

CUBA: A MATERIALIST-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE  
ON THE SOCIALIST PROJECT

by

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And approved by

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## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

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Dr. Mary Hawkesworth

My dissertation develops a rich account of how the two political projects of socialism and feminism were mutually articulated in the pursuit of women's liberation by the Cuban revolution and through the multifaceted practices and living labor of Cuban women. Grounded in materialist feminism and feminist political economy, as well as theories of care, democracy, and liberation, my research argues for a thorough rethinking of socialist feminism. Through a careful examination of the theory and trajectory of gender equity as women's liberation within Cuba since 1959, I note significant gains achieved across myriad social dimensions but a marked resilience of gender inequalities cemented by the theoretical foundations of Marxist-Leninism espoused by the Cuban Communist Party and the Federation of Cuban Women through analyses of its keynote texts. I argue, nonetheless, that socialism and feminism are still key to degendering structural differences among human flourishing, and that cooperatively they hold the promise of a deeper social transformation beyond a gender equality purchased at the price of women's disautonomy and hypertrophied commodity production. My dissertation makes this argument through a materialist feminist analysis of Cuban women's socially invisible work which challenges the rigidities of gender-blind socialism, labor-blind

feminism, and masculine versions of liberation and proposes that the identification of care-work as a distinct category of labor illuminates new possibilities for human liberation. This proposal carries within it the explicit critique of the idols of the political economies of both neoliberalism and socialism, commodity production, and begins to chart a third way toward the non-exploited, non-alienated, and interdependent wellbeing of all members of society through a feminist theory of revolutionary democracy. This theory aims toward social justice and the realm of freedom by outlining the substantive social recognition of care-work as a means to empower people to gain control over their economy, temper commodity production, incorporate women fully in politics and governance, and alter the sites, forms, and contents of social democracy. By attending to care-work and encouraging its universal practice, we open possibilities for social justice that have to date eluded us.

## **Acknowledgement**

All human endeavors rest on a foundation composed of the talents and labors of multitudes and I know this to be especially true of this dissertation. I first thank my advisor, Professor Mary Hawkesworth, whose advice and assistance throughout the long and arduous course of this project was truly inimitable. Her enormous breadth of knowledge in the field was always able to point me to the perfectly relevant article and her tireless energy and generous spirit somehow found time to offer comments and discuss yet another chapter draft. Although no amount of gratitude could suffice, I would like to recognize that my entry into the ancient and honorable community of scholars is in large part thanks to her labors.

My other committee members also deserve praise and thanks. Professors Drucilla Cornell, Andrew Murphy, and Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo all offered tremendously valuable feedback, warm encouragement, and sharp intellectual provocation to help me improve this project beyond what I believed myself capable of.

I ought not forget my fellow graduate students whose friendship and intellectual perseverance helped shape me, this project, and how I understood the very fundamental concepts and ideas I was wrestling with through the classroom and, more importantly, through the informal discussions fueled by our mutual passions for the subject of politics, gender, social justice. Many thanks to Albert Castle, Alexandra Hoerl, Ben Pauli, Benjamin Peters, Christina Doonan, Elric Kline, Lincoln Addison, Nick Martyniak, Rocky Graziose, Vivian Kao, and Vaughn Anderson.

I also thank my parents who more than most have helped shape who I am. I always like to say that my mom was secretly a Kantian and that my dad was secretly an economist, although neither of those words was ever mentioned during my childhood. Further, it is thanks to their values, labors, and material gifts that social justice matters to me. Put together, feminist political economy made perfect sense. I hope this dissertation has made them proud.

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## **Part I.       Grounding the Project**

### *Introduction*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people around the globe find themselves economically insecure, unable to govern their societies, and confronting major crises of inequality and environmental degradation. Neoliberals insist that “there is no alternative.” Yet, history provides various alternatives—socialism and feminism have long envisioned paths toward liberation understood in terms of human flourishing.

My dissertation began with these two political projects, each seeking liberation through the satisfaction of needs but also through seeking and creating the spaces where humans would develop that which makes life worthwhile, two political projects that attempt to move beyond the market to create an economy that works for all. Yet, the Left has been sorely disappointed by the lack of flourishing promoted in the largest and most well-known examples of socialism. Adding further difficulty, socialism and feminism have not seemed to work well together on a theoretical level. Some scholars, in fact, have suggested they are irreconcilable. The immiscibility of the two traditions seems all the more a permanent obstacle when one considers that, in practice as well, various socialist polities have tried different tacks to women’s equality with limited feminist gains. Examples range from Stalinist Russia’s search for “stable families” (Buckley 1989, 264) to China’s Cultural Revolution’s socialist androgyny, promoting a kind of woman who was “genderless in public, chaste wife and selfless mother in private” (M. B. Young 1989, 236). Russia and China, however, do not exhaust the possibilities for socialist feminism. Cuba has been a socialist society for five decades.

This dissertation advances a feminist analysis of Cuban socialism in order to explore strengths and weaknesses in the socialist-feminist project, thereby enriching contemporary understanding of alternatives to capitalist inequalities. My goal in undertaking this analysis is not only to assess the successes and shortcomings of women's liberation within the Cuban socialist system, but to develop a new critique of the means and ends of the socialist project itself. Chapter 1, "Cuban Feminist History," presents a summary sketch of Cuban history since the 1890s with particular attention to revolutionary Cuba's efforts with respect to women's liberation. The Revolution achieved significant social justice gains since 1959: literacy campaigns, especially targeting rural areas; job training of former domestic workers; mandatory public schooling funded equally for blacks, whites, and mulattos; socialized childcare; shopping plans to accommodate working women; maternity benefits in both healthcare and the workforce; promotion of women in assemblies/legislatures; increased numbers of women college graduates, physicians, and technical workers; attention to gendered relationships of power in newspapers, magazines, sex education, and even a national law addressing domestic and parental responsibilities for both women and men.

Yet, Cubans struggled with some seemingly intractable dilemmas. Cuba deliberately buried its pre-Revolutionary feminist history under a retrograde and formulaic Marxist-Leninism. Its state policies were often championed by men, intermittently applied, and subsumed under other principles, suggesting that women's empowerment was not an end in itself but an occasional means to other political and economic goals. Some scholars have stated outright that the Cuban state manipulated the female labor force in order to achieve development goals (Azicri 1981, 295). And most glaring of all, men continue to hold the major positions of power in the

Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Revolutionary National Police (PNR) and Revolutionary National Militias (MNR), managerial positions and higher-paying labor sectors in the market, as well as leadership in religious organizations and families.

To understand why gender inequality was entrenched in Revolutionary Cuba, Chapter 2, “The Cuban Path to Women’s Liberation,” conducts an in-depth examination of the socialist-feminist theoretical constellation guiding state policies. This examination relies upon close readings of the Cuban Communist Party’s “Thesis on the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality” and the major documents published by the sole women’s organization recognized by the state, the Federation of Cuban Women. As I will show, Revolutionary Cuba had a profoundly influential and very particular agenda with regard to women, men, gender, family, and care. The main source of that agenda was the particular socialist-feminist tradition stemming from Marx, Engels, Bebel, etc. and passing through Lenin. I refer to this tradition as the orthodox socialist-feminist inheritance. This tradition and its application in Cuba had four fatal flaws, the subject of the following chapters.

Chapter 3, “Flaws in the Socialist Vision of Women’s Emancipation in Cuba,” analyzes and presents arguments documenting two of these flaws, the failure to escape a “narrow production fetishism” (Cleaver 1984, xxvi) and the failure to give women voice in naming their own oppression and controlling their own liberation. The Cuban state sought to push, and still pushes, nearly every adult member of the population—both women and men—into commodity production in order to focus on the acquisition of foreign exchange. Production would liberate the nation and women’s production would be the means to their own liberation. Yet, the state quashed every effort by women to press for other goals, to organize themselves, to

clarify and analyze their own problems and to demand their own organic solutions. Liberation was the goal and women would accomplish the goal through formal market labor and the Federation of Cuban Women.

These two shortcomings stemmed from the third, namely the failure to start from a materialist analysis of *all* work in Cuba. Like many socialist experiments in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Cuban leaders largely ignored and rendered invisible the work done by Cuban women outside of the formal labor market. Chapter 4, “Women’s Work,” undertakes to fill this materialist lacuna, detailing the panoply of material activity undertaken by Cuban women that remained unrecognized and unremunerated by the state. Throughout the course of the Revolution, women in Cuba met their needs, and those of others, through domestic work, child care work, affective labor, community building, and myriad forms of volunteer work.

My materialist-feminist analysis of women’s labor makes it apparent that women are not only engaged in different material activity, but their qualitatively different material activity creates wholly other modes of social relations. Chapter 5, “Care-Work and Revolutionary Democracy,” argues that this activity is not production-work, but instead what Elisabeth Bubeck has termed care-work. Following the materialist-feminism argument advanced by Christine Delphy, I note that care-work in Cuba is exploited in ways that privilege production. Challenging the presumptive priority of the production sector is key to fulfilling the potential of socialist-feminism. By theorizing care-work and devising political means for its substantive recognition and remuneration, it is possible to achieve a richer, more democratic, and less exploitative version of socialism than heretofore practiced, a feminist version of revolutionary democracy in keeping with the vision of Jennifer Disney and Katherine Hoyt.

For socialists to begin from the axiom that care-work is unproductive and a peripheral element of social, economic, and political life is to drastically reduce the force of socialism's liberatory potential. I argue that to end the exploitation of care-work and to promote such activity among men and women will take us a very long way toward a society that promotes "everything which makes life worthwhile." It is the means to give people control over their economy, tempering the production fetish, incorporating women fully in politics and governance, and altering the sites, forms, and contents of social democracy. Attending to care-work and encouraging its universal practice opens possibilities for social justice that have to date eluded us.

*Ch. 1. Cuban Feminist History*

Cuba's history is a history of those who have struggled tirelessly for autonomy, justice, and independence. Around 1300, long before the Europeans had arrived, as the Guanahatabeyes were in decline, the Taínos conquered the Ciboneyes and made them their servants or *nabories* (Suchlicki 1997, 5–8). Two hundred years later, the island of Cuba became a Spanish colony under the governor Diego Velázquez who ruled from 1511-24. Velázquez used the Spanish *encomienda* system to support the Spanish crown's aims, and his own. The *encomienda* system "entailed assigning Indian families or other inhabitants of a town to a Spaniard who would extract labor and tribute from them while providing for their Christianization" (Suchlicki 1997, 19). At this time, the Taínos and Ciboneyes "served as the principal labor force in the early colony," as they mined quarries, panned streams, tilled fields, tended flocks, worked as field hands, house servants, deck hands, and "performed every other form of manual labor and menial task demanded by the *conquistadores*" (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 28).

Along with the first *conquistadores* came slaves originally taken from Africa. This forced migration radically changed Cuba, leaving its indelible mark in Cuban society and politics for centuries. In 1544, Cuba's population was estimated at 660 Spaniards, 5,000 Indians, and 800 African slaves. Two centuries later, in 1774, there were nearly 40,000 slaves out of a total population of 170,000, or 22.7%. In 1872, there were 700,000 inhabitants: 306,109 Whites (43.7%), 286,942 Black slaves (41.0%), and 106,949 freed Blacks (15.3%) (Suchlicki 1997, 28–31, 43). A burgeoning institutional race and class system, although different from that seen in the English colonies, was most influenced by economic changes, specifically, the

development of the cattle, tobacco, and especially sugar industries—the latter two being extremely labor-intensive.

These demographic changes of race were accompanied by changes in the sex composition of these classes as well. During the 1500s, European women were less than 10% of the total Spanish population. Thus, the first generation creoles were largely the descendants of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers whom the *conquistadores* had distributed among themselves as personal servants and permanent concubines. Within 100 years of European immigration, the Indian populations had been decimated from 60,000 to less than 2,000. Soon enough, African slaves became the principal female laborers: “they prepared food, tended or managed taverns, and discharged a variety of domestic services” in addition to their duties as mistresses to the Spanish (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 46–47). In the late 1700s, it was White women and freed Black women whose numbers grew the fastest.

**Figure 1.1: Demographic Change in Cuba, 1774-1791<sup>1</sup>**

	1774	1791	% Subtotal 1774	% Subtotal 1791	% Grand Total 1774	% Grand Total 1791
White Male	55,576	82,299	58%	54%	32%	30%
White Female	40,864	71,260	42%	46%	24%	26%
White Total	96,440	153,559	100%	100%	56%	56%
Freed Black Male	16,152	25,211	52%	47%	9%	9%
Freed Black Female	14,695	28,940	48%	53%	9%	11%
Freed Black Total	30,847	54,151	100%	100%	18%	20%
Black Slave Male	28,771	47,724	65%	74%	17%	18%
Black Slave Female	15,562	16,866	35%	26%	9%	6%
Black Slave Total	44,333	64,590	100%	100%	26%	24%
Grand Total	171,620	272,300			100%	100%

Those brutally subjugated fiercely resisted the oppressions and exploitations of slavery. The Indians fought the Spanish and even killed themselves and their children; runaway slaves hid in the mountains and formed mutual assistance societies; women fought for the safety and wellbeing of their persons and their families. Although various plots and insurrections were planned and put down by the Spanish military-planter alliance, those living in Cuba would not accept colonial

<sup>1</sup> (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 63); originally adapted from US War Dept, Informe sobre el censo de Cuba, 1899 (Washington, DC, 1900).



subordination. On October 10, 1868, the “*Grito de Yara*” begins the first of three Wars of Independence that finally concluded in 1898. This political struggle and social movement united both Whites and Blacks, men and women, proletariat and peasantry, and the landless and poor behind José Martí’s vision of a free and sovereign Cuba in order to, in his words, “secure the system opposed to the interests and habits of the rule of the oppressors” (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 148).

This led directly, but somewhat tempestuously due to military occupation by the United States, to the formal inauguration of the sovereign Cuban republic in 1902. The lofty ideals of Martí and the broad array of classes and interests that worked together for independence did not last long. Racial tensions had peaked in 1894 (as they had in 1854) but only rose more acutely to the surface with independence—it was still important to have ‘good hair’ and to ‘advance [whiten] the family’ (Stolcke [Martinez-Alier] 1989, 41). Strong prejudices still worked against Cuban *criollos* [native-born] in favor of *peninsulares* [those born in Spain]<sup>2</sup> in the early days of the Cuban republic (Córdova 2002, 27). Discrimination with respect to jobs and government assistance was even harsher against Black Africans, Haitians, and Jamaicans, in addition to the small numbers of Chinese, Jews, and Arabs (Farber 2006, 17).

In addition, hard won national independence seemed to trade one foreign power for another. Formal sovereignty under the aegis of the United States seemed little more than a formality. Foreign capital dominated the Cuban economy, land was consolidated, ownership was concentrated, and “the beneficiaries of North American rule [and capital] were North Americans” (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 195, 199). In fact, United

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<sup>2</sup> There were an estimated 300,000 Spaniards on the island in 1934 out of 1931 population of 3,962,344 inhabitants, i.e., 7.6% (Salazar-Carrillo 2002, 20; Suchlicki 1997, 89).

States investors had more than three times as much invested in Cuba in 1959 than in the rest of Latin America put together (Blasier 1971, 10).<sup>3</sup>

All of these factors contributed to making the Republican Era (1900-40) a time of political unrest and violence (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 416–21). There were disputed national elections in 1906 and 1916 leading to armed rebellion in each case. Afro-Cubans took up arms in 1912 to combat racism and discrimination. The United States government intervened, occupied, or governed in each of these cases, amounting to a cumulative ten years of Cuba's 'independence' from Spain between 1898-1940 (Stoner 1991, 2). Indeed,, the U.S. military occupied Cuba from 1906-09, intervened to protect U.S. property in 1912, maintained a military presence in the eastern third of Cuba from 1917-22, and directly controlled the Zayas presidential administration from 1920-23. As the U.S. slipped into the background in the 1920s, taking on a more subtle role in Cuban politics, Cubans were subjected to and fought against various dictatorships. In 1928, the dictator Gerardo Machado was unconstitutionally elected to a six year term of office. At the same time, workers grew defiantly more powerful and enforced general strikes in March 1930, August 1933, and March 1935. This led to the conservative revanchism known as the *Pax Batistiana* [Batista's Peace], brutally maintained by Army General Fulgencio Batista from 1935-53 (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 277–78; Stoner 1991, 128). More general strikes, this time against Batista's administration, were called in April 1958 and January 1959.

Working people under the *Pax Batistiana* found life very difficult. In 1957, the rural working population equaled 34% of Cuba's inhabitants and took home 10% of the national income. In addition, 16.4% of Cubans were unemployed and an additional 17.1% underemployed. This skewed income distribution and spotty

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<sup>3</sup> US\$143 for every Cuban versus US\$39 per inhabitant in the rest of the region.

incorporation into the formal market was partly responsible for Cuba's overwhelmingly militant unionization of urban and rural workers which stood near 50% through the 1950s (Farber 2006, 21–22).

In addition to the explicitly economic political fights between Cuba's peasants and proletarians against foreign metropolises, Cuba was also the site of vigorous and variegated feminist and women's activities between 1900 and the Revolution (Stoner 1991). Married women acquired the legal right to administer and dispose of property as well as the right to make public and private property contracts in 1917. No-fault divorce became legal one year later and women gained the right to vote in 1936 (Farber 2006, 19).

“The 1940 constitution prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex, gave women the right to retain Cuban citizenship regardless of marriage, legislated equal pay for equal work, and affirmed their right to paid maternity leave and universal suffrage. In 1950 a civil rights law gave women the possibility of full legal equality (Casal 1980, 186–87). However, most women received no practical benefit from these rights” (Harris 1995, 93).

With workers, peasants, Blacks, and women all desperate to end Batista's increasingly brutal dictatorship and facing serious hardships in Cuban economic, political, and social life, the tides of history were set to change.

### **The Promise of Revolution**

Nearly the entire populace of Cuba was exhausted by the escalating violence of the *Pax Batistiana* and desired new government. From among the various sources of informal and formal resistance, the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement emerged as the most potent

threat to Batista and the most likely successor. This Movement was headed by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos.

Batista eventually fled the country New Year's Eve, 1958, and Fidel Castro arrived triumphantly in Havana on January 8, 1959. Riding a gigantic wave of nationalist sentiment grounded in collective suffering and injustice, these leaders found they had tapped into a social need for decisive action based on moral convictions and the yearning for a political narrative of rebirth, "*proceso*," [??] and "*la revolución*" (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 315–16). This historical process, supported by all but envisioned differently by liberals, moderates, and professionals, found its greatest support in the working class: the urban and rural proletariat, the peasants, and the under- and unemployed (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 317–18).

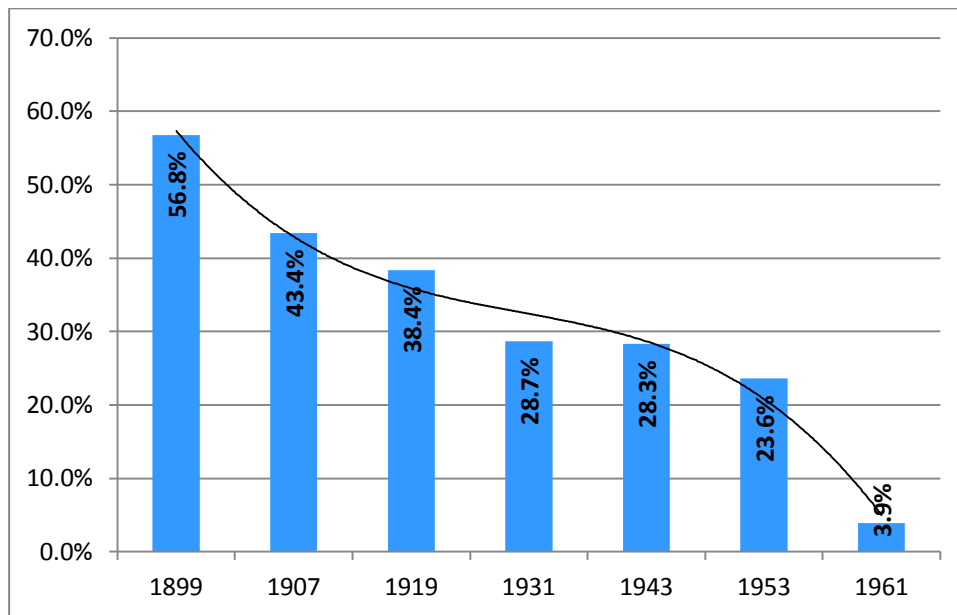
Of the four great cleavages in Cuban society: a) socio-economic class, b) rural-urban divide, c) race, and d) sex, the new powerholders focused the least amount of attention on sex (Casal 1980, 184). Even so, it was nevertheless immediately clear that this Movement promised great changes for women, and the number of programs that incorporated or targeted them was staggering. To set the stage, 1959 saw over 1,500 decrees, laws, and edicts in regard to telephone and electricity rates; wages; health, education, and unemployment; property and rents; luxury imports; etc. In the midst of all this activity focused on justice for Cuba's *precaristas* [insecure and dispossessed—the precarious], this new government enacted the Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959 that directly targeted the rural-urban divide. Using a political pedagogy inspired by Paulo Freire, the 1961 Literacy Campaign [*Campaña de Alfabetización*]*—one of the most impressive in all of history for its efficacy and universality (cf. Lorenzetto and Neys 1965) (see )—taught the illiterate to read by*

ensuring that the readings engaged the learners in what was most politically salient to their lives.

Thus, their first primers eschewed bourgeois house stories in favor of the new law and other public topics of the times with passages such as the following:

“The Agrarian Reform Law has converted thousands of tenants, share croppers, and *precaristas* into proprietors of the land which they cultivated, and it has fixed a limit of 30 *caballerías* [~1,000 acres] on the possession of land, thereby eradicating the *latifundio*. The Agrarian Reform has made real the saying of [Cuban patriot and forefather, José] Martí: “Broad is the untilled land of Cuba and clear the justice of opening it to him who works it and withdrawing it from him who has not used it” (Fagen 1964, 26).

**Figure 1.2: Percentage Illiterate Persons by Cuban Census: Selected Years, 1899-1961<sup>4</sup>**



More importantly for women, this social upheaval directly relied upon women's massive participation. The Literacy Campaign of 1961 turned tens of thousands of young women into teachers and tens of thousands of women, particularly in rural areas, learned to read. Fifty-five percent of those who learned to read were women and women constituted 59% of those who were teachers (Caram León 2006, 6). Additionally, thousands of workers from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC)<sup>5</sup> supported these teachers as they lived a peripatetic life outside of their home cities (Molyneux 2000, 317n19). The rural focus was especially important given that 20% of Cuba's population resided near Havana, 19% lived to the West, while 26% were in the rural central area of the country, and 35% in the least urbanized Eastern region (ONE 1997, 16).

In addition to the Literacy Campaign, the revolution introduced many new programs directed at and by women. It's true that many of the women fighting in the

<sup>4</sup> (Lorenzetto and Neys 1965, 15, 29)

<sup>5</sup> *La Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) has been the largest women's organization in Cuba throughout the Revolution, counting over four-fifths of every adult woman as a member.

July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement to remove Batista did not have gender equity as a principal aim (Díaz Vallina 2001, 6). Nonetheless, women became explicit subjects of the state's activity as it sought to train, educate, incorporate, and transform them in droves. In 1960, the FMC began to run the Ana Betancourt Schools for Peasant Women, teaching young rural women skills like sewing and clothes making. After one year in this program, women returned to their rural homes with a sewing machine in tow and instructions to teach ten other women all they had learned: physical education, dancing and singing, hygiene and first aid. Their families and communities were amazed by these returning women whose health, orthodonture, and new skills made them, according to Vilma Espín, "the first political leaders in the countryside" (orig. Bulit 1985, 124; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 37–39). By 1976, these schools had trained almost 100,000 young women (orig. F. Castro 1985; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 39).

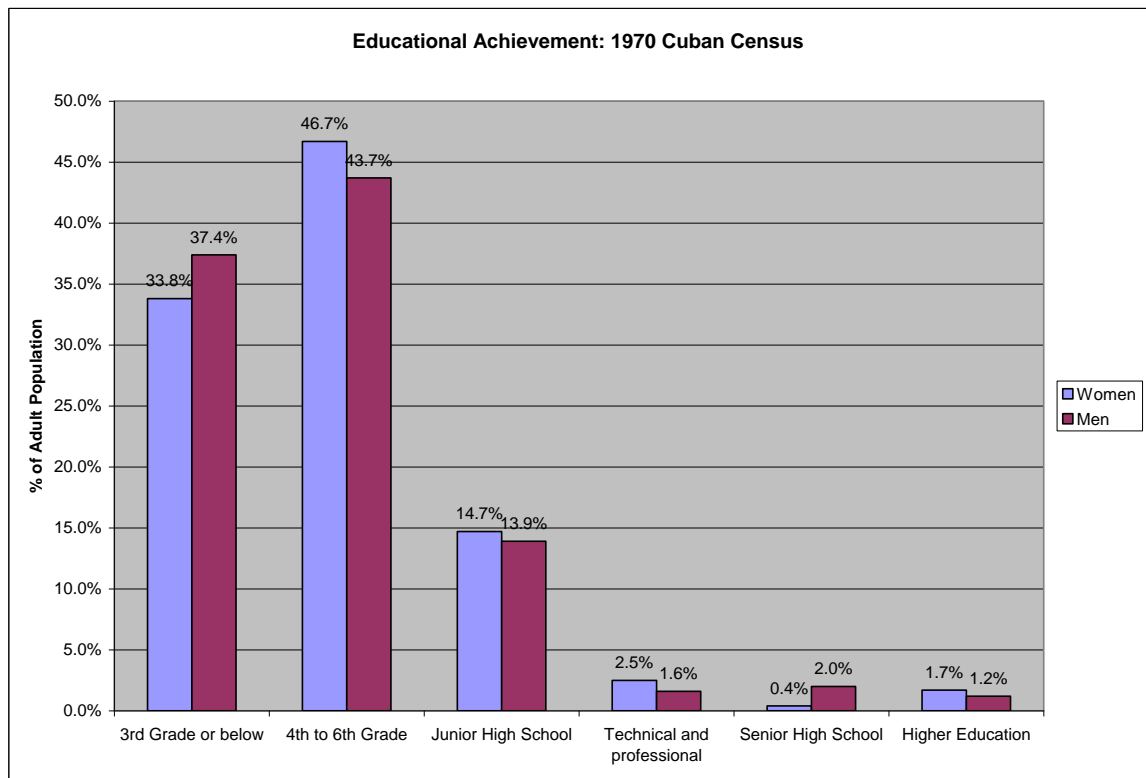
The Revolution also targeted urban women. In April 1961, the Evening Schools for Domestic Workers opened. Fidel Castro, by then the clear leading figure of the Revolution, opposed the unionization of these workers and sought a more moderate shift in the formal labor force that would get them out of the home through literacy classes, consciousness raising, and job training (Weisman 2004, 72). Filling the labor shortage that was due in part to the exodus of Cubans following the revolution and in part to newly created jobs, urban women became bank and telephone workers, healthcare workers, technicians, and bureaucrats. These schools closed in 1968 after having retrained thousands of former domestic workers (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 39–40). Simultaneously, Law 993 of 1961 outlawed prostitution and offered prostitutes therapy and reeducation/rehabilitation. Many

appreciated these programs and prostitution was drastically reduced, although in a few cases through exile or imprisonment (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 40–41).

By 1970, women achieved near parity in education throughout Cuba (see Figure 1.3). In no small part, thanks to the FMC's efforts in the battle for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and the battle for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (1978-79), which tried to raise everyone's minimum level of educational proficiency (FMC 1987, 154). Since that time, the numbers of women among college graduates, physicians, and technical workers has increased significantly. As is well known, Cuban women have attended university in far greater numbers than men for many years and are extremely well educated and technically trained. Not only was women's technical training and access to higher education vastly improved, but gender itself became a subject of study. At the request of the FMC, Cuba's premier university—the *Universidad de La Habana*—created the *Cátedra de la Mujer* [Women's Studies Department] in September, 1991 (FMC 1995b, 61). In addition, the FMC very recently helped develop and release a book called *Gender and Education* that was designed to help professors ensure that all students are learning as best they can, irrespective of sex (FMC 2009, 75).



**Figure 1.3: Education Levels of Men and Women: 1970 Cuban Census**<sup>678</sup>



The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the parent organization for these and many other projects, radically transformed Cuban women's access to income and other benefits. It was officially inaugurated on 23 August 1960, to unite women and organize them into the revolutionary *proceso* (Weisman 2004, 71). This national feminine organization<sup>9</sup> united under one umbrella a number of previously existing women's organizations: *La Unidad Femenina Revolucionaria*, *La Unión Femenina Revolucionaria*, *La Columna Agraria*, *Las Brigadas Femeninas Revolucionarias*, *Los Grupos de Mujeres Humanistas*, *La Hermandad de Madres*, etc. [the Women's Revolutionary Unit (serving peasant women), Women's Revolutionary Union, Agrarian Column, Women's Revolutionary Brigades, Humanist Women's Groups,

<sup>6</sup> Data from Partido Comunista de Cuba 1975a: 93.

<sup>7</sup> "Junior High School" refers to "Secondary school". [Note in original.]

<sup>8</sup> "Senior High School" refers to "Technological, FOC, or regular senior high. [Note in original.]

<sup>9</sup> The FMC declared itself "feminine not feminist" at various of its quintennial Congresses.

Confraternity of Women, etc.] (PCC 2008). The Unión Femenina Revolucionaria was in many ways, however, the FMC's precursor. Several of its best organizers did not belong to Fidel Castro's 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, coming instead from the Popular Socialist Party, but were soon drawn into Castro's FMC. Escaping the pall of Batista's legacy, everyone wished to be part of the movement and the FMC gained some highly capable leaders. Elena Gil became Director of Women's Improvement and ran the Ana Betancourt schools; Clementina Serra became Director of the *Círculos Infantiles* [Daycare Centers]; and Rosario Fernández Perera became Director of Women's Employment (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 34).

Alongside the FMC's immediate gains in promoting literacy and education, the organization implemented the Sanitary Brigades in 1964 to promote local health care access and delivery (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 61–63). It coordinated the National Association of Small Farmers (FMC-ANAP) [*Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños*] Mutual Aid Brigades beginning in 1966 to ensure efficient and effective agricultural production (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 43). The FMC chartered the Militant Mothers for Education [*Movimiento de Madres Combatientes*] in 1970 to act as truancy monitors, tutors, custodians of school grounds, and occasionally substituted for absent teachers (Casal 1980, 191; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 43; E. Stone 1981, 110n). Out of the FMC's works and mandate grew the Feminine Front, charged in 1969 with the responsibility of aiding women as workers in the formal labor market—a task now under the Commission's for Women's Employment [*Comisiones de Empleo Femenino*] (Casal 1980, 193; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 100–01). In addition, all of this was ensconced within a background of community organization through block committees grouped under the direction of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) [*Comités para la Defensa de*

*la Revolución*]. This organization was formed in September 1960 (Domínguez 1978, 208), one month after the FMC, and is the second most important organization with respect to Cuban women's training, education, incorporation, and transformation.

Not only were women incorporated into this sweeping *proceso revolucionario*, but the Revolution meant to transform women's daily lives with respect to home and children in order to realize real gender equity in Cuba. New policies went into effect such as the Maternity Law for Working Women (Law 1100), effectuated as part of the Social Security Law of March 27, 1963. This law granted working women twelve weeks of paid pre- and post-natal leave from their formal market labor; plus an hour of each workday to use for breastfeeding, bonding, and other care activities (Randall 1981, 152–53). The *Plan Jaba* [Shopping Bag Plan] was initiated in 1971 to create special shopping days and hours to accommodate working women as well as allow them to pick up their groceries without having to wait in line (Casal 1980, 193; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 104). On January 14, 1974, an expansive new Maternity Law for Working Women (Law No. 1263) went into effect and superseded the 1963 law. This law increased paid leave to eighteen weeks (six pre-natal, twelve post-natal); guaranteed an additional nine months of unpaid leave if necessary; eliminated the extra hour each workday; and offered one paid day each month to increase pediatric visits (Dorticós Torrado 1981a). And, although the 1938 Criminal Code was still on the books with respect to abortion until February 15, 1979, allowing abortion in only three types of cases, the Ministry of Public Health had adopted a policy validating abortions for any reason since 1965 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 73–74).

On February 14, 1975, after thousands of formal and informal debates in the community and workplace, The Family Code was passed—a veritable landmark in Cuba's gender history. This law prescribed a new regime of gender equity in the

family and the household by promoting families in which men and women shared equitably in the care and upbringing of children as well as the “running of the home” [*el gobierno del hogar*]. The Code also made it explicit that both men and women possessed the right to work outside the home (Dorticós Torrado 1975, 1981b). Further buttressing women’s socioeconomic equality, a new Social Security law (Calderío 1979) improved pensions and retirement benefits for women in 1979 and revised widows’ pensions to avoid penalizing working women (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 106).

Socialized childcare began in the Revolution’s third year as *Círculos Infantiles* [Daycare Centers] opened in 1961 with the specific purpose of serving working mothers, i.e., mothers who worked in the formal market. In 1961, the *círculos* served 2,000 mothers. This advanced to serving 82,900 in 1980, and 119,600 in 2008 (ONE 2009d, 1). In 1994, the *círculos* employed 8,384 *Educadoras* [Educators (*feminine*)], 1,898 Directors and Sub-Directors, and 15,575 *Auxiliares Pedagógicas* [Teacher’s Aides (*feminine*)] in order to serve 131,467 children aged 0-4 years (Varela Hernández and Et al. 1995, 7.1.6). The cumulative effects of these programs were impressive: for the years 2000-2006, Cuba ranked 20<sup>th</sup> among the world’s nations with respect to the Child Development Index (Hague et al. 2008, 19).

Even political elections, causes of major civil unrest during the Republican era (1900-1940), came under the transformative hand of the Revolution’s gender program. After what might be considered a trial-run of public competitive elections in the Matanzas province in 1974 it was noted that not very many women were elected—3.0% at the Municipal level (Domínguez 1978, 287; also cf. PCC 1975). In response, when public competitive elections were held throughout the nation in 1976, the government intervened to promote the election of more women candidates

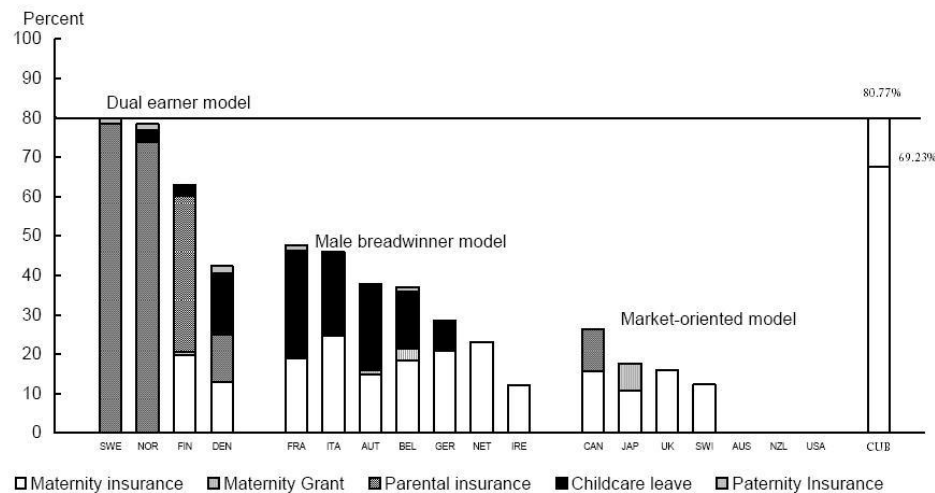
(Domínguez 1978, 503). Such intervention continues today and during the 2008 elections, “government authorities.. have publicly demanded that blacks, women, and youths be promoted to positions of leadership within government structures and the Communist Party” (also cf. R. Castro 2008; de la Fuente 2008, 718). Compared to the initial results of 3.0% at the Municipal level, women now boast 43.3% of Deputies on the National Assembly (2007-2012), 40.6% of the Delegates to the Provincial Assemblies (2007-2009), and 27.3 of the Delegates to the Municipal Assemblies (2007-2009).

While most of this radical transformative activity was at its zenith from 1960-75, the benefits of maternity leave continued to expand during the Special Period (1990-2004). On 24 July 1991, Resolution 10 gave working mothers the possibility of receiving 60% of their salary until the child turns six months old. On 15 May 2001, in Resolution 11, this was extended to 60% of salary until the child’s first birthday. On 13 August 2003, a new Maternity Law for Working Women (Law No. 234) was passed, providing six weeks pre-natal paid maternity leave at 100% salary, twelve weeks post-natal, plus an additional nine months at 60% salary if desired. This law reinstated the previously eliminated paid hour of breastfeeding each day until the child’s first birthday and maintained one paid day of leave per month to facilitate pediatric visits (Castro Ruz 2003). It even makes Cuba one of the few nations in the world that allows the couple to decide which parent will receive the benefits (FMC 2009, 57). Figure 1.4: *Net Parental Leave Benefits, First Year after Confinement, As a Percentage of a Net Average Production Worker’s Wage in Eighteen Countries with Different Family Policy Models in 2000* illustrates Cuba’s social generosity in comparison with eighteen other welfare states. Because Cuba offers six weeks of pre-natal maternity leave at 100% of salary, this raises the possible benefits received by

the child's first birthday to 80.77% of the average formal market worker's salary. If one only counts from birthdate to first birthday, this drops to 69.23%, still far outpacing all but the most generous Nordic countries, Sweden and Norway.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 1.4: Net Parental Leave Benefits, First Year after Confinement, As a Percentage of a Net Average Production Worker's Wage in Eighteen Countries with Different Family Policy Models in 2000<sup>11</sup>**

**FIGURE 2: NET PARENTAL LEAVE BENEFITS, FIRST YEAR AFTER CONFINEMENT, AS A PERCENTAGE OF A NET AVERAGE PRODUCTION WORKER'S WAGE IN EIGHTEEN COUNTRIES WITH DIFFERENT FAMILY POLICY MODELS IN 2000**



Source: Ferrarini (2003)

<sup>10</sup> I have not seen statistics disaggregating the average formal market woman worker's pay difference from the average formal market man worker. More detailed occupational information may lower Cuba's relative generosity depending on the take home wage impact of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation in Cuba. Looking only at horizontal segregation across nine broad economic activities in 2002, I found almost zero difference (0.04%-0.70%, largely explicable due to rounding error) between the average formal market woman worker's salary and the average formal market worker's salary (ONE 2006b, Table VI.3, VI.4). Núñez Sarmiento found women earned 80-85% of men largely due to horizontal segregation according to 1996 statistics (Núñez Sarmiento 2001, 47). Were a ratio of 80% true today, men would average 449 pesos/month, women 359 pesos/month, and the 80.77% and 69.23% reported in Figure 2.1 should be dropped to 69.87% and 59.89% of the average worker's salary of 415 pesos/month (2008)—still better than all but Sweden and Norway.

<sup>11</sup> (Duvander, Ferrarini, and Thalberg 2005, 7; citing Ferrarini 2003)

The force of the Revolution even reached the Constitution itself. Cuba's history has seen various versions of a constitution and, in one way or another, all of them have an explicit focus on gender equity. Cuban legislators wrote and passed new Constitutions in 1940, 1976, 1992, and 2002. The 1940 Constitution, although born in turbulent times, was a progressive document (Purcell 1973, 260) steeped in the ideals of the *Generación del Treinta* [Generation of 1930] (Márquez-Sterling 2002, 82), also known as the "Student Generation" of 1930 (Suchlicki 1997, 120). This document prohibited discrimination based on sex—as well as other social markers—and even included a provision of equal pay for equal work (Purcell 1973, 260). Nevertheless, such provisions were not a fundamental priority of pre-revolutionary political activity and did not affect most women's lives.

The next three Constitutions (1976, 1992, 2002) were all passed under the revolutionary Castro government. According to Jorge I. Domínguez<sup>12</sup>, the differences between 1976 and the others are these:

"The 1992 amendments changed the property regime, decentralized foreign trade procedures, dropped a commitment to an atheistic state and provided guarantees of non-discrimination to religious believers, eliminated references to democratic centralism, abandoned a social-class definition of the state, and required direct elections for the National Assembly (Azcuy 1995). In 2002, the National Assembly again amended the Constitution to seek to guarantee the permanent and irrevocable quality of the socialist system. These new amendments attempt to constrain the capacity of future

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that Domínguez is working on a transitional constitution that he hopes Cuba can utilize as it works on adopting or creating a more permanent post-Castro constitution

National Assemblies to make fundamental constitutional changes” (Domínguez 2003, 4).

The 1976 and 1992 Constitutions declare that ‘discrimination based on race, skin color, sex, national origin, religious creeds, or any other insult to human dignity is proscribed and sanctioned by law’ and some specific areas in which this discrimination is proscribed are then delineated such as work, salary, education, health, domiciles, transportation, etc. (1992: Ch. VI, Art. 42, 43). They also guarantee that no man or woman, willing and able to work, is without some type of employment (1992: Art. 9); declare that matrimony is made by a man and woman (1992: Art. 36); seek equal opportunity, plus provision of day care, pre- and post-partum maternity leave; and in addition, the state will ‘make an effort to create all the conditions that lend themselves towards equality [of man and woman] (1992: Art. 44); and declare suffrage rights to men and women, as well as the right to be elected (1992: Art. 132, 133).

### **Obstacles to Gender Equality**

Even this cursory survey of the number of years, solutions, plans, laws, discussions, exhortations, writings, monies, and other resources devoted to gender equity, suggests that gender equity has been one of the Cuban government’s most ardently sought policy agendas. Jorge Domínguez writes that the approval of the Family Code, for example, “is incomprehensible in terms of a strictly economic hypothesis. The Family Code addresses issues that are politically explosive, legally unenforceable, and far removed from the obvious economic priorities of the revolutionary government in the 1970s” (Domínguez 1978, 270). Despite this



gargantuan effort, the outcomes of Cuban gender equity policies have been mixed and the types and points of resistance have been varied and stubborn.

While the transformative promise of justice through the Revolution was achieved with some major programs, the path was not entirely smooth or satisfactory. As it became clearer that the Castro government was turning towards socialism and/or communism, some of the first acts of resistance would technically be classified as exit. Numerous Cubans voted with their feet in the first years after the revolution. Net emigration for 1960-1962 was a little more than 60,000 persons emigrating out of Cuba each year (Domínguez 1978, 140; Pérez, Jr. 1995, 335); this represents 1% each year of a population of barely 6,000,000. ‘Voting with their feet’ is supposed to bring economic benefits to those who choose to relocate, and are able to do so, yet it has other economic consequences for those who remain. The economic consequences were severe for the Cuban economy: one figure estimated that the loss of *human capital alone* already suffered by the beginning of 1961 was more than \$20 billion—nearly 150% of Cuba’s entire GDP of \$14 billion (Maddison 2003; Salazar-Carrillo 2002, 22). Some of those who left also came back in 1961 after CIA training and attempted a failed military attack on Cuba and the Castro government at the *Bahía de Cochinos* [Bay of Pigs]. Resistance, however, has been much more complex than simply emigration or military action—especially in the realm of gender policies.

### ***Women’s Healthcare***

Healthcare has been a primary public policy front in Cuba, largely to excellent effects as statistics show, but not without struggle. In the early 1980s Cuba had risen in per capita tobacco consumption and reached third place among all nations in the world; 35-40% of Cuban women and 43% of adolescent girls smoked and the incidences of heart disease and lung cancer, among women especially, were rapidly

rising (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 64). Both obesity and smoking were subject to public service announcements, health campaigns, advertisements on radio television, the opening of exercise centers, as well as shifting the emphasis away from long-term costs (heart disease, cancer, stroke, etc.) towards the short-term costs (love handles, spare tires, bad breath, yellow teeth, and premature aging, and even circulating an anti-hegemonic discourse on female Cuban bodies—speaking of corpulence in negative terms rather than their traditional positives) (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 63–64).

Practices of abortion and contraception were also arenas of push and pull between government leaders and the everyday populace as abortion has long been on the government's list of undesirable social practices. The Cuban government has in fact not tried to eliminate the possibility of abortion nor make it illegal, rather, it has sought the substitution of the practice by heavily promoting various forms of contraception both educationally, through sex education, and materially, by trying to acquire enough contraception to meet the needs of the Cuban population.

It may appear that the Cuban government was slow to take action regarding abortion, actually allowing the 1938 criminal code's treatment of abortion to remain in force until 1979. However, it should be mentioned that the Ministry of Public Health focused on a portion of the criminal code that allowed abortion to save the life of the (potential) mother as a way to validate all abortion cases beginning in 1965 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 73–74). This was a social policy that was intended under pre-revolutionary governments to act as a cost and thus a corrective to the use of abortion in order to curtail and eliminate the usage thereof. By keeping this law on

the books, the Cuban government tacitly and implicitly supported<sup>13</sup> these hindrances to the practice of abortion, directly contrary to the wishes of most Cuban women judging by the high prevalence of conceptions ending in abortion: between the early 1970s and 1989 around 40% of all pregnancies ended in abortion (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 74). The use of abortion increased slightly as the USSR collapsed such that there were nine abortions for every ten births (around 45-50% of all pregnancies ended in abortion) (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 385), but dropped precipitously shortly thereafter to 57.0 abortions for every 100 births (36.3% of all pregnancies) (Catasús Cervera 1997, 6).

During the two decades before the collapse of the USSR the Cuban government sought, to no avail, to instill a “contraceptive consciousness” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 73) in its citizens and its women in particular. While it is partly true that contraceptive pills and other devices have not been as available to Cubans as they have to many people in the U.S., Western Europe, Japan, etc., it seems that Cuban women were declaring their preference for abortion as the mode of reducing the number of children born. While some scholars have pointed out that this may be the preference of Cuban men—considering birth control a “threat” to their manhood (E. Stone 1981, 6) or conception as proof of their virility (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 73)—it also seems plausible that Cuban women differ from American (middle/upper class) women with regard to abortion. All forms of contraception, whether IUDs—Cuba’s most used mode in the late 1980s (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 72)—pills, injections, condoms, and abortion have their health risks. Side effects that Cuban women may be choosing to forego include: (IUD) increased menstrual flow, blood loss and cramping, irregular bleeding (dysmenorrhea), and one

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Sir Thomas More resting his legal case, and thus his life, on the legal principle [*Latin phrase*] that ‘silence denotes consent’ such that Henry could not legally construe Thomas’ refusal to take an oath as anything more than silence, i.e., consent. Bolt, Robert. *A Man for All Seasons*.

of the most common causes of female infertility in Cuba (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 72); (pills and injections: combined or progestin-only) nausea, vomiting, mastalgia, chloasma, amenorrhea, mood changes, hair loss, etc.; (male condom) “decrease in spontaneity or sensation”, allergic reaction, skin irritation (Zieman and Hatcher 2007, 41). Thus, the case is not so clear cut. Cuban women may very likely prefer the benefits and risks of a ‘natural’ sexuality and multiple abortions to the benefits and risks of extended hormonal interference—despite the policies of their government.

### ***Women’s Incorporation into the Formal Workforce***

Gender equity was even more explicitly thwarted by the many Cubans who resisted women’s widespread incorporation into the formal marketplace. Promoting the entrance and participation of women in the formal market as a significant portion of the labor force was not immediate but accelerated with heightened activity only in the late 1960s and the “revolutionary offensive” (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 370). It was then that Fidel Castro called for women to join a “revolution within the revolution” (Domínguez 1978, 494). This offensive was the strategy by which economic planners desired to boost the nation’s productive output and was characterized by the unrealistic goal of a 10 million ton *zafra* (sugar harvest) for 1970. A significant contribution to this offensive was made by the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) as they made house visits and did their best to persuade 600,000 non-working women to enter the formal market (FMC 1975, 33).

And women did indeed join the labor force in ever greater numbers. One of the problems noticed by the government, however, was the high rate of women’s attrition: “An estimated 76% of the women who entered the labor force in 1969 dropped out within one year” (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 372). While this assertion is tempered

by more sanguine numbers from other sources—144,253 began work, 29,501 quit soon thereafter (i.e., 20% dropout rate) (Domínguez 1978, 500)—the bulk of the literature reports high attrition. Even Cuba’s own statistics from the Ministry of Justice state a dropout rate of 67% (MINJUS (Ministerio de Justicia) 1977, 252–57). Many women still thought of themselves “exclusively as nurturing mothers.” In spite of the government’s wishes, husbands, other family members, employers, as well as some women too, all spent time and energy persuading women to *reduce* the number of hours they committed to wage labor (King 1977, 110).

In 1975, the Presidenta of the FMC, Vilma Espín, averred that many husbands put this pressure on their wives and most husbands refused to do their share of housework (E. Stone 1981, 15). Estimates (in hours) of “working men’s” time contribution to domestic chores ranged from 0:38 to 1:16 (FLACSO 2000, 50; Nazzari 1989, 117), while *nonworking women* contributed 7:43 and *working women* 4:59 (FLACSO 2000, 50). In some cases, sex discrimination remained a problem: work centers *simply refused to hire women* (King 1977, 110) because of the added difficulties of dealing with a worker who might take advantage of her legal guarantee to maternity leave, her legal guarantee to acquire the same job when she returned to the workplace, and who placed added burdens on the work center so that she might have time for shopping and caring for the young, the sick, and the elderly. As noted elsewhere around the world, employers actually used the sex-specific benefits promised by the Constitution and the laws to rationalize discrimination.

In addition, although broad government policy promoted gender equity in the formal labor force, there were large numbers of occupations that were legally sex-segregated. In January 1965 Resolutions 47 and 48 asked men to voluntarily leave 437 female-classified occupations at no reduction in salary, similarly asking women

to quit 498 occupations considered hazardous to their reproductive function(s) (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 123). Resolution 47 was abolished at the 1973 Congress of the Central Organization of Cuban Trade Unions (E. Stone 1981, 14). Notwithstanding its feminist commitments and the adoption of the Family Code in 1975, the Cuban government “reaffirmed and even extended” its list of occupations from which women were proscribed in June of 1976 (Domínguez 1978, 501). Both of these Resolutions proved to be very difficult to execute in practice, partly due to the sheer lack of women’s time to perform the jobs set aside strictly for their labor (E. Stone 1981, 14). Thanks in part to the efforts of the FMC, the list of occupations proscribed for women was reduced in 1985 to twenty-five, (Pérez-Stable 1987, 61); yet, even today these twenty-five still stand (A. Serra 2005, 35–36).

Contract labor was another way employers discriminated against women. By hiring them as semi-permanent, flexible workers, male employers treated women as the ‘reserve labor force’ to the real workers: men. This allowed the employers to avoid incurring the costs of benefits paid out to these female employees including pensions, paid maternity leave, vacations, etc. (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 126). This was another piece of the pattern of male managers’ attempts to minimize the payouts on maternity leave legislation as they asserted their beliefs that home and family duties and responsibilities would interfere with women’s efficacy in upper-level positions (Domínguez 1978, 504; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 127).

Alongside horizontal labor force segregation, i.e., sex segregation among occupations, Cuba demonstrated vertical labor force segregation as well. Men are the vast majority of persons working as forepersons or managers and they are disproportionately overrepresented as a percentage of management as compared to their participation rates in the labor force. In 1974 women made up 25.3% of the

workforce and 15% of managers (F. Castro 1975, 57). The Party found that this tremendously overweighted presence of men in management existed even in areas of work with a majority of employees who were women, including both the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) and the Ministry of Education (MINED), citing a “low level of women in leadership posts” (PCC 1975, 89). Women held fifty-nine percent of all positions in MINED and 63.6% of the positions in MINSAP, yet, they comprised only 19.7% of management posts within MINED and 15.9% within MINSAP, respectively.<sup>14</sup>

By 1989, women’s representation in management positions had increased tremendously, although still lagging formal labor force participation: women were 38.6% of all laborers and 26.5% of managers (FMC 1975, 19, 278, 1984, 4, 1990, 4, 18). However, precisely as in 1975, even in the industries where women were the vast majority of workers, they continued to remain distant from sharing 50% of leadership posts. In 1989 women constituted 66% of the workers and 31% of the leaders in the Ministry of Education. That same year women constituted 70% of the workers, but only 22% of leadership in the Ministry of Public Health (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 212n43; orig. FMC 1990, 4, 18).<sup>15</sup>

Although these numbers do suggest ‘missing women’ in management there was, nevertheless, consistent growth among women in the workforce and in managerial positions. In this time period, as women’s proportion in the labor force increased 52.6% (from 25.3% to 38.6% of total formal laborers), their percentage of

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<sup>14</sup> I estimate that 12% of all positions were classified as ‘management’ in 1975. I arrive at this figure by using Tables 1-3 in Partido Comunista de Cuba 1975a: 88. Table 1 lists women as 15.3% of all managers in the sum workforces of five “bodies,” two of which are MINED and MINSAP. Table 2 lists the number of women and the percentage of workers who are women in each of these five “bodies.” Table 3 lists the percentage of women who are managers in each of these five “bodies.” Extrapolating from figures, I calculated that approximately 10,550 women were managers compared to approximately 58,406 men (15.3 : 84.7 :: 10,550 : 58,406) in 1975 in these five “bodies,” thus on average, 12.0% of all workers in these five “bodies” were managers.

<sup>15</sup> One area where women did shine: women were 47% of directors of polyclinics—the distribution point for public health services (Espín 1990, 4, 18; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 212n43).

the managerial force increased 76.7% (from 15.0% to 26.5%). Although increasing numbers of women in management placed more cash income in the hands of some women, it did not eliminate gender discrepancies in salaries. Even in non-managerial occupations, men tended to hold the jobs with higher pay scales (which typically required more training). In the 1950s, women comprised 90% of those in Cuba whose occupation was *despalillar* [those who removed the stems and veins from tobacco leaves]; nearly half of these workers were Afro-Cubans (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 13; orig. Stubbs 1985, 71). Today (2007) this job continues to be almost exclusively performed by women, requiring three months training and paying 260 Cuban pesos per month (~\$10 US). By contrast, the work of rolling cigars is less sex segregated, requiring nine months of training and paying between 320-360 pesos per month (~\$13-14 US).<sup>16</sup>

Women's absence from better paid positions is sometimes attributed to women's lack of interest combined with men's high interest in leadership posts. One study called this hypothesis starkly into question. A survey of brick-factory workers in 1991 indicated that 75% of the women stated that they would be willing to take on the responsibilities of a supervisory position, whereas only 26% of the men were equally inclined. Despite such gendered ambition, almost every supervisor in the brick factory was a man (Núñez Sarmiento 1991, 7).

Marked patterns of gender discrimination in the labor force surface in data generated by the Cuban government, yet these findings are isolated from other facets of Cuban history. Although gaps between women in the labor force and women in managerial positions are noted at each *Congreso* of the FMC, neither the FMC nor the leadership of the Cuban government draws parallels between vertical and horizontal

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<sup>16</sup> Personal conversation during a trip to Cuba, 26 May to 2 June 2007.



labor market discrimination in the aftermath of the Revolution and the type of discrimination Cuban *criollos* (native-born) suffered from *peninsulares* (those born in Spain) in the early days of the Cuban republic. Efrén Córdova, a respected scholar of Cuba, emphasizes that “Not only did the *peninsulares* occupy the best remunerated positions with the pretext that they better understood them [*mejor conocían los oficios*] but they were also preferred as forepersons and managers” (Córdova 2002, 27). Such discrimination was highly visible in the early 1900s, contributing to growing union affiliation, the use of strikes, and increasing nationalist sentiments, that provoked strong government responses. Parallel forms and types of contemporary labor discrimination and favoritism tied to gender, however, are seldom perceived as legitimate grievances. When Cuban women rather than Cuban men suffer career disadvantage, their plight is often deemed beyond politics.

### ***Women’s Incorporation into Political Leadership and Participation***

At the same time that the Cuban Revolutionary government was attempting to bring more women into the formal market as laborers, it was also promoting gender equity in the political sphere. Women had been sorely underrepresented in leadership positions throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Cuba, as in many other nations, serving, at best, a consultative role through what in contemporary parlance is called “civil society.”

Although equal rights were a rallying cry at the time of Cuban independence, women did not have the legal capacity to vote. Lack of suffrage was used against women’s claims to leadership and their claims to employment. In 1928, for example, President Machado was under pressure to enforce a constitutional requirement that only voters occupy government positions—a tactic clearly directed against women.

To overcome this prejudice against women in leadership positions and even as government functionaries, Cuban women of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century linked women's suffrage to conservative themes of 'stability, morality, and justice' (Stoner 1991, 111, 113). They drew on their cultural heritage through Cuban patriotic hero, supporter of independence, and literary genius, José Martí, who thought that women should have the vote. Reflecting the terms of the suffrage debate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Martí argued that women would use their vote to purify the polity, rejecting egoism and vanity (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 12; orig. Llanes and Martínez 1983, 165). Supplementing this romantic depiction of maternal tenderness, Cuban feminists drew upon the ideals of republican motherhood embodied in the classical Roman mother of intelligence and virtues (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 12).

Women secured the right of suffrage in 1933 from the leader of the "student generation," President Ramón Grau San Martín (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 268) after years of false promises from President Gerardo Machado, who served from 1925 to 1929 (Stoner 1991, 72). The potential of this reform measure was largely undermined, however, by the unstable economic and political conditions of the period. Grau San Martín took office on 9 September 1933. Faced with U.S. support for Batista and the Cuban army, President Grau San Martín was forced to resign and seek refuge in the Dominican Republic four months later—nineteen days before his executive decrees were published in the official *Gaceta* of government legislation on 3 February 1934 (Stoner 1991, 124–25, 213n41). A women's vigil outside the presidential palace helped persuade the Commission of Oppositionist Sectors, which had convened to produce a provisional constitution (passed 3 February 1934), to reaffirm women's suffrage and several other of Grau San Martín's reform decrees. Women's legal capacity to vote and be elected to public office was written into the 1940 Constitution,

which provided a firmer political foundation and permanent legitimacy for women's franchise (Stoner 1991, 125).

Women's possession of basic legal rights by no means changed the face of Cuban politics, which remained in the hands of men. As Domínguez notes, "Women have always been less likely to be elected than to be appointed to public office [in Cuba, 1940-70]." In the 1940s and 1950s, women were elected to between 3 and 6 of 130-36 seats in the House of Representatives. Following his 1952 *coup d'état*, Batista appointed 6 women to the 80 member Consultative Council. When socialist elections came back into fashion within the Revolution, four times as many women in the Matanzas province won the non-competitive and controlled election of 1967 to the municipal parliamentary body, known as *Poder Popular* (PP) [People's Power] as won the trial competitive elections in 1974 (Domínguez 1978, 501). In 1967, women constituted 12.3% of elected delegates from Matanzas province in the *Poder Popular* (219 out of 1,783 delegates)—surpassing the national average of 10.9% (Domínguez 1978, 288; orig. *Granma Weekly Review* 1967, 3). When the controls were relaxed in the 1974 trial elections in Matanzas province, women's representation dropped to 3.0%, or 30 out of 1,014 (Domínguez 1978, 502).<sup>17</sup> Castro stated that only 7.6% of the candidates proposed in 1974 by the masses were women—thus showing quite plainly that women candidates were far less likely to be chosen by the electors than men (F. Castro 1975, 57). Women did slightly better in 1974 in the *Poder Popular* at larger geographical sectors, such as region<sup>18</sup> and province, winning 6.9% of 151 representative seats at the regional level and 16.0% of 68 representatives in the provincial level (Domínguez 1978, 287).

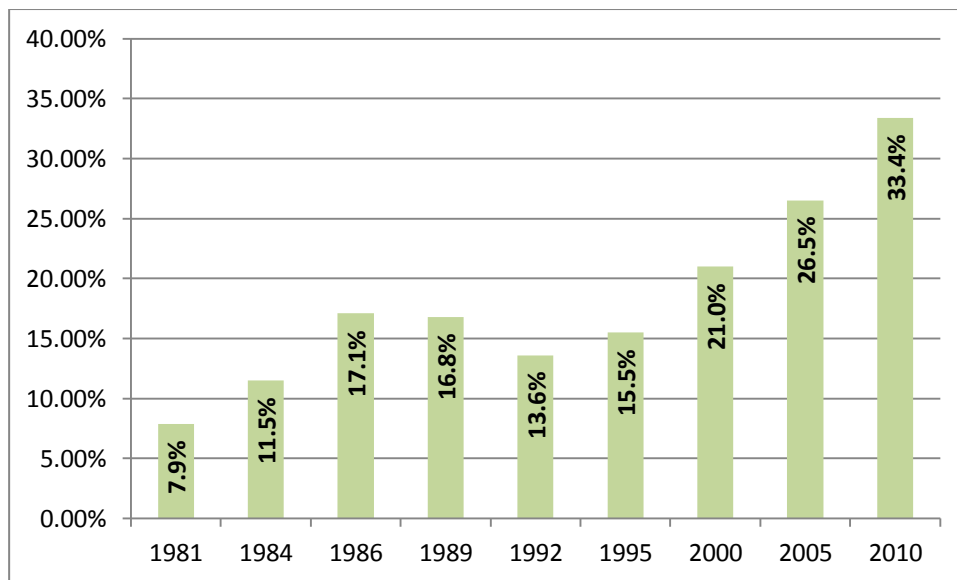
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<sup>17</sup> Data for the 1974 Matanzas Municipal delegates are only available for 1,014 of the 1,079 Municipal delegates, or 94.0% (Domínguez 1978: 586n73).

<sup>18</sup> The new Constitution of 1976 increased the number of provinces from six to fourteen; thus the Regional level assemblies and other offices seen here in the Matanzas 'experiment' were eliminated (Domínguez 1978: 289; original ref. *Granma Weekly Review* 1976: 5; *Granma* 1976: 6).

By the Third Congress of the FMC in 1980 Castro was still displeased with the lack of progress in promoting women's leadership. Indeed, he pointed out that in some areas women were losing ground: "fewer women were elected in the second elections for the *Poder Popular* in April 1979 than the 6.6%<sup>19</sup> elected in 1974" (FMC 1984, 121). Despite the articulation of concern from the top, as years passed, little changed.

**Figure 1.5: Delegates Elected to Municipal Assemblies of Poder Popular (% Women)<sup>20</sup>**



The *Poder Popular* elected 843 women out of 10,735 delegates (7.9%) at the Municipal level in October 1981, 17.1% in 1986, and 33.4% in 2010 (Lee 2010) (see Figure 1.5). Shy of 5%, women held 8 of 169 of the presidencies of municipal councils in 1989. None of 14 of the Province level councils had a woman as president (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 47). In 1981, women held 22.6% (113 out of 499) of the seats in the National Assembly—the national level of the *Poder Popular*. By 1986 women had secured 33% of the seats (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 48; orig.

<sup>19</sup> This number may actually be closer to 8.0%; cf. Pérez-Stable 1987: 56. TABLE 1. "Female Membership and Leadership in the Party, Mass Organizations, and Popular Power Institutions in Cuba, 1975-1985 (in percent)."

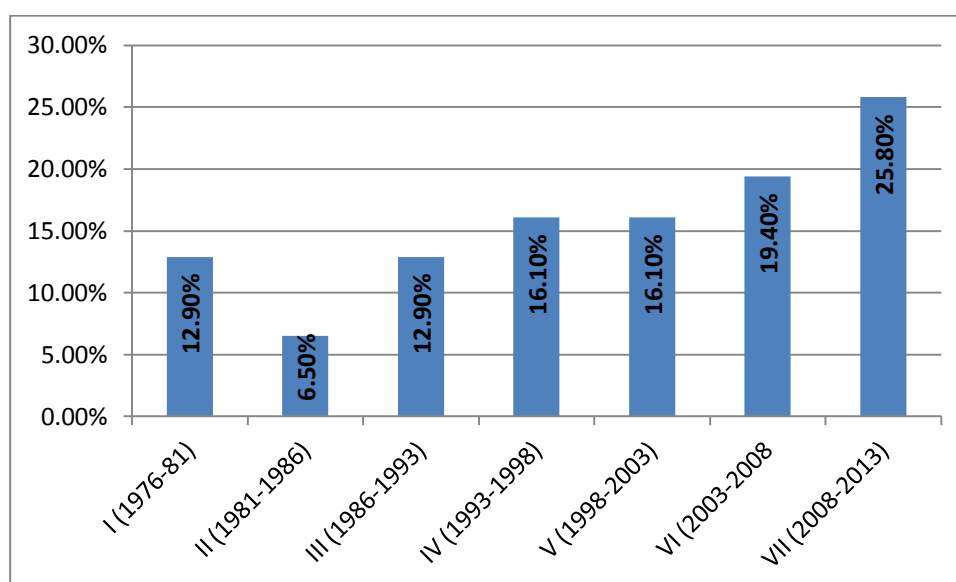
<sup>20</sup> (ONE 2011b, sec. 7.1; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 47)

Santana and Hernández 1990, 15). As was the case in many socialist states, the relatively high numbers of women provided demographic representation that had little substantive content. The National Assembly was not the site of real power in Cuba. Its actual powers have been, and remain virtually nil. Almost all commentators on the National Assembly point out that its function is to provide the appearance of republicanism (rule by and for the people), but the Assembly meets only two times a year to approve the ukases of the Politburo; it does not possess or exercise any independent power (Domínguez 1978, 247; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 48; Suchlicki 1997, 186–87). The presence of women in the National Assembly has been linked to its stature as a *pseudo*-legislature: women are well represented precisely because the organization lacks power. In Cuba—as in many other political systems, the more powerful the organization, the fewer the number of women involved (Jancar 1978).

The paucity of women, formally and substantively, was evident at most other levels of leadership as well throughout this time period. Women comprised only 14.1% of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) [*Partido Comunista de Cuba*] in 1975; increasing to 19.1% in 1980. Women's prospects seemed somewhat better in the Young Communist League (UJC) [*Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*]. As an organization designed to generate future PCC leaders, the Young Communist League included 30% women members in 1975, growing to 41.8% in 1980 (F. Castro 1980). Yet, as in its parent organization, women were sparse in positions of leadership in UJC, holding 6 of 24 positions (25%) in the Secretariat, 38 out of 152 (25%) full memberships on national committee, and 39% of the alternate memberships (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 47).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women's presence grew significantly in Cuba's political organizations. In December 2009, women held 43% of the seats in the National Assembly and 37.5% of the positions in the Council of State, after a long period constituting only 10% to -15% percent of its members (see Figure 1.6). The Council of State has held steady and in 2012 is now composed of 12 women and 15 men, or 44.4% women (PCC 2012b).

**Figure 1.6: Representation of Women in the Council of State [Consejo de Estado], by Legislature<sup>21</sup>**

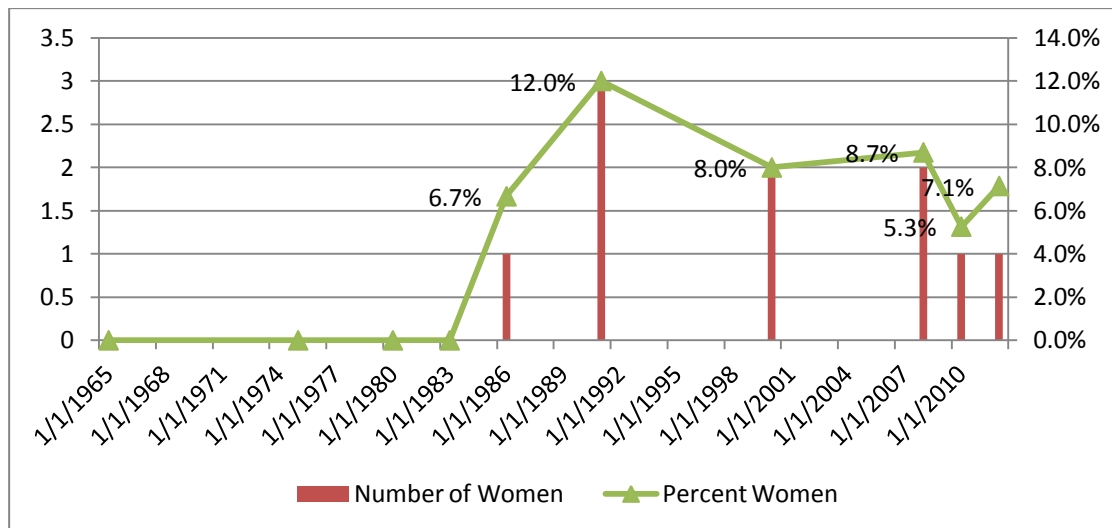


The PCC, however, continued to be heavily dominated by men. In December, 2010, the Political Bureau (the most powerful decisionmaking body in the Party and the nation), included nineteen members-- only one of whom was a woman. Of the fourteen persons currently serving in the Politburo, only one is a woman (see ) (PCC 2012a). Currently, one out of ten Secretariat members and 7 of 39 (19%) of the

<sup>21</sup> (ONE 2011b, sec. 7.7)

Council of Ministers are women.<sup>22</sup> (For a full picture of the executive and administrative branches of the Cuban state, see Appendix A.)

**Figure 1.7: Women on the Political Bureau [Politburó] of the Cuban Communist Party: Selected Years, 1965-2012<sup>23</sup>**



Despite continuing sex discrimination and sex-segregation in the labor force, women achieved their most significant numbers in leadership at the local level of the trade unions. In 1980, women comprised 42.7% of the local trade union leaders (E. Stone 1981, 20). By 1983, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos* (CTC) [Confederation of Cuban Workers] boasted that 45% of leaders at the municipality level were women. Despite such impressive numbers at the local level, however,

<sup>22</sup> In August 23, 2012, on the 52<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the founding of the FMC, *Granma* reported that in seven branches of government, women held between 50 and 70 percent of the highest positions, including the Ministry of Work and Social Security, the People's Supreme Court, Attorney General, Comptroller of the Republic, Central Bank of Cuba, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Finance and Prices (Leyva 2012). *El Nuevo Herald* reported that women currently hold the highest posts in the Ministries of Food Industry, Finance and Prices, Domestic Trade, Education, Work and Social Security, Science, Justice, and Light Industry as well as the Comptroller General ("Crece en Cuba el número de mujeres en cargos públicos y gubernamentales" 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Dominguez 1978: 330; Suchlicki 1997: 185n; Perez-Stable 1987: 51-52; Smith and Padula 1996: 47; <http://www.oxfam.ca/sites/default/files/imce/women-social-change-cuba.pdf>; [http://www.revistainterforum.com/espanol/articulos/articleprin4\\_022801.html](http://www.revistainterforum.com/espanol/articulos/articleprin4_022801.html); <https://www.fas.org/irp/world/cuba/overview.pdf>

women remained underrepresented in national trade union leadership in the eighties, constituting only 14% of leaders at the national level—a figure that increased to 22% by 1990 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 47).

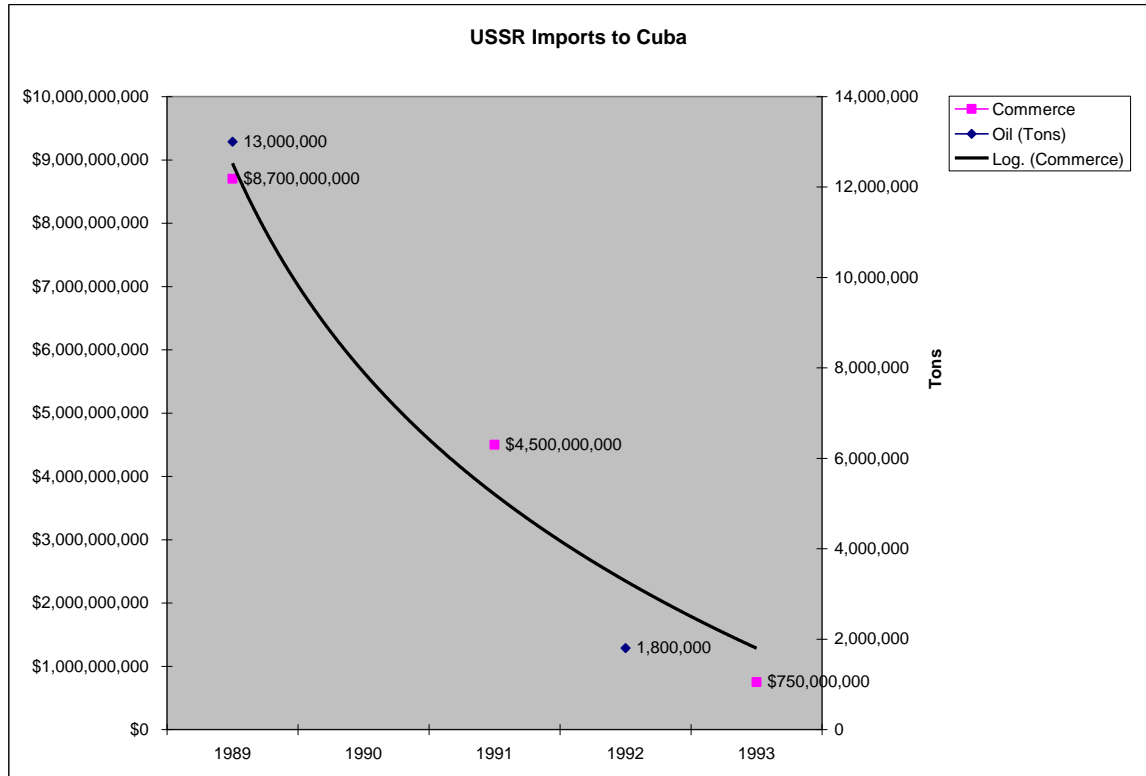
### ***The Problems of the Special Period***

When the USSR dissolved in 1989, Cubans were prepared, but this nevertheless dramatically changed the nation along core social axes, including gender. To understand Cuba today, one must reckon with the disappearance of the nation's major patron. With the crumbling of the USSR, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance—the source of 85% of Cuba's trade—disappeared (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 383). In response to the tremendous contraction of the Cuban economy (see Figure 1.8), the Cuban government announced the onset of the Special Period in Peacetime [*Período Especial en Tiempos de Paz*] (Triff 2002, 13). To cope with this “Special Period,” the Cuban leadership introduced a plan originally designed to manage economic (and political) emergencies of wartime (Azicri 2004, 4). Announced August 1990, the Special Period gave notice that the Cuban standard of living was temporarily going to dip, exacerbating long-standing inequalities. Drastic cuts in trade generated shortages of a number of high-need items. The lack of fuel, for example, rendered industrial capital virtually useless. The lack of medicines, especially those patented and/or distributed in the U.S., caused a 1993 epidemic of optic neuropathy as 50,000 Cubans were deficient in vitamin B complex. Lack of spare parts idled almost 50% of Havana's 1200 buses in early 1993. Food shortages were also widespread (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 364, 383–87; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 186). Cuba lost nearly 90% of its overall commerce with the USSR—including 90% of its oil supply. Cuba also lost almost 100% of overall commerce with Eastern Europe (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 383). To put



this decline in productive output in perspective, between 1989 and 1993 the Cuban economy as a whole shrank roughly 35-50% (Klepak 2005, 265).

**Figure 1.8: USSR Commerce and Oil Imports to Cuba: 1989-93<sup>24</sup>**



The “economic dip” contributed to political developments associated with *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and the overthrow of communist governments in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The economic effects were sufficiently catastrophic to mobilize significant political opposition in Cuba—opposition that publicly protested human rights abuses, collected signatures calling for a plebiscite on the existing government, demanded a national dialogue on peaceful transition to democracy, and disseminated the “*Carta de los Diez*” (Letter of the Ten), written by a group of intellectuals soliciting democratic reforms (Triff 2002, 13).

<sup>24</sup> Data from Pérez 1995: 383.

The Special Period engendered large scale alterations in both production and consumption patterns. The shortage of chemical fertilizers and fuels for farm machinery, for example, made it impossible to match previous yields of farm produce by contemporary techniques. The government's response included heavy promotion of sustainable organic agriculture. This was demonstrated philosophically in a new respect for the soil and new understanding of how the complexities of the ecological habitat could be shaped or damaged by farming practices. Some have characterized this development as a departure from a reductive positivism bent on controlling nature to a more respectful posture towards the delicate balance between plants, microorganisms, soils, and sun (Morgan 2006). Yet it is also important to note that Cuban government policies promoting a romantic return to nature that make some effort to account for social costs and market externalities, also justify and reward more labor intensive farming practices. Cuban agriculture has begun to emphasize plowing fields by cattle again with clear opportunity costs in terms of extra time spent plowing. They have also begun experimenting not only with simple crop rotation as a means of promoting soil nutrients and overall health, but growing plants mixed together within a plot of land, creating "agricultural jungles" (Morgan 2006). This fairly dense growth of multiple species of plants makes mechanic harvesting rather difficult, thus harvesting practices rely increasingly on manual labor.

As often develops when the economy is replete with shortages, black markets boomed in Cuba, particularly with respect to food. In contrast to fuel shortages, where the lack of favorable trading partners made it impossible for Cubans to consume as much petroleum products (gasoline, kerosene, etc.) as they had previously, food represents a unique case. The problems related to food during the Special Period were not primarily an issue of availability.. Even in 1956 the daily

caloric content of the average Cuban diet was 2,500, a number that increased to 2,967 by 1987 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 60; orig. Norniella 1987, 1). In 1991—in the heart of the Special Period—Cuba had a better ratio of average daily calorie supply per capita than Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, or Peru. Indeed, Cubans on average consumed 137% of the minimum daily requirement (Azicri 2000, 39–40).<sup>25</sup>

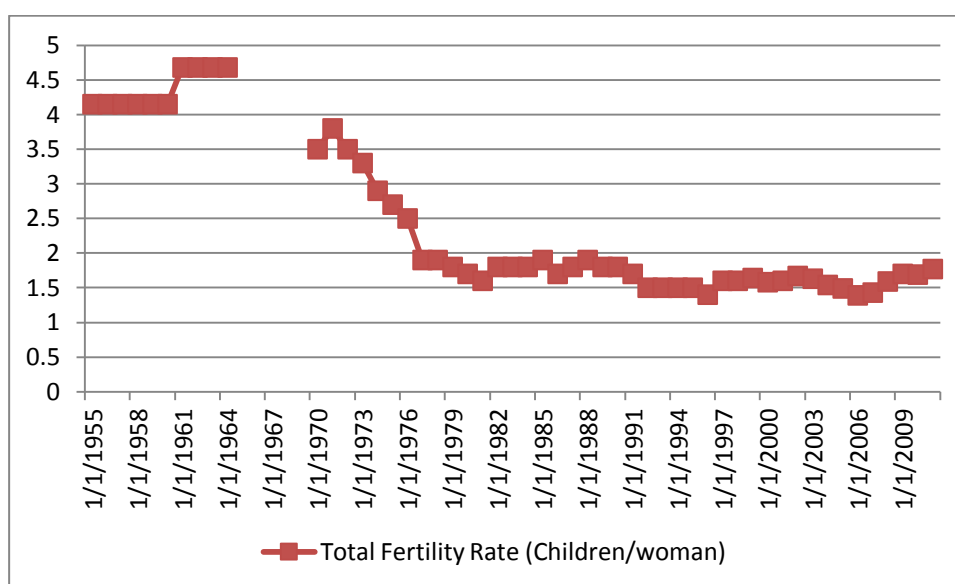
The food problem during the Special Period was a shortage of quality, specifically, freshness and variety. Beginning in 1962, Cuba used ration cards to help more of its citizens get better nutrition (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 60), contributing to the emergence of various secondary markets. In “parallel markets,” unrestricted goods could be sold at higher prices (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 60). In “grey” markets, services were traded (e.g., one such service was provided by the *colero* [one who queues] who would wait in the omnipresent and ubiquitous lines found outside ration centers, ice creameries, etc.). These grey markets also enabled trade in various qualities of produce (e.g., poorer black beans for better black beans), as well as kinds of food stuffs (e.g., trading unwanted eggs for a desired chicken), or use of cash for scarce commodities. In addition, pure black markets proliferated. Often existing on the boundaries of, or simply outside, the law, dollar markets (illegal before mid-1993) served as sites for the exchange of an estimated \$400 million in cash in 1993 (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 391). Farmers’ markets and *paladares* (private restaurants) fluctuated, with shifting governmental policies—sometimes highly

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<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, obesity was actually becoming one of Cuba’s big health concerns due to the success of their healthcare system which had brought Cuba into the ranks of the richest nations of the world. By the 1970s, the leading causes of death in Cuba were the same as those found in the wealthiest societies: heart disease, cancer, and stroke (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 365; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 63). The typical Cuban diet is high in both oils and sugars—the average Cuban consumed one kilogram of sugar each week in the 1980s! Combined with a sedentary lifestyle, Cuban officials estimated that approximately 25% of all Cubans were obese, over 66% of whom were women (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 63).

regulated and periodically shut down, only later to be legalized again. Although these parallel markets had been functioning in Cuba for decades, black market trade exploded during the Special Period from an estimated \$2 billion in 1989 to near \$14.5 billion in 1993 (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 392). Indeed, by 1993 the black market had become the leading supplier of food in Cuba (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 186).

In addition to dramatic changes in agricultural production and the ascendancy of the black market, the Cuban government developed joint ventures with foreign capital to significantly expand the tourism sector. Tourism provided many Cuban citizens with access to *divisas* [foreign currency]. For this reason, employment in the tourism sector was heavily sought after. The Cuban peso experienced a shocking devaluation during the Special Period, falling from 10:\$1US to 100:\$1US between 1992-93 (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 391)), gradually rising to 25: \$1US in 2007. With monthly salaries ranging from a minimum of 250 Cuban pesos to a maximum of 400 Cuban pesos (\$10-\$18US), plus possible bonuses and incentives that raised monthly income to around \$30 US, even the smallest tip in foreign currency could drastically increase purchasing power for consumer goods. Numerous professionals, not to mention less-trained Cubans, zealously sought positions as “bus boys, porters, bell hops, waiters and waitresses, cashiers, and cooks” in search of *divisas* (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 393). The economic pressures of the Special Period were so great that some Cubans postponed childbearing. Cuba’s total fertility rate, already below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) in 1978 thanks to Cuba’s major strides in girls’ education (see ), dropped even further during the early 1990s (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 151; UNIFEM - Australian National Committee 2009).

**Figure 1.9: Total Fertility Rate (Children per Woman): 1955-2008<sup>26</sup>**

In sum, core components of the social compact defended by the Revolution were subjected to even greater challenges during the Special Period, as Cubans struggled not only with the political system but to preserve their livelihoods. As some Cubans protested the lack of democracy, others challenged the regulated distribution of goods, and the limitations on labor and entrepreneurship. Forced to shift toward more time- and labor-intensive agricultural practices due to shortages of properly functioning machinery and fuel, and pressured to supplement their wages to meet their needs, many desperately sought foreign currency by legal or illegal means. They hid their entrepreneurial activities, expropriated goods from state enterprises, avoided tax payments, and relied on a menagerie of secondary markets to sustain daily life.

Although all Cubans were subjected to severe stress during the economic dislocations of the Special Period, certain hardships were gendered and raced. During the Special Period, the 10.1% unemployment rate for women was more than twice

<sup>26</sup> The years 1955-1960 and 1961-1964 display averages over those years, not TFRs for each individual year. Source: Catusus Cervera 2004, 109-11, Table 5.4; ONE 2009, Table II.4; 2011 Anuario Demografico, II.4; <http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/9/36499/fertilityOD05.pdf>

that of men and remains slightly higher among women today (ONE 2008a, Table 7.1; Helen I. Safa 2005, 326). Women earned 80-85% of the wages of their male counterparts. These wage differentials were compounded by the race/ethnic preferences of managers. Whites, for example, held 80% of jobs in the lucrative tourism sector (Cuba Facts 2005; de la Fuente 2008, 716; Núñez Sarmiento 2001, 44–47). During the Special Period, women in particular were diverted from professional occupations to the service sector, which offered low-paying, part-time work with little chance for upward mobility (Toro-Morn, Roschelle, and Facio 2002, 33).

As tourism grew from 4% to 43% of Cuba's hard currency earnings between 1990-2000, Cuban women were exoticized and sexualized with government consent (Weisman 2004, 75). European and North American men (and some women) found abundant hetero- and homosexual services at bargain prices (Allen 2007), as desire, cathexis, and economic survival were confounded in Cuba (Cabezas 2004). During the Special Period, class and race divisions were also exacerbated as the tourism industry contributed to sometimes extreme inequalities in income (De la Fuente 2008, 699; Levins 2005, 60). Within highly racialized circuits of desire, both foreign visitors and local men indulged fantasies of exotic, dangerous, fiery, Black sexuality (Allen 2007, 186, 198). Catering both to foreign visitors and local men, prostitution—of women, men, and occasional youth—grew in dramatic fashion in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Allen 2007).

The severity of the struggle during the Special Period was formally acknowledged by the Cuban government, which reluctantly liberalized certain parts of the economy (allowing for self-employment in certain trades, *paladares*, farmers' markets, joint ventures with foreign capital, legalization of the dollar, etc.). Yet there has been far less recognition of the threats posed to gender and racial equality by

President Raúl Castro's moves toward various forms of market liberalization. As documented in this chapter, male privilege continues to exist in multiple domains despite egalitarian commitments of the Revolution.

The next chapter examines the primary source documents guiding and expressing the Cuban government's stance toward gender equity. By probing the concept of equality that informs Cuban socialism, I will identify factors that constrain socialist feminism in Cuba, laying the foundation for a more expansive concept of materialist feminism with greater transformative potential.

## **Part II. Revolutionary Cuba's Feminist Agenda**

### *Ch. 2. The Cuban Path to Women's Liberation*

Before the Revolution in 1959, feminism flourished in Cuba, generating radical critiques of family, marriage, the state, law, and society. As long ago as the famed Assembly of Guáimaro of April 1869 when the Cuban Republic in Arms came together to draft its first Constitution prior to the Ten Years' War with Spain, women demanded that their contribution to Cuba's liberation be repaid with sex emancipation. Comparing the abolitionist and anti-imperialist goals of Cuba's war against Spain to women's desire for political rights on a par with men, Ana Betancourt Agramonte (1832-1901) defended these principles before the Assembly and called for equal rights for women (Alzola 2009, 70, 72; Masó 1998, 250):

Citizens: When the time comes to liberate women, the Cuban man, who has abolished slavery by birth and by race, will also dedicate his generous soul to battling for the rights of women, women who today in the war are his devoted and self-sacrificing sisters, and who tomorrow, as it was yesterday, will be his worthy companions (Fernández Soneira 2008, 78).

After Cuba's separation from Spain, in the heart of the Republican Era, Cuban women sought to expand their rights by calling attention to gross social and economic inequalities found on the island. Dulce María Borrero de Luján (1883-1945), for example, a feminist organizer and theorist, as well as an author of Cuban literature, argued for the necessity of full citizenship for Cuban women, advanced a critique of marriage as an integral part of achieving more stable families, demanded state provision of material security for poor and deserted women, and suggested



connections between women in governance and world peace. Noting that women of various classes share a precarious economic position because their wellbeing depends upon a relationship to one man, whether a father or a husband, she insisted that women required guarantees of shelter and health services, particularly in light of the health risks associated with abortion and childbirth (Stoner 1991, 171). Challenging the myth of the male bread-winner, she called attention to the numbers of working women and their pressing need for maternity care and childcare. Attentive to the plight of the worst off, she advocated the creation of welfare houses for those women who were temporarily unemployed or destitute (1991, 171).

Like Borrero de Luján, a dense network of women's and feminist associations advocated the empowerment of women, as well as creative interventions to address multiple women's issues. Chief among these were *la Asociación Femenina de Cuba* [the Women's Association of Cuba], *el Comité de Sufragio Femenino* [the Women's Suffrage Association], *la Asociación de Damas Isabelinas* [the Association of Isabelan Women], *el Club Femenino de Cuba* [the Women's Club of Cuba], *la Alianza Nacional Feminista* [the Feminist National Alliance], *El Lyceum y Lawn Tennis Club* [The Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club], *la Unión Laborista de Mujeres* [the Women's Labor Union], and *la Federación Democrática de Mujeres Cubanas*, [the Democratic Federation of Cuban Women] (Alzola 2009, 78, 85). Although these organizations were strong during most of the Republican Era, the brutal dictatorial imposition of the *Pax Batistiana* (1935-53) quieted feminist politics for two decades. During the *Pax Batistiana*, the leading radical women joined and led organizations that were directly involved in the anti-Batista struggles that eventually combined to overthrow the dictator.

Once Fulgencio Batista fled the island, however, all autonomous women's organizations were disbanded by Fidel Castro's M-26 movement. Some, like the *Frente Cívico de Mujeres Marianas* (FCMM) [Women's Civic Front José Martí], decided themselves that they were unnecessary as a separate organization after Batista fled (Weisman 2004, 69). Despite the superficial quiescence during the *Pax Batistiana*, these previously autonomous women's organizations used their substantial experience to mobilize women, and create structures that advanced political critiques, demands, and pressure for social transformation. Within the organizations, there was no shortage of leadership. Women such as Aida Pelayo, Carmen Castro Porta (no relation to Fidel Castro), and Olga Román provided vital feminist leadership. Fidel Castro and his group, however, had plans for one, and only one, women's organization—an organization which would necessarily subordinate itself to their July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement.

### **Adapting Revolutionary Principles to Cuba**

Once the July 26<sup>th</sup> Movement gained power, becoming the leadership of the Cuban Revolution, women's liberation began to take a very definite and unified trajectory. The central points of this trajectory are contained within the core documents produced by the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) [*Partido Comunista de Cuba*] and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) [*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*], the Revolution's single, mass organization for Cuban women. The Cuban Communist Party's "Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women's Equality" (PCC 1978), authored in 1975 provides particular insights into the Party's understanding of "the efforts [and thus the theory] of the [Cuban] socialist state" toward women's liberation. In addition, the FMC worked to shape and augment the Party's stance on women, holding eight National *Congresos* following its inception in 1960. The reports from

these *Congresos*, convened in 1962 (I), 1974 (II), 1980 (III), 1985 (IV), 1990 (V), 1995 (VI), 2000 (VII), and 2009 (VIII), chart important epochs of Cuba's socialist and feminist history.

As the banner hanging at the head table of the FMC's *I Congreso Nacional* [First National Congress] demonstrates, women's liberation was intricately tied to moving the nation "Forward in the Construction of Socialism" (FMC 1962, inside cover). Their goal was to create a society that was "just, free of poverty, ignorance, hunger, and violence"—a society "without exploited or exploiters" (FMC 1962, 5, 29). The explicit theory identified to guide this transformation was "*teoría marxista-leninista*" [Marxist-Leninist theory]. Barbara Wolfe Jancar argues that all Communist regimes have officially followed the report prepared by the First International Conference of Working Women and delivered to the Second Comintern Congress of Russia, 1920 as their guide for gender equality. As specified in this report, the strategies for women's liberation were inseparable from involving all citizens in building a socialist economy. As Jancar has noted, the primary tactics included:

to bring women out of the home into the economy; to end peasant households that keep women in subservient positions; to provide equal educational opportunities for women; to mobilize women in political work, including government administration; to provide adequate work conditions "to satisfy the particular needs of the female organism and also the physical, moral and spiritual needs of the woman as mother;" and to develop communal services to alleviate housework (Jancar 1978, 85).

Cuban policy followed this prescription conscientiously with one addition made by Lenin and developed by the Chinese program for women's liberation (1941-43). Women's active engagement in the Revolution's political goals was absolutely necessary—without women, the Revolution would fail. These origins had telling effects on numerous facets of women's liberation in Cuba, shaping the PCC leadership's understanding of the obstacles to gender equity and the path forward to women's liberation.

### ***Women's Unity and Participation***

One of the most notable aspects of Cuba's official theory of women's liberation was the Revolution's unswerving demand for unity of action. As Carollee Bengelsdorf has noted, "the single most primary factor influencing the Cuban revolutionary leadership from its earliest moments [is] the central importance of unity" (Bengelsdorf 1994, 73). The FMC completely agreed.

According to the FMC, one of the obstacles to a more just society was that women were dispersed into various groups and organizations, "separated by false differences of focus or concepts." This perception of flawed and unnecessary divisions among women explained the decision to disband autonomous women's organizations—both those that had helped rout Batista as well as those with older pedigrees. Adopting language consistent with the recent military struggle, the FMC declared forcefully that there was only one social goal: "we must fight for it united as one sole front" (FMC 1962, 5–6). This demand for the unity of the Revolution stemmed directly from Lenin who was tellingly quoted by the opening FMC *Congreso* from his Speech at the "First All-Russia Congress of Working Women" (1918): "The success of the Revolution depends on how much women take part in it" (FMC 1962, 20; Lenin 1984, 60). The FMC established early that successful

revolution required that women's energies be subordinated to the Revolution, or more precisely the Revolutionary leadership. Devoting women's energies to anything else would undermine national unity and harm the revolution.

Lenin was not simply quoted as a platitude; his ideas left an indelible mark on the FMC. Following a general trend of cementing the explicit socialist character of the revolution in political structures, the *III Congreso* held in 1980 declared, "democratic centralism constitutes a principle of inestimable worth for the work of a mass organization [such as the FMC]." It then went on to discuss "discipline...the subordination of the minority to the majority, and the obligation of the inferior bodies to comply with the measures adopted by the superior bodies" (FMC 1984, 13). The FMC's adherence to the tenets of Leninism can also be seen in its praise of a very specific idea of the mass organization as a partisan political force in action when they spoke of a "*correa trasmisora del Partido*" [transmission belt of the Party] (FMC 1984, 15).

This Leninist demand for unity behind the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist revolutionary mission allowed no space for organized autonomous political activity by women. Following a path first championed by Clara Zetkin in the late nineteenth century, the FMC made a complete break with Cuba's own feminist history when it clarified that it was a *feminine* organization, not *feminist*, and proceeded to tar so-called feminists with the epithet of "diversionism." In fact, the FMC pejoratively and authoritatively marked the entire field of new ideas to "better or perfect socialism" as intolerable "ideological diversionism" (FMC 1984, 51–53). To make this point yet more explicit, the *Federadas* were told they must "combat...whatever manifestation of ideological diversionism [and] penetration of the enemy into the field of ideas" (FMC 1984, 168). For the Cuban leadership, unity among women had to be held at all

costs. Thus, the FMC continued to operate in 1980 as a mass organization “faithful to [their] Marxist-Leninist principles and to proletarian internationalism” (FMC 1984, 178). In 1985, FMC again proclaimed itself an “instrument of the Revolution” (FMC 1987, 139). Even in the midst of the implosion of the Cuban economy during the post-USSR Special Period, the FMC advocate unity and fidelity to revolutionary principles (Espín 1990, 262; FMC 1995b, 208).

Although a demand for unity respects the power of the people to accomplish political goals—the success of the revolution depends on their participation—it also institutionalizes imperatives associated with military command, which are incompatible with principles of democracy. The *VIII Congreso* in 2009 reminded all FMC members that from the inception of the FMC, it has been and still is “in truth, an army” (FMC 2009, 3). As such, insubordination is unacceptable, the chain of command is inviolable, and a strict hierarchy sends all orders directly from the top to all the soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Prejudices and Discrimination***

Lenin’s emphasis on unity of action influenced all Cuban organizations, but his theorization of women’s oppression and liberation had a particular impact on the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and its organization for women, the FMC. The Cuban Communist Party’s “Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality,” authored in 1975, provides the most authoritative and comprehensive statement of the revolution’s position concerning women’s liberation. Yet, despite its explicit commitment to an analysis grounded in Marxist-Leninist principles, the thesis avoids

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<sup>27</sup> It remains to be seen whether Raúl Castro’s presidency exacerbates this tendency—his political power stems from the military and his counsel to the FMC shows a certain military, and laconically Spartan understanding of politics. He told the cadres of the FMC, the organization’s leaders, at the most recent *Congreso* that they must “establish priorities, organize work, bring forces together, demand discipline...” (FMC 2009, 14).

the material and labor aspects of the sex-gender system in Cuba. Instead, it emphasizes that women's liberation is only possible through changes to the ideological, non-material, non-economic parts of society. In the Introduction, the PCC notes that "woman's full equality [with man] still does not exist," but that woman's full equality "is indispensable for the proper construction of socialist society." Framing gender inequality as a problem in need of a solution, the Party suggests that an adequate solution must be multifaceted, "involve[ing] an uninterrupted process of advancement in keeping with the country's economic development; the efforts of the socialist state; *and the permanent ideological battle against the still-remaining prejudices and discrimination*" (PCC 1975, 74–75, italics added). In several sections, the Party reiterates the importance of "the extirpation down to its very roots of the holdovers of old attitudes.. prejudices and discrimination." Toward that end, "*the party and its members—at the same time that they foster the objective conditions for the growing integration of women into economic, social, and political life—[must] carry forward in all spheres of national life an ideological effort designed to eliminate the holdovers of the old society.*" (PCC 1975, 74–75).

By 1975, the PCC understood Cuba to be beyond the class struggle and the overthrow of capitalism that demanded so much unified attention. Cuba was no longer one of the "societies of exploitation" (PCC 1978). Cuba had reached a new stage of socialism and was now *perfecting* socialism because the working class had fundamentally expropriated the owners of both capital and land. Having accomplished the material transformations necessary to its theory of socialism, the PCC could approach auxiliary problems such as gender equity with different tools. Rather than acknowledging the role of gender divisions of labor in the persistence of

inequality, the PCC suggested that inequality stemmed largely from old mental habits, remnants of the capitalist order. Thus, ideology rather than labor was identified as the primary determining factor in the relative advancement of gender equity within society. Three times in the opening paragraphs of its Thesis, the PCC reiterates that gender equity in Cuba is dependent upon culture, habit, and ideas. Although objective factors are mentioned later in the thesis, they are noted as an aside that underscores their secondary status.

Within the PCC's framework, *workers* were engaged in a class struggle that included an ideological dimension, but which necessitated transformation of economic realities if the struggle against capital were to be won. Workers were the subjects of history, the actors who would transform labor, remuneration, and all economic relations of unfreedom. Women, unlike workers, were not perceived as agents engaged in a class struggle against men but were drowning in a sea of ideology. Women did not need to change any gendered economic relationships nor, did the PCC's analysis of the problem of inequality begin with women's work. This lack of a material analysis and solution to gender inequality failed not only to solve the real problem, but also failed to appreciate women as concurrent subjects of history alongside (men) workers.

Rather than focus on the separate and distinct economic positions of women and men, particularly in relation to the sexual division of labor and the control of disposable income and wealth, the PCC focused on the "influence" of prejudices that "hinder the full and effective exercise of.. equality" (1975, 75). Rather than link inequality to the separate and distinct economic positions of men and women, particularly in relation to material activities to meet human needs, the Party suggested that outdated ideas were responsible—ideas so powerful and intransigent, that despite



the socialist revolution's death blow to capitalism, they remained impervious to Cuba's new economic relations and material circumstances.

One of my central goals in this dissertation is to demonstrate that the new economic relations and material circumstances introduced by the Cuban revolution—the expropriation of capitalists and landowners—had little impact on gender equity precisely because they failed to grapple with the gendered division of labor in the home and in affective relations. Like many socialists before them, the PCC failed to subject the new socialist economic relations to a feminist-materialist analysis. Instead, they assumed that “backward” and out-of-place ideologies kept women from participating in the formal market labor force. The origins of the entrenched prejudices hindering gender equity were attributed to the capitalist and neo-colonial order that had dominated Cuba for hundreds of years and continued to lag behind the nation's economic changes.

The PCC's analysis of gender inequality had impressive staying power. The FMC accepted the logic of the Thesis. Even in 1995 in the midst of the enormous economic upheaval of the special period, the FMC suggested that gender roles originated in classist societies and for that reason had no material basis in contemporary Cuba (FMC 1995c, 11). In 2009, after Cuban women had achieved some tremendous successes and gained real economic power by entering the formal marketplace in large numbers, the FMC still argued that the old “prejudices, mentalities, and traditional cultural patterns” held women back from full gender equity (FMC 2009, 58–59).

Neither the PCC nor the FMC challenged the socialist myth that gender inequality was a remnant of earlier class societies. Neither considered that “gender roles” and “prejudices” aligned with the very real sexual division of labor between

Cuban women and men. Instead, the 1975 PCC thesis harked back to Engels and Bebel to explain the real source of these ideologies: private property itself. “[W]ith the disintegration of the primitive community and the establishment of private property and the division of society into classes, men attained economic supremacy, and with it, social predominance” (1975, 80). The Resolutions of the PCC directly following the Thesis declared,

“The Revolution, upon achieving the real independence and sovereignty of the country, abolishing private property of the fundamental means of production, and beginning the construction of socialism, created the bases for the realization of the equality of all citizens, and consequently, the equality of rights between man and woman..” (PCC 1978, author’s translation).

This explanation tied women’s liberation to the creation of a classless society and the elimination of private property. Yet, no one questioned that men’s economic and political “supremacy” persisted even after there were no longer capitalists in Cuba. The Thesis declared the cause of gender inequality to be the “field of ideas” and the FMC told its members the same.

During the five decades of Vilma Espín’s leadership, the FMC echoed the PCC’s account of persisting gender inequities. In 1975, Espin proclaimed: “Our people have been able to destroy capitalism and make the revolution, to do away with the exploitation of man by man once and for all, and they must also be able to achieve victory in the field of ideas, attaining the full equality of women” (PCC 1975, 100). Years later, Espín amended her analysis of gender inequality in a way that hinted at the role of gendered divisions of labor in the home and at work:

“a fundamental position (*planteamiento*) of the FMC [is] the need to eliminate traditional sexist education [within the home and family]; boys and girls must be raised as equals with a clear sense of their shared responsibility as partners in the home and the workplace, in the family and in society; boys must be educated too for the tenderness and “delicate missions” of fatherhood.” (FMC 1995c, 28)

Yet even this radical articulation of the problem did not break completely with the causal primacy of ideology. While noting the importance of raising boys to become men who participate equitably in the home and the workplace, Espin continued to suggest that the means to this end was “education” rather than a changed division of labor itself. Indeed, she advocated new forms of education in the home through the support of the 155 *Casas de Orientación a la Mujer y la Familia* [Health Clinics for Women and Families] found throughout the nation.<sup>28</sup>

Education that targets attitudes and beliefs can only go so far. Telling people that they are equal does not make them so. Telling wage-laborers and capitalists that they can and should share the burdens and benefits of society does not alter who controls the economy, polity, or society. The leadership of the Cuban revolution failed to examine the possibility that the sexual division of labor has a material provenance. Following a long-established socialist logic that situates the problem of inequality in atavisms, prejudices, ideological diversionism, or lack of cultural development, the PCC and the FMC gave explanatory weight to old ideas that

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<sup>28</sup> It's unclear whether this education involved domestic labor, but nowhere have chores at home as a child transformed the adult sexual division of labor.

“perpetuate the stereotyped models of man and woman in future generations” (FMC 1995a, 29).

### ***Productivity***

In addition to the themes of unity and prejudice, an emphasis on the need for production remained a central element of Cuban revolutionary doctrine. At the 1962 *I Congreso*, the FMC declared “The construction of socialism requires the work and effort of all to impel [an] indispensable economic development, produce more in quantity and quality and ever better satisfy the growing needs of the people” (FMC 1962, 53). The language of the FMC again reflected the views of gender equity embedded in the PCC Thesis, which was subsumed gender equity under the primary goal of developing national productivity. The PCC’s discussion of the “Incorporation and Permanence of Women in the Work Force” begins with the assertion that “Society needs the contribution of all its members, both men and women, in order to overcome underdevelopment.” Echoing the core tenets of development economics, marketable production was the PCC’s primary goal. Toward that end, the Party sought to mobilize all able-bodied workers for the labor force: “Men and women...have the duty to...boost productivity...and take part enthusiastically in emulation [producing extra without pay] in order to promote production and improve the quality of services” (PCC 1975, 82–83).

In keeping with socialist assumptions about productive labor, however the duty to work did not include housework. The PCC Thesis recognized that women were doing “all the housework” and that the “working woman” (i.e., one who works in the formal labor market) expended a “far greater energy outlay” than the working man who *only* worked in the formal labor market (PCC 1975, 82). Yet, rather than discuss these facts of housework in terms of invisible and necessary labor contributing

to the development and productivity of the economy, the PCC described housework as a barrier to women's activity in the formal market, the site of "real work" contributing to economic productivity.

Despite the recognition of inequitable burdens associated with work within the home, the PCC Thesis quickly dropped the discussion of housework, turning to an examination of the incorporation and retention of women in the Cuban formal labor market. The rates of Cuban women's participation in the formal sector were low, and their rates of job turnover and attrition were very high. Between 1969 and 1974, for example, only 28% of women who joined the formal market remained there (PCC 1975, 82–83). Although the PCC Thesis declared its goal was to examine the means and hindrances to the "Full Exercise of Women's Equality," the problem consistently under discussion was an analysis of the causes and mechanisms of women's low formal market participation and productivity.

In a fascinating acknowledgment of the demands of domestic labor, the PCC noted that women devote thirteen hours per day during the week to "job-related and household activities" and 11.5 hours on weekends due to housework accumulated during the week. Yet even while enumerating the hours of labor involved in housework, the Communist Party of Cuba did not hesitate to tell women they were duty-bound to start contributing to the formal production economy by entering a wage-contract in exchange for their labor (PCC 1975, 82). The revolutionary leadership of Cuba was not blind to women's performance of domestic duties, it simply did not categorize unwaged work as productive labor. In keeping with the orthodoxies of development economics as well as those of socialism, unwaged work in the home or in the informal sector did not count as economic productivity..

### *Women's Work*

Activities generally considered to be “women’s work” in Cuba were seldom discussed in a detailed way by the FMC or the PCC. On the contrary, they were typically named only to be dismissed with a call for women to move into “*trabajo socialmente útil*” [socially useful work], i.e., formal market production (FMC 1975, 55, 199, 1984, 41, 1987, 3, 13, 68, 1995a, 13, 1995b, 10, 101–02, 1995c, 13; PCC 1975, 99). In 1980, the FMC clarified that work for the family is not even in the *vida económica* [economic life] of the country and neither “productive nor social” (FMC 1984, 74, 41). Although visible, domestic labor fell outside the two types of work acknowledged to be essential to building the revolution.

Only during the Special Period did the FMC recognize women’s contributions to the satisfaction of human needs in performing activities outside the formal productive sphere. For example, the FMC noted that between 1990 and 2004, there were “difficulties and shortages that we daily face in the satisfaction of such basic necessities as food, adequate rest, personal hygiene, and those of the home [sic], *in summary, in the indispensable work that assures the reproduction of persons’ energy and their physical and spiritual wellbeing*” (FMC 1995c, 10, italics added). The FMC’s recognition of the “indispensable work” performed almost exclusively by Cuban women occurred only at a moment of economic disruption, high female formal unemployment, and a massive shortage of oil that forced the Cuban macroeconomy to shift to more labor-intensive work outside the then-current boundaries of the formal market.

In contrast to the recognition of women’s indispensable labor during the Special Period, FMC was far more likely to characterize women’s work as dispensable drudgery. This negative characterization of women’s work as drudgery also came directly from Lenin. In “Capitalism and Female Labour” (1913) and “A

Great Beginning” (1919), Lenin depicted women as “household slaves” “chain[ed] to the kitchen and the nursery.” In keeping with the equation of domestic labor with a form of enslavement, Lenin called for an “all-out struggle...against this petty housekeeping” (Lenin 1970, 109, 1984, 26, 63–64). Lenin’s terminology surfaced early in the FMC’s discussion of the woman question. In 1962, the FMC declared in *I Congreso* that “the Revolution [will] liberate us from the *slavery of domestic chores*,” promising that “within a few years almost all women will work in *industrial production*” (FMC 1962, 21–22, italics added). While the *I Congreso* adopted Lenin’s terminology, the *II Congreso* in 1974 explicitly cited Lenin’s “A Great Beginning,” where Lenin wrote with a rhetorical flourish that woman “waste[s] her activity on an absolutely fastidious, brutalizing, enervating, petty and unproductive work” (FMC 1975, 16–17).

The Cuban Communist Party leadership and the Federation of Cuban Women concurred with a long line of socialist theorists that women’s work, traditionally defined, was not work at all. Instead it was a Sisyphean task of drudgery, repetition, tragedy, and sometimes slavery that would be better abolished altogether. There was no recognition that women (and future men) might choose and excel at work that exceeded the parameters of the formal waged labor market. Women’s work was not a *technē*, nor a project, let alone a choice. In adhering to this view, Cuban socialists like many of their predecessors exempted women’s labor from materialist analysis.

### *Childcare*

In keeping with the lack of attention to women’s labor outside the formal market, childcare largely eluded the PCC’s best analysis. In marked contrast to the Cuban Communist Party’s detailed discussion of formal market productivity, replete with bulleted points concerning concrete policies, specific questions to be asked, and

determinate problems to be overcome, only one-half page was devoted to the issue of childcare in the Thesis. In the place of concrete policy proposals, the PCC settled for exhortations with regard to responsibilities: “It is absolutely vital for men and women to share the responsibility for the care for and education of children.” Situating gender-inclusive childcare in the context of children’s wellbeing, the Party noted “It is a pedagogical and psychological fact that girls and boys need their mothers and their fathers equally” (1975, 86). Yet the Party did not move from the identification of fathers involvement in childcare as a social good to any policies designed to materially incent men to share childrearing responsibilities.

Each time the Thesis took up women’s labor within the household, it turned its attention elsewhere. Drifting again from an analysis of the real problem—men and women and the relationships of economic and social dominance found between them—the Thesis spoke of the cultural and educational needs of children *without any connection to the economic structures that inhibit this parental sharing of duties*.

The brief section on childcare did make reference, however, to one concrete problem—the care of sick children, noting that “the proper bodies must foster the conditions” such that when both parents work they are able to share in the care of sick children. Yet despite this explicit statement that day-care providers and school authorities ought to involve fathers as well as mothers in duties to care for sick children, the standard practice at the time was to call mothers to take their sick children home. This practice did not change, contributing to popular notions that women’s labor could be interrupted for family emergencies, while constructing fathers as independent laborers without time commitments or care-work responsibilities.



The care of sick children and the legitimacy of calling both parents away from ‘productivity’ during the workday to attend to their children’s need took up half of the space allocated to “Childcare” in the PCC Thesis. The care of children performed before or after the workday warranted no detailed attention, suggesting that childcare and its effects on gender equity were only a problem from nine to five.

The repeated characterization of women’s ‘activities’—both housework and childcare—as unproductive and “not socially useful,” in addition to the lack of wages for such work, consolidated the hierarchy of formal market wage-labor over Cuban women’s other material activities. The lack of a materialist analysis of domestic labor and childcare limited the Cuban government to a superficial critique of time constraints that contribute so significantly to gender inequities.

### *Political Leadership*

Although Lenin’s views structured the account of women’s liberation articulated by the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, there were some arenas in which the revolution moved beyond any positions held by Lenin and his antecedents. In particular, the PCC Thesis called attention to the inclusion of women in leadership positions, the need to develop a specific focus on young women, and the potential of maternal self-abnegation as a force in the revolution’s success.

The 1975 Thesis discussed the lack of women in administrative and political leadership positions. Although it did not develop strong arguments about why women ought to hold these positions beyond general statements about equality within socialism, the Thesis did mention women’s experience working with the mass organizations (such as the FMC itself) and their intimate knowledge of community problems as resources for socialism. (PCC 1975, 90).

The FMC documents added concrete details about the kinds of leadership women should assume and how leadership transformation might take place. In addition to encouraging women to enter the formal labor market, the leaders of Cuba's revolution emphasized that women possessed political capacities that could be harnessed for the well-being of communities, culture, households, and the state. The FMC suggested that women's politics exhibited a more local, particular character than men's politics due to women's social and material locations. Home and community were sites that might benefit from the revolutionary leadership of Cuban women. "The housewife, due to her permanence in the home and in the vicinity [neighborhood], has the possibility of influencing through her example and political work the development of social life" (FMC 1975, 159).

Women were envisioned as something of a volunteer civil service within the Cuban Revolution. Operating at the local level, women could interpret policy goals, and educate their friends and neighbors about revolutionary programs and guarantees of the Constitution. Although the local interpretations provided by women remained subject to review by the government, they could provide the will and the labor to effectuate policies planned elsewhere by others. Although the effective capacity to guide or direct the formulation of public policies remained in the hands of the male leaders of the revolution, women were entrusted to implement policies at the local level, a role crucial to the success of the revolution.

Women did not, however, transparently enact elite directives as if they were a simple instrument of the state. Women dramatically augmented the government's and their own power. In order for the government to accomplish policy outcomes, to bridge the chasm between centralized political will and grassroots action, the Party and the FMC asked women to generate and sustain more formal social networks and

to stifle and redirect disobedience in accord with the will of central policymakers. Some women were supported in gaining formal leadership posts with responsibility and power, but most women worked more subtly to influence a constituency vital to the future—children and youth. Within their communities, women worked to “strengthen the relation between the mother and the Day-Care Centers, the schools, the Union of Cuban Pioneers [Communist Party for Youth] and the youth organizations” (FMC 1975, 208). Equal stress was placed on the education and regulation of the young. “There are numerous activities that women should perform in the community, such as combatant mother for education [i.e., truant officer plus other responsibilities]...participating devotedly and patiently in work with small children who present conduct problems, or contributing to safeguard people’s health” (FMC 1975, 159).

In harnessing women’s labor for particular revolutionary political ends, the Cuban state actively relied on and deployed unpaid women to socialize new and current generations to emerging political structures, allowing some women to acquire prestige and power through such work (Pertierra 2008). Elite policymakers did not wish women to merely hold society together, however, but to do so in new and particular forms. In 1975, the year the PCC circulated its Thesis on Women’s Equality, Cuba incorporated a new Family Code. According to Bengelsdorf and Stubbs, the majority of scholarship concerned with the 1975 Family Code construes the law as another step in a series leading steadily towards gender equity in Cuba. Taking issue with this interpretation, Bengelsdorf and Stubbs suggest that the 1975 Code returned to an ideal “which had dissipated in the first decade of the revolution,” the family as “the major arena of child socialization.” Moreover, the 1975 Family code prescribed the nuclear family as the ideal family formation, a form that did not

represent and had never represented the reality of families in Cuba (1992, 155–56). The FMC's 1975 Congress declared that the family was held together by “revolutionary principles and love” between man and woman as a “natural nucleus in the development of society” (FMC 1975, 206–07). Within this nuclear family, socialism would be lovingly reproduced: “The couple in socialism constitutes the seed of the family, society's fundamental cell” (FMC 1975, 185).

[[Matanzas]]

### *Young Women*

As a new theme within the arena of gender equity, the 1975 Thesis made a separate analysis of young women. The first reason to do so, according to the Thesis, was that young women were more often involved in the care of young children and that this must be taken into account when trying to design social measures that will increase their attachment to the formal labor market. In addition, the Thesis asserted that the revolution had already invested “considerable resources in educating” these young women and extra effort must be taken to ensure that they returned this investment back to the people.

The nature of this special investment was not altogether clear. At the time the Thesis was written in 1975, the revolution had been incrementally pushing the construction of daycare centers for fifteen years, since the very first year of the Revolution (UNICEF 2001, 50). Assuming that publicly supported childcare facilities were designed for children from birth to 5 years of age, then the special investment might refer to the considerable resources devoted to boys and girls in public childcare. But that would not explain why girls would require “extra effort” to ensure a return on the investment. Only if it is assumed that the presence of early childhood education facilities will supplant the unwaged work women do in childrearing does a specter

arise of women failing to make adequate return on the state's investment by caring for and raising other children.

The revolution also made substantial efforts to make literacy, education, graduation, and scholarship equally accessible to young women and young men. But access to education can coexist with gender segregated work forces and gendered divisions of labor in the home, which structure gendered forms of unemployment. If someone is unemployed and literally does nothing, then the state's investment in that person's education may not be repaid. But Cuban women who were not participating in the formal labor force did not conform to such a hypothetical nonworker. Cuban women overwhelmingly participated in informal, unpaid labor within families and communities—labor that unquestionably benefitted the Cuban people. Whether through subsistence gardening, childcare, domestic work, odd jobs, food preparation, or community building, women were contributing actively to the nation. At the same time as the Thesis appeared to recognize the important foundational work done by young women—as well as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, etc.—that allowed those cared for to receive further education, it took that recognition away. Just as quickly, the Thesis shifts to a conception of women's work as unproductive drudgery, an obstacle to real work, or indeed a failure to return the state's investment in them.

The “young woman who neither works nor studies” was a prime target for the public policies of the Cuban state even while women 20-24 years of age had the highest rate of labor force participation among all women in 1970 at 25.2 percent (Pavón 1975, Cuadro 8). She was to be incorporated into the mass organizations in order to break down the ideological barriers that prevented her from working for society. The mass organizations were to guide her in the direction of enrolling in

“technological studies and in courses on public health and in the formation of teachers” (FMC 1975, 189). She was thus to fill the new positions opened up by a socialist state investing in public welfare and transfer her unrecognized and erased private welfare provisionary role (traditional Cuban woman) to a “new” socialized welfare provisionary role (revolutionary Cuban woman). Not only would this admittedly multiply the beneficiaries and benefits of her work, it would also promote the professionalization, unionization, proletarianization, and remuneration of the young woman worker herself.

Additionally, when the FMC discussed young women in 1974, it was one of the few times the official Cuban documents on gender equity recognized grandmothers’ role in childcare. Grandmothers were noted as a potential strategic point to leverage (young) mothers out of the home and into the workforce. The FMC document declared, “grandmothers... have always played a very important role contributing to the incorporation of their children in work which is socially useful” (FMC 1975, 162). That is to say, grandmothers were to be relied upon to take care of the “not socially useful” work so that mothers could return to the productivity of the formal marketplace.

Young women were the first to have benefited throughout their lives from the gender equity changes implemented through the revolution. As such, the PCC suggested that they should repay the social investment they had received. However, beyond the maximum maternity leave (18 months counting pre- and post-partum leave), time women devoted to domestic labor outside of the formal labor market was constructed as “receiv[ing] without giving anything in return” (PCC 1975, 96). The PCC did not consider young women’s education of her extended family, her

construction of social networks, or her reproduction of the community valuable enough to “repay” the social debt she owed.

### *Maternal Abnegation*

Cuba grafted another innovation onto Lenin’s formula of mass organizations united in a common goal, an innovation that paid deference to, and reinforced, the Cuban socio-cultural maternal role. Rather than the forms of androgyny associated with labor in the USSR or China, Cuba pushed women to become public in a feminine way—essentially, to become mothers to the nation. The FMC was confident that its members would help to realize the goals of the revolution with their “inexhaustible enthusiasm and abnegation” (FMC 1962, 16). The Resolutions of the PCC following the 1975 Thesis quoted and reiterated Fidel Castro’s 1974 pronouncement during the *II Congreso FMC* that “*la abnegación*” was one of the virtues that represented the revolutionary quality of Cuban women (PCC 1978). Abnegation is a peculiar word, strongly associated with women’s work and the maternal role in its related meanings of self-denial and self-sacrifice for the good of others. Celebrating these maternal traits became a hallmark of the FMC. At its very first *Congreso* in 1962, the FMC placed Social Services and Volunteer Labor at the heart its mission (FMC 1962, 55). Confirming this maternal sensibility, the *Federadas* [members of the FMC] declared that they valued their role in the “formation of new generations” (FMC 1984, 6).

In celebrating women’s maternal role, the FMC followed practices deeply entrenched in the tradition of “republican motherhood” associated with the revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and with nationalism in the twentieth century. But in contrast to precedents that restricted women to the private sphere—envisioning mothering as women’s sole political role, Cuba advanced a socialist agenda that sought to incorporate women within the formal economy as the primary strategy of

liberation, while celebrating maternal abnegation as a cultural value. According to the official documents of the revolution reviewed in this chapter, women were consigned to the labor force for the good of economic development and praised for their double duty in the home and their triple shift of labor in the voluntary sector. The revolutionary woman was expected to engage in three times the labor as her male counterpart, taking solace in the virtue of self-sacrifice. As the official rhetoric celebrated this vision of gender equality, Cuban women continued to struggle with thoroughly inequitable personal responsibilities and social relations. Chapter 3 advances a sustained critique of the inequities embodied within this vision of women's emancipation.



### *Ch. 3. Flaws in the Socialist Vision of Women's Emancipation in Cuba*

Cuba's revolutionary leadership held certain ideas about women's liberation inspired by socialists including Lenin and Engels. In this chapter, I will argue that these ideas suffer from two fatal flaws that directly and powerfully erase the potential for a more 'progressive union' between socialism and feminism (Hartmann 1981). The vision of women's emancipation failed to escape its moorings in a "narrow production fetishism" (Cleaver 1984, xxvi) and it failed to give women voice in naming their own oppression and control over their own liberation.

#### **Liberation Through Production**

The first fatal flaw of the Cuban socialist-feminist vision stemmed from its reliance on industrial and formal market production as the essence of the liberatory project. All women had to do to achieve emancipation was join the wage-labor force. It did not matter *where* she was incorporated into production, *how* she was remunerated for her production, or if she *controlled* production—whether at the level of the firm or in terms of her control of society's investments (Schweickart 2011). Even in 2009, with Cuba's female formal market labor force participation at 60.2%, surpassing that of the United States (59.5%), the FMC told its members that "even when appreciating the gains made, they must continue promoting the incorporation of women into every organization and in every part of the country" (FMC 2009, 51). This narrow conception of liberation made it impossible to see the factors constraining women's lives, to analyze the economics of the private sphere, or to grasp the import of feminist political economy that had challenged productionist models of emancipation.

### Production is Liberation

Cuba's official policy concerning the problems facing the revolution, and the appropriate solutions were firmly Marxist-Leninist. Liberation in Cuba was premised upon a conception of the industrial proletariat (workers) and their ownership of the fundamental means of production through the organs of the state. Industrial production was imagined as the dominant fulcrum of change, a single means by which the revolution melded the liberation of workers, peasants, and women as different facets of the same project.

With respect to women, the abstract means to their liberation was to overthrow the function of capital within capitalism, the extraction of surplus value from industrial workers. The concrete means was to transform bodies previously excluded from the industrial labor force into new modes of productive activity, i.e., press women into formal market production.<sup>29</sup> As noted in the last chapter, the PCC identified housework as *the* problem that kept women from productive labor in the formal market. According to the Communist Party of Cuba, women were spending inordinate amounts of time within the home, in unproductive labor. The PCC's sought to change this by incorporating women into "*trabajo socialmente útil*" [socially useful work] (PCC 1978). This analysis was not new.

Lenin wrote these words a half-century earlier in "A Great Beginning" (1919). Woman "wastes her labour on barbarously *unproductive*...petty housekeeping [of the kitchen and nursery]" (Lenin 1984, 64, italics added). Yet, there is no inherent reason to assume that women's lack of "productive labor" contributes to their oppression. As

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<sup>29</sup> The latest work by feminist labor historians notes that women were present in the industrial labor force in the 1830s and 1840s, then forced out by complex alliances of capitalists and unions, who agreed to negotiate about a "family wage." This was an intentional project. I do not intend to suggest that women were not a key part of the proletariat, however, it should be noted that in 1953, 84.1 percent of Cuban men's principal economic activity was in the formal labor force, 22.5 percent for women. Further, only 13.7 percent of women worked for pay in 1953 (ONE 1953, Tabla 43, 50, 54).

Marxists know quite well, *productivity* has no intrinsic relationship to social reward or political control—it is the *unproductive* master, lord, capitalist, etc. who possesses the most economic and political power. Cuban women's lack of formal labor market participation and productivity was not fundamentally an issue of gender equity but was, more importantly, an issue of Cuba's chrematistic production within the domestic and global economy.

Although participation in commodity production, and ownership of the means thereof, is a rich theoretical space from which to begin a Marxian project, it is in the end a more narrow and circumscribed solution than Marx's original dream—the end of exploitation.<sup>30</sup> Further, even the end of exploitation is not a complete picture of liberation or social justice. When the larger goal of social justice is taken into account, the gender equity solutions proposed in Cuba fall doubly short.

Maxine Molyneux has argued that gender equity in Cuba fell short, coming second to formal marketplace production, because Cuban socialist-feminism stemmed from a few key assumptions, one of which was that mature socialism required a certain development of productive forces not yet reached (Molyneux 1985b, 58–59). This was borrowed from earlier socialists such as Engels, Bebel, and Lenin, who believed in a vision of the economy that would incorporate every adult into the formal marketplace of commodity production. The equality of men and women was to be solved by ensuring equal liability to productive labor within a fairly narrow construction of productive activity within a solidly chrematistic political economy.

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<sup>30</sup> The inability to recognize the likely lack of concordance among them was partially generated by the post-Marx hagiographic qualities of socialist theorizing that could only counter bibliophiles of a new testament against the old order of Marxists. This inability was also due in part to a practice shared by both Marx and many of his followers, of projecting a society without a state, without legal institutions, and 'beyond rights' (Cunningham 1987, 96, 128). This had the obvious advantages, and disadvantages, of concentrating energies on the rather concrete problem of the present economic mode of production instead of the looming complexities of institutions, monitors, checks, balances, legislatures, local government, individual autonomy, social need, minorities, etc. that currently beset the modern nation-state and presumably would require reckoning by any replacement.

Beyond the power of Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, the leaders of the Cuban revolution came of age in the era of development economics, at a time when modernization was deemed the solution to all modes of “underdevelopment” and “maldevelopment” and modernization was understood to entail industrialization and urbanization.

As political subjects, Cuba’s revolutionary leaders possessed the means of their own liberation—armed insurrection. But to achieve the full scope of the revolution they envisioned, they had to capture the energies and allegiance of Cuban nationals, only a small proportion of whom conformed to the Marxist conception of the proletariat. Lenin had already recognized that peasants and women required different treatment than that which was appropriate for recruiting the German proletariat, but his answer was to efface the complexities of difference by adding peasants and women to his concept of the proletariat. Although women in Lenin’s Russia and Castro’s Cuba faced the insults and injuries of life under the dominion of petty despots within the household, Castro following Lenin swept away the lived materiality of women, replacing the gender struggle with a new universal commodity-producing worker.

It is for this reason that Lenin so uncritically blasted the evils of the home, “because *petty housework* crushes, strangles, stultifies and degrades her, chains her to the kitchen and the nursery, and she wastes her labour on barbarously unproductive, petty, nerve-racking, stultifying and crushing drudgery” (Lenin 1970, 109). Ignoring the complexity of women’s unwaged labor and the double burdens associated with combining waged and unwaged work, socialist revolutionaries neglected to subject the economics of the private sphere to materialist analysis. Thus they missed not only the dynamics of the domestic economy, but also the perception that the home may be

a source of power, political education, and moral and economic values for women and men (Buhle 1981, 134).

Focused primarily on issues pertaining to economic development, the needs of the state made it a simple matter to subsume women under the demand for the equal liability of all to formally productive wage-labor. Lenin's language afforded them a means to suggest that in recruiting women to the formal sector, the Cuban Revolution would foster women's real interests, as well as the government's. The national director of Cuba's *Círculos Infantiles* (Daycare Centers), Clementina Serra, wrote in 1969, "Women who are tied down by housework...lose contact with life itself...[and] reduce their scope of interest to the solution of never-ending daily needs. In this way, they daily narrow their vital areas, hold back their development and *exchange living for routine vegetating*" (Leiner 1974, 15; orig. C. Serra 1969, 8–10, italics added).

To shape women's desires in accordance with the Party's conception of liberation through production, housework was repeatedly attacked as an impediment to the promotion of economic development and women's liberation. The introduction to the *III Congreso* (1984) declared that "economic development is needed for objective factors to promote women's full participation" in Cuban society. This same document later made reference to the authoritative text on the Woman Question in Cuba, the PCC's "Thesis on the Full Exercise of Women's Equality," which declared that there were only two means to liberate women: economic development and eliminating old prejudices (FMC 1984, 7, 39). Until the *VI Congreso* (1995), official FMC documents exhibited only the faintest consideration of women's work as worthwhile. As noted in the last chapter, this belated recognition of the worth of women's work outside the formal market was articulated in the midst of the sharp economic depression of Cuba's formal labor market known as the Special Period

(1990-2004). Although this was not the first time the FMC had recognized “*la doble carga*” (the double shift), it was the first time such work was understood as women’s *tradicional aporte invisible* (traditional invisible contribution) (FMC 1995b, 14, 30). This belated nod to women’s work hinted that women’s traditional work in Cuba was indeed work, and that its social relationships exceeded the standard PCC analysis, but it occurred a moment when the Cuban formal marketplace was glutted, and workers were being laid off in great numbers. Within these changing economic conditions, the FMC rhetoric concerning the importance of non-waged contributions to society appears suspiciously opportunistic—more closely allied with China’s campaign to persuade women recently laid off from closing state-owned enterprises that they preferred life in the private sphere. By and large, the FMC concurred in the narrow construction of productive activity articulated by the PCC. At no point did they develop an argument that Cuban women’s traditional work was a necessary part of all societies—material activity responding to real human needs—or that it is productive, beneficial, and important, or that it must be a central part of societies that aspire to socialism.

### ***A Certain Development of Productive Forces***

While the recognition of “objective conditions” necessary to integrate women into the formal productive economy, and away from drudgery, was flawed by its reliance on a superficial critique of gendered time constraints, the very presupposition that mature socialism required a certain development of productive forces not yet reached in order to free women’s time was itself productionist. The Party followed Engels in supposing that the economy might develop to a point where private housework and childcare might be eliminated. As Engels notes, the “first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public

industry, and this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished” (Engels 1972, 137–38). “Public industry” in this construal is “modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit the employment of female labor over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends toward ending private domestic labor by changing it more and more into a public industry” (Engels 1972, 221).

The 1975 Thesis identified some “Material Solutions for the Problems of Working Families,” such as day-care centers, boarding schools, and workers’ canteens. Although not necessary for gender equity, these make perfect sense within the parameters of the Thesis. They relieve many women from doing childcare, education, and food preparation and simultaneously pay a salary to those who perform these tasks for society. Further, the Thesis mentioned housework appliances such as washers, food processors, and sewing machines intended to lessen the hours required for housework, thereby making housework more efficient. The PCC also proposed “special hours...of stores ... [as well as] gynecological, obstetrical, and pediatric appointments” or “pre-made-up grocery orders” to accommodate working women (1975, 85).

The problem with such ameliorations of individual women’s burdens, however, is that they do not change the economic or political relationships inside the household—those grounded in gender-based divisions of labor. Instead, these ameliorative strategies offer women extra time, which the government presumes will be used for “real” economic production within a wage-labor system.

### ***Ideology and Women’s Liberation***

The axiom that women’s work outside the formal market is unproductive and a peripheral element of social, economic, and political life necessarily reduced the

force of socialism's liberatory potential. Even more disconcerting was the insistence that the means to women's liberation entailed the elimination of old prejudices and ideological change in general. The excessive focus on a narrow conception of production had a corollary—a repeated failure to countenance economic motives and solutions outside the industrial sector and a failure to engage in a serious and sustained gender analysis of material activity in Cuba. Rather than analyze the economics of gendered divisions of labor, the PCC focused on ideology as the source of all ills and obstacles (FMC 1984, 166, 1987, 72–73, 1995b, 111, 1995c, 29; PCC 1975).

Although the PCC claimed to espouse Marxist-Leninist principles and theory as the key to women's liberation and socialist liberation, their adherence to the tenets of Marxism tenets was selective. They actively embraced. 'unity' (democratic-centralism), but, with respect to persistent gender inequity, they devoted no time to a materialist analysis. Considering ideology as the main problem to overcome has led to strange results. The most recent FMC Congress devoted considerable energy to undermining sexist songs rather than investigating and eliminating the material relationships that allow songs to be sexist in the first place (FMC 2009, 105).

Little had changed from three decades earlier, when the Communist Party clearly stated the fundamentals of the process to achieve gender equality. Objective conditions were associated with a narrow focus on economic development, while the PCC identified ideological struggle as the solution to a host of other problems.

Thus, it is the task of the Party and its members—at the same time that they foster the objective conditions [economic development] for the growing integration of women into economic, social, and political life—to carry



forward in all spheres of national life an ideological effort designed to eliminate the holdovers of the old society [prejudices], seeing to it that all the people take part in this struggle. (PCC 1975, 75)

### *An Empty Household*

Leaders of the Cuban revolution, like contemporary advocates of neoclassical economics, deny the existence of any significant economic relationships and practices within the household. Equipped with an analytical frame tied to industrial production, the FMC and the PCC never targeted material mechanisms—human sensuous activity—to explain and change gender oppression. The notion that prejudices are separable from material reality has led to an inversion of materialist methodology in Cuba. When analyzing the plight of the *proletariat*, socialist diagnoses of and solutions to inequality and exploitation have never been primarily concerned with rectifying the ideology consequent to exploitation. Instead, socialists have focused on removing exploitation as the sufficient cause and root of the power of ideology. In the case of gender oppression, Cuban socialists have reversed this materialist method. Following Lenin and other like-minded Marxists, Cuban socialists place the condition of women outside materialism.

The Federation of Cuban Women suggested in 1995, for example, that Cubans must not “enthron[e] atavisms and prejudices under the guise of “aiding and assisting” [*apoyar y ayudar*] mothers by not assigning them a leadership responsibility in order not to overburden her” (FMC 1995c, 13). The FMC is quite right that women gain nothing when they are omitted from positions of power and responsibility on the grounds that such opportunities would overburden them. It is just as foolish, however, to suggest that women can lead on the same terms as men while ignoring the material facts of women’s “indispensable,” invisible work. It is absolutely true that

men *should* help at home and women *should* be political leaders. But neither gender can do what they should while the old material facts and mechanisms of gendered divisions of labor remain in place. It is a materialist truism that ought follows is, but the official Revolutionary position on gender equity was just the opposite, that what is depends upon what should be.

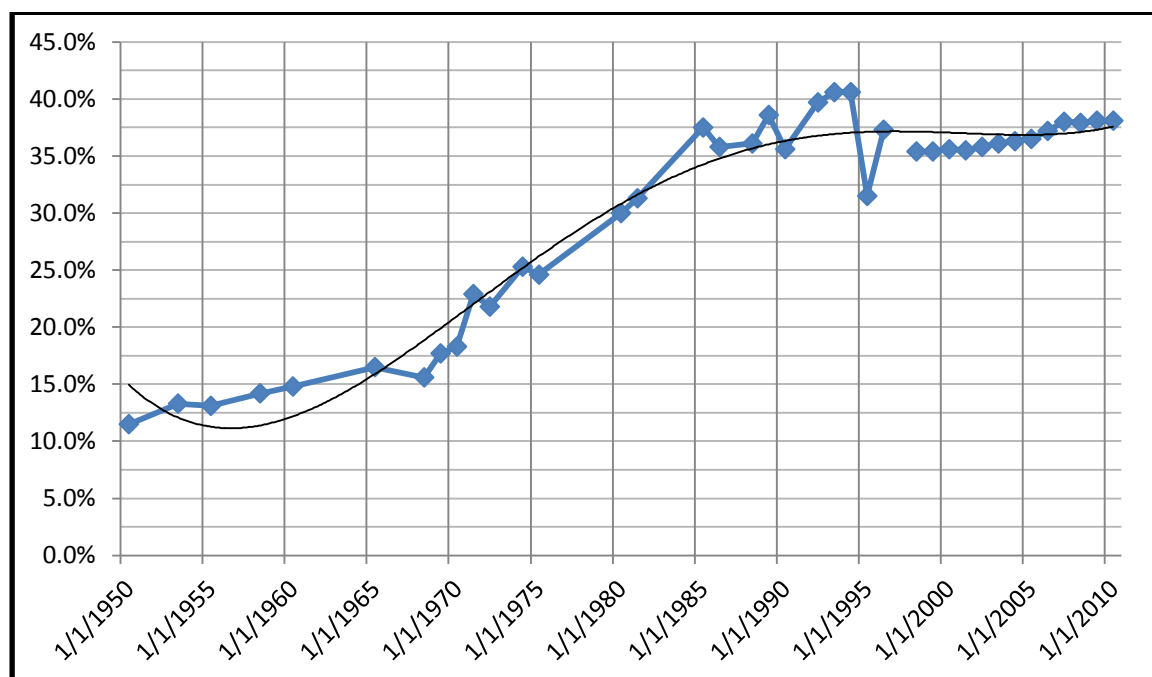
Within Cuba's official policies, far too much of what has hindered women's full equality was labeled "subjective." This placed women's and men's activities within a frame of will, *voluntad*, and choice, disconnected from various forms of discrimination, rational bargaining, or transactions. Ultimately, this squarely aligned the Communist Party's Thesis with traditional neoclassical economics. It disingenuously proposed that what has traditionally been Cuban women's work can take care of itself even when women are working full-time in the waged labor force. Or equally optimistically, it is assumed that the burden of domestic labor can be equitably divided among women and men simply through hortatory measures. Ignoring obvious and subtle material levers of human activity, these idealistic notions tie gender equity to changing "prejudices," applying "discipline," and the exhortations that other family members *could* do housework and that childcare *should* be shared.

### **Forgotten Alternatives**

Cuba, an island nation in the Caribbean, somewhat curiously touted Marxist-Leninist theory designed in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia for a land mass, nation, and economy wholly alien to Cuba's historic specificity. One of the most telling differences for gender equity that existed during Lenin's era and Cuba's implementation of his theories was the composition of the workforce itself. At the outset of the First World War, Russian women already composed one-third of the workforce; they comprised half the labor force by 1917 (Stites 1978, 287). This

staggering increase may be due in part to military conscription and in part to the decimating “demographic earthquake,” the tragic loss of 16 million lives between 1914-21 stemming from “World War I, the Civil War, epidemics, and famine” (Lewin 1985, 210). This increase in women’s labor force participation, however, was not merely the result of removing men from the formal labor market; it also stemmed from adding women to it. The number of women participating in the formal workforce rose 38.8% between 1914 and 1917 (Stites 1978, 287). Cuba thus adopted policies originating in a society in which the formal market labor force already comprised of 50% women. Yet the PCC leaders applied these policies to a society where women constituted only 14% of the formal market labor force (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

**Figure 3.1: Women as a Percentage of Persons Employed in Cuban Formal Market: Selected Years, 1950-2010<sup>31</sup>**



In spite of these important differences, some Russians proffered alternative solutions to Lenin's New Economic Policy of 1921 and his policies to achieve women's liberation, policies which may have been better suited to the actual conditions of both Russian and Cuban women. Of particular note in this regard is Alexandra Kollontai, Russian protégé of Clara Zetkin. She argued that the state ought to be responsible in some significant measure for health care, education, and even child rearing (Freedman 2002, 61). While she was in government and women were independently organized within the Communist Party, she was even able to push the

<sup>31</sup> Stone 1981, 88; Catus-Cervera. *Patrones Reproductivos*. 1997, 3 (Table 1); Perfil Estadística: 141, <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/enfoquegenero/mujer/mujer.pdf>; Perfil Estadística: 12, <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/enfoquegenero/mujer/mujer.pdf>; 2005 Anuario Estadístico: VI. Workforce and Salaries.pdf, VI.9; 2006 Anuario Estadístico: VI. Workforce and Salaries.pdf, VI.9; 2007 Anuario Estadístico: 7.9; ONE 2009, 1-2 (Mujeres y Empleo); 2008 Anuario Estadístico, 7.9 Empleo y Salarios; Caram Leon 2007, 10 (Empoderamiento Femenino en Cuba: Criterios para su Análisis en las Cooperativas); Lewis et al. 1977. *Four Women*. p. xviii [1958,1968]; FMC 1995. *Realidades y Desafíos*, 13; ONE, 2011, *Mujeres y Hombres*, Fig. 3.1; 2010 Anuario Estadístico, fig. 7.1

party toward ending “legal restrictions on sexual behavior, including homosexuality and abortion, preventing women’s jobs from being given to returning soldiers (they were allocated on the basis of need rather than sex), [as well as] providing communal restaurants, laundries, and childcare” (Holmstrom 2002, 4). Kollontai also suggested at first that the state subsidize mothers by paying them alimony rather than seeking out the fathers in futility—a somewhat fruitless task still undertaken by Cuba’s FMC. Noting the slower pace of the New Economic Policy, she shifted her support from direct alimony to each mother in favor of a General Insurance Fund to provide crèches as well as support for single mothers unable to work (Farnsworth 1976, 302–03). This last idea is similar to Cuban policy with one significant difference to be discussed later: the *entire adult working population* would contribute to Kollontai’s General Insurance Fund as opposed to the FMC’s policy of *autofinanciamiento* (providing for its whole budget from only its members’ dues, i.e., dues paid by Cuban women only). Despite the rich potential of her revolutionary vision, Lenin dissolved Kollontai’s left-wing faction of the Party, ensuring that her influence in Russia and beyond was quite limited.

Cuba adopted Marxist-Leninist policies not simply from ideological affinity, but in large part because Soviet subsidies to the Cuban economy totaled 21% of Cuba’s GNP (Gershman and Gutierrez 2009, 36). To choose policy prescriptions from a discredited Russian revolutionary might have risked the economic support vital to the revolution. Kollontai’s policies were discredited precisely because her focus on gender was radical enough to challenge a conception of women’s liberation grounded in industrial production alone.

The Soviet subsidy disappeared in 1989, launching Cuba into a full economic depression, which simultaneously created the political space for reform. Three

decades after the Cuban Revolution had initiated gender equity policies, new options were available for adoption championed by democratic socialist states such as Sweden. In January 1974, thirteen months before Cuba passed its renowned Family Code, Sweden officially changed its maternity leave policy to a six-month paid parental leave policy, funded at 90% of the worker's wages. Over the next two decades, the length of leave was gradually increased to twelve months as the wage replacement level dropped to its current 80%. Even at the level of 80% of wage replacement, half of fathers took no parental leave at all before 1995, when a new law earmarked one non-transferable month for the father. Responding to the fact that Swedish women were using 90-98% of parental leave, the new law specifically set out to incorporate fathers into the provision of care for newborn and adopted children. In 2002, the earmark for fathers was increased to two months. Since 1995, fathers' share of leave has increased steadily to 17-20%, or 2.3 months in instances where all 13 months of leave are used. Four out of five Swedish fathers now take some parental leave (Duvander, Ferrarini, and Thalberg 2005, 8–12). To encourage more childbearing, Sweden has increased its parental leave in recent years; parents are now eligible for 16 months of leave (Försäkringskassan 2012).

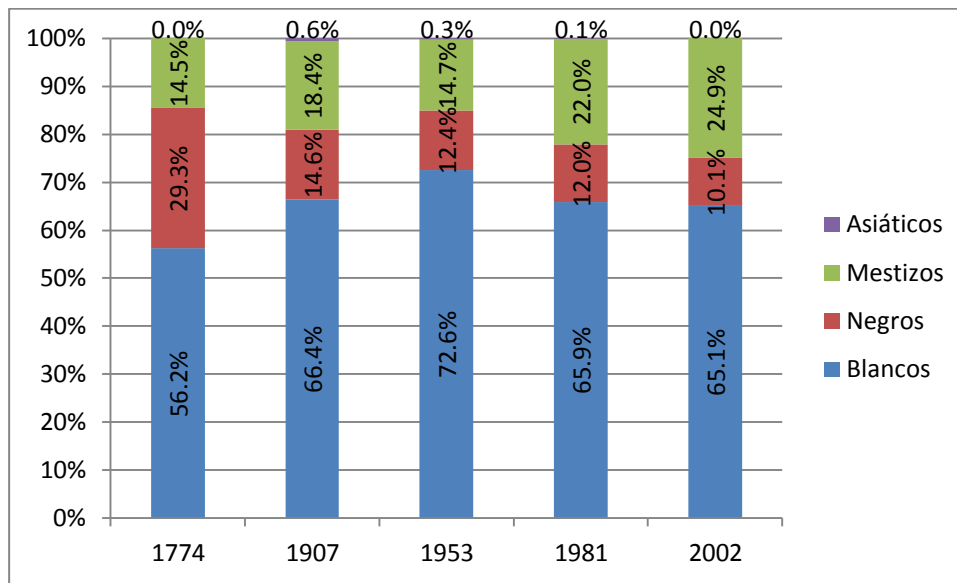
Although the Cuban Communist Party could find new models for more egalitarian parenting in the 1990s, the Special Period (1990-2004) was a time of severe economic depression, which constrained the Party's ability to remunerate previously invisible, unpaid labor. Yet, as the Special Period drew to a close, Cuba passed new legislation in this area, the August 2003 Maternity Law for Working Women. Sweden's experiment had shown that two decades of parental leave from 1974 to 1995, in name only, had few results; whereas the material benefits provided in the 1995 earmarks had immediate and impressive effects. Before introducing the

non-transferable month in 1995, Sweden had poured considerable sums of money into public advertising campaigns to promote fatherhood to no avail (Bennhold 2010). In spite of this seemingly straightforward evidence, Cuba did not include men as caregivers in its 2003 law, insisting instead that ideological factors remained the significant barrier to women's liberation.

### **The Present Absence: Race and Class Analysis in Cuba**

Classical Marxist doctrine posits families within the working class as more or less undifferentiated with respect to race, age, ethnicity or religion. Developed during the same era that European scholars were inventing the “science” of race, particularly in Britain, France, and Germany, Marxists succumbed to the legitimating effects of the new science, which accredited rather than leveled a critical eye at racial hierarchies. Indeed, few Marxists explored the effects of European constructions of racial difference on practices of colonization until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Cuba, the processes and effects of racialization in the context of colonization were unmistakable.

Cuba is a country, unlike much like the rest of Latin America, with something other than roughly equal proportions of its population designated Black, White, and Mestizo (or Mulato)—roughly two-thirds of Cubans are White according to the Census (see Figure 3.2). Cuba's indigenous population was almost entirely eradicated with the Spanish invasion and its associated warfare, brutal labor practices, and introduction of disease, which decimated the Guanahatabeyes, Ciboneyes, and Taínos (Suchlicki 1997, 11).

**Figure 3.2: Ethnic Composition in Cuba: Selected Years, 1774-2002**

Cuba's multiracial society bears the marks of a colonial history, characterized by virulent racist practices under Spanish rule. The Spanish transformed Cuba's social, legal, economic, and political landscape. Native-born Cubans of Spanish descent sought independence during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This movement continued through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, interrupted by short periods of U.S. rule. During these periods, harmful racializations did not abate as the U.S. exacerbated racial hierarchies, creating a Rural Guard (internal military) in Cuba along *de facto* strict racial lines by using *de jure* "neutral" economic factors (Klepak 2005, 218–19). During the Republican Era (1900-40), when Cubans of Spanish-descent held formal sovereignty, Cuba continued the systemic racial violence of the colonial era, occasionally under "softer" personal terms. Cubans of Spanish-descent were responsible for substantial expulsions of "foreign" Black workers during the 1930s using economic crisis and the workers' precarious socio-legal status as intermittent seasonal workers from nearby islands to legitimate their removal (Farber 2006, 17).



With the inauguration of the revolution, however, race became a present absence—visible but unacknowledged. The tenets of socialist equality officially obviated racial hierarchy. And many Cubans--Whites and Blacks--concur that the revolution eliminated racism and racial prejudice (McGarrity 1992, 196). The absence of racism is a belief shared equally by elites and the populace, a belief that has resulted in the elimination of racial classifications from government studies. Indeed, it is difficult to find specialized and detailed sociological data on Cuba that is disaggregated by race (Albizu-Campos Espiñeira 2005, 1; McGarrity 1992, 196–97) . The problem is not that the data does not exist. Cuba has recorded race in over thirty surveys in the last three decades covering subjects as diverse as fertility, migration, health, work, income, and aging (ONE 2009e, 2). Yet, in its 1970 Census, for example, the National Office of Statistics (ONE) gathered but did not process, analyze, or publish racially disaggregated data (ONE 2009e, 2). The absence of demographic data makes it difficult to speak authoritatively on the subject of race in Cuba.

Although the intentional refusal to analyze race could be construed as an overcorrection to the race-obsession of regimes that count, control, pathologize, produce, and reproduce the social meanings of race, several other factors are relevant to Cuba's construction of itself as a raceless society. Most Cubans who left in the first wave of emigration in the early 1960s were White upper-class or White middle-class professionals (Burwell 2004, 87–88). By default, this affected the racial demographics of those remaining in Cuba, opening opportunities for increasing numbers of Blacks with respect to income, leadership, housing, status, education and occupation. In addition, the military has played an exaggerated role in Cuban politics since the late 1800s, and continues to play an equally exaggerated role in the Cuban

economy today. In contrast to the Republican Era's near total racial segregation of officers and infantry up to Batista's dictatorship, the revolution incorporated Blacks and Mestizos in military leadership, achieving near parity with their proportion of the Cuban population (Klepak 2005, 218–19). These two factors have greatly dampened institutional racism in Cuba. Persons of color have made dramatic gains through revolutionary policies—and Cuban women of color are very well represented within the FMC leadership (FMC 2009, 16).

Nevertheless, race still matters. There are notable economic distinctions, suggesting that Blacks are overrepresented in the formal labor force. In 1981, for example, when White and Mestizo rates of economic activity hovered near 52.0%, economic activity among Blacks was 55.6% (Catasús Cervera 1997, 4–5). In 1995, 38.7% of women were in the labor force, including 37.3% of White women, 37.4% of Mestiza women, and 47.8% of Black women (Catasús Cervera 1997, 10). Household size and composition also differ by race. In 1981 Cubans of Asian-ancestry, who comprised only 0.1% of the population, had the highest rate of one-person households; Whites and Mestizos tended to live in households of four persons; Blacks populated households of seven persons or more (Catasús Cervera 1997, 4–5). White women in Cuba are more likely to be married than Black women: in 1995, 46% of White women were married (23.1% of whom remained in their first consensual union) compared to 37% of Black women (21% of whom have never divorced) and 32% for Mestizas (31% of whom remain with their first spouse). The proportion of women who have divorced is highest among Black women, who are also most likely to be heads-of-household: 43.8% of Black households are headed by women; 37.2% of Mestizo households are headed by women; and 33.5% of White household are headed by women. Thus almost one third 30.7% ) of Black women shoulder the

responsibilities of household support without a partner, compared to a quarter (25.5%) of Mestiza women and 23.3% of White women (Catasús Cervera 1997, 4–5).

Small differences exist with respect to reproduction as well. In 1981, although all Cuban women were bearing fewer children than “replacement” levels, White women on average bore 1.77 children, Black women bore 1.88 children, and Mestizo women gave birth to 1.99 children. By 1987, these numbers converged for women in the first five years of their first union (the time of greatest fecundity, demographically speaking), with a difference of only 0.17 births between White and Black women and Mestizo women falling in the middle of these two groups. To put these figures in context of claims about the absence of race in Cuba, gaps this small are seldom seen when studying race and ethnicity in the rest of the world (Catasús Cervera 1997, 4–5). The infant mortality rate, however, suggests that full equality remains elusive. Blacks constituted roughly 36% of the Cuban population in 2003, but they accounted for 42.0% of infant mortality (Albizu-Campos Espiñeira 2005, 5). The means and methods of controlling births differ by race as well. The highest levels of abortion exist among urban Black women under the age of 25 (Catasús Cervera 1997, 6).

Longevity is also affected by race. In 2002, 16.1% of Whites were 60 years or older, compared to only 12% of Blacks and Mestizos, a gap that has been growing since 1953 (ONE 2009e, 3). The average life expectancy for Whites remains 1.1 year longer at 76.9 than for non-Whites (Albizu-Campos Espiñeira 2005, 21 (Cuadro 4)).

Cuba’s official doctrine suggests that race and class issues have been eliminated by the revolution. Yet, political and economic structures and individual life prospects continue to reflect these hierarchies of difference. Black women’s higher rates of infant mortality, mortality, economic participation, divorce, and head-of-household status effect their political and economic position in Cuba. Whether the

hardships Black women experience are attributed to rural concentration, occupational segregation, or simply “prejudice,” race remains a vector of power in Cuba that Marxist-Leninist tradition provides no means to address. This version of Marxism thus fails as a total theory because women’s oppression, racial oppression, and gay and lesbian oppression continue to remain “additive to central questions of Marxism” (I. M. Young 1981, 49).

### **Regime Priorities: Economic development, Social Stability, National Autonomy**

The Cuban Revolution adopted the same strategy for gender equality developed in the radically different context of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia, ignored the ideas and policy prescriptions of renowned socialist-feminists, and dismissed the question of race and its impact on gender equity. These lapses stemmed in part from the construction of gender equity as a secondary consideration that would be addressed with the achievement of a very specific economy. The Cuban Revolution sought, first and foremost, economic development.

Socialist-feminists have been consistently critical of many socialist countries’ less than effusive pursuit of women-friendly policies, arguing that “economic and political considerations consistently, and often misguidedly, shaped policy on women and the family” (Stacey 1979, 308–09). Policies that explicitly focused on gender equity, like those pertaining to families, were subordinated to programs to vitalize economic development. Maxine Molyneux, who has analyzed socialist policies on women in depth, notes that revolutionary governments tend to use women’s liberation “to accomplish at least three goals: to extend the base of the government’s political support, to increase the size or quality of the active labour force, and to help harness the family more securely to the process of social reproduction” (Molyneux 1985b,

245).<sup>32</sup> Revolutionary governments have defended themselves against such critiques by insisting “that ‘true’ or mature ‘socialism’ requires a certain level of economic development and until this has been achieved, society’s priority is to increase production within the limits imposed by considerations of national security” (Molyneux 1985a, 58–59). As noted in the previous chapter, gender equity initiatives in Cuba reflected these economic priorities.

Cuban socialism attempted to replace the material incentives that guide social and economic activity with moral incentives (Guevara 2004) so that ethics, rather than capital, would govern Cubans’ activities. From the standpoint of possessive individualism associated with neoclassical economics, a more radical proposition could hardly be fathomed. Yet the Cuban revolutionary leadership devoted surprisingly little effort to the campaign for a new gender regime of labor and economic power. Official state action seldom moved beyond exhorting more “socially useful labor” from women and more household participation from men. Chapter 5 makes the case that the gender regime of labor and economic power is precisely what must be changed if Cuba is to find a way beyond *Homo economicus*—the disembodied rational economic man of capitalist societies (De la Torre Dwyer 2012). To lay the foundation for that argument, it is important to consider how reliance on exhortatory solutions and ideological change failed to challenge the roots of the politico-economic gender equity problem.

Many political theories draw parallels between the state and the household. In Cuba, the revolutionary leadership conceived the State as the new household, using the power of the state to ameliorate certain economic infelicities. As the benevolent paternal head-of-household, the state redistributed goods to rectify large inequities

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<sup>32</sup> In an earlier version of the article, Molyneux also included two additional objectives, efforts to improve the quality, skill and discipline of wage labour through education and training programmes and to alter the structure of the rural economy (Molyneux 1984, 53).

within society, uncoupling provision of food, healthcare, and education from individual breadwinners. Yet, just as traditional patriarchal households masked injustice, exploitation, and economic maldistribution along gender-lines (Okin 1991), so too did the Cuban state. The state pushed as many members of its household as possible into “production” to raise the wage-income of the household. Yet, it did little to facilitate the performance of what has been traditionally known as “women’s work”—expecting women working outside the home to simultaneously assume the burdens of household labor. Much like the bourgeois family man of the capitalist order who the revolution disparaged, the Cuban state continued to rely on unwaged work based on informal, nonconsensual, revocable, and variable contracts with women. More than fifty years after the revolution, the Cuban state still does not recognize *or remunerate* women for the work done in the home.

Cuba’s official policies continue to praise and laud women’s work without shifting the political-economy to provide material rewards for that labor. Women’s domestic labor continues to be exploited by individual men and by Cuban society more generally. In a 1995 speech to the FMC by Fidel Castro, the Cuban President asks the following rhetorical question, “*Pero, ¿qué sería de nuestra Revolución sin la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas? ¿cuánto podríamos hablar de derechos sociales alcanzados, de conquistas logradas, de injusticias que hemos podido hacer desaparecer* [Where would our revolution be without the FMC? Would we even be able to speak of social rights gained, battles won, of injustices we have eliminated?]” (FMC 1995b, 183)? Cuban women’s work is recognized as central to the revolutionary project, but it is extracted from women without compensation. Indeed, such praise of women’s selfless labor was typically accompanied by exhortations to women to do even more work (FMC 1995c, 29).

The Cuban revolutionary leadership's top priority was economic growth and development, but to what end? What types of economic growth did the state promote with what corollary effects? Equally important, how were the benefits of growth distributed? It is an economic platitude that full employment constitutes one critical dimension of economic development. In Cuba, workers are expected to devote 40 hours to work between Monday and Friday, as well as a half-day of work on Saturday. Long hours devoted to work, frequent travel, and unremunerated domestic labor and child care make it difficult to balance the demands of family and personal flourishing with the responsibilities of one's job.

An unrelenting focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as an index of economic growth ignores problems of distribution, borrowing, sustainability, and care-work. One must recognize that an economy produces human subjects just as surely as it produces marketable goods and services. Yet, just as any capitalist or welfare-capitalist state does, Cuba ignores women's domestic and community labor in its national accounts, yet still asserts that GDP growth is "one of the principal indices of the evolution of the economy of a country" (ONE 2011a, 125). As such, it provides only a crude measurement of human wellbeing while hypocritically allowing women's work—the social glue necessary to "the success of the Revolution"—to go unrewarded. GDP growth does not address larger questions about the nature of work itself, the demand to be free from alienation, or Marx's utopian demand that we reach a place where "labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want" (Marx 1970). Even less does a focus on equal liability to labor comprehend the criticism leveled by Paul Lafargue's "Right to Be Lazy" (1883). Although full employment in production does indeed spur growth in the formal economy counted by GDP, its blindness to women's domestic labor (and its distribution) ensures that

the benefits of “growth” are channeled into fewer hands, specifically, the hands of men.

The strategies chosen by the Cuban leadership have not broken, and cannot break, the gender regime in which men, by and large, have direct and indirect control of women by means of greater economic and political power. Indeed, they have never tried to cause such a rupture. When the portion of the economic pie that the state monitors (the formal marketplace) becomes larger, the government has made gestures to aid women—providing more daycare centers and housing developments. Yet when social provision begins to interfere with “growth,” the state retreats.

Rather than paying those who do “women’s work” a social wage as suggested by Maria Dallacosta and Selma James (Dalla Costa and James 1975), the Cuban state avoided subsidizing the FMC’s activities. Indeed, the state extracted a portion of FMC revenue generated through payment of dues while also charging the FMC with the responsibility to mobilize millions of hours of volunteer labor from women in addition to the uncounted hours of women’s work done in the home and community. Rather than uncoupling (formal) labor and income through a guaranteed basic income to all Cuban citizens (Weeks 2011), the Cuban state created serious challenges to work-family-leisure balance by according unswerving priority to the production of market goods for the sake of the nation’s economic development. Rather than offer those who do women’s work “equal shares” in ownership of the means of production as suggested by a feminist reading of *The Communist Manifesto* and an ingenious, but practical, idea by John E. Roemer (Marx and Engels 1948; Roemer 1996), the Cuban state sought to overrepresent formal market workers in the FMC. Rather than look to the cooperatives of Mondragón, Spain (or elsewhere) for examples of labor democracy in terms of ownership, salaries, and decisionmaking (W. F. Whyte and K.



K. Whyte 1991), the Cuban state promoted cooperatives only in agriculture and practiced “worker democracy” through ownership by the state, which deployed capitalist principles of management in the workplace. Rather than taking up the Great Law of the Iroquois and holding its political and economic practices accountable to the next seven generations (Folbre 1994, 89), the Cuban state sought social justice principally through a simple formula of market growth. Rather than transforming current political decisionmaking structures into institutions able to roundly accommodate gender differences, the Cuban state noted, but subsequently ignored, the fact that both men and women believe it is difficult for those doing women’s work (i.e., women) to get elected to the people’s assemblies. Rather than heeding its own exhortations to include more women in leadership, the state has continued to develop policy through an overwhelmingly male-dominant Politburo and Council of State. Rather than involving those who do women’s work in a “political community” focused on the practice of democratic governance as suggested (at least for formal market workers) by David Schweickart (Schweickart 1998, 17), the Cuban state has continued to see enterprises as things to be owned by their workers (through the State), has made the existence of women’s associations outside the FMC almost impossible, and has let the extraordinarily male-dominant military control a staggering proportion of the Cuban economy. Rather than promoting gender equity by emulating Sweden’s creation of incentives to involve fathers in parenting, the Cuban state has raised men’s participation in the formal market to very high levels, as the FMC has promoted the “special and irreplaceable bond between a mother and her child.” The leadership has pressured more people to work in the formal sector of the economy rather than considering an equitable distribution of what has hitherto been known as men’s and women’s work.

Marx and Engels said themselves that “the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies *beyond the sphere of actual material production*” (Marx and Engels 1894). Yet in Cuba, the socialist revolution prized production and productivity above all else. Rather than stepping back from the concept of GDP—a concept designed to gauge *industrial* recovery from the Great Depression—and taking up the question of welfare directly as done in 1972 by Bhutan’s “Gross National Happiness” or the United Nation’s first World Happiness Report in 2012 (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2012), the Cuban state has unswervingly followed a road to increase productivity. Rather than considering women’s work, and those who do it, as valuable, rewarding, and important for all societies—as something of worth in and of itself—as an integral part of the full human personality or the good life, the socialist leadership in Cuba, like capitalists across the world, has ignored the economy of women’s domestic labor.

### **The Role of Women’s Work and Women’s Voices in a Theory of Socialist Liberation**

The second fatal flaw embodied within the Revolution’s plan for women’s liberation was the narrow, pre-scripted role accorded to women’s voices that ignored the necessity of women’s autonomy in any emancipatory project. According to the PCC, women would play a central role in powering the Cuban Revolution. It did not matter if they acted under the direction of others, worked in and through institutions that did not fit their needs, were barred from forming autonomous groups, or that they were forced to insert their political energies into pre-defined women’s issues.

### **Fear of Feminism: The Beginnings of the FMC**

“When Castro’s forces took power, more than 920 women’s organizations existed in the country” (Luciak 2007, 15). Although a vibrant set of feminisms and feminist activists emerged in Cuba during the four-decade Republican period preceding Batista and Castro (Stoner 1991), the Revolution quashed this diversity. In November 1959, Cuba sent a delegation of seventy-six women to Chile for the First Latin American Congress of Women sponsored by the Women’s International Democratic Federation (E. Stone 1981, 40, 40n). By August 1960, all versions of feminism were subsumed under the newly created *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC) [Federation of Cuban Women], an organization that replaced the *Unión Femenino Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Women’s Union; UFR) and absorbed the women involved in Castro’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement (M-26-7). As members of the *Partido de Socialistas Populares* (Popular Socialist’s Party, PSP) evolved into the *Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista* (United Party of the Socialist Revolution, PURS) and subsequently, the ruling Communist Party, the PCC, the Party “forbade women to form autonomous organizations to press [other] issues” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 36, 167). As noted above, all autonomous women’s organizations were disbanded—although some, like the *Frente Cívico de Mujeres Marianas* (Women’s Civic Front José Martí, FCMM), decided themselves that they were unnecessary as a separate organization after Batista fled (Weisman 2004, 69).

This suppression of autonomous groups followed Lenin once again, in insisting that women’s liberation depended upon their participation in the socialist transformation, and most particularly in the formal economy: “Women’s emancipation is achieved in the liberatory process of the people and in the measure to which she actively participates in this process” (FMC 1984, 24). In 1985, the FMC

seemed to recognize that the liberatory process of the people might be a gendered phenomenon, suggesting instead that “women have to fight for their own liberation” (FMC 1987, 205). Whether women’s liberation was to come through the liberation of all society’s members or their own partisan efforts (with or without help from men), the loud and clear message was that women must get involved in revolutionary transformation. Yet, their energies on the road to liberation were expected to be expended in explicit and symbolic obedience to the Party. As the *III Congreso* specifies, “The FMC freely and conscientiously reveres and respects the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba, vanguard of the working class, leading and guiding force of our people” (FMC 1984, 24).

As the story of this obedient women’s organization is told, it was Fidel Castro’s idea to found the FMC (Domínguez 1978, 208). Vilma Espín, President of the FMC from its inception until her death in 2007, claims she saw no reason for women to organize *as women*. In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Espín recalled that when Fidel Castro told her he wanted to create the FMC—organize diverse groups under one banner<sup>33</sup>—she queried, “Why do we have to have a woman’s organization? I had never been discriminated against. I had my career as a chemical engineer. I never suffered. I never had difficulty” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 36). Although ignorant of differences among women—tens of thousands weren’t even literate—as well as her unique and protected status as one of the elite among Cuba’s elite, Vilma Espín Guillois, nonetheless led the FMC for five decades. Married in January 1959 to Fidel Castro’s brother, the current President of Cuba, Raúl Castro, Vilma Espín Guillois went on to become a member of the Central Committee of the PCC (E. Stone 1981, 34) and a onetime full member of the Political Bureau of

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<sup>33</sup> There were already many women’s political groups that had to be converted to serving the Party (Stone 1981: 41; original ref. FMC 1975).

the PCC. A woman devoid of feminist commitments, who professed to never having experienced sex discrimination, and who did not see the need for women's political organizing held more political power than any other Cuban woman within the revolution.

Inattention to “the woman question” and insistence that “feminist demands be put aside” were sentiments shared by many beyond Espín. Many women of the “revolutionary generation”—women who fought in and worked for the Movimiento 26-7—had no prior participation in women's organizations (Weisman 2004, 69–70). The lack of feminist consciousness among the revolutionary generation was due in part to Castro's strategy of recruiting women who were focused exclusively on the immediate crisis of the Batista dictatorship. Pursuing an agenda that Brecht characterized as “*Erst das essen, dann die moralen*” [food first, then morals], women of the revolutionary generation worked within groups that privileged survival over justice. As documented in numerous histories of the Left, leaders of socialist movements were notoriously anti-feminist, a stance that necessarily influenced which women were recruited to their struggle, which women chose to join, and the conditions under which they served the revolution. Among those most central to the anti-Batista struggle, the lack of feminist consciousness is particularly stark among the “combatants” of the revolutionary generation. In 1995, four decades after the resistance movement, Elvira Díaz Vallina, Olga Dotre Romáy, and Caridad Dacosta Pérez conducted a study of 675 female former combatants. They found that 94% of the women had no specific demands related to gender—and *not one* demanded women's rights—during the anti-Batista struggles of the 1950s. The women

revolutionaries “fought against dictatorship and for political and social demands for everyone” (Díaz Vallina 2001, 6; Weisman 2004, 70).<sup>34</sup>

Yet the combatants were not the only women involved in the revolutionary struggle. Among the members of Cuba’s 920 women’s organizations were a number of outstanding revolutionary women such as Elvira Díaz Vallina, a leader of the *Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios* (FEU, Federation of University Students) and later, a member of Castro’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement (M-26-7), who proclaimed, “We wanted equality for women with men” (Weisman 2004, 69). It is no coincidence that Castro chose Vilma Espín to lead what would become the sole women’s organization in Cuba, rather than leaders of women’s political groups with years of experience such as Aida Pelayo, Carmen Castro Porta (no relation to Fidel Castro), Olga Román, Elvira Díaz Vallina, or many others.

Espín had at best an inchoate feminist consciousness that steered clear of challenging men’s prerogatives, or calling attention to the highly disparate gendered lives men and women lived in Cuba. She was much more a feminist blank slate than those women leaders with years of political experience in the women’s organizations, making her less likely to pursue goals and use tactics that did not mesh well with Castro’s ideals. Moreover, her loyalty to the M-26-7 movement could be trusted for the simple fact that she was Fidel Castro’s sister-in-law. Consistent with women’s paths to power in many parts of the world, Espín’s ascendance was integrally tied to family connections.

This anti-feminist choice was not novel within the Revolutionary leadership. It runs parallel to an earlier story of the Mariana Grajales Platoon, an all women military platoon that fought in the mountains with M-26-7 and was also created, over

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<sup>34</sup> “The participants’ memories are substantiated by documents from the 1950s” (Weisman 2004: 70; please see Díaz Vallina, Dotre Romy, and Dacosta Pérez 1995).

the objections of others, by Fidel Castro. Through the creation of the FMC, Castro was able to accomplish two important conditions to harness women's energy and work for his own political goals: these groups helped to overcome male resistance to women's groups and simultaneously redirect women's energies towards his movement's ideals rather than in their own autonomous directions.

This lack of autonomy is especially troublesome when the FMC is compared with the CTC, the Confederation of Cuban Workers. Since 1994, the unions have employed their own specialist labor lawyers which helped lead to Resolución No. 8/2005, placing "all key aspects of employment relations, and especially the new human resource management systems, into the collective bargaining agreement, the *convenio colectivo de trabajo* [collective labor agreements] (CCT), whose scope had previously been limited by ministerial domination of economic life" (Ludlam 2009, 551). Each CCT is written by the unions and management and must then find approval from the workers' assembly, "providing a fundamental guarantee of worker participation and control" (Ludlam 2009, 552).

### **Distinctive Characteristics of the FMC Leadership**

In 2009, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) counted 88.1% of all women, fifteen years old and older, as members (FMC 2009, 5). Yet, as early as 1976, there seemed to be a generation gap between the FMC leadership and Cuban women. FMC leaders were accused of representing the founding generation's views, perhaps the founding *combatant* generation's views, and of operating on a different wavelength from younger Cuban women (Azicri 2000, 86). Age also distinguished the FMC membership *and* leadership from grassroots women. In 1974,<sup>35</sup> 44% of FMC Congress delegates were over forty years of age; by the time of the Third FMC

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<sup>35</sup> Smith and Padula 1996: 53 says "In 1975, 44 percent of congress delegates", but as the Second Congress was November 1974, I have changed the year.

Congress in 1980, 54% of the delegates were older than 40 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 53). The sclerotic image of the FMC as an organization serving the past was illustrated as late as the *VIII Congreso* in 2009 when Vilma Espín, FMC leader for nearly five decades until her death in 2007 was proclaimed “FMC President forever” [“la “eterna presidenta””]—in part sentimental, in part, substantive truth (FMC 2009, 3; Leyva 2012).

Apart from the growing difference in age, the FMC leadership was not representative of women in terms of their backgrounds or Party affiliation. The Reports stemming from the *II, III, and IV Congresos* (1974, 1980, 1985) revealed the number of housewives among membership and leadership—data that were not included in later Reports. In 1974, 70% of FMC membership were ‘housewives’ while only 18.8% of the 1,916 delegates chosen to attend the Second Congress and produce the outcome documents were so categorized (FMC 1975, 87). The number of delegates at the *III Congreso* in 1980 classified as ‘housewives’ was 23% (FMC 1984, 105), far shy of their proportion in the population--nearly 60% of Cuban women.<sup>36</sup> The *IV Congreso* in 1985 boasted that 13% of the delegates were housewives (FMC 1987, 112). The composition of FMC delegates was not reported at the time of the *V Congreso* in 1990 nor since then, but housewives comprised 42.5% of FMC members in 1995 and stayed above 40% through 2002 (FMC 1995b, 117; ONE 2005, 343, Tabla IV.8). Today, housewives still represent “more than one-third” of FMC membership (FMC 2009, 11). The disparity in economic activity between FMC membership and leadership is less egregious for urban areas as, for example, only

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<sup>36</sup> Women made up only 32.5% of the labor force in 1980 (Azicri 2000: 85). With a little math the disparity will become clear. If women make up 1/3 of the labor force: men must equal 2/3. Assume that there are equal numbers of working age men and women. If 100% of men are in the labor force: then 50% of women are in the labor force (100 : 50 :: 2/3 : 1/3). 50% is well below 77%. Of course, some men are not in the labor force: if only 80% of men are in the labor force, then 40% of women are in the labor force (80 : 40 :: 2/3 : 1/3). 40% is even farther below 77%.



32.3% of women residing in Havana were considered “economically inactive” and responsible for the chores of the home (CEE - ONC 1981, 205). Yet, as a mass organization that is supposed to represent all Cuban women and that counts 80-90% of all Cuban women as its members, this underrepresentation of housewives and overrepresentation of an urban economy is a problem (FMC 1984, 5, 1995b, 26), particularly when socialism fails to reckon different modes of economic activity.

Equally important were the differences in Party affiliation among the FMC leadership. In 1974, 47.2% of the delegates to the FMC’s II *Congreso* were members of the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* (PCC) but only 1.1% of FMC membership was so affiliated (Domínguez 1978, 297). Indeed, at this time, ‘housewives’ were not allowed to become PCC members (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 51). This exclusion guaranteed that only formal market labor force participants participated in the nation’s core political institution. If 70% of FMC membership in 1974 were ‘housewives,’ then the remaining 30% might be expected to join the party, comprising 15% of PCC membership. Indeed, 12.79% of all Party members were women in 1974 (FMC 1975, 87–88, 279). While the incorporation of women working in the formal economy appears strong, this still represents a small proportion of party members. Yet the very absence of women working in the home may help explain the weaknesses of the Party’s Thesis on the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality. It should also be noted that many of the delegates attending the 1974 *Congreso* were appointed. Only 60.2% of the 1,916 delegates who attended the *Congreso* were elected directly by the FMC’s members (Domínguez 1978, 297).

These trends had not changed by the time of the Third Congress in 1980. Very few FMC members were also PCC members yet 55% of FMC delegates were PCC members (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 53). This bias is accentuated at the highest

echelons of power among the delegates, specifically, the membership of the National Leadership of the FMC. Of 60 leaders on the National Committee (*Comité Nacional*) at the time of the *II Congreso*, all 60 were classified as Workers and 49 (82%) were Party members (FMC 1975, 87–88, 279).

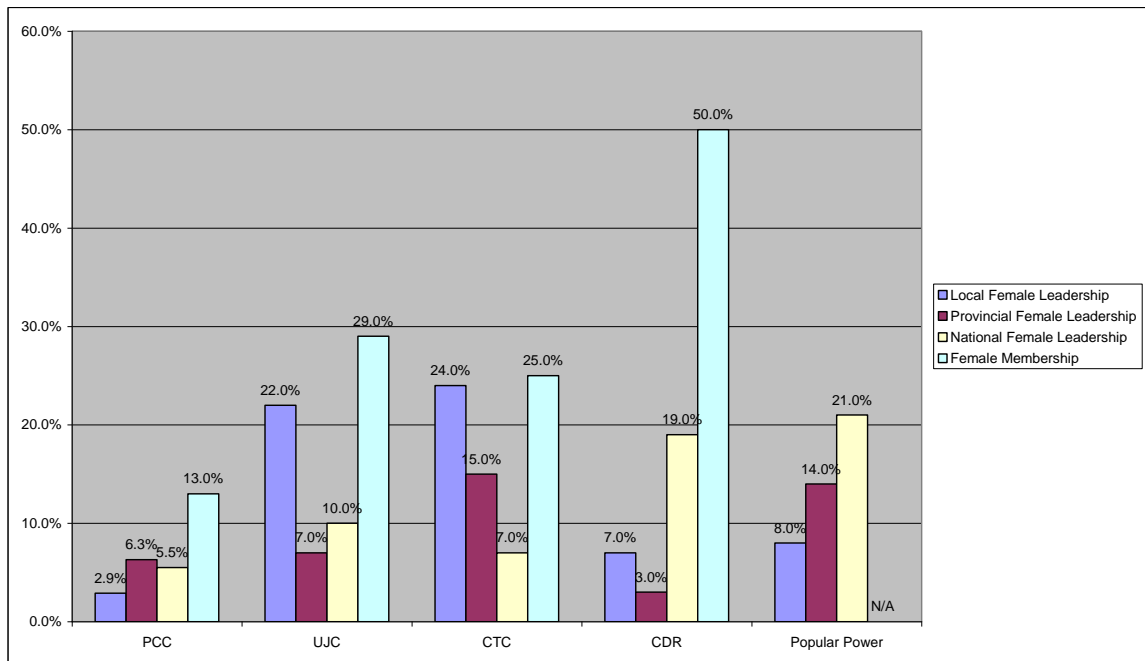
Since then, the Party has become more inclusive and greatly rectified this imbalance by incorporating more women into the party. By the time of the 2009 *VIII Congreso*, 58.2% of FMC members were Party militants (FMC 2009, 16). It is striking, nevertheless, that despite doubling the proportion of women's inclusion in the Party, the Party still relies on a 1975 document as the master text for women's liberation in Cuba.

More striking than the lack of substantive representation within the FMC is the absence of women in all other centers of power. Men continue to hold the major positions of power in the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Revolutionary National Police (PNR) and Revolutionary National Militias (MNR), managerial positions and higher-paying labor sectors in the market, as well as leadership in religious organizations and families. (De la Torre Dwyer 2011, 217)

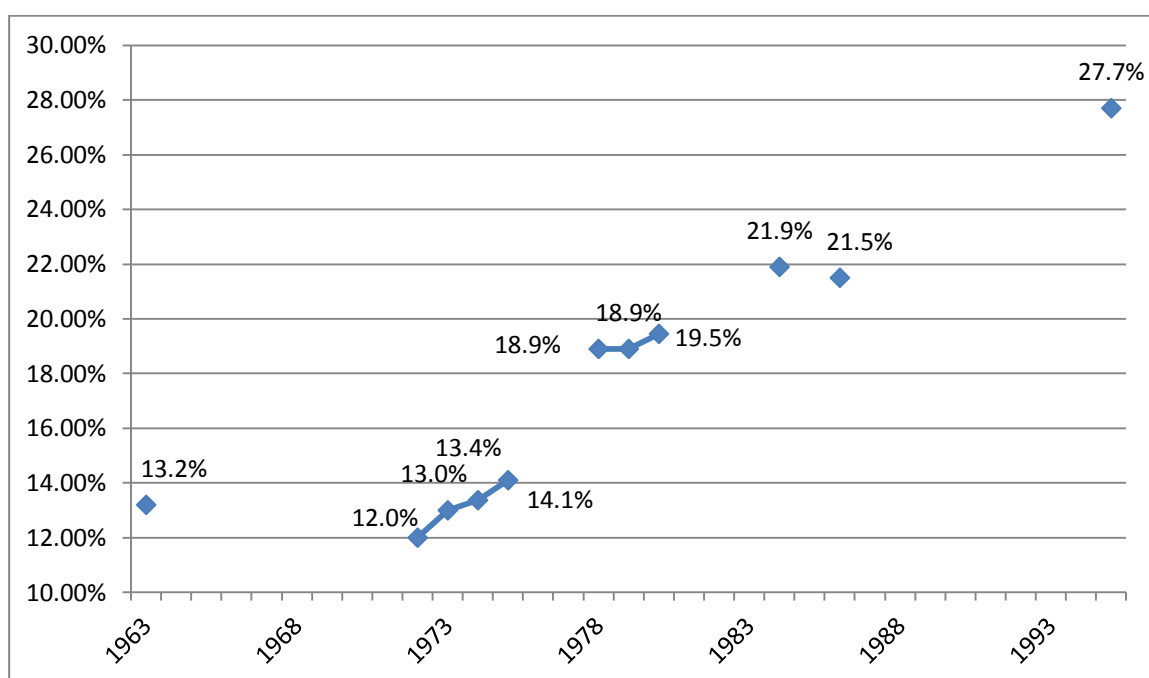
The final documents of the *IV Congreso* and the *VI Congreso* twice note the existence of an inverse relationship between the representation of women within a decisionmaking body and political power of that body (FMC 1987, 143, 145, 1995b, 38, 105). Within the PCC, the key power holder in the country, women constituted only 14.4% of the membership in 1974, 19.8% in 1980, and 21.9% in 1984 (FMC 1987, 145). By 1995, women were only 27.7% of the PCC membership (FMC 1995b, 108). In the 1992 elections for the *Poder Popular* Assemblies, women won 13.5% of assembly seats at the local level, 22.8% at the national level, and were 16.1% of the

Council of State. Women made up 16.4% of the highly influential Comité Central. There were only three women on the Politburo and two First Secretaries of the PCC (FMC 1995b, 108). The Council of State was composed of 13.8% women in 1986 and 16.1% women in 1992, i.e., five women of a 31 member body (FMC 1995b, 106). In the very year of the new and celebrated Family Code, one can see that women's leadership was sorely lacking (see Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3: Female Membership and Leadership in the Party Organizations: 1975-76<sup>37</sup>**



<sup>37</sup> Data from Pérez-Stable 1987: 56. TABLE 1. "Female Membership and Leadership in the Party, Mass Organizations, and Popular Power Institutions in Cuba, 1975-1985 (in percent)." Original Sources: cf. Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba (1976:585); *Bohemia*, November 16, 1976, p. 48; September 17, 1985, p. 82; Second Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (1981: 78, 415-21); Federation of Cuban Women (1979: 37); "Memoria del IV Congreso de la UJC" (1982: 7); Castro (1986: 88, 92); Radaelli (1985); Espín (1985: 52; 1986: 65-66); *Memorias: XV Congreso de la CTC* (1984: 268-69); *Granma* October 28, 1986.

**Figure 3.4: Women as Percent of Party Membership, Partido Comunista de Cuba<sup>38</sup>**

As can be seen in Figure 3.4, women made significant gains in positions of formal power in the 1970s although they remained far from a critical mass. Despite the state's explicit commitment to gender equity in governance, women still remain underrepresented in the central governing organizations. As noted earlier, women made dramatic gains again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, now constituting 43 percent of the National Assembly and 37.5 percent of the Council of State (since 2009). although only one women serves in the 14 member Politburo, the most powerful decisionmaking body in the nation (PCC 2012a).

In a pithy assessment of official justification for the persistent differences between population demographics and leadership demographics, Domínguez noted that, “the revolution does not rule because it is elected, but because it is right” (1978, 298). One might paraphrase: the PCC leadership is not in power because it reflects

<sup>38</sup> (FMC 1987, 145; LeoGrande 2004, 184–85; Pérez, Jr. 1995, 374; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 46; E. Stone 1981, 20, 57, 91)

the gender, age or racial composition of the people; it is in power because it possesses a particular vision of socialism. This vision insists that women were not to make demands upon government. Instead a vanguard elite of men and a few women committed to a socialist society were to educate women and adjust the system so that women desired what they ought to desire for the good of society.

This system of political representation has undermined women's potential democratic empowerment, creating rifts between the leadership and those who are supposed to follow. At the Second Congress of the FMC in 1974, the elites sent strategic signals to mollify some of the swelling discontent. Officials apologized about the inadequacies in day care provision and resources—acknowledging existing needs that could not be fulfilled. Simultaneously, however, the FMC warned its members that they “should fight ideological diversionism” (Domínguez 1978, 270). The first signal, apology, showed that the elite understanding of ‘the woman question’ and the demands of Cuban women aligned fairly well. The apology posed a direct concern with women's wishes, masking ulterior motives on the part of the revolution. The second signal--a warning—suggested that elite understanding of “the woman question” and the demands of Cuban women did not align. This warning categorized some popular demands as “diversionism,” that is, demands that were both incorrect and perhaps counter-revolutionary.

This ability of the highest echelons of the Cuban government to win over and rein in women's political loyalties has ensured that the FMC—and most Cuban women—have not challenged the Cuban elite's understanding of women's role(s) or the FMC's function as a transmission belt in a socialist society. This has also contributed to the FMC's declining priority and importance in the lives of many Cuban women. By the time of the Third Congress in 1980 the FMC itself was noting

that its meetings were of low quality (FMC 1984, 9; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 53) and members considered many of the meetings to be boring, irrelevant, and not worth attending. Only 64% actually signed in at the required monthly meetings in 1979 (FMC 1984, 114; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 53). This number was increased to 80% by the time of the 1984 *IV Congreso* (FMC 1987, 126). Yet, twenty-five years later, the 2009 Report reiterated concerns about the FMC's inability to be a real force in women's lives, and their inability to capture women's political energies and faith.

As the FMC waned in relevance by the Fifth Congress in March 1990, it was becoming more apparent that the FMC—and the revolution—were losing many women's allegiance, especially younger women. A random survey of 100 women in 1990 reported that over 70% of Cuban women were unaware of the impending FMC *V Congreso* just one week before the event. In response to unfavorable perceptions by the rank and file, the FMC introduced several changes, giving local FMC branches more autonomy to respond to local needs and interests; reducing the number of meetings; and reducing the amount of dues (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 54).

In spite of these efforts, the FMC had trouble rejuvenating itself and escaping its characterization as an aging dinosaur that clumsily and quixotically operated as a mass organization requiring all women to serve the revolution. The call for the Fourth Congress for the Communist Party was announced in March of 1990—in the midst of the Special Period in Peacetime—and it eventually took place in October 1991. Much of 1990 was spent trying to foster a public dialogue and individual participation in order to reach “the necessary consensus” for policy formation in troubled times (LeoGrande 2004, 190). One of the principal political criticisms in the pre-congress debates in which three million persons participated was the “sclerotic

bureaucratism that had overtaken local government and the mass organizations, especially the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), which some people argued should be disbanded or merged with the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR)” (LeoGrande 2004, 190).

Recent evidence suggests that things may be turning around in the FMC as a younger cohort of leaders takes the helm. In 2009, the average age of the FMC *cuadros* [cadres] was 38. Prior to the *VII Congreso* in 2000, only 58.6% of *cuadros* remained in their positions. In contrast, the *VIII Congreso* was pleased to report that 72% of the *cuadros* were retained in 2009. Youthful leadership and higher retentions rate are signs of burgeoning institutional strength as popular young women *cuadros* will have time to rise through the ranks, assuring the vitality of the organization in the near- and medium-term future (FMC 2009, 15–16).

In spite of signs of possible rejuvenation during the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the entrenched history of women’s absence from PCC power, the sclerotic bureaucracy of a backward-looking FMC that had lost touch with its membership will not be easily overcome. Grassroots women will not soon forget the lessons learned each time one of their strongest demands of the PCC and FMC was not met (Molyneux 2000, 318–19n35). The average *cuadro* was born in 1970-71, the first generation to have grown up under the revolutionary transformations of the 1970s. Yet benefitting from a host of revolutionary policies does not ensure that this generation shares the views of the PCC leadership. If this younger generation embraces a broader conception of women’s autonomy, they may still confront hostility from the Party elite. The leadership of the revolution in Cuba has always feared women’s deviance from the Party line.

### *The Containment of Feminisms*

Part and parcel of the PCC's fear of women's deviance is concern that outside feminisms might divert revolutionary fervor toward alternative modes of politics. More and more Cuban women have had opportunities over recent decades to interact with women activists in various regions of the world. They have also met many feminists, some of whom are women and some of whom are men (Weisman 2004, 81). Cuban transnational scholarly connections and presence at international conferences has grown since 1985 (Núñez Sarmiento 2003, 12). Often these *encuentros* (meetings/conferences) took place elsewhere in the Caribbean, Latin America, and even North America but Cuba has also hosted such events (Azicri 2000, 85).

In contrast to this *glasnost*, throughout much of its history, FMC leadership sought to acutely separate themselves from the 'bourgeois feminists' of the U.S. and elsewhere. Government elites' perceived U.S. feminism as both a capitalist *and* an imperialist tool to divert women from the class and nationalist struggles Cuba had to fight (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 4, 42)—especially during the 1970s, 1980s, and even the 1990s. The FMC sent no women to the first three feminist *Encuentros* of Latin American women, held during the 1980s, but finally sent four women in 1988 to the Fourth *Encuentro*. After this tepid *entrée*, at the Fifth *Encuentro* in 1990, Cuba rejected a suggestion to hold the Sixth *Encuentro* inside Cuba (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 42).

Internally, the Cuban state didn't wish for women to deviate from their prescribed role within women's emancipation as understood by the Marxist-Leninist theory guiding the Revolution. The *II Congreso* took place in 1974 and already began to exhort women in their duty to liberate themselves according to a plan devised by one man and one party a half century earlier. FMC members were to "jealously watch



the ideological formation of the young generation” and themselves to guard against the ‘imperialist weapon’ of ideological diversionism (FMC 1975, 22–23). In 1980, the FMC pointed out the bad kinds of feminism that Cuban women should avoid, strikingly and pedantically asserting that the FMC was a *feminine* organization (not *feminist*), and declaring that all attempts to improve and critique socialism should be considered diversionism—or even penetration by *the enemy* into the field of ideas (FMC 1984, 51–53, 168). The FMC also stated the need to educate more of its local leaders in ‘political instruction schools’ and include more rank and file in *Grupos de Agitación y Propaganda* [Agitation and Propaganda Groups]—a term borrowed directly from the time of the October Revolution of early Soviet Russia (FMC 1984, 122–23). This suggestion stemmed from the belief that “the family exercises a primordial influence on the formation of habits, attitudes, and conduct of children and youth” (FMC 1987, 30).

This heightened attention to “diversionism” increased as women’s organizations that troubled the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) grew elsewhere in the world. For example, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Italian women in the UDI (Union of Italian Women) struggled to maintain the party line of the PCI (Italian Communist Party) at the same time that they felt ineluctably drawn to push the ideological boundaries of the party, cut their ties to “male” political forms, and muddy the boundary between the pre-political and the political. They “organized consciousness-raising meetings, formed collectives, occupied vacant buildings and claimed them as women’s centers, opened women’s bookstores,” among other things (Ferrari 2008, 580–84). Italy’s Left characterized such feminist mobilization as a source of division among women, while also a unified front against traditional male-dominant politics—two developments the PCC regarded as anathema.

Nevertheless, this slow trickle of outside feminist ideas and arguments accelerated, allowing FMC activists to be more academically comfortable with “feminist approaches” (Azicri 2000, 85). Less emphasis was placed on “feminine, not feminist” approaches that emphasized gender integration and social benefits for all (Azicri 2000, 86). Part of this intellectual aperture is apparent in the creation of a formal Women Studies Program at the University of Havana in 1991 (Núñez Sarmiento 2003, 12). Buttressed by connections with international women’s leaders around the world, the FMC boasted in 2009 that it held “systematic relationships with more than 2,056 feminine and feminist leaders, belonging to 1,038 institutions in 141 countries” (FMC 2009, 94). Although there is still an effort to maintain something feminine in the face of feminism, to describe today’s FMC as hermetically sealed from feminist movements and theorists around the world would clearly be incorrect.

The trouble is, as Smith and Padula have insightfully suggested, that the presence of an extremely well educated population of women has presented problems for Cuba’s hitherto paternalist modes of governance (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 56). While there seems to be recognition that there are variegated feminisms and that perhaps some of them (as opposed to simply *one* of them) are not ideologically diversionary, there is also little flexibility or dynamism within either the FMC itself and the Party elite: “the FMC’s hierarchical structure and national objectives are not helping women acquire a feminist understanding of gender, nor supporting media programs with participatory perspectives or new modalities empowering women” (Weisman 2004, 81). The outside feminist ideas and arguments are being received, discussed, and digested faster than the government elite can plan how to channel them; yet the government still asserts its right to disallow the division of women’s energies among groups that compete with the FMC (Azicri 2004, 27).

As stated at the FMC's inception, 'women's differences are false.' Thus, while the FMC trudged at its old pace, Cuban women raced ahead seeking their own solutions. One group, composed of women in various communications fields, formed MAGÍN in 1993 in order to develop an understanding of gender in Cuba; specifically, they criticized the lack of women in government leadership positions and the use of women as sex-objects in the government promotion of tourism (Weisman 2004, 75, 66). This group was forced to disband in 1996 after they were repeatedly unable to find meeting space and they officially received notice that they were to disband. They were conciliated by official notice that they could continue to raise issues of gender both in their workplace organizations and the FMC (cf. Fernandes 2006). It should be obvious that these women had already come to the conclusion that the FMC was not very amenable to their goals—hence the impetus to create a new organization.

In sum, highly educated Cuban women have been newly exposed to fresh feminist ideas, yet confront a rigid bureaucracy designed to solve problems that are not theirs. Some are losing their tolerance for the old regime and some have already tried to solve problems in their own ways. Women leaders are categorically unable to serve women's wants under the current system and the FMC in particular has been faltering since at least 1991, when the PCC began to extricate itself from any apparent ties to the organization (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 56). It is an institution that cannot count on Cuban women's support and backing and this may bode ill for the future strength of women-friendly activism and civil society support (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007, 559; also cf. Matland and Montgomery 2003; Nechemias 1996).

### **Marginalizing Women's Issues and Women from the Realm of the Political**

Women around the globe have discovered that there are many challenges to transforming the patriarchal state. Feminists in official government women's bureaus (such as Canada and Australia) and feminists in unofficial non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are both preoccupied with their short- and long-term efficacy in achieving their goals. Latin American NGOs have worried whether they are being drawn in too tightly with government as gender experts and gender subcontractors, thus losing critical perspective and voice, or entrenched within civil society, i.e., a displaced metonym for citizens tied to liberal interest group activity (Álvarez 1999). Yet Cuban women face even larger challenges than these. The FMC, the very organization created and developed specifically for the purpose of attending to and answering the wishes of women is faltering in its performance. Moreover, as Smith and Padula suggest, there is a danger that the activities and work demanded by the FMC has "siphoned" women's energies away from the actual spheres of power such as the PCC (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 55). The fact that the women's organization was beginning to flounder becomes doubly alarming in that many of the active forces in Cuba pressing for women's interests have been sidelined from the main arenas of decisionmaking and relegated to the one slowly withering institution that formally represents all Cuban women.

The FMC first began as an "independent mass organization" (IMO) and received no government funding (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 55, 50). Today, it is technically a non-governmental organization (August 2004, 226; Azicri 2004, 27; Weisman 2004, 80). But it is a very peculiar NGO with capacities in nearly every political arena. The FMC has its own National Council, delegate branches at the

Provincial and Municipal level, and even its own Secretariat with Chiefs of Production, Organization, Finance, Education, Social Services, Ideological Orientation, Political Studies and Solidarity, and Foreign Relations (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 55, 49). This insider-outsider status of an IMO-NGO hybrid has erected barriers between women and the seat of decision making. Rather than imbricating women in the government elite and state hierarchy, FMC channels women's efforts into an advisory body. In a democracy, governance ought to be substantively connected to government, but the FMC does neither one nor the other and has been at a loss to determine what exactly it controls and determines. The truth is that it has controlled very little.

The second danger with "siphoning" women off into an independent organization (or Bureau) is that the rest of government carries on normally without any need for change. Androcentric politics and economics continue to wrestle with the "real issues of the day" while allowing an auxiliary group to produce some reports on breast cancer or divorce rates. This normalized traditional male concerns as perennial political issues, while marginalizing the concerns of women as apolitical at worst or a political addendum at best. The demarcation of women's issues as somehow outside of politics is evident in the topics of debate at FMC Congresses: discrimination, day care, laundry services, shop hours, schools, and whether men ought to be allowed to witness the birth of their children at maternity hospitals merit attention; but nuclear power, African foreign policy, or economic planning do not (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 51). This preconceived paradigm of "women's issues" (as separate issues) limits the influence of a feminist perspective by subordinating women and their "peculiarities" to an androcentric system of meaning as well as a vulgar and reductivist theory of causal chains. Women's special issues are circumscribed and

isolated in order to deny their interconnection with the big questions of politics. This species of women's auxiliary politics refuses to admit that breast cancer is intimately connected to foreign relations and international trade when an embargo/blockade restricts the export of X-ray film to Cuba (American Association for World Health 1997) and divorce is a nutritional question when ration books distributed to families are the method of food distribution (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 151).

One of the strengths of socialism is that it attempts to bring social webs and relations to light and to show individuals the ties that give them their strength, gifts, and plural happinesses. Within the framework of the Cuban model, socialism has been unable to adequately assess and reward the importance of women's labor to society. The Cuban government elite have claimed to possess the answers for gender equality. They have decided where women would be allowed into the political arena, pushed women to a periphery and shadow government, understood "women's issues" as a separate phenomenon from the real tasks of governance, silenced outside feminist ideas and arguments, curtailed Cuban women's independent initiatives, and requested (and received) far more political compliance from women than from men.

In 1975, the year of the First Party Congress and the time when the *caudillismo*<sup>3940</sup> of the 1960s began institutionalizing its aims through the lithification

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<sup>39</sup> Stemming from the word *caudillo* (chief, boss), *caudillismo* (or *caudillaje*) is a political term used often in the Latin American context of a few elites and many, many poor, illiterate, etc.; many natural geographic borders and difficult to traverse terrain; myriad languages; independence struggles from Spanish and Portuguese governance; and certainly many other factors that have contributed to a species of "political bossism" associated with rule by one man-chief that is characterized as personal, charismatic, despotic, authoritarian, demagogic, *machista*, patriarchal, violent, and dictatorial (University of Chicago Spanish-English/English-Spanish Dictionary *sub verba* "caudillaje"; Kattán-Ibarra 1995: 84; Nucetelli 2002: 167; (Smith and Padula 1996: 184; original ref. Fuentes 1994: 33).

<sup>40</sup> One example of a *caudillo* mentioned by Nucetelli is a man named Facundo Quiroga (1790-1835), popular among the *gauchos* ['nomad' people of the Pampas] of La Rioja in Argentina. The future president of the Argentine Republic (1868-74), Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1811-88), worked against the then current dictator of Argentina, Juan Manuel de Rosas (1793-1877) calling him *el espíritu de las pampas* (the spirit of the Pampas). The point Sarmiento wished to make was that Quiroga and de Rosas were one and the same type, personal despots with too much power. To my mind Sarmiento's approach is still personalist politics—the pot calling the kettle black. The Humanists and the Scholastics debated a question through the mirror-for-princes genre, Giordano Bruni and

of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the Party began to grow in importance as a weakly autonomous political machine. With this change, the vast majority of Cubans who had not fought in the Sierra Maestra with Fidel Castro began to receive pieces of the political pie through their Party affiliation (LeoGrande 2004, 184). Yet, women had not been substantively incorporated into this and other burgeoning sources of dominant institutional power. This was shown in Figure 3.3 above in which the major mass organizations of the Cuban political landscape had far more women as members than they have at any level of leadership, whether local, provincial, or national; with the exception of local leadership in the CTC (Confederation of Cuban Workers). In the Cuban Communist Party (PCC), the Communist Youth (UJC), the Cuban Workers' Confederation (CTC), and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), women's national leadership hovers at around one third of the percentage of female membership in each organization, and the same more or less holds true in the Popular Power institutions. Even in 2009, only 20.1% of the Presidents of the Municipal Assemblies of the *Poder Popular* and 7.1% of the Presidents of the Provincial Assemblies were women (ONE 2011b, fig. 7.5, 7.6) and it was not until 2012 that Ana María Mari Machado became the first female Vice President of Cuba's Parliament, the National Assembly of the *Poder Popular* ("Ana Maria Mary Machado: New Vice-president of the Cuban Parliament" 2012; Leyva 2012).

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Niccolò Machiavelli (cf. *Discorsi, The Prince*) gave some notable answers, and *The Federalist* wrestled over putting answers into practice; the question was: is it better to have good governors or a good system of government? It then seems that *caudillismo* is a bad system of government (with a dominant executive will) where all political players presume that the amelioration of faults is accomplished by replacing that will—the *caudillo*; as each *caudillo* understands politics in terms of their own will (good governance) and the forces obstructing that will, and as those forces—the other political players (opponents and/or other branches of government, bureaucracy, etc.)—are obstructing the *caudillo*'s will they ruin good governance, and thus, seeking to maintain their good-governor-will unalloyed by the wrongheaded wills of others they further consolidate power into the hands of the executive leading to a heightened focus on replacing that *caudillo*—a vicious cycle.

Of course, there have been a few notable examples of women in leadership positions. Even in the early 1960s post-Batista era, one Comrade Osoria took charge of the Banao Plan, the economic development of an agricultural area, “because she had, objectively speaking, proved herself capable of heading such a program” (E. Stone 1981, 49–50). Another example is the 4,000 women selected to head workplaces where a majority of employees were women when medium and large businesses were nationalized in October 1960<sup>41</sup> (Domínguez 1978, 147; E. Stone 1981, 11). Or there is Brigadier General Teté Puebla, the highest ranking woman in Cuba’s Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (Revolutionary Armed Forces, FAR)—and the only female general—who recalls a few other exceptions:

In March 1969, on the order of the commander in chief, I was named director of the Guaicanamar Cattle Plan in Jaruco, in Havana province. He said he was putting me in charge to demonstrate that women could lead as well as men, to show that women could lead an agricultural project, that women could head up any front and carry out any task of the revolution. So Fidel took eight women who were directors of plans—Isabel Rielo among them—to show that women could also lead in agriculture. Part of our job was to get the peasant women there involved in work. (Puebla 2003, 66–67).

Yet the manifest tenor regarding the hierarchy’s cupola is clear despite these exceptions. Jaime Suchlicki notes that even *since* 1975, all the efforts of the Cuban

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<sup>41</sup> “...on October 13, 1960, 382 Cuban-owned businesses, including all the sugar refineries, banks, and large industries and the largest wholesale and retail enterprises, were socialized. Three days later [16 October] the Urban Reform Act socialized all commercially owned real estate” (Domínguez 1978: 147).



government to get women to become part and parcel of the Party leadership have met with less than mediocre results: most of the women who do hold any leadership position are destined for secondary positions within the governing echelons (Suchlicki 1997, 184). These absences were, and are, present not only at the pinnacle of the governmental structure, but rather pervade the entire system of government bodies and organizations, even at the local level.

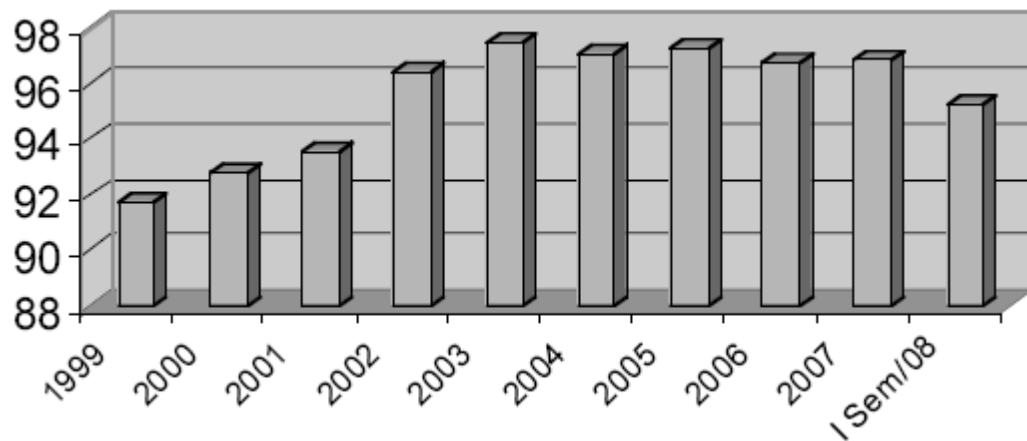
### *FMC Finances*

Women have also been isolated to allegedly particular women's issues through the use of particular funding mechanisms as well. The FMC asked women, and women alone, to finance the activities and work performed by their own mass organization, the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*. The overwhelming majority of Cuban women 15 and older are *Federadas*—around 80%—and it is primarily, if not entirely, the *Federadas*' own dues that pay for the *Círculos Infantiles* that take care of Cuban children and the rest of the FMC projects. This structure denies that the FMC performs labor that benefits anyone besides women. Women, through finances and direct labor, are still held solely responsible for many *socialized responsibilities* that have traditionally been women's work. The state pushes women to produce goods and services in the formal market *and then* demands that women, and women alone, buy the work of a few women assigned to the *círculos* with that wage. Yet, by taxing only women, this actually undermines a material recognition of this necessary work by absolving half of all citizens from supporting this work in spite of the benefits they receive from it.

In the *I Congreso*, the FMC quotes Georgi Dimitrov, the first Communist leader of Bulgaria, who said, "The payment of dues is the first index of devotion that ties her to her organization" (FMC 1962, 9). In 1962, 85% of *Federadas* paid their

dues in a timely fashion (FMC 1984, 19). This number rose to 94.6% in 1980, and 98% in 1985 (FMC 1987, 50). This number was predictably lower during the economic hard times of the “Special Period” (see Figure 3.5) but has rebounded to 96.7% in 2007 (FMC 2009, 20).

**Figure 3.5: Percent of Federadas who paid dues on time<sup>42</sup>**



The amount of dues is not prohibitive per individual woman, but the dues are substantial in the aggregate. In 1962, the FMC asked its members to pay 1% of their income or more as dues, reduce the costs of the *Círculos* from 40 pesos per month per child to 30, raise the monthly dues of parents to 33% of the monthly outlay, and raise money through gardens and other activities *as the Círculos were “still very costly to the State”* (FMC 1962, 38, 43, italics added). In addition to dues already paid, these requests came on top of Cuban women having offered almost 2,000,000 pesos worth of clothing, furniture, construction materials, and donations for the *Círculos*. This was augmented during the two International Infants’ Days during which they raised another 746,719.10 pesos which, according to an agreement with the government,

<sup>42</sup> (FMC 2009, 20)

would be used to help pay the *Círculos*' expenses (FMC 1962, 23, 45). Summing up its income and expenses at the time of the *III Congreso* (1980), the FMC declared it had a deficit of 40% that was subsidized by the state but aimed to reach 100% self-financing (*autofinanciamiento*) as soon as possible (FMC 1984, 20). This deficit was not altogether new, but was severely aggravated compared to previous budgets. *Federadas*' dues had provided 90.5% of the FMC budget in 1974, 94.6% in 1979, and 70.9% in 1980,<sup>43</sup> rebounding to 78% by 1985 (FMC 1987, 50). Surprisingly, the FMC was able to announce at its *VI Congreso* in 1995, the heart of the Special Period, that it had again reached *autofinanciamiento* from internal and foreign sources and that it had received no subsidies from the Cuban state over the past five years (FMC 1995b, 71, 146).

Yet, *autofinanciamiento* is not as simple as it seems. One of the *Círculos*' 1962 Resolutions stated that no level of the FMC may be in the possession of savings accounts (FMC 1962, 35). At first this might appear to require the organization to use all its funds for women's benefit. However, in 1974 the FMC stated, "According to our statistics for 1967-73, the [FMC] has been self-sufficient in 107%, thereby contributing a considerable amount of money to the State" (FMC 1975, 127). That is to say, not all the dues paid were spent directly on FMC projects to serve women. An unspent surplus seemed to disappear in support of the state's other purposes. Not only did the Cuban government finance "women's work" from women's assets, but it underfunded that work and diverted some of those funds to other entirely unrelated purposes.

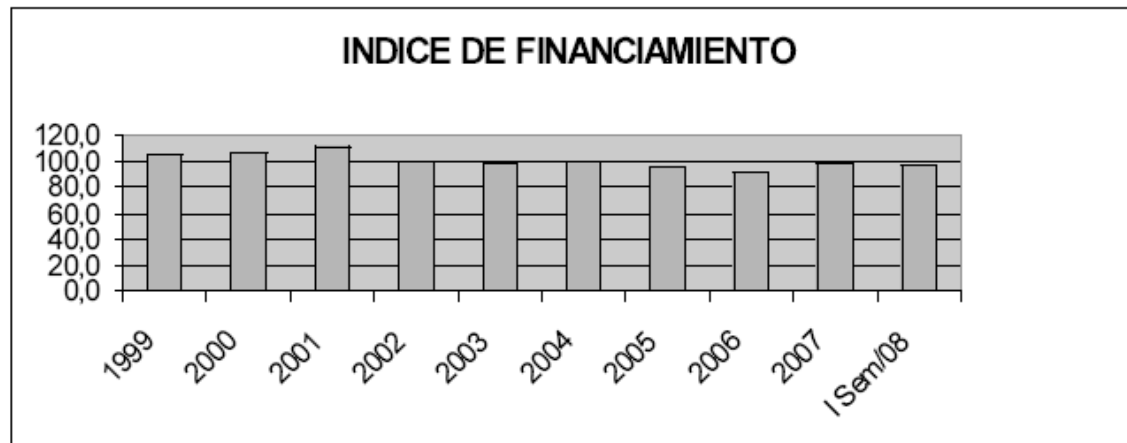
Today, the FMC is back to *autofinanciamiento*—and even surpassed 100% from 1999-2001 (see Figure 3.6)—allowing women to tax themselves to pay for the

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<sup>43</sup> The 1984 and 1987 sources appear to disagree about the 1980 budget. It is possible that the phrase "40% deficit" in the 1984 citation should mean "a debt worth 40% of their annual budget" but I have been unable to verify this.

various activities they used to undertake themselves, now performed by other women. A more trenchant blow to gender equality is hard to imagine than this policy of explicitly financing what has traditionally been women's work in Cuba through Cuban women's wealth alone. This refusal to ask society to remunerate Cuban women for the benefits they provide daily is nothing more and nothing less than men's exploitation of women, formalized by the state.

**Figure 3.6: Autofinanciamiento of the FMC<sup>44</sup>**

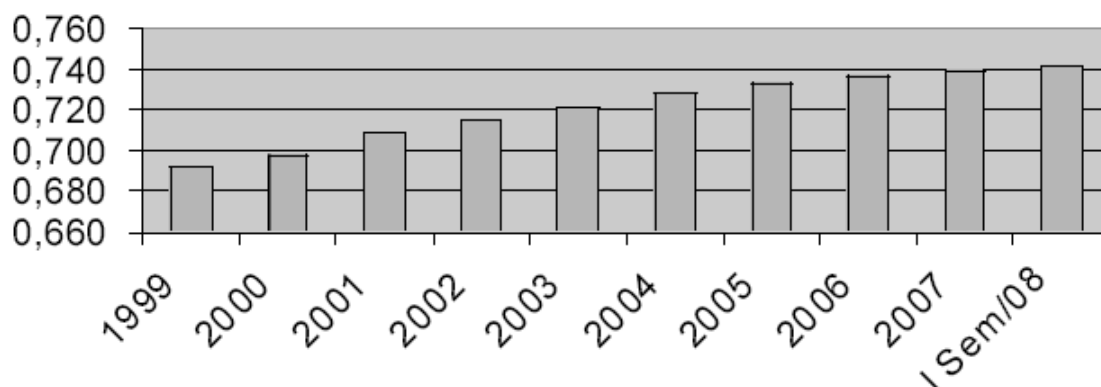


Collecting the dues to achieve these feats has not been easy. The documents of the FMC *Congresos* show a repeated worry and frustration that their cadres (the best and brightest activists for the FMC) were wasting valuable time and energy as “collecting dues has become a central activity for all cadres” (FMC 1987, 124). This lack of punctual dues payment was still a problem for the FMC in 2009 (see Figure 3.7) (FMC 2009, 9). In part this may be related to women's formal income. For women working in the formal market, paying the standard dues of 3 pesos per year is around one-tenth of 1% of their income. Yet, 42.5% of *Federadas* were

<sup>44</sup> (FMC 2009, 22)

“housewives” in 1995, who presumably have far less cash inflows. This may explain why the actual dues collected amounted to 74% of those 3 pesos in 2007.

**Figure 3.7: Average Dues paid per Federada (Peso)**<sup>45</sup>



It appears Dimitrov’s statement—already reflective of a perfectly androcentric economy that formally segregates women’s work—has been further perverted in Cuba, where “the payment of dues reflects her devotion to her organization and her self-abnegation in favor of the State’s other projects.” Virtually all Cuban women belong to the FMC and dues payment is a reduction of their wages to help raise all Cuban children—but why shouldn’t men contribute? There has been no material analysis of the gendered distribution of benefits and burdens resulting from women’s unwaged labor in the home and community. This has allowed blatantly sexist policies to persist, which require women’s contributions, and women’s alone, to pay for childcare while all of society benefits therefrom. Not only do men avoid any social contribution to childcare, but the dues system is even more regressive in that it asks “housewives” to contribute the same standard cash dues as women working in the formal market. Informal workers, care-workers, and women who perform work in the

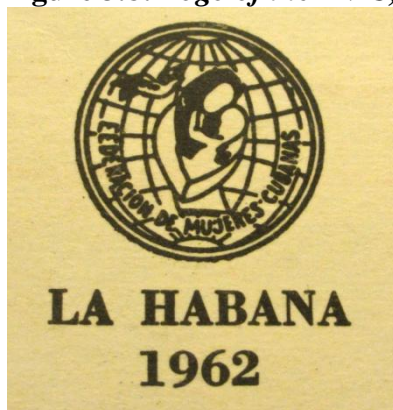
<sup>45</sup> (FMC 2009, 21)

formal labor market—in fact, all women, period—are not simply marginalized in Cuba, they are financially penalized.

### FMC Symbolology

This restriction of Cuban women's energies to women's issues and the state's policies positioning women as the guarantors of social motherhood in Cuba gain poetic and symbolic weight in the context of an examination of the symbols of the FMC. In 1962, the original symbol of the FMC was a "*madre con su hijo en brazos*" [mother embracing her child/son] accompanied by a flying dove (FMC 1962, 67). When the report of the *III Congreso* was published in 1984, this symbol had changed. Then, the FMC was represented by a "*miliciiana con un niño en los brazos*" (militiawoman with a child/boy in her arms) (FMC 1984, 36). These changes in symbols illustrate some of the broader changes Cuban women underwent during the course of the revolution.

**Figure 3.8: Logo of the FMC, I Congreso (1962)<sup>46</sup>**



<sup>46</sup> (FMC 1962, colophon on back cover)

**Figure 3.9: Logo of the FMC, III Congreso (1980)<sup>47</sup>**



Women's roles changed as they were socially integrated into the socialist revolution. Although the FMC originally drew on a Cuban ideology of women primarily as mothers, producers and caretakers of children, by its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary the FMC envisioned a new social role. The militiawoman fit into a social hierarchy that privileged men, but served a purpose higher than family needs. Where women's role was individualized and possessive in the first symbol--as a mother who cared for *her child/son*, in the later symbol, she is a woman who fights to protect the children of the nation. As childcare was socialized—both in terms of labor and finances provided by women, the symbol of the FMC transcended the privacy of individual households to assume the persona of collective defense and provision. All Cuban women contributed FMC dues and volunteered work to care for all Cuban children through myriad forms of voluntarism, as we shall see in Chapter 4. The dove of peace was replaced by a military beret and rifle. This, as feminist critique reveals so much of the world to be for women, is a double edged sword. On the one hand, women were no longer associated with an essence of pacifism, a natural gravitation to empty symbols without action, an aversion to politics that would stain the immaculate White dove. What is less stereotypically feminine than a woman with a rifle? On the other hand, women's energies have been co-opted by the state. Similar to Sarah Palin's attempt

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<sup>47</sup> (EcuRed n.d.)

to co-opt maternal fears and ferocity under the Grizzly Bear banner for a conservative-libertarian project of an anemic state, Cuba draws women into the state project of socialist survival. Ironically, both projects leave women with less power by fundamentally supporting transfers of power to the men in charge of the military, at the top of the economy, and running the state (whether strong or weak).

In 2009, the most recent *Congreso* of the FMC resolved that an image of their longtime leader, Vilma Espín, clad as a militiawoman, carrying a rifle and wearing an olive beret would preside over the organization (Álvarez Ramos 2010). Hands clasped in front of her body, she holds no child in her arms. She embodies the first pillar of the FMC, the defense of the revolution while the second pillar, the fight for equality, appears less certain. While the anonymous symbols could accomplish anything through the appropriate political projection, the historical person achieved the most formal power of any woman during the Cuban revolution through specific pathways, made definite statements, had particular shortcomings, and did not substantively lead a life known to most Cuban women possessed of privilege that enabled her to avoid the contradictions of Cuba's sexual division of labor.

**Figure 3.10: Current Logo of FMC (2010)<sup>48</sup>**



While socialism in Cuba may imply, reminiscent of Rousseau's *Social Contract*, "a coincidence of individual and collective interests" (FMC 1984, 69), these

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<sup>48</sup> (Álvarez Ramos 2010)



collective interests seem to always be defined as the interests of the elite men at the pinnacle of revolutionary leadership. Throughout the course of the revolution, as Azicri claimed, Cuban women were asked to change according to the roles they needed to fill in the projects devised for them by the revolution's leaders.

### **Conclusion: Incomplete Transformation**

The liberation of the Cuban people followed a Marxist-Leninist script written for a proletariat that did not fully exist in Cuba. The revolutionary leadership adapted the standpoint of proletarian interests as the universal stance of the Cuban population, challenging any other position that, actually or potentially, threatened those interests. Autonomous organization on behalf of women was construed as bourgeois diversion, which jeopardized the goals of socialist transformation. Unity was demanded of women, consequently autonomous women's organizations were denied space and shut down by the state (Fernandes 2006). Through the FMC's effort to incorporate every woman in Cuba, women were channeled into certain sectors of politics and certain policy spaces, primarily as financiers of, and laborers for, social and community reproduction. To be political and a woman in Cuba was to serve the proletariat's vision of revolution through the state.

From a socialist feminist perspective, there are a number of problems with this political vision. The state tells women, but not men, that they must pay dues to and participate in a political organization because of their sex (not their occupation or their citizenship). Within the only organization allowed for women, members could not deviate from prescribed paths and solutions to political problems defined by the men at the pinnacle of the Communist Party of Cuba. Moreover, women could not form their own groups or seek alternative spaces in which to wrestle with questions of their own formulation. Grassroots mobilizations and democratic practices that have

been the lifeblood of women's organizing in many parts of the world were removed from the table for Cuban women. In addition, Cuban women's access to formal channels of power was also stunted. Women's political activities, public participation, employment options, and locations in geographic and emotional space within Cuban society were isolated and quarantined from power. Women were assigned responsibilities for health, education, and childcare, but their sphere of operation remained the FMC, whose status as women's auxiliary made any transition to the most powerful formal decisionmaking bodies near impossible.

Despite Cuban women's overwhelming support for the revolution and their arduous efforts to ensure its success, these complex forces have derailed the promise of equality articulated in the founding documents of Cuban socialism. As a creation of the PCC designed to accomplish the goals of the Party, the FMC has never been in a position to harness women's independent political energies, or to press the state to consider dimensions of social existence that challenge Marxist-Leninist prescriptions. Chapter 4 takes up the question of women's lives. Arguing that the chief failure of the Cuban path toward women's liberation was its failure to undertake a thorough materialist analysis of women's work in the context of persisting sexual divisions of labor, the next chapter theorizes dimensions of inequality that the revolutionary elite in Cuba missed.

### **Part III. A Materialist-Feminist Account**

#### *Ch. 4. Women's Work*

Although the Cuban Revolution achieved some major accomplishments with respect to gender equality after gaining power in 1959, I have suggested that the vision of women's liberation advanced by the PCC suffered from serious flaws. Cuba's version of socialist-feminism suggested again and again that women's full equity would come only through their full participation in "*trabajo socialmente útil*" [socially useful work] narrowly defined in terms of employment in the formal sector of the economy. In addition, the revolutionary leadership's focus on unity and its harsh treatment of any form of diversionism ensured that it could not hear women who suggested alternative conceptions of liberation. Instead of developing a materialist analysis of Cuban women's lives and labor, the Party attributed persisting gender inequalities to ideological remnants of earlier capitalist orders.

The Leninist theory of liberation that guided the PCC ignored not only autonomous women's interests, but all work performed by Cuban women in the home that contributed to the economy, individual and social wellbeing, and quality of life of all Cubans. The first step in any materialist analysis of oppression is to analyze work—the human sensuous activity of the oppressed and the social relations developed through that activity. This chapter presents a counterargument to the assertion that women were not already performing socially useful work throughout the course of the revolution. Toward that end, it examines the complex and multifaceted material activity, formal and informal, undertaken by Cuban women since 1959. I approach this activity through the analytical lenses provided by feminist political economy and materialist-feminist theory. In addition to challenging the PCC conception of "socially useful work," my analysis of women's domestic labor, care

work, and community-building projects elucidates the sexual division of labor and the social relations that circumscribe women's work. Further, this exposition reveals the key to unlocking the problems plaguing gender equity in Cuba—and anywhere else that the lofty goals of human flourishing are taken seriously.

### **Materialist-Feminist Analysis**

Women's work is undertheorized in both the Marxian and liberal traditions. It has been naturalized and shielded from investigation by claims concerning voluntary commitments within the "private sphere." Sustained neglect of women's labor, however, contributes to its continuing exploitation. To ignore the work that women do, to fail to comprehend the dimensions of work outside the formal economy, is a particularly severe shortcoming for a materialist theory.

As demonstrated in previous chapters, the version of Marxist-Leninism adopted in Cuba did not go very far toward crediting the work women do as "socially useful work." Feminists such as Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, less famous German and Jewish immigrants to the U.S., and Cubans had all approached this problem with varying degrees of formal theoretical treatments before the Cuban Revolution had ever taken hold. Yet, the revolution never picked up these threads. Cuba was not alone in this regard. Feminist analyses of women's labor did not find favor anywhere within mainstream Left political movements.

In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the topic of women's invisible, unwaged, and underpaid work was taken up by feminists on the Left who creatively redeployed Marxian categories to challenge doctrinaire interpretations of Marx's (advanced by men). A new generation of socialist feminists developed materialist analyses of problems that Marx had glossed over. While these developments took place well after the Cuban Revolution began in 1959, they occurred during the prime of Cuba's

national focus on socialist-feminist issues. Despite the availability of these innovative analyses, the revolutionary leadership in Cuba, like their counterparts in the traditional Left elsewhere, continued to stand by a narrow construction of productive activity that saw very little value in being a “housewife.”

Socialist feminists sought to advance a new theoretical line of attack that would be persuasive to the well organized and motivated political Left, demonstrating that gender was a “useful category” and an “analytical tool” for social justice projects (Scott 1986). Socialist feminists tended to exonerate Marx for his lack of analysis of women’s household labor by highlighting the specificity of Marx’s project in analyzing economic relations mediated by capital (Holmstrom 2002, 7). They celebrated the power of Marx’s general method of historical materialism as a tool applicable to other domains of labor (e.g., Delphy 1980). “Historical materialism begins with the premise that meeting human needs is the baseline of history. Needs are corporeal—because they involve keeping the body alive—but they are not “natural,” because meeting them always takes place through social relationships” (Hennessy 2002, 84). Socialist feminists advanced a much broader conceptualization of work, as a means to meet human needs. Within this expanded conception, they emphasized that labor is required to meet any human need and that meeting human needs engenders social relationships structured by power and privilege. Materialist-feminism recognizes that Marx investigated a particularly important social-economic structure emerging during his time and place—capitalism—but claims that other social structures governing the ways humans meet needs also merit analysis by Marx’s materialist methods.

Marx offered feminists a bevy of tools and concepts with which to begin their innovative analyses. Some materialist-feminists focused on *class* and argued that “the

analysis of the situation of women fits naturally into a class analysis of society.” The endeavor was to understand the sexual division of labor—and change it—by deploying a traditional Marxian framework of economic classes to the categories *women* and *men* through an inquiry into each gender’s relation to the means of production (Benston 1984). Others placed more emphasis on expanding the meaning of *production*, launching debates about and campaigns for “Wages for Housework” (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Gardiner 1975). These debates fostered feminist consciousness raising, politicized the invisibility of women’s traditional labor, and analyzed the complexity of women’s work within the terms afforded by Marxist’s theoretical grid. Some even situated women’s labor within the contours of Marx’s theory of *alienation* (Foreman 1977). As committed Marxists, many of these feminists addressed their arguments to an audience of “‘Marxists’ rather than ‘women’” (Kaluzynska 1980, 27). Believing that historical materialism was a theoretical framework amenable to creative adaptation and revision, socialist feminists advanced their critiques in good faith, assuming that their interlocutors were open to argumentative force and persuasion. Trying to make very careful arguments within the terms set by contemporary Marxist discourse, these debates became highly technical and a bit removed from the interests of feminist activists and women, more generally.

As feminists concerned with the “domestic labor” debates became embroiled in the Left’s understanding of Marx’s specific analysis of capitalism, they failed to engage in a broader analysis of “the production and reproduction of immediate life” (Engels 1972, 71). This eventually led Christine Delphy to argue that it is Marx’s method, not his specific pronouncements or conclusions, which have the power to illuminate and eliminate women’s oppression. Delphy set out to undo the perversion

of those who “judge real oppression, and even the very existence of oppression, according to whether or not it corresponds to ‘Marxism,’ [by instead judging] Marxism according to whether or not it is pertinent or not to real oppressions” (Delphy 1980, 84). Delphy and others, such as Iris Marion Young, were not afraid to find Marxism wanting: “If traditional Marxism has no theoretical place for analysis of gender relations and the oppression of women, then that theory is an inadequate theory of production relations” (I. M. Young 1981, 49–50).

Following Delphy’s insistence that the materialist method begins with the barest bones of Marxian theory, I examine women’s work in Cuba, while avoiding technical arguments and various particulars of the Cuban economy just as Marx ignored certain things while “abstracting from” and excluding the particulars of interests, rents, taxes, etc. (Harvey 2012, 35–42). I deploy a much more flexible and supple method of a materialism that starts at the beginning—humans working to satisfy needs—and propose a general reworking of Marx’s methods into a materialist feminism (Bubeck 1995; Delphy 1980). By coupling feminist materialist analysis with insights from feminist political economy (Ferber and Nelson 2003; Folbre 1994; Moe 2003; Nelson 2006), I develop an analysis designed to resolve the central socialist-feminist dilemma—how to eliminate systemic gender inequalities that persist in capitalist and socialist systems alike.

### **Women’s Work: The sexual division of labor**

It appears to be fairly common, if not universal, across human societies to organize life around a sexual division that genders some members as women and some as men, others are gendered children ((quasi-)non-sexual), and still others may be deemed to occupy an entirely different gender. Recognizing the existence of sexual division by no means suggests all women (or men) are the same around the

world. It behooves us to consider the nuances of sex/gender systems (Rubin 2006, 88). The criteria and standards by which genders are identified and constructed vary over time and place; sexual practices and identities are products of human activity, which take manifold forms under particular historical conditions. Gender roles and sexuality are wide ranging around the world. In contrast to the pervasive assumptions of hegemonic heteronormativity, some cultures incorporate taboos on heterosexual intercourse for two-thirds of the year; some men fear the fatal powers of copulation; some men fear rape and flee women (Rubin 1984, 158n2). In his monumental study of the family in England over the course of three centuries, Lawrence Stone notes that the nuclear family is a social system that has “two castes—male and female—and two classes—adult and child” (L. Stone 1977, 22). Cuba’s sex/gender system possesses these same characteristics. Stone used the language of caste to highlight the hereditary, fixed, and segregated nature of the division between men and women. Gender is akin to caste in that it is a property attributed at birth that assigns a status one may not escape from. In many places, the rights and duties associated with this status requires physical and ideological separation. Despite their wholesale segregation, men and women are also joined together, not simply by sexual concupiscence as so many scholars are apt to off-handedly suggest, but by mutually binding social relations of hierarchy and dominance.

These relationships of power, structured by a sex-gender system of meaning and enforcement, lie at the heart of social order. In addition to the universal human practice of transforming corporeal and sexual things that simply are into things that have meaning, emotional valence, and normative force, humans also transform labor in the same way. This understanding of both sex/gender and labor comes directly from Marx’s criticism of Feuerbach’s ‘abstract materialism’ in favor of a ‘historical



materialism’—it is “sensuous human activity [and] practice” that both makes the world how it is, presents problems in particular ways, governs our theoretical apparatuses, perceptions, and even desires. Hunger seems biologically straightforward, for example, but its meaning, means and modes of satisfaction, problems, importance, and even sensation all rest on sensuous human activity and the social relations governing the activities surrounding the phenomenon and its satisfaction (Bordo 1988; Marx and Engels 1968a, pt. I.B).

Not only are sex/gender and labor both modes of ‘human sensuous activity,’ but the sex/gender system constitutes key social relations of labor. This is not to say that all those who are gendered women perform a certain type of labor in all societies. In fact, quite the contrary, in some places men wash the outside of the windows while the women wash the insides, and in other places women wash the outsides and men wash the inside of the windows; in other locales, earthing up potatoes and driving draught animals is women’s work and elsewhere it is men’s work (Delphy 1984c, 49). In fact, when we look at the panoply of labor or tasks that men, women, and other genders perform around the world we find that there is no task that is forbidden universally by all societies to women or to men. There are even examples that fully contradict our most rigid gender archetypes of women hunters and warriors and men performing child-care tasks (Rubin 2006, 94). In fact, exhaustive empirical work demonstrates that women’s and men’s work are not measured or determined by any technical criteria, nor the duration or intensity of the work, rather they are measured in the way all labor is measured—principally by the status of the worker and the social relationships governing their labor (Delphy 1984b, 200).

A key insight of feminist political economy is that industrial wage economies undervalue what has traditionally been women’s work. Capitalism flourishes by

externalizing the costs of social reproduction, imposing unwaged or underpaid labor on those with less social power. Within the socialist tradition, it is obvious that proletarians and capitalists are rewarded according to social relations of power and not according to the value of their labor, yet somehow followers of Marx have been oblivious to the parallel form of gendered divisions of labor and their consequent gendered social rewards. As Delphy quipped, it's obvious to anyone that women can act diplomatically, but curiously not as obvious that they can be diplomats (1984b, 205).

Cuba exhibits social relations of hierarchy and dominance between men and women and their respective labor. Already in 1973, two years before the famed Family Code prescribed more equality in the family, researchers at the University of Havana found that 60% of Cuban men and women thought that the husband should retain authority within the family while the rest of the respondents believed that authority should be shared (Hernández Martínez 1973, 51). These background beliefs were brought to the forefront of thousands of public discussions and debates involving millions of Cubans on the roles and relationships of women in Cuba's socialist project as the new Family Code came under popular dialectic review in 1975 (FMC 1975, 5–9, 84–87). Yet, paper ideals found in surveys, public discussions and debates, and even the Family Code itself are no match for social structures of power and rewards.

Cuba's revolution accomplished some sexual desegregation of the formal labor marketplace. The Duncan Index provides one means to measure sex segregation in the labor force.- The Duncan index may be used, for example, to identify the percentage of women (and men) who would have to shift jobs to a male-dominant (or female dominant) occupation to achieve sex-parity among occupations. The Duncan index reaches this result by summing the absolute differences between

the percent of *all* men and the percent of *all* women in different occupations and divides by two. Victor Fuchs provided a useful example of how the Duncan Index can compute gender segregation in the labor force (Fuchs 1988, 33):

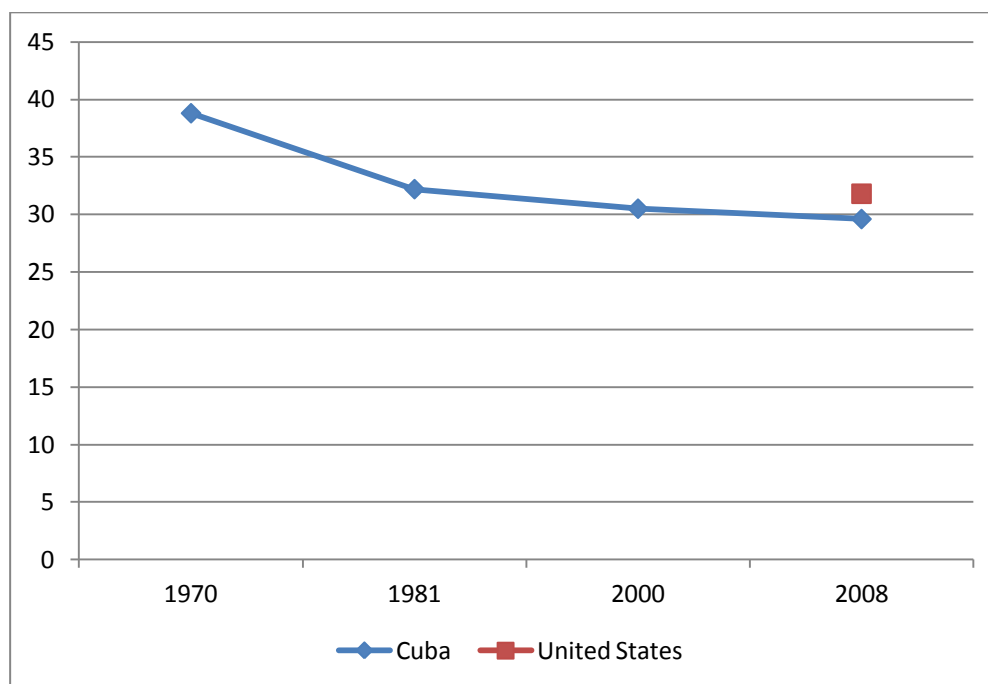
	% of men	% of women	Absolute difference
Occupation A	50%	10%	40
Occupation B	30%	25%	5
Occupation C	<u>20%</u>	<u>65%</u>	<u>45</u>
	100%	100%	<b><u>90</u></b>

An absolute difference of 90 divided by 2 generates a Duncan Index of 45, which indicates that at least 45% of men (or women) would have to switch occupations to eliminate the sex differences in the economy. Duncan Index scores range from 0, indicating no sex segregation in occupations, to 100 indicating total sex segregation in professions.

Using 2008 data from Cuba's *Statistical Almanac* and extrapolating from a few tables, I calculate that the Duncan Index for sex segregation by economic industry in Cuba was 29.6 in 2008 (ONE 2008a, fig. Tables 7.1, 7.3).<sup>49</sup> As Figure 4.1 illustrates, Cuba's Duncan Index for industry segregation shows significant improvement dropping nearly 10 points as Cuba moved from 38.8 in 1970 to 32.2 in 1981 and 30.5 in 2000 (ILO Department of Statistics 2009; ONE 2006a, Table VI.3).

<sup>49</sup> It must be noted that these calculations are by industry, an extremely rough form of occupational segregation with less than a dozen categories and not likely to represent the true segregation in the economy at more granular levels of detail. Cf. (Wells 1999, 373, Table 2) for more detailed occupational levels. For comparison's sake, using roughly the same level of industry categories (9 for Cuba, 10 for U.S.), the Duncan index for sex segregation by economic industry in the United States was 31.8 in 2008 (BLS 2009, 203, Table 10). Wells also arrives at much lower Duncan indexes for the United States in 1980, 1990, and 1997 than my much rougher estimate.

**Figure 4.1: Occupational Segregation of Cuba's Formal Labor Market, Duncan Index: 1970-2008<sup>50</sup>**



This rather sanguine picture changes, however, if one takes into account those doing work outside the formal marketplace. If women's labor is counted fully, sex segregation of labor must be analyzed across the economy as a whole, not simply within that portion of the economy formally counted as wage-earners. In Cuba (and the United States) about 40% of working-age women remain outside the formal market (39.8% in Cuba and 40.5% in the U.S. in 2008). These percentages are much different for men: only 12.2% of Cuban men are outside the formal market, compared to 27.0% of men in the United States. Cuba's 1971 Law No. 1231, the *Ley Contra la Vagancia* [Law Against Loafing/Idleness], which applied to men only, is largely responsible for this discrepancy in the labor force participation of men in the two nations (Pérez-López 1995, 72–73; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 105). Cuba also has a labor intensive agriculture system that is heavily male-dominant. When one

<sup>50</sup> ILO Department of Statistics 2009a; ONE 2008a, fig. Tables 7.1, 7.3; ONE 2006, Table VI.3.

includes all working-age men and women who are not officially in the formal market, the Duncan Index score for Cuba is 33.9 (compared to 26.1 for the United States).<sup>51</sup> When women's unwaged labor in the home is taken into account, Cuba's progress in desegregating the labor force appears less exemplary.

Another illustrative example of the sexual division of labor in Cuba comes from the military, dramatically illustrated by the story of General Teté Puebla, the only woman among Cuba's 100 generals (Báez 1997). In 2009, women comprised 18.9% of the enlisted ranks in the Cuban military, and 12.5% of the officer corps. These numbers reflect very recent developments. In 1994, women comprised only 3.5% of the military as a whole; and 7.7% of the officers (FMC 2009, 20). Inclusion of women in the military, however, does not imply that women are performing the same roles as men within the armed forces. Again, General Puebla's biography is illuminating. Among the responsibilities she held within the military, which are detailed in her biography, are:

director of the Rebel Army's Department of Assistance to War Victims and their families...head of education in the Eastern Army...in charge of the Children's Farms for war orphans and of Social Security within the Western Army...working in a Special Unit to attend to the family members of internationalist volunteers...director of the Guaicanamar Cattle Plan in Jaruco, in Havana province...head of the military section of the Communist Party in Havana...director of the office responsible for Assistance to Combatants and Family Members of Internationalists and Martyrs of the Revolution (Puebla 2003, 9–10).

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<sup>51</sup> Again, these are rough heuristics but they do inform us nonetheless.

Even when incorporated into male-dominant institutions, women are assigned gendered responsibilities. General Puebla spent most of her career in the military working for victims, families, children, orphans, volunteers, and martyrs.

Household surveys tell a similar story. In 1990, at the beginning of the Special Period (1990-2004) and fifteen years after the countrywide debates about, and passage of, the 1975 Family Code, Patricia Arés Muzio conducted a study of the Cuban family that provides excellent insight into the Cuban sexual division of labor. First, roughly two-thirds of women in 1990 said that they were *not* in agreement with the traditional sexual stereotypes of men and women; while slightly more than one-half of men said they agreed with traditional sexual stereotypes (Arés Muzio 1990, 51). The survey also collected self-reported data about sex-typed activities. More men reported performing traditionally feminine activities than women reported performing traditionally masculine activities. The reasons provided to explain the transgression of gender boundaries were telling. Women reported that they did not perform stereotypically masculine tasks because of “ignorance or lack of ability” or because they had “no need to perform those activities.” By contrast, men indicated that they did not perform stereotypically feminine tasks due to “lack of time,” “custom/habit,” or because they “dislike performing that type of activity” (Arés Muzio 1990, 52–53: Tablas 7–8).

While I would argue that all of these answers reproduce, rather than explain, the sexual division of labor, there is one answer that stands out: men’s most oft-cited answer, a “lack of time.” That men mention lack of time and women do not is a puzzle. A 2001 Time-Use Survey found that women performed 21% more hours of work each week than men (ONE 2001, 61, Gráfico 6.2). While men claimed a “lack

of time,” they also acknowledged that women carried a heavier burden of domestic labor: 89% of men declared that in their partnership, it was the woman who was “overburdened,” a statement with which 78% of women agreed (Arés Muzio 1990, 56: Tabla 11).

One of the key tenets of the sexual division of labor found in Cuba is that, as Talcott Parsons pointed out with respect to the sexual division of labor in the United States, women’s labor “entails qualities and activities which rank lowest in economic status and yet highest amongst moral values” (Somerville 2000, 80). The moral merits of women’s work seem to impair perception of its material value. As noted in chapter 2, the revolutionary government in Cuba was remarkably inattentive to the labor involved in childcare. Yet, on the other hand, the FMC’s *Congresos*, especially in their earlier more maternal years, clearly stated, “*el ser humano* [the human being] is the greatest treasure [for the Revolution]” (FMC 1962, 54). The FMC later declared “mothers and fathers must combine their responsibilities as revolutionary workers with the time they must devote to the [correct] education of their children...with absolute certainty...that [this time] is as valuable for the Revolution as that devoted to any other task” (FMC 1975, 207). This contradiction in material and moral assessments accords women an elusive moral authority sustained by their self-sacrificing labor in the home, which is conjoined with economic and political marginalization.

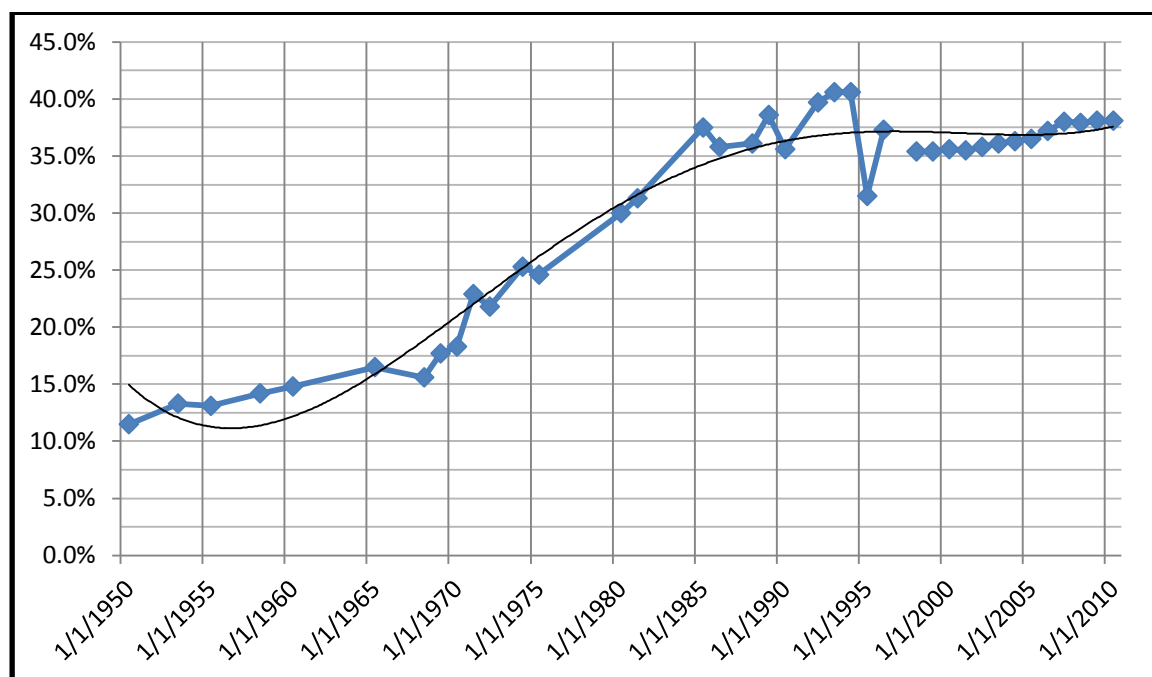
### **Women’s Formal Market Labor Context**

Women’s work outside of the formal marketplace must be considered in the context of their waged work inside the formal marketplace. Women’s participation in the labor force has climbed dramatically during the revolution (see Figure 4.2). In 1950, women constituted only 11.5% of the Cuban labor force in the formal sector.

Women's composition of waged labor rose steadily to a high of 40.6% of all formal laborers in 1993, when the economic dislocation of the Special Period reduced it to 31.5% by 1995 (Catasús Cervera 1997, 2). Over the past 17 years, women's paid labor force participation has been rising slowly again. This rise and then precipitous decline of women's participation in the formal sector demonstrate the power of the macroeconomic situation in Cuba as the growth associated with the revolution gave way to the collapse of the USSR and the onset of the Special Period (1990-2004). It also suggests that the Cuban government has deployed women as a "reserve army" of labor adventitiously.



**Figure 4.2: Women as a Percentage of Persons Employed in Cuban Formal Market**  
*Selected Years, 1950-2010*<sup>52</sup>



As noted in Chapter 2, between 1969 and 1974, women's turnover and attrition rates were very high; only 28% of women who joined the formal market remained there (PCC 1975, 82–83). Two decades later in the midst of the Special Period, however, turnover and attrition had abated. By 1990, 95% of employed women remained employed the following year (Espín 1990, 250). The reduction in turnover is surely related to the desperate demand for additional wage income at the onset of the Special Period. But economic hardship should not mask another reality:

<sup>52</sup> Stone 1981, 88; Catusas-Cervera. *Patrones Reproductivos*. 1997, 3 (Table 1); Perfil Estadística: 141, <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/enfoquegenero/mujer/mujer.pdf>; Perfil Estadística: 12, <http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/enfoquegenero/mujer/mujer.pdf>; 2005 Anuario Estadístico: VI. Workforce and Salaries.pdf, VI.9; 2006 Anuario Estadístico: VI. Workforce and Salaries.pdf, VI.9; 2007 Anuario Estadístico: 7.9; ONE 2009, 1-2 (Mujeres y Empleo); 2008 Anuario Estadístico, 7.9 Empleo y Salarios; Caram Leon 2007, 10 (Empoderamiento Femenino en Cuba: Criterios para su Análisis en las Cooperativas); Lewis et al. 1977. *Four Women*. p. xviii [1958,1968]; FMC 1995. *Realidades y Desafíos*, 13; ONE, 2011, *Mujeres y Hombres*, Fig. 3.1; 2010 Anuario Estadístico, fig. 7.1

women's formal market labor force attachment had increased significantly from two decades earlier.

### **Domestic labor**

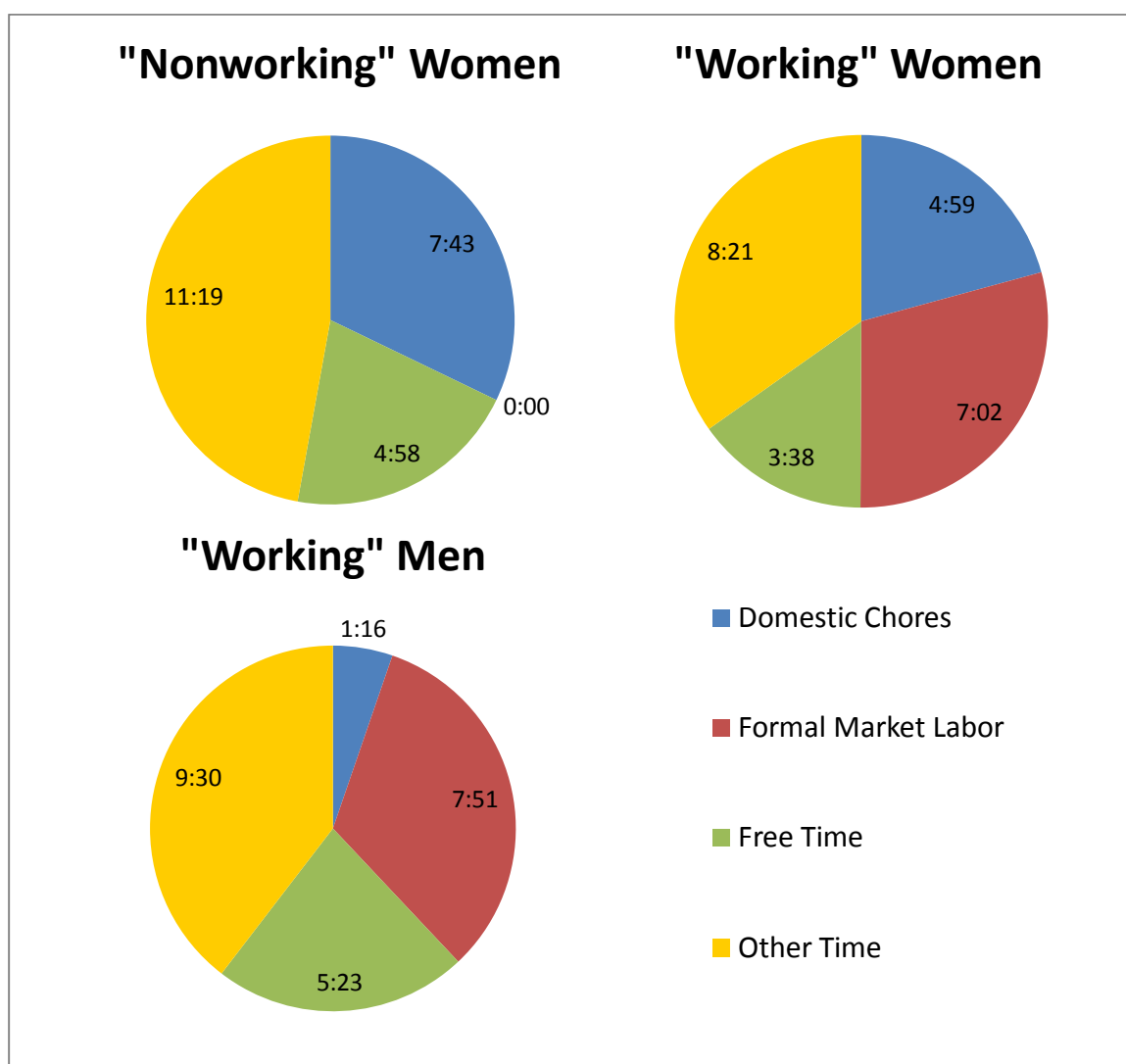
Labor performed within the Cuban family engenders distinct relationships that differ markedly from those operating in the sphere of capitalist or socialist wage-labor. In contrast to labor that generates profit through the extraction of surplus value, the alienated work relationships that are the intellectual and political foundation of classical socialism, women's labor within the home involves relations that are often described affectively, labor motivated by and performed as a manifestation of love. The material dimensions of this affective domain must be examined.

### ***Housework***

In spite of women's growing incorporation into the wage economy, almost every Cuban woman spends a large proportion of her time in the home doing housework. Even those women who work outside the home in the formal marketplace are not exempt from housework: 90% of gainfully employed women also work in the home (Díaz Vallina 2001, 11). Men do some work in the home, too, but it pales in comparison to women's efforts. In 1990, children reported that mothers performed eight out of seventeen household tasks alone; while the other nine tasks were shared between mother and father (Arés Muzio 1990, 60–64, Table 14). One Cuban study, originally published in 1979 (aggregating housework and childcare into a domestic work category) found that housewives spent 9:14 (9 hours and 14 minutes) each day on domestic work, working women spent 4:44, and working men spent only 0:38—38 minutes (Nazzari 1989, 117). Another study from 1979 showed much the same results (see Figure 4.3). A third study, published in 2001, found that Cuban

women spend an average of 34 hours per week working in the home, more than tripling Cuban men's 11 hours (Díaz Vallina 2001, 11). In 2001, toward the end of the Special Period and a quarter-century after passage of the Family Code, men performed about two more hours of domestic work than they did in 1979.

**Figure 4.3: Daily Time Use Distribution, Cuba: 1979<sup>53</sup>**



<sup>53</sup> Data from *Cuba: Mujeres Latinoamericanas en Cifras* 1992: 50 (accessed Sep 2007 <http://www.eurosur.org/FLACSO/mujeres/>) [ICODI, Investigaciones sobre presupuesto de tiempo. La Habana, 1975 (a y b)]

As we look more closely at the sex-gender system of labor, class—supposedly eradicated in Cuba—becomes a salient category. A few studies in the 1990s have shown that family models tend to differ by class (cf. Caño Secado 1993; Núñez Sarmiento 1993; Sosa and Proveyer Cervantes 1993). Highly-educated women working in middle-class jobs tend to share the burdens of housework in a more egalitarian fashion with their male partners. Less-educated women, and those with less economic independence, occupy a more precarious social and economic position. They tend to be more fearful of abandonment as an effect of asserting themselves (Harris 1995, 101–03). Reviewing research on Cuban exiles conducted by Geoffrey Fox (1973), Colette Harris suggests one explanation for these class differences may be that less educated men have thoroughly invested their self-esteem (and its converse, a sense of shame) in a family model of an authoritarian man and submissive woman (Harris 1995, 101–03). Some households do not include a man, authoritarian or otherwise, but this exacerbates women’s domestic workload rather than alleviates it. In 1981, 28% of Cuban households were headed by women. As has been the case in many parts of the world in the recent era of globalization, the number of women-headed households in Cuba has increased dramatically, rising to 36% of all households in 1995 and 40.6% in 2002 (Catasús Cervera 1997, 7; ONE 2009c, 1). Of all women-headed households in Cuba, 56.7% of the women household heads are neither cohabiting nor married—that is, 812,000 households or about 20% of all Cuban households are headed by single women (cf. ONE 2009c, 2).

Even multi-generation households do not offer Cuban women any easy way out of the second shift; nor do such households encourage men to transform the sexual division of labor. As the Special Period (1990-2004) began, Helen Icken Safa noted that the growing percentage of three-generation households “reinforce[d] traditional

patterns of authority and domestic labor” (1995, 163). Although additional people sharing the household gave younger women needed support in childcare and housework, older women performed this work, “discouraging men from taking more responsibility” (Helen Icken Safa 1995, 163). The Special Period impelled Cubans toward formation and maintenance of extended families, yet, according to some research, the intensity of economic difficulty made it impossible for many young couples to rely on the financial support of their elders as previous generations had (Caram León 1998, 4, 2006). Some researchers found, *pace* Safa, that in the context of the economic perils of the Special Period, husbands and even children played a greater role in the home (Aguilar, Popowski, and Verdeses 1996). Yet, such changes occurred only in the most severe phase of the Special Period (1990-94); afterwards family members reverted to their previous roles and the home to its previous form (Caram León 2007, 12).

The general research consensus on the gendered effects of the Special Period suggests that “the domestic response to the crisis in Cuba has been to reinforce, rather than dissolve, traditional sexual divisions of labour in [housework] activities” (Pearson 1998). Women continue to prepare and cook the meals; clean floors, kitchens, and bedrooms on a daily basis; wash and repair clothes; nurse the sick and elderly; do all the shopping for the family; pay the bills; and more (Pearson 1997; cf. Pertierra 2008). Men, on the other hand, “generate income, organize house and furniture repairs, and run errands that require heavy lifting.. They are usually ‘sent’ by the women in charge of household provisioning...on such errands” (Pertierra 2008, 746). In a much more damning assessment, Elvira Díaz Vallina notes:

We must not forget that inequality in domestic duties between men and women has shown positive, if small, changes, but the sense of responsibility for these duties remains very weak and in general men behave like children in the face of these tasks, in that they have to be reminded continuously of what they must do to *help*. (2001, 11)

The sexual division of labor is alive and well in contemporary Cuba. The connection between women and the household has increased in strength and breadth since the disappearance of Soviet trade and the most significant indicator of women's status is "the physical state and cleanliness of their house and the quantity and consistency of their food provision" (Pertierra 2008, 744). Regardless of their traditional associations, these household responsibilities are "undoubtedly sources of prestige and power for women" (Pertierra 2008, 763–64).

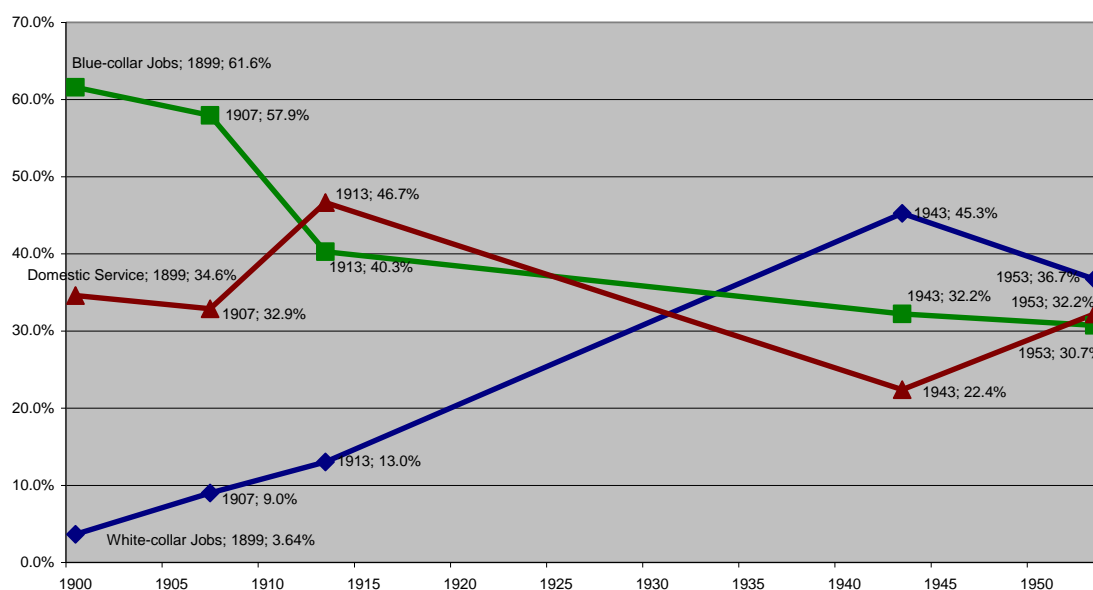
### ***Childcare and Social Reproduction***

Muriel Nazzari considers childcare to be the key issue in the struggle for gender equity in Cuba. "The issue in the struggle for women's equality is not housework *per se* but child care and the additional housework the presence of children requires" (Nazzari 1989, 117). Adult male status in the Cuban sex/gender system exempts a person from responsibility for childcare activities. Childcare is overwhelmingly connected to Cuban mothers today, and has been for at least the last 150 years. Women perform this uncounted labor: the bulk of the work is undertaken by mothers with auxiliary contributions from grandmothers, aunts, daughters, and other women friends, as well as young girls. These facts are very much in accord with the research performed by Nancy Chodorow regarding the organizational features of the 1970s Anglo family in the United States and the social organization of

gender: “Women care for infants and children, and when they receive help, it is from children and old people” (Chodorow 1979, 86–87).

Although adult male status is a sufficient condition for the avoidance of childcare, it is not a necessary condition. In the homes of the wealthy classes before the revolution domestic workers (maids, nannies) often performed many of the tasks that less advantaged Cuban mothers performed in their own homes on a daily basis—cooking, cleaning, caring for the children, washing clothes and other goods, keeping the children clean and presentable. Between 1920 and 1960, 30,000 to 90,000 domestic workers were employed on the island-- fully one third of working women were employed in this occupation just before the revolution (see Figure 4.4) (FMC 1995c, 11; Stoner 1991, 200).

**Figure 4.4: Women in the Female Labor Force as Percentages, 1899-1953<sup>54, 55</sup>**



Today, few Cuban women hire maids or nannies to perform this labor. The revolution targeted domestic workers as a specific occupation for transformation, making strong efforts to recruit domestic workers to new forms of employment. Inaugurated in Havana in late 1961, night schools offered courses to 20,000 former domestic servants in more than 60 schools in subjects such as “driving training, typing, commercial secretary, shorthand, administration, etc.” (Lorenzetto and Neys 1965, 68). The Cuban government has claimed that of the total 194,000 women working before the Revolution, 70% were maids (F. Castro 1975, 57; FMC 1975, 170). The practical implications of the elimination of this class of workers are staggering—training, skilling, and relocating 136,000 workers is no mean feat. In keeping with socialist principles, former domestic workers were relocated to work in

<sup>54</sup> Extrapolated from “Occupational Distribution of Employed Cuban Women by Class, 1899-1953.” In Stoner, K. Lynn. *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman’s Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940*. Duke University Press: Durham. 1991. Appendix.

<sup>55</sup> Using Microsoft Excel to make this chart, I was unable to accomplish a time-series without eliminating all dates before 1900, i.e. to make the x-axis to scale according to the dates linked to the data. Thus, the data from 1899 is aligned with 1900 on the x-axis. My apologies.



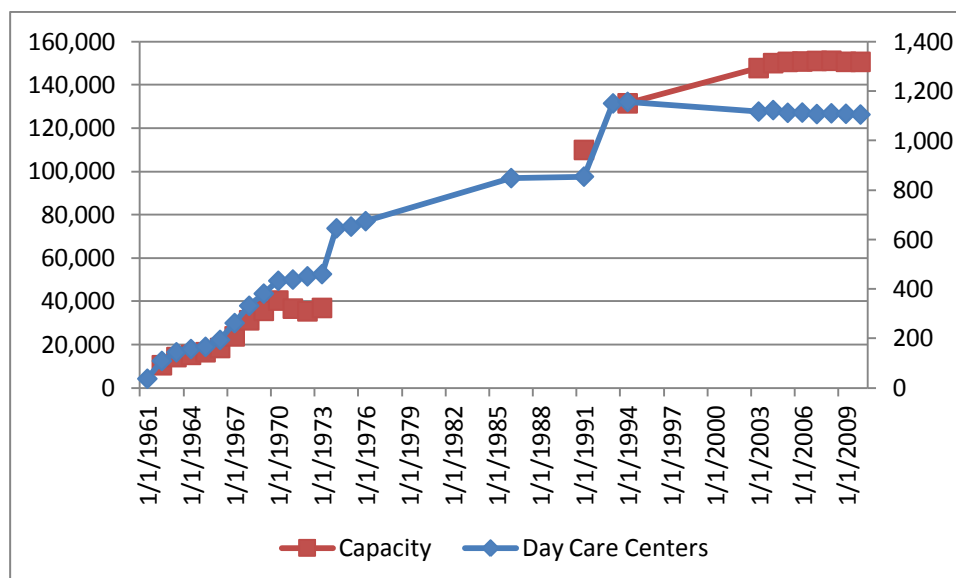
occupations deemed more socially useful by the Cuban government, such as bank workers, phone operators, health care personnel, etc. (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 39–40). The disappearance of maids and nannies (coupled with men’s avoidance of domestic labor) also ensured that gendered double and triple shifts exist for a much higher percentage of contemporary Cuban women.

The strong connection between childrearing and women stems in part from Cuba’s cultural heritage. Spanish culture and the religious patriarchy associated with the Catholic Church mixed with the vested interests of the plantation class developing in Cuba to create a sexed, raced, and classed hierarchy that continued unabated after Spain was ousted from official sovereignty over the island. This tradition put a stark division between the sexes: men were *hecho para la calle* [made for the street] and women were *para la casa* [for the home] (Stoner 1991, 10). Men were public actors, women were private dependents, and childcare was a private concern. The link between women and childcare was reinforced even after the revolution severed ties with the colonial and imperial histories of Spain and the United States. Cuba, like many socialist states, assumed that childcare was the mother’s responsibility. Even the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where women participated fully in the waged labor force, linked women with the care of children rigidly as late as 1988. In response to a GDR survey asking if men should put their careers on hold at some point when there are children in the family, a mere 3% of women and 1% of men said “yes” (Einhorn 1993, 29). Cuban women demonstrated similar beliefs. Indeed the President of the FMC, Vilma Espín contradicted the notion of parental equality put in place in the 1975 Family Code by supporting a government ruling that same year that only mothers, not fathers, could be called at work to take their sick children home. In

keeping with very old stereotypes, Espin alleged that a “special bond exists between a mother and her child” (Salva 1975, 46–47).

Although important continuities remained in the sex-gender systems in Cuba during the first and second halves of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the revolution did make some striking changes beyond the elimination of maids and nannies. Before the revolution, there were only 37 crèches for children aged 1-6 years old and their mission was not education and care for all but the care and protection of needy children (Leiner 1974, 53). The revolution irrevocably changed this. The first five *círculos infantiles* (daycare centers) opened July 26, 1961—three of them in Camagüey and two in Havana. The purpose of these centers, according to the Director of Cuba’s *Círculos Infantiles*, Clementina Serra, was “to take care of the children of working mothers, free them from responsibility while working, and offer them the guarantee that their children will be well cared for and provided with all that is necessary for improved development” (cited in Leiner 1974, 12; C. Serra 1969, 1). The *círculos* accepted children from the age of 45 days until they were ready to enter elementary school at age 6; most were open six days a week from 6am-6pm (Leiner 1974, 13; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 133). In addition to caring for the children’s cognitive needs, the *círculos* also offer two snacks and one meal each day with an eye to childhood nutrition, providing 66% of each child’s daily nutritional needs (Varela Hernández and Et al. 1995, 7.2.4). The scale of the day care centers grew immensely as the revolution progressed but capacity in 2010 was equivalent to only 150,622 (25.2%) of 598,071 children under 5 years of age (see ). The *círculos* benefited 2,000 *mothers* in 1961, 82,900 in 1980, and 119,600 *mothers* in 2008 (ONE 2009d). As the language of the government statistics office makes clear, childcare was considered a benefit to mothers—not to fathers, families, or society.

**Figure 4.5: Day Care Centers [Círculos Infantiles] and Capacity of Centers: Selected Years, 1961-2010<sup>56</sup>**



Throughout the revolution's history, the *círculos* have battled against underfunding, pursuing various measures to acquire the revenues to aid the revolution. They began by charging fees based on parental income in 1961, eliminated fees in 1967 for families with working mothers, but reinstituted fees in 1977 (Domínguez 1978, 269; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 133). In Cuba, as elsewhere, childcare workers were the lowest paid occupation in the nation in 1973, earning 77% of the average wage (Domínguez 1978, 501). Nonetheless, the FMC voiced the government's concern that costs were too high. According to FMC President, Vilma Espín, parents of children in the *círculos* in 1991 were paying between 24-480 pesos a year for childcare, although the annual cost for each child was 957 pesos (Espín 1991, 13). Depending on their income, parents paid between

<sup>56</sup> Leiner 1974: 56, 57 (day care centers by province; all of Cuba by year); Espín 1991, 13; Varela Hernández 1995, 7.1.3-5; Domínguez 1978, 269; Smith and Padula 1996, 133; Anuario Estadístico: 2008, 347; 2011, Anuario Estadístico, 18.1

2.5% and 50.2% of the actual cost for these facilities. The average salary for a Cuban working in the formal market in 1991 was ~182 pesos per month, or 2,184 per year. Thus, the average salaried Cuban worker in 1991 paid a minimum of 1.1% and a maximum of 22.0% of his/her annual salary for childcare in one of the *círculos*. As a very rough comparison, among the 50 states in the U.S., a parent might expect to pay 14-32% of the median salary for infant care (Demos 2011, 55).

The *círculos* represented a collective mode of childcare provision. Rather than struggling to provide such a collective alternative, the Cuban state could have paid mothers a wage for caring for their children at home. In Cuba, a society with an extraordinarily low birthrate--1.7 children per woman (ONE 2009a, Table II.4), the Cuban state could have spent the exact same amount on childcare (957 pesos per child) had it paid each mother about 75% of the average Cuban wage in 1991 to care for her children at home. This of course, presupposes that the state recognized childrearing in particular and women's labor in the home more generally as socially useful labor.

In addition to the public childcare offered by the *círculos infantiles*, childcare in Cuba included a Pre-School program operating every school day for children five years old, supplemented by what euphemistically used to be called *vías no formales* [informal methods]. This last form of childcare was divided into two parts: education for children from birth to two years old in the home and secondarily for children from two to four years old in parks and local meeting places. These informal groups generally met twice a week, did not include meals, and were as much about educating parents as children (Varela Hernández and Et al. 1995, 7.1.3, 7.2.2). This informal social program, later formalized as *Educa a Tu Hijo* [Educate Your Child], was introduced and tested in conjunction with UNICEF by the Ministry of Education from

1983-87 on a small scale, and subsequently expanded to a national program in 1992, replete with pamphlets and training for parents and educators (Innovemos 2005; OEI 2003). The program grew tremendously and by 1999, relied upon over 14,000 Directors [*Promotores*] and 60,000 “volunteers” [*Ejecutores*] to use the language developed by UNICEF. In 1999, 88.7% of the *Ejecutores* working for the *Educa a Tu Hijo* program were women (UNICEF 2001, 50–51). Today, women comprise 80.4% of volunteers (FMC 2009, 38). This women-dominated workforce allows these three programs to reach 99.8% of all Cuban children from birth to 6 years of age: 17% in *círculos infantiles*, 12% in Pre-School, and 71% in *Educa a Tu Hijo* (OEI 2003).

Although 99.8% of children are reached by these programs, Cuban mothers continue to provide the vast majority of childcare for their children. The *círculos* have cared for only 13-17% of Cuban children over the past two decades; estimated demand outstrips supply by around 25%. With insufficient numbers of *círculos* to meet childcare demand, the low-cost, low-intensity *Educa a Tu Hijo* program tripled the number of children served from 1993-2001, during a period when the *círculos* grew only 9.6% (IWRAW 1999; OEI 2003). Thus Cuban mothers of children under the age of 4 (and their mother-substitutes) are the primary care-workers for their children seven days a week except for a few hours of *Educa a Tu Hijo*, two days each week.

Mothers’ work involves various activities that ensure the physical reproduction of children (that they grow and develop in healthy ways), e.g., feeding, bathing, playing, conversing, socializing, watching over, touching, etc. More and more science confirms that infants and young children need incessant loving interaction to survive (T. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon 2000, 66–99)—a fact confirmed by turn-of-the-century, highest quality “sterile nurseries” that routinely exhibited

infant mortality rates above 75% by depriving children of such constant loving interaction (T. Lewis, Amini, and Lannon 2000, 69–70).<sup>57</sup>

Food is one of the most important elements of care for any human being, but it is especially critical for infants. The Cuban state provided special rations of food for young children during the Special Period, but accessing these rations required waiting in line. In addition, the rationed foodstuffs were not fully processed, requiring women to devote more time to meal preparation as well as food acquisition (Azicri and Deal 2004, 93). A parent could trade these valuable commodities earmarked for young children (i.e., milk and meat) for other household goods, but the general feeling among Cuban women was articulated by a 35 year-old teacher and mother who said, “At the moment with rationed water, my son gets priority” (Pearson 1997, 688).

### **Girls and Boys: Reproducing Gender**

Childcare is also a prime nexus for cultural reproduction, ensuring that children learn to identify with, understand, and manipulate the symbols of their community. Strategies to allow successful integration into, negotiation with, and creation of cultural life are typically discussed as forms of socialization: “In the family children are socialized into appropriate roles and acculturated to appropriate status expectations. Many classic studies have documented the ways in which styles of childrearing—varying by social class—accomplish this all-important task” (Barrett and McIntosh 1982, 105). The care-work involved in socialization has been considered a highly important by social theorists and empirical researchers concerned with the preservation of social order and cultural formations across generations. Women’s work is necessary to a range of important educational attainments: language

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<sup>57</sup> Sterile nurseries used the new “germ theory,” disastrously as it turns out, to justify their practices of limiting infants’ interaction with caretakers.

acquisition, construction of mores, understanding social hierarchies, social geographies, hygiene of body and mind, psychological and physical thriving, the ability to form relationships, and of course, the “soft” skill formation necessary to acclimate to a high-complexity, socially dense, domination-dense world of formal market production.

Some revolutionaries, however, have bemoaned the conservative nature of socialization, claiming that, “it rigidifies past ideals.. [and] is there to prevent the future” (Mitchell 1971, 156). One clear way that socialization rigidifies the past is through the reproduction of sexual divisions of labor—not only those operating among the gendered adults who socialize the young, but also through socializations ideological and material effects: the production of girls and boys who aspire to be just like the adults in their culture.

When women are pressed to enter the formal labor force, their time is stretched thin by the double and triple shifts of domestic work, market work, and community/social work. someone must pick up the slack. When women are pressed by political and economic forces to take jobs that are socially remunerated in ways that put food on the table in a predictable and contractual manner, the need for women’s unwaged labor in domestic and community spheres is not lessened or eliminated. Houses and children still get dirty, lines are still being formed to acquire foodstuffs, children still have homework, gardens still grow fruits and vegetables, informal black and grey markets still exist within the neighborhood, neighbors still need favors, humans still want to spend time together in spaces full of love. Who picks up the slack when women work full-time outside the home?

Cuban girls often assume a larger proportion of this work. Taking on care-work can have negative consequences for girls, ranging from higher school dropout

rates to perpetuation of a sex-class system that trains girls to invest their centers of meaning in care-work, trapping them into making the same bargains later in life that their mothers made before them (Vasallo Barrueta 2001, 72). Rather than cultivating their human and social capital during childhood, girls are routinely shortchanged as they are pulled into the informal labor market earlier and to a greater degree than their brothers. Asking girls to assume responsibilities for care-work hurts all girls but it is especially detrimental to those girls among the poor, who have more to gain from early investments in their futures (Meurs and Giddings 2004, 2).

Loss of human and social capital curtails girls' future income and leadership potential, as it trains them in the family model of their parents' sex/gender system, reinforcing links between their gendered self-identities and the sexual division of labor among the adults in their family and households. As girls labor in the same way women do (and boys avoid labor in the same way men do), they come to understand themselves more concretely as particular kinds of women (and men). As they come to understand themselves more concretely as gendered subjects, they become invested in the dominant sex/gender system that shapes their expectations and desires and prepares them for particular roles and careers that reproduce certain divisions of labor. Needless to say, boys too learn to practice domestic irresponsibility. They come to prize the pseudo-independence that comes from ignoring others' needs and others' work to fulfill that need, taking pleasure in the power that stems from a gendered hierarchy of needs and wants favored by social and material incentives.

The sexual division of labor naturalized within Cuban households is overwhelmingly sex-segregated. According to research at the beginning of the Special Period, when children drew pictures of their families, mothers were in 97% of drawings and fathers appeared in 70%. The vast majority of mothers (90%) were



drawn performing domestic tasks; this was true for only 30% of fathers. The fathers depicted doing household tasks constituted only 30% of the fathers who were included in children's drawings of their families; thus only 21% of Cuban children drew their fathers performing a domestic task). In contrast, 80% of all feminine figures in the drawings (including grandmothers, sisters, and aunts) were performing domestic chores. In addition, 80% of girls drew *themselves* doing domestic work; but only 10% of boys did the same (Arés Muzio 1990, 121–22). As I noted above, children reported that mothers alone performed eight out of seventeen household tasks while the other nine tasks were shared between both mother and father (Arés Muzio 1990, 60–64, Table 14). It is also worth noting that mothers were portrayed as doing more tasks, but possessing less decision-making power. By contrast, men did far fewer tasks but decided more. Cuban children's depictions of the Cuban home accurately portrayed the typical inverse relationship between authority and labor (Arés Muzio 1990, 45–47, Table 3).

Perhaps, some might argue, we should not trust these children's idealizations. After all, many children over the age of six spend much of their time in school, thus they lack continuous empirical data on their parents' activities. Yet, in one sense, it is completely irrelevant whether mothers and fathers actually spend their days doing what their children's drawings depict. The drawings demonstrate how Cuban children understand their society. That these perceptions are powerful can be seen by their lopsided representations of domestic labor and care-work, and powerful perceptions generate expectations and limitations. Even if the children's perceptions were well off the mark from quotidian reality in Cuba, the children's understanding of society's rules will have some effect on the ways they will labor as gendered persons throughout their lives. It is far too naïve to suggest that Cuban children are

completely blind. Although they may not see, at this age, the full picture of the sex-gender system in which they are imbricated, there is still something to be said for their recognition of who is there in the home most often, who helps with homework most often, who picks them up when they are sick most often, who prepares meals most often, even if it is during the few hours children are actually in the family domicile.

Girls are taught not merely through words, ideas, and images that they are the ‘second sex’ (De Beauvoir 1978), but they are taught quite literally by the tasks they (and their mothers) perform and the relationships that govern these tasks. Both girls and boys are taught through material practices of labor that they are gendered, that girls become women, that boys become men, and that both girls and women are subordinate to boys and men. Girls and women perform unremunerated labor centralized around hearth and community in an unending series of tasks, while men are either absent, unaccountable, and working for money; or present, unaccountable, and enjoying leisure time. Both of these masculine modes of being are understood as superior because they plainly demonstrate liberty and power on a daily basis with respect to other gendered members of family and community.

### *Economies of Affect*

Ann Laura Stoler has argued that much of the politics that interests current scholars (including gender, race, class, their meanings, their modes of production and destabilization, etc.) can be further articulated and analyzed by paying attention to bodies that come into contact, those that don’t, the ways they do or don’t connect, and the meanings generated around those connections and prohibitions (Stoler 2002; Stoler 2006).

Not only has Cuba’s brand of socialism failed to come to terms with family and home, but even cutting-edge feminisms over the past few decades have been

deeply troubled by the family and unsure about its political nature—broadly speaking, whether it is a good or bad institution (Somerville 2000, chap. Ch. 7). However, simply because undesirable consequences issue from the current rules, structures, and power relations of some legislative bodies does not automatically suggest we ought to abolish those bodies. I would suggest similar temperance regarding the uneasiness with the bourgeois family/home model as an institution. The family and home offer something good, or so men and women continue to say, believe, and practice—we must take their word, and their agency, seriously. The questions thus become, if the family that arises from the current sex-gender system is as bad as feminists posit, myself included, then why do women, queers, and even feminists themselves keep playing the family game? Is the family capable of transcending its attachment to conservative theories and outcomes? If so, what type of families ought a socialist-feminist polity seek to produce?

The family as an institution peculiar to contemporary Cuba is not entirely defined by, but may be conceptualized as, a set of relations within which bodies and subjects live at a heightened register of affect. The historical form of the Cuban family is a site of psychosexual expression of ties of affection between adults, sharing and maintenance of a common domicile, consistent exchange of work and gifts based on implicit and unregulated social and idiosyncratic agreements, and psychosexual development, maintenance, enculturation, and care of children (cf. L. Stone 1977).

The FMC's *IV Congreso* mentioned this affective aspect of human beings when it stated, "*En nuestra sociedad no pueden existir seres que no reciban, además de las necesidades materiales para la vida, el afecto, el cuidado de su desarrollo en todos los aspectos*" [There cannot exist in our society persons who do not receive, in addition to the material necessities of life, affection and care for their development in

all its aspects] (FMC 1987, 167). This affective labor should not, however, be reduced to a matter of feeling or sentiment. Emotional engagement is a component of affective work, a powerful component. Indeed, Cuban families seem to be overflowing with emotion: love, hate, contempt, violence, shame, pride, and disappointment (O. Lewis, R. M. Lewis, and Rigdon 1977). As Diemut Elisabeth Bubeck notes in her masterful materialist theorization of care-work, “Whilst involving a material net loss, caring<sup>58</sup> is also often one of the most meaningful and rewarding kinds of activity that anyone could engage in” (Bubeck 1995, 147). A material understanding of this form of labor does not ignore emotional content but recognizes that emotions are one aspect of care-work. Equally important is the material activity involved in caring processes.

To perform care-work, the first requirement is presence. Cuban children’s understandings of their mothers suggest immediate and continuous presence (Arés Muzio 1990, 120). This powerful presence is very likely related to the strength of affect found within the Cuban family. Also important are touch and communication. Bodies form attachments through the very material practice of physical contact. Communication also expresses care. These two mechanisms, practiced more by Cuban women and mothers than by Cuban men and fathers (Arés Muzio 1990, 127), demonstrate that care-work is “other-directed and other-beneficial” (Bubeck 1995, 149). It may also be accompanied by a certain selflessness—long celebrated by the FMC. As Pearson notes, “In both the urban and rural studies, it was clear that women expressed concern primarily for the needs of other family members, both children and the elderly, rather than for themselves” (Pearson 1997, 686). Last but not least, encompassing all of the above dimensions, care-work is sensuous human activity.

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<sup>58</sup> Bubeck’s definition of “care” is not the same as mine; nor is her definition of “care” the same as what I mean when I say “affective labor”—but it is close enough to use the quote for illustrative purposes.

And affective activities are necessarily material practices, concrete forms of “doing.” As depicted in Cuban children’s view of the world, 100% of mothers were drawn as “active” and “in motion,” only 70% of fathers were so drawn. Similarly, in the girls and boys drawing themselves, 80% of girls drew themselves as “active,” while only 40% of boys did so (Arés Muzio 1990, 121–22).

It is not only children who benefit from domestic and affective labor, of course. Men (and women) do as well. Although the youngest children are most susceptible to the alarm and despair that sets in with a lack of human contact, interaction, and care, all humans—even men and CEOs—need care.

### **Domestic Labor: Collateral Effects**

This sexual division of labor in domestic work is reproduced within the formal economy, in part because the extra time and work required for housework, childcare, and affective labor constrains the amount of time women can devote to other forms of work as well as leisure. When seeking work in the formal economy, women engaged in childcare may seek jobs that offer more flexibility—jobs which involve less responsibility in the workplace, but answer concretely to more human needs in the domestic and community sphere. Yet the concentration of women in “casual labor,” is often not a matter of individual choice. Anticipating that women will bring the burdens of domestic labor into the workplace causes many employers to discriminate against working women. Employers lack flexibility over how many hours constitute a full-time job and they often presume that the job should be the employee’s top priority. This cluster of assumptions about domestic labor produces collateral effects, especially in the absence of any social policies designed to assist workers with childcare demands: “in the absence of nursery or after-school provision, flexible work may be literally the only work available” to women (Barrett 1988, 157).

An economy premised on a sexual division of labor that assigns responsibility for domestic labor to women thereby privileges and rewards unencumbered workers, who happen to be men. When economic exigencies pull women into the formal economy, they are not offered the full panoply of employment options as their male counterparts. Women are pressured into working certain jobs in particular job-sectors within the formal market, jobs associated with flexible hours, less than full-time occupation, and absence of benefits. Theories of women's liberation that trace women's economic marginalization to individual prejudices or ideological commitments of an earlier era ignore the collateral material effects of the sexual division of labor. Even if attitudes that contribute to sex discrimination are eliminated through socialization to egalitarian norms, *de facto* discrimination stemming from the gendered burden of domestic labor would persist. Women would continue to receive less pay for their work, be segregated horizontally in their firms (concentrated in jobs with less responsibility and lower pay), be segregated horizontally across firms (concentrated in job sectors associated with casual labor and flexible hours), and be segregated vertically within and across firms (underrepresented in positions of leadership and responsibility) (Díaz Vallina 2001, 11-12; ONE 2008a, VII.3; 2008b, 54).

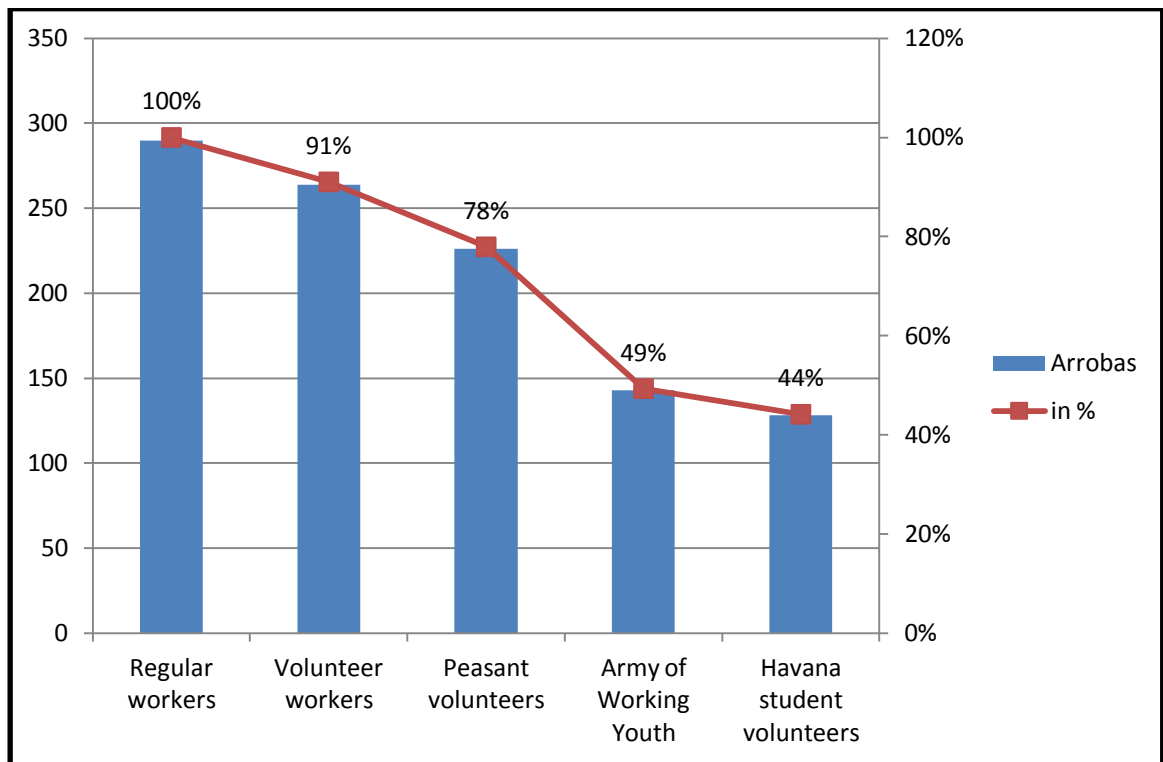
### ***Gender and Volunteer Labor***

One of Cuba's most unique job-sectors is volunteer labor, the importance of which for Cuban women cannot be overestimated. Although workers in the formal sector of the market (men and women) have occasionally donated parts of their workday (e.g., two hours overtime each day at a hardware factory or voluntary labor all day on Saturdays) (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 119), volunteer work in Cuba has predominantly been the province of women. The FMC's founding program

declares that social services and volunteer labor are at the heart of the FMC (FMC 1962, 55). Cuban society as a whole and the Cuban state, in particular, benefit directly from women's activities that generate goods and services donated to the economy through unwaged labor. No one has to pay cash for unremunerated volunteer labor, no one has to pay benefits for workers without pensions, there is no need to provide for maternity leave or vacation time. Volunteer labor also enables the state to mobilize laborers according to random economic fluctuations or environmental or political challenges that contribute to shifting demands for labor. It also allows the state to fill cracks and niches left unfilled by the formal market economy as it seeks surplus revenues through the sale of commodities and services. A reserve army of laborers mobilized as volunteers is a particularly effective means to meet demand when it arises or to reduce the supply of workers when demand drops.

On the other hand, voluntary labor is sporadic and irregular and makes economic planning (whether of one firm or one country) more difficult. Some persons may volunteer for seemingly counterproductive reasons—e.g., during food shortages the government asks women to volunteer to produce more food for the nation, yet women perform this unpaid agricultural work in part for its easy access to food for themselves and their families (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 120). In addition, volunteer work is frequently of lesser quality than permanent professional labor, taking longer periods of time to complete its tasks and still unable to reach the level of craftsmanship of the paid laborers. Figure 4.6 demonstrates these problems in the context of sugarcane cutting.

**Figure 4.6: Arrobas per Cutter, First Half 1973 Harvest in Matanzas<sup>59</sup>**



According to Jorge I. Domínguez, the inclusion of women into “socially useful work” at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s coincided with dropping unemployment rates. As estimated by economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago, unemployment in Cuba affected 8.8% of the workforce in 1962, declining precipitously to 4.5% in 1965, 2.7% in 1968, and 1.3% in 1970 (Domínguez 1978, 182–83). As unemployment was replaced by a “shortage of labor,”<sup>60</sup> citizens were mobilized. In the minds of the leaders of government, women were an obvious target. Castro himself said at the FMC’s Second Congress in 1974 that women’s inclusion in the formal market as laborers “is an imperative necessity of the Revolution, it is a demand of our economic development, because at some point, the male work force will not be enough” (FMC 1975, 292). As the Cuban government tried to reach ever

<sup>59</sup> (Domínguez 1978, 360)

<sup>60</sup> When writing about socialism and keeping in mind a critique of economic reductivism I am wary of the language (e.g., labor supply, labor shortage, etc.) that lends itself to considering humans as simply another economic input rather than as the end(s) for which the system works, and ought to work.



increasing production objectives, it appealed to the ethic and *conciencia* (conscience) of an *hombre nuevo* (new man) who seemed rather analogous to the stereotypical *mujer antigua* (woman of the past)—selfless and sacrificing. This “new” morality and *conciencia* sought a collective good and offered “moral rewards” (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 340). This old form of Cuban self-abnegation was no longer for the benefit of the patriarchal family, but mobilized instead for the good of the patriarchal state and nation.

Volunteers responded to the revolution’s call: hundreds of thousands of FMC women contributed volunteer work for the revolution by 1980 (FMC 1984, 75). Some of this unremunerated work was the kind of unbidden charity that pours out during times of crisis and emergency. These were caused by military circumstances such as the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. During both of these mobilizations, women went to work in the agricultural and industrial sectors without pay. The revolutionary slogan, “Not one machine left idle, not one position left empty,” translated into 62,449 women volunteering in 4,341 work battalions for agriculture, construction, clothing production, among other things (FMC 1962, 28). Women also supported the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) [Revolutionary Armed Forces] during the Bay of Pigs invasion (April 16, 1961), running supplies to first aid posts, managing 100 kitchens, and running three hospitals (FMC 1975, 97–99). Natural disasters such as hurricanes prompted similar acts of kindness and solidarity. In the fall of 1963 the FMC “organized women to evacuate survivors, give aid, and operate emergency shelters” and worked to mitigate the agricultural damage suffered due to Hurricane Flora, which killed over 1,000 people and destroyed more than 10,000 homes (FMC 1975, 99; L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 97; E. Stone 1981, 45n).

The intensity of volunteer labor follows the bellwether provided by the production within the rest of the Cuban economy. Women's volunteer contributions subsided a wee amount in the late 1970s and early 1980s as economic trade was highly favorable to Cuba. Under the Five-Year Plan for 1980-85, Cuba produced—in its formal marketplace economy—an annual growth rate of 5% (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 354). The very next year, in 1986, Castro announced a '*Rectificación*' [Rectification] campaign for the revolution to reassess its successes and failures, to loosen restrictions on citizens for ampler critique, and to develop new economic strategies to keep the revolution viable under a weakening set of trade partners in the Soviet Bloc and an ever tightening U.S. economic embargo. The *Rectificación* sought to make the economy more efficient: one of the strategies utilized was the reduction of personnel redundancies in the formal labor market. "Redundancy" forced many women out of the formal market and into unpaid voluntary labor. Some were let go because they were simply "extra" formal market workers; some were filling in for maternity-related absences; and some couldn't find childcare when confronted with lengthened shifts or unpaid overtime required of them (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 118–19).

### Defending the Revolution

Other types of voluntary labor were related more to Cuba's political economy than to altruistic charity in extraordinary times. Some women preferred voluntary work such as assisting the *Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución* (CDRs) [Committees for the Defense of the Revolution] and the FMC because it was more flexible and/or part-time (Stone 1981: 16). In 1963, women constituted 44% of the 1.5 million CDR members (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 369). The CDRs are voluntary block organizations that patrol the streets, clean and "beautify" [*embellecer*] the

neighborhood, campaign for public health (e.g., registering women for free pap smears), and bring together study circles (Randall 1992, 189n4). The CDRs also helped the Popular Parents' Schools [*Escuelas Populares de Padres*] disseminate information related to family healthcare and sexuality (FMC 1984, 66). In many ways, however, the CDRs are also the non-combat forces of the militia.

The principal tasks of the CDRs at the beginning of the revolution were: vigilance, local government, public health, and organizational growth. These priorities changed in importance in 1967 when the CDR turned its attention to organizational restructuring, local government, vigilance, and public health. When the Cuban government grew concerned about the growing autonomy of "organizational restructuring," however, it returned "vigilance" to the top of the list of priorities. Throughout the course of the Revolution, the primary role of the CDR has been in vigilance and public health with a slight emphasis on local government.

When the CDRs moved slightly away from vigilance toward public health the 1980s, women increased their volunteer contributions toward the martial defense of the Revolution. Tens of thousands of volunteer activists joined the newly created FMC-FAR [Federation of Cuban Women-Revolutionary Armed Forces] in 1982—the FMC wing of the Cuban military. One year later in 1983, the Cuban state experimented with the creation of a *Servicio Militar Voluntario Femenino* [Women's Voluntary Military Corps].

This transition toward external defense occurred as internal vigilance had become less of an issue. As the focus turned to defense against external enemies, the percentage of the population serving as members of the CDR grew from 40% in 1964 to 80% in 1972 (Domínguez 1978, 261–65). While the portion of the populace who belonged to the CDRs grew, the gender composition of membership and leadership

remained fairly stable.. Women remained approximately half of the members of CDR throughout the Revolution, yet they never held more than 20-35% percent of the leadership positions in the CDR (PCC 1975, 91; Pérez, Jr. 1995, 373). Almost none of the organizational work of the CDR leaders was paid. Nor was the “police powers” work on behalf of welfare, safety, health, and morals, or the creation and maintenance of social capital by the membership, paid.

#### Agriculture, Food, Gardens

Agriculture is another sector of the economy that received heavy inputs from women’s unpaid voluntary labor. Women volunteered labor in the *zafra* (sugar harvest) as well as coffee, cotton, and other harvests (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 97). The sheer amount of this voluntary labor is staggering. By 1962, the FMC reported in its *I Congreso* that 62,449 women volunteers in 4,341 work battalions cut sugarcane, harvested cotton, peanuts, beans, tomatoes, cut grass for hay, constructed *Círculos Infantiles* (daycare centers), built houses, manufactured clothing, and more (FMC 1962, 28). FMC volunteers also helped in aviculture to sell eggs and other products and “were decisive in the coffee harvests of 1962 and 1963” (FMC 1975, 111). In January 1965, Cuba pushed for more volunteer work, creating the “Year of Agriculture Legions” and launching the Female Farmers Plan on an experimental basis with 600 women from Havana (FMC 1975, 112). In 1968 the FMC mobilized more than 2 million women-days (16 million hours) to transplant 61,000,000 coffee plants for the *Cordón de La Habana* (Havana Green Belt Plan) (FMC 1975, 114). In 1970 women volunteered 41 million hours of unpaid labor (FMC 1975, 121), 20.1 million hours of which contributed to the failed 10 million ton *zafra*. Although

Domínguez underestimates the levels of women's volunteer labor,<sup>61</sup> his figures nonetheless capture extraordinary levels of unwaged work. The high point of women's volunteer labor was 1973, when women worked 95.6 million hours without remuneration. This fell to 49.3 million hours in 1975—an average of twenty-four hours per FMC member (making the extremely unlikely assumption that every single member—almost every single woman 14 and older—volunteered) (Domínguez 1978, 267–68).<sup>62</sup> This difficult work not only created products of value but, according to revolutionary leaders, this work instilled and inculcated a “new consciousness” and opened horizons (FMC 1975, 95) in which the (culture and ideology of the) new society might flourish.

In the 1990s, as the Special Period began, Cuban families were encouraged to further develop the nutritional self-subsistence of the nation by planting family-plot “victory gardens”—reaching 10,000 hectares by January 1991 (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 120). In 1994, 376 detachments comprising 18,438 “housewives and youths...cultivate[d] viands, plants, vegetable gardens, fruits, and breed animals” (FMC 1995c, 13). Due to the hardships of the Special Period, this agricultural work went beyond foodstuffs. As the country turned toward “alternative and green medicine” to cut import costs, the FMC took upon itself the task of growing plots of medicinal herbs (FMC 1995c, 25). Cuban women also volunteered to work on state farms (Deere 1991). This longstanding volunteer project was performed by the

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<sup>61</sup> The percentage of women of work age in the formal labor force in 1970 was 24.9%, compared to 44.5% in 1979 (Smith and Padula 1996: 101). 101,273 women in FMC-ANAP brigades (1974?); by mid-70s some paid, most for free (Smith and Padula 1996: 103) I believe that both Domínguez and Smith and Padula are citing the FMC's Second Congress in 1975 (although Domínguez does not include a citation); as the Cuban government, and thus the FMC, have reasons for underestimating the amount of women's voluntary labor in Cuba's economy—the state writes less paychecks and women feel less exploited—I believe one may reasonably infer the undercounting of women's unpaid labor in the Cuban political economy.

<sup>62</sup> These numbers seem far too low. 1970 = 30.9 volunteer hours per FMC member; 1973 = ~54.4; 1975 = 24.0.

FMC—ANAP<sup>63</sup> [FMC-National Association of Small Farmers] Mutual Aid Brigades, initially formed in 1966. By 1974, this program incorporated 100,000 women as volunteers, decreasing to 72,000 in 1979/80. These women volunteered their time either replacing male agricultural workers in emergencies or by joining the men during harvests (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 43).

In addition to the voluntary labor women contributed to the agricultural sector, some women also perform agricultural work for wages; others earn money by selling agricultural goods, which they have produced on their own plots of land. The revenue generated by women's farm labor is a small fraction of aggregate agricultural output, however. Women constituted 9.1% of all agricultural landowners in 2009 and 8.53% of usufructuary owners. Women comprised 17.9% of the Municipal Presidents of the ANAP [National Association of Small Farmers] (FMC 2009, 56).

### Education

Women also volunteered in the field of education. One of their first projects was the immensely successful Literacy Campaign during the 1961 "Year of Education." Approximately 100,000 adolescents--55,000 of them girls--between the ages of ten and eighteen became voluntary literacy *brigadistas*, who left the cities to teach rural citizens basic reading and writing skills (Kozol 1980). Along with this younger cohort, another group of teachers, the *alfabetizadores populares* [popular literacy workers], numbering near 121,000, volunteered part-time in urban areas; as did another 15,000 workers on paid leaves-of-absence through the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) [*Cofederación de Trabajadores de Cuba*] (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 358–59). All in all, 91,000 *Federadas* participated in the campaign, 59% of Literacy

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<sup>63</sup> ANAP stands for *Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* [National Association of Small Farmers].

Campaign workers were women, slightly higher than the female proportion of student volunteers (55%) (FMC 1962, 12, 1995c, 17). These *Federadas* acted as if they were adolescents' "loving mothers," performing such tasks as delivering their mail, making their beds, and cooking, as well as replacing schoolteachers who were involved in the campaign (FMC 1962, 12; Molyneux 2000, 307n19). Government officials also requested further volunteer hours for teaching from instructors for adult education classes during nights and weekends. They even asked some to act as makeshift security guards—those who refused to comply with these requests risked losing their jobs and being considered counterrevolutionary (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 85).

Throughout the course of the revolution, women worked in various programs to educate, socialize, and protect Cuban youth. One such volunteer program began as a suggestion by *Federadas* from Matanzas in 1970, the Militant Mothers for Education Movement [*Movimiento de Madres Combatientes por la Educación*] (FMC 1987, 28). This program began at the elementary level and has since expanded to middle and secondary school levels as well. Elizabeth Stone described the multiple responsibilities with which these women are entrusted:

The Militant Mothers for Education is a program composed mainly of housewives whose task is to check on students' attendance, help children in collective and individual study, help in the upkeep of the schools, sponsor Pioneer activities, and when appropriate, do substitute teaching (E. Stone 1981, 110n).

By the *II Congreso* of the FMC, there were 15,948 brigades of 434,134 Militant Mothers (FMC 1975, 105). In 1974, one of the "five minimum

responsibilities” of an FMC member was to join the Militant Mothers (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 50). At the time of the FMC’s Third Congress in 1980, Fidel Castro boasted the Militant Mothers were an association of 1.4 million female volunteers, a number that rose to 1.7 million by the time of the Fourth Congress (F. Castro 1980, 110, 1985, 4).

These Militant Mothers also worked in the school cafeterias, helped out on Saturdays, and organized work in the school gardens (FMC 1975, 105). Some of these volunteer women made students’ beds, comforted the homesick, sewed uniforms, and monitored or policed students’ behavior (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 43). This movement eventually began to include fathers in the 1980s and officially changed its name before the *VI Congreso* in 1995 to Militant Mothers and Fathers for Education Movement [*Movimiento de Madres y Padres Combatientes por la Educación*] (FMC 1995b, 120, 1995c, 18)(FMC 1995b, 18, 1995c, 120).

As was discussed above, early childhood education in Cuba also relies on volunteers. In 1980, the FMC called upon its members to increase their volunteer work in order to build, repair, and maintain the *círculos infantiles* that were still unable to meet the national demand for childcare. The United Nations reported that the program it sponsors to complement the *círculos*, *Educa a Tu Hijo*, is able to reach 80% of children under six years old, two days a week, thanks to 60,000 volunteers—almost all of whom are women (UNICEF 2001, 51).

#### Healthcare and Social Work

Another sector in which women have donated their time and labor is healthcare. By 1962 the FMC had graduated 1,300 *Federadas* from Popular Schools of Health [*Escuelas Populares de Salud*]. These graduates became instructors for 7,503 Health Response Volunteers [*Responsables de Salud*], hoping to train 35,000 by



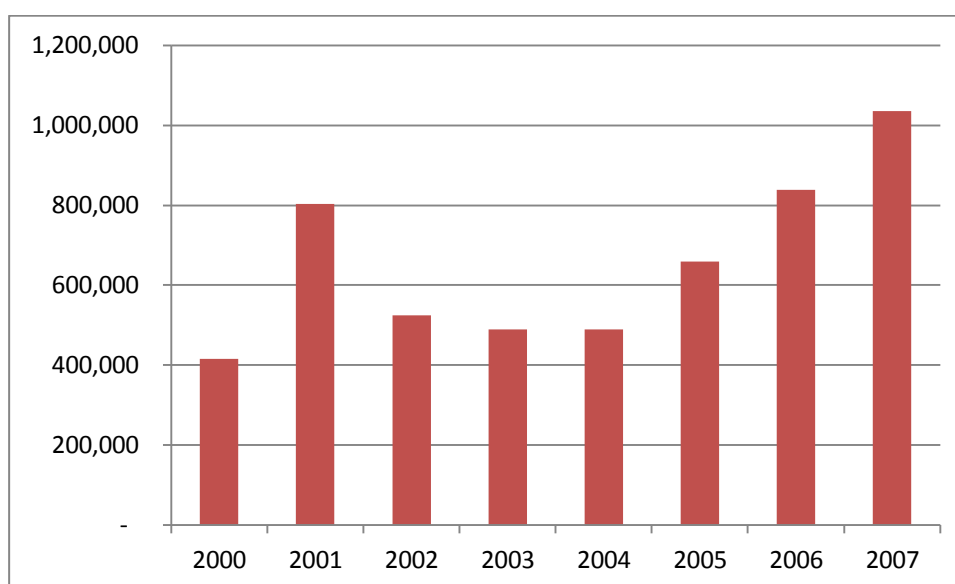
the end of the next semester. Working with financial help from the USSR, these volunteers completely eradicated polio from Cuba (FMC 1962, 25) and contributed enormously to the first anti-parasite campaign in the Escambray mountains from February to May, 1961 (FMC 1975, 97–99). In addition, *Federadas* trained in first-aid comprised the Auxiliary Corps of the Medical Services of the Armed Forces [*Cuerpo Auxiliar de los Servicios Médicos de las Fuerzas Armadas*] that worked ceaselessly at *Playa Girón* (the Bay of Pigs landing site) to attend to and transport the wounded (FMC 1962, 26). In a third effort, Cuba trained 10,920 Sanitary Brigade Volunteers [*Brigadistas Sanitarias*] in first-aid skills. These women created medicine kits for 940 FMC *Delegaciones* (smallest FMC grouping, usually comprising 50 *Federadas*), prepared half a million bandages for the Armed Forces, and began sanitary work in unhealthy and at-risk neighborhoods (FMC 1962, 26).

The FMC implemented the Sanitary Brigades composed of women health volunteers, in 1964. By 1974 there were 47,000 Sanitary Brigade Volunteers (FMC 1975, 109); by the 1990s, the program included over 70,000 *Brigadistas* (FMC 1995b, 46). These women work together with the family-doctor program to keep their local communities healthy through inoculations, health education, and encouraging and reminding community members to utilize the available healthcare services and information (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 61–63 (orig. Espín 1990, 4)). After eradicating polio, major vaccination campaigns also took place in 1975–76 and 1979, as well as health campaigns against dengue fever and hemorrhagic conjunctivitis (FMC 1984, 131, 1987, 33). These *Brigadistas* have volunteered with the Red Cross and generally engage in two activities per month (FMC 1987, 33). During the course of the Revolution, they have attended to begging children, orphans, cleaning up unsanitary neighborhoods, creating a network of asylums for the elderly, and aiding

the hospitals and psychiatric wards. They also helped end prostitution (FMC 1995c, 19).

In addition to the work of *Brigadistas*, members of the CDR assist in the Popular Parents' Schools [*Escuelas Populares de Padres*] to educate parents in matters of family health and sexuality (FMC 1984, 66). In 2008, the *Brigadistas* numbered 82,405 women and helped promote preventive healthcare for various cancers, recently including lung cancer, as well as fighting yellow fever and dengue fever through public campaigns to reduce standing water and interfere with the mosquito reproductive cycle (FMC 2009, 40–44). Ten thousand professionals also volunteer their time at the local healthcare clinics, Orientation Houses for Women and Family [*Casas de Orientación a la Mujer y la Familia*], whose clientele is more than three-quarters women, serving approximately 650,000 persons each year (see Figure 4.7) (FMC 2009, 46–47). These neighborhood centers offer

a variety of services, including AIDS education, psychiatric assistance, domestic violence services, self-esteem workshops, as well as various training programs designed to facilitate economic independence for women, classes which range from hairdressing and French to computing and marketing (McAuliff and Walker 2002).

**Figure 4.7: Numbers of persons visiting Casas de Orientación<sup>64</sup>**

Many women also work in the community as social workers [*Trabajadoras Sociales*].<sup>65</sup> In 1974, 8,323 women trained as social workers offered “long and patient hours to minors with behavior problems, working jointly with parents and schools, aiming at the elimination of all antisocial behaviors.” This work was enlarged to include “reeducation centers for women and youth” (FMC 1975, 110). By 1980, 12,754 social workers had been trained in the Frank País School of Social Workers (FMC 1984, 129). The program continued to expand. By 1985 there were more than 17,000 social workers, who began to work more formally with the National Revolutionary Police (PNR) [*Policía Nacional Revolucionaria*] (FMC 1987, 30). In 1986, formalizing the FMC’s work to prevent crimes and reeducate or attend to all those who need it, the Commissions for Social Care and Prevention [*Comisiones de Prevención y Atención Social*] were created in municipalities, provinces, and the nation. These commissions propose and refine policies, coordinate and supervise the

<sup>64</sup> (FMC 2009, 46–47)

<sup>65</sup> These workers are always referred to in FMC documents as “*trabajadoras*,” i.e., gendered as feminine.

application of policies, and assess and evaluate their execution. The Commissions included over 23,000 social workers by 1990, who worked in concert with 53,000 volunteer social activists to support individual, direct, and systematic action on the micro level (Espín 1990, 252; FMC 1995c, 20). The numbers involved with the Commissions for Social Care and Prevention continued to grow throughout the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>, including 80,000 volunteers by 1999 and 81,907 *Trabajadoras Sociales* in 2008 (FMC 2009, 23).

This work by the FMC expanded to target the variegated and changing social problems of contemporary Cuba. Along with continuing widespread work in children's nutrition and education, FMC launched programs to combat prostitution by working with prostitutes as well as pimps and madams with special focus on the areas of Havana where these activities are most heavily practiced. Other programs focus on drug abuse and addiction. Numerous organizations formed collaborative partnerships with FMC to address the problem of domestic violence between partners and familymembers. They have worked with various precincts and stations of the National Revolutionary Police to situate this violence in a social and community context in which both victims and perpetrators have recourse to multiple professionals for treatment, rather than simply addressing domestic violence in a criminal or penal context. Indeed, the FMC claims to have "converted women's prisons into schools," helping to maintain family connections between those incarcerated and their children. Additionally, the FMC has been expanding its work with the disabled community (FMC 2009, 23–32).

#### Organizational Leadership and Bureaucracy

A fourth sector of volunteer labor that ought not be forgotten is the organizational and leadership labor that goes unpaid and unremunerated, such as that

performed by the leaders of the CDRs, the Feminine Front of the trade unions' Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), and the FMC. The Feminine Front's duties were specifically focused on working women, ensuring that their abilities to fulfill their domestic responsibilities were not hindered by the marketplace. They also collected and maintained meticulous records regarding "work performance, absenteeism, and family life;" informing women of open slots in day care centers and schools for their children, and of job opportunities for those currently seeking work. The FMC also sent representatives to visit absentee female workers (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 100–01).

Like the CDRs, the FMC has functioned almost exclusively on the basis of volunteer, unpaid labor. "During the 1960s almost all of the FMC's staff were full-time volunteers, but in 1974 the staff—now numbering 14,000 women—began receiving salaries" (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 50). In 1975, 99.3% of FMC's 326,450 leaders were volunteers and only 0.7% (~2,285) were paid (Domínguez 1978, 271; FMC 1975, 126). In 1970 the FMC claimed a total of 1.3 million members, of whom 89,169 were considered "activists" (roughly 1/14 of membership). By 1980, nearly one in every seven of the FMC's 2.3 million members was an activist (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 50–53). Membership grew to 2.6 million in 1985 (Pérez, Jr. 1995, 369).

To remain members in good standing in Cuba's various volunteer organizations, women were expected to attend ubiquitous required meetings. The unpaid leaders not only attended and ran the meetings, but devoted time to planning them.

### **Working at Home, and Not Working**

Another form of unpaid or underpaid labor Cuban women engaged in was to bring work into the home. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this was done partly to appease husbands and fathers who were uncomfortable with and antagonistic toward women working outside of the four walls of the home. Jobs such as sewing, laundry, and even factory piecework were brought into working-class homes accompanied by the wages that contributed to the family budget (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 10). Statistics on work at home are notoriously unreliable—whether because men don’t want to admit to census takers that “their woman” is employed, citizens don’t want the government to curtail or punish their private initiative, or because these home-based activities are excluded from the official definition of “work.” Nonetheless, there appeared to be a great boom of women working in the home the year the USSR crumbled. “The number of women working at home increased from 15,000 in 1967 to 62,428 in 1989. Despite a request by the FMC, home workers did not receive social security benefits, nor were they represented in Cuban’s national union, the CTC (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 138).

The FMC turned its attention to these home-based workers in part due to the fact that 72.1% of these ‘home workers’ were women (FMC 1995b, 35). They worked as sewers and tobacco rollers, and they performed craftwork such as making clothing. During some eras, these home-based women workers resisted pressure from the state to enter the formal marketplace. In spite of the lack of benefits and shifting the costs of overhead to the home, they favored autonomy from factory bosses, union stewards, and state discipline, factors that are relevant to a feminist critique of state capitalism in Cuba. Despite the drawbacks and severe risks to income security, some women preferred to work piece-rate in their own homes because it enabled them to make their

own schedules and work at their own pace, operating as a species of entrepreneur, who had no boss but themselves.

Another alternative to inclusion in the formal market labor force chosen by some entrepreneurial women is simply “not working” at all. Some home-based workers sought to avoid government regulations associated with social security benefits and union representation because they sold their goods and services on the gray and black markets. Offering to sew a few shirts for some extra eggs might “provide for the family,” “produce healthier children for society,” or some other ill-defined and hard to measure social activity, but it is still work. This unregulated and far more flexible labor grew as dollars were reintroduced into the Cuban economy in the early 1990s, and many more women began to work in “the street.” To secure dollars, they sold food, toys, small utensils, and other products, bartered services, rented rooms, and even cooked food for tourists or students (Alvarez Suárez 1998). Although this activity is not technically legal, it has a longstanding precedents in Cuba. Extra-legal activities to acquire scarce dollars (colloquially referred to as *divisas* [foreign exchange]) became an increasingly important source of economic power during the “Special Period.”

In the context of this informal sector of Cuba’s economy, women’s absence from the formal sector takes on new meaning. “In 1969, 68.5% of the 181,625 women between seventeen and thirty-four who had no physical handicaps, no children, and no job refused to work” (Domínguez 1978, 500). Although the percentage of the female population working in the formal marketplace rose from 24% in 1974 to nearly 32% in 1980 (E. Stone 1981, 15) the informal sector retained its importance. “Even thirty years after the triumph of the Cuban revolution many of the *women workers* viewed “liberation” as the freedom to abandon paid employment

in order more adequately to carry out their domestic work” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 142, *italics added*). This curious gendered definition of liberation appears to ring just as true with Cuban women today who find both oppression, and power, in the informal economy. In 2008, 12.2% of men of working age (17-59) are neither working nor unemployed, for women of working age (17-54) this number balloons to 39.8% (ONE 2009b, 160: Table VII.1).

### ***Community Labor***

A theoretical shift occurred in Cuba during the Special Period. Leaders began to speak of “the community” as a complex social web or system that benefited families and individuals; indeed, they came to speak of “cultural work” and “community work.” In addition to all the various forms of work recognized as contributions to the revolution mentioned above, Cuban women also engaged in a host of programs and activities during the course of the revolution that might be described as community labor, a domain characterized by feminist political economists as women’s unwaged “third shift.”

The FMC sponsored the ‘Preparation for Conscientious Motherhood and Fatherhood’ Program, participates in the ‘Friends of the Child and Mother’ movement, anti-smoking campaigns, the Adult Education, Parents’ Education, and Family Education Schools [*Educación de Adultos*, *Educación de Padres*, and *Escuela de Educación Familiar*] and the Maternity Homes [*Hogares Maternos*] (FMC 1995b, 17, 43–49, 1995c, 23). The Maternity Homes do much of the work that keeps Cuba’s infant and maternal mortality rates one of the lowest in the world—including offering meals, 2,800 daily calories, vitamins, and lactation support leading to 80% mother-infant pairs exclusively breastfeeding through four months old (Renz 2002).



Two million women worked as Production and Defense Volunteers [*Brigadas de Producción y Defensa*] (FMC 1995b, 153). Oddly enough in a state-run economy, the FMC is responsible for the universally difficult task of finding those persons (men) in arrears on their child support payments (FMC 1995b, 54). They have fought discrimination against women and aided in the incorporation of women into formal market labor through the Commission of Women's Employment [*Comisión de Empleo Femenino*]. Throughout the revolution they have attended to the marginalized of society: orphans, the elderly, and prostitutes (FMC 1995c, 19). This includes creating Day Centers [*Centros Diurnos*] for elderly day care (FMC 1987, 31). They have even aided food production through their development of apiculture (FMC 1985, 254). Aiding the community of women, the FMC started an Archival Center [*Centro de Documentación*] to archive important documents relevant to women and their role in the revolution (FMC 1987, 181).

Ruth Pearson notes that women voluntary labor has been vital to the success of the revolution and to socialism itself. She characterizes the FMC's work, detailed throughout this chapter, as having paramount importance: "the 'community management' role... [as the reproduction of] the activities involved in maintaining the revolutionary process on a day-to-day basis at the community or neighborhood level is the key to our analysis of Cuba's transition at the end of the twentieth century" (Pearson 1998). Women's unwaged labor—in the home, in the community, and in the revolution—is disturbingly untheorized in contemporary accounts of socialism. Chapter 5 takes up the challenge of theorizing women's work as central to the analysis of Cuban socialism.

## Part IV. The Care-Work Difference

### *Ch. 5. Care-Work and Revolutionary Democracy*

Cuba's Revolutionary leadership never seriously considered the possibility that the inclusion of women, their voices, and their work into the heart of the Cuban political economy might bring new forms and constellations to Cuban politics and a better, more profound socialism. Yet, the social relations of labor characteristic of care-work offer modes of solidarity, concern with human flourishing, and willingness to work for the good of others central to socialist conceptions of the good life.

Rather than relying on moral exhortation to abandon old sexist prejudices and residual capitalist fixation on self-interest and selfish advantage, the materialist analysis of care-work developed in Chapter 4, suggests that involving men and women in a universal liability to perform care-work could significantly alter the economic foundation and the social relations of Cuban socialism. Socialist feminists concerned with understanding women's "difference"—whether those documented in surveys of gendered policy preferences or those manifested in attitudes toward care—have suggested that "traditional women's work" plays a central role in structuring non-instrumental and non-exploitative social relations. As Nancy Holmstrom has noted:

Following Marx's approach, we should expect psychological [sociological, political, etc.] differences to be connected to differences in the sorts of labor that women do in society and to the resulting differences in social relations. ... Now the Marxist view is not that there is a direct causal connection between the type of labor people do and their personality structure. Rather, the type of labor people do puts them into certain social relations, and these

relations are institutionalized into sets of practices, institutions, cultural agencies, and so on. In the case of the sexual division of labor, the most important of these institutions is the family (Holmstrom 2002, 365–66).

If differences in propensity to care stem not from some putative women's nature but emerge in the context of material activity designed to meet and give priority to human needs, then involving all people in the material labor of care might have profound effects on the affective dimensions and the political possibilities of socialism. Following Diemut Elisabet Bubeck (1995), I will argue in this chapter that women's traditional work is *care-work* (Bubeck 1995), which has historically been performed under oppressive conditions, but which nonetheless involves unique social relations between the care-worker and the cared-for.

My argument entails a larger claim than simply one stating that the economy is gendered, i.e., that women and men are situated distinctly and unequally in society, the economy, and in political life and thus they would offer distinct political perspectives, insights, and demands. I want to draw attention to specific fault lines within this gendered economy and to consequences of this gendered division of labor for the stated and shared values, goals, and ends that Cuban political life is supposed to foster—values that are alleged to be impossible to achieve within a non-socialist polity. The substantive incorporation of care-work and the care-worker into the Cuban political economy is the missing piece in the Cuban plan to find a 'third way' that does not suffer either the ills of capitalism or early state socialism. Remunerating care-workers monetarily, while certainly a necessary step to this third way, however, will only change the distribution of income within the same political-economic

system; fully incorporating care-work and care-workers within the central analysis is the necessary step to allow for the creation of a whole new socialist system.

In the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Marx suggested that the proletariat had to recognize itself as the universal class and the source of economic value to lay the groundwork for a legitimate claim to political power. Today, care-workers have to recognize that care-work is ubiquitous and indispensable, a unique form of labor essential to all aspects of human existence, which should be equitably distributed, rewarded, and accorded political power. This is the third way of a new socialism. This chapter aims to reach that new socialist system by drawing upon feminist theoretical insights concerning the interaction between gender, labor, the economy, and politics. I argue that socialism needs feminism: the “new man” Cuba once sought can be realized only through recognition that all persons are constituted through care-work.

### **What an analysis of care-work adds to socialism**

Many theorists of care have attempted to defend care as an ethic, a practice, or an attitude on its own merits—that is, foundationally. I take a different route and defend care specifically within an already well-developed political theory. Care theory, by itself, is an “incomplete theory of justice [and recognizes] that human beings might legitimately choose.. to promote some vision of the good life above and beyond caregiving, such as individual freedom, worker autonomy, or religious virtue” (Engster 2007, 126). Thus, my goal is to graft care theory to socialist-feminism. By wedding care theory to a political theory that focuses on work, gendered divisions of labor, exploitation, and social justice (Bubeck 1995, 4), I advance an analysis of care-work able to revitalize the socialist-feminist project.

Within the socialist-feminist tradition, much of the analysis of women’s work has been done by feminist political economists in order to critique neoclassical

economics' blind spots and neoliberal dogma. Although their economic analyses yield important insights into the contemporary globalized political-economy, political theorists have not yet fully appreciated feminist political economists' insights. My analysis of care-work in Cuba bridges this gap by bringing political economy and political theory closer together. Political theory has not yet integrated care. My analysis of care-work therefore builds upon and expands Joan Tronto's prescient insights in *Moral Boundaries*. In particular, Tronto notes that to study care and to question the adequacy of care leads to a "profound rethinking of moral and political life" (Tronto 1993, 111–12). To ignore care serves the powerful and privileged and harms those who care. Thus a full account of social justice must attend to "current arrangements" of care in our societies (Tronto 1993, 111–12).

By pursuing these insights further than hitherto accomplished, I connect the political economy of care to political theory. In so doing, I contribute to the scholarly literature in the two fields of socialist-feminism and care theory. By developing a macro-view of the type of work real people engage in every day, focusing on the largely underappreciated and ignored sector of care-work, I advance a more comprehensive materialist approach for socialist-feminism. By dissociating care theory from autochthonous sentiments and instead focusing on its material practices, I develop and extend a theoretical foundation for a materialist-feminist theory of care.

A new analysis of political-economy through care-work holds the potential to affirm the value of care-work, contribute to ending the exploitation of care-workers, facilitate the widely-dispersed sharing of care-work throughout society, allow care-workers the necessary liberty and political power to pursue their own plans, and points to a new political-economy that is not conceptually and empirically modeled on the impossible liberties of some men, of some colors, of some formal-market

economic classes, of some nation-states, bought at the expense of the rest of humanity and the earth's resources. This new political-economy is no utopia. Trade-offs must be made, values must be balanced and arranged, and hard choices must be faced. Nevertheless, when the socialist project is enlarged by feminist insights, it is possible to create solutions for more than solely those persons with the right kind of "socially designed biographies" (MacKinnon 1989, 224).

### *The Care-Work Difference*

Exploring themes of care, work, and gender through the lens of "difference" is not without its perils. Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory And Women's Development* (1982) launched an explosion of fruitful inquiry focused on care, justice, and gender. Yet, many feminist scholars criticized Gilligan for valorizing "women's difference," the very thing they had been vigorously critiquing as fallacious cultural hegemony. Other feminist scholars who have reframed difference(s) as socially produced, mediated, and distributed, however, gave Gilligan more favorable and nuanced treatment (Tronto 1993, 77–97).

While women's "difference" today receives lukewarm or cautious appreciation at best from the U.S. academy, it has been one of the most prevalent themes of women's activism throughout the 20th century, both in the United States and Cuba. In the United States, women's "difference," and maternal narratives in particular, according to Kristin A. Goss (2009, 456), "were central to women's collective action around peace (Sharer 2004); social welfare and labor policy (Skocpol 1992; Wilson 2007); the Red scare (Gerson 1994); race relations (Feldstein 1994); anti-nuclear issues (Garrison 1994; Swerdlow 1993);" gun control (DiQuinzio 2005); and has even been used to support war and military aggression (Managhan 2005). In Cuba's Republican era (1901-1940) too, women's political action was buttressed most

saliently by arguments concerning women's "difference." The brilliant socialist-feminist writer, Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta, argued forcefully in 1931 that women's liberation meant "women [must] take responsibility for their own lives and place themselves at the center of all social, political, and moral issues" (Stoner 1991, 101). Virtually the only feminist from this era to focus singularly on gender equality, refusing to see anything special or different based in motherhood or the "feminine" was the conservative, María Collado (Stoner 1991, 105–06). Another leading feminist, the "Red Feminist" Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, argued that women's "natural function...was sensitivity to the needs of others" (Stoner 1991, 91). Curiously, this focus on others sat comfortably beside her belief that Cuban society's faults (and ultimate solution) lay with Cuban mothers' teachings. For Sabas Alomá women must determine "national morality" and influence men's public and private behavior (Stoner 1991, 91–93).

Claims concerning women's difference continued during the revolution. At the closing session of the FMC's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress in 1974, Fidel Castro declared:

Women are nature's workshop where life is formed. They are the creators par excellence of the human being. And I say this because...women deserve special consideration from society. ...If there is to be any privilege in human society, if there is to be any inequality...let there be certain small privileges and...inequalities in favor of women" (FMC 1975, 295–96).

Castro has always walked the awkward line that vehemently recriminates the "subjective forces of old culture and old prejudices" (FMC 1975, 291) and denigrates the "traditional housewife," while recognizing that in Cuba "veneration of

motherhood is a cornerstone of national culture” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 122) and still part of the nation’s culture and historiography (Thomas-Woodard 2003). This perception is widely shared across feminist analyses of Cuba. Bengelsdorf has argued that no one in Cuba has been able to challenge “notions surrounding the female as mother and the absolute primacy of [her] biological functions” (1988, 129). Smith and Padula add depth to this view by arguing that “many Cuban women, however, perceived their role as mother as a source not of servitude but of power in the family, community, and nation” (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 140). Lest it be thought that this is a dated phenomenon, Pertierra has argued that, “from the onset of the Special Period through 2004, the home gained immensely in economic and social importance, and women gained status and power as managers of the home” (Pertierra 2008, 764).

Contemporary feminist scholars have raised concerns about troubling essentialist notions associated with idealized maternalism as a political force. It is possible to theorize differences grounded in women’s labor and the particular conditions of their existence without falling into essentialism, however. Too often, women's difference has been used by feminism's opponents to maintain women's occupational segregation. Cuba’s Resolution 48, for example, which was enacted and in effect from 1965 to 1976, prohibited women from working in 498 jobs considered dangerous to their reproductive function.<sup>66</sup> Twenty-five jobs were still prohibited to women as of 2005 (A. Serra 2005, 35–36). Too often, women's collective energies and sentiments based in care-giving have been used against the liberatory and humane purposes women have struggled to achieve (DiQuinzio 2005; cf. Haq 2007). It is certainly plausible that the persistent use of difference demonstrates, *and perhaps*

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<sup>66</sup> Another e.g., “To care for chickens may seem a trivial thing. Nevertheless, it requires special qualities of patience and care on the part of the worker. This is why women, with their innate faculties for lavishing care, represent the highest percentage of workers in poultry farms. –Male director of Camagüey chicken farm, 1983 (Blanch 1983, 40-41, cited in L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 121).



*continues because of*, its lack of strategic efficacy as “women remain almost entirely excluded from power and political, economic, and cultural institutions of importance” (Tronto 1993, 1) in both the United States and Cuba.

Difference is also a concept that is selectively applied. Rather than characterizing all women, the rhetoric of difference gained particular efficacy in a specific historical context, when White, middle-class, native-born, and otherwise privileged women became associated with and ensconced within the “private” sphere (Tronto 1993, 85). Contemporary feminist scholars argue that society did not simply find the characteristics of care and nurturance among these populations, nor were these characteristics valued because they were found among these women. Rather, the “cult of true womanhood” and “cult of domesticity” (Welter 1973) actively produced such women simultaneous to the production of masculinity through the “cult of rugged individualism.”<sup>67</sup> These raced meanings of difference were active in Cuba as well, particularly under a rubric of “decency.” During the Republican era, Black women were seen openly as “lacking honor and virtue,...sexually available,...[and] lacking culture and morality” (De la Fuente 2001, 155–56). Middle class Blacks and Black intellectuals supported the rhetoric concerning (White) honor, virtue, and decency as something Blacks should strive to attain, and argued that Black women’s primary responsibility and social function was to create [and care for] stable families (De la Fuente 2001, 169). “Difference” certainly has historical raced, classed, and gendered roots and any use of the concept must take these roots into account.

In spite of these caveats, it cannot be denied that claims of “difference” resonate with Cuban women both as agentic subjects and political actors. The fact

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<sup>67</sup> While Welter’s work popularized the phrase ‘cult of true womanhood,’ I have not seen masculine ideals referred to as cults. This nominal division follows the separate spheres conceptual terrain that divides home and economy. Of course, to pretend that masculinity is produced by objective economic factors while femininity has been produced by cultish ideological factors must be rejected as ideological rubbish itself.

that so much of women's collective action and political activism has drawn upon these themes cannot simply be ignored by feminist scholars who view “difference” as dangerous. A growing literature explores women’s deployment of motherhood, assessing its political potential and pitfalls [[need to cite this]]. Carefully eschewing a theory of ‘false consciousness’ for women, this literature assesses the merits of particular applications of maternalism on the basis of its empirical, normative, and pragmatic effects.

In advancing a materialist analysis of the different values, conditions, activities, and social relations of women’s labor in Cuba (Chapter 4), I avoid invoking any essentialist conception of maternalism. Rather than advancing an esoteric and abstract theory divorced from the realities of actual political persons or relying upon metonymic ideals of womanhood, I use the concept of care-work in ways that draw upon socialist and socialist-feminist tradition in Cuba which is grounded in a long tradition of claims concerning women's difference in Cuba. Where this tradition has not yet been successful in affording women liberation and political power, a refigured conception of care-work may open new possibilities for full inclusion in economic and political power. Thus, in spite of its many liabilities, I draw upon notions of women's ‘difference’ because they fit clearly within a tradition with deep and longstanding roots in Cuban society and because Cuban women so clearly illustrate the materialist foundation I wish to lay and upon which rests my new conceptualization of sustainable, equitable, revolutionary democracy.

My analysis of care-work takes pains to distinguish between the content of care-work and the social relations that enable and are enabled by the performance of care-work. The content of care-work revolves around meeting human needs. For many women, however, performance of care-work has occurred in the context of

patriarchal families, which have required “a woman [to] subordinate her individual interests to those of others, particularly her family” (Degler 1980, vii; cf. Somerville 2000, 238). To liberate herself from oppressive patriarchal relations, some might assume that a woman must dissociate herself from the needs of her family, mimicking traditional male behavior. In contrast to this hasty assumption, this chapter will affirm the substance and value of what has traditionally been construed as women’s work, which may involve the subordination of individual interests to family forms, yet it will argue that meeting human needs through care-work does not require an ensemble of patriarchal relationships. The subordination of women to men that has characterized this work in the past is incidental to care-work and must be eliminated while the content of the work is fundamentally necessary to human survival and the good life.

If this seems impossible, compare to the proletariat. Marx did not suggest that the proletariat’s solution to exploitation was to become capitalists themselves nor that the exploited deserve, because of their exploitation, to hold political power. He suggested that the exploited must change the political-economy to end their exploitation and reach a new stage of greater human liberation. In a similar way, socialist-feminism ought to argue that in order to end their oppression, dependence, and exploitation, women must not construct for themselves, nor accommodate themselves to, hegemonic masculine biographies. Further, it would be just as erroneous to tell men to take on women’s current roles with no other change. Although women absolutely must participate equitably in waged-labor and in all aspects of social and political life, and men must absolutely participate equitably in care-work, they must also change both of these spheres and their interrelationship in ways that liberate all citizens from exploitation.

### Defining Care-work

Care and care-work have been defined in multiple ways within the literature. Engster defines caring as “everything we do directly to help individuals to meet their vital biological needs, develop or maintain their basic capabilities, and avoid or alleviate unnecessary or unwanted pain and suffering, so that they can survive, develop, and function in society” (2007, 28–29). Tronto and Fisher argue more broadly “that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” (Tronto 1993, 103). Trying to work through the materialist tradition, Bubeck advances a much more circumscribed definition: “Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared-for is a crucial element of the overall activity and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself” (1995, 129).

These definitions set the stage for my own. To begin generically, a materialist-feminist definition of care-work should include the tremendously valuable unpaid and underpaid work of women directed toward the fulfillment of human need, the reproduction and nurturance of human life, and the promotion of the well-being of families and communities. In 1980 the United Nations claimed that women “constitute *half* the world’s population, perform nearly *two-thirds* of its work hours, receive *one-tenth* of the world’s income, and own less than *one-hundredth* of the world’s property.” In 1995 the United Nations claimed that the official valuation of global production (i.e., formal market remunerated labor) was \$23 trillion. This did not count “the non-monetized, invisible contribution of women,” valued somewhat conservatively at \$11 trillion (UN HDR 1995, 6). In Cuba, where the invisible

contributions of women are not counted, women control only 33% of the nation's income while they represented 38.0% of the nation's formal market labor force and the overwhelming majority of the care-work labor force (Save the Children 2012).<sup>68</sup> A materialist feminist definition of care-work *must* capture this invisible labor and elaborate its difference from models of work, politics, and economics that focus upon production.

To elaborate an adequate conception of care-work, it is helpful to begin where Marx himself began his materialist studies, from 'premises' *completely* divorced from capital: "real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity" (Marx and Engels 1968a, 6). Women's traditional activity in Cuba demonstrates "a primary and a social commitment to reproductive tasks which are not entirely reducible to calculations of economic advantage (Elson 1995, 176) but which reflect women's investment in the well-being of their households and their children's futures" (Pearson 1997, 673). Not only do Cuban women *directly* care for children, adults, and the home, they also perform the economic activities that *indirectly* support this direct care (and all the activities and conditions that make the good life possible) by "working in the street, utilizing extensive household networks for support, receiving money from transnational family relations, and employing assistance from the state" (Burwell 2004, 80).

Thus, I want to define care-work as *activity that directly sustains others—whether individual, family, or community—by fulfilling their basic human needs (of*

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<sup>68</sup> The original statistic states that Cuban women are estimated to earn 49% as much income as Cuban men. This is not a measure of the gender pay gap, but combines the gender pay gap with the gender labor force gap to understand how income is distributed throughout the entire population, not how it is distributed throughout those who work in the formal labor force. The highest ratio in the world belonged to the quasi-socialist population of Mozambique (90%), and the lowest to Jordan (19%). Unable to update data for 2007, the Occupied Palestinian Territory (12%). The highest OECD country in 2007 was Norway (77%).

*food, health, love, sex, social interaction, language, play, education, safety*). Care-work uses face to face means insofar as the care-worker relates to the activity as a local best-outcome given the circumstances and insofar as the activity seeks to satisfy and/or surpass a socially fabricated requirement for a good life and insofar as the care-worker relates to the sustained as irreplaceable, of infinite worth, and with strong feelings of sympathy. I use the term *care-work* as a strategic intervention to mark the moral, political, and economic equivalence between this distinctive form of labor and productive labor.

### ***Content of Care-Work***

#### **Needs vs Interests**

When care-work is placed at the center of analysis, the standard political-economic goals and pursuits of growth and trade appear as inadequate and wrongheaded proxies for the welfare of human beings. The care-worker aims to fulfill basic human needs first—whether they be needs for autonomy, dignity, health, joy, opportunity, learning, capacity-building, human relationships, deep meaning, or the creation of another generation. Care-workers invest their energies in cultivating the capabilities of children, adults, the elderly, disabled, lonely, and the injured. They support, protect, and foster sufficient independence to thrive in society, act responsibly, and participate in the exercise of freedom; or when circumstances warrant, assist those who are beyond any meaningful autonomy meet their last worldly needs.

In contrast to the production of goods, care-work focuses upon the “full development of the individual” (Marx 1993, 711) and fosters the human being’s flourishing within society, thereby enabling both self and society to function in the highest degree (cf. Lebowitz 2003, 66–70). Although capital helps cultivate and

satisfy new needs as it cultivates “all the qualities of the social human being... in a form as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations” (Marx 1993, 409), capitalist production for profit ensures a significant gulf between those who produce and those who consume such goods. Moreover, the historically contingent and socially constructed set of human needs is a wide-ranging portfolio, only a part of which is satisfied by goods—and only a smaller part still that is satisfied by goods in which a capitalist might profitably invest. Care-work distinguishes itself by focusing not merely on needs that capital has helped cultivate or needs that are required for organic life, but on the rich ensemble of socially constructed needs that encompass the whole person.

Bernard Yack has rightly seen Marx as a theorist of liberation (Yack 1986). Socialism has always dreamed that a man might “be a fisher in the morning, a shepherd in the afternoon, and a critic in the evening” (Marx and Engels 1968a, chap. 1), but it has been insufficiently attentive to the care-work required to enable that vision for all, including both men and women. A shift from a one-dimensional focus on commodity wealth toward the development of human capabilities through care-work goes hand in hand with a non-mechanized understanding of human beings, in short, the humanist liberatory project.

### **Face to Face Interaction**

As Bubeck writes so persuasively, there is an important difference at the human scale between work rendered face to face and that rendered at a distance. One of the distinctions of care-work is that it is face to face labor and necessarily an intersubjective human relationship. Tronto states, “Care implies a reaching out to something other than the self: it is neither self-referring nor self-absorbing” (Tronto 1993, 102). Individuals, families, and communities by their very nature can only be

produced and maintained by face to face contact and care-work. This is the source of care-work's irreducibility. Individuals, families, and communities in some shape or form are necessary to the very survival of the species and in certain forms have supremely important spillover benefits—i.e., they are economically good with respect to the real ends of an economy. Some persons, at some times, must perform care-work if the species is to survive and individuals flourish. To put it more forcefully, humans need care which necessarily requires labor by others. Further, the quality of care provided is central to a life worth living.

### **Quality and Quantity**

Perhaps another way to synthesize some of the various characteristics of care-work is to trace its relation to issues of quality rather than quantity. The care-worker produces not only use-values to be utilized by other persons but also the persons who consume those use-values. In undertaking this mode of production, the goal is not to increase the quantity of parents, children, homes, families, or communities but to increase their quality of wellbeing.

Efficiency also has negligible value in the domain of care-work. The care-worker does not, *as a first-order goal*, try to produce persons or use-values as quickly as possible, or using as few resources as possible. She does not meticulously seek out, plan, and execute that which will give the greatest ratio of output to input. Nor does she work up until the marginal last moment when her time and energy will no longer be compensated at greater value. Her first-order goal is answering variable, historical, and contingent human need.

### **Time-Intensive Labor vs Profitability**

In Baumol's terms, care-work is a technologically unprogressive good—that is, it is intrinsically labor-time intensive. Whereas shoes and tomatoes require far less



labor-time to produce today than they did in 1800 (even including the labor-time required to produce the capital goods utilized by the final laborers), educating children and bathing the infirm are still just as labor-time intensive as they ever were. This is both an enormous limitation (when viewed by capital) but the source of its immense strength and importance—the two sides of the coin of technologically “unprogressive” labor (Perrons 2005, 395). Thus, while the standard economic measurement of productivity (output/hour) has risen for most if not all commodities, it has certainly not risen in anywhere near the same degree for care-work.<sup>69</sup> We might call this “time inelasticity.” One cannot speed up the teaching of multiplication, nor the bathing of a parent, nor the feeding of an infant, nor the consolation of a friend. These are only to mention the most discrete tasks of the typical care-worker, leaving unmentioned care-work’s contribution to enculturation, emotional and psychological development, the material elements of love and friendship, and other needs of humans that are far too complex to be listed on a checklist. Even housework—the production of a home (“economy”- *οἰκονομία*)—although far more elastic than the aforementioned and given to far greater historical and cultural variation is, in the end, a labor-intensive activity. This means that there are few ways to maximize profit when controlling the care-work labor-time of others.

As a service, care-work is typically consumed as it is produced. It is location specific, and much of it serves those with least power in society. Care-work is based on interaction between the ‘producer and the consumer’ and there are sharply diminishing returns when one care-giver tries to care for too many people simultaneously. Due to the demands of human interfacing, care-work is not easily transportable. It cannot be produced in one city and then shipped across the country

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<sup>69</sup> Much of this rests on the sources of energy humans have recently tapped. Of course, oil and sunlight cannot radically change care-work.

to consumers. As a form of labor that is not capital-intensive, there are very few economies of scale to be found.

### **Vulnerability to Exploitation**

Because of this lack of profitability, care-work has not fit easily into capitalist accounts of labor. Affluent families have often exploited impoverished people, employing them in domestic labor at very low wages, and extracting the performance of care. The global care chain that drafts millions of women from the global South to work in the homes of affluent families in the North (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Hochschild 2005) is just the latest incarnation of this extraction of care under exploitative circumstances within private households. Social provision of care remains inadequately funded in most societies and serving those who have the least resources at their command is often subject to cut-backs at the earliest signs of economic recession or at the impetus of ideological goals such as those advanced by neoliberalism. While the wealthy can take recourse to private provision, the worst off are consigned to bare necessity.<sup>70</sup> But at the same time, the unique nature of care-work has a corollary: when it is not performed, harm is done. To ignore this person's particular need is to do harm. While we may not know exactly how much care is required to do good, more investment in time and diverse strategies to meet complex needs seems far more likely to help than to do harm. As Bubeck rightly points out, care-work is vulnerable to exploitation—it answers to need, need which may have few limits in certain circumstances—it does not answer to contract. We cannot adequately specify beforehand exactly what must be done to achieve good care. As a

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<sup>70</sup> While each individual or family unit may wish to care as best they can, this contraction of care is especially evident when seen in a societal context where the wealthiest may make sure their relatives and selves are cared-for without the slightest investment in caring for those among the poor.

fundamentally different kind of labor, care-work is subject to a unique form of exploitation, a form that has hitherto escaped detailed analysis.

### **Exploitation of Care-Work: A Materialist Analysis**

My analysis of care-work follows Marx, although perhaps not the Marx we are most familiar with. Marx began his analysis of capital with material activity—i.e., work. Marx could have chosen a number of points for critical entry into the processes of work but chose to focus on the ‘primacy of production’ (Balbus 1982, 11–60). Marx himself says as much in the German Ideology, “If you proceed from production, you necessarily concern yourself with the real conditions of.. the productive activity of men. But if you proceed from consumption ... [you can afford to ignore] the real living conditions and the activity of men” (Marx and Engels 1968a, vol. 2). Unfortunately, this focus on material activity has been misdirected, due to an androcentric bias held by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and all of their epigones, into a *technical definition of productive wage-work based upon the historically contingent rise of industrial capital*.

Feminists concerned with socialism have long chafed against this orthodox Marxist position, which claims that industrial wage workers are the “central actors” in the class struggle (Chinchilla 1991, 300). These industrial standards of work and life are presented as gender neutral; ignoring the gendered aspects of material activity performed on a day to day basis within and beyond capitalist enterprises or formal marketplace relations (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). Feminists have called attention to the pervasive gendered division of labor. Where men have dominated the industrial labor force in Cuba, domestic labor is almost entirely performed by Cuban women, despite the diversity of Cuban households and families (Zabala 2006, 6). This activity typically involves maintenance of and care for home and family and remains largely

unwaged. Yet these feminist arguments have not been incorporated into socialist analysis.

A production-orientation in socialist theory and practice has generated a fundamental lacuna in the socialist project. This productionist bias is not exclusive to socialism. On the contrary, it is nearly ubiquitous: it can be found in Mussolini's fascism, the social democrats of Norway and Denmark in the 1930s, the social democrats of 1989 Germany (Stjernø 2005, 280; 117–18; 106–07), the standard macroeconomic focus on Gross Domestic Product found in OECD nations as politically and ideologically diverse as the United States and Sweden, and this bias is even found in Marx himself (Balbus 1982; also cf. Negri 1984). In all these various forms, the conflation of production-oriented work with human labor renders care-work invisible. As demonstrated in chapter 4, the type of work overwhelmingly performed by the women in Cuban society has been disregarded by the PCC who following an orthodox Marxist position assume that care work produces use-values and not exchange-values; lacks a relationship with a capitalist who buys the care-giver's labor-power; lacks a capitalist who extracts the care-giver's surplus-labor; does not operate under the rubric of profitability; is not "abstract or is not "social" but private, *et cetera* (cf. P. Smith 1978).

Realizing the political difficulties of a direct attack, some socialist feminists focused their energies on dual-systems theory, arguing that capitalism and patriarchy were discrete systems of oppression mapping the relationship between these systems in specific historical contexts. Challenging the validity of dual systems theory, Iris Marion Young cogently argued that the "marginalization of women and thereby our functioning as a secondary labor force is an essential and fundamental characteristic of capitalism" (1981, 58). Dual systems theory's chief weakness is that it "allows

Marxism to retain in basically unchanged form its theory of economic and social relations, onto which it merely grafts a theory of gender relations” (I. M. Young 1980, 98).<sup>71</sup> In Young’s view, dual systems theory thus insulated traditional Marxism’s concepts of production relations, historical change, and the operations of capitalism from critiques devised by feminists and critical race theorists (Hawkesworth 2008, 319–20).

Despite such cogent critique, few Marxists heeded feminist arguments. Indeed, some twisted feminist arguments concerning the ubiquity of male domination against socialist feminists. Ros Petchesky, for example, had pointed out that patriarchy is not a feature of capitalism alone. There is “...plenty of anthropological evidence that male supremacy in certain forms predates not only capitalism but class and state society generally” (Petchesky 1979, 378). Some Marxists countered that feminism would not affect the working (male) class as “capitalism was gender neutral and could theoretically concede gender equality as a result of its pursuit of cheap labor and profits while still leaving exploitation on the basis of class intact” (Chinchilla 1991, 295).

Unfortunately for the development of socialism and the contributions of socialist-feminism, these debates diverted energies from the real problems at hand: analyzing care-work along the lines of Marx’s method—as material activity. Marx analyzed capital *in isolation from the majority of the material activity performed in the social economy*: “the non-monetized, invisible contribution of women” (UN HDR 1995, 6). To rectify that oversight, I take the liberty of studying care-giving as

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<sup>71</sup> Among other defects of dual systems theory, Young noted that it dehistoricized and universalized women’s oppression. It tended to situate patriarchy in the private realm, emphasizing separate spheres and women’s roles in the family, while neglecting dimensions of women’s oppression outside the family. “Dual systems theory does not seem to have the theoretical equipment to identify and analyze the specific forms of sexist oppression which women suffer in the contemporary workplace (I. M. Young 1981, 49).

material activity on its own to develop a materialist analysis of care-work *per se*. By using Marx's materialist method, rather than his conclusions about proletariat wage-labor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we will then be led back to feminists' original contribution in the "wages for housework" debate: domestic labor is indeed exploited, although not *capitalistically* exploited (cf. Bubeck 1995, 62). Furthermore, to grasp its particular form of exploitation is to elucidate care-work as a unique category within the realm of material activity. Such recognition will illuminate the potential contributions to a socialist (and capitalist) political-economy that are possible through the substantive and equitable recognition of care-work.

### **Forms of Exploitation**

How is care-work exploited, although not capitalistically so? Ultimately, exploitation is at the heart of the care-work story, the sexual division of labor, and the androcentrism of politics and the economy within both socialism and capitalism today. This is only hard to see because the very concept of exploitation has been severely curtailed in an attempt to delimit the 'Woman Question' as derivative and distracting from the real class struggle. The orthodox position cited above tells us that the proletariat is exploited because he is directly linked to a system of capitalism, i.e., a) he produces exchange-values, b) a capitalist buys his labor-power, c) a capitalist extracts his surplus-labor, d) he is affected by 'profitability,' e) his work is "abstract," f) his work is "social" (cf. P. Smith 1978). But this is far too narrow a definition of exploitation.

Although the proletariat became the paradigmatic example of exploitation to the exclusion of all other history, it should be obvious, as it was to Marx, that exploitation does not require a capitalist. He unhesitatingly averred that exploitation was a fact for "[f]reeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master

and journeyman” (Marx and Engels 1948, 9). As an astute student of history, Marx used exploitation to cast an even wider net,

Wherever a part of society possesses the monopoly of the means of production, the labourer, free or not free, must add to the working-time necessary for his own maintenance an extra working-time in order to produce the means of subsistence for the owners of the means of production, whether this proprietor be the Athenian *calos cagaqos* [well-to-do man], Etruscan theocrat, *civis Romanus* [Roman citizen], Norman baron, American slave-owner, *Wallachian Boyard*, modern landlord or capitalist. (Marx 1887, 10, Sec. 2)

In Chapter 3 of *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels further state, “By taking into account the economic relations of rent, profit and wages, the definite relations of exploitation of the various classes were introduced, since the manner of exploitation depends on the social position of the exploiter” (Marx and Engels 1968b, sec. 1.2.6.3). If the manner of exploitation depends on the social position of the exploiter, this again confirms that there is not simply one definite relation of exploitation—exploitation has many guises, and many forms. The multiple exploiters referred to by “various classes” are “the other portion of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc.” (Marx and Engels 1948, 16). Even under dominant relations of capitalist production, Marx was perfectly comfortable with multiple forms of simultaneous economic relations and exploitation—a point adroitly pursued by modern socialist scholarship (Gibson-Graham 2006).

In the block quote above, and throughout his corpus, Marx uses the concepts of necessary-labor and surplus-labor as seemingly integral elements of his definition of exploitation.

The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave-labour, and one based on wage-labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer. (Marx 1887, 9, Sec. 1)

While it is certainly true that Marx kept consistently to this production-centered definition—one must produce enough food to feed oneself and one’s exploiter—he occasionally gives hints that even this is too specific and illuminates the more generalizable nature of exploitation. Diemut Elisabet Bubeck (1995) has synthesized these hints to generate rich theoretical conclusions about Marx’s materialist foundations. If we strip away the specifics of the capitalist system to see the category ‘exploitation,’ we see that the proletariat is exploited because it is the class which “has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages” (Marx and Engels 1968a, 42). The evidence for Marx that the proletariat is exploited tells us what those burdens and advantages are—work and time. “In capitalist society, free (*freie*) time is produced (*produziert*) for one class [capitalists] by converting the whole lifetime of the [proletariat] masses into labour-time” (Marx 1887, chap. 17.4.B).

Thus, Marx advanced a general definition of material exploitation that encompassed a wide range of activities. As a philosopher of history most interested in historical changes rather than apparent transhistorical uniformity, Marx focused on



exploitation within differing modes of production and, more specifically, one mechanism of production—industrial labor. Yet, in spite of the resistance proffered by Marx and many of his followers, his general definition of material exploitation and his methods can be extended to cover the type of labor that is often seen as ‘women’s work’ in Cuba (and elsewhere). An adequate materialist-feminist account of the political-economy of a society must then analyze, clarify, and explain ‘women’s work’ and its particular mode of exploitation (cf. Bubeck 1995; Dalla Costa and James 1975; Delphy and Leonard 1992; Delphy 1984a).

### ***The Benefits and Burdens of Care-work***

As shown in Chapter 2, Cuba’s official political-economy tended to see ‘women’s work’ through the eyes of Lenin—that is, as drudgery to be eliminated. What are the politico-economic burdens and benefits associated with such ‘drudgery?’ In 2001, Cuban researchers at the National Statistics Office (ONE) published a Time Use Survey Report that attempted to calculate the value of women’s *unremunerated* domestic labor in Cuba. The report estimated that if Cuban women (not otherwise employed in the formal market)<sup>72</sup> received the equivalent of the median monthly wage converted into an hourly rate for their unwaged care-work, they might earn between 288 and 428 pesos each month (ONE 2001, 63). These numbers reveal that the number of hours devoted to unwaged domestic labor greatly exceeds the average work time for Cubans. In 2000 and 2001, the median monthly wages were 238 and 252 pesos, respectively (ONE 2006a, Table IV.4). That is to say, the National Statistics Office estimated that if paid for their labor, unwaged care-work might earn anywhere between 114% and 180% of the median wage earned in the ‘productive’

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<sup>72</sup> N.B., There are some problems with this report leaving it unclear who exactly these women are that average 12.4 hours/day of “unremunerated domestic work” as well as who the men are that average between 5-8 hours/day of the same. My reasoned conjecture is thus, these are persons not otherwise employed in the formal market.

sector. The Time Use Survey also found that regardless of age, educational attainment, or rural/urban location, women work 21% more hours every day than men in Cuba—a fact corroborated by studies of other nations throughout the world (ONE 2001, 61–62: Gráficos 6.2–6.4).

As the Time Use Survey Report noted in its one-page sketch of women's work, this unremunerated work takes multiple forms.

‘Unremunerated work’ refers to unremunerated domestic work and community work. In large part, this work is unseen, undervalued, and the majority of it is done by women.... The importance of this invisible work of women goes beyond economic effects for it is thanks to this work that society is reproduced, viewing social reproduction as a larger concept, not only as the reproduction of workers, but as the guarantee of the continuity of generations, which includes the birth, care, and nurture of children. The majority of this work is performed by women, who in addition, administer the home as well as care for those unable to work such as the sick and the elderly. Women contribute to social reproduction in an even wider sense as it is not limited by the boundaries of the home but also extends to include work for the community.

This work in the home and in the community has great social and economic importance. For this reason, a gender analysis must evaluate how these responsibilities are distributed between men and women and what actions must be undertaken within the economic and social context to improve gender equity. ... The recognition that women's unremunerated work deserves

will only exist when its social and economic value has been integrated [into the economy] (ONE 2001, 60–61).

The National Statistics Office report provides a helpful point of departure, and certainly provides a sense of some of the work burdens and lack of benefits borne by those doing care-work—instead of an income substantially above the median Cuban wage-worker, the work considered in this study earned them nothing. At the same time, this study does not adequately theorize care-work. Its concept of unremunerated labor is drawn from the UN Gender and Development literature, which had trouble articulating its gender equity program and goals in ways that empower women (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002). By focusing on traditional divisions of labor within families, this approach “forg[es] normative arrangements of intimacy,” that prescribe idealized heterosexuality as integral to good economic policy (Bedford 2009). Moreover, this approach does not consider the distinctive problems and perspectives of the socialist project.

In addition, the report claims to seek a larger [*más amplio*] concept of social reproduction, yet it is actually quite restrictive. Social reproduction here comprises the reproduction of workers, an approach associated with the most crude and economistic understandings of socialism. It is expanded by noting that social reproduction also guarantees the future of the species with a small nod to the material activity required therein, such as care and nurture. But this ‘vulgar economism’ falls far short of recognizing the humanist and liberatory potential to be found in a more developed materialist analysis of care-work which I develop below.

Despite its theoretical shortcomings, this report highlights that Cuba does not “value [domestic work] in an economic sense.” What is more important, it notes that

domestic work and community work both have social and economic value and that Cuban women might receive wages for this work. Nevertheless, the subtle recommendation that care-work be remunerated was never implemented. The national priorities of the Cuban state continued (in line with Lenin) to over-reward narrow constructions of productive activity, while under-rewarding care-work to the detriment of gender equity, the socialist-feminist project, as well as the socialist project itself.

To expand upon the conclusions of this report within our new exploitation framework, the benefits and burdens borne by care-workers have remained vastly uneven. Not only is care-work unremunerated, those who do care-work in Cuba find themselves behind in almost every other conceivable benefit (De la Torre Dwyer 2011). In the midst of the “Special Period” (1990-2004), the period of economic crisis in Cuba following the collapse of the Soviet system, the 10.1 percent unemployment rate for women was more than twice that of men and remains slightly higher among women today. Women in particular have been diverted from professional occupations to the service sector, which offered low-paying, part-time work with little chance for upward mobility. In 1996, women earned 80-85 cents for every dollar earned by men and these wage differentials were compounded by the race/ethnic preferences of managers—whites, for example, held 80 percent of jobs in the lucrative tourism sector in 2005. Throughout the revolution, the need for socialized childcare has chronically outstripped supply and a 1999 estimate suggested 25 percent more capacity was necessary. Poor transportation places an even greater demand on women’s time as managers of the household—a growing economic hub during the economic crisis but decreasing in importance outside of crises.

Beyond these economic outcomes, perhaps the most egregious gender inequities within the Revolution persist in the institutional domain of political, military, and economic power—the spheres where control is exercised and decisions are made. Men continue to hold the major positions of political power and control within Cuban society through the institutions of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Revolutionary National Police (PNR) and Revolutionary National Militias (MNR), managerial positions and higher-paying labor sectors in the market, as well as leadership in religious organizations and families.

Thus, as in the paradigmatic case of the proletariat, those who do care-work perform far more material labor than those who do not at the same time as they receive far less of the control and enjoyment of the benefits society has to distribute. To understand why, we must explore in greater depth to the exploitative economic relations that surround care-work in Cuba.

### ***Relations of Care-Work***

#### **Exploitation as Cycle**

As noted above, Marx consistently defined exploitation as the appropriation of the fruits of labor from those who are exploited to the benefit of those who exploit—that is, the realization of the capacity to extract surplus-labor. Under capitalism, this takes place through the unseen and unremunerated transfer of the value of surplus-labor from the proletariat to the capitalist. In contrast, Delphy and Leonard argue that one of the key differences between wage-work and care-work is that the exploitation of the first is performed through the medium of exchange, the second through dependence (Delphy and Leonard 1992, 111–12). Summing up this perspective, “the pattern of women’s work is thus determined not on the basis of their own material

needs and security, but on the basis of the needs of the rest of the family. This fact illustrates [their] subordinate, subservient, and dependent position” (Bubeck 1995, 87).

In fact, both exploitation stories are right. Exploitation always demonstrates both dependence and exchange—they are ineluctably linked. As is the case with all forms of exploitation, the mismatch between burdens and benefits for those who perform care-work and those who do not is actually and always about power and the goods that flow therefrom. Yet, power and advantage do not spring from nothing. Power must be exercised in order to maintain power and its benefits. That is to say, exploitation is part of a cycle in which unequal bargaining positions and monopolies (dependence, which must be maintained by unequal power) lead to exploitation (unequal exchange, which unequally distributes power and goods) which leads to oppression (the exercise of unequal power to create dependence)—you cannot have one without the others. This then is the great catachresis of exploitation within feminist-materialism—exploitation has been debated with respect to women’s work as if exploitation meant solely ‘the transfer of benefits from workers to non-workers.’ But exploitation is not a complete process in and of itself, it is a portion of a cycle.

Exploitation, oppression, and dependence are often interrelated. It is not that we have to view them together as one gestalt phenomenon, but our analysis must be cognizant of the interconnections among these phenomena. If women are oppressed and dependent upon men financially or emotionally, the conditions for exploitation are ripe. Work—sensuous human activity applied to myriad natural resources is the fundamental condition of existence, the means by which subsistence is produced. Although one may steal the work of another, the burdens of work are inextricably linked not only to the production of the means of life, but to the cultivation of

physical and mental abilities, the joys of creativity, and the satisfaction of world making. To decouple such benefits from the burdens of labor at the individual level requires a social system that imposes the burdens of work on some workers, while transferring the benefits to non-workers—a social system that institutionalizes exploitation, thereby fostering oppression and dependence.<sup>73</sup>

What do we mean by oppression? For Cuban care-workers, a useful list might begin with Iris Marion Young's five faces of oppression, each of which strikes women in Cuba: economic exploitation, socio-economic marginalization, lack of power or autonomy over one's work, cultural imperialism, and systematic violence (I. M. Young 2005). For a materialist, however, exploitation should not be construed only as a dimension of oppression. It is an entirely separate analytical category as described above. For this reason, I would make an alteration and some additions to Young's list. Within Cuba, if not elsewhere, it would be more accurate to say that marginalization is socio-politico-economic marginalization as women are clearly marginalized from real political power. Small gender inequities within social and economic power are leveraged to create and maintain great disparities in political power. I would also add forms of epistemological oppression to this list, such as notions of inherent gender difference. Entrenched conceptions of embodied difference sustain hierarchies of power manifested in sexual divisions of labor (MacKinnon 1989, 219; Pateman 1988, 207). As Karen Tranberg Hansen has observed, notions of inherent difference generate social distance critical to domestic service in Zambia, which "can only operate smoothly when servants and employers are considered different from each other" (K. T. Hansen 1989, 7). Another form of

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<sup>73</sup> It should be clear that oppression is costly and requires resources, and thus exploitation must be the fuel for systematic oppression. At the same time, the *raison d'être* for oppression is to acquire benefits and the only possible means to acquire benefits is exploitation. However, I make no claim as to which came first, the chicken or the egg. The three processes of the exploitation cycle grow and die together.

epistemological oppression is embedded in hegemonic concepts of power: in an arena saturated with exploitation, the very definition of power becomes ‘power-over’ as opposed to a more recent feminist concept of energy, competence, and empowerment (Hartsock 1983, 1–12, 224). These oppressions help non-careworkers (men) maintain careworkers (women) in a state of dependence.

What do we mean by dependence? When an individual’s access to income, position, security, or survival is channeled through another person, that is dependence. Of course, most individuals live in states of mutual interdependence (while, e.g., small children live in states of entire dependence). The key concept is in truth, relative dependence. Feminist economists model this through the identification of “threat points” within bargaining arrangements (Ferber and Nelson 2003, 49–51). Within a couple (whether romantic partners, business partners, or employer-employee relations), although a man and a woman might both depend on each other, it is important to know what each might gain through the relationship and might lose if the relationship dissolves. If the survival of one party (whether woman, proletariat, etc.) depends more upon the relationship with the other than vice versa, then their threat points differ and this relative dependence is a perfect recipe for exploitation.

Just as we must see the full cycle required to complete and continue exploitation, we must see that individuals exploit each other and are exploited within a system of property relations that enable such inequity. In the *Draft of a Communist Confession of Faith*, Engels wrote, “The slave is the property of one master and for that very reason has a guaranteed subsistence, however wretched it may be. The proletariat is, so to speak, the slave of the entire bourgeois class, not of one master, and therefore has no guaranteed subsistence, since nobody buys his labour if he does not need it” (Engels 1847). It would seem that the slave is dependent upon one person



only—a supposition currently supported by individualist ideology that denies as much mutual interdependence as possible. However, simply because one individual is responsible for the slave's subsistence, does not negate the systemic nature of this exploitation and its dependence upon a particular system of laws. An individual cut off from society cannot own a slave (let alone anything else). Enforceable property rights demand at least some sort of social convention. Hegel's master-slave relationship, while analytically useful, can only exist in a vacuum as the relationship of slavery is not ontologically, but only sociologically comprehensible. The same is true for man-woman relationships as they currently exist in Cuba.

### **Examining the Cycle**

As exploitation rests squarely upon work, one oft seen form of oppression creates dependence premised upon property- and other social-rights that help maintain a monopoly of labor-market activity in order to funnel work through specific exploitative structures. To illustrate, the relationship of guildmaster to journeyman was one of monopoly—one could not sell goods without the proper license, a license strictly enforced by violence. The relationship of capitalist to proletariat was one of monopoly—the destruction of the commons eliminated the ability of households to survive without connection to the wage-economy and only those with capital could avoid selling themselves as wage-labor. Even the post-slavery and post-Jim Crow relationships of American whites to blacks have been one of monopoly—geographic, horizontal, vertical, and social segregation restricted participation in the most lucrative spheres of the economy to whites through white control of capital, banks, and politics.

Cuba's particular politico-sexual history has accomplished the same sort of monopoly, according men power to extract care-work from women. Although many

women work outside the home in Cuba, inequities grounded in law, custom, penury, violence, and education have excluded them from equal access to the commons, to productive land and to various forms of better paid wage-labor, while simultaneously imposing on them primary responsibility for unremunerated care-work. When care-giving is understood in terms of the unwaged labor it entails, the relevance of Marx's conception of exploitation becomes manifest. In a system in which men are exempted from the necessary labor of care, they are enabled to extract a particular form of physical and affective surplus labor from women. Marriage contracts, as well as laws granting men guardianship over women have in the past established men's entitlement to extract this labor. Today, men rely on the overpaid positions of wage-work to avoid care-work. Thus, patriarchal power has marked similarities to exploitive systems analyzed by Marx. Slavery is a system designed to have some persons (slaves) assume extra burdens and relinquish the attendant benefits to others (freemen) *in the performance of any labor considered socially necessary by the freemen*. Serfdom is a system designed to have some persons (serfs) assume extra burdens and relinquish the attendant benefits to others (lords) *in the performance of nearly all agricultural-work within society*. Capitalism is a system designed to have some persons (proletariat) assume extra burdens and relinquish the attendant benefits to others (capitalists) *in the performance of all commodity-production-work within society*. Similarly, patriarchy is a system designed to have some persons (women) assume extra burdens and relinquish the attendant benefits to others (men) *in the performance of nearly all care-work within families and society*.

Some might argue that patriarchal power is on the wane in Cuba (and elsewhere), a development apparent in the changing family structure as increasing numbers of marriages dissolve. Where, in the past, men secured the benefits of

patriarchy by ruling within the home, men are now removing themselves from the marriage contract. The high divorce rate in present day Cuba and the high number of female-headed households, however, does not necessarily signify a diminution in male power. Men who abandon traditional marriages often have recourse to cohabitation with women partners in contexts where they continue to demonstrate an unwillingness to participate in care-work. Divorce may indicate that some men are less invested in personal control over their children's labor power, but it need not imply that they no longer exploit those who do care-work. By removing themselves from the family, absent fathers reduce the private transfers that might otherwise be made to children. They contribute little or no care-work to meet the needs of their growing children. They continue to reap pension and healthcare benefits beyond their personal savings and insurance purchases based on their children's productive capacities. Although the nature of male dominance may be changing, societal values still support the long-established notion that "all men are deemed good enough to be women's masters" (Pateman 1988, 219). Boys receive more resources than girls, they then become men who contribute almost nothing to care-work, and are then rewarded with a pension system that pays them more than women for their masculine labor-market biography of continuous, higher paying formal labor market employment.<sup>74</sup>

Care-workers create value and non-care-workers receive more of this value than they have put in, thus exploitation. An Bubeck has persuasively argued, exploitation is different in the context of care, that is, "the exploiters, in the case of care...are those persons whose time is freed by not having to care" (Bubeck 1995, 182n172). That is, rather than skimming off the top, non-care-workers are left free to

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<sup>74</sup> It should also be noted that men's control of the state is a secondary mode of exploitation of care-workers. The state wants workers who will create a favorable trade balance—more exports and fewer imports—and asks women to produce the labor force with the human capital necessary to do so while refusing to adequately remunerate care-workers, especially if they are caring for the family rather than the public.

pursue other projects, burdens, and work opportunities that are formally rewarded with better benefits than care-work because they receive benefits diverted from care-work. Or, as Ehrenreich and Hochschild would put it in regards to paid domestic labor, “Strictly speaking, the presence of immigrant nannies does not enable affluent women to enter the workforce; it enables affluent men to continue avoiding the second shift” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003, 9).

‘Avoiding burdens’ is a type of exploitation that may look very different from our paradigmatic examples such as slavery, serfdom, and capitalism. In the paradigmatic examples, the exploited does work, the exploiter does not, and at least some surplus product and income from the exploited’s work goes to the exploiter. ‘Avoiding burdens’ is not systemically different from these paradigmatic examples, however. When the lord does not work his own land and the capitalist does not work in his own factory, the *exploiter transfers burdens to the exploited* at the same time that the exploited produces benefits that are transferred to the exploiter.

Let’s dig deeper and look at some cases of transferred burdens. The classic example is the free rider. Examples of free riders are those who do not pay their taxes, ride the subway without paying their fare, or sleep while on watch duty—they do not receive *extra* benefits,<sup>75</sup> but they pay less than their fair share. These examples are not often conceived in terms of exploitation. Yet a related example may illuminate the exploitative dimension of this failure to do one’s fare share. During the American civil war, many men of wealth (e.g., Grover Cleveland, Teddy Roosevelt’s father, *et alia*) paid other men to serve in the military in their stead. This example demonstrates how exploitation exists within linked systems of oppression and

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<sup>75</sup> While compared to those who contribute, it seems they have extra benefits, note they do not receive *extra* income by shirking on taxes, they do not receive *extra* subway rides, nor do they receive *extra* sleep—they simply do not contribute their fair share. This leaves them with more *net* benefits but not more *gross* benefits than those who do contribute their fair share.

dependence that revolve around work actually performed. Paying another person to be a draft substitute in the military requires that someone actually do the work the wealthy avoid. The exploitation is possible only because one party is significantly advantaged and the other is desperate.

Each of these examples involves what economists call “public goods.” Exploitation grounded in avoiding burdens looks different from the paradigmatic examples of a transfer of benefits because it is related to a system of public goods. When exploitation is related to the enjoyment of private goods, the exploiter’s avoidance of particular burdens devolves upon the exploited who must pick up those burdens. In the context of the exploitation of public goods, however, one person may exploit another by avoiding a burden without necessarily increasing his/her own benefits. Simply by shirking public duties, one cannot get more clean air, subway service, or public defense. But the negative consequence of avoiding one’s responsibilities devolves onto everyone else; it permeates the system. When care-work in Cuba (or elsewhere) produces public goods—whether healthy citizens, public hygiene, well-nourished children, or vibrant neighborhoods—those who fail to assume their fair portion of care-work exploit those who do their part. Avoidance of care-work creates greater burdens of care, a form of exploitation quite distinct from the under-remuneration or non-remuneration of care-workers.

This discussion of exploitation in terms of transferred burdens may seem strange for two reasons. The epistemological perspective of the exploiters tends to structure public understandings of social goods in ways that mask exploitation. The fact that the lord does not work in the fields, that the capitalist does not work in the factory, and that the man does not work in the home are all taken as natural and just. It is also far easier to focus on the transfer of benefits rather than the transfer of

burdens. The reason this is so is because the burdens of labor can only be reduced from twenty-four hours to zero per day while benefits can increase to infinity—one capitalist can take benefits from thousands of workers which is worth many times the reduction of all of the individual capitalist's possible labor burdens transferred to anyone else. For these reasons, the exploitation of public goods has until now remained hidden.

The elucidation of the exploitation cycle—oppression, dependence, exploitation—helps us see that the paradigmatic examples of exploitation and that of care-workers are analytically much more similar phenomena than heretofore admitted. Exploitation grounded on private goods may seem more familiar because it involves an accrual of benefits produced by the work of others. The exploitation of public goods, however, is based on a withdrawal from the burden of care, which imposes added burdens upon those who assume the duties of care. Although this mode of exploitation may seem dissimilar to paradigmatic examples, it is exploitation nonetheless—an illegitimate transfer of benefits and burdens that does not accord with work actually performed—that carries profound effects on persons, social relations, and social systems over a lifetime. Until this form of exploitation is recognized and corrected, care-workers will suffer economically and emotionally. They will also see their unique perspectives excluded from politics, a subject to which we now turn.

### **Persona carans and Civitas carans**

How can a society recognize and justly reward those who care? And what effects will this have on society? Care-workers are engaged in a fundamentally different mode of work. A materialist analysis suggests that a different mode of labor should create possibilities for a different politics. In contrast to neoclassical

(political-)economic man, *homo economicus*, some have suggested this different politics would create an alternative model as the subject of political theory, *persona carans* (Bubeck 1995, 12; Held 1993). While *homo economicus* calculates the costs and benefits of each and every move according to his personal utility, *persona carans* is the care-worker whose work looks more like that discussed in Chapter 4. Yet, the recognition and promotion of such a *universal* subject is no small task in a society that explicitly denies this subject a place as a “socially productive worker.”

While my approach is relatively unexplored in its materialist foundations (although Bubeck has a tangential project), this strategy of seeking an economy beyond state capitalism or state socialism has roots in various other thinkers. Maria Mies and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen proposed “the subsistence perspective” by beginning from a ‘perspective from below’ (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999). This was preceded by Teodor Shanin’s 1990 argument regarding expolary economies—those that do not function according to the dominant capitalist or socialist economic models (Shanin 1990). Even in the 1920s, Alexander Chayanov had “developed a theory of an independent peasant economy with a social and cultural logic of its own” (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, 91). The rest of this chapter focuses on a subject most developed previously by Mies—what insights and benefits are to be gained by including care-work within a grand theory of work.

### **El Hombre Nuevo and Revolutionary Democracy**

Cuba’s socialist leaders, including both Che Guevara and Fidel Castro argued that one of the goals of the revolution was the new man and woman. This was a millenarian vision of a society filled with individuals in full possession of solidarity, altruism, generosity and the ability “to treat each other like brothers and sisters” (Castro Ruz 1988). At the same time, the new socialist man and woman have been

subjects of ambivalence for Cuban policymakers. The Cuban economy vacillated over the years between one that rejected market liberalization and one that more or less embraced it, the first in favor of *el hombre nuevo* and the latter against. This was the result of a Cuban economy that was never able to reach a new equilibrium where both the economy appeared healthy and the people appeared ‘new.’ Of course, part of this failure stems purely from the difficulties of a highly centralized and planned command economy. It also stems from Guevara’s requirement for a “perpetual.. heroic attitude in daily life” that is, quite frankly, impossible (Guevara 1965).

Another barrier to a new political-economy and a new man and woman, however, is the lack of new political and economic institutions that foster this type of solidarity. The moral fiber of individuals themselves is irrelevant without the proper political and economic institutions, writ large, to promote this new man and woman. Cuba treats care-work much the same as any other capitalist nation and this is the primary obstacle to a new society. The OECD, EU, and Cuba all view work-life balance and family-friendly policies as means to raise the female employment rate rather than to promote gender equity and gender justice (Perrons 2005, 392). While female formal-market employment is absolutely part of gender equity, it is not sufficient in and of itself.

Gender equity must account for care-work in a much richer fashion. There is a long tradition of theorizing democracy in the socialist tradition but the key, previously unconsidered, to the socialist goal of revolutionary democracy is serious attention to care-work. Thus, I theorize socialism from care-work and care-workers as *revolutionary democracy* (Disney 2003; Hoyt 1995), which leads to three insights relevant to Cuban politics in particular and socialism in general. To begin from care-work allows for a reordering of the economy that both fairly compensates all work



and thus truly satisfies human wellbeing better than any other. To begin from care-work promotes a legitimate *public* ‘ethic of care,’ consistent with socialism’s highest values. To begin from care-work challenges the boundaries between the public and the private and bridges the gap between democracy and those who work. Both capitalism and Cuban socialism at present wear formal-market colored glasses and neither accounts for, let alone begins from, care-work. Nonetheless, an economic and political recognition of care-work is the only way to a ‘third way.’

### **Means of reaching a *Third Way*—*Civitas carans***

What is the ‘third way?’ Carollee Bengelsdorf claims, “Egalitarian popular participation in determining and carrying out public policy and in directly controlling the process of production lies at the center of the Marxist definition of socialist society” (Bengelsdorf 1994, 3). Others have more radically claimed that individuals should be a “determining part of the process by which social reality is produced” (T. R. Young 1978, 1). It is *social reality*, not merely production (and certainly not the vulgar definition of production we have witnessed in action in Cuba and elsewhere) that is at the heart of the socialist liberatory project. This aligns with the Marxist goal of the unalienated human, one who is not subject to “conditions of life [that] seem accidental” nor crushed by the “violence of things,” but who exercises an element of human control over their work (and their leisure) and thus their life (Marx and Engels 1968a, 35 (I.D)).

This is to say that Marx and some of his most perspicacious followers saw not only the need to change the economy but to change human relations. To simply pay care-workers a wage, stipend, or salary, and end it at that, still leaves the quasi-capitalist wage-system in place. It still asks those playing the role of the state to act as capitalists, to invest in projects only if they generate the most surplus and to treat

people as another input factor in the supply chain of the production process. To truly change human relations, to move away from state-capitalism as the model of economic relations, a society must wholeheartedly bring care-work *and the care-work perspective* into politics and the economy. The effects of such a change would be an utterly revolutionary social transformation of “every human relation” whereby “generalizing the human possibilities present in the life activity of women to the social system as a whole would raise, for the first time in human history, the possibility of a fully human community” (Hartsock 1983, 247). Only this will transform the private inwardness of both *homo economicus* and *persona carans* into the new socialist citizen, the *civitas carans*. It is this citizen who will be positioned best to fulfill revolutionary democracy. Revolutionary democracy encompasses political or representative democracy that is more republican than an elite Schumpeterian vision, participatory or mass democracy that includes deliberative elements but is also strongly polyagoric (Hilmer 2010), and economic democracy that equalizes distribution but also allows the people to control resources and the nature of the economic system itself.

### ***Economic Democracy***

Revolutionary democracy entails, in part, the control of the economy and the equitable remuneration of all workers. If Cubans are to achieve this economic arm of revolutionary democracy, three things will be necessary. Society must remunerate care-workers; men must be offered exclusive non-transferable benefits for care-work, comparable to but more extensive than those created in Sweden (Duvander, Ferrarini, and Thalberg 2005); and such remuneration and benefits must not be made analogous to the social and hierarchical relations that currently define wage-labor. Unremunerated care-work is exploited care-work, the political consequences of which

will be discussed at greater length below. If men are offered transferable benefits, evidence from other countries shows us that the dual-earner, dual-carer model will be eschewed entirely. But why not pay care-workers as wage-laborers? At the very least it would relax the state pressure currently exercised to increase female labor force participation and production.

One element that weakens some of the work on care and hinders the remuneration of care-workers is “commodification anxiety,” Joan Williams’ term for the culturally reinforced notion that it is morally wrong and impossible to commodify women’s labor because it is an expression of their love (Bowman and Cole 2009, 173; Williams 2001, 31). While I believe that good care-work will very often involve expressions of love, my definition has no anxiety about paying care-workers for their labor. The entire thrust of the dissertation is to remunerate work, even when it is care-work. Nevertheless, as the Marxian project and the working class have stressed for hundreds of years now, commodification is not equivalent to nor necessary to remuneration. That is, it is possible to remunerate work without the abject prioritization of the commodity over the worker. Care-workers must not enter into wage-labor relationships with even greater dependence than occurs now. *Pace* Nancy Hirschmann, submitting care-workers to the kind of alienating Taylorism, productivity measurements, and delineation of proper forms of care would be counterproductive to revolutionary democracy.<sup>76</sup> We must also recognize that the commodification of care-work makes it impossible for a rising number of care-workers to have work-family balance with their own families. The increasingly growing ‘global care chain’ may function on trade flows and exchanges of money,

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<sup>76</sup> A diversity of forms should be promoted for the benefits of a diverse community, a reduction in cultural imperialism, and an increase in care-workers work autonomy. At the same time, policymakers may reward relativized outcomes to incentivize good results without turning care-workers into factory workers.

assets, persons, and care-work but it is still a central locus of exploitation and the ‘global care drain’ whereby individual families’ and societies’ capacity for care are steadily diminished by the particular forms of labor emigration—whether international or intranational (Hochschild 2005).

For these and many other reasons, I believe we ought to preserve and expand a sphere that does not look like capitalism’s economy of bad-faith bargains even while we ought to guarantee that the work within that sphere is at the same time remunerated. Marx footnotes N. Linguet in *Capital*, Vol. I, “*Si le manouvrier libre prend un instant de repos, l’économie sordide qui le suit des yeux avec inquiétude, prétend qu’il la vole.*” [If the free labourer allows himself an instant of rest, the base and petty management, which follows him with wary eyes, claims he is stealing from it.]<sup>77</sup> If we are foolish enough to ignore our commodity anxiety and allow all facets of life to be permeated by such greedy, wary eyes, there will be nothing left in life worth living for. Paying care-workers as wage-laborers is not the way to give Cubans control over their economy, although it is one of the possible ways a society might choose to adequately remunerate care-work.

### ***Full Citizenship and the Formal Market***

Revolutionary democracy also entails the full, substantive representation of all citizens in political decisionmaking. Increasingly, Cuban women are finding this easier said than done. In spite of the important economic recuperation that ended the Special Period in the mid-2000s, “domestic work has become exceedingly time-consuming, impacting women’s public participation” (Krull and Kobayashi 2009, 166). Over the course of the Revolution, women have also had their political energies largely co-opted and funneled through the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). Not

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<sup>77</sup> N. Linguet, “*Théorie des Lois Civiles. &c.*” London, 1767, t. II., p. 466.

only is this arm of the government meant to transmit policy directives to women in Cuba, but this is to be women's avenue for political power and their means to gender equity. By segregating women's political structures from the primary halls of power, however, the political elite continues to be almost exclusively composed of men fifty years after the revolution began. Apart from its distance from elite centers of power, the FMC also suffers problems of representation, independence, and resources (Molyneux 2000, 311). Other women's political organizations, autonomously formed and directed, have been pressured into disbanding (Fernandes 2006) leaving women little space to inject new perspectives, forms, or practices into Cuban politics.

Of course, not all women leaders work for the FMC. Many women leaders dot government posts but, again, they tend to be segregated in secondary decisionmaking levels and sectors of the government such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps the most famous example is Mariela Castro-Espín, daughter of Raúl Castro and director of CENESEX, the National Sex Education Center. These women leaders and their ministries are feminized as ministering to the needs of those with the least resources and power to fend for themselves. In addition, these sectors seem to be more vulnerable to the threat of redundancy when the formal economy contracts (as demonstrated in the Czech Republic, Nicaragua, and Cuba during the Special Period).

These are some of the direct and deleterious effects of the gendered care-work dilemma. Women do the overwhelming amount of care-work in Cuba and the fact that they are not seriously and substantively an equitable "determining part of the process by which social reality is produced" stems directly from their time burdens

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<sup>78</sup> For one exception to the rule, Cuban women in the Foreign Service, see Martínez Reinosá, Milagros. "Women and Cuban Foreign Policy: An Approximation to the Study of the Topic in the Decade of the Nineties," in *Cuban Women: History, Contradictions, and Contemporary Challenges*, (eds) Colleen Lundy and Norma Vasallo Barrueta, (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2001), p. 83-92.

and lack of remuneration. While a liberal model of politics might see women's absence as a problem because policies that women favor are less likely pursued by public structures, it is actually a much bigger problem for a polity striving toward socialism.

If I am right that care-work is both exploited as a private and public good in Cuba and that care-work is a fundamentally different type of work, then the failure to recognize care-work stands as a key impediment to revolutionary democracy in Cuba. Women's exclusion from decisionmaking is not based upon chance but instead stems from their political-economic position in the structure of care-work. A truly representative democracy within socialism that is more republican than an elite Schumpeterian vision must not exclude a segment of workers—a central materialist category—and thus their preferences and worldviews from public decisionmaking. Further, the very forms themselves of democratic decisionmaking within deliberative bodies would be altered—leadership, democracy, representation, etc. are not precisely defined procedures but substantive concepts susceptible to alteration based on the material activity and roles performed by its practitioners.<sup>79</sup>

The effects of such an inclusion, hitherto untested and unseen, would be profound in any society but must certainly be amplified in a society with a state as important to the nation's political-economy as in Cuba. It is estimated that the military controls around 60-65 percent of the economy. This kind of male domination cannot fulfill the promise of socialism. Socialism has always aimed at the possibility of participation in value-making and -choosing—the process by which social reality is produced—by all members of society. The socialist goal of eliminating the

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<sup>79</sup> This does not mean power will cease to exist, but may move society closer to the absence of oppression. There can be no society devoid of some immediate domination and subordination (Tronto 1993, 135) and no society devoid of care-work and needs, but these immediacies may be temporary, rotational, shared, etc.

differences between the propertied and the propertyless is simply a particular socialist extension of the liberal premise that all political actors are equal to each other *in the political sense*. Nevertheless, in Cuba there is a clear connection between full citizenship and formal-market work and military masculinity (Sasson-Levy and Amram-Katz 2007).

This is a clear hindrance to revolutionary democracy. Not only does it make it difficult to incorporate care-workers into political participation for reasons of time as they work the double- and triple-shift. Not only does it remove the care-worker's perspective and insights from politics as the more masculine social biographies have the most opportunity to participate. It also denigrates the care-worker for her attachment to private things and claims that she is thereby less fit for control over public concerns. The ever-present theme of the unproductive housewife is clear evidence of the parallel demarcation of moral and political boundaries in Cuba whereby these 'unproductive housewives' are the objects of public policy, though certainly not its creators or collaborators.

### *Sites of Politics*

Revolutionary democracy demands not simply representative democracy but participatory democracy as well. This points us precisely to the fact that the shape of the political sphere must be changed and that attention to care-work is a key means to reinvigorate participatory democracy. If care-work is recognized as a social benefit, much in the same vein as productive work, this would contribute to the democratization of not simply the deliberative, formal, political structures that political scientists have long been comfortable studying, but to the household, neighborhood, and the workplace as well.

Jeffrey D. Hilmer has argued that since the 1980s and 1990s, participatory democratic theory has been increasingly narrowed down to, and intellectually conflated with, deliberative democratic theory (2010). Socialist-feminism offers a unique vantage point for critique of both the educational and class elitism as well as the masculine bias of deliberative democracy in place of participatory democracy. The “rational public deliberation among free and equal citizens about matters of common concern” (Hilmer 2010, 51) privileges the abstract and masculinist conceptions of rationality, the thin freedom and equality commensurate with a liberal, minimalist polity, a masculine notion of citizen-worker/citizen-fighter as found in liberal and socialist polities, and the deliberative sector of the state—i.e., the male-dominant sphere of the public—as the realm of politics.

This ‘productivist fetish’ of androcentric democracy has its dangers. Jeffrey Broxmeyer has argued that the New Deal era, for example, “was defined...by massively *labor*-intensive political participation and the notion of the voter as citizen” (Broxmeyer 2010, 19; Putnam 2001; also, cf. Rosenstone and J. M. Hansen 1993). Cuba has tended strongly toward this particular flavor of political participation and citizenship. Instead of capital-intensive political campaigns such as evinced by Schwarzenegger’s 2003 gubernatorial bid or the 2012 \$1 trillion dollar presidential race in the U.S., Cuba bars any form of campaigning beyond the one-page *curriculum vitae* posted for all voters to see (August 1999, ??) [[fix this]]. Cuba’s elections are also held on Sundays to facilitate voting by formal-market laborers. One weakness in this respect is that the 30-minute nomination process, however, is not as accessible to workers (August 1999, 266). This was compensated for by a 1992 change that put the nomination of National Assembly members in the hands of the trade union. Although an improvement over the previous nomination committees, chaired by a Party



member appointed by the Party, its lack of gender equity is apparent. It directly locates the source of political power in the formal marketplace, which despite women's union leadership roles, is dominated by men.

To recognize care-work as socially beneficial and productive work would thus be a very important step in the incorporation of care-workers into the production of social reality. Uniquely, this extension of revolutionary democracy will set in motion a mutual tension between the public and private, the political and the personal. Cuban politics would make a simultaneous double move that brings allegedly "private" care-workers into a more public realm of the deliberative sphere while bringing allegedly "public" decisionmaking and concerns into a more private realm. If politics is not only a neutral channel for power, but its very shape and form actively respond to structures of power, this double move will involve a nearly unprecedented expansion of democracy not simply into the household, but furthering the strength of democracy in the workplaces and neighborhoods as well. Such developments would also have spillover effects into other segments of society as even the workplaces and sectors of the workplace that tend to be more men-heavy through horizontal and vertical occupational segregation would be touched.

Revolutionary democracy will no longer be simply a transition from a state designed to support capitalists to one designed to support production-workers, but it will be a state that supports all workers and recognizes the importance of all kinds of work. Marguerite G. Rosenthal has claimed, "Evidence from other countries indicates that so long as women bear the primary responsibility for home and care of family, they cannot participate as equals in community and political life" (1992, 163). This is true, *only insofar as* politics and public life have been removed and abstracted from the material activities of the home and community. Similar to my critique of

Cuba's theory on the "woman question," the answer ought not be that all persons need to be in the formal political sphere as it exists now. Rather, if care-work is truly taken as a necessity of life, then the formal political sphere must expand to reach the people where they are and where they work.

That politics is polyagoric, that there are a multiplicity of public spaces, is already true. This is seen in the union work done by Silvia Tlaseca, the wife of a formal union leader of Mexican immigrant laborers in Pennsylvania's mushroom industry, which is gendered in terms of its audience, its forms, and its spaces. The fact that her organizing is so gendered does not mean that it is not politics, it has instead helped render her activities invisible from both an intra- and extra-community perspective. Her tireless labor redounds not to the benefit of her own political power, nor that of the women she organizes, but to the formal masculine power structures in which her husband takes part (Garcia 2008). Thus, the challenge for a socialist-feminism is not necessarily to create something brand new (although new structures may strengthen already existing political forms), rather it is to aid an already existing polyagoric politics to flourish and to support the recognition and aggrandizement of what was heretofore invisible daily life into legitimate sources of political power in their own right.

As Marx had little to say on the structures of communist state and society, I too believe that economic power will have to be accorded to care-workers before we can see the shape that these new developments are to take. Most directly, it would alter the political power of care-workers. As women's economic power and status increases, as the economic relationships of care-work change, as more men engage in care-work, care-workers would change their relationship to households and community as well. Women are already highly involved in these areas, yet as their

work becomes recognized, remunerated, and shared with men, these sectors will take on more public and social importance. These will become stronger spheres of decisionmaking, civic education, exchange, local political power. Given that the work that already takes place here—as Marx says in *Theses on Feuerbach*, “sensuous human activity, practice [Praxis]” (Marx 1967, 400)—has been produced as ‘care’ rather than ‘market production,’ these sites of local political power will exhibit different modes, means, and ends of democracy.

In addition, simultaneous to this devolution of power from the deliberative sites of politics currently in control (Council of State, Politburo, and to some extent the National Assembly) to the participatory sites where care-workers already live and work, the care-work perspective will gain influence within the currently existing formal structures of political power in Cuba. Democracy will no longer rest in the hands of those with a production-fetish, but will incorporate a large and nearly omnipresent category of life previously excluded from the formal political decisionmaking of the nation-state. In the end, if Cuba is to fully incorporate women’s and care-workers’ voices into politics, it will not be enough to simply exhort women to get involved or accept nomination. Nor will it be enough to create a workers’ state that turns heavily to the trade unions for guidance, direction, and authority. Cuba will have to attempt to chart and navigate the unexplored possibilities of altering the very shape of the political sphere by bringing political power to care-workers rather than asking care-workers to find their way into the political sphere as it is currently constituted.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Perhaps there is the danger that the more participatory politics becomes, the more the care-receivers (e.g., elderly adults in *need* of care) will be marginalized from politics. I would argue against this for a few reasons. First, Cuba is undergoing a major demographic shift as its birthrates have dropped sharply and its standard of living and life expectancies have risen dramatically. This is in large part directly represented by the fact that Cuba has in 2007, by a sizable margin, the highest positive {GDP/capita rank – HDI rank} of all the world’s states at 44 (UN HDR 2009, 171, Table H). Such a

### Conclusion

In their studies of socialist Nicaragua, Katherine Hoyt (Hoyt 1995, iv) and Jennifer Disney (Disney 2003, 538n6) identify three dimensions central to revolutionary democracy. To repeat, revolutionary democracy encompasses a political or representative democracy that is more republican than an elite Schumpeterian vision, participatory or mass democracy that includes deliberative elements but is also strongly polyagoric (Hilmer 2010), and economic democracy that equalizes distribution but also allows the people to control resources and the nature of the economic system itself.

Representative democracy in Cuba currently lacks a whole class of workers, those who do care-work. This directly affects political outcomes. Men in Cuba are commonly considered irresponsible, self-centered, and lazy when it comes to care-work (L. M. Smith and Padula 1996, 166)—acting upon what we might call a selfish ethic. By contrast, women who do care-work have been trained to act upon a socialist ethic of solidarity but are simultaneously excluded from politics. As Ruth Pearson has noted, “[Cuban] women have a primary and a social commitment to reproductive tasks which are not entirely reducible to calculations of economic advantage (Elson 1995, 176) but which reflect women's investment in the well-being of their households and their children's futures” (Pearson 1997, 673). To focus on wellbeing is the most fundamental and potent challenge that one can make today against the

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demographic shift will lend its own effects to a strengthening of the democratic power of the elderly in Cuba and a shift of resources towards their benefits. Secondly, I think it is reasonable to suggest that as care-work is more and more recognized as work, that care-receivers will also benefit by being less and less objects of pity, scorn, or ignorance. This is merely a hypothesis with little theoretical development to back it up and will thus require future empirical testing to substantiate the claim. (GDP = Gross Domestic Product (US\$); HDI = United Nations' Human Development Index. Using ranks may be misleading as ordinal numbers hide some of the information of cardinal numbers, but this nevertheless reveals that Cuba has a phenomenal HDI given its rather low GDP/capita. Likewise, if one subtracts the United Nations' GDP Index from its Life Expectancy Index one sees that Cuba ranks 23<sup>rd</sup> of the 182 member nations. If one looks only at countries that have surpassed the median life expectancy inclusive (71.7), Cuba ranks 5<sup>th</sup> out of 89 nations. Interestingly, this same method reveals Nicaragua in 3<sup>rd</sup> (10<sup>th</sup> of 182), another Latin American country with a dramatic socialist past as the only Latin American country bettering Cuba in these ways.)

political-economic hegemony of commodity production. To remove the carriers of this ethic from politics not only undermines gender equity within political representation, but it directly inhibits the possibility of the most liberatory socialist policies to promote the flourishing of all humans beyond “the realm of necessity.”

In addition to a simple lack of representation, the paramount socialist process of participatory democracy is just as affected by the absence of care-workers. Typically, women in many polities, including Cuba, have constructed and constituted the loose informal networks of decisionmaking at local community levels. Moreover, Latin American women have famously used their gendered networks to seek human rights, more equitable distributions of resources, and to connect politics to human need (also cf. Jelin 1985, 18; Kaplan 1997, 179–89), all part of the socialist basket of preferred goods. To narrow and weight the sphere of politics to the formally demarcated deliberative spaces most accessible to those who do not do care-work not only undermines gender equity within participation, but it hinders the growth of a rich polyagoric democracy that simultaneously blurs divisions between public and private and furthers the influence over and ownership of politics by those previously regarded as objects not actors.

The very design of the economic system is severely skewed by ignoring care-work. “‘Women’s work’ takes over where neo-classical economic theory parts from reality—public goods, externalities, and information inequalities—and provides the work that individualists cannot rightly value” (Riley 1988, 50). While Cuba has devoted massive public monies to health, education, childcare, hygiene/sanitation as well as food and eldercare, these investments in care-work have aimed to impel women toward jobs in the formal market sector. This violates the principle of a society without exploitation and it negates the possibility that all workers might craft

the nature of the economic system within which they live. To limit remuneration to production-work not only undermines gender equity by continuing a cycle of oppression, dependency, and exploitation, but prioritizes the production and exchange of commodities over the true fundamental of economics, human wellbeing.

Theorizing socialism from care-work, and care-workers—what Bubeck and Held have called *persona carans*—leads to three insights relevant to Cuban politics in particular and socialism in general. To begin from care-work promotes the inclusion of a legitimate *public* ‘ethic of care’ within politics consistent with socialism’s highest values. To begin from care-work challenges the boundaries between the public and the private and bridges the gap between democracy and those who work. To begin from care-work allows for a reordering of the economy that both fairly compensates all work and truly satisfies human wellbeing better than any other.

Many, inside and outside Cuba, are wrestling over its future. Jorge Domínguez, one of Cuba’s foremost scholars, has written a transitional Cuban Constitution which he hopes Cubans can one day utilize as they work on adopting or creating a more permanent post-Castro constitution. Yet, the contest for Cuba’s soul consistently ignores care-work. The transitional document crafted by Domínguez only mentions women twice, noting that the state exercises a monopoly over “services for infants, women, and the elderly, among others” and that this should constitutionally be opened up to private enterprises (2003, 9); and reporting that women “can retire on a full pension at age 55 and men at age 60” and suggesting that due to Cuba’s long life expectancy—extremely long for economically comparable countries’ citizens—that this law may be changed without affecting the constitution (2003, 14). It is this care-blindness, however, not any regime change, that will in the end undermine Cuba’s liberatory vision.

Today's world rests upon a precipice, one we have arrived at through willful ignorance of the human wreckage strewn in the path of capitalism's history. Further, capitalism currently threatens the very survival of large numbers of our species due to ecological sustainability issues. Socialism was to end exploitation and to propel humans into the realm of freedom beyond the realm of necessity. Yet, socialism as we have seen in Cuba has picked up capital's production-orientation without missing a beat. Our greatest hope for justice is revolutionary democracy shaped by a feminist substantive recognition and remuneration of care-work.

This is decidedly not the American middle-class (read: "professional-class") feminist's ideal of liberation (nor the Marxist feminist's), each of which often describes women's performance of domestic work (and childcare) as backwards, patriarchal and sexist, stifling, monotonous, drudgery, something to be professionalized, a bad bargain, bad faith, and just plain bad. Yet, we must account for the fact that neither work nor home is its metaphor—each is in the end a real place filled to the brim with complex experiences, even if they are sites of exploitation and patriarchy. Few experiences in the world are monotonic in the sense that they are all autonomy, all freedom, or all exploitation and misery. Micaela di Leonardo and Roger Lancaster write, "Just as more ordinarily envisioned labor—in a factory or an office—can reflect at the same time exploitation, cooperation, and fundamental human satisfaction wrested from constraining circumstances, so can, and often are, women's and men's sexual, household and reproductive experiences" (2002, 48).

Yes, my proposal that we value the human response to need in support of non-commodity flourishing is a radical solution. But if we refuse to recognize and remunerate care-work, if we insist on a world fetishizing the chrematistic and the commodity, we will fill our world with exploitation while we empty ourselves of

happiness. The radical prioritization of care-work I propose may make some of us poorer in things, but I believe it is our only hope to growing richer in all that which makes life worth living for.



## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Cuban Leadership Chart, April 2009<sup>81</sup>**

“The Council of State is the executive body of the Cuban legislature, the National Assembly of the People's Government (ANPP), and acts on its behalf when it is not in session. The ANPP elects the Council of State from among its members at the beginning of each five-year legislative period; the last election was held on 24 February 2008, when Raul and others officially took office. According to the Constitution, the Council of State has 31 members: a president, a first vice president, five vice presidents, a secretary, and 23 other members. As of mid-April 2009, actual membership stood at 28, following the early March removal of a vice president and two members. The president of the Council of State also serves as president of the Council of Ministers.

The Council of Ministers is the state's top executive and administrative body. It consists of a president, a first vice president, an unspecified number of vice presidents, a secretary, and the heads of various ministries. All positions besides the president are nominated by him and approved by the ANPP. The Council of Ministers is directed by an executive committee including its president, first vice president, vice presidents, and additional members and advisers chosen by the president.

Fidel Castro retained his post as first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC), the sole legal party; Raul Castro is second secretary. The party congress is the highest decisionmaking body in the PCC and elects the members of the Central Committee. The congress is supposed to meet every 5 years, but there have only been five congresses since the PCC was founded in 1965, with the most recent in October 1997.

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<sup>81</sup> (OSC - Open Source Center 2009a)

The Central Committee, which currently has about 150 members, leads the PCC between congresses. It holds plenary meetings at least once a year, and more often if convened by the Council of State. It elects the members of the Politburo and the first and second secretaries.

The Politburo serves as the PCC's executive arm and the leading decisionmaking body between the Central Committee's plenary meetings. The Secretariat is charged with assisting the Politburo, ensuring that its decisions are implemented, and overseeing the "correct application of cadre policy," according to Communist Party daily Granma (4 July 2006). The Secretariat was disbanded in 1991, but Fidel Castro established it during the July 2006 plenary meeting of the Central Committee." (OSC - Open Source Center 2009b)

Cuban Leadership Chart, April 2009

## Communist Party of Cuba (PCC)

## State Entities



The Council of Ministers is a body of 26 ministers, 12 of whom are appointed by the Government and 14 by the Congress. The Council is headed by the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the President on the advice of the Council. The Council is responsible for the administration of the Government and for the implementation of the policies of the Government. The Council is also responsible for the preparation of the annual budget and for the presentation of the budget to the Parliament. The Council is also responsible for the preparation of the annual report of the Government and for the presentation of the report to the Parliament. The Council is also responsible for the preparation of the annual report of the Government and for the presentation of the report to the Parliament.

## Council of State

### Vice Presidents



## Council of Ministers

### Vice Presidents



## Poliburo



## Secretariat



## National Assembly



## Top Military Leaders



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