre-revolutionary years, this chapter will cite statistics from the 1953 census as well

as statistics from various secondary sources. With any study based on statistical information, however, one always runs the risk of misrepresenting the “truth”.

Women’s own experiences, revealed in interviews or journals, may offer a different view of their educational, political, and economic situation, but few primary sources of this nature are available for the pre-1959 period. For the post-1959 period, no census was printed again until 1970, so this chapter must rely upon secondary sources in its examination of Cuban women’s public life between 1960 and 1974.

In 1960, Castro’s regime began to correct the social, political, and economic inequalities suffered by women during the 1950s and before. This began with the creation of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) and continued with the Literacy Campaign of 1961 and the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1974. Castro’s goal, ultimately, was to create a socialist Cuba in which distinctions of gender, class, and race would no longer exist. By educating women, giving them greater opportunities to participate in politics, and incorporating them into the work force, Castro could come closer to achieving sexual equality in the public sphere, which was an important part of his socialist agenda.

#### **A. Educational Level**

Prior to 1959, Cuban women experienced several social limitations, perhaps the most important of which included their lack of education and low literacy levels. Although education was compulsory, more than one million Cubans (or 23% of the population) over the age of ten were illiterate and another one million were only

semi-literate.<sup>114</sup> In rural areas, illiteracy rates in children reached as high as 49 percent.<sup>115</sup> The problem, it seemed, was that very few children went to school. In 1953, 21 percent of children between the ages of 6 and 14 attended school, and only 17 percent of those ages 15 to 19 attended.<sup>116</sup> Among all age groups, Niurka Pérez Rojas writes that 71 percent of Cubans had no formal schooling, and only one percent had ever attended a university.<sup>117</sup>

One of the principal reasons why women in particular were undereducated before the Revolution is that many Cubans held the traditional belief that a woman's place was in the home.<sup>118</sup> Women were supposed to be mothers and wives, not students. Their job was to educate their children and serve the needs of their husbands.<sup>119</sup> A result of women's under education, according to Author Inger Holt-Seeland, was that many women turned to marriage as a "logical way out" of their dire circumstances.<sup>120</sup> With a man's financial support, uneducated women could stay at home and avoid the challenge of finding a job that required little or no education.

To improve women's educational level, Castro combined his efforts with the FMC and started the Literacy Campaign (*Campaña de Alfabetización*) in 1961. The goal of the Literacy Campaign was twofold: to educate the masses and to incorporate

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<sup>114</sup> Cuba, ONCDE, *Censos de Población, Viviendas, y Electoral* (La Habana: Tribunal Superior Electoral, ONCDE, 1953): xxxix.

<sup>115</sup> Cuba, ONCDE xxxix.

<sup>116</sup> Cuba, ONCDE xxxviii.

<sup>117</sup> Niurka Pérez Rojas 51.

<sup>118</sup> Leahy 92.

<sup>119</sup> Guillermo Wasmer Miguel, ed., *La mujer en Cuba socialista* (La Habana: Empresa Editorial Orbe, 1977): 135-136.

<sup>120</sup> Inger Holt-Seeland, *Women of Cuba* (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1981): 95.

women into the Revolution. Just prior to 1961, the FMC hired and trained 10,000 literate women to serve as teachers in the campaign. Over the next few years, Elizabeth Stone testifies, “a hundred thousand youth between the ages of ten and eighteen left their schools and went into the countryside as literacy *brigadistas* to teach people how to read and write. Over half of these *brigadistas* were girls and young women.”<sup>121</sup> With this large number of volunteer teachers, the FMC and its teachers helped to decrease the illiteracy rate from 23 percent to 3.7 percent between 1960 and 1975.<sup>122</sup>

Over half of those who learned to read and write (55 percent) during the Literacy Campaign were women, and for many of them, “learning to read and write was a first step toward greater self-confidence, a sense of their own worth and dignity, and more control over their lives.”<sup>123</sup> Because there was no longer an educational barrier separating women from men, many women felt liberated and dignified. Stone quotes a former literacy teacher’s own experiences with the campaign: “The literacy drive was the first time in my life, and I believe the first time in our history as well, that women were given an equal role with men in bringing about monumental changes.”<sup>124</sup> Through their roles as volunteer teachers, Cuban women were able to make giant strides toward achieving greater equality with men and earned an honorable place in Cuba’s history. Not only did the Literacy

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<sup>121</sup> Elizabeth Stone, Introduction, Women and the Cuban Revolution (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981): 9.

<sup>122</sup> Azicri “Women’s Development” 36.

<sup>123</sup> Stone 10.

<sup>124</sup> Stone 11.

Campaign teach women how to read and write, but it also gave them the opportunity to advance their education, to obtain jobs in fields that required higher levels of education, and to feel proud about their accomplishments.<sup>125</sup>

## **B. Political Participation**

Given the encouragement and expectation for Cuban women to remain at home, few women before the Revolution had the time, the desire, or the ability to participate in politics. Even if women *were* active outside of the home, their amount of free time was limited.<sup>126</sup> Although Cuban women received the right to vote in 1934 and later became very involved in political demonstrations and the passing of feminist legislation—such as the 1934 Maternity Law, the 1940 Constitution (with several articles devoted to women’s rights as workers), and the 1950 law on women’s civil rights—few women held an office within Cuban government before 1959 and even fewer occupied positions of power.<sup>127</sup>

Although statistics regarding women’s participation in politics in the 1950s are scarce, Margaret Leahy offers the following figures for female delegates in the Cuban House of Representatives: in 1946, women comprised 3.4 percent of all delegates, 4.4 percent in 1948, and 2.3 percent in 1954. Leahy says that women’s low political participation before the Revolution was a result of 1) a political structure that

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<sup>125</sup> Azicri “Women’s Development” 36.

<sup>126</sup> Valdés and Gomáriz 50, present statistics for working women’s division of time in 1979 that show that working women have an hour less of free time per day than unemployed women. These statistics could also be applied to women in the 1950s, because workingwomen in the 1950s would have had the same demands of working, child-rearing, and doing household chores.

<sup>127</sup> Leahy 92.

excluded women, 2) limited economic mobility, and 3) traditional sex-role stereotyping.<sup>128</sup> Contributing further to these obstacles was the fact that many women in the 1950s were not educated enough to serve as local or national officials and that many others were discouraged by their families from taking part in public life.<sup>129</sup>

For those women who were politically active, either in the government or in feminist and/or labor organizations, K. Lynn Stoner indicates that the majority came from the middle and upper classes. All were white, over half were educated professionals, and one-third was independently wealthy.<sup>130</sup> Some of these women belonged to the Communist Party, the *Partido Demócrata Sufragista*, the *Unión Laborista de Mujeres*, or other political organizations.<sup>131</sup> Stoner states that “the total number of feminists probably never came to more than one thousand women at any given time between 1927 and 1940.”<sup>132</sup> It was not until after the Revolution began, and especially after the creation of the Constitution of 1976, that women’s participation in politics began to increase and that women began to fill more positions of power.

In 1960, Fidel Castro created what is today the largest all-female political organization in Latin America—the FMC (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*). The FMC became both an extension and the unified body of several different feminist

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<sup>128</sup> Leahy 92. Numbers taken from Lowry Nelson, *Rural Cuba* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951).

<sup>129</sup> Stone 9.

<sup>130</sup> K. Lynn Stoner, *From the House to the Streets* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 78.

<sup>131</sup> Stoner, *From the House to the Streets* 85.

<sup>132</sup> Stoner, *From the House to the Streets* 78.

organizations that had disappeared before the Revolution.<sup>133</sup> Its main goals were to: 1) incorporate women into the labor force, 2) create more daycare centers for working women, 3) defend women's and children's rights, and 4) defend world peace.<sup>134</sup> But above its seemingly charitable existence, the FMC was created for a far more political reason: the execution and success of the Revolution. Fidel Castro used the FMC to "harness the political enthusiasm, talents, and energy of Cuban women for the revolution."<sup>135</sup> He realized that women were an untapped and extremely valuable source of political power that could be used not only to benefit the Revolution but also to benefit women themselves.

Castro utilized the women of the FMC in his revolutionary crusade as volunteer militia women, nurses, and teachers; and as propagandists, fund-raisers, and activists. As Elizabeth Stone phrases it, the women of the FMC "were mobilized to defend the revolution and to carry out tasks aimed at raising the standard of living for the masses of people."<sup>136</sup> And because most of these women were previously working as domestic servants or caring for their children at home, "such activities were the first step out of the home and into any kind of social or political life."<sup>137</sup> For this reason, women's participation in the Revolution played an essential role in improving both their position and their level of integration in Cuban society. Castro's use of the FMC in his revolutionary crusade became not only the means to change the

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<sup>133</sup> Espín and the FMC, *La mujer en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Política, 1990): 3.

<sup>134</sup> Espín, *La mujer en Cuba* 5.

<sup>135</sup> Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution* 32.

<sup>136</sup> Stone 5.

<sup>137</sup> Stone 5.

structure of Cuban society in general but also to change the lives of women and their families.

Though the FMC aided Castro in his efforts to improve women's public lives, its role in this process was in many ways a contradictory one. According to Maxine Molyneaux, the FMC "was an authoritarian organization which took its orders from above and allowed little internal dissent, let alone public debate of policy issues."<sup>138</sup> Its very structure was patriarchal in nature, and some Cuban analysts believed that it lost support in the late 1980s because of its failure to mobilize around issues important to Cuban women.<sup>139</sup> Rather than fighting against the state for changes in women's public and private lives, the FMC operates under state control and therefore has less autonomy to press women's issues. So though the FMC originally served as a political vehicle for change in women's lives, it has become less effective and popular in recent years.

In addition to those women who were politically active in the FMC, more women began to participate in national and local government, though their participation was still well below that of men's. Few statistics on women's participation in government are available until after 1975, when the first national elections were held under Castro. According to Margaret Leahy, only 15 percent of the Cuban Communist Party was female in 1975,<sup>140</sup> and only six women out of 100

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<sup>138</sup> Molyneaux, State, Gender, and Institutional Change 19.

<sup>139</sup> Molyneaux, State, Gender, and Institutional Change 17.

<sup>140</sup> Leahy 98.

representatives served on the Central Committee.<sup>141</sup> During the elections of 1976, women represented [only] 13 percent of those running for office and 8 percent of those elected.<sup>142</sup> Though these numbers increased substantially in the 1980s, males continue to dominate nearly all aspects of Cuban politics.<sup>143</sup>

### C. Economic Involvement

In addition to women's low participation in politics before the Revolution, few women participated in the work force. When women *did* work outside the home in 1953, the majority of them (70 percent) occupied domestic service positions (maids, laundresses, cooks) and "earned starvation wages ranging from eight dollars to twenty-five dollars a month."<sup>144</sup> Domestic service offered women with little education or work experience the greatest opportunity to work outside the home.<sup>145</sup> Many uneducated young girls and women also became prostitutes to survive. Other occupations with high female representation were teaching (81 percent), social work and clergy (45 percent), typing (52 percent), and clothing manufacturing (45 percent). These were careers that Cuban society considered to be "suitable" for women.<sup>146</sup> According to Lourdes Casal, "'unwomanly' occupations included not only those involving hard physical labor but also those high-prestige, high-pay occupations

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<sup>141</sup> Bingham and Gross 112.

<sup>142</sup> Holt-Seeland 94. These numbers are averages for all elections held nationally and locally.

<sup>143</sup> Bingham and Gross 112. See also Reza Moreira 120.

<sup>144</sup> Margaret Randall, Cuban Women Now (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1974): 9.

<sup>145</sup> Stone 7.

<sup>146</sup> Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*" 186.

which would have brought women into positions of authority vis-à-vis men.”<sup>147</sup> Such occupations include law, medicine, engineering, and business—all of which were almost exclusively dominated by men.

As a result of being excluded from high-paying jobs and occupations typically filled by men, women had little economic incentive to work at all. According to the 1953 Cuban Census, women comprised only 17 percent of the total work force, and in rural areas only 10 percent.<sup>148</sup> These figures for economically active women in the 1950s are lower than those of 17 other Latin American countries.<sup>149</sup> When women *did* leave the home to work, they could expect little in terms of the type of work that they could do and the amount of pay that they would receive. To summarize the situation, Margaret Randall says that women worked in extremely disadvantaged positions with discriminatory wages and virtually no benefits.<sup>150</sup>

Like women’s political progress, women’s economic progress after the Revolution was slow. Although the percentage of women in the workforce more than doubled between 1959 and 1974, women still only comprised 24 percent of all workers in 1974—a mere 14.2 percent increase over fifteen years.<sup>151</sup> Still, women did benefit from several important labor policies that the FMC helped to pass between 1960 and 1974. One of these labor policies was Plan Jaba, or the Shopping Bag Plan. This plan allowed workingwomen to drop off their grocery lists at local stores and to

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<sup>147</sup> Casal, “Revolution and *Conciencia*” 188.

<sup>148</sup> Cuba, ONCDE xl.

<sup>149</sup> U.N. 90.

<sup>150</sup> Margaret Randall, Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later (New York: Smyrna Press, 1981): 53.

<sup>151</sup> Stone 15.

have their orders filled while they were working. Then, in 1974, the Maternity Law was passed, which extended maternity leave from twelve weeks to eighteen weeks (paid), gave pregnant women six full days off for doctors' visits, and gave women the option to take an additional nine months' unpaid leave without losing their jobs.<sup>152</sup> The Maternity Law, like Plan Jaba, was intended to give women more incentives to work, but neither did anything to increase women's participation in the workforce.

Sociologist Elsa M. Chaney, in her work Supermadre: Women in Politics in Latin America, attributes the slow incorporation of women into the workforce to labor policies' sometimes-detrimental effects:

Maternity leaves, child care provisions, and protective legislation (such as prohibitions against overtime and night work for women) ...ironically appear to work against the incorporation of women in developing economies rather than in their favor [...]. Such laws make women more expensive to hire than men, and more troublesome, since their jobs must be covered somehow in their absence.<sup>153</sup>

But other scholars, like Stone, Smith, and Padula, attribute the low percentage of women in the workplace during the 1970s to other factors: male resistance,<sup>154</sup> pressures of home and family, women's burden of household duties, and the lack of economic incentives.<sup>155</sup> Whatever the reason may have been for women's low participation in the work force, it is clear, with only 24 percent of the work force comprised of women in 1974, that "a very large number of women in Cuba [still did]

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<sup>152</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 104.

<sup>153</sup> Qtd. in Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 113.

<sup>154</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 104.

<sup>155</sup> Stone 15.

housework and [reared] children as their main job.”<sup>156</sup> To be more specific, 49% of Cubans over the age of fifteen devoted the majority of their time to domestic chores, and nearly all of the people in this group were women.<sup>157</sup> It appeared that the Revolution still had some work to do after 1974 to continue women’s incorporation into the workforce.

#### **D. Access to Childcare**

The economic challenges that Cuban women faced in the 1950s were compounded by the lack of childcare centers available to workingwomen. The Informe Central of the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (1975) reported only 38 *creches* in Cuba in 1958,<sup>158</sup> which was not a sufficient number to service all workingwomen. According to Margaret Randall, “there were virtually no day care centers in Cuba [before 1959 and] only a few *creches* (infant care facilities) run by charity organizations, which were patronized and used by the upper classes.”<sup>159</sup> The insufficient number of *creches* meant that there was a great deal of competition among working mothers, and often times only those mothers with political or economic connections were afforded this luxury.<sup>160</sup> This fact, together with poor working conditions, the lack of medical benefits, and the lack of moral support, caused many women to decide to stay at home with their children instead of

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<sup>156</sup> Stone 19.

<sup>157</sup> Reza Moreira [et. al.] 48. These numbers are for 1981.

<sup>158</sup> Cited in Ravenet Ramirez 54.

<sup>159</sup> Randall Women in Cuba 29.

<sup>160</sup> Randall, Cuban Women Now 127.

working.<sup>161</sup> Otherwise, women had to rely on their older children, parents, or other family members to care for their children while they were at work.<sup>162</sup>

After the Revolution, Cuban women still faced the challenges associated with an insufficient number of childcare facilities. Though the government made substantial improvements in this area of women's lives, only 600 facilities serving 50,000 children were available in the early 1970s.<sup>163</sup> This meant that over one million workingwomen still did not have access to this service and had to find relatives with which they could leave their children or stay at home. To make matters worse, the Cuban government initiated a sliding scale of fees during the 1970s, and parents had to pay from three to forty pesos a month, depending on their income.<sup>164</sup> These fees turned away some families who had previously taken advantage of childcare services. Additionally, the daycare centers were only open from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., which did not coincide with all workingwomen's schedules. All of these factors combined to make childcare inaccessible to many workingwomen. According to Elizabeth Stone, the reason that the government could not adequately address the problems with childcare is that material resources were simply not available to make improvements.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Lewis xiii-xiv.

<sup>162</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 132.

<sup>163</sup> Leahy 109. The number of daycare centers increased by 1986 to total 837, which was more than double what it was in 1975. See Espín, Cuban Women 99. Still, these facilities only serviced approximately 96,000 working mothers. See Reza Moreira [et. al.] 92.

<sup>164</sup> Leahy 109.

<sup>165</sup> Stone 21.

## E. Conclusion

All of the social, political, and economic challenges faced by women in pre-revolutionary years, as well as the poor economic situation of Cuban society as a whole, gave Fidel Castro the foundation on which to base his revolutionary agenda. “From the perspective of the Cuban government,” argues Oscar Lewis, “the liberation of women is dependent upon the Revolution’s success in attaining its primary objective: to establish a wholly socialist economy and society.”<sup>166</sup> In order for this to occur, however, Fidel Castro’s regime needed to improve the situation of Cuban women in both the public and the private spheres.

Though women’s lives in the public sphere certainly improved after 1959, many women were still doing housework and raising their children as their main job in the 1970s. With this in mind, it becomes fitting to then ask: what, if anything, did the Revolution do to improve women’s lives within their homes? We know now that the Cuban Revolution has improved women’s lives in certain respects—such as greater economic and political participation, a higher level of education, and greater access to childcare facilities—but has it been able to improve the lives of women in the one area that seems to be most important: the family? The next chapter will analyze the way that Cuban men and women relate to one another within the home and how their relations are shaped by Cuban gender ideology. Then, the final chapter will examine the extent to which Castro’s regime has tried to change male-female relations within the home and whether or not it has been successful.

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<sup>166</sup> Lewis xvii.

## V. CUBAN GENDER RELATIONS, 1969-1974

Although the gender, racial, and class ideologies of a particular society or community often determine the organization and hierarchy of that society's social, political, and economic structures, the way that these ideologies translate into men's and women's everyday life experiences can vary greatly. As will be seen in Cuba, current gender ideologies, inherited from colonial Spain, influence men and women's actions in different ways, depending on their age, race, class, religion, occupation, and a multiplicity of other factors. Ideally, it would be best if this study could examine how factors such as race and class affected gender relations both before and after the Revolution, but the studies available do not allow for this type of analysis. As a result, this chapter will not be able to analyze all of these factors separately or in detail. Rather, Iris Marion Young's concept of a series will be used as a method to analyze the shared experiences of Cuban men and women.

In her article, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective", Young calls for the reconceptualization of the meaning of social groups, as many scholars often confront the problem of identifying *all* of the common attributes (sex, race, class, religion, geographic location, etc.) of a particular social group (like "men" or "women"). Instead, if scholars classify "men" or "women" as a series, they are able "to see women [and men] as a collective without identifying common attributes that all women [and men] have or implying that all women [and

men] have a common identity.”<sup>167</sup> Therefore, one can talk about “women” in a study such as this without trying to tackle the impossible, which is to divide Cuban women into groups that are based on common characteristics.<sup>168</sup> This would be a task more appropriate for a dissertation or a book.

Young’s concept of seriality will become extremely useful for this study, since the few sources that illustrate Cuban men and women’s daily experiences in marriage and the family do not categorize men and women into groups based on common characteristics, such as “white, middle-class women from Havana” or “black, working-class men in agriculture”. Instead, these sources—which include interviews, films, and literature—illustrate Cuban men and women’s experiences as they relate to being “male” or “female”, or belonging to the series “men” or “women”. Evidence from interviews, films, and literature reveals how some Cuban men and women conform to the gender ideology inherited from the colonial period and how others rebel against it.

#### **A. Ideal Forms of Behavior**

Mirta de la Torre Mulhare’s 1969 Ph.D. dissertation “Sexual Ideology in Pre-Castro Cuba” aims to solve the problem of sex role stereotyping of Cuban men and women by making people aware of the ways in which gender ideologies affect relations between men and women and the position of men and women within Cuban

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<sup>167</sup> Iris Marion Young, “Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective”, *Signs* 19.3 (Spring 1994): 714.

<sup>168</sup> Refer to the rest of Young’s article to understand the complexity of this task.

society. She defines the various elements of pre-Castro Cuban sexual ideology<sup>169</sup> that shaped men and women's relations, behavior, attitudes, and decisions. To compose her data, de la Torre interviewed over 200 Cuban citizens and exiles about "what [they expected] from one another in 'normal' heterosexual relations."<sup>170</sup> She found that "in the actual relations of the male and female, the sexual ideology is clearly expressed. Whether or not individuals may choose to live by the models,<sup>171</sup> their lives are under constant pressure to conform to the models. From courtship to marriage...the ideology is ubiquitous."<sup>172</sup> In sum, de la Torre discovered that Cuban gender ideology permeated all aspects of men and women's lives, but some individuals conformed to the ideals of male and female behavior and others rebelled against it.

It is to these "ideals" that this chapter will now turn. As was discussed briefly in Chapter Two, white male elites during the nineteenth century held very firm ideas about Cuban men and women's relationships and behavior before and during marriage. Parents' and the state's regulation of marriage and sexuality varied greatly between different classes and races, but the same fundamental gender ideology affected the way that parents and the state treated men and women. As Mirta de la Torre Mulhare shows in her dissertation, the elite's gender ideology set forth the ideals of behavior, roles, and relations toward which Cuban men and women were to

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<sup>169</sup> For the purposes of this study, sexual ideology is analogous with gender ideology.

<sup>170</sup> De la Torre 13.

<sup>171</sup> By "models", De la Torre is here referring to the ideals of male and female behavior established by white male elites in the colonial period.

<sup>172</sup> De la Torre 269.

strive and around which Cuban social, political, and economic institutions were organized.

Due to limits in the data, however, this section will only focus on the ideals of “normal, healthy male [and female] behavior,”<sup>173</sup> which pay no particular attention to race, class, age, religion, occupation, or various other factors that influence men and women’s behavior, gender roles, and relations. By “normal, healthy male and female behavior”, De la Torre refers to the behavior of common Cuban men and women who may or may not share other characteristics, such as race or class, but who share the commonality of being either *male* or *female* in the biological sense.<sup>174</sup>

In de la Torre’s dissertation, the Cuban models of socialization and sex toward which Cuban men and women are to strive are *el macho* (the male) and *la hembra* (the female).<sup>175</sup> These two terms, however, encompass a complex set of expectations, or ideology, that, in theory, orient men and women’s behavior, influence the development of their attitudes, and affect their decisions. In de la Torre’s opinion, “the dominating mode of behavior for *el macho*, the male, is the sexual imperative, that is, an overpowering sexual drive which no measure of friendship or even close kinship relations with a female can totally eradicate.”<sup>176</sup> For *la hembra*, the female, “the dominating mode of behavior...is the maternal imperative, that is, an overpowering desire to nurture and protect not only her children but her man as

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<sup>173</sup> De la Torre 147.

<sup>174</sup> I understand that the terms *male* and *female* in themselves are quite difficult to define, but for the purposes of this chapter, I am not simply interested in the biological traits that determine men and women’s sex but also in the set of behaviors, attitudes, and roles that define a person as either masculine or feminine.

well.”<sup>177</sup> These two opposing modes of behavior—the sexual imperative and the maternal imperative—are acted out in various ways, but theoretically explain the differences between Cuban men and women and how they relate to one another.

Mirta de la Torre compiled a list, based on her research, of all of the different aspects of Cuban gender ideology that inform twentieth-century Cuban men and women how to behave. Among the ideals of masculine behavior that de la Torre lists are:

- 1) A man should protect the females in his family from the lust of other men.
- 2) A man can keep one or more mistresses provided [that] he can afford them.
- 3) A man should, without necessarily sidestepping the boundaries of proper behavior, make a woman aware of her femaleness and his own maleness by word, deed, glance, and gesture [...].<sup>178</sup>
- 4) A sexually ‘vicious’ man should take his ‘vices’ elsewhere than to his wife. Furthermore, he should not humiliate her by flagrantly boasting of his amorous adventures in her presence, or deprive her or the children essentials in order to keep other women.<sup>179</sup>

These twentieth-century ideals reinforce the nineteenth-century idea that men are sexually promiscuous by nature, and are, therefore, excused from acts of adultery. They also reinforce the nineteenth-century idea that fathers and husbands need to protect “their” women from the sexual advances of other men, which, in turn, protects their families’ honor and purity.

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<sup>175</sup> De la Torre 14.

<sup>176</sup> De la Torre 141.

<sup>177</sup> De la Torre 148.

<sup>178</sup> De la Torre 146.

<sup>179</sup> De la Torre 145.

The twentieth-century ideals that de la Torre lists for Cuban women likewise support nineteenth-century gender ideology. Among these are:

- 1) A woman is exceedingly naïve about a man's attempt to seduce her. In her desire to mother him, she may easily become the victim of his cunning.
- 2) A woman will very willingly bow to the needs of the man she loves and respects and honor him.
- 3) A woman will endure almost any measure of hardship, pain, and discomfort for the sake of preserving the happiness of her man and her children.<sup>180</sup>
- 4) A woman can easily understand and forgive a man's philandering.
- 5) A woman's virginity is the ultimate expression of her womanhood. She must guard it zealously at all times to avoid her becoming 'ruined', tainted by the lust of men.
- 6) To guard her virginity in maidenhood and her honor after marriage, a female must behave with modesty and respect at all times so as to demonstrate her decency and discourage seduction.<sup>181</sup>

In these twentieth-century ideals of feminine behavior, one can recognize nineteenth-century gender ideology. For instance, women are understood to require protection from men's sexual advances, which may "ruin" them. They are also expected to fulfill the needs of their husbands and children and to accept their husbands' infidelity.

In comparison to the ideals listed for men, the ideals of female behavior seem to portray mental weakness and moral strength. While ideal feminine behavior accentuates women's decency, virginity, and benevolence, it also points out their naïveté and vulnerability. Women lack the mental and physical capacity to live free from male control and protection. In order to receive protection, they serve their

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<sup>180</sup> De la Torre 150.

<sup>181</sup> De la Torre 151.

husbands at home and submit to their control. Ideal male behavior, on the other hand, stresses independence, aggressiveness, and protectorship, but also accepts licentiousness and promiscuousness. Men, while relying on their wives to care for themselves and their children, seek sexual fulfillment outside the home with a mistress. To compensate for their infidelity, men provide their wives and children with protection and the essentials to live. The next section of this chapter will show how these ideals of masculine and feminine behavior are either accepted or rejected by twentieth-century Cuban men and women.

De la Torre's study is the only study of its kind to address specifically the masculine and feminine ideals of behavior of the Cuban elite at a particular time—in 1969. Without this study, one would be left to guess what Cuban gender ideology really encompasses and also theoretically what Cuban elites believe to be ideal male and female behavior and relations—both of which are crucial to understanding how men and women behave and relate today.

Next, this section will present material that offers further evidence of the ideal forms of male and female behavior that were discussed in De la Torre's study. For these ideals, this study will refer to the works of Geoffrey E. Fox ("Honor, Shame, and Women's Liberation in Cuba," 1973) and Isabel Holgado Fernández (No es fácil, 2000). Fox's article investigates the changes that have occurred in Cuban gender relations since the 1959 Revolution. "These changes," says Fox, "[have challenged] the traditional male system of esteem, which is founded on a sociophysiological myth of innate differences between the sexes in temperament, desires, and physical and

moral competence.”<sup>182</sup> As a result, Cuban men, particularly working-class men, feel resentment toward and are disaffected from the Revolution.<sup>183</sup> The Revolution, after all, gave women more economic independence, more education, and more opportunities to participate in political organizations and placed a larger number of children under the control of the state—all of which was seen as an insult by Cuban men. Working-class men were no longer guaranteed the dominant position in the home, as their wives did not have to depend on them economically and as their children were not under their complete control.<sup>184</sup> This uprooting of male authority consequently caused some Cuban men to feel threatened and to resent the Revolution.

Some of the excerpts from interviews conducted by Geoffrey Fox reflect working-class males’ resentment of the changes caused by the Revolution, while others reflect the persistence of the traditional view that men are naturally superior to women. For example, a 37-year old white émigré male living in the U.S. shared his view that “the ideal woman is the obedient one. [...] Man on earth, man is the superior instrument. [...] By the law of nature, the man is the guide. [...] Starting from this basis, the man has to think of himself [and] be considered by the woman as such.”<sup>185</sup> This statement clearly reflects the concept of biological determinism, where men are biologically determined to be protectors and leaders and women to be nurturers and followers. Mirta de la Torre Mulhare found the male ideal to include

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<sup>182</sup> Fox 275.

<sup>183</sup> Fox 275.

<sup>184</sup> Fox 278-279.

<sup>185</sup> Fox 282-283.

the display of maleness in “word, deed, glance, and gesture.”<sup>186</sup> That is, the ideal male behavior is one that emphasizes men’s superiority, leadership, and protectorship.

Fox’s interviews also reveal how Cuban men and women view and describe admirable men and women. “The admirable man,” Fox states, “is described most often...as ‘a man of work’ [...].”<sup>187</sup> The second most common description...was ‘one who struggles for his family.’”<sup>188</sup> On the other hand, “the qualities men most commonly admired in women were those denoting some form of submissiveness to the husband [...].”<sup>189</sup> The most frequently cited qualities of the admirable man and woman, therefore, are those that fit the ideals of masculine and feminine behavior. Men work outside the home in order to provide for their families, and women work inside the home in order to meet the needs of their husbands and children.

Fox’s study not only illustrates the way that Cuban gender ideology translates into men’s everyday lives, but it also presents the voices and opinions of Cuban men that have long been omitted from Cuban gender and women’s studies. Aside from works like Mirta de la Torre Mulhare’s, very few other Cuban gender studies that present men’s voices exist. Though Fox’s article was published in 1973, around the time of Verena Stolcke’s book, few studies since that time have focused equally on Cuban men and women or solely on Cuban men. For this reason, Fox’s article is

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<sup>186</sup> De la Torre 146.

<sup>187</sup> Fox 283.

<sup>188</sup> Fox 284.

<sup>189</sup> Fox 284.

quite valuable to Cuban scholars studying gender, gender relations, and gender ideology.

Moving from Fox's work to the work of Isabel Holgado Fernández, one receives a slightly different perspective of Cuban gender ideology. Holgado presents the testimonies of more than sixty Havana women in 2000 and attempts to show how discriminatory cultural mechanisms have made it difficult to revise the social codes that direct relations between men and women.<sup>190</sup> She finds that sexual stereotypes in the home are still strongly embedded in the minds of some of the women she interviewed and that these women conform to and even reinforce these stereotypes.<sup>191</sup> Holgado explains these findings by pointing to the failure of the Cuban government to resolve the sexual division of labor in the household, the double burden experienced by workingwomen, or the inequality of the sexes that exists at the family level.<sup>192</sup> Fidel Castro's regime has only perpetuated the equation of females with the home and males with the street. For instance, Cuban men have never been forced to share domestic chores or educated in childcare.<sup>193</sup> Additionally, Holgado maintains that the Cuban government has never mentioned the need to eradicate male stereotypes that reinforce the idea of being *macho* or paternalistic. In turn, men are

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<sup>190</sup> Holgado 13.

<sup>191</sup> Holgado 135.

<sup>192</sup> Holgado 325.

<sup>193</sup> Although the Family Code of 1975 theoretically requires men and women to share equally in household chores and childcare responsibilities, Holgado claims that the government has done little to *enforce* the law.

still trying to aspire to the model of the virile male archetype that has formed the basis of their nationhood for more than one hundred years.<sup>194</sup>

Because Holgado's study is so recent (2000), it offers Cuban scholars strong evidence of the fact that some Cuban men and women, mostly of the older generations, still possess traditional views of men and women's roles in the home and in society. The testimonies she includes in her book also attest to the continued existence of sexual inequality, which is something that the Cuban government has been trying to eradicate for the last forty years. Overall, Holgado's study is quite comprehensive. It relates the situation of women in the family, in politics, and in the workforce to the broader situation of Cuban social, political, and economic structures. But Holgado's book mainly focuses on the Special Period, or the period of Cuban economic instability and downturn in the early 1990s. While she does make some comparisons between the status of Cuban women in the present and the status of women in the past, most of her interviews and information relate to the last ten years.

## **B. Gender Relations in Film**

Next, this chapter will examine Cuban gender relations in film. Two Cuban films that center on gender relations in the 1969-1974 period are Lucía and Portrait of Teresa. Lucía, says Michael Myerson, "tells the story of three women [all named Lucía] at different points of Cuban history: 1895 and the war for independence; 1933 and the overthrow of the Machado dictatorship; and 196-, the year left purposely

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<sup>194</sup> Holgado 326.

vague.”<sup>195</sup> Although each of the film’s three episodes could be used to examine gender roles and relations, the 196- episode best presents gender inequalities in the home after the Revolution. It is in this episode that the viewer sees the clash between old norms and values (with regards to gender roles and relations) and revolutionary ones.

The director, Humberto Solás, is trying to show that Cuba’s gender problems are far from over by examining the life of Lucía, a revolutionary woman living during the 1960s. Lucía is married to a possessive *machista*, who does not want her to work, to have visitors, or to attend literacy class, even though these restrictions are what the Revolution is trying to overcome.<sup>196</sup> One of the scenes of this episode shows Lucía’s husband, Tomás, boarding up the windows of their home in an attempt to “protect” Lucía from the outside world. He feels that Lucía is becoming too independent, which challenges his authority and threatens his masculinity. He also fears that Lucía will be lured into a relationship with the male teacher who is teaching her how to read and write in their home.<sup>197</sup> Tomás’ possessiveness pushes Lucía to her limits, and she decides to leave him with the support of her friends, who “provide her with a radically transformed context which demonstrates how out-of-date Tomás’ attitudes are and allows her to develop her criticism of his vestigial *machismo*.”<sup>198</sup> But Lucía’s independence is short-lived. At the end of the film, it appears that Lucía is going to

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<sup>195</sup> Michael Myerson, ed., Memories of Underdevelopment: The Revolutionary Films of Cuba (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973): 114.

<sup>196</sup> Peter Biskind, “Lucía”, Jump/Cut 2 (July-Aug 1974): 8.

<sup>197</sup> Lucía, Dir. Humberto Solás, Perf. Adela Legra, videocassette (ICAIC, 1968).

<sup>198</sup> Mraz, “Film and History” 273-274.

take Tomás back. According to John Mraz, “she remains attracted to Tomás both because of and in spite of his *machismo*.”<sup>199</sup> Though Lucía is a revolutionary woman, she has been raised in a social context where men have authority over and are protective of women. Therefore, she has perhaps learned to tolerate her husband’s behavior. The end of the film gives the viewer the impression that Lucía and Tomás, and that Cuban men and women in general, will not escape their sex-role stereotypes and that conflicts between old and new ideals will persist.

The end of the 196- episode of *Lucía* also shows that cultural and social attitudes, which can contain sexual prejudices and stereotypes, are far more difficult to change than political or economic problems.<sup>200</sup> The Lucía of this episode is engaged in a battle with her husband and his archaic values, which becomes a battle of the psyche, because essentially she is trying to change the way that Tomás thinks. She wants him to stop controlling her life and to stop being jealous and overprotective, but those are things that Tomás thinks he must do as her husband and as a man. The conflict at the end of the film illustrates this psychological battle especially well. Lucía tells Tomás that she is coming back to him but with the condition that he lets her work and be independent. Tomás replies by telling her that she is wrong and that she has to obey him, and then throws her down in the sand. Lucía can only cry and say, “Don’t push me around...or I’ll stop loving you,

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<sup>199</sup> Mraz, “Film and History” 278.

<sup>200</sup> Biskind 8.

Tomás!”<sup>201</sup> She can do nothing to change Tomás’ mind, only wait for him to change himself. As Lucía and Tomás fight in the sand, a young girl—interpreted by some scholars to represent the future generations<sup>202</sup>—observes their struggle with amusement, suggesting that Tomás and Lucía’s problems will not be experienced by the younger generations. As this paper will prove, however, Tomás and Lucía’s problems *do* become the problems of the younger generations, and this is evident in later films, such as *Retrato de Teresa* (1979), *Hasta cierto punto* (1983), and *Fresa y chocolate* (1993).

In 1979, more than ten years after *Lucía* was released, Pastor Vega created a film that is perhaps the best representation of gender roles and relations in Cuba after the Revolution. Much like the third episode of *Lucía*, *Retrato de Teresa* is a film about “the strains and contradictions of personal life” in Cuba.<sup>203</sup> What makes *Retrato de Teresa* different from *Lucía*, however, is that *Retrato de Teresa* specifically addresses women’s problems in the home, rather than addressing women’s problems in society and society’s problems in general. According to Julianne Burton, the film “launches a head-on attack against the pair of informal institutions which most effectively perpetuate women’s inequality in Cuba: the ‘double shift’ (full integration of women into the paid workforce without a parallel

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<sup>201</sup> Myerson 163.

<sup>202</sup> Mraz, “Film and History” 163.

<sup>203</sup> Julianne Burton, “Seeing, Being Seen: Portrait of Teresa”, *Social Text* 0.4 (Autumn 1981): 80. The double standard relates to men’s ability to be promiscuous and to have extramarital affairs but the expectation that their wives/partners remain chaste and faithful.

modification of household responsibilities) and the double standard.”<sup>204</sup> *Retrato de Teresa* not only examines these two female problems as faced by the main character, Teresa, but also advocates change by motivating Cubans to think about these problems in their own lives. Because Teresa is so typical, she “enables ordinary Cuban women to identify strongly with her and, potentially, to imitate her in the struggle for personal fulfillment.”<sup>205</sup> This “typicality” was not something that the female characters of *Lucía* possessed.

In *Retrato de Teresa*, Teresa faces the problems that many Cuban women face in their homes: a *machista* husband who does not help with household chores or childcare and who expects Teresa to wait on him hand and foot, a double shift (working and fulfilling domestic responsibilities), and a lack of free time.<sup>206</sup> But Teresa, unlike Lucía, tries to develop herself outside of her family life and work and to take control of her life. She becomes involved in a dance group at work, which gives her an opportunity to meet new people and to do something she enjoys. When her husband, Ramón, complains that she is disregarding her duties as wife and mother, Teresa shouts back at him, “What about my life as a human being?” and slaps him in the face. She continues going to dance practice, which keeps her away from

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<sup>204</sup> Burton 82.

<sup>205</sup> Burton 95.

<sup>206</sup> Max Azicri, “Women’s Development Through Revolutionary Mobilization”, *International Journal of Women’s Studies* 2.1 (1979): 29. See also Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, “The Cuban Family in the 1980s”, *Transformation and Struggle*, ed. by Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (New York: Praeger, 1990): 179.

home, and decides to stop doing housework so that Ramón knows what it is like to have a double shift.<sup>207</sup>

Whether because of Teresa's newly found independence or not, Ramón begins having an affair and moves in with his mother. At the end of the film Ramón attempts to reconcile with Teresa, but the reconciliation "fails when Teresa confronts the fairness of his double standard (i.e., it is okay if he has an affair but not if she does)."<sup>208</sup> Ramón tells Teresa that "It isn't the same" if she has an affair, and Teresa realizes that Ramón will never change.<sup>209</sup> If she stays with Ramón, she will not be able to escape her role as mother and wife, and she will have to live with Ramón's *machista* attitudes. She is happy with her new life and decides that she would be better off without him. This is unlike Lucía, who decides to stay with her husband in spite of their differences and her unhappiness.

What *Retrato de Teresa* shows, a little like *Lucía*, is that even though Cuban women like Teresa are participating in public life and are becoming more independent, they still experience many inequalities in the home, such as the unequal division of labor and the double standard. As Juan A. García explains, "The film indicates that for women to achieve full equality, it is necessary to go beyond educational and economic changes. Women should be allowed to escape their daily responsibilities in the home in order to discover their talents in other areas and to

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<sup>207</sup> *Retrato de Teresa*, Dir. Pastor Vega, Perf. Daisy Granados, videocassette (New Yorker Films, 1979).

<sup>208</sup> Ronald Schwartz, *Latin American Films, 1932-1994* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, 1997): 213-214.

<sup>209</sup> *Retrato de Teresa*.

enrich their lives spiritually,”<sup>210</sup> which is what Teresa attempts to do by becoming involved in the dance group. Going beyond education and economic changes means going to the source of women’s inequality, which is gender ideology, or the way that men and women “think about gender and gendered experiences.”<sup>211</sup> Other films to follow *Retrato de Teresa* also address the fact that Cuban women continue to confront ideological barriers to their full equality in Cuban society. Not until these ideological barriers are overcome will Cuban women like Teresa experience more equality in the home.

Films such as *Portrait of Teresa* and *Lucía* offer unique frameworks with which Cuban scholars can analyze gender relations in twentieth-century Cuban society. Both of these films interpret the ways in which Cuban men and women not only relate to one another but also perceive differences between one another. They are mediums through which filmmakers can transmit their own gender ideologies, and they present images of men and women that have the possibility to influence the way that Cuban viewers think about themselves and others.

### C. Gender Relations in Literature

Finally, this chapter will briefly explore gender relations in popular literature, relying upon the work of Lourdes Casal, “Images of Women in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Cuban Novels”. Due to the fact that “[...] there are few studies of sex-

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<sup>210</sup> Juan A. García Borrero, *Guía crítica del cine cubano de ficción* (La Habana: Editorial de Arte y Literatura, 2001): 290. [my translation]

<sup>211</sup> This is Elizabeth Kuznesof’s definition of gender ideology. “The Construction of Gender in Colonial Latin America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 1.1-2 (1992): 254.

role stereotypes and attitudes prevalent in pre-Revolutionary society,”<sup>212</sup> Casal’s work serves as a valuable resource. Additionally, Casal’s work studies novels, which, like films, “are a medium through which norms and values are introduced or transmitted. [...] In a literate culture, novels...are important sources of role models and ideal images that can have an impact upon shaping norms and behavior [...].”<sup>213</sup> Not only do novels shape norms and behavior, but they are also *shaped by* the norms and behavior that are encompassed in the elite’s gender ideology. Novelists create images of men and women that are products of the society in which they live. Therefore, novels are an alternative source for studying the way in which gender ideology translates into everyday life.

To analyze the images of men and women present “in the social consciousness of pre- and post-Revolutionary Cuban novelists,” Casal reviews 37 novels in the period from 1950-1958 and 67 novels in the period from 1959-1967.<sup>214</sup> She concludes that “of the 1,756 characters present in the novels, 1,241 (70.7 percent) are male and 515 (29.3 percent) are female.”<sup>215</sup> The majority of female characters present in the novels are employed in either service or prostitution. White women, who are not employed, are largely concentrated in the category of housewives.<sup>216</sup> Casal goes on to describe how “females are commonly seen under male tutelage...and they are considered explicitly or implicitly to be their husbands’

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<sup>212</sup> Casal, “Images of Women in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Cuban Novels”, Cuban Studies 17 (1987): 28.

<sup>213</sup> Casal, “Images” 27-28.

<sup>214</sup> Casal, “Images” 27-28.

<sup>215</sup> Casal, “Images” 29.

<sup>216</sup> Casal, “Images” 34.

property. Females *must* marry, since it is considered that a woman without a man is somehow incomplete and in a state of prolonged childhood and dependency [...].”<sup>217</sup>

After marriage, women are portrayed as the caretakers of their husbands and children.<sup>218</sup> All of these images of women have some relevance to historical reality. Women occupied the same social position in nineteenth-century Cuba as they did in twentieth century Cuba: naïve, vulnerable, and dependent mothers, wives, and daughters.

#### D. Conclusion

After the Revolution of 1959, some Cuban women abandoned their traditional gender roles to enter the workforce and to participate in political organizations, though others held on to the traditional female stereotype that equated women with motherhood and the home. The way that Cuban gender ideology was conceived in theory differed greatly from the way that it translated into men’s and women’s everyday lives. By comparing the *ideals* of male and female behavior to the reality of men and women’s actions in film, literature, and everyday life, it is apparent that not all Cuban men and women conform to stereotypical male and female roles. Women like Teresa in Portrait of Teresa abandoned the idea that women should be responsible for the home and the children and should tolerate infidelity. These women call on men to share the responsibilities of household chores and childcare and to be faithful husbands. But other women, like those portrayed in twentieth-

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<sup>217</sup> Casal, “Images” 35.

<sup>218</sup> Casal, “Images” 36.

century Cuban novels, still perform stereotypical tasks of wives and mothers and depend on men for protection and economic support.

This chapter has presented information on gender relations in Cuba that may be regarded as suggestive, rather than definitive. For instance, it has been unable to give adequate attention to Cuban men's point-of-view due to the paucity of information in this area. Geoffrey Fox's study is one of the few existing studies to offer the voices of Cuban men, which is something that Cuban scholars need to change. Additionally, this chapter briefly examined gender relations in film and literature, though other films and studies could certainly be discussed. Finally, this chapter has been limited in its discussion of how gender relations differ across races and classes due to the lack of scholarship on this subject. Hopefully, future studies on Cuban gender ideology can address these issues.

## VI. CUBAN WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE, 1975-1990

Fidel Castro, realizing the continued existence of sexual inequality in Cuba, said at the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1974: “We have to admit the reality that there is still not absolute equality for women in Cuban society.”<sup>219</sup> The problem, Castro stated, was one of an “old culture, old habits, old mentalities, and old prejudices”—essentially, all of the things that Cuba adopted from Spanish colonization.<sup>220</sup> According to Castro, women living in pre-Revolutionary times were seen as sexual objects and as instruments of desire, even in marriage.<sup>221</sup> As a result, they experienced a great deal of discrimination and inequality, both in the home and in public.

Castro’s solution to sexual inequality was drastic. He, in cooperation with the FMC, created a law in 1975 that, in theory, would make men and women’s roles in the home equal: The Family Code. Though the Code was intended to equalize male-female responsibilities and relations in the home, much of the burden of childcare and household chores continued to fall on women’s shoulders. Additionally, the Code failed to alleviate the stresses that led to divorce and the deterioration of family relations. The lack of perceptible change within Cuban households since 1975 demonstrates two things: 1) that the traditional gender ideology continues to influence

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<sup>219</sup> Fidel Castro, “*La revolución tiene en las mujeres cubanas hoy día una impresionante fuerza política*” (Second Congress of the FMC. La Habana. 29 Nov 1974): 16. [my translation]

<sup>220</sup> Castro “*La revolución tiene en las mujeres*” 37.

<sup>221</sup> Fidel Castro, quoted in an interview by Gianni Miná, *Un encuentro con Fidel* (La Habana: Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 1988): 203.

relationships within the household, and 2) that the Cuban government's program for women's equality in the home is not supported on the grass roots level.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the Family Code and will later analyze women's status in the home and family relations in the 1975-1990 period. I selected 1990 as an ending point to this study as the early 1990s were the years in which the Special Period, or the period of economic downturn, began. With the Special Period came several economic problems that have diverted the Cuban government's attention away from the issue of gender equality and family relations and toward the failing economy. Also, few studies relating to women's status in the home and to family relations exist after 1990; the majority appeared in the 1970s and 1980s.

#### **A. The Family Code of 1975**

In the Second Cuban Congress of the Communist Party (1974), the FMC stressed the necessity of educating fathers, male teachers, and male doctors about the importance of putting an end to the ignorance and prejudices regarding women's status in Cuban society.<sup>222</sup> Among other discussions at the Second Congress, the FMC addressed the continued existence, in spite of the progress made in women's rights, of *machismo*, the double standard regarding household duties and care of the children, and traditional roles of men and women in the family.<sup>223</sup> All of these

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<sup>222</sup> Espín, *La mujer en Cuba* 66.

<sup>223</sup> Espín, *La mujer en Cuba* 172.

discussions culminated in the creation of the Family Code in 1975 and its approval on February 14. It became law on March 8, 1975, International Women's Day.<sup>224</sup>

Examining the Family Code is important, according to Lisandro Pérez, because "it is a document which...institutionalizes many of the Revolutionary government's long-standing practices in the regulation of family matters and embodies the ideology of the Cuban revolution with regard to the status of women, parent-child relations, and the functions of the family."<sup>225</sup> In legal terms, the Family Code was a written social policy aimed at equalizing the responsibilities, contributions, and rights of each marriage partner within the Cuban household. As Elizabeth Stone explains, the Family Code "was proposed as a replacement for the pre-Revolutionary laws on marriage, divorce, adoption, and alimony."<sup>226</sup> However, the Code was markedly different from pre-revolutionary laws in that Articles 24 through 28 "stipulated that women should be equal in marriage and that men should share in housework and raising children. This section of the code also stated that both members of a couple should have an equal right to pursue an education or have a job and that they should cooperate with each other to make that possible."<sup>227</sup> Nothing in the pre-revolutionary laws on marriage, divorce, adoption, and alimony required husbands and wives to share in the housework and the raising of the children or to support one another's educational and occupational goals.

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<sup>224</sup> Azicri "Women's Development" 45.

<sup>225</sup> Pérez 245.

<sup>226</sup> Stone 17.

<sup>227</sup> Stone 17.

So for many Cubans, both men and women, Articles 24 through 28 of the Family Code challenged long-standing family traditions and attitudes about men and women's roles within the home and threatened to change the way that families operated. For women, the changes that the Family Code would create seemed positive, because their burden of doing the household chores and raising the children would be lessened. Men, on the other hand, had a less positive reaction to the Code, because it would mean that they would not only have to set aside their *macho* attitudes but also begin to contribute to typically female chores within the home. Men who felt that it was not their responsibility to do housework or their obligation to support their wives' education or jobs met these articles of the Code with strong opposition.<sup>228</sup> As mentioned by Pérez, "no other single clause elicited as much controversy as this idea of Cuban males sharing in housework and childcare."<sup>229</sup> After all, the Code marked the first attempt in Cuba's history to regulate family relations and to extend socialist ideals and values to the family.

Despite the Family Code's legality, there was virtually no way for the Cuban government to enforce it. According to Isabel Holgado Fernández, "The law was approved, and nothing more was done to put it into practice."<sup>230</sup> The only way for the Cuban government to enforce the Code would have been to send government officials door to door to inspect the activities of each household—a solution that was too costly and time consuming. The responsibility of enforcing the Code, then, came to

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<sup>228</sup> Smith and Padula, Sex and Revolution 105.

<sup>229</sup> Pérez 248.

<sup>230</sup> Holgado 163, my translation.

rest upon the shoulders of members within each household. For instance, if a woman felt that her husband was breaking the Code by not doing his fair share of household chores, then it would be her responsibility to file a report with a law enforcement agency.<sup>231</sup> But how many women were actually willing to take that step? To make enforcement of the Code even more complicated, nothing in the Code's wording indicates what the punishment is for violating it. Divorce was the only alternative that a woman had if her husband did not follow the Code.<sup>232</sup>

So if the Code did not make clear the punishment for breaking it and if the government had no way to enforce the Code, then what deterrent was there for those who refused to comply with it? Furthermore, what is to say that the pre-existing attitudes of *machismo* and traditional gender roles of men and women within the home did not continue? How do we know whether or not the Family Code has been successful in creating positive change in the lives of Cuban women and their families? For instance, has the Family Code elevated women's status within the home by forcing husbands to share in the responsibilities of doing household chores and raising children and to support their wives' educational and career goals? Has the Family Code improved family relations by making fathers more active participants in their children's lives and by making husbands more supportive of their wives?

The best way to answer these questions is by examining 1) what Cuban scholars and researchers have concluded about the changes in women's lives since

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<sup>231</sup> Randall, Women in Cuba 40.

<sup>232</sup> Cuba, Ministry of Justice, Family Code: Law No. 1289, of February 14, 1975, (La Habana: Ministry of Justice, 1975): 29.

1975, 2) what Cuban women themselves have said about their experiences and their families since 1975, and 3) how post-1975 films portray gender relations in the home. Although these questions can be answered in part through statistics and censuses, it is impossible to calculate changes in family relations and women's status in the home with numbers and facts alone. Scholars can refer to statistics on divorce rates, family size and composition, and fertility rates, but this kind of information says little about the way that men and women and parents and children relate to one another in the home on a daily basis. Family and gender relationships can be best examined through non-quantifiable sources, such as literature, interviews, and films, where women's voices are heard and where their everyday experiences are considered. Therefore, the following sections will relate and analyze literature, interviews, and films that either emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s or that focus on family and gender relations during this time period.

## **B. Women's Status in the Home**

One of the most useful works of literature published on the subject of Cuban women's changing role and status within the family after 1975 is State, Gender, and Institutional Change in Cuba's 'Special Period': The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas by sociologist Maxine Molyneaux. In it, Molyneaux discusses how much of the burden of housework and childcare in the home continues to fall on women's shoulders and how, despite efforts by the FMC in the 1970s, women still have not achieved equality with their husbands in the household. Molyneaux writes, "Cuban surveys show that 'the traditional sexual division of [labor] in domestic work'

remains virtually unchallenged by years of FMC efforts to raise awareness of the problem, or by the 1975 Family Code, with 'women bearing the main burden, whether or not they are in employment.'"<sup>233</sup> Molyneaux goes on to say that, in addition to the unequal division of labor, inequality also exists between Cuban men and women's participation in their children's education and socialization, with women taking on more of the responsibilities.

Author Max Azicri agrees with Molyneaux that neither the FMC nor the Family Code have been able to change Cuban society's cultural values regarding men and women's gender roles within the home. Azicri argues that in spite of all the changes that have taken place regarding a woman's place in revolutionary Cuba, traditional sex-typed roles and *machismo* still exist.<sup>234</sup> He maintains, "There seems to be a general consensus that women in Cuba still continue to do the majority of household tasks, and that no one is thrown in jail for not sharing in home responsibilities."<sup>235</sup> A good deal of Cuban women's labor (eight times that of men's)<sup>236</sup> continues to take place in the home, where it is either unrecognized, unpaid, or both, while men's labor occurs outside of the home in more visible, more prestigious, and better paid jobs.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Maxine Molyneaux, *State, Gender, and Institutional Change* (London: Univ of London, 1996): 36.

<sup>234</sup> Azicri, "Women's Development" 29; Eleanor B. Leacock and Helen I. Safa confirm this also in *Women's Work* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1986): 238.

<sup>235</sup> Leahy 108.

<sup>236</sup> Smith and Padula, "The Cuban Family in the 1980s", in *Transformation and Struggle*, ed. by Sandor Halebsky and John M. Kirk (New York: Praeger, 1990): 179.

<sup>237</sup> Leacock and Safa 248.

According to a study conducted by the U.N. in 1983, the fact that men and women carry out different tasks in and outside the home means that they have different statuses. Women carry out the less-economically-profitable task of maintaining the home and raising the children and, consequently, have to depend on their husbands for financial support. Men, on the other hand, support the family economically through work outside the home and serve as the head of household.<sup>238</sup> The result is an imbalance of power within the home. This imbalance of power is evident not only in the unequal division of labor in the home but also in decision making. Men typically hold the greatest amount of authority in the decision-making process and can typically persuade their wives to follow their advice in such matters as promotions or career changes, to name two. However, some women say that their husbands have far less authority in the home than they would imagine or admit.<sup>239</sup>

When one views films such as Portrait of Teresa (1979), One Way or Another (1977), and Lucía (1968)—three Cuban films that deal with the persistence of gender inequality and *machismo*—it becomes clear that post-revolutionary gender relations in Cuba are still imbalanced. Each of these three films has female characters that struggle in their marriages or in their relationships with *macho* men who hold traditional views about male and female gender roles and who try to control and dominate them. In Portrait of Teresa, the *machista* is Teresa's husband Ramón; in One Way or Another, it is Yolanda's boyfriend Mario; and in Lucía, it is Lucía's

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<sup>238</sup> U.N. 154, 184. Of course, not all households are headed by men, especially in the last ten years. See Safa, The Myth 30-31.

<sup>239</sup> Smith and Padula, "Twenty Questions on Sex and Gender in Cuba", Cuban Studies 18 (1988): 158.

husband Tomás. These are all men who in some way or another fit the *macho* male stereotype. Ramón believes that it is Teresa's duty as a wife to do all of the housework and take care of the children; Mario thinks that breaking away from *macho* patterns will make him seem feminine and weak; and Tomás assumes that it is his natural right as a husband to control his wife's actions.<sup>240</sup>

To further support the arguments of Cuban scholars and the evidence in Cuban films, it is useful to examine interviews with Cuban women experiencing sexual inequality in the home firsthand. One of the most recent sources containing interviews with Cuban women is that of Isabel Holgado Fernández. In her work, Holgado Fernández draws from the testimonies of more than sixty Cuban women who she interviewed between 1996 and 1999. One of the women interviewed by Holgado says this about the unequal roles that Cuban women and men play in the home:

When it is not necessary to wash clothes, it is necessary to iron them, and afterwards to cook and serve the food, and later scrub the dishes and be sure that the children and the husband have clothes to wear, and keep the house clean, and...the story never ends. But no one pays these hours. Even worse, it is as if they didn't exist, as if all of this work was done [by...] a fairy.<sup>241</sup>

And this woman was not the only one interviewed who was unhappy with the division of labor in the home; 55 out of 60 women interviewed by Holgado were dissatisfied with the participation of their partners in the home.<sup>242</sup> Even with this

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<sup>240</sup> Michael Chanan, The Cuban Image (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press, 1985): 289; Portrait of Teresa and Lucía.

<sup>241</sup> Holgado 131, my translation.

<sup>242</sup> Holgado 132.

said, many of the women in Holgado's study do not protest. In fact, they conform to the sexual stereotypes of the home and in large part reinforce them.

Another of the women interviewed by Holgado explains this conformity by saying that she comes from the traditional, *machista* generation where men do not lift a finger in the house.<sup>243</sup> Growing up with this mentality makes it difficult to protest, because sex role stereotypes have been ingrained into this generation's minds. According to Holgado, many Cuban men are still trying to aspire to the patriarchal and *macho* male archetype that has formed the basis of their nationhood for over one hundred years.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, the wives of these men are confronting more than just an unwillingness to help around the house; they are confronting an ideology of what is appropriate male and female behavior.

Another source with interviews on the issue of sexual inequality is Women of Cuba, by Inger Holt-Seeland. Holt-Seeland's work examines the lives of several Cuban women during the 1980s. One of the women interviewed (Isabel), makes this comment about men's continued lack of support for their wives' household burdens: "[...] Working women in Cuba still carry the largest workload because men don't assume the responsibility around the house that, for instance, the younger generation of men will have to take."<sup>245</sup> Some Cuban men—particularly those belonging to the older generations—continue to favor traditional sex roles in the home, which assign all of the tasks of household maintenance and childcare to the female.

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<sup>243</sup> Holgado 135-136.

<sup>244</sup> Holgado 326.

<sup>245</sup> Holt-Seeland 44.

### C. Family Relations

In addition to gender inequality in the home, a second problem that the Family Code (a product of the Revolution) has not been able to address is the deterioration of the Cuban family unit. Before the Revolution,

the Cuban family was a tightly-knit group, [and...] grandparents, parents, and children were interdependent and emotionally close. [But...] the demands of the revolutionary society changed all that. [...] Women no longer stayed at home while their husbands were 'out with the boys' or 'working late.' Their lives began to take on a meaning they had never had before, and this, naturally, brought clashes and struggles in more than a few family units.<sup>246</sup>

As women became more involved in politics, labor organizations, the work force, and education, they had less and less time to spend with their families. Like the case of Teresa in the film Portrait of Teresa, many Cuban women found it difficult to combine the demands of their careers and family duties, especially when their husbands were unwilling to share their load at home. As a result, conflicts arose between husbands and wives, and these conflicts sometimes led to divorce. In 1953, approximately 8.3 out of every 100 marriages ended in divorce. By 1968, however, the divorce rate had reached 18.1 percent,<sup>247</sup> and in 1987 the rate was up to 42 percent—five times what it was in 1953.<sup>248</sup>

Though there are few Cuban studies about “the characteristics of marriages, the dynamics of the marital relationship, and the factors associated with divorce,” one

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<sup>246</sup> Randall, Women in Cuba 88.

<sup>247</sup> Benigno E. Aguirre, “Women in Cuban Bureaucracies,” Women in the Family and the Economy, eds. George Kurian and Ratna Ghosh (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981): 376.

<sup>248</sup> Safa 135. Another study by Max Azicri, Cuba: Politics, Economics, and Society (London and New York: Pinter Publishers, 1988): 58, states that the number of divorces increased eightfold between 1960 and 1975.

study conducted in the early 1970s by a group of sociology students “constitutes a significant contribution to the literature on the contemporary Cuban family,” “[...] on marriages and divorces,” and “[...] on the behavior and attitudes of Cubans with respect to married life.”<sup>249</sup> The researchers of this study concluded that Cuba’s divorce rate could have reached one of the highest in the world by the early 1980s if it continued at the rate it was on during the early 1970s. The study also found that more than half of all divorces occurred in marriages that were less than six years old and that 70 percent of all divorces were granted to couples with children.<sup>250</sup>

What this study shows is that the Cuban family and marriage relations were deteriorating prior to the enactment of the 1975 Family Code and that more than ten years of revolution had done little to change the ideology that existed at the core of Cuban society. “The University of La Habana study confirms,” says Lisandro Pérez, “what many other observers have already noted: behavior and attitudes regarding the relationship between the sexes and spouses, domestic authority and obligations, and sex roles are deeply ingrained in a society’s fabric.”<sup>251</sup> Changing these behaviors and attitudes requires much time, effort, and education, and there is no guarantee that *all* Cuban men and women will respond positively to these changes. This becomes especially clear when one observes the fact that in many Cuban homes “there is still substantial opposition to such innovations as women working outside the home, equalitarian decision making, and...redefinitions of the male role that include a

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<sup>249</sup> Pérez 255-256.

<sup>250</sup> Pérez 257.

<sup>251</sup> Pérez 261.

sharing of domestic duties with the wife.”<sup>252</sup> This is true especially in rural areas.<sup>253</sup>

For women in non-egalitarian relationships such as these, divorce is often the way out.

It seems, however, that change is occurring among the younger generations. Younger men and women view sex roles in the home and in marriage differently than their parents. Young women especially “have greater confidence and self-esteem and expect more from [their partners], in terms of sharing household responsibilities, [childcare], and decisions [...]”<sup>254</sup> This could explain why women between 25 and 44 years of age account for the largest group of divorcees in Cuba.<sup>255</sup> In 60 percent of all divorces, the women involved were less than 30 years old and the men were less than 34 years old.<sup>256</sup> Younger women simply do not tolerate inequality in the home to the extent that older women do.<sup>257</sup> Most women, however, seem to be trying to find a balance between a stable relationship and their own autonomy.<sup>258</sup>

As Helen Safa discovered in interviews with Cuban women in the 1990s, one of the reasons why more and more Cuban marriages are ending in divorce is that fewer women feel forced to stay in an unhappy marriage for financial reasons. They feel that they are able to marry for love, not money.<sup>259</sup> As one Cuban woman remarks, “[...] The Revolution came and gave [women the] freedom to work [so...]”

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<sup>252</sup> Pérez 261.

<sup>253</sup> Ravenet Ramírez 193-194.

<sup>254</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 181; 138.

<sup>255</sup> Valdés and Gomáriz 30.

<sup>256</sup> Pérez 257.

<sup>257</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 181.

<sup>258</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 183.

<sup>259</sup> Smith and Padula, “The Cuban Family” 178.

now I don't have to think of staying with [my husband] because he has to support me."<sup>260</sup> Another woman in Inger Holt-Seeland's work says, "[...] I used to live with the fear that [my husband would] leave me if I didn't please him. Not anymore. One day, [...] I told him: 'If you want to, leave. With what [our daughter] and I earn, and with what you will have to give the children by law, we will have enough.'"<sup>261</sup> These women's testimonies provide evidence of the fact that some Cuban women no longer need a male breadwinner. They are more economically independent today than they were fifty years ago, and they have greater access to support services such as childcare (whether through a daycare facility or a family member) that allow them to work and participate in activities outside the home.<sup>262</sup> For these reasons, more and more Cuban women are raising children alone and are serving as the head of household.<sup>263</sup> As cited by Vilma Espín, there were approximately 200,000 female-headed households in Cuba in 1987.<sup>264</sup>

A second factor promoting marital instability is the housing shortage.<sup>265</sup> The housing shortage began in the 1970s and, as of the 1990s, had not yet been resolved. According to Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, Cuba could not keep up with its growing population and it had to use all available materials for the construction of

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<sup>260</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 160.

<sup>261</sup> Holt-Seeland 24.

<sup>262</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 139.

<sup>263</sup> Smith and Padula, "Twenty Questions" 155.

<sup>264</sup> Espín cited in Smith and Padula, "The Cuban Family" 181.

<sup>265</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 141; Azicri, *Cuba* 63. The housing shortage has been more of a problem since the economic crisis of the early 1990s, but sharing a home with family members was common before this time. In 1980, for example, 23,000 families in Havana alone were without housing. See Holgado 156.

new schools and public facilities. As a result, newly wedded couples have been forced to move in with their parents or other relatives, and some divorced couples have had to continue living in the same residence, “their beds separated by a sheet hung from the ceiling.”<sup>266</sup> The lack of privacy and independence often causes marital problems for couples living with family members, because the couple is sharing space and having to negotiate such things as authority, childcare, and finances with parents, siblings, or other relatives.<sup>267</sup> A woman in Isabel Holgado Fernández’s study describes her own situation in this way: “We lived with his mother, his uncle, grandmother, aunt, and two cousins...that is to say, everyone [...]. He had been an only child [...] so logically [his mother] wasn’t going to let him do anything. This really hurt our marriage because all of my good intentions to create an environment where he would share [failed].”<sup>268</sup> This is only one example of the many problems faced by couples living with relatives, and it is an example of the fact that the housing shortage has placed an additional strain on Cuban families.

In addition to increasing divorce rates, another affect of women’s increased participation in politics and the work force was the break down of “over-protective parent-child relationships.”<sup>269</sup> Both women and their children left the house to participate in revolutionary activities and organizations, and the Revolution has called on fathers to support their wives and children’s participation in these activities.<sup>270</sup> As

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<sup>266</sup> Smith and Padula, “The Cuban Family” 179.

<sup>267</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 131.

<sup>268</sup> Holgado 150.

<sup>269</sup> Randall, *Women in Cuba* 91. Also, Cuban Ministry of Justice 20.

<sup>270</sup> Stone 27.

stated by Elizabeth Stone, "The old norm, where a tyrannical father dominated wife and children, is becoming a thing of the past."<sup>271</sup> Fathers have had to lessen their grip on their children in order to allow them to attend boarding schools away from home, to participate in the Young Pioneers and the Union of Young Communists, and to volunteer in the countryside and abroad.<sup>272</sup> However, Cuban scholars have yet to produce a comprehensive study that examines the extent to which the Revolution has changed father-child or even parent-child relations over time.<sup>273</sup> Therefore, this study cannot comment on whether or not father-child or parent-child relationships improved or deteriorated during the 1975 to 1990 period. What *is* known is that the time that families spend together has diminished as a result of all Cubans' service to and participation in the Revolution.<sup>274</sup>

A third way that Cuban women have responded to the demands and opportunities of the Revolution is by delaying motherhood, by limiting the number of children they have, or by rejecting motherhood altogether. According to Sergio Díaz-Briquets, over 30 percent of married, childless women between the ages of 20 and 29 do not want children. This percentage is even higher among younger women.<sup>275</sup> The greater availability of family planning methods and services, such as contraceptives

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<sup>271</sup> Stone 26.

<sup>272</sup> Smith and Padula, "The Cuban Family" 179-180.

<sup>273</sup> The study by Inés Reza Moreira [et. al.] discusses a few Cuban studies about communication between parents and children, but these studies focus on the manner of communication more than what is being communicated. None discusses specifically the relationship between fathers and their children. See 195-207.

<sup>274</sup> Smith and Padula, "The Cuban Family" 180.

<sup>275</sup> Sergio Díaz-Briquets, Review of *La Fecundidad Retrospectiva*, by the Comité Estatal de Estadísticas, in *Cuban Studies* 13.1 (1983): 79.

and abortion, has allowed Cuban women to determine whether or not they will have children, when, and how many.<sup>276</sup> In addition to driving the birth curve down, this has given some women an alternative to the traditional role of mother and housewife. It has also allowed women to be more sexually active. Though increased sexual freedom is mostly positive, one negative result has been an alarming increase in teenage pregnancy. As of 1985, state Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, one-third of all births were to teenage mothers.<sup>277</sup>

#### **D. Conclusion**

What the changes mentioned in this section show is that the Revolution has been less successful in improving Cuban women's lives in the private sphere than it has been in improving their lives in the public sphere. The high divorce rate, the limited amount of time that families have to spend together, and the high rate of teenage pregnancy are just some of the problems facing the Cuban family today that government policies like the Family Code have not been able to change. The persistence of these problems, coupled with the persistence of gender inequality in the home, call into question whether or not the Cuban government will ever transform women's lives in the private sphere the way that it has transformed their lives in the public sphere.

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<sup>276</sup> Azicri, *Cuba* 62. Also Díaz-Briquets 79.

<sup>277</sup> Smith and Padula, "The Cuban Family" 180 and endnote no. 18, p 188.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Through the tenets of socialism, the Cuban government has improved many aspects of Cuban women's lives. When compared with Cuban women living in pre-revolutionary times, Cuban women today enjoy far greater equality in politics, the workforce, and education and benefit from far more support services and government-sponsored programs. Women no longer have to depend on men to financially support them, and they are no longer forced into degrading careers that require little or no education, like domestic service and prostitution. Also, Cuban women today are protected by laws and policies that ensure that they receive equal pay for equal work, twelve weeks of maternity leave, free health care, and a good education.

While Cuban women's public lives have advanced tremendously in the last forty years, their private lives have changed to a far lesser degree. It is true that the Cuban government has tried to intervene in family life by passing legislation—like the Family Code—that is aimed at decreasing gender inequality in the home. But these measures are superficial and have not attacked the root of women's problems in the home, which is the pervasiveness of colonial attitudes and ideas about male-female relations, gender roles, and gender-appropriate behaviors. As Margaret Leahy states,

positive progress toward women's equality will not occur with the 'mere provision of equal rights' for women. Rather, women's equal rights and women's ability to use these rights will be conditioned [in part] by [...] the extent to which governments take 'positive and concerted action to change attitudes and prejudices' concerning women's social role.

The achievement of women's equality also requires governments to give high priority to women's issues and to integrate those issues into the overall development strategy of the nation.<sup>278</sup> With the government's support of the FMC, it has been difficult for women to politically voice their opinions and to take action, especially when the FMC, which is still the only feminine organization on the island, has not been putting issues important to Cuban women at the top of its agenda. Though the Cuban government gave greater priority to women's issues in the past, recent economic problems have diverted the government's attention away from these issues. It is understandable that the economy must be the number one priority in order for the people's basic needs to be met, but the government can still do much to change Cubans' attitudes and prejudices about men and women's role in the home. The Cuban government can: 1) more strongly enforce the Family Code, 2) place a greater emphasis on men's roles as fathers and husbands and less emphasis on women's roles as mothers and wives, 3) encourage more men to fill traditionally female occupations, 4) study the causes of marital problems and divorce and try to correct them, and 5) educate parents about the effects of socializing boys and girls differently. These are measures that the Cuban government has not yet performed fully. As a result, Cuban women continue to occupy positions of inferiority in the home and continue to bear the sole responsibility of raising children and looking after the home.

At least in the younger generations, a certain degree of change is occurring. In younger couples, there seems to be a more egalitarian division of labor and

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<sup>278</sup> Leahy 4.

authority in the home.<sup>279</sup> Young Cuban men and women have been raised in a different manner and time than their parents, and most of them have a different conception of gender roles and relations than their parents. Helen Safa notes, “[... Younger] women’s consciousness of gender subordination is growing [...]. [They] now recognize that they have rights as well as responsibilities—as housewives, workers, and citizens—and they are more willing to challenge male domination, especially within the household.”<sup>280</sup> This means that they expect more from men—in terms of sharing household responsibilities and decisions—than perhaps their mothers do. But traditional gender roles and stereotypes and the unequal division of labor remain unchallenged in many Cuban households, and the Cuban government recognizes this. But can or will gender equality in the home ever be achieved under Cuban socialism? At the moment, there is great doubt. However, the achievement of gender equality in the home is a matter to be determined by time and future investigation.

Although this thesis has evaluated the origins and characteristics of Cuban gender ideology, its persistence in twentieth-century gender relations, and the current situation of Cuban women in the home, many questions are left unanswered. This study has addressed only part of a complex problem in Cuba today, which is the existence of gender inequality in the public but especially in the private sphere. Some of the questions that future Cuban women’s studies must answer are: Where do

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<sup>279</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 179.

<sup>280</sup> Safa, *The Myth* 184-185.

problems of gender inequality rank on Castro's priority list today? Is Castro still dedicated to achieving *la plena igualdad de la mujer*, or has he set aside women's issues in order to address economic issues? What are policymakers (particularly female policymakers) doing to assure that forty years of social progress is not lost? Are policymakers or the FMC making the effort to educate Cuban mothers and fathers about their roles and duties as parents (i.e. their responsibility to raise "new" men and women)? If so, how is this education taking place? With regard to generational differences, what percentage of young Cubans really have different views of men and women's roles in society than their parents and how many are simply following in their parents' footsteps? Have psychological and sociological studies been conducted to test whether or not gender ideology can change over time? If not, how does the Castro regime know whether or not it is possible to eradicate traditional conceptions of male and female roles and sexual stereotypes? These questions and others merit greater attention and research. Until the Cuban government addresses these issues and until Cuban scholars study them, it will be difficult to determine the degree to which Cuba has transitioned to socialism and to be certain that Cuban women will achieve full equality with men. At the present, it seems that many vestiges of traditional gender ideology remain intact and that this ideology is slowing progress in women's private lives.

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