

SEX AND STATE MAKING IN REVOLUTIONARY CUBA, 1959-1968

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## ABSTRACT

RACHEL M. HYNSON: Sex and State Making in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1968  
(Under the direction of Kathryn J. Burns)

This dissertation explores the construction of the revolutionary state in order to trace the entwinement of familial health and national security during the first decade of the Cuban revolution. It analyzes campaigns deployed by government officials to remake sexual norms and produce families deemed healthier than those under capitalism. More specifically, my dissertation examines state efforts that normalized patriarchy by criminalizing abortion, legitimized marriage through collective weddings, schematized the workforce by condemning female prostitution, and restructured economic gender roles via the rehabilitation of *chulos* (loosely translated as “kept men”). Through close analysis of print media, speeches, travel narratives, and oral histories, my work makes two major contributions to the study of Cuban sexuality. First, by joining prerevolutionary context to an analysis of revolutionary policies, I demonstrate that the sexual behaviors lauded by state officials as new measures of revolutionary well-being were in fact traditional criteria recycled from prior Cuban regimes. Second, I assert that revolutionary leadership of the 1960s attempted to remake the state by challenging popular definitions of terms such as marriage, family planning, sex worker, and *chulo*. But while laying claim to language seemed to give the government control over patterns of intimacy, it also created space for individuals to exert autonomy by mobilizing language to their benefit. By uncovering the methods by which Cuban leaders constructed the state, my project maps the role of sexuality

in the landscape of 1960s Cuba and illuminates connections between sexual and more broadly based sociocultural changes.

*In loving memory of my grandfather,  
Dr. Leon O. Hynson (1930-2006)*

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## INTRODUCTION

In late 1961, amidst rumors that the Cuban government would terminate parental rights, Minister of Justice Alfredo Yabur Maluf asserted, “Unlike the lifestyle imposed by the capitalist regimes, the socialist State and the popular democracies place real emphasis on strengthening the family.”<sup>1</sup> His remarks were a response to widely-circulated claims that revolutionary leadership intended to ship Cuban children to Soviet work camps. By this time, thousands of parents had already sent their sons and daughters to perceived safety in the United States.<sup>2</sup> But Yabur defined strong Cuban socialist families in opposition to those found under capitalism. He affirmed, “While extramarital unions abound in capitalist societies, marriage is encouraged in socialist society. While anticonceptive methods are usually employed in capitalist society, even to the point of criminality, motherhood is encouraged in socialist society.” Yabur added that parents under socialism, unlike their capitalist counterparts, were obligated to assume responsibility for the children who “wandered the streets fueling vice and delinquency.”<sup>3</sup> His comments illustrated the importance of family to early revolutionary discourse and the way that non-normative family

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in “La patria potestad: Dos opiniones y un comentario,” *Verde Olivo*, 1 October 1961, 27.

<sup>2</sup> The emergence of state-run daycares contributed to rumors that the Cuban government would end patria potestad or parental rights. Encouraged by the U.S. government, the rumors prompted terrified parents to send over fourteen thousand unaccompanied minors to the United States between 1960 and 1962. This mass exodus became known as Operation Peter Pan. “Serán unidas en matrimonio cuatrocientas mil parejas,” *Revolución*, 22 November 1960, 13; Tomassena, “Hablan los padres,” *Bohemia*, 15 October 1961, 16-18, 129. See also Bryan O. Walsh, “Cuban Refugee Children,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* (July-Oct. 1971): 384; Maria de los Ángeles Torres, *The Lost Apple: Operation Pedro Pan, Cuban Children in the U.S., and the Promise of a Better Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 58.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in “La patria potestad,” 27.

forms could be interpreted as capitalist or counterrevolutionary. Yabur sought to convince Cubans that parental rights were an essential component of life under socialism, but he also hinted at the dangers of deviating from specific intimate practices.

Government efforts to promote fitter families form the basis of this dissertation, which explores the construction of the revolutionary state in order to trace the entwinement of familial health and national security during the first decade of the Cuban revolution. It analyzes campaigns deployed by government officials to remake sexual norms and produce families deemed healthier than those under capitalism. More specifically, my dissertation examines state efforts that normalized patriarchy by criminalizing abortion, legitimized marriage through collective weddings, schematized the workforce by condemning female prostitution, and restructured economic gender roles via the rehabilitation of *chulos* (loosely translated as “kept men”). Through close analysis of print media, speeches, travel narratives, and oral histories, my work makes two major contributions to the study of Cuban sexuality. First, by joining prerevolutionary context to an analysis of revolutionary policies, I demonstrate that the sexual behaviors lauded by state officials as new measures of revolutionary well-being were in fact traditional criteria recycled from prior Cuban regimes. Second, I assert that revolutionary leadership of the 1960s attempted to remake the state by challenging popular definitions of terms such as marriage, family planning, sex worker, and *chulo*. But while laying claim to language seemed to give the state control over patterns of intimacy, it also created space for individuals to exert autonomy by mobilizing language to their benefit. By uncovering the methods by which Cuban leaders constructed the state, my project maps the role of sexuality in the landscape of 1960s Cuba and illuminates connections between sexual and more broadly based sociocultural changes.

By outlining the complex place of familial practices in the early revolutionary Cuban cultural arena, this dissertation demonstrates that state formation was closely tied to the sexual practices of ordinary Cubans. Revolutionary leadership emphasized that sexual behavior, beyond homosexuality, could challenge national security. In 1961, authorities asserted that occupations were also governed by a kind of Marxist logic, coming to reflect concepts about what constituted productive labor and acceptable behavior in a quest to better the revolution.<sup>4</sup> They judged as security risks the people and practices that did not fit into this developmental trajectory.<sup>5</sup> But ordinary Cubans did not always comply with official expectations; indeed, many refused to abandon abortions or labor for the government.<sup>6</sup> Their actions contradict the official narrative that Cubans unanimously supported the revolution.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Empleo para todos, a los jefes de familia primero,” *Revolución*, 25 September 1961, 4-5; Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” *Obra Revolucionaria*, 9 October 1961, 10, 18; Bunck, 129-133.

<sup>5</sup> Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz...en el acto de entrega de diplomas a los obreros más destacados en la zafra, efectuado en la playa de Varadero,” 16 July 1962, *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/fl60762e.html>; Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de la República de Cuba, en acto conmemorativo del X aniversario de la creación del MININT, celebrado en el Teatro de la CTC,” 6 June 1971. *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f060671e.html>; “La patria potestad: Dos opiniones y un comentario,” 27.

<sup>6</sup> “El carnet laboral,” *Trabajo* 5, no. 12 (June 1964): 26-31; “¡Al que le venga bien el plástico, que se lo ponga!” *Pa’lante*, 15 October 1964, 8; Dominique Gay-Sylvestre, *Navegaciones y borrascas: Monika Krause y la educación sexual en Cuba (1979-1990)* (Eichstätt, Germany: Katholische Universität Eichstätt, Zentralinstitut für Lateinamerika-Studien, 2003), 48; Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Díaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: Population Council, 1983), 34; Elise Andaya, “Reproducing the Revolution: Gender, Kinship, and the State in Contemporary Cuba” (PhD diss., New York University, 2007), 176.

<sup>7</sup> Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 8.

At least as important were the responses of government leaders to what they viewed as resistance. In virtually all cases, authorities papered over stories of perceived opposition to the revolution. For example, in the case of abortion, on which the government eventually reversed its initial position, revolutionary leadership silenced the history of efforts to curtail it, and historians have largely accepted this narrative. Lillian Guerra demonstrates that the Cuban state exerted great effort to “write over and *script* citizens’ actions and thoughts in ways conducive to government interests.” But despite their attempts to create a grand narrative that revealed unequivocal compliance with government expectations, Guerra argues that revolutionary leaders merely participated in the construction of palimpsests, “that is, documents and metaphors of a contradictory political process.”<sup>8</sup> The production of palimpsests might also be understood as physical manifestations of the struggle for discursive hegemony. This dissertation loosens the knot of official revolutionary history to reveal the silence and contradictions surrounding four early revolutionary campaigns. It also provides a historical context for the large number of abortions, sex workers, extralegal unions, and *chulos* in twenty-first century Cuba.

### Historiography

Since the 1980s, scholars in various fields have explored how private practices become entangled with public institutions, asking: How do sexual practices inform state formation? What intimate practices are considered “civilized”? How is heterosexuality constructed as capitalist (or socialist)? Numerous scholars of North American history have noted that government officials identified homosexuality as a security threat during the Cold

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 33. Emphasis in the original.

War.<sup>9</sup> They build on the scholarship of Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Cynthia Enloe who have demonstrated that sexuality is socially constructed and closely tied to militarism and the nation-state.<sup>10</sup> However, only a few have analyzed the construction of families and heterosexuality as necessary to the anti-Communist struggle. To take some representative examples, Mary Louise Adams asserts that Canadian society expressed its fear of juvenile delinquency by surveilling the country's adolescents and educating them in proper sexual behavior, while Carolyn Herbst Lewis focuses on U.S. medical practitioners who crafted a definition of healthy heterosexuality that they believed would keep the United States safe from Communism and nuclear disaster.<sup>11</sup> The importance of family is also highlighted by Elaine Tyler May, who argues that it was a "psychological fortress" against domestic and foreign Cold War threats.<sup>12</sup>

Over the past decade and a half, historians of Latin America have also begun to examine social anxieties surrounding intimacy in the twentieth century. Through themes such as adolescent sexuality, labor reform, and family planning, scholars have revealed the link between sexual practices and politics. Valeria Manzano's analysis of the morality

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<sup>9</sup> For homosexuals as security threats, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State: Language, Politics, and Belonging* (London: Seagull, 2007); Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 13.

campaign against Buenos Aires youth in 1960-1961 highlights the perceived correlation between delinquency and communism, an association that prompted Argentine police to repress adolescent sexual practices.<sup>13</sup> While the 1964 Chilean agrarian reforms were not explicitly tied to the family, Heidi Tinsman concludes that government policies ultimately institutionalized both gender hierarchies and women's role in the home.<sup>14</sup> Raúl Necochea López demonstrates that Peruvian physicians viewed their work as essential to the family. By promoting contraception in the 1960s, they hoped to shield families from poverty and women from physical harm.<sup>15</sup> Kim Clark also explores the politics of health by analyzing Ecuadorian state projects to modernize women and the role of women in this process.<sup>16</sup>

In Cuban Studies, meanwhile, scholars like Ian Lumsden, Abel Sierra Madero, and Guerra have highlighted the repression of male homosexuality and non-normative gender

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<sup>13</sup> For other references to fears about adolescent sexuality, see: Katherine Elaine Bliss and Ann S. Blum, "Dangerous Driving: Adolescence, Sex, and the Gendered Experience of Public Space in Early-Twentieth-Century Mexico City," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Power in Latin America since Independence*, eds. William E. French and Katherine Elaine Bliss (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 163-186; Isabel Córdova Suárez, "Setting Them Straight: Social Services, Youth, Sexuality, and Modernization in Postwar (WWII) Puerto Rico," *CENTRO: Journal of the Center for Puerto Rican Studies* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 27-49; Valeria Manzano, "Sexualizing Youth: Morality Campaigns and Representations of Youth in Early 1960s Buenos Aires," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14, no. 4 (October 2005): 433-461.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of female sexuality under industrialization, see also Ann Farnsworth-Alvear, *Dulcinea in the Factory: Myths, Morals, Men, and Women in Colombia's Industrial Experiment, 1905-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Heidi Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, and Labor in the Chilean Agrarian Reform, 1950-1973* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> For more information on institutionalized family planning, see Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Raúl Necochea López, "The Institutionalization of Birth Control in Peru I: Transnational Discourses and Local Actions, 1930s-1974," in "A History of the Medical Control of Fertility in Peru, 1895-1976" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2009), 160-225.

<sup>16</sup> A. Kim Clark, *Gender, State, and Medicine in Highland Ecuador: Modernizing Women, Modernizing the State, 1895-1950* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

expressions as a key element of Cuban nation-building.<sup>17</sup> However, researchers have not yet addressed how Cuban officials situated broader forms of sexuality in the wider landscape of state policies and national security. With some exceptions, literature on intimacy practices in revolutionary Cuba has primarily been restricted to the repression of gay men in the 1960s and the practices of *jineteras*—a widely-used term for prostitutes post-1991—in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, researchers sought to understand both the methods and the reasons behind the persecution of sexual minorities, especially homosexuals.<sup>18</sup> In *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS*, Marvin Leiner examines the lives of gay Cuban men in order to understand more clearly the communication between marginalized groups and society. He notes that the treatment of homosexuals may be employed as a “barometer” for how a society interacts with minorities in general.<sup>19</sup> Lumsden seeks to explain not just how, but why the revolutionary leadership controlled and sanctioned sexuality. In *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality*, he argues that revolutionary leadership sought to recuperate the “decency” that many people felt had been lost in the 1950s. Leaders associated abnormal sexuality with Fulgencio Batista and hoped to

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<sup>17</sup> Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Abel Sierra Madero, *Del otro lado del espejo: La sexualidad en la construcción de la nación cubana* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 2006); Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 227-289.

<sup>18</sup> See for example: Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981); Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, “Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experiences, Part I,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 683-699; Laura Gotkowitz and Richard Turits, “Socialist Morality: Sexual Preference, Family, and State Intervention in Cuba,” *Socialism and Democracy* 4, no. 1 (1990): 7-29; José Quiroga, “Homosexualities in the Tropic of Revolution,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 133-154.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin Leiner, *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

attain political legitimacy through the eradication of sexual deviance. According to Lumsden, they did this by celebrating a specific type of revolutionary masculinity, one that left no space for effeminate men.<sup>20</sup> Throughout these decades, most scholars accepted that the revolutionary government opposed homosexuality because of its perceived relationship with the “debauched” neocolonial past.

By the turn of the twentieth century, scholars began to complicate this understanding by examining the repression of gays prior to the revolution. Emilio Bejel used Cuban literary texts to demonstrate the correlation between Cuban nationalism and homosexuality. He asserts in *Gay Cuban Nation* that homophobia has long been an essential element of nation-building efforts in Cuba. Bejel also notes that the homosexual body was a threat to the success of the nation-state as early as the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Sierra Madero expands on this argument, noting that the construction of the Cuban nation has historically been based on the othering of sexual minorities, specifically homosexuals and transgender individuals. The regulation of sexual subalterns began as early as the late eighteenth century, notes Sierra Madero, and continues through twenty-first century discourse on diversity, over which the government claims exclusive authority.<sup>22</sup> His exploration of female sexuality forms part of a small historiography within Cuban studies.

In the 1990s, scholars began to take interest in studying women’s sexuality in Cuba. Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula’s influential *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba*

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<sup>20</sup> Lumsden, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Abel Sierra Madero, “Del hombre nuevo al travestismo de estado,” *Diario de Cuba*, 25 January 2014, [http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1390513833\\_6826.html](http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1390513833_6826.html); Sierra Madero, *Del otro lado*, 23-28.

argues that understandings of femininity changed as the revolutionary government mobilized women to serve and protect the island. However, the authors also note that the transmission of new ideas about sexuality was complicated by a lack of discursive consistency within the administration and the unwillingness of ordinary Cubans to accept new ideas about sex.<sup>23</sup>

Rosa Miriam Elizalde challenges criticisms that the increase of prostitution in Cuba illustrated a failure of the revolution. She argues that Cuban leaders had successfully eliminated sex work in the 1960s, and it had only returned with the economic crisis that followed the loss of funding from the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> Following Elizalde, scholars have increasingly studied the phenomenon of *jineteras* in Cuba. But in her overview of Cuban sexual politics, Carrie Hamilton recently called on historians to contextualize contemporary ethnographies with historical research on the early revolutionary period.<sup>25</sup>

In *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971*, a particularly important revisionist study, Lillian Guerra provides a provocative historical analysis of the heterogeneous nature of revolution in 1960s Cuba. She demonstrates that individual Cubans promoted varying definitions of revolution, challenging the myth of unanimity endorsed by the state media. By exploring the revolution “from within,” Guerra reveals its extensive impact on everyday life.<sup>26</sup> The text forms part of a small, yet growing,

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<sup>23</sup> Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Rosa Miriam Elizalde, *Flores desechables ¿prostitución en Cuba?* (Havana: Ediciones Abril, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Carrie Hamilton, *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 234.

<sup>26</sup> Guerra, 4-5, 8.

historiography on the politics of everyday life under the revolution.<sup>27</sup> However, *Visions of Power in Cuba* initiates another, perhaps more important, historiographical transition. Guerra notes that her book “rejects both the exile narrative of betrayal and the Cuban government’s grand narrative of unflinching popular support,” providing a more nuanced interpretation of the early-revolutionary process.<sup>28</sup> My dissertation straddles the same ideological fence, asserting that the traditional for-or-against approach obfuscates the multiple discursive practices that defined sexuality and state formation in Cuba.

### Methodology and Theory

To understand the process of regulating sexuality that occurred between 1959 and 1968, this project employs several methodological and theoretical approaches. My research is informed by feminist gender analysis, which is based on the premise that “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”<sup>29</sup> Joan Scott notes the presence of politics in everyday gendered practices and asserts that “changes in gender relationships can be set off by views of the needs of the state.”<sup>30</sup> Gender as method contributes to an understanding of how revolutionary leadership fashioned the Cuban state along lines defined by race, sex, class, and ideology. But because these categories were constantly in flux, so too

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<sup>27</sup> Other examples of this historiographical transition include Anita Casavantes-Bradford, “Understanding Elián: The Politics of Childhood in Miami and Havana, 1959-1962,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2011, 126-224; Devyn Spence Benson, “Not Blacks, but Citizens! Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1961,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Guerra, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1067.

<sup>30</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 46.

were the contours of state formation. A necessary form of analysis, gender history redefines how the state was constituted in early revolutionary Cuba.

“Sex and State Making” assumes that conceptions of gender, sexuality, and family evolved throughout the 1960s. Gender was (and is) generally understood to be “a cultural marker of biological sex,” while “sexuality [is defined as] desire and erotic pleasure.”<sup>31</sup> Yet as Gayle Rubin notes, “It is impossible to think with any clarity about the politics of race or gender as long as these are thought of as biological entities rather than as social constructs.”<sup>32</sup> Eve Sedgwick provides a more precise definition of gender, which situates it as the “dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors.”<sup>33</sup> Because gender does not exist a priori, it must be reproduced and reinforced daily. “Gender is always a doing,” opines Judith Butler, an act of “performativity.”<sup>34</sup> In this way, gender is separate from chromosomes.<sup>35</sup> While sexuality is biological, it is also external to the body, inasmuch as it refers to “pleasure *and* physiology, fantasy *and* anatomy.”<sup>36</sup> But like gender, sexuality is also political, notes Rubin, as it “is organized into

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<sup>31</sup> Carole S. Vance, “Pleasure and Danger: Towards A Politics of Sexuality, in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 9.

<sup>32</sup> Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 277.

<sup>33</sup> Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 27.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Tamar Mayer, “Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage,” in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (New York: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1. Emphasis in original.

systems of power which reward and encourage some individuals and activities while punishing and suppressing others.”<sup>37</sup>

Normative sexuality is defined through discourse, necessitating that I examine how language produces knowledge. Simply put, discourse is “a recognizable way of seeing the world.”<sup>38</sup> Stuart Hall defines it as a “group of statements that provide a language for talking about... a particular kind of knowledge about a topic.”<sup>39</sup> While multiple discursive practices existed on sexuality, Cuban officials sought to shape and naturalize their own discourse. Their struggle to achieve discursive hegemony, manifested through speeches, newspaper articles, and laws, is the historical process I explore in this dissertation. But the ability of leaders to shape discourse was not absolute. Not only were there silences, contradictions, and changes within the hegemonic discourse, but other discursive practices also emerged to challenge ideological assumptions.<sup>40</sup>

A key part of my argument is that the meanings of specific terms, like prostitute (*prostituta*), changed over time, an insight that emerged only after close examination of public sources as well as autobiographies, travel narratives, and oral histories, including eighteen that I collected myself. This reinvention of language served various purposes, but

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<sup>37</sup> Rubin, 309.

<sup>38</sup> Jane Sunderland and Lia Litosseliti, “Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations,” in *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*, eds. Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Formations of Modernity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben (Cambridge: Polity Press and The Open University, 1992), 291.

<sup>40</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 129-131; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1980).

most importantly, it allowed government officials to appear unchanging and consistent, even as they continually modified the boundaries of the revolutionary state. In the case of *prostituta*, government activists did not ultimately seek confirmation that women exchanged money for sex and instead identified as prostitutes women who appeared to be sexually available.<sup>41</sup> Laying claim to language afforded the state legitimacy, while simultaneously creating space for ordinary Cubans to exert autonomy by mobilizing language to their benefit. Indeed, ordinary Cubans interpreted these terms in ways that went beyond official pronouncements. For example, traditional understandings of Cuban marriage (*matrimonio*) were based on cohabitation, not legal documentation. Therefore, when revolutionary officials attempted to redefine marriage as a state-sanctioned union, many Cubans legalized their relationships, but they continued to use the term *matrimonio* to indicate couples who lived together, regardless of civil status.

The subject matter of this dissertation necessitated casting a wide net to ensnare the fragmentary pieces of evidence that exist about sexual norms and the family in 1960s Cuba. While government documents for this era remain inaccessible, speeches, memoirs, and published interviews with revolutionary leaders offer surprising insights into the internal workings of the government. The fact that the early revolutionary regime conceived of many of its gender-normative campaigns as unquestionably positive meant that government representatives often did not hesitate to talk about their experiences with journalists or

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<sup>41</sup> Juan Vivés (pseud.), *Los amos de Cuba*, trans. Zoraida Valcárcel (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1982), 238; Laurette Séjourné, with Tatiana Coll, *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980), 38; Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), *Programa a la atención a la problemática de la prostitución*, Government publication, October 1993, 17-19, 22, 30; Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 279 n. 7.

foreign visitors. Furthermore, revolutionary leaders and ordinary Cubans often viewed sexual practices as apolitical, and thus spoke about their experiences (with me and others) at great length. However, many of these sources made only passing references to much larger stories of sex reform, necessitating that I patch together a quilt of sources from several locations in the United States and Cuba. Interviews with Cubans who experienced the 1960s first-hand provided evidence for this dissertation, as well as clues that directed me to campaigns largely forgotten in Cuban history.

## Organization

“Sex and State Making” is organized around four campaigns that illustrate the relationship between sex and state making. The first chapter explores the criminalization of abortion and state opposition to reproductive control. It begins by examining the demographic explosion that occurred between 1959 and 1964, highlighting the role played by anti-abortion efforts and the U.S. embargo of contraceptives. Key to this analysis is the activism of gynecologists who aimed to counteract the high maternal mortality rate by making available contraceptives and abortions. Drawing on the work of Susanne Klausen and others, I argue that gynecologists led by Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere maintained a careful balancing act between upholding their ideological allegiance to the revolution and meeting women’s contraceptive needs.<sup>42</sup> While Cuban physicians certainly relied on population control organizations for much-needed information and products, they resisted neo-

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<sup>42</sup> Susanne M. Klausen, *Race, Maternity, and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa, 1910-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Johanna Schoen, *Choice and Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Iris López, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women’s Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Necochea López, 160-225.

Malthusian rhetoric that classified Cuban women as inferior. By exploring the actions of both Cuban women and gynecologists, I highlight the limited reach of these international organizations and navigate the multiple discursive practices surrounding birth control within Cuba.

Chapter Two begins by investigating Operation Family, a state campaign that aimed to legalize common-law unions. In the early 1960s, government representatives held mass weddings throughout the countryside, asserting that such ceremonies strengthened the nuclear family. This campaign formed part of a broader movement to introduce rural Cubans (*campesinos*) to the goals of the revolution by sending doctors, teachers, and other volunteers to practice and teach in the countryside. While a number of scholars have examined legal marriage as an illustration of state sovereignty elsewhere, I consider how Cuban socialism relied on marriage as a tool of state formation.<sup>43</sup> I also suggest that Cuban couples might use weddings to subvert state policies such as rationing, rejecting the official discourse of marriage and marrying for the foodstuffs exclusively available to newlyweds.

Through an examination of the revolutionary campaign to eliminate female prostitution, Chapter Three asserts that the criteria by which government activists identified sex workers followed a logic that allowed state representatives to identify women as prostitutes if they appeared to be sexually available, rather than targeting those who exchanged sex for money. Complimenting Guerra's claim that low-level officials promoted unsanctioned reforms following the official end of the anti-prostitution campaign in 1965, I

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<sup>43</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Sara L. Friedman, *Intimate Politics: Marriage, the Market, and State Power in Southeastern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

argue that other low-level representatives also helped *initiate* the campaign. In this way, I challenge government claims that it was a monolithic movement that originated at the top and occurred uniformly across the island.<sup>44</sup> Beyond revealing the connections between sex work, gender norms, and individual activism, this chapter also demonstrates how some women bypassed government regulation and created new forms of prostitution, such as the exchange of sex for access to tourist-only shopping centers, which ultimately became categorized as threats to national security.

Chapter Four focuses on the rehabilitation of *chulos* or *proxenetas*, two terms traditionally translated by English-language scholars as “pimp.” It argues that in the cultural context of mid-twentieth-century Cuba, *chulos* are better understood as a wide range of individuals, usually men, who accepted money from women. The mis-translation “pimp” minimizes the scope and meaning of the state campaign that aimed to restructure gender roles in families where women were the primary wage earners. Drawing on Angus McLaren’s work on normative masculinity in France, Canada, and Great Britain, I assert that government officials in 1960s Cuba used the multipurpose tool of vagrancy laws to apprehend men that they perceived as failing “to live up to newly created standards of masculinity.”<sup>45</sup> The arrests of *chulos* also served to disrupt sex workers’ households and to further government efforts to eliminate prostitution. By engaging with academic scholarship on UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) work camps, I draw out economic

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<sup>44</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 287-288.

<sup>45</sup> Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 14.

issues, as well as fears about gender inversion, that were hidden within contemporary discourse.<sup>46</sup>

The concluding chapter explores the legacies of these campaigns, specifically how sexual norms continue to serve as criteria for state formation. This chapter also highlights the subsequent silence surrounding early efforts to regulate sexuality and its importance in the construction of discursive hegemony.

“Sex and State Making” seeks to enhance debates on state formation and shape discussions on sexual health and the Cold War. By engaging with transnational scholarship on sexuality, I demonstrate that countries on both sides of the Cold War struggle prioritized familial stability and normative sexuality. However, Cuban authorities viewed sexual well-being differently than their U.S. counterparts, employing it as a defense against counterrevolutionaries, capitalism, and the United States. By highlighting the parallels between Cold War constructions of normative sexuality, this project illuminates the ways in which governments mobilize gender to their benefit.

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<sup>46</sup> Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981); Enrique Ros, *UMAP: El Gulag castrista* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004); Joseph Tahbaz, “Desmystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba,” *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 2 (December 31, 2013), [http://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html#\\_ednref19](http://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html#_ednref19); Bejel, 21-33; Lumsden, 55-77.

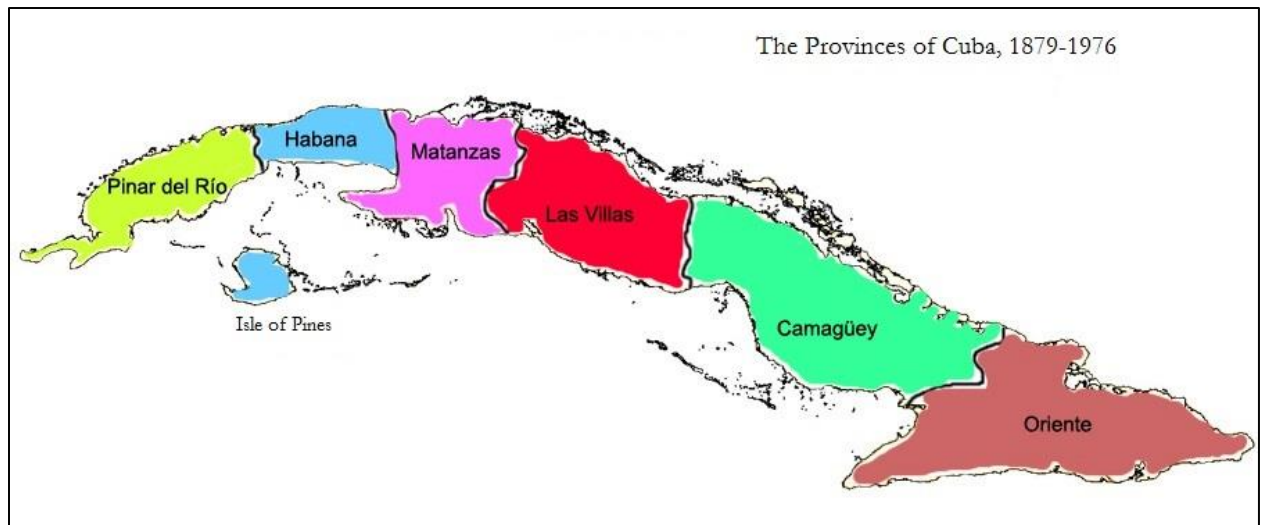


Image 1: The Provinces of Cuba, 1879-1976

## CHAPTER ONE

### Cuban Abortions and Chilean IUDs: Negotiating Fertility Control, 1959-1966

In a 1966 speech to school monitors, Fidel Castro challenged “the capitalists, the exploiters” who would seek to “establish a limit upon the number of human beings who can exist on this earth.” In lieu of birth control, he proposed social changes, such as rural boarding schools, to ameliorate poverty and underdevelopment.<sup>1</sup> His comments were emblematic of revolutionary discourse on fertility control during the first half of the 1960s. At this time, Cuban leaders and the state media publically associated contraception with capitalism and abortions with neocolonialism. Their efforts to restrict access to contraceptive methods had significant consequences for Cubans, especially women.

During the first half of the 1960s, scholars agree, Cuba experienced a demographic explosion.<sup>2</sup> The emigration of large numbers of physicians, coupled with the criminalization

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<sup>1</sup> Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro Speech to School Monitors,” 17 September 1966, *Castro Speech Database, UTLANIC*, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1966/19660918.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Almost no historians have studied the baby boom, but it is widely noted, especially among demographers. Juan Pérez de la Riva, “La población de Cuba et ses problèmes,” *Population* 22, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 1967): 102, as translated by Barent F. Landstreet, Jr., “Marxists,” in *Ideology, Faith, and Family Planning in Latin America: Studies in Public and Private Opinion on Fertility Control*, ed. J. Mayone Stycos (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 108; Paula E. Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility, Abortion, and Contraception in Cuba* (New York: The Population Council, 1980), 1; Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Díaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: Population Council, 1983), 2, 5, 15; Elizabeth Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba: An Interview with Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere,” *International Journal of Health Services* 18, no. 2 (1988): 345; Barent F. Landstreet, Jr., “Cuban Population Issues in Historical and Comparative Perspective” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1976), 195; Luisa Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985), 30.

of abortions, limited women's access to the procedures.<sup>3</sup> Since women of all classes often relied on abortions to control their fertility, the absence of these procedures likely contributed to the baby boom.<sup>4</sup> Contemporaries also lamented the high maternal mortality rate, for which statistics are difficult to obtain, as many women desperately self-induced their own abortions.<sup>5</sup> The U.S. embargo appears to have worsened this crisis by restricting the importation of birth control devices to the island.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter documents the evolution of Cuban policies and discourse surrounding abortion and contraception between 1959 and 1966. I begin by providing background on the culture of abortion in pre-revolutionary Cuba, both for Cuban and North American women, in order to explain Fidel's perception of the procedures as illustrations of capitalist influence. I then explore the baby boom that peaked in 1964 and the condemnation of birth control expressed by Fidel and the state media. As we will see, some physicians at this time initiated

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<sup>3</sup> Elise Andaya, "Reproducing the Revolution: Gender, Kinship, and the State in Contemporary Cuba" (PhD diss., New York University, 2007), 176; Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 73; María Elena Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," *Inter Press Service*, 1 June 2011, [http://www.ipscuba.net/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=663:evitar-mejor-que-abortar-un-recorrido-por-la-pr%C3%A1ctica-del-aborto-en-cuba&Itemid=10](http://www.ipscuba.net/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=663:evitar-mejor-que-abortar-un-recorrido-por-la-pr%C3%A1ctica-del-aborto-en-cuba&Itemid=10) (accessed 27 April 2012); Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 34; Fee, 346.

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Gay-Sylvestre, *Navegaciones y borrascas: Monika Krause y la educación sexual en Cuba (1979-1990)* (Eichstätt, Germany: Katholische Universität Eichstätt, Zentralinstitut für Lateinamerika-Studien, 2003), 48-49; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 14; Fee, 344; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>5</sup> Luisa Álvarez Vázquez et al., *El aborto en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1995); Carmen Luisa Aguila Acebal and Antonio Neyra Reyes, "El aborto en Cuba: Un reto para los educadores," in *Género y salud reproductiva en América Latina*, ed. Lucila Cavone (Cartago: Editorial Tecnológico de Costa Rica, 1999), 208; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 15; Hollerbach & Díaz-Briquets, 34; Gay-Sylvestre, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Lois M. Smith, "Progress, Science, and Myth: The Health Education of Cuban Women," *Cuban Studies* 19 (1989): 181; Paula E. Hollerbach, "Recent Trends in Fertility, Abortion, and Contraception in Cuba," *International Family Planning Perspectives* 6, no. 3 (September 1980): 104; Monika Krause-Fuchs, *¿Machismo? No, gracias, Cuba: Sexualidad en la revolución* (San Clemente, Spain: Ediciones Idea, 2007), 78-80; Fee, 345; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

a careful balancing act between maintaining their ideological allegiance to the revolution and meeting women's contraceptive needs. This uneven process inevitably resulted in much public confusion about the legality of contraceptive procedures and devices. But increased contact with international organizations, such as International Planned Parenthood, and access to new contraceptive technology from Chile, brought increased birth control devices to the island.<sup>7</sup> By mid-decade, the Ministry of Public Health was reported to have eased restrictions on abortions.<sup>8</sup> But these actions did not necessarily provide all Cuba women with the means to effectively control their fertility. The activism of Cuban physicians like Dr. Álvarez Lajonchere illustrates that international population control organizations had little impact on 1960s Cuban reproduction. Drawing on the work of scholars who have begun to examine the role of national birth control advocates around the world, this chapter demonstrates how women and their doctors carefully negotiated the methods by which contraceptives arrived to and were understood by the Cuban population.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hernán Sanhueza, "Family Planning in Chile: A Tale of the Unexpected," in *The Global Family Planning Revolution: Three Decades of Population Policies and Programs*, eds. Warren C. Robinson and John A. Ross (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2007), 107; J. Zipper, M. L. Garcia, and L. Pastene, "The Nylon Ring: A Device with a Half-Life of Eight Years," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Santiago, Chile, 9-15 April 1967*, eds. R. K. B. Hankinson et al. (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons, Ltd., 1967), 302-305; Irwin H. Kaiser, "Alan Guttmacher, and Family Planning in Cuba, 1966 and 1974," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine* 42, no. 4 (July-August 1975): 300; Juan Liscano, *El aumento de la población* (Caracas: Fundación Eugenio Mendoza, 1967), 39; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78-80; Fee, 345; Hollerbach, "Recent Trends," 104.

<sup>8</sup> Monika Krause-Fuchs, "'Para mí una virgen es como un carro nuevo.'" Reflexiones sobre la sexualidad en Cuba," in *Género, feminismo y masculinidad en América Latina*, ed. Silke Helfrich (El Salvador: Ediciones Heinrich Böll, 2001), 191; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Aguila Acebal, and Neyra Reyes, 208; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1; Gay-Sylvestre, 50; Andaya, 176; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 77; Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 219.

<sup>9</sup> Raúl Necochea López, "The Institutionalization of Birth Control in Peru I: Transnational Discourses and Local Actions, 1930s-1974," in "A History of the Medical Control of Fertility in Peru, 1895-1976" (PhD diss., McGill University, 2009), 160-225; Susanne M. Klausen, *Race, Maternity, and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa, 1910-1939* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Johanna Schoen, *Choice and*

## Background: Abortion Capital of the Western Hemisphere

From the late eighteenth century to the mid twentieth century, most abortions performed in Cuba were illegal, yet tolerated. The Penal Code of 1870, instituted under Spanish colonial rule, classified abortions as criminal acts. Only permitted were abortions carried out under special circumstances, for the health of the woman, for example.<sup>10</sup> Following Cuban independence in 1902, abortions remained illegal. The republican state ratified the illegality of abortions in 1936, legalizing them only when a pregnancy threatened the health of the woman, was provoked by rape, or would result in fetal impairment.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the law did not specify the exact circumstances that would be considered hazardous to a woman's health. This meant that if two physicians agreed that a woman's health was at risk, they could legally authorize an abortion.<sup>12</sup> This loophole granted legitimacy to procedures that might otherwise have been considered illegal.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many doctors operated without fear of punishment. Few accusations were ever made, and the Ministry of Health and Social

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*Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Iris López, *Matters of Choice: Puerto Rican Women's Struggle for Reproductive Freedom* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Necochea López, 160-225.

<sup>10</sup> Digna Mayo Abad, "Algunos aspectos histórico-sociales del aborto," *Revista Cubana de Obstetricia y Ginecología* 28, no. 2 (May-Aug. 2002), [http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0138-600X2002000200012](http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0138-600X2002000200012).

<sup>11</sup> Cubans based this change on the 1922 Argentine law that allowed abortions in the case of rape. Articles 439-443, *Código de Defensa Social*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Havana: Ediciones Montero, 1936), 287; Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 143, 148.

<sup>12</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends*, 14.

Welfare only investigated following the death of a patient.<sup>13</sup> The law indicated that the abortion provider, patient, and anyone deemed an accomplice all risked a jail sentence (up to twelve years) if convicted.<sup>14</sup> Because so many individuals, including family members, could be held accountable for the abortion, Cubans rarely filed charges. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare had no accepted criteria regarding the prosecution of abortions.<sup>15</sup> In an interview with historian Tomás Jiménez Araya and demographer María Elena Benítez Pérez, Dr. Álvarez Lajonchere noted that in 1923, at the age of six, “I already knew, living in a small Escambray town, that there was an abortion clinic in Cienfuegos.... Those who performed them in clinics [also] performed them in their homes. It was private, not clandestine, because everyone knew, but it was not legal.”<sup>16</sup>

However, lack of formal sanctions did not signify a lack of concern. Beginning in the 1930s, certain Cuban physicians expressed concern about the large number of clandestine abortions. Most notably, eugenicist and physician Dr. José Chelala Aguilera asserted that outlawing abortions did little to stop them. He suggested instead that the government legalize the procedures, prioritize birth control, and provide health services, especially to poor women.<sup>17</sup> But as we will see, not all physicians agreed with Dr. Chelala. Government officials, too, ignored his requests. In 1957, Chelala declared, “We physicians have to fight to extend the reach of the Social Assistance Services in Cuba.... Our leaders, in their

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.

<sup>14</sup> *Código de Defensa Social*, 286.

<sup>15</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.

<sup>17</sup> José Chelala Aguilera, “Maternidad e infancia,” *El Mundo*, 29 December 1938; José Chelala Aguilera, *Natalidad, mortalidad, maternidad y aborto* (Havana: Cultural, S.A., 1937), 8, 11, 103-104, 143.

blindness, have not paid any attention to it.”<sup>18</sup> Dr. Vicente Barnet, professor of surgery at the University of Havana School of Medicine, disagreed, arguing that a pregnant woman with no financial support should still give birth, “because no matter her sufferings, they will never compare with the regret of having assassinated [her child].”<sup>19</sup> Professor and physician Armando Ruíz Leiro also believed that abortion should never be allowed, even in the case of rape. Other physicians also highlighted their support for the Ogino-Knauss rhythm method of birth control.<sup>20</sup>

Exclusive support for the Ogino-Knauss method replicated the rhetoric of the Catholic Church. The only form of birth control approved of by Cuban archbishop Enrique Pérez Serantes was the rhythm method.<sup>21</sup> Conceived of in the 1920s by Austrian Hermann Knauss and later by Japanese Kyusaku Ogino, the practice involved abstaining from intercourse in the period 12 to 16 days before menses.<sup>22</sup> Cuban gynecologist (and Catholic) Luis Valdés Larralde reported that the only method of birth control that he recommended to his patients was the Ogino-Knauss method, as it was “the most natural” and “healthiest for both partners.”<sup>23</sup> While Valdés Larralde did not doubt the effectiveness of this practice, Archbishop Pérez Serantes implied his own recognition of the method’s limitations,

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Alfredo Álvarez Torres, “Las prácticas malthusianas y sus consecuencias,” *Carteles* 17 (1957): 69.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-49, 69-71.

<sup>21</sup> Ignacio Uría, *Iglesia y revolución en Cuba: Enrique Pérez Serantes (1883-1968), el obispo que salvo a Fidel Castro* (Madrid: Encuentro, 2011), 526.

<sup>22</sup> Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 105.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Álvarez Torres, 71.

lamenting in a 1964 letter that there did not exist a more morally acceptable method for preventing reproduction. He associated the use of contraceptives with lapsed or less-developed Catholics, specifically those who were white and living in urban areas.<sup>24</sup> This same urban demographic also had the easiest access to abortions.

Meanwhile, the restrictive abortion laws of the United States were leading many North American women with means to Cuba to obtain abortions. According to historian Leslie J. Reagan, McCarthy-era politicians associated abortion with communism and categorized it as political deviance.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, many U.S. states aggressively suppressed abortion, targeting both female patients and abortion providers. In prior decades, police officers and state prosecutors had pursued abortionists only following the death of a patient. But by 1940, skilled and trusted abortion providers also faced charges, and the U.S. government might force patients to testify against them. Hospital administrators imposed greater limitations on therapeutic abortions, further constraining women's ability to terminate their pregnancies. Obtaining an abortion by the 1950s in the United States was thus risky and potentially traumatic, and yet women demanded them in greater numbers.<sup>26</sup> Police raids and public trials, coupled with women's growing social independence and the continued illegality of contraceptives in many states, incentivized women of means to terminate their pregnancies abroad.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Uría, 526.

<sup>25</sup> Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 160-165, 172, 194.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Birth control was illegal in many U.S. states until 1965, when *Griswold v. Connecticut* gave married women the right to obtain and use contraceptives. Alexandra M. Lord, *Condom Nation: The U.S.*

Many women who could afford to end their pregnancies relied on North American physicians or specialized travel agents to facilitate trips to Cuba. For example, Michael Freiman, an obstetrician-gynecologist from Missouri, noted in an interview with journalist Cynthia Gorney that he maintained a list of reputable Cuban abortionists to whom he could refer his patients.<sup>28</sup> In a 1993 interview with activist Patricia G. Miller, a woman named Julia noted that she relied on the help of a U.S. doctor to obtain the name of a Cuban gynecologist who would perform the procedure. The U.S. contact also provided Julia with transportation information, including the name of a local taxi driver.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, American entrepreneurs willing to risk jail time served as specialized travel experts. They established contacts with Cuban doctors and offered weekend vacation packages to women who wished to terminate their pregnancies.<sup>30</sup> These individuals were based in New York, Los Angeles, and Miami, and for 1200 dollars, they provided women with a first-class, round-trip ticket to Havana, hotel accommodations, and an abortion.<sup>31</sup> Their customers might arrive to Cuba on Friday afternoon, have an abortion on Saturday, and return to the United States on Sunday.<sup>32</sup> The relative ease with which many well-to-do women terminated their pregnancies in Cuba

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*Government's Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 204 n. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Gorney, *Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 218.

<sup>29</sup> Patricia G. Miller, *The Worst of Times* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 168-169.

<sup>30</sup> Annette B. Ramírez de Arellano and Conrad Seipp, *Colonialism, Catholicism, and Contraception: A History of Birth Control in Puerto Rico* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 146; Luis Enrique Délano, *Cuba 66* (Santiago, Chile: Editora Austral, 1966), 75.

<sup>31</sup> This is the equivalent of over 9,500 dollars in 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Steir, *Jailhouse Journal of an OB/GYN* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2008), 126; Don Sloan and Paula Hartz, *Choice: A Doctor's Experience with the Abortion Dilemma*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: International Publishers, 2002), 22.

during this era made visible the degree to which socioeconomic class affected the reproductive choices of women prior to the legalization of abortion in the United States.

The abortion industry was part of the larger business of Cuban tourism. Tourists arrived on a ferry from Key West or a cheap PanAmerican flight from Miami, often staying at one of the twenty Havana hotels constructed between 1952 and 1958.<sup>33</sup> Male and female tourists spent their money freely, playing blackjack at the Hotel Capri, shopping at El Encanto, and clubbing at the Tropicana. Julia recalled visiting a Havana casino “that was so opulent it made Las Vegas and Atlantic City look like nothing.”<sup>34</sup> Seemingly without fear of prosecution, North Americans paid for drugs and the services of prostitutes. Indeed, sex was a big part of Cuba’s attraction. Pilar López Gonzáles, a former Cuban sex worker interviewed by anthropologist Oscar Lewis’ research team between 1969 and 1970, remembered that American men were especially fond of watching girl-on-girl intercourse. Valued at thirty pesos, “the two-woman act was the best-paid job in the brothel.”<sup>35</sup> Other tourists attended the pornographic performances of El Chocolate, a man celebrated for his ability to become aroused and ejaculate, all without touching his “large insect.”<sup>36</sup> When speaking with novelist Warren Miller, one resident described Havana as a place where

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 52; Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 222.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Miller, *The Worst*, 171.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 271.

<sup>36</sup> José Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution: Life in a Cuban Country Town* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 219-220.

everything was for sale: “With money you could buy anything, anything, *anything!*”<sup>37</sup> North Americans who obtained abortions likely recalled their visit very differently than those who procured drugs or sex. Yet many Cubans would ultimately conflate these activities and view them as illustrations of U.S. imperialism.<sup>38</sup>

Many Cuban women also relied on abortions to control their reproduction. Abortions were available to a large part of the urban population, and physicians performed many of these operations.<sup>39</sup> Monika Krause, who later became Cuba’s first sex educator, told researcher Dominique Gay-Sylvestre that for Cuban women with enough money, “abortions became a tradition.”<sup>40</sup> While Krause thought that North Americans could obtain an abortion for a mere twenty dollars, this fee was most likely that paid by Cuban women.<sup>41</sup> Of course, rural residents did not have the same access to physicians as their urban counterparts. In the 1950s, the doctor-to-patient ratio in Havana was 1 to 227; it was only 1 to 2,423 in rural Oriente province.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, rural women were probably more likely to rely on female herbalists, healers, religious practitioners, and even con artists. In 1937, physician Chelala insisted that these non-specialists formed part of an abortion industry that was

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<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Warren Miller, *90 Miles from Home: The Face of Cuba Today* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1961), 244. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>38</sup> Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.

<sup>39</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 14; Fee, 344; Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Dominique Gay-Sylvestre, *Navegaciones y borrascas: Monika Krause y la educación sexual en Cuba (1979-1990)* (Eichstätt, Germany: Katholische Universität Eichstätt, Zentralinstitut für Lateinamerika-Studien, 2003), 48-49.

<sup>41</sup> North American women claim to have paid hundreds of dollars for abortions. David C. Reardon, *Aborted Women: Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987), 305; Gay-Sylvestre, 48-49; Fee, 344; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 14; Miller, *The Worst*, 168.

<sup>42</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 302-303.

virtually ignored by the republican government.<sup>43</sup> Lack of regulation allowed more practitioners to operate, thereby increasing the accessibility of abortions; it also afforded patients little protection from disreputable abortion providers. The emergence of separate abortion markets for people of different classes paralleled abortion practices in nearby Puerto Rico, where midwives charged less and catered to the poor, while doctors performed abortions on the affluent for a higher price.<sup>44</sup>

By contrast, in Cuba, many urban residents had relatively easy access to physician-induced abortions.<sup>45</sup> When Mona Flores became pregnant in the late 1950s, she and her partner traveled to a local cigar factory, where the physician on staff agreed to terminate her pregnancy. He induced the abortion by injecting a shot of crude liver extract into her uterus.<sup>46</sup> At this time Pilar López Gonzáles also became pregnant and elected to have an abortion. She stood in line with twenty other women at a Havana doctor's office. The physician gave her a saline abortion, and Pilar aborted four days later. Pilar was alone when she expelled the fetus, and curiosity prompted her to examine it. She later told Oscar Lewis' research team, "I hated myself for having killed my son." Although Pilar decided that abortion was "very wrong," she continued to use abortion as a form of birth control.<sup>47</sup> She performed sex work throughout 1958, and during that time she became pregnant every two to

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<sup>43</sup> José Chelala Aguilera, "El aborto a través de la historia," *Medicina de Hoy* 2, no. 6 (1937): 385-389; Armando García González and Raquel Álvarez Peláez, *En busca de la raza perfecta: Eugenesia e higiene en Cuba, 1898-1958* (Madrid: EBCOMP, 1999), 398.

<sup>44</sup> Ramírez de Arellano and Seipp, 145.

<sup>45</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 14; Fee, 344; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Men: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 214.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 264.

three months. Each time this occurred she went to the same doctor and terminated the pregnancy.<sup>48</sup> Consuela, a former prostitute interviewed by historian Tomás Fernández Robaina, had so many abortions that she lost count of the total number. But unlike Pilar, Consuela did not regret these operations, as she never wanted to have children.<sup>49</sup>

Cuban women might also induce their own abortions. They did so for a variety of reasons, including the inability to pay. Both rural and urban Cubans employed herbal remedies, sometimes mixing seeds, bark, and alcohol in the hopes of provoking a miscarriage. According to Krause, other women threw themselves down flights of stairs or douched with kerosene, employing any means possible to terminate their pregnancies. Uncounted numbers died in the process.<sup>50</sup>

It is probable that poor and rural women, many of whom were Afro-Cuban, were more likely to rely on holistic methods to end unwanted pregnancies. Knowledge of abortifacients was passed down by word of mouth, from generation to generation, and it often originated with indigenous and slave women.<sup>51</sup> One example comes from the well-known memoir of María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, whose grandmother was a slave until the abolition of slavery in 1886. While not always successful, Grandma Tatica sought to

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>49</sup> Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Historias de mujeres públicas* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Gay-Sylvestre, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Elisa Janine Sobo, *One Blood: The Jamaican Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 257; Robert Combs, *Plants Collected in the District of Cienfuegos, Province of Santa Clara, Cuba, in 1895-1896* (St. Louis, MO: Nixon-Jones Print. Co., 1897), 458; María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno and Daisy Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Woman in Twentieth Century Cuba*, trans. Anne McLean (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 25.

prevent pregnancy by ingesting a decoction of herbs and roots.<sup>52</sup> These same methods would continue to be employed by Cuban women in the twentieth century. In 1951, Pilar López's Afro-Cuban mother sought to provoke a miscarriage. Pilar later related that her mother would do anything to end the pregnancy; she boiled cinnamon water, ingested senna leaves, and even inserted a stick of soap into her uterus. After seven months, one of her mother's attempts finally succeeded, and nine-year-old Pilar was recruited to aid her mother and remove the fetus from the womb.<sup>53</sup> The similarity between the stories of these two women reveals the continued importance of oral traditions and herbal remedies in the lives of impoverished Afro-Cubans.

Although women in rural areas had less access to medical and surgical abortions, their familiarity with herbal remedies and relationships with midwives probably gave them more autonomy regarding fertility control.<sup>54</sup> Sara Rojas grew up in a village in eastern Cuba, and she recalled that her grandmother was the town midwife. Grandma Camelia was present at all births, and she distributed medicines and herbs to those in need. When interviewed by Oscar Lewis' team, Sara noted, "People from places nobody ever heard of would show up at Grandma's door asking for medicines. Everybody trusted her."<sup>55</sup> It is likely that many of those helped by Grandma Camelia sought to terminate their pregnancies. But it was not merely women who knew the abortive properties of local herbs. In an interview with anthropologist José Seone Gallo, one resident of Camagüey province recommended using a

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<sup>52</sup> Castillo Bueno and Rubiera Castillo, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 249-250.

<sup>54</sup> Andaya, 200 n. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Neighbors: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 255.

decoction of *anamú* root, *canella* bark, and *cundeamor* root to induce abortion.<sup>56</sup> Known by the Latin name *momordica charantia*, *cundeamor* can be toxic, and it is used globally to provoke miscarriages.<sup>57</sup> Women in India successfully use the plant root to cause abortions, and the Garífuna people of Nicaragua boil the *cundeamor* leaves to induce labor.<sup>58</sup>

In the 1950s, medical contraceptives were limited, both in Cuba and around the world. IUDs were rudimentary and occasionally injurious; indeed, Cuban doctors opposed the use of these early, metallic instruments. Women sometimes relied on alum or soda douches, vaginal sponges, and less frequently cervical buttons, pills inserted into the cervical opening each time a woman wished to have intercourse. Slightly more common were diaphragms and rubber condoms.<sup>59</sup>

While condoms were one of the more popular forms of birth control, Dr. Chelela and others noted that men often refused to use them.<sup>60</sup> Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, director of Obstetrics and Gynecology for the Ministry of Public Health, admitted to historian Elizabeth

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<sup>56</sup> José Seone Gallo, *El folclor médico de Cuba: Provincia de Camagüey* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1984), 799.

<sup>57</sup> Ivan A. Ross, *Medicinal Plants of the World: Chemical Constituents, Traditional and Modern Medicinal Uses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press, 2003), 337; David W. Nellis, *Poisonous Plants and Animals of Florida and the Caribbean* (Sarasota, FL: Pineapple Press, 1997), 160.

<sup>58</sup> The Garífuna refer to this plant as *sorosí*. R. N. Chopra, *Chopra's Indigenous Drugs of India* (Calcutta, India: Academic Publishers, 2006), 568; Felix G. Coe and Gregory J. Anderson, "Ethnobotany of the Garífuna of Eastern Nicaragua," *Economic Botany* 50, no. 1 (January-March 1996): 90.

<sup>59</sup> Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, *Guantánamo Bay* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1977), 104; Estrella Marina Viñelas, *Cuban Madam: The Shocking Autobiography of the Woman who Ruled Castro's White Slave Ring* (New York: Paperback Library, 1969), 32-33; José Chelala, "Contraception and Abortion in Cuba," *IPPF Medical Bulletin* 5, no. 3 (June 1971): 3; José Chelala Aguilera, "Aspectos médicos-sociales de la fertilidad humana," *Revista Cubana de Obstetricia y Ginecología* 5, no. 4 (April 1943): 82-84; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Gay-Sylvestre, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 22; Chelala, "Contraception and Abortion," 3.

Fee, “There was no habit in the country of using contraceptives, and contraception did not even appear in the medical school curriculum.”<sup>61</sup> According to Álvarez Lajonchere, “The private physicians at that time didn’t give contraceptive services to their patients because they could charge much more doing abortions. They preferred that their patients get pregnant and then [they could] do the abortions rather than give them contraceptives.”<sup>62</sup> In an interview with Oscar Lewis’ research team, Sara Rojas confirmed that the men and women in her rural Oriente neighborhood possessed little knowledge of contraception. Despite her grandmother being a midwife, Sara was unaware of how to conceive a child when she married in 1948 at the age of 14. However, Sara noticed that some women spaced out their pregnancies; these women did not immediately become pregnant after having a child. “I don’t know if it just happens or if they do something to make it that way,” she expressed. Sara noted that her husband knew about birth control, but she was too embarrassed to ask him for details. She reflected that he possibly purposely withheld this information from her. Sara’s observation demonstrates that knowledge about contraception might be a powerful tool within a relationship. Because she did not know how to limit fertility, she continued to have “one pregnancy after another.”<sup>63</sup>

The ability of Cuban women to control their reproductive cycles resulted in a declining national birth rate throughout the 1950s.<sup>64</sup> This continued a trend that began in the 1920s. Over forty children were born for every thousand people in 1920; by 1958, the

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Fee, 344.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 344-345.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 255, 276.

<sup>64</sup> Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Lisandro Pérez, “Fertility Decline in Cuba: A Socioeconomic Interpretation,” *Population and Development Review* 8, no. 3 (Sept. 1982): 516.

number had decreased by 35 percent, to 26 per 1000.<sup>65</sup> Women in their twenties experienced the largest reduction in fertility. This decline was not restricted to urban areas, where abortions and birth control devices were more available. The rural provinces of Pinar del Río and Oriente also experienced declining fertility throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Scholars Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Lisandro Pérez note that some sort of family planning was clearly practiced in rural areas, as the provincial birth rates “were well below what would be expected in the absence of deliberate birth control practice by couples.”<sup>66</sup> As we have seen, the widespread availability of medical and surgical abortions in urban areas, combined with the accessibility of non-specialists and holistic abortifacients, allowed many Cuban women to maintain some control over their reproduction.

#### The Birth of “Generation Fidel,” 1959-1964

While it is difficult to determine how soon revolutionary leadership began enforcing the 1936 anti-abortion law, government hostility toward these procedures quickly became evident. In an interview with Oscar Lewis’ research team, Pilar López González noted that by 1961, abortions were both risky and expensive.<sup>67</sup> The regime itself has never discussed its early opposition to abortion. Consequently, historical memory of this moment has been largely erased.<sup>68</sup> Álvarez Lajonchere was one of the few physicians willing to speak openly about this period, and he later explained to historian Tomás Jiménez Araya and demographer María Elena Benítez Pérez that it was impossible to legalize abortions during the first half of

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<sup>65</sup> Díaz-Briquets and Pérez, 513; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1; Díaz-Briquets and Pérez, 516.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 277.

<sup>68</sup> Andaya, 176; Smith and Padula, 73.

the 1960s (and even later). In addition to moral opposition from churches and the press, he stated, “the ideology of the young Revolution condemned abortion,” as it was associated with the “criminal abortions of bourgeois society.” This negative perception of the procedures ignored the fact that women of all classes relied on abortions to control reproduction. But since the Cuban press adopted a “feigned moralist position” against the procedures, the Catholic Church opposed them, and leading Cuban physicians refused to perform them on moral grounds, revolutionary leaders likely encountered little initial resistance to the criminalization of abortions.<sup>69</sup>

Access to safe (albeit illegal) abortions was also made difficult by the mass emigration of Cuban physicians. Between 1959 and 1962, over two hundred thousand Cubans migrated to the United States, including many physicians. Once the Castro regime nationalized American businesses and the United States cut economic and diplomatic ties with the island, Cuban elites fled the country. Not only did they anticipate a future without the job security provided to them by U.S. investments; they were also distrustful of Fidel’s one-man rule and his numerous economic reforms.<sup>70</sup> These initial émigrés were mostly members of the upper and middle classes. For this reason, they became known as the Golden Exiles.<sup>71</sup> Official reports documented the departure of two to three thousand private

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.; Uría, 525-526; Álvarez Torres, 47-49, 69-71.

<sup>70</sup> Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, “Cuba’s Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration,” *International Migration Review* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 9-11; Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 321-322.

<sup>71</sup> Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 130; Luis M. Falcón and Dan Gilbarg, “Cuban Americans,” in *Handbook of Hispanic Cultures in the United States: Sociology*, ed. Félix Padilla (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994), 63.

physicians in the early years of the revolution.<sup>72</sup> Álvarez Lajonchere estimated that while half of all Cuban doctors left the island, obstetricians and gynecologists accounted for 97 percent of these émigré doctors.<sup>73</sup>

Changes in the health care system also prompted Cuban physicians to emigrate. The transition from a private-enterprise health system to a state-controlled system did not happen easily.<sup>74</sup> Professors at the medical school in Havana resisted these reforms, resigning en masse in the early months of 1959. They hoped that the revolution's need for medical professors would give them bargaining power. But the government surprised the professors and accepted their resignations.<sup>75</sup> In 1961, the Ministry of Public Health became the sole legal authority in Cuban health care. By 1963, nearly all Cuban medical facilities had been nationalized. This included pharmacies, laboratories, hospitals, and the health resorts that once provided abortions to American women. While some physicians were allowed to retain their private practices, the vast majority of these professionals had already fled the island.<sup>76</sup>

The near-absence of private physicians and the enforcement of the 1936 Penal Code meant women found it increasingly difficult to get abortions.<sup>77</sup> There were fewer abortion

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<sup>72</sup> Reports indicate that 6,300 physicians previously practiced on the island. Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Díaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: Population Council, 1983), 34.

<sup>73</sup> Fee, 346.

<sup>74</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 129-130.

<sup>75</sup> Fee, 345.

<sup>76</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 129.

<sup>77</sup> Álvarez Vázquez, 30.

providers, and those willing to practice seem to have charged large sums of money.<sup>78</sup> Many physicians refused to terminate a pregnancy unless the pregnant woman was escorted by someone the doctor personally knew. For example, Pilar, later interviewed by Oscar Lewis' team, had an abortion in 1961, and she visited "the doctor accompanied by a friend of his, or he wouldn't have dared the risk." This same abortion cost her 150 pesos, more than seven times the amount it cost Cuban women in 1958.<sup>79</sup>

In a conversation with U.S journalist José Yglesias, hospital director Dr. Padrón claimed that when hospital doctors examined a patient who they believed was recovering from an abortion, they were required to report her to the authorities. He added, however, that the police were only interested in prosecuting the abortion provider, not the woman who ended her pregnancy. "They come and question the woman," claimed Dr. Padrón, "only to find out if there is someone who makes an illegal profession of giving abortions."<sup>80</sup> In an interview with Oscar Lewis' research team, Eulalia Fontanés disagreed, asserting that friends and family members could also be imprisoned for helping a woman terminate her pregnancy. A hospital physician had interviewed Eulalia in 1966, suspicious that her sister's miscarriage had been provoked. But Eulalia had refused to provide any information about her sister or the boyfriend who had transported her to the abortion provider.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 34.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 277; Gay-Sylvestre, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Yglesias, 266.

<sup>81</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 149-150.

Patients, family members, and even doctors sometimes protected the confidentiality of individuals involved in the abortion.<sup>82</sup> While physicians were required to report potential abortions to the police, some did not. Padrón admitted that physicians at his hospital were “rather relaxed about it,” and did not always contact the authorities.<sup>83</sup> It is unclear how prevalent this attitude was amongst Cuban doctors, but historian Raúl Necochea López writes that this was a pattern in early twentieth-century Peru. Despite their professed opposition to abortion, Peruvian physicians rarely charged women with the crime of abortion. Necochea López attributes this to the “desire to protect their careers, the sympathy they felt for some women, and the ease with which they could be tricked or denied information.”<sup>84</sup> Something similar appears likely in Cuba as well. While some Cuban doctors willingly informed on the women, the women themselves did not always reveal the names of their accomplices. In 1963, after giving birth in a Havana hospital, Monika Krause witnessed the police questioning an eighteen-year-old woman who had recently aborted a pregnancy with a cholerick acid douche.<sup>85</sup> The police demanded to know who had assisted her, but the woman refused to say. Krause notes that the woman’s reproductive organs had been so damaged by the acid that hospital physicians were forced to remove her uterus. Although the woman was lucky to survive, she refused to inform on her collaborator.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Yglesias, 266; Gay-Sylvestre, 67-68.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Yglesias, 266.

<sup>84</sup> Necochea López, 144.

<sup>85</sup> German-born Monika Krause would later become Cuba’s first state sex educator.

<sup>86</sup> Gay Sylvestre, 67-68.

Given the dangerous conditions surrounding abortion procedures in the early 1960s, numerous demographers and doctors have asserted that more women died from induced abortions than had previously been the case during the Republican era.<sup>87</sup> The increased cost of obtaining an abortion and the rising difficulty of finding a skilled doctor meant more and more women relied on unskilled practitioners.<sup>88</sup> Desperate women might also perform abortions on themselves, using acids, sulfate, and kerosene to induce miscarriage.<sup>89</sup> Álvarez Lajonchere reported that the women who developed septic shock from such methods, the body's most severe response to infection, were often close to death by the time they sought medical treatment.<sup>90</sup> Physicians saved the lives of these patients by removing their uteruses, much like what happened to the woman in Krause's hospital room. But other individuals suffered long-term complications, such as a pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.<sup>91</sup> According to demographers Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Díaz-Briquets, covert abortions accounted for one-third of maternal deaths in Cuba between the years 1962 and 1965.<sup>92</sup> Psychologist Carmen Luisa Aguila Acebal and physician Antonio Neyra Reyes write that abortions "performed secretly by unqualified individuals or in private facilities without

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 48; Luisa Álvarez Vázquez et al., *El aborto en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1995), 15-16; Carmen Luisa Aguila Acebal and Antonio Neyra Reyes, "El aborto en Cuba: Un reto para los educadores," in *Género y salud reproductiva en América Latina*, ed. Lucila Cavone (Cartago: Editorial Tecnológico de Costa Rica, 1999), 208; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 15; Hollerbach & Díaz-Briquets, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 15; Hollerbach & Díaz-Briquets, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Gay-Sylvestre, 48.

<sup>90</sup> George H. Sakorafas and Adelais G. Tsiotou, eds., *Septic Shock: Current, Pathogenetic Concepts, Optimal Management, and Future Perspectives* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2005), 1; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>91</sup> Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>92</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 34; Andaya, 176.

adequate means” resulted in so many deaths that provoked abortions were the primary cause of maternal mortality during these early years.<sup>93</sup> While many scholars make this claim, I have yet to find any statistical support for it. It is clear in any case that the maternal mortality rate was high enough to cause alarm in the medical community. This would influence doctors’ actions later in the 1960s.

Limited numbers of North American women continued to terminate their pregnancies in Havana, at least through 1960. Their willingness to travel to Cuba in 1960 distinguishes them from the typical tourist. By this time, most Americans were uncomfortable with the revolutionary unrest and unwilling to vacation in Cuba. Indeed, U.S. tourism had nearly vanished by 1960.<sup>94</sup> That same year, a woman named Ila journeyed alone to Cuba. As she later recounted to activist David Reardon, after spending the night across the street from the thirty-story Habana Hilton Hotel (now the Habana Libre), she was taken to a clinic where the abortion provider spoke no English. They communicated via hand gestures; Ila consented to general anesthesia and received an abortion that she later described as “simple.”<sup>95</sup> Journalist Susan Brownmiller later testified before a U.S. federal court that she had had a “quick abortion” in Cuba in 1960.<sup>96</sup> These women must have had D&Cs (dilation and curettage), as

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<sup>93</sup> Aguila Acebal and Neyra Reyes, 208.

<sup>94</sup> Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 129-130.

<sup>95</sup> Reardon, 305.

<sup>96</sup> Brownmiller testified in one of four federal court cases that challenged the constitutionality of state laws that criminalized abortions. This was three years before the landmark court case, *Roe v. Wade*, which ruled that a woman’s right to privacy extended to (first-trimester) abortions. “Women Testify in Abortion Law Test,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1970, 29; Clarke D. Forsythe, *Abuse of Discretion: The Inside Story of Roe v. Wade* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

any other type of abortion would have obligated them to remain in Cuba until they expelled the contents of the uterus. Following the revolution, as Elizabeth Myer told historian David P. Cline, she and her husband flew to Cuba on two occasions in order to terminate her pregnancies. She recounted: “They were surgical abortions and they seemed to go okay. I didn’t feel scared... I just assumed everything would be all right. And it seemed to be.”<sup>97</sup> It is possible that American women had abortions in Cuba later than 1960 as well, but it would not have been common or easy.

Throughout 1960 and 1961, relations between Cuba and the United States progressively deteriorated. In 1960, Cuban leaders reestablished diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and then proceeded to nationalize North American oil refineries. When the United States imposed an economic embargo on the island, Cuba retaliated by expropriating nearly all U.S. property, including hotels and casinos.<sup>98</sup> This political and economic war culminated in April 1961 with the U.S.-sponsored attack on Playa Girón (the Bay of Pigs). That same month, Fidel declared Cuba a socialist state. For these reasons and more, writer Carlos Franqui described 1961 as a “political heat wave.”<sup>99</sup> The number of emigrants

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted in David P. Cline, *Creating Choice: A Community Responds to the Need for Abortion and Birth Control, 1961-1973* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 31.

<sup>98</sup> The revolutionaries intervened in casino operations in January 1959; but within several weeks, U.S. mafiosos were allowed to reopen select casinos and hotels and continue with business. The new regime required that they pay a new tax and limit gambling to cockfighting. The casinos were finally shut down in September 1961. Sáenz Rovner, 124-125; Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 325-326.

<sup>99</sup> Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait with Fidel*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 111.

skyrocketed and continued high until October 1962, when flights from Havana to Miami were cancelled due to the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>100</sup>

Limited access to abortions was also accompanied by a deficit in contraceptives. Evidence suggests that, beginning in 1960, the U.S. embargo prevented medical birth control from entering the island.<sup>101</sup> While food and medicine were exempt from the embargo, it does not appear that U.S. lawmakers considered contraceptives to be legitimate forms of medicine.<sup>102</sup> This was particularly problematic for Cubans desiring contraception because it seems that they did not produce birth control devices on the island. During the first half of the 1960s, access to contraceptives was thus sporadic, and men and women often found it nearly impossible to buy condoms, diaphragms, cervical buttons, and other forms of birth control.<sup>103</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Trade sought the help of Cuba's new Eastern bloc trading partners, but the availability of birth control devices was not always assured. Franqui noted that "a new supply of mothers was more or less guaranteed [in 1961] when a shipment of socialist condoms never arrived."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Pedraza-Bailey, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, "Progress, Science, and Myth," 181; Hollerbach, "Recent Trends in Fertility," 104; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78-80; Fee, 345; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>102</sup> Patrick Jude Haney and Walt Venderbush, *The Cuban Embargo: The Domestic Politics of an American Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>103</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 34; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 30.

<sup>104</sup> Franqui, 146.

Chinese suppliers delivered prophylactics to Cuba in 1961, but many Cubans declared them ineffective.<sup>105</sup> Demographer Judith Banister confirms this, writing that Chinese contraceptives were “limited in variety [and] poor in quality.”<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, Franqui recalled, some people claimed Chinese condoms “were too small.”<sup>107</sup> In his memoir ventriloquizing Fidel, Norberto Fuentes suggests that “Chinese prophylactics enjoyed little sympathy with the [Cuban] population, given the bad reputation, regarding size, of the reproductive equipment of Asian men.”<sup>108</sup> A resident of Oriente province later informed José Yglesias that “Chinese condoms were known as butterflies “because they have a short life. If you have not done it for a couple of days, you can shoot right through them!”<sup>109</sup> Fuentes suggests that the nickname came from the packaging, as the Chinese rubbers were imported in cartons that looked like American match boxes and were adorned with the image of a multi-colored butterfly.<sup>110</sup> Of course, since Cubans used the term “butterfly” (*mariposa*) as slang for “gay,” the name and appearance of the condoms would not have encouraged their usage.

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.; Yglesias, 207.

<sup>106</sup> Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 148.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Franqui, 146.

<sup>108</sup> Norberto Fuentes, *La autobiografía de Fidel Castro: El poder absoluto e insuficiente*, vol. 2 (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 2007), 353. A Cuban author, Fuentes worked closely with Fidel Castro until attempting to escape the island in 1989. In his unorthodox memoir, Fuentes speaks as if he were Fidel.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Yglesias, 207.

<sup>110</sup> Fuentes, vol. 2, 1001.

Due at least in part to the absence of prophylactics, abortions, or both, the fertility rate increased dramatically, eventually peaking in 1963 and 1964.<sup>111</sup> During the first half of the 1960s, the Cuban fertility rate was higher than it had been since the 1920s.<sup>112</sup> This demographic explosion became known as “Generation Fidel.”<sup>113</sup> Krause describes this baby boom as “incredible,” noting that “there were teenagers giving birth, their mothers giving birth, and their grandmothers giving birth—from thirteen, fourteen, to forty-five years old.” She adds that because birth control was not available, women could not limit their pregnancies: “There were no options!”<sup>114</sup> “A lot of mothers who didn’t want to have children had babies,” admitted Álvarez Lajonchere.<sup>115</sup> As Krause noted, many of these women were teenagers. Indeed, the 15-to-19-year-old cohort experienced the greatest increase in fertility, jumping more than 50 percent.<sup>116</sup> Franqui claimed to have witnessed “lines of pregnant *mulatas*, dancing and chanting: ‘Fidel, Fidel, watch me swell. Here you see the revolution; now please give a smart solution.’”<sup>117</sup> The fertility increase impacted rural and urban women alike, but it was sharpest in the more urban provinces of Matanzas,

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<sup>111</sup> Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 30; Fee, 345; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1; Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 2; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 195.

<sup>112</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 5, 15.

<sup>113</sup> Mohammed A. Rauf, Jr. writes that this generation of children was known as the “Fidelista babies,” in *Cuban Journal: Castro’s Cuba as it Really is – An Eyewitness Account by an American Reporter* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 161; Franqui, 146.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Gay-Sylvestre, 49.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Fee, 345.

<sup>116</sup> In the 1955-1960 period, teenage girls had a fertility rate of 78.8 births per 1,000 women. Between 1960 and 1965, the fertility rate of this same group was 119.7 births per 1,000 women. Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 5,15.

<sup>117</sup> Translated by Alfred MacAdam from the original: “La cola de barrigonas, mulatas zandungueras y cubistas, decían, moviendo nalgas y barriga: ‘Fidel, Fidel, la revolución, mielmano, ya tú lo ve.’” Franqui, 146.

Las Villas, and La Habana.<sup>118</sup> Rural women were less reliant on the medical abortions and contraceptives previously available in cities; therefore, the absence of these technologies influenced them less.<sup>119</sup>

Although limited abortions and birth control contributed to this rise in fertility, other factors may have also influenced the demographic explosion.<sup>120</sup> Demographer Juan Pérez de la Riva wrote that the birth rate increased due to an “atmosphere of euphoria, optimism and unlimited confidence in the socialist future.”<sup>121</sup> The only academic demographer in Cuba during the early 1960s, Pérez de la Riva witnessed the “revolutionary effervescence” of this period. It was by many accounts a time of great possibility and enormous change. Cubans who supported the revolution believed that anything was possible, and early reforms seemed to prove them right.<sup>122</sup> Peasants received land, the unemployed obtained jobs, and many others saw wage increases.<sup>123</sup> Meanwhile, tens of thousands of Cubans found themselves deprived of property and livelihood. Landowners, landlords, and vendors involuntarily contributed to the improved welfare of their fellow compatriots.<sup>124</sup> Because of this, many fled the country, unable or unwilling to live with the changes. In 1961, one émigré recalled

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<sup>118</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 19.

<sup>119</sup> Andaya, 200, n 9.

<sup>120</sup> Fee, 344-345; Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 32; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1, 10; Pérez de la Riva, “La population,” 102.

<sup>121</sup> Pérez de la Riva, “La population,” 102.

<sup>122</sup> Cubans often use the term “effervescence” to refer to this early revolutionary era. Interview with Félix Ríos (pseudonym) by author, 6 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 320.

<sup>123</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 320-321.

<sup>124</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 346.

to Warren Miller why he left: “I had trouble catching my breath; sometimes, for fear of falling, so strong was my vertigo, that in the midst of walking down a street I would have to stop and grab hold of a lamp post or something... I could feel the world shifting under my feet.”<sup>125</sup>

While some scholars and contemporaries claim that women became pregnant in order to qualify for more goods through the ration system, these assertions seem to reflect more hearsay than reality.<sup>126</sup> In 1962, the Cuban government sought to mediate an economic crisis through rationing. Historian Hugh Thomas notes that at the time, each Cuban qualified for six pounds of rice, two pounds of lard, and one and a half pounds of beans each month.<sup>127</sup> Because the state provided children with special food, rationing alleviated the stress of additional children and indirectly promoted big families, argues scholar Aaron Segal.<sup>128</sup> Alfredo Barrera Lordi agreed, informing Oscar Lewis’ research team, “Rationing is easier for people who have children. Every married couple has heaps of children; the more the merrier. That’s the only way of beating the food shortages.”<sup>129</sup>

However, such statements ignore the fact that eligibility did not equal accessibility, and rationed goods were not always available for purchase. For example, in a series of

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<sup>125</sup> Quoted in Miller, *90 Miles*, 244.

<sup>126</sup> Aaron Segal, with Kent C. Earnhardt, *Politics and Population in the Caribbean* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, University of Puerto Rico, 1969), 69; Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 37; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 244, 276.

<sup>127</sup> Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 1377; Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 174.

<sup>128</sup> Segal, 69.

<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Men*, 244.

November 1963 cartoons, editors of *Pa'lante*, the humor appendix of the newspaper *Granma*, underscored the difficulties women faced when purchasing products for their families, specifically children.



Image 2: *Pa'lante*, 14 November 1963, 5.



Image 3: *Pa'lante*, 14 November 1963, 5.

In one cartoon, a woman asks a mother why her infant is crying, querying if it is because he has lost an apple. The mother replies: “No... because he has bottles but no nipples” (Image 2).<sup>130</sup> In another image, an infant shouts to her mother from the beak of a stork, “Mommy, have you gotten my crib yet?” (Image 3). The cartoon suggests that the child refuses to

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<sup>130</sup> “Parqueando la cigüeña,” *Pa'lante*, 14 November 1963, 5.

arrive in the world until she has a place to sleep.<sup>131</sup> Future sex educator Monika Krause, who gave birth in the early 1960s, recalled driving 26 kilometers from Havana to San Antonio de los Baños to purchase baby formula. Monika also had to beg cloth diapers from her friends after the ten that she had purchased on the ration card were stolen from her clothesline.<sup>132</sup> However, in spite of these economic difficulties, Álvarez Lajonchere noted that the Cuban government never publicly sought to limit pregnancies or decrease fertility.<sup>133</sup>

The revolutionary government refused to align itself with the burgeoning international family planning movement, which believed that high fertility levels were detrimental to society and should be rectified through contraception.<sup>134</sup> Proponents of the birth control movement were convinced that high birth rates were especially dangerous in poor countries, like India, Pakistan, and Honduras.<sup>135</sup> They invested hundreds of millions of dollars in their mission to decrease contraception in East Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.<sup>136</sup> Cubans and their Soviet allies publicly rejected these ideas, asserting that population growth was not a problem and that attempts to mitigate it merely supported

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Monika Krause-Fuchs, *Monika y la revolución: Una mirada singular sobre la historia reciente de Cuba* (Tenerife, Spain: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 2002), 84-89.

<sup>133</sup> Fee, 346.

<sup>134</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 10-11.

<sup>135</sup> Matthew Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>136</sup> For money allocated to this cause, see for example: Connelly, 169, 279, 281, 289, 357.

capitalism. They often referred to their opponents' views as "Malthusian" or "neo-Malthusian," while characterizing their own as "Marxist."<sup>137</sup>

Followers of Englishman Thomas Robert Malthus and his 1798 essay "An Essay on the Principle of Population" accepted his argument that unchecked population growth was dangerous. While Malthus believed that "moral restraint" was the solution to overpopulation, neo-Malthusians later campaigned for the universal adoption of contraceptives.<sup>138</sup> Beginning in the 1950s, neo-Malthusian thinking gained popularity in the United States. Population control programs received economic backing from the United States in the 1960s, a fact that further alienated socialist countries from the family planning movement.<sup>139</sup> Cuban leaders and the media expressed their opposition to birth control.<sup>140</sup> Cuban physicians, however, became increasingly concerned about the high number of illegal abortions.<sup>141</sup> Others voiced alarmed that so many teenagers were becoming pregnant.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 1, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 2, 10-11.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 15; Connelly, 279.

<sup>140</sup> See for example: José A. Benítez, "En los próximos segundos," *Granma*, 3 March 1968, 12; R. Pérez Pereira, "Population Explosion? Or Revolutionary Explosion?" *Granma Weekly Review*, 3 December 1967, 12; Fidel Castro, "Castro Speech Closing Cultural Conference," 13 January 1968, *Castro Speech Database, UTLANIC*, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1968/19680113.html>; Castro, "Fidel Speech to School Monitors," n.p.

<sup>141</sup> Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, "Abortion and the New Woman," *The Guardian*, 10 April 1971, 9; Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 218; Landstreet, "Marxists," 111-112; Aguila Acebal and Neyra Reyes, 208; Kaiser, 306.

<sup>142</sup> Krause-Fuchs, "'Para mí,'" 190; Gay-Sylvestre, 50.

## The Zipper Ring and Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, 1964-1966

By 1965, as far as many physicians were concerned, Cuba was in the midst of a reproductive health crisis. While Fidel publicly opposed contraception throughout the 1960s, a small number of the country's physicians began to make birth control available to the Cuban people. Worried about the increasing numbers of illegal abortions, they sought an alternative family planning method.<sup>143</sup> Of course, the medical community was aware that its actions could be misinterpreted as neo-Malthusian, and proponents like Álvarez Lajonchere insisted: "We have never said that having a small family is good; we have never pressured people to reduce the birth rate."<sup>144</sup> They sought to distinguish birth control from the population control advocated by neo-Malthusians who believed that overpopulation was an economic problem.

A national family planning system slowly began to develop in Cuba in the mid-1960s, although contraceptives remained in short supply. Álvarez Lajonchere recalled that in these early years, physicians inserted IUDs when they were available. But many countries that manufactured these devices refused to sell them to Cuba, most likely because of their compliance with the U.S. embargo.<sup>145</sup> As previously mentioned, Chinese condom shipments did not always arrive on time, and those that did might be ineffective.<sup>146</sup> Oral contraceptives

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<sup>143</sup> Guttmacher, "Guttmacher Reports on Visit to Cuban MD Meeting," *Medical Tribune*, 4 April 1966, 2; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in Fee, 346.

<sup>145</sup> Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78-80; Fee, 345; Hollerbach, "Recent Trends," 104; Smith, "Progress, Science, and Myth," 181.

<sup>146</sup> Franqui, 146; Yglesias, 207.

were not widely available.<sup>147</sup> These were cost-prohibitive to import, and Cuban physicians often doubted the safety and effectiveness of this contraceptive method.<sup>148</sup> Fuentes suggests that the country also imported Anti-Jelly, a spermicide from Czechoslovakia.<sup>149</sup> Female sterilization was available, but it is difficult to determine if there was a national norm for the procedure.<sup>150</sup> Scholars seem to agree that women had to be over thirty years of age and have had at least three children in order to qualify for sterilization.<sup>151</sup> It does not appear that sterilization for men was considered.<sup>152</sup> As women in the Soviet Union and many countries under Soviet influence relied almost exclusively on legal abortions to control their reproduction, contraceptives were not imported from the USSR.<sup>153</sup>

In 1964, a low-cost, locally-produced IUD became available to Cuban women, one which inspired hope in physicians.<sup>154</sup> The Zipper ring, known in Cuba as the *anillo de nilón*, originated in Chile (Image 4). In 1959, while working at the Barros Luco Hospital in

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<sup>147</sup> Fee, 345; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 209.

<sup>148</sup> Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 209; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78-80.

<sup>149</sup> Fuentes, vol. 2, 351, 1001.

<sup>150</sup> Álvarez Vázquez asserts that there was no national norm. Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 84.

<sup>151</sup> In the late 1960s, Sara Rojas was denied a tubal ligation because she was healthy. Elizabeth Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), 178; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 292; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 209; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 26-28.

<sup>152</sup> Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 202-210.

<sup>153</sup> David Heer, “Abortion, Contraception, and Population Policy in the Soviet Union,” *Soviet Studies* 17, no. 1 (July 1965): 76-83; Laetitia Atlani-Duault, *Humanitarian Aid in Post-Soviet Countries: An Anthropological Perspective*, trans. Andrew Wilson (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 44-45; Ana Hofman, “When We Were Walking Down the Road and Singing”: Rural Women’s Memories of Socialism in Serbia,” in *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, eds. Shana Penn and Jill Massino (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 188-189.

<sup>154</sup> Although Monika Krause asserts that *anillos* arrived to Cuba in 1963. Gay Sylvestre, 52; Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 37, f37, 84; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 208.

Santiago, Chilean physician Jaime Zipper began experimenting with a simple IUD made of nylon thread in the form of a ring. He based his design on an IUD developed in 1929 by the German physician Ernst Graefenberg.<sup>155</sup> Zipper's research was unsupervised and unauthorized; even his patients were unaware that they were participants in a new study. While the medical community eventually learned of his independent research, the effectiveness of the *anillo* overruled the possibility of punishment for his unorthodox research.<sup>156</sup> In 1962 and 1964, Zipper presented his work at the Conference on Intrauterine Devices; *anillos* later became available throughout Chile and other parts of the world, including Cuba.<sup>157</sup>

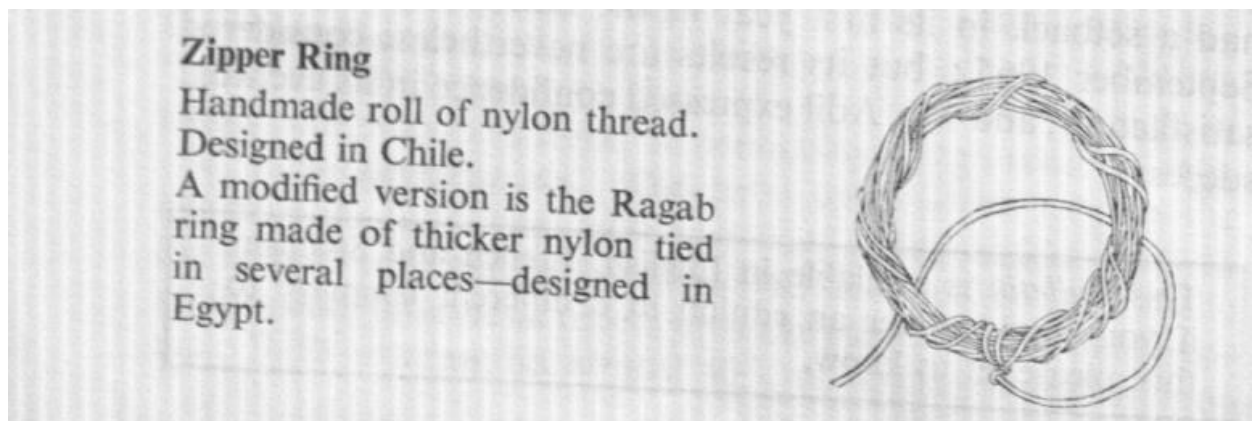


Image 4: *IPPF Medical Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (April 1967): 4.

Álvarez Lajonchere learned about the Zipper Ring on a trip to Chile in the early 1960s. In his role as Director of Obstetrics and Gynecology for the Ministry of Public Health, he sought an IUD neither manufactured nor patented in the United States, since the

<sup>155</sup> Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, *The Politics of Motherhood: Maternity and Women's Rights in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 56-57; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78; Sanhueza, 107; Zipper, García, and Pastene, 302-305.

<sup>156</sup> Mooney, 56-61; Álvarez Vázquez, *La fecundidad*, 37 n. 37, 84; Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 208.

<sup>157</sup> Sanhueza, 107; Zipper, García, and Pastene, 302.

U.S. embargo prevented these vendors from selling to Cubans.<sup>158</sup> The *anillo* met Álvarez Lajonchere's qualifications, as it could be manufactured in Cuba for a very low price. Zipper and his colleagues celebrated the cost-effectiveness of the IUD when they wrote, "This device can be made by anybody [who is] interested, at an insignificant cost. This was a decisive factor, at least in Chile, in the spread of its use without the need for setting up distribution networks.... We believe this to be true anywhere in Latin America."<sup>159</sup> Doctors, nurses, and assistants easily constructed the Zipper rings using fishing line created by the Cuban Fishing Institute.<sup>160</sup> Physicians inserted the first Zipper ring at the Calixto García General Hospital in Havana in 1964.<sup>161</sup>

In a country where, according to Álvarez Lajonchere, abortion had long been the primary method used by women to control their fertility, contraceptive use did not develop quickly.<sup>162</sup> Over the next several years, the *anillo* slowly gained in popularity, both with physicians and with patients. Each group had to become accustomed to the idea of birth control. The process was further slowed by the reticence of physicians to speak about birth control. Not only were they silenced by the anti-Malthusian rhetoric of the state; their own ignorance also silenced them. Family planning had only been incorporated into the medical school curriculum in 1962, when Álvarez Lajonchere assumed the position as head of

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<sup>158</sup> Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78-80; Fee, 345; Hollerbach, "Recent Trends," 104.

<sup>159</sup> Zipper, García, and Pastene 306.

<sup>160</sup> Gay-Sylvestre 52; Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 208-209; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 26; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 78.

<sup>161</sup> Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>162</sup> Fee, 346.

obstetrics and gynecology.<sup>163</sup> In an interview with Oscar Lewis' team, Eulalia noted that she obtained a Zipper ring in 1965, following the birth of her fourth child. She was one of the first Cuban women to have the *anillo*, and she served as a test subject for the Soviet physician who was teaching Cuban gynecologists how to insert the IUD. Eulalia recalled, "I was embarrassed while the ring was being inserted because a lot of doctors walked in and out of the room. The doctor explained to each of them how to insert it."<sup>164</sup> When Dr. Alan Guttmacher, president of Planned Parenthood Federation-World Population, traveled to Cuba in 1966, he noted that *anillos* were not yet commonly used. He added, "I sense the birth control program is new and not well developed."<sup>165</sup> Two years later, however, demographer Barent F. Landstreet observed that the Zipper ring was "one of the most popular methods of birth control in Cuba." Of course, at this time there was still a severe shortage of doctors, and women often waited up to a month for their IUD insertion.<sup>166</sup>

While some Cubans were glad to have the *anillo* as a birth control option, not everyone was convinced of its success. The physicians with whom Landstreet spoke in 1968 stated they were "reasonably content with the ring," although they admitted that it was not as effective as the Lippes loop, a plastic IUD with an open, serpentine design.<sup>167</sup> Since the loop contained barium, so as to be detected in an X-ray, Cubans were unable to create their own version. They attempted to manufacture it in 1968, but they lacked the equipment to embed

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 345; Benítez Pérez, "Evitar mejor que abortar," n.p.

<sup>164</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 140.

<sup>165</sup> Guttmacher, "Guttmacher Reports," 2.

<sup>166</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 208-209.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

the barium.<sup>168</sup> Zipper himself recognized the potential for discontent, noting that the *anillo* sometimes exacerbated chronic pelvic inflammations.<sup>169</sup> He also wrote that the “high incidence of primary expulsions with this IUD—17% in the first year—discouraged many investigators from using it.”<sup>170</sup> Eulalia recalled that her own *anillo* fell out two years after she received it.<sup>171</sup> Teresa Noble also expelled her Zipper rings. A physician mistakenly inserted two at once, and both felt out.<sup>172</sup>

In 1965, the Ministry of Public Health responded to reproductive concerns by allowing for a more “flexible interpretation” of the 1938 anti-abortion law, specifically the section which permitted abortions to avoid harm to the mother’s “health.”<sup>173</sup> The reinterpretation of the law was only possible after the Ministry adopted the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health, “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”<sup>174</sup> While there was no change to the Penal Code and most abortions remained illegal, the Ministry of Public Health agreed to

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<sup>168</sup> G.M. Dhaar and Irfan Robbani, *Foundations of Community Medicines*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Noida, India: Elsevier, 2008), 122; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 208-209.

<sup>169</sup> S.J. Segal, A.L. Southam, and K. D. Shafer, eds., *Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Intra-Uterine Contraception* (Amsterdam: Excerpta Medica, 1965), 90-92.

<sup>170</sup> Zipper, García, and Pastene, 305.

<sup>171</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 140.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Teresa Noble (pseudonym) by author, 18 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>173</sup> Some authors assert that this change occurred in 1964. Benítez Pérez, “Evitar mejor que abortar,” n.p.; Aguila Acebal, and Neyra Reyes, 208; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1; Gay-Sylvestre, 50; Andaya, 176; Krause-Fuchs, *Machismo*, 77; Krause-Fuchs, “Para mí,” 191; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 219.

<sup>174</sup> A copy of the Constitution is located in Gian Luca Burci and Claude-Henri Vignes, *World Health Organization* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2004), 225. Aguila Acebal and Neyra Reyes, 208; Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 219; Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 34.

allow physicians to determine when the woman's health was at risk. This reinterpretation resulted in increasing numbers of legal abortions and much confusion, as access to abortion services depended to a large extent on the attitude of each individual doctor.<sup>175</sup>

Misunderstanding regarding abortion access was reflected in government policy as well as oral histories from the time period. Public confusion was exacerbated by the fact that there was no attempt to inform Cubans of this unofficial change in interpretation.<sup>176</sup> At this time, the number of legal abortions performed in hospitals began to increase. Hollerbach notes that "since 1965... requests for abortions up to 10 weeks of gestation have been performed for single women 18 and older, and for all married women, solely at the woman's request."<sup>177</sup> But in a conversation with Landstreet, one Cuban said that it seemed most of these procedures were performed on married women who had already had several children.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, each hospital director had a different interpretation of the law, and abortion access varied from hospital to hospital.<sup>179</sup> For example, Nicolás Salazar Fernández told the Oscar Lewis research team that in the mid-1960s he had engaged in a debate with his partner, Emelina, over the accessibility of legal abortions. She had claimed that getting pregnant was not a problem, because "if I do, I'll just go to a doctor and have an abortion."

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<sup>175</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 220; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, xxv.

<sup>176</sup> Kaiser, 306.

<sup>177</sup> Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 15.

<sup>178</sup> Álvarez Vázquez et al., 15; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 1; Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 220.

<sup>179</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 219; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, xxv; Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility*, 15.

Nicolás had disagreed, declaring that “getting an abortion isn’t nearly as easy as you think. Suppose that doctor says no?”<sup>180</sup> Many doctors did indeed refuse to perform abortions.

Because the government made no effort to impose a uniform policy, physicians gained increased power over the bodies of female patients. This was illustrated in the case of Ilona Sorel, who attempted to terminate her pregnancy in 1967. A friend gave her numerous injections, but instead of having a miscarriage, Ilona merely developed an infection. When she begged for help at the Mayarí Hospital in Oriente, Director Padrón stated, “It is not our job to give her an abortion.” In a later conversation with U.S journalist José Yglesias, the director amended his statement and said he could only perform an abortion if he had the permission of Ilona’s husband.<sup>181</sup> In 1966, a doctor Cruz Álvarez proclaimed to Chilean journalist Enrique Délano, “We’re not pruders, but we currently only perform abortions when necessary for physical reasons. For economic reasons, it’s still not possible to deal with the issue of legal abortions.”<sup>182</sup> Journalist Sona Pérez Tobella made the same claim the following year when she wrote: ““The Revolutionary Government does not support birth control for economic reasons. We do not accept the capitalist premise that the population explosion is the cause of the people’s misery.”<sup>183</sup>

Because the accessibility of abortion depended to a large extent on the willingness of the physician or hospital director, many women still resorted to illegal abortions. One

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<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Men*, 434.

<sup>181</sup> Quoted in Yglesias, 266-273.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Délano, 75.

<sup>183</sup> Sonia Pérez Tobella, “On the Use of Contraceptives,” *Granma Weekly Review*, 9 July 1967, 11.

woman interviewed by Oscar Lewis' research team recalled that she had paid a physician 200 dollars to terminate her pregnancy in 1966, and women like Ilona risked death in order to provoke a miscarriage.<sup>184</sup>

In the late 1960s, performing abortions following the failure of an *anillo* appears to have become common. While this was certainly not the law, it was prevalent enough for individuals to believe it was government policy. In her erroneous article for the *Granma Weekly Review*, reporter Pérez Tobella wrote, "In the event a woman using contraceptives becomes pregnant, an abortion is... permitted."<sup>185</sup> In 1969, Eulalia Fontanés agreed, telling Oscar Lewis' team, "If you get pregnant with the ring in place, you can have an abortion."<sup>186</sup> She added, "Some women use that as an excuse because it's a crime to have an abortion unless a woman tells a doctor that she lost her ring."<sup>187</sup> But it was not always true that a woman could get an abortion following IUD failure.<sup>188</sup>

At mid-decade, both Soviets and Cubans began to challenge the assumption that capitalists inevitably supported birth control and Marxists promoted only economic development.<sup>189</sup> In the months following the 1965 U.N. World Population Conference in Belgrade, Soviet demographers began to revise their perspective on family planning. They admitted that population problems existed, but attributed them to socio economic

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<sup>184</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 293; Yglesias, 266-273.

<sup>185</sup> Pérez Tobella, 11. This claim is repeated in Sutherland, 178.

<sup>186</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Neighbors*, 140.

<sup>187</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 220-221.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 65.

circumstances, not excessive reproduction. The Soviets' proposed solution was socialism combined with birth control.<sup>190</sup> This perspective was already quietly reflected in Cuba. Indeed, it existed as early as 1963 and 1964 when physicians agreed to insert IUDs when available.<sup>191</sup>

While the Cuban medical community attempted to define its position on family planning in the mid-1960s, it also sought to situate itself as an actor in the international debate on population control. Soon after importing the *anillo* to Cuba, Álvarez Lajonchere flew to Yugoslavia, where he met with demographic and medical specialists to discuss demographics and family planning. In September 1965, he and two colleagues attended the World Population Conference in Belgrade, which united 800 population experts and demographers from 90 countries.<sup>192</sup> They assembled to exchange opinions about world population growth and the economic resources necessary to sustain this growth.<sup>193</sup> The following year, Havana served as host to the XI Cuban Medical Conference, a convention attended by more than four thousand professionals to exchange information about developments in the field of medicine, including family planning. In attendance was Alan Guttmacher, president of Planned Parenthood-World Federation, who delivered a lecture on the various types of birth control and expressed his preference for IUDs over oral

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 64-73.

<sup>191</sup> Fee, 345.

<sup>192</sup> "Cuba Wants to Import Birth Control Pill," *The Washington Post*, 8 March 1966, D2; Liscano, 39; Kaiser, 300.

<sup>193</sup> "World Population Conference, Belgrade, 1965," *Journal of International Affairs* 92 (1966): 91-92.

contraceptives. The Cuban Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) also organized another panel on birth control, one without foreign panelists.<sup>194</sup>

By inviting Guttmacher to the conference, MINSAP illustrated Cuba's involvement in the transnational discussion on family planning. It also displayed an interest in providing Cubans with the option of birth control. But by offering a complementary panel on contraceptives, one featuring only Cuban doctors, Cuba asserted its autonomy within the international debate. Cuban medical authorities agreed to host and learn from Guttmacher, but they refused to be defined by him or the population control movement. In this way, Cubans demonstrated their acceptance of birth control and their continued opposition to the ideology of population control.

Throughout the second half of the decade, Cuban physicians continued to communicate with the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), but they seem to have established no formal affiliation with the organization.<sup>195</sup> In 1966 Cuban gynecologists participated in an IPPF-sponsored training program in Santiago, Chile. The following year, they appear to have attended the Eighth International IPPF Conference in the same city. Contacts made in Chile ultimately resulted in a training seminar on family planning and public health; this appears to have been led by Chilean physicians in Havana in May 1967.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> This conference was titled the XI Congreso Médico y VII Estomatológico Nacional. Rogelio L. Bravet and Gregorio Hernández, "Gráficas del Congreso Nacional Médico y Estomatológico," *Bohemia*, 4 March 1966, 68; "Fidel habla esta noche en el "Chaplin" en el acto clausura del Congreso Médico," *Granma*, 26 February 1966, 1; Marta Rojas et al., "Desarrollados temas sobre el empleo de contraceptivos," *Granma*, 27 February 1966, 6.

<sup>195</sup> Landstreet, "Cuban Population," 207-208.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.; Luisa Pfau, "Programmes: Western Hemisphere Region Report," in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, Santiago, Chile, 9-15 April 1967*, eds. R. K. B. Hankinson et al. (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons, Ltd., 1967), 183; Juan de Onis,

Most, if not all, of these exchanges were funded by the IPPF.<sup>197</sup> Increased contact and training with the population control movement, however, did little to alter Cuban government opposition to neo-Malthusian ideology. But these cross-cultural encounters were valuable because they convinced some Cubans that birth control and population control were not one and the same. In 1968, one Cuban told Landstreet that “if demography and family planning had been tools of the bourgeoisie before, they could now be used against them.”<sup>198</sup> It is possible that Landstreet’s informant referred to emerging discourse, which identified contraceptives as facilitating women’s increased participation outside of the home.<sup>199</sup>

During the early years of the revolution, in sum, Cuban women and their physicians negotiated the meaning of contraception and abortion. They struggled to disassociate abortions from neocolonialism and contraception from the ideology of population control organizations. Their actions reveal the nuance behind Fidel’s public opposition to birth control as a tool of imperialism. Throughout the second half of the 1960s, Fidel continued to condemn “the capitalists, the exploiters” who “resort to technology to repress [socialist] revolutions and... ask the help of science to prevent the growth of population.”<sup>200</sup> The

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“Cuba Now Trying to Reduce Births: World Group Aids Campaign for Family Planning,” *New York Times*, 27 March 1967, 4; International Planned Parenthood Federation, *Family Planning in Cuba: A Profile of the Development of Policies and Programmes* (London: International Planned Parenthood Federation, 1979) 8; Segal and Earnhardt, 29, 69.

<sup>197</sup> Segal and Earnhardt, 29; Pfau, 183.

<sup>198</sup> Quoted in Landstreet, “Cuban Population,” 208.

<sup>199</sup> Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, “Abortion and the New Woman,” *The Guardian*, 10 April 1971, 9. Originally presented at the Cultural Congress of Havana in January 1968; Elena Díaz and Natasha Klein, “Women in Revolutionary Cuba,” in *Voices of National Liberation: The Revolutionary Ideology of the “Third World” as Expressed by Artists and Intellectuals at the Cultural Congress of Havana, January 1968* (Brooklyn: Central Book Company, 1970), 219-224.

<sup>200</sup> Castro, “Castro Speech Closing Cultural Conference,” n.p.; Castro, “Fidel Speech to School Monitors,” n.p.

medical community also remained opposed to neo-Malthusian thought, but it increasingly supported birth control as a way to eliminate high abortion numbers. Although contraception and abortions remained relatively limited on the island until the late 1960s and early 1970s, the presence of the *anillo* and the reinterpretation of the abortion law marked the beginning of change. This process reflects the restricted impact of foreign aid organizations on reproductive policies in Cuba and highlights the ability of low-level, national actors to adapt to national needs.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Revolutionary Weddings: Defining Citizenship through Marriage, 1959-1968

Less than a year after coming to power, the Cuban revolutionary government held its first collective wedding. In October 1959, more than fifty couples were legally married in Jagüey Grande, a town on the edge of the Zapata swamp in Matanzas province.<sup>1</sup> The mass wedding marked the beginning of Operation Family, a campaign that aimed at once to legalize common-law unions and register undocumented Cubans.<sup>2</sup> According to contemporary journalists, most of the couples married in Jagüey Grande had long before formed extra-legal unions, establishing households and raising children together.<sup>3</sup> But these undocumented relationships troubled the new government and the state media, as they seemed to illustrate the limited reach of civil authority and the inability of the government to record the Cuban people accurately.<sup>4</sup> By initiating Operation Family in a poor and rural section of the country, government officials reinforced two of the campaign's main

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<sup>1</sup> José Sergio Velázquez, "Contrajeron matrimonio 180 parejas en Quivicán," *El Mundo*, 25 November 1959, 1; Carlos Marten, "Matrimonios colectivos: De la Habana a la Ciénaga de Zapata," *INRA* 2, no. 3 (March 1961): 110; Gracia Dana, "La función social de los matrimonios en masa," *Verde Olivo* 26 (September 1960): 42-43; Carlos Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata: Más ciudadanos de la Cuba nueva," *INRA* 2, no. 1 (January 1961): 62.

<sup>2</sup> Operation Family was less commonly known as Operation Matrimony. Luis Rolando Cabrera, "La Revolución ha legalizado ya miles de uniones," *Bohemia*, 24 January 1960, 36-38, 96-97; Hector Hernández, "Los matrimonios y la revolución," *Granma*, 26 May 1968, 7; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 61-63; Dana, 40-43.

<sup>3</sup> Marten, "Matrimonios colectivos," 110; Velázquez, 1; Cabrera, 36-37; Dana, 40-43.

<sup>4</sup> "Contribuye la Revolución a la consolidación de la familia," *Revolución*, 29 December 1960, 14; "Patria potestad y enseñanza privada," *Revolución*, October 28, 1960, p. 1, 6; Marten, "Matrimonios colectivos," 108; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62.

narratives: that the Cuban revolution granted legal status to formerly undocumented individuals and that it strengthened the Cuban nuclear family.<sup>5</sup>

Operation Family formed part of a broader movement to expand the reach of the state and introduce rural Cubans (*campesinos*) to the goals of the revolution. Beginning in 1959, volunteer medical brigades erected rural hospitals in the countryside (*campo*). They were soon followed by thousands of physicians and dentists required by the revolution to serve a year of obligatory rural service.<sup>6</sup> Medical personnel served as government representatives alongside the volunteer teachers and literacy workers (*brigadistas*) who constituted a campaign to eliminate illiteracy on the island. In 1961, two hundred and sixty thousand *brigadistas*, most of them adolescents, lived with and educated rural Cubans, exemplifying citizen-based reforms in the *campo*.<sup>7</sup> Even hairdressers performed volunteer service in the *campo*.<sup>8</sup> By situating Operation Family within these larger social movements, this chapter underscores the importance of gender norms to early revolutionary attempts at consolidating power.

In the past decade, historians have demonstrated how socialist governments relied on marriage regulation to strengthen state power. As sociologist Göran Therborn observes,

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Marten, “En la Ciénaga de Zapata,” 61-63; Velázquez, A6.

<sup>6</sup> Christina Pérez, *Caring for Them From Birth to Death: The Practice of Community-Based Cuban Medicine* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 14; Ross Danielson, *Cuban Medicine* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1979), 133-134.

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Herman, “An Army of Educators: Gender, Revolution, and the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961,” *Gender & History* 24, no. 1 (April 2012): 93-111; Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 23-27; Denise F. Blum, *Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values: Educating the New Socialist Citizen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 48-49.

<sup>8</sup> “Plan político asistencial Carlos Rojas,” *ANAP* 4, nos. 3-4 (March-April 1964): 53.

“Whatever Communism did, it did not do away with marriage.”<sup>9</sup> East German officials encouraged early unions by providing marriage loans to newlyweds 26 years of age and under. This was illustrative, notes historian Josie McLellan, of the government’s idealization of reproductive sexuality within stable marriages.<sup>10</sup> Historian Jill Massino, in her study of marital roles in socialist Romania, has argued that while socialism did not revolutionize marriage, it did succeed in using policy and propaganda to reformulate marriage practices.”<sup>11</sup> While Operation Family originated before the Cuban revolution declared itself socialist in 1961, government officials came to view the campaign’s goals as distinctly socialist.<sup>12</sup>

This chapter demonstrates that this movement was an important element of forming a state that was at once “normal” and “consolidated.”<sup>13</sup> In their push to legalize monogamous, heterosexual relationships, Cuban authorities asserted their authority over definitions of citizenship.<sup>14</sup> However, the desire to legalize extra-legal relationships did not originate with the Castro regime. It was also promoted during the Second Cuban Republic (1933-1958) by

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<sup>9</sup> Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power: Family in the World, 1900-2000* (London: Routledge, 2004), 168.

<sup>10</sup> Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 41-42.

<sup>11</sup> Jill Massino, “Something Old, Something New: Marital Roles and Relations in State Socialist Romania,” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 35.

<sup>12</sup> “La patria potestad,” *Verde Olivo*, 1 October 1961, 25-27.

<sup>13</sup> Leaders and journalists often used these terms to describe the value of Operation Family for the Cuban family. See for example: Velázquez, A6; Reeves, 391; “Contribuye la Revolución,” 14; Cabrera, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy F. Cott discusses the relationship between marriage and the state in “Giving Character to Our Whole Civil Polity: Marriage and the Public Order in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *U.S. History as Women’s History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 109; Elise Andaya, “Reproducing the Revolution: Gender, Kinship, and the State in Contemporary Cuba,” Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 2007, 77-78.

Cubans who sought to create a democratic state.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, Operation Family is better viewed not as something entirely new, but as a continuous desire for a specific version of Cuban citizenship. However, in contrast to earlier republican lawmakers, revolutionary leaders and the media ultimately associated legal marriage with socialism, not Catholicism, and viewed Operation Family as a strategy for severing marriage's previous association with the bourgeoisie and making it accessible to even the poorest of Cubans.<sup>16</sup> As we will see, the rural poor, Afro-Cubans, and parents were some of the primary targets of this campaign. By the mid-1960s, Operation Family gave way to new policies and propaganda regarding marriage, ones that seem to have incentivized many ordinary Cubans to marry for economic rather than ideological reasons.<sup>17</sup>

#### Background: Notions of Republican Marriage

Operation Family was not the first time that marriage was proposed as a tool for achieving government aims in Cuba. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah R. Arvey, "Sex and the Ordinary Cuban: Cuban Physicians, Eugenics, and Marital Sexuality, 1933-1958," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (January 2012): 95-97; Sarah R. Arvey, "Making the Immoral Moral: Consensual Unions and Birth Status in Cuban Law and Everyday Practice, 1940-1958," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (November 2010): 627-660.

<sup>16</sup> Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 140; Juan Martínez-Alier and Verena Martínez Alier, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad* (Paris: Ruedo Ibérico, 1972), 56; Herbert L. Matthews, *Cuba* (New York: The MacMillan Press, 1964), 39; Margaret Randall, *Cuban Women Now: Interview with Cuban Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1974), 25; Germán Wettstein, *Vivir en revolución: 20 semanas en Cuba* (Montevideo: Editorial Signo, 1969), 89; Ramón Torreira Crespo and José Buajasán Marrawi, *Operación Peter Pan: Un caso de guerra psicológica contra Cuba* (Havana: Editora Política, 2000), 99; Hernández, "Los matrimonios," 7; Dana, 41; "La patria potestad," 25-27; Reeves, 391.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Pedro Gómez (pseudonym) by author, 23 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Interview with Roberto Chaviano (pseudonym) by author, 13 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Marlene Moleon, *En la isla de los Pregones* (Miami: Eriginal Books, 2010), 181; Jorge Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio* (Havana: Centro de Información Científica y Técnica, Universidad de La Habana, 1973), 67; "Assembly-Line Weddings in Cuba," *The Washington Post*, 5 March 1972, E21.

select Cubans elites suggested that marriage between slaves would ensure stability in slave communities. They also believed that slave marriages would result in increased reproduction among slave women, thereby reducing the number of slaves imported from Africa.<sup>18</sup> In practice, marriage was not common among slaves in Cuba prior to emancipation in 1886. The legalization of unions cost money, and slave owners often refused to pay the fees.<sup>19</sup> By the early twentieth century, however, some Cuban elites viewed legal marriage between Afro-Cubans as a way to promote civility and eliminate barbarism.<sup>20</sup> Many Afro-Cubans likewise believed that legal unions illustrated the virtue and progress of their community.<sup>21</sup> This same discourse was reflected in debates surrounding the 1940 Constitution.

Between 1933 and 1958, Cuban lawmakers relied on traditional notions of sexual propriety to revise laws related to marriage and divorce. They believed that monogamy and legal matrimony were necessary for the creation of a stable and democratic Cuba. Legislators expressed particular anxiety over extra-legal unions, often formed by *campesinos* and people of color.<sup>22</sup> In a debate surrounding the construction of the 1940 Cuban Constitution, lawyer and journalist Francisco Ichaso noted his desire to pass laws that would “spread and invigorate matrimony in Cuba so that more people, especially rural folk, marry

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah L. Franklin, *Women and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Colonial Cuba* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 45-46.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 136.

<sup>21</sup> Takkara Keosha Brunson, “Constructing Afro-Cuban Womanhood: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in Republican-Era Cuba,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2011, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Sarah R. Arvey, “Sex and the Ordinary Cuban: Cuban Physicians, Eugenics, and Marital Sexuality, 1933-1958,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 21, no. 1 (January 2012): 95-97.

legally.”<sup>23</sup> Politician Rafael Guas Inclán agreed, proclaiming that *campesinos* who were in monogamous, extra-legal relationships should benefit from the same privileges as legally married Cubans. However, he added that relationships based on sex or money should not qualify as legal unions.<sup>24</sup> The Constituent Assembly members finally decided to introduce a judicial process known as *equiparación de matrimonio civil*, which allowed Cubans in common-law relationships to petition the court for the same rights as legally married Cubans.<sup>25</sup>

Members of the Constituent Assembly believed that it was mostly women and children who would benefit from this addition to the Constitution, particularly women abandoned by their partners. If they qualified for *equiparación*, Cuban women could claim an inheritance from the estate of the deceased partner or receive a veteran’s or worker’s widow pension. They could also legitimate their child’s birth status, which allowed the child to claim a full, rather than partial, inheritance. With the introduction of this new text, Cuba lawmakers assigned the state a role as a protector of women. By requiring that common-law couples go to court to obtain the same privileges as the legally married, the regime also assured the government its position as the sole judge of marital legitimacy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Francisco Ichaso, Cuban Constitutional Assembly member, quoted in Andrés Lazcano y Mazón, *Constitución de Cuba 1940 (con los debates sobre su articulado y transitorias en la Convención constituyente)* (Havana: Cultural y Sociedad Anónima, 1941), 46. Translated by and cited in Arvey, “Sex and the Ordinary Cuban,” 98.

<sup>24</sup> Sarah R. Arvey, ““Labyrinths of Love”: Sexual Propriety, Family, and Social Reform in the Second Cuban Republic, 1933-1958,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2007, 54.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 4, 67.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

The extra-legal unions opposed by republican lawmakers represented no small percentage of the population. In 1960, Minister of Justice Alfredo Yabur Maluf estimated that there existed approximately 420,000 extra-legal unions on the island.<sup>27</sup> Many couples never considered legalizing their unions and instead formed deep, domestic ties beyond the reach of the state. According to anthropologist Heidi Härkönen, informal relationships were typical of Cuba and of the Caribbean more broadly.<sup>28</sup> Despite attempts by republican lawmakers to promote legal matrimony in Cuba, the impact of the 1940 law is difficult to determine.<sup>29</sup>

#### Operation Family, 1959-1965

Rather than granting common-law unions the same rights as legal unions, the revolution's Fundamental Law of 1959 prioritized legal marriage and asserted that couples in consensual unions only had the same rights as legally married Cubans if a court determined that their union was "stable and of exceptional nature."<sup>30</sup> In this way, revolutionary leaders replicated the terminology of the 1940 Constitution. While the revolutionary government continued to allow *equiparaciones*, it placed greater emphasis on making legal unions free

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<sup>27</sup> "Serán unidas en matrimonio cuatrocientos mil parejas," *Revolución*, 22 November 1960, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Heidi Härkönen, "Matrifocality in Cuba: A Comparison" (Paper presented at the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 11-14, 2009), 5-6; Andaya, 77.

<sup>29</sup> Arvey, "Making the Immoral Moral," 632, n. 8.

<sup>30</sup> "The court shall determine those cases in which, for reasons of equity, a union between persons with legal capacity to marry shall, because of its stability and exceptional nature, be given the same status as civil marriage," in Article 43, *Fundamental Law of Cuba, 1959* (Washington, D.C.: Pan American Union, 1959), 14.

and accessible to poor and rural Cubans.<sup>31</sup> In 1968, *Granma* correspondent Hector Hernández asserted, “No other government has favored the institution of marriage as much as the Revolutionary Government.”<sup>32</sup> By legalizing their unions, noted journalist Gracia Dana, Cubans would not need to spend money and experience delays in seeking *equiparación*.<sup>33</sup> The new government’s prioritization of legal marriage over *equiparaciones* distinguished it from the previous regime, but its investment in state-sanctioned unions reflected the continued importance of legal unions.

Concurrent with pressure to legally marry, officials mandated that Cubans register themselves with the government. In March 1959, Cuban officials passed Law 164, informing all Cubans that their names and birth dates should appear in the Registry of Civil Status. Policymakers were both cajoling and forceful in the phrasing of this law, reminding Cubans of their legal obligation, while also specifying that if they registered within 180 working days, any possible disciplinary action or fine would be waived.<sup>34</sup> For an individual under the age of fourteen, the registration process was relatively easy. Child and parent merely had to notify the appropriate official and confirm that the child was not yet fourteen. Cubans over this age had to either show proof that they had fought with the Rebel Army or speak with the Municipal Judge. Once the judge validated that the individual was a native Cuban, two additional witnesses had to confirm the applicant’s statement. However, municipal judges struggled to interpret the new law, and less than three weeks after it was passed, Cuban

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<sup>31</sup> Law 164 of May 1959 allowed common-law couples to marry free of charge for one year. Manuel C. Rubio Jáquez, *Treinta años en el Registro Civil*, 2nd ed. (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1961), 711; Dana, 42.

<sup>32</sup> Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7.

<sup>33</sup> Dana, 41.

<sup>34</sup> Rubio Jáquez, 103-114, 557.

officials published a mass letter clarifying the main points of the law.<sup>35</sup> Despite this, Cubans did not register in the numbers hoped for by revolutionary authorities, and Cuban leaders turned to other methods to encourage registration.<sup>36</sup> Following Law 164, the government launched a series of concurrent campaigns, all with similar goals of promoting registration and legal marriage.<sup>37</sup> One of these campaigns was Operation Family.

According to contemporary journalists, Operation Family began in October 1959, when more than fifty couples were married in a mass wedding in Jagüey Grande.<sup>38</sup> The campaign extended into the most rural areas of Cuba and was organized by the Ministry of Justice, with the help of various public agencies, including the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) and the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA).<sup>39</sup> But notaries, judges, and representatives from the Ministry of Justice were not always the first to arrive in the towns targeted by the campaign.

Operation Family recruited law students from the University of Havana to serve as some of the revolution's first marital evangelists. The students arrived in the small, rural villages of Cuba long before many government officials and journalists. In November 1960, ten law students moved over one hundred kilometers from Havana to the swamps of rural

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 577-578.

<sup>36</sup> In May 1960, Cuban officials were still frustrated that so many Cubans remained in the "awful state" of being unregistered. Ibid., 579.

<sup>37</sup> María del Pilar Díaz Castañón, *Ideología y revolución: Cuba, 1959-1962* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2001), 147 n. 79; Torreira and Buajasan, 100; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62.

<sup>38</sup> "52 Couples in Cuba Get Belated Nuptials," *New York Times*, 31 October 1959, 12; Velázquez, 1; Dana, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Adelfo Martín Barrios, *La ANAP: Veinte años de trabajo* (Havana: Empresa Poligráfica, 1982), 30; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62.

Matanzas, and they spent three months knocking on doors and attempting to convince couples to legalize their common-law unions and inscribe their names and those of their children in the Civil Registry. Couples with children or in positions of authority experienced extra pressure from the canvassers, as their goal was “to leave not one couple unmarried or a single child undocumented.”<sup>40</sup> Thanks to the labor of these volunteers, 37 couples married in Santo Tomás, a town in the heart of the soon-to-be Zapata Peninsula National Park (Image 5).<sup>41</sup> The unions were formalized in front of the medical dispensary, where many townspeople congregated to watch the festivities. The image below represents the popular festivities that accompanied mass weddings in the countryside.



Image 5: *INRA* 2, no. 3 (March 1961): 110

The mobilization of Cuban teenagers on behalf of Operation Family was not a new government strategy. This was a common method employed by the Castro regime to introduce *campesinos* to the Revolution and its goals. But these mass mobilizations not only

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Hofmann, “A Cuban Valentine: Weddings en Masse,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1965, 1; Marten, “Matrimonios colectivos,” 109; Marten, “En la Ciénaga de Zapata,” 62-63. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

<sup>41</sup> Marten, “Matrimonios colectivos,” 108-109.

incorporated *campesinos* into the scope of the revolution; they also introduced Cuban youth to rural life and revolutionary praxis. In this way, the younger generations were able to witness and participate in the changes carried out by the revolution. Scholar Denise Blum avers that the Literacy Campaign of 1961 “helped unify Cubans socially and emotionally, reinforcing nationalistic and revolutionary values.”<sup>42</sup> The same would have been true for the Havana law students who encouraged rural workers to become a formal part of the state.

Minister of Justice Alfredo Yabur Maluf served as a replacement “priest” for these ceremonies.<sup>43</sup> In the “autobiography” that he wrote ventriloquizing Fidel, Norberto Fuentes suggests that Yabur and his viceministers traveled “on the backs of mules, in endless downpours, on the edges of ravines...lacerated by plagues of mosquitos, with toes bitten by dogs and spiders” in the course of their “matrimonial evangelism.”<sup>44</sup> Charged with overseeing Operation Family, Yabur supervised the direction, development, and promotion of the plan.<sup>45</sup> He served as witness at many of the mass weddings, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by his wife Georgina Curí.<sup>46</sup> When Yabur and Curí arrived together, they would sit side by side at one of the many tables, signing documents and chatting with the newlyweds.<sup>47</sup> The presence of the Minister of Justice and his wife at these

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<sup>42</sup> Blum, 50.

<sup>43</sup> The second last name of Armando Torres Santrayll is sometimes spelled “Santayaril” or “Santrayil.”

<sup>44</sup> Norberto Fuentes, *La autobiografía de Fidel Castro*, vol. 1 (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 2004), 311.

<sup>45</sup> Eduardo Saenz Rovner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 125; “Contribuye la Revolución,” 14.

<sup>46</sup> Cabrera, 37, 96; Saenz Rovner, 125.

<sup>47</sup> Cabrera, 96.

weddings symbolized legal, marital unity. They were the ideal to which Cuba's extra-legal couples were seemingly meant to aspire.

At one mass wedding, approximately one hundred eighty couples wed in the town of Quivicán, located just twenty five miles south of Havana.<sup>48</sup> José Sergio Velázquez, a journalist for *El Mundo*, attended the ceremony, and the details he highlighted in his article are illustrative of contemporary discourse surrounding mass weddings. Velázquez made sure to note that the unions occurred between couples in long-term, extra-legal relationships. Most of them were not from Quivicán and had traveled to the town by foot, in car, or on horseback. They were accompanied by children who ranged in age from several months to over eighteen years old. And according to Velázquez, a spirit of celebration hung over the event. Indeed, a local band played national anthems, including the official Twenty-sixth of July anthem, and people crowded courthouse and the surrounding park and streets. Cuban journalists and visitors to the island routinely described these events as joyous, yet simple.<sup>49</sup>

The structure of these mass weddings seems to have illustrated the growing tension between the revolutionary government and the Catholic Church.<sup>50</sup> In a pastoral missive from January 3, 1959, Cuban archbishop Enrique Pérez Serantes celebrated the revolution and its plans for social reform and democracy. Priests and Catholic intellectuals shared his belief

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<sup>48</sup> Velázquez, 1, A6; Dana, 42.

<sup>49</sup> See for example Velázquez, A6; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62; Cabrera, 36-38, 96-97.

<sup>50</sup> I am indebted to Anita Casavantes-Bradford for this insight. See Anita Casavantes-Bradford, "Understanding Elián: The Politics of Childhood in Miami and Havana, 1959-1962," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2011, 98, 106, 129, 165-168.

that the revolution was informed by Christian tenets.<sup>51</sup> But their hope quickly changed to disillusionment by the end of the year, when educational and economic policies became increasingly radicalized. At the same time, Fidel and his allies began to discredit the Church as a force of social change, seeking instead to position the revolutionary government as the sole provider of moral redemption. Historian Anita Casavantes-Bradford argues that competition between progressive Catholics and revolutionary activists to provide care and resources to the poor became “the most serious obstacle to the consolidation of the Revolution and the concentration of power in the hands of its leader.”<sup>52</sup> During the first half of 1960, mobs heckled churchgoers across the island, as revolutionary militia arrested several parishioners. Evidence of the divide between civil and Church authorities, asserts Casavantes-Bradford, was found in their dueling discussions of childhood, with both sides claiming to speak for Cuban children.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of family was clearly articulated in journalists’ observations of the collective weddings. They consistently mentioned the number of children at these ceremonies, affirming that legal marriage was of great benefit to the youngest generation of Cubans.<sup>54</sup> Of course, it was no accident that so many parents found themselves formalizing their unions, as extra pressure was placed on these individuals to legalize their

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<sup>51</sup> Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba’s Revolution and Exodus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56-57, 64.

<sup>52</sup> Casavantes-Bradford, 106, 129, 141.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 165, 171.

<sup>54</sup> “Patria potestad y enseñanza privada,” *Revolución*, 28 October 1960, 1,6; “5,000 matrimonios en un día,” *Revolución*, 29 August 1960, 3; Dana, 41-42; Cabrera, 38; “52 Couples,” 12; Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7; Reeves, 391; Torreira and Buajasan, 98; Hofmann, “A Cuban Valentine,” 1, 9.

relationships.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the rhetoric of childhood formed an important part of Cuban nationalist discourse, and it is not surprising that the Castro regime employed this discursive strategy to encourage nuptials.<sup>56</sup> Cubans who rejected the revolutionary trajectory could be accused of indifference to the destiny of Cuban children, whether they refused to marry, opposed education reforms, or rejected housing initiatives.<sup>57</sup> While parents could technically inscribe themselves and their children on the Civil Registry without legally marrying, they seem to have been accepted much less readily by revolutionary activists than their legally-married counterparts.<sup>58</sup>

Although the unions had previously been extra-legal, journalists made sure to emphasize the newly-married couples' loyalty and fidelity.<sup>59</sup> Reporter Velázquez noted that Dominga Núñez Cuello and Eusebio A. Mesa Rodríguez were together thirty-seven years and raised ten children before they made their marriage official.<sup>60</sup> Journalist Luis Rolando Cabrera described an emotional moment when Marcelina Arteaga expressed her gratitude to the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Yabur: "Thanks to you all, I married in my old age. For the

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<sup>55</sup> Velázquez, 1; Marten, "Matrimonios colectivos," 109; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62-63; Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 1.

<sup>56</sup> Casavantes-Bradford argues that both symbolic and actual children were central to the Cuban and Cuban-American process of nation-making; she asserts that children were "nation-makers" mobilized to "explain and justify actions taken on [their] behalf, and by extension, on behalf of the community." Casavantes-Bradford, 13, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 90-91, 104-105, 112-113.

<sup>58</sup> Marten, "Matrimonios colectivos," 109; Marten, "En la Ciénaga de Zapata," 62-63; Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 1.

<sup>59</sup> See for example "5,000 matrimonios," 3; Cabrera, 36-38, 96-97; Velázquez, A6.

<sup>60</sup> Velázquez, A6.

children....”<sup>61</sup> Reporters discussed how older newlyweds had long practiced ideal matrimony, lacking only the official stamp of the state. Reporter Cabrera stated that the collective marriages of *campesinos* in January 1960 were between couples who had “not previously passed before the court to legalize a union that had already been blessed by God and accepted by society.”<sup>62</sup> Cabrera continued by noting that the information contained in articles 56 and 57 of the Civil Code “was nothing new” to the couple. “Although they might never have heard it before,” he wrote, “they know through experience that the husband should protect the wife and that she should remain in her husband’s home.”<sup>63</sup> These same articles also affirmed that the pair should be faithful. In this way, journalists reinforced accepted definitions of matrimony as stable and monogamous.

Contemporary journalists illustrated that the rural and urban poor were another target of this campaign. Journalist José Sergio Velázquez associated Operation Family exclusively with rural areas, writing: “Operation Family arrives to socially and legally normalize the extralegal unions so abundant in our countryside.”<sup>64</sup> Reporter Marten proclaimed that the residents of a once-forgotten corner of Cuba “are now cheerful, smiling, and happy” because their names appear on the Civil Registry. He added, “They feel lucky because they have not been forgotten.”<sup>65</sup> By emphasizing the new visibility of Cuba’s *campesinos*, Marten explicitly connected marriage to state-making via Operation Family.

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Cabrera, 96.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>64</sup> Velázquez, A6.

<sup>65</sup> Marten, “En la Ciénaga de Zapata,” 62.

While discussions about Operation Family and the legalization of extra-legal unions were tied to eliminating class differences (and sometimes gender inequality), the campaign to “consolidate the Cuban family” was also ostensibly about rehabilitating Afro-Cubans and creating uniformity across racial lines.<sup>66</sup> Rural Cubans of all background and ethnicities who wished to appear in the Civil Registry and become official Cuban citizens likely had to contend with the condemnation of government activists if they chose not to marry.<sup>67</sup> But this was likely especially true of Afro-Cubans, many of whom were not legally married. Historian Devyn Spence Benson has noted that revolutionary leadership required Afro-Cubans in a Havana slum to reform and adopt more appropriate behavior prior to achieving discursive Cuban citizenship.<sup>68</sup> Through Operation Family, Afro-Cubans’ access to legal citizenship seems to have been influenced by their response to revolutionary marital reforms. However, Cuban journalists were uniformly silent about race. In this way, they complied with the revolution’s “color-blind approach to race relations.”<sup>69</sup> While the revolutionary government initially addressed issues of racism, these conversations ceased in the fall of 1960 when Cuban leaders claimed that racial inequality had finally been defeated.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cabrera, 96.

<sup>67</sup> Marten, “Matrimonios colectivos,” 109; Marten, “En la Ciénaga de Zapata,” 62-63; Hofmann, “A Cuban Valentine,” 1.

<sup>68</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, “Not Blacks, but Citizens! Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1961,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, 53.

<sup>69</sup> Nadine T. Fernández, *Revolutionizing Romance: Interracial Couples in Contemporary Cuba* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Since most of my Cuban newspaper sources are from fall 1960 or later, I am not surprised that race was not referenced. Benson, 128-129, 136.

However, Afro-Cubans were not entirely absent from popular images of early revolutionary matrimony that circulated in period journalism. Travelers to the island did not hesitate to write about race, and Cubans of color talked about their own experiences through oral histories and autobiographies. While visiting Cuba in 1960, for example, U.S. attorney Nancy Reeves spoke with an Afro-Cuban newlywed who had just married her partner in a collective ceremony. The woman informed Reeves that she legalized her union because it was what Fidel wanted, and she was glad to have the opportunity to do so.<sup>71</sup> In 1968, Uruguayan geographer Germán Wettstein described the Afro-Cuban experience from his own perspective, noting that “now nobody can prevent [black and *mulato* Cubans], like before, from having their honeymoon in the Hotel Riviera. Nor do they have to pay, like before, a mountain of money.”<sup>72</sup> With this comment, Wettstein acknowledged the marital benefits newly available to Afro-Cubans, but by conflating poverty and race, he also participated in a pattern that Spence Benson has analyzed, depicting “people of color in safe and harmless ways that emphasized their poverty and allegiance to the new government.”<sup>73</sup>

Of course, some Cubans of color expressed reticence to legally wed. After Norberta Rivas Viáñez, an Afro-Cuban, married her domestic partner Enrique in the early 1960s, she was embarrassed and refused to tell anyone. In an interview Norberta told historian Eugenia Meyer that she felt self-conscious that “two old folks” such as her and her partner had decided to legalize their union. She recalled, “Until we were [legally] married, we had never thought about doing it. We lived well like that, we went everywhere as a married couple

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<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Reeves, 391.

<sup>72</sup> Wettstein, 89.

<sup>73</sup> Benson, 174.

(*matrimonio*).”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Norberta was like many Cubans who classified their relationships in terms of personal loyalties, housing arrangements, and sexual ties rather than formal, government documents.<sup>75</sup> It is also important to note that Norberta’s hesitation to marry illustrated a tendency among Afro-Cubans, noted by Spence Benson, to distrust campaigns spearheaded by white leaders.<sup>76</sup>

The few official images featuring Afro-Cubans who formalized their unions provide an opportunity to analyze the racial composition of the campaign. In early 1960, a series of close-up photos appeared in a *Bohemia* news article about mass weddings.<sup>77</sup> It appears that the couples were selected to convey specific messages to the Cuban public. In one photo, the newspaper reporter captured a newly-married Afro-Cuban woman leaning against her much lighter companion (Image 6). The same interracial couple appears at the center of another image, which features several newlyweds providing their personal information to a Ministry of Justice representative (Image 7).<sup>78</sup> The caption of the first photograph reads: “We will now feel much better.”<sup>79</sup> While race was not explicitly mentioned in the article, the unnamed interracial couple conveyed important messages to both national and international audiences.

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<sup>74</sup> Norberta’s use of the term “matrimonio” to describe her extra-marital union illustrated the lack of linguistic differentiation given by Cubans to legal and extra-legal relationships. Quoted in Eugenia Meyer, *El futuro era nuestro: Ocho cubanas narran sus historias de vida* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007), 257; Mona Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution: Everyday Life in Socialist Cuba* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 56-57; Härkönen, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Therborn, 170-171; Härkönen, 5-6, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Benson, 51-52.

<sup>77</sup> Cabrera, 37.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

They supported the rhetoric of improved race relations under the revolution and demonstrated compliance with marital norms. The featured couple could also have been used to contrast Cuban marriage laws with those in the United States, where many states still banned interracial marriage and sex.<sup>80</sup> In any event, they illustrate a sentiment expressed by Fidel to a group of visiting African Americans the following month. He proclaimed, “In Cuba we are resolving problems that the United States has not been able to resolve, such as that of racial discrimination. Here everyone lives together without problems. You all have seen and will see that everyone is able to dance together.”<sup>81</sup>



Image 6: *Bohemia*, 24 January 1960, 37.

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<sup>80</sup> Stanley O. Gaines, Jr., “Anti-Miscegenation Laws,” in *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society*, vol. 1, ed. Jodi O’Brien (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 37.

<sup>81</sup> “En Alemania,” *Combate 13 de Marzo*, 12 February 1960, 6. Translated by and quoted in Benson, 98.



Image 7: *Bohemia*, 24 January 1960, 38.

The disconnect between revolutionary discourse and everyday life was also apparent in the (in)accessibility of legal matrimony for many Cubans; it was not as inclusive as policymakers and the media suggested. Fuentes suggests that individuals with more than one partner were prohibited from marrying, as it seems were same-sex couples and individuals younger than twenty-one.<sup>82</sup> According to Ramón Moline López, a former official in Las Villas who appears to have emigrated to Miami, Cubans who did not sympathize with the regime also experienced barriers to matrimony.<sup>83</sup> Moline López criticized the revolutionary government's involvement with the Civil Registry and civil nuptials, two ceremonies that had previously been the sole domain of provincial judges. He noted that prior to approving a marriage application, local judges were required to submit the form to three separate state agencies: the G2 secret service, the Urban Reform Commission, and the couple's Committee for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR), a neighborhood watch group.<sup>84</sup> Couples not

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<sup>82</sup> With parental permission, it seems that women and men as young as twelve and fourteen, respectively, could marry. John E. Cooney, "Best Things in Life Are...? Well, Nuptials Are in Cuba, Anyway." *Wall Street Journal*, 5 December 1974, 1; Fuentes, vol. 1, 312-314.

<sup>83</sup> Ramón Moline López, "La nueva ley matrimonial en Cuba," *Información Democrática* (Miami) 27 (April 1964): 11.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

deemed to be communists experienced delays and occasionally rejection. These changes, avowed Moline López, “strengthened the communist regime’s control over its citizens.”<sup>85</sup>

But revolutionary official did not classify all dissidents as irredeemable and therefore unqualified to marry. Indeed, the government often encouraged its prisoners to marry, viewing marriage as a sign of rehabilitation.<sup>86</sup> In 1967, photojournalist Lee Lockwood reported that twenty thousand Cuban men were in prison for political crimes, and that revolutionary leadership had established schools to educate and rehabilitate their female partners. Instructors lectured the women on the benefits of curlers, high heels, and formalized marriage. Because of this, according to Lockwood, many couples ultimately legalized their unions.<sup>87</sup> On a visit to Cuba several years before, novelist Warren Miller had passed by an Oriente jail that opened its doors once weekly to the wives and girlfriends of prisoners. A prison guard had explained to him that this policy had “already resulted in several marriages.”<sup>88</sup> He added, “The man is happy, the woman is happy... even apart from the matter of happiness, not to let the girlfriend visit would be less than civilized behavior.”<sup>89</sup> At the same time, supervisors at a juvenile rehabilitation facility outside of Havana sought to

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<sup>85</sup> Moline López, 10-11.

<sup>86</sup> “Cuba Fights Delinquency: Uses Modern Methods at ‘Juvenile Farms,’” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 June 1962, 24; Lee Lockwood, “A Report on Cuba’s 20,000 Political Prisoners: Newlyweds in a Cuban Prison,” *Chicago Tribune*, 9 April 1967, A1; Warren Miller, *90 Miles from Home* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1961), 169.

<sup>87</sup> Lee Lockwood, *Castro’s Cuba, Cuba’s Fidel: An American Journalist’s Inside Look at Today’s Cuba – in Text and Picture* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), 236; Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977), xviii; Lockwood, “A Report,” A1.

<sup>88</sup> Miller, *90 Miles*, 169.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

convert their female delinquents into proper revolutionaries. After learning that one teenager was to be married upon her release, they allowed her to work on her wedding dress while incarcerated.<sup>90</sup>

While not explicitly targeted by Operation Family, officers and other founding members of the Twenty-sixth of July Movement legalized their unions in peacetime.<sup>91</sup> Less than one month after Fulgencio Batista departed Cuba, Vilma Espín and Raúl Castro wed in a civil ceremony in Santiago.<sup>92</sup> Both had fought in the Sierra Maestra mountains; indeed, they were the royalty of a new era. *Life* magazine even did a one-page spread on the newlyweds, titling it “Raul Castro is Captured.”<sup>93</sup> The article featured a photo of Vilma in the countryside loading a weapon and another of her and Raúl on their wedding day. In the first image, Vilma appears tough and imposing. In the second, Vilma is “girlish and pretty in bridal array,” and the uniform-clad Raúl carries a .45 rifle and has a firm grasp on her elbow.<sup>94</sup>

The May 1959 wedding of Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Aleida March was less publicized but equally important to the revolutionary narrative. One week after divorcing Hilda Gadea, Che married the pregnant Aleida in a simple civil ceremony in his Havana office. She was dressed in a white department-store gown; he was attired in a crumpled

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<sup>90</sup> “Cuba Fights Delinquency,” 24.

<sup>91</sup> Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 169; Saenz Rovner, 125-126.

<sup>92</sup> Tom Gjelten, *Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba: The Biography of a Cause* (New York: Viking, 2008), 208-209.

<sup>93</sup> “Raúl Castro is Captured,” *Life*, 9 February 1959, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

uniform. There were three people in attendance, plus the notary and Che's bodyguards.<sup>95</sup>

While these two weddings differed in size and staging, both illustrated the importance of legal marriage to the revolutionary government. Fidel himself never remarried after his 1955 divorce from Mirta Díaz Balart, but according to historian Richard Gott, this was because Fidel claimed that he was married to the revolution.<sup>96</sup>

Operation Family lasted from 1959 to 1965, during which time both the ordinary and crude marriage rates increased.<sup>97</sup> However, most marriages occurred between people who were formalizing their common-law unions, not establishing new relationships. The year 1960 was particularly important, as revolutionary leadership officially introduced the campaign to the most rural areas of Cuba, witnessing a 78 percent increase in the rate of legalized common-law unions.<sup>98</sup> On August 27, 1960, the Operation made international headlines when 5,000 couples married in collective ceremonies across the island.<sup>99</sup> The campaign persisted in the midst of great domestic and international turmoil, but it experienced quantifiable setbacks following the 1961 U.S. invasion of the Bay of Pigs, domestic attacks by anti-revolutionary guerrillas, and the economic crisis that forced the

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<sup>95</sup> Robert Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 244-245; Gott, 169.

<sup>96</sup> Antonio Rafael de la Cova, *The Moncada Attack: Birth of the Cuban Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 349 n. 35; Gott, 169.

<sup>97</sup> The crude marriage rate is the number of marriages per 1,000 people, both those who had previously formed consensual unions and those who had not. The ordinary marriage rate is the number of marriages per 1,000 people who had not formerly lived in common law unions.

<sup>98</sup> Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Díaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: The Population Council, 1983), 62, 79.

<sup>99</sup> "Cuba Legalizes 5,000 Marriages," *Los Angeles Times*, 28 August 1960, C2; "5,000 Couples Wed in Cuba," *New York Times*, 28 August 1960, 22; "Contraen matrimonio hoy cinco mil parejas," *Revolución*, 27 August 1960, 1, 9; "5,000 matrimonios," 3; Dana, 43; Reeves, 391.

implementation of rationing in 1962. In 1965, the revolution experienced an ideological shift, following which individual behaviors faced increased scrutiny from government officials.<sup>100</sup> At this time, common-law couples again faced pressure to formalize their unions.<sup>101</sup>

Hundreds of Cuban couples celebrated Valentine's Day of 1965 by formalizing their relationships.<sup>102</sup> In Havana alone, 800 men and women gathered at the headquarters of the Confederation of Cuban Workers to collectively affirm their fidelity to each other and sign the state registry.<sup>103</sup> The simple rite included neither flowers nor refreshments. According to journalist Paul Hofmann, "[t]here were some tears and a few flashes of cameras, but the prevailing mood was one of sobriety."<sup>104</sup> As was typical of mass weddings, the Minister of Justice or a local official read articles 56 and 57 of the Civil Code, the couples responded "Sí" in unison, and they then lined up to sign the Civil Registry.<sup>105</sup> The Mexican serial *Política* reported that these unions were between partners who had long lived together in unofficial marriage. It added that government officials employed special measures to

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<sup>100</sup> Lillian Guerra writes that the period from 1965 to 1970 "marked a critical phase in the construction of a society in which scrutinizing attitudes and silencing dissent would become necessary in the fight against U.S. imperialism.... Reasons for this were twofold. First, individual attitudes, aesthetics, and creativity became a primary domain of interest for the state.... With the national economy approaching collapse, achieving greater production through strict labor discipline was no longer a matter of persuasion but an indispensable political imperative." Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 227-228.

<sup>101</sup> Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 1, 9.

<sup>102</sup> "Moral socialista," *Política: Quince días de México y del Mundo* 117 (1 March 1965): 30-31; Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 1, 9; Hofmann, "Cuba Hails Women," 14.

<sup>103</sup> "Moral socialista," 31; Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 1, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Hofmann, "A Cuban Valentine," 9.

<sup>105</sup> Although occasionally the judge read the Articles individually to each couple. Rubio Jáquez, 713-714; "Moral socialista," 31; Cabrera, 37; Dana, 42.

encourage the matrimony of couples with children.<sup>106</sup> In 1965, the ordinary marriage rate increased by only ten percent, whereas the rate of legalized, extra-legal unions increased by 230 percent.<sup>107</sup>

But why did couples consent to marry? What benefit did it have for them? The answers provided to visiting U.S. lawyer Nancy Reeves in 1960 reveal the motivations of some Cuban women. Two individuals proclaimed that they married because the revolutionary government had eliminated certain economic and bureaucratic restrictions.<sup>108</sup> Indeed, Law 797 of May 1960 allowed common-law couples to legalize their unions and register their children free of charge for the period of one year.<sup>109</sup> Another woman claimed that she wed her common-law partner in order to legitimize her children and guarantee them an inheritance. With this statement, the woman reproduced a point Minister of Justice Alfredo Yabur had made only hours before at her wedding ceremony, when he asserted that “the main thing is to give the child a legal home so that he will have a normal situation in society.”<sup>110</sup> Considering that most Cuban couples were not married, Yabur was certainly speaking of a new, revolutionary normalcy. This was reason enough for another newlywed who spoke to Reeves, who married because “Fidel says we should.”<sup>111</sup> Finally, the implementation of rationing in 1962 surely incentivized additional couples to marry, as

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<sup>106</sup> “Moral socialista,” 30-31.

<sup>107</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 59.

<sup>108</sup> Reeves, 391.

<sup>109</sup> Rubio Jaquez, 711; Dana, 42.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Reeves, 391.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

formalizing their families' size and shape was a viable and necessary economic strategy. The *libreta* (rationing card) was assigned to a household, not an individual, and switching from one *libreta* to another was difficult to do.<sup>112</sup>

The testimonies of ordinary Cubans and the stories of mass weddings should not obscure the limitations of Operation Family, as noted by demographers and anthropologists, who demonstrate that many common-law couples did not legalize their unions.<sup>113</sup> For example, German anthropologist Verena Martínez Alier lived in a small village at the base of the Sierra Maestra mountains from 1967 to 1968, and she observed that only five percent of couples were legally married. The rest lived *aplazados*, or in extra-legal unions.<sup>114</sup> According to her, the term *aplazarse* was used in eastern Cuba to indicate “free unions entered into with the intention of marrying at some later date.”<sup>115</sup> However, given that so many couple living as *aplazados* never intended to legalize their relationships, it seems more likely that Cubans used the term to indicate the establishment of a permanent union rather than the postponement of legal marriage. Due to Haiti's proximity to eastern Cuba, Martínez-Alier hypothesized that *aplazarse* originated from the Haitian Creole word *plasaj* (or *plaçage*).<sup>116</sup> The linguistic influence is likely, as the terms sound similar when

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<sup>112</sup> Alexis Baldacci, “A Veces No Hay Nada”: Food Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1970,” (Paper presented at the Meeting of the American Historical Association, Washington, D.C., January 2-5, 2014).

<sup>113</sup> Verena Stolcke, *Color, clase y matrimonio en Cuba en el siglo XIX* (Havana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 1968), 62; Hollerbach and Díaz-Briquets, 59; Martínez-Alier and Martínez Alier, *Cuba*, 57; Rosendahl, 56; Härkönen, 11.

<sup>114</sup> Verena published under both the last name of “Stolcke” and “Martínez-Alier.” Stolcke, 62; Martínez-Alier and Martínez-Alier, *Cuba*, 56-57.

<sup>115</sup> The term used in western Cuba is *arrimarse*. Ángel Antonio Moreno, *Testimonios de la Ciénaga* (Havana: Editora Política, 1985), 46; Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour*, 178-179 n. 7.

<sup>116</sup> Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour*, 178-179 n. 7.

pronounced and have equivalent meanings. While there are different types of *plasaj*, the word “contains a sense of permanency—it is not a superficial relationship because there is an exchange of support similar to a marriage.”<sup>117</sup> Haitians traveling west to Cuba would have found their system of *plasaj* very similar to that of *aplazados* in eastern Cuba.

In 1966, Operation Family ceased to exist, as revolutionary leadership seems to have decided that exporting weddings to the masses was no longer sufficient. Rather, state media began to promote the idea that couples of all socioeconomic levels deserved the glitz and pageantry associated with upper-class, non-collective marriage ceremonies.<sup>118</sup> Government leaders converted former mansions into Wedding Palaces, granted additional purchasing power to newlyweds, and minimized the paperwork required to marry.<sup>119</sup> Unlike Operation Family, which sought to convince the rural poor and Cubans of color that they should wed, the new emphasis on glamour and ease targeted a population that had become increasingly accustomed to standing in line, often for basic and unavailable products.<sup>120</sup> This change also resulted in a high rate of ordinary marriages between 1968 and 1971, whereas under Operation Family, the increase in marriages primarily reflected the legalization of common-law unions.<sup>121</sup> Finally, the new state project created increased opportunities for Cubans to

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<sup>117</sup> Cécile Accilien, *Rethinking Marriage in Francophone African and Caribbean Literature* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 77.

<sup>118</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *In Cuba*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (New York: New Directions, 1974), 85.

<sup>119</sup> Fenton Wheeler, “Free Weddings in Cuban Palace,” *The Park City Daily News* (Bowling Green, Kentucky), 12 June 1968, 2; Wettstein, 89; Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7.

<sup>120</sup> For a humorous interpretation of the phenomenon of standing in line, see “Parqueando la cigüeña,” *Pa’lante*, 14 November 1963, 4-6.

<sup>121</sup> Catasús Cervera, 56; Hollerbach and Díaz Briquets, 62, 79.

cooperate—or alternatively, for them to resist, ignore, and co-opt state policies regarding marriage.

### Beer, Cake, and Weddings Palaces

In July 1966, the Cuban government sought to remedy the absence of nuptial accommodations by opening a Wedding Palace (Palacio de los Matrimonios) in Havana.<sup>122</sup> Within two years, other provinces had their own Wedding Palaces, including Pinar del Rio, Las Villas, and Camagüey.<sup>123</sup> Nueva Gerona on the Isla de Pinos (now Isla de Juventud) was also reported to have its own Palace.<sup>124</sup> The Havana Palace was housed in the former headquarters of the Casino Español, a social club for elite Spaniards living in Cuba, and it offered an opulent setting for Cubans of all social classes to marry.<sup>125</sup> Journalist Hector Hernández declared that Wedding Palaces “provide the bride and groom with all the elements of beauty, brilliance, and tradition characteristic of the ceremony, elements that were previously the privilege of elites.”<sup>126</sup> With this statement, Hernández expanded upon the discourse that the revolution sought to reclaim legal marriages from the bourgeois domain. He asserted that Cubans of all classes not only deserved to marry, but to marry in

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<sup>122</sup> “Cuban Marriage Palace is in the Moscow Style,” *New York Times*, 24 July 1966, 45; “‘Wedding Palace’ Opened in Havana,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 July 1966, 10; Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7; Wettstein, 89.

<sup>123</sup> Wheeler, “Free Weddings,” 2; Wettstein, 89.

<sup>124</sup> Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7; Wettstein, 89.

<sup>125</sup> Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2005), 124; J.C. Prince, *Souvenir of the Grand Hotel Telegrafo, Havana, Cuba* (Havana: Gonzalez & Giralt, 1893), 12; Elizabeth Sutherland, *The Youngest Revolution: A Personal Report on Cuba* (New York: The Dial Press, Inc., 1969), 176; Sutherland, 176; Wettstein, 89; Wheeler, “Free Weddings,” 2.

<sup>126</sup> Hernández “Los matrimonios,” 7.

style. A Cuban radio broadcast overheard in Miami also associated the Wedding Palace with greater class equality. When announcing the inauguration of the Havana Wedding Palace, the broadcaster noted that the “Socialist weddings” performed at the Palace would “eradicate old prejudices in capitalistic marriage ceremonies.”<sup>127</sup>

The Havana Wedding Palace was so opulent that visitors to the island often commented on its splendor and the activities it housed. They described the marble staircase with its red carpeting, the palatial halls named by the color of paint on their walls, and the crystal chandeliers that hung from the ceiling. Sculptures of cherubs, stained glass windows, and paintings of lovers filled the hallways.<sup>128</sup> U.S. journalist Fenton Wheeler noted, “Palace is no misnomer for the elegant building on the Prado in Old Havana.”<sup>129</sup> John E. Cooney, a staff reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, added that the plush rooms “provide a highly ornate touch of the class that has vanished from Cuba.”<sup>130</sup> The rooms ranged in size from the expansive, 40-meter-long Gold Room to the more intimate Pink Room. Personal preference, not money, dictated where the ceremony took place. Director Patria Olano informed Argentine journalist Enrique Raab, “All the comrades are equal for us. Yes, there are those who prefer luxury, ostentation, pomp, and they go to the Gold Room. There are others, more

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in “‘Wedding Palace’ Opened in Havana” 10.

<sup>128</sup> Enrique Raab, *Cuba: Vida cotidiana y revolución* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Flor, 1974), 54; John Fenton Wheeler, *Last Man Out: Memoirs of the Last U.S. Reporter Castro Kicked out of Cuba during the Cold War* (Spokane, WA: Demers Books, 2008), 108; Sutherland, 176; Wheeler, “Free Weddings,” 2; Cooney, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Wheeler, “Free Weddings,” 2.

<sup>130</sup> Cooney, 1.

romantic...who prefer the Pink. And the Green also has its fans, especially with the more mature couples.”<sup>131</sup>

It is likely that the Cuban Wedding Palaces were inspired by the popular wedding palaces in the Soviet Union.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, a *New York Times* article made this connection in 1966 when it described the newly inaugurated Havana institution as a “Soviet-Style Palace for Marriage.”<sup>133</sup> In 1959, the first Soviet Wedding Palace opened its doors in Leningrad. It was housed in the former home of a Russian nobleman and was just as opulent as its later Cuban equivalent.<sup>134</sup> By 1972, 600 Wedding Palaces existed across the Soviet Union, reportedly erected in response to requests by Soviet youth to marry with greater ceremony and surrounded by a wider group of friends and family than had been allowed in the small government office.<sup>135</sup> The Havana Wedding Palace was similarly popular. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as few as twelve couples would typically marry on a weekday, and as many as fifty would pass through the Havana Palace doors on the weekend. Valentine’s Day and Mothers’ Day were especially popular days on which to have a Palace wedding, and extra lawyers were recruited to accommodate the 100 couples scheduled to wed at those times.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Raab, 54

<sup>132</sup> Sutherland, 176.

<sup>133</sup> “Cuban Marriage Palace,” 45.

<sup>134</sup> “Leningrad Opens Wedding Palace on Banks of River,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 October 1959, 33.

<sup>135</sup> Stephen Lovell, *The Soviet Union: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 33; A.G. Kharchev, “Marriage Motivation Studies,” in *Town, Country, and People: Studies in Soviet Society*, vol. 2, ed. G.V. Osipov (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969), 85 n. 1.

<sup>136</sup> Raab, 52; Cooney, 27; Wheeler, “Free Weddings,” 2; Wheeler, *Last Man Out*, 108.

The ceremony itself was brief, between ten and twenty minutes, but the preparation time was extensive.<sup>137</sup> Demand to marry in the Havana Wedding Palace was so high that some couples had to wait in line for days to obtain an appointment. In January 1974, for example, Deborah Tuñas waited outside the Havana Palace for a week in order to qualify for wedding slot. In the end, she was disappointed to receive an appointment for seven o'clock in the evening.<sup>138</sup> One month prior to the wedding, Deborah and her beau were required to meet with Director Olano in order to affirm their desire to marry and to provide the first of two required signatures.<sup>139</sup>

Not only did the number of Wedding Palaces increase, so too did laws aimed at decreasing the cost and paperwork required to marry.<sup>140</sup> Passed in October 1967, Law 1215 (followed by Resolution 169) reduced the marriage paperwork to a single form. Depending on where the couple declared their intention to marry, they only needed to have a marriage certificate or a sworn statement.<sup>141</sup> No longer were the fiancés required to present their certificates of birth and civil status prior to the ceremony.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, this law changed the requirement that women wait 301 days to remarry. As of December 8, 1967, in order to

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with Patria Olano Navarete by author, 23 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Wheeler, "Free Weddings," 2.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Deborah Tuñas (pseudonym) by author, 16 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Interview with Dulce Zumbado (pseudonym) by author, 19 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>139</sup> Patria Olano Navarete, interview, 23 December 2011; Raab, 52.

<sup>140</sup> Wheeler, "Free Weddings," 2; Hernández, "Los matrimonios," 7; Wettstein, 89.

<sup>141</sup> Hernández, "Los matrimonios," 7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

re-marry, women merely had to show proof that they were not pregnant.<sup>143</sup> Law 1230, also passed in 1967, reduced the amount of tax charged for a legal wedding.<sup>144</sup> A Cuban radio announcer emphasized the facility of legal unions: “That’s all,” declared a Havana radio announcer, “you enter engaged and in a few minutes you leave ‘just married.’”<sup>145</sup> Previously, common-law couples were able to marry free of charge, but other individuals had to pay nearly fourteen dollars.<sup>146</sup>

But Wedding Palaces and laws alone did not account for the nearly 60 percent increase in the crude marriage rate between 1967 and 1968.<sup>147</sup> Sweeping domestic reforms, new emigration policies, and changing social practices all influenced this surge in nuptials. One incentive was prioritized access to certain goods. One month prior to their wedding, after the couple provided the first of two required sets of signatures, they received permission to purchase products at specialty stores available exclusively to engaged couples.<sup>148</sup> While most Cubans could only buy goods with a ration card or on the black market, engaged couples qualified for an extra ration card, which they received from the Wedding Palace or another authorized agency. With this *papelito*, they could purchase or rent products that they

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<sup>143</sup> “Sólo se necesitará hacer declaración bajo juramento para contraer matrimonio,” *Granma*, 7 December 1967, 5.

<sup>144</sup> Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Lowry Nelson, “Cuban Population Estimates, 1953-1970,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* 12, no. 3 (July 1970): 399.

<sup>146</sup> Hernández, “Los matrimonios,” 7; Rubio Jáquez, 711; Dana, 42.

<sup>147</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz Briquets, 62, 79.

<sup>148</sup> Cooney, 1; “Assembly-Line Weddings,” E21; Raab, 52-53; Dulce Zumbado, interview, 19 December 2011; Deborah Tuñas, interview, 16 December 2011.

needed for the wedding or their home.<sup>149</sup> These included sheets, duvet covers, towels, underwear, shampoo, and beer.<sup>150</sup> It is for this reason that reporter Cooney referred to the Wedding Palace as an “authorization agency.”<sup>151</sup> When Dulce Zumbado wed in 1966, she relied on her extra purchasing power as a fiancé to buy shoes for the wedding.<sup>152</sup> Dulce made her wedding dress from fabric she already owned, but by the 1970s, it was common to rent wedding gowns.<sup>153</sup> Deborah Tuñas rented a short, white dress in 1974 from the Fin de Siglo shop in Central Havana.

Although money was more plentiful than goods in this era, not even a *papelito* ensured a bride her wedding gown. While the government attempted to reward marriage and provide engaged couples with buying privileges, the promised products were not always available to them. Privation and empty store shelves were an inevitable part of Cuban life during these years. Couples only had a one- to two-day period to shop at the *tienda de novios*, and if the items they qualified for were not in stock on those days, the couples had to do without.<sup>154</sup> Some brides were unable to purchase goods at the store due to a complete lack

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<sup>149</sup> “Assembly-Line Weddings in Cuba,” *The Washington Post*, 15 March 1972, E21; Raab, 52-53; Cooney 1. A discussion of these “special state shops” in the 1980s and 1990s appears in Härkönen, 9.

<sup>150</sup> Deborah Tuñas, interview, 16 December 2011.

<sup>151</sup> Cooney, 1.

<sup>152</sup> Dulce Zumbado, interview, 19 December 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Cooney, 1; Deborah Tuñas, interview, 16 December 2011.

<sup>154</sup> Deborah Tuñas, interview, 16 December 2011.

of funds. In 1965, Teresa Noble was married in a “simple” ceremony in her Matanzas home. But she later confessed that she had no money with which to buy or rent a gown.<sup>155</sup>

For some Cubans, the increased access to state-subsidized material goods appears to have converted marriage into an economic transaction.<sup>156</sup> Until the 1990s, Heidi Härkönen notes, there was no limit on the number of times an individual could marry.<sup>157</sup> Consequently, men and women might agree to marry one another in order to gain access to otherwise unavailable goods. Even today, it is rare to find a Cuban unwilling to discuss the persistent phenomenon of marrying for “the right to buy” (*el derecho de comprar*) beer and cake. “For the majority of couples, the most exciting part of the wedding is buying the otherwise rationed goods allowed to them,” noted one U.S. journalist, adding that “many young Cubans were ready to get married for the sake of these special concessions.”<sup>158</sup> In her 1970 novel, Marlene Moleon describes how a group of twelve friends each agreed to marry a different woman every year, thereby guaranteeing themselves and their friends twelve annual opportunities to imbibe. Several months after each man married, he and his wife divorced so that the man could marry once again.<sup>159</sup> This is, of course, fictitious, yet it describes a situation that appears to have some basis in reality.

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<sup>155</sup> Interview with Teresa Noble (pseudonym) by author, 18 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>156</sup> Härkönen documents this trend in later decades, 9; Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio*, 67; “Assembly-Line Weddings in Cuba,” E21.

<sup>157</sup> Härkönen, 9.

<sup>158</sup> “Assembly-Line Weddings in Cuba,” E21.

<sup>159</sup> Moleon, 181.

It is impossible to determine exactly how many Cubans married in order to have the “right to buy” otherwise unavailable products. But widespread acceptance of marriage-for-profit as part of everyday life exemplified the degree to which perspectives on matrimony changed following the introduction of the *papelito*.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, one participant in a 1970 survey opined that divorce rates were high “because many people marry only to obtain [the items] provided by the [Marriage] Palace.”<sup>161</sup> While some Cubans likely married for economic reasons prior to this year, the radical policy changes combined with increased immigration would have highlighted the value of matrimony-for-profit.

For an unknown number of Cubans, weddings were seemingly a way to improve their economic situation and make use of government regulations. Popular discourse identified beer and cake as two popular reasons for marrying.<sup>162</sup> Considering that Cuban beer production decreased by over fifty percent between 1967 and 1969, access to alcohol was indeed a luxury at this time.<sup>163</sup> Couples also appear to have married in order to avoid regulations on the sale of personal items such as cars. Roberto Chaviano noted that when it was illegal to sell an automobile and the only way to transfer possession was through a divorce, Cubans sought out potential buyers of the opposite sex who were willing to marry and divorce for a car.<sup>164</sup> But money was not the only reason that seems to have motivated Cubans to legalize their unions. A desire to publicly celebrate outlawed religious ceremonies

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<sup>160</sup> “Assembly-Line Weddings in Cuba,” E21; Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio*, 67.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted in Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio*, 67.

<sup>162</sup> Guillermo Franco Salazar discusses this as a more recent practice in *Memorias Cubanas* (Sevilla: Ediciones Espuela de Plata, 2004), 165.

<sup>163</sup> Domínguez, 414.

<sup>164</sup> Roberto Chaviano, interview, 13 December 2011.

also motivated couples to marry. After Fidel prohibited Cubans from celebrating Christmas in 1969, Pedro Gómez recalled, individuals married on Christmas Eve in order to have an excuse to celebrate the outlawed holiday.<sup>165</sup>

Just as the marriage rate increased throughout the 1960s, so too did the divorce rate.<sup>166</sup> Between 1959 and 1968, the divorce rate nearly quadrupled. In 1971, divorces had again grown by almost eighty percent, topping out at 3.2 divorces per 1,000 people.<sup>167</sup> One Cuban took note of this trend and commented, “The most interesting question in Cuba today is the new relationship of men and women.... Imagine, all my married friends from 1960 have gotten divorced since then.”<sup>168</sup> Concerned and intrigued by this phenomenon, four sociologists at the University of Havana conducted a 1970 study of divorced residents in Central Havana. They sought to determine the reasons why so many marriages were ending. The researchers cited various reasons why “the rupture of familial ties” had reached new heights in Cuba, including the inability of couples to establish independent households and women’s increasing involvement outside of the home.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Cubans typically celebrate the holiday on Christmas Eve rather than Christmas day. “Natividades cubanas,” *INRA* 12 (December 1961): 106; Pedro Gómez, interview, 23 December 2011; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 306.

<sup>166</sup> Lowry Nelson, *Cuba: The Measure of a Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 154; Mario López Cepero and Ernesto Chávez Álvarez, eds., *Características de la divorcialidad cubana* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1976), 44; Hollerbach and Díaz Briquets, 62, 79; Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio*, 68.

<sup>167</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz Briquets, 62, 79.

<sup>168</sup> Quoted in Sutherland, 171.

<sup>169</sup> Hernández et al., *Estudio sobre el divorcio*, 49-50.

The sociologists ultimately concluded that marriages were ending due to the inevitable clash between traditional norms and revolutionary practices. The characteristics of a traditional Cuban family, they asserted, “belong to a social system that is out-of-date and incompatible with contemporary revolutionary society; this inevitably leads to divorce.” In conjunction with this ideological shift, they noted that other factors also led to divorce, including increased access to housing, marriage for profit, and changing youth culture. A large portion of respondents to the survey blamed the divorce rate on the greater social liberties of Cuban youth.<sup>170</sup> But this divorce trend only continued until 1971, after which divorces increased at a much lower rate. It then remained more or less consistent throughout the last half of the 1970s.<sup>171</sup>

By the early 1970s, sexual norms and ideologies were changing. There were small fluctuations in marriage and divorce rates following 1971, but there were no changes comparable to those of the 1960s.<sup>172</sup> Abortions were increasingly available, as was birth control.<sup>173</sup> The government had dismantled the work camps, known as Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP), where vagrants, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals had been imprisoned and “reeducated.”<sup>174</sup> Indeed, there was some relaxation in the parameters of

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 67, 69-72.

<sup>171</sup> Hollerbach and Díaz Briquets, 62, 79.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 62, 79.

<sup>173</sup> Paula E. Hollerbach, *Recent Trends in Fertility, Abortion, and Contraception in Cuba* (New York: The Population Council, 1980), 2; Andaya, 176.

<sup>174</sup> “History as Prologue: Cuba Before the Special Period,” in *Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Cuba Reader*, eds. Philip Brenner, et al. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 11.

acceptable sexual comportment.<sup>175</sup> Increasing numbers of teenagers experimented with sex at newly-established rural boarding schools, named *Escuelas Secundarias Básicas en el Campo* (ESBEC).<sup>176</sup> Scholars Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich assert that “Cuba's need to relate to progressive political forces emerging in the United States and Western Europe also modified the official rhetoric.”<sup>177</sup> While their statement referred specifically to homosexuality, it could also be applied to Cuban sexuality more broadly.

Throughout the 1960s, legal matrimony was closely tied to government attempts to define stability and formulate revolutionary citizenship. But by defining socialist citizenship in terms of legalized marriage, the new government replicated the earlier efforts of republican officials who had promoted formal marriage as a democratic ideal. While revolutionary leaders sought to break with Cuba's neocolonial past and purify what they perceived as adulterated, their promotion of legal marriage illustrated the persistent desire for order, specifically gendered order. By subscribing to this discourse and legalizing their unions, Cubans both reinforced the state and demonstrated revolutionary fidelity. Individuals who refused to formalize their unions risked being seen as doing the opposite, blurring the definition of *matrimonio* and rejecting constructed notions of legitimacy.

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<sup>175</sup> Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, “Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Male Experiences, Part I,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984):692.

<sup>176</sup> Monika Krause-Fuchs, *¿Machismo? No, gracias, Cuba: sexualidad en la revolución* (San Clemente, Spain: Ediciones Idea, 2007), 96-105; Andaya, 177.

<sup>177</sup> Arguelles and Rich, 692.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “Count, Capture, and Reeducate”: The Campaign to Rehabilitate Female Sex Workers, 1959-1966

In 1964, Cuba’s fledgling movie industry collaborated with Soviet filmmakers to create *Soy Cuba (I Am Cuba)*, a dizzying, expressionist tale of four Cubans whose problems were ameliorated by the revolution. One vignette features María, a young prostitute abandoned by her boyfriend after he finds her entertaining a U.S. businessman.<sup>1</sup> The film insinuates that sex workers, once victims of U.S. imperialism and capitalism, were healed and reeducated by the government campaign against prostitution.<sup>2</sup> However, *Soy Cuba* received a cool reception on the island. Moviegoers and critics rejected the dream-like aesthetic of the film and demanded more “realistic” depictions of their revolution.<sup>3</sup> This perceived disconnect between cinematic representation and revolutionary reality parallels the disjuncture between official discourse on prostitution and the complex experiences of female sex workers in early revolutionary Cuba.

The Cuban government and the historical narrative both describe the campaign to rehabilitate prostitutes as one of the great successes of the revolution, a monolithic movement

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<sup>1</sup> Following the trend of recent publications, I use the terms “prostitution” and “prostitute” interchangeably with “sex work” and “sex worker.”

<sup>2</sup> *Soy Cuba*, directed by Mikhail Kalatozov (1964; Cuba and the USSR: Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficas (ICAIC) and Mosfilm), DVD.

<sup>3</sup> Juan Antonio García Borrero, *Cine cubano de los sesenta: mito y realidad* (Madrid: Ocho y Medio, 2007), 108-109; Rob Stone, “Mother Lands, Sister Nations: The Epic, Poetic, Propaganda Films of Cuba and the Basque Country,” in *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Film*, eds. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), 65-72, 68.

that supposedly originated at the top and occurred uniformly across the island.<sup>4</sup> But this story obscures the lived experiences of activists and sex workers who participated in a campaign that was complex, diverse, and conflictive. The campaign officially lasted from 1959 to 1965, during which time officials in the Department of Social Ills (Departamento de Lacras Sociales) at the Ministry of the Interior (MININT) decided policies, as did local activists and low-level government representatives from the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), and other state organizations. Activists in nearly all of the country's six provinces organized to combat sex work; while at least one of these groups initiated reeducation (*reeducción*) without official approval and another ignored a new law, the actions of the low-level and regional reformers ultimately complemented the rehabilitation efforts of high-level government agents.

This chapter examines the revolution's initial attempts to rehabilitate the island's thirty to forty thousand sex workers, paying special attention to the rhetoric and strategies deployed by activists outside of the capital city of Havana.<sup>5</sup> It argues that low-level reformers helped initiate the anti-prostitution campaign, operating freely and without state interference until 1962, when high-level officials assumed greater control over the campaign and penal work farms became a tool of reform. During the first six years of the revolution, the government transitioned from viewing sex workers as victims to categorizing them as counterrevolutionaries. Key to this analysis are the methods used by reformers to identify

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<sup>4</sup> United States Information Agency, *Cuba Annual Report: 1989* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1992), 215; Noelle M. Stout, "Feminists, Queers, and Critics: Debating the Cuban Sex Trade," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40, no. 4 (2008): 721-742, 728; Rosa del Olmo, "The Cuban Revolution and the Struggle Against Prostitution," trans. Daniel Sudran, *Crime and Social Justice*, vol. 12 (1979): 34-40, 38.

<sup>5</sup> This estimate is given by Armando Torres, former Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Social Defense, in Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 279 n. 7.

prostitutes (*prostitutas*). Rather than seeking confirmation that women exchanged sex for money, activists identified sex workers according to their attire, behavior, race, place of residence, and sexual partners. Consequently, I also demonstrate that the revolutionary campaign adopted a broad and flexible definition of *prostituta*, one that allowed government representatives to target for reform the behavior of all Cuban women, not merely that of women who identified as sex workers.<sup>6</sup>

Despite significant cultural, political and social upheavals following the revolutionary take-over in 1959, the literature on prostitution in Cuba has focused on the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, specifically the sex workers (*jineteras*) who became increasingly visible in the economic crisis that proceeded the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>7</sup> Some scholars have studied the late colonial and early republican eras, analyzing the role of prostitution in the construction of national identity and its intermittent regulation by both colonial and republican authorities.<sup>8</sup> However, few have examined the early revolutionary, nation-wide movement to reform the nation's sex workers.<sup>9</sup> In this chapter, I highlight the anti-

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<sup>6</sup> Carrie Hamilton notes that lacking from scholarship on Cuban sexuality is "most notably historical research on the pre-revolutionary and early revolutionary periods," specifically "detailed research on the revolutionary campaign to eradicate prostitution and rehabilitate prostitutes in the early 1960s," in *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba: Passion, Politics, and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 234-235.

<sup>7</sup> In the 1990s, Cubans began to refer to female sex workers as *jineteras*. Ana Alcázar Campos, "'Jineterismo': ¿Turismo sexual o uso táctico del sexo?" *Revista de Antropología Social* 19 (2010): 307-336; Amir Valle, *Jineteras* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana, 2006); Amalia L. Cabezas, "Between Love and Money: Sex, Tourism, and Citizenship in Cuba and the Dominican Republic," *Signs* 29, no. 4 (2004): 987-1015; Rosa Miriam Elizalde, *Flores desechables ¿prostitución en Cuba?* (Havana: Ediciones Abril, 1996); Stout, 721-742.

<sup>8</sup> Tiffany A. Sippial, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic, 1840-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Mayra Beers, "Murder in San Isidro: Crime and Culture during the Second Cuban Republic," *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 97-129.

<sup>9</sup> The few exceptions include Lillian Guerra's exploration of Artemisa reformers, Alyssa García's brief discussion of FMC involvement in the campaign, and Abel Sierra Madero's analysis of evolving state discourse on sexuality. Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and*

prostitution strategies of government leaders, as well as low-level representatives, who helped initiate the revolutionary campaign.<sup>10</sup>

### Pre-revolutionary Prostitution

Prostitution had long existed in Cuba, and revolutionary officials were not the first to regulate it. Reform efforts persisted throughout the U.S. occupation of Cuba (1898-1902), yet prostitution was never criminalized, nor were these changes successful, as attempts at regulation continued during the republican era (1902-1958).<sup>11</sup> The reformist strategies of Government Secretary Rogelio Zayas Bazán were particularly memorable, as he shut down Havana's many bars and brothels, prosecuted prostitutes, and erected a prison on the Isle of Pines in 1925.<sup>12</sup> While these numerous campaigns were not effective at eliminating sex work or curtailing the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), they inhabited popular memory and reinforced the notion that no government would ever successfully eradicate prostitution.<sup>13</sup> When interviewed by historian Tomás Fernández Robaina, Havana sex worker Violeta recalled that after the revolution, prostitutes "yelled that it was monstrous that

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*Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 256-289; Alyssa García, "Continuous Moral Economies: The State Regulation of Bodies and Sex Work in Cuba," *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 171-196, 176-178; Abel Sierra Madero, "Travestismo de Estado: Los discursos de la diversidad y las identidades trans en la Cuba postsocialista," (Paper presented at the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., May 30 – 1 June 1, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> This study finds inspiration in the work of Guerra who demonstrates that regional FMC activists in the town of Artemisa became unintended dissidents when they sought to rehabilitate sex workers after the campaign officially ended and Fidel Castro declared the island cleansed of prostitution in 1966. Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 287-288.

<sup>11</sup> Sippial's recent publication reveals the long history of prostitution reform in colonial and republican Cuba; Beers, 112-114.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 573-574; del Olmo, 34-40.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Historias de mujeres públicas* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 110.

they wanted to eliminate the oldest profession on earth, that with that government policy of wanting to change everything, the Americans would be upset, and we would die of hunger if they did not buy our sugar.”<sup>14</sup>

Sex work constituted a part of the pre-revolutionary Cuban landscape, assuming multiple forms and flowering in the midst of other perceived social ills. By the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of tourists traveled to Cuba each year, enjoying easy access to alcohol, drugs, gambling, and sex.<sup>15</sup> While these visitors mostly stayed in or around Havana, U.S. military personnel sustained the lust-fueled economies of Guantánamo and Caimanera, cities in eastern Oriente province located outside of the Guantánamo Bay naval base.<sup>16</sup> But it was Cuban men who served as the primary clientele of the island’s prostitutes.<sup>17</sup> They bought the services of male and female sex workers who labored throughout the country, often in red-light districts (*zonas de tolerancia*) where their practices were most tolerated.<sup>18</sup> Gambling,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Also, the Castro government routinely referenced the interrupted reform efforts of republican leaders, linking these failures to continued U.S. intervention.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 52.

<sup>16</sup> Jana K. Lipman, *Guantánamo: A Working-Class History Between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 105-110.

<sup>17</sup> Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 40; Carrie Hamilton, “Intervention: Public Women and Public History: Revolution, Prostitution, and Testimony in Cuba,” *Rethinking History* 15, no. 2 (2011): 175-187, 182; Eduardo Sáenz Rovner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling, and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 176.

<sup>18</sup> Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 33-36; Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, *Guantánamo Bay* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1977), 77; Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), *Programa a la atención a la problemática de la prostitución*, Government publication, October 1993, 23.

drugs, and violence surrounded these men and women as they worked, some in better conditions than others.<sup>19</sup>

Poverty-stricken individuals often migrated to cities in order to work as maids, cooks, bartenders, nannies, and sex workers.<sup>20</sup> According to former prostitutes, some were the victims of sex trafficking, forced into prostitution against their wishes.<sup>21</sup> One such woman was Herminia, who fled Camagüey to find work as a maid in Havana. In an interview with Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, Herminia lamented that she realized too late that she had been deceived and forced into prostitution.<sup>22</sup> Herminia and others reconciled themselves to sex work, too ashamed by their own experiences or lacking the money to return to their families.<sup>23</sup> Other prostitutes reported that they continued to practice sex work because it paid far better than other jobs available to them.<sup>24</sup> Black and mixed-race (*mulata*) women encountered even more obstacles in the search for paid labor.<sup>25</sup> When interviewed by French journalist Victor Franco, an Afro-Cuban security guard explained sex work in terms of race. According to him, a “whore” (*puta*) was “a girl who says ‘I love you’ to a white man for a few pesos, even if it’s not true. What does he think, this white man who gives her two or three pesos and sometimes a pack of Camel [cigarettes]? He thinks: For two or three pesos, all black women

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<sup>19</sup> Lipman, 109-110; Fernández Robaina, 19-24, 57-58; Cruz Díaz, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 303-304; Lipman, 110; Cruz Díaz, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Estrella Marina Viñelas, *Cuban Madam: The Shocking Autobiography of the Woman who Ruled Castro’s White Slave Ring* (New York: Paperback Library, 1969), 20-32; Cruz Díaz, 76-77, 88-89; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 280.

<sup>22</sup> Cruz Díaz, 88-89.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 86, 89, 94; Viñelas, 44-45, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 280.

<sup>25</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 306-307.

will lie down, spread their legs, and say I love you.”<sup>26</sup> Not only did women of color often occupy the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder, the color of their skin marked them as sexually available to whites.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the women who became sex workers were of rural origin. While Havana and Guantánamo had greater access to tourist dollars, the people of rural Cuba had limited access to health care, education, and food.<sup>28</sup> Lieutenant Ferrer told Mexican ethnographer Laurette Séjourné that, for these reasons, most Cuban sex workers were from the countryside.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the decision to become a prostitute was made within an economic and cultural milieu that did not favor women, and this “choice” was mitigated by factors outside of the women’s control.

Pre-revolutionary prostitutes experienced varying work conditions and different types of clients. Indeed, there was no universal, sex-worker experience. Prostitutes and reformers recalled that the accepted social hierarchy for female prostitutes classified the least mobile as the most respectable.<sup>30</sup> Women who worked in brothels and split their earnings with a madam (*matrona*) were ranked highest, followed by self-employed women who rented their rooms by the month. Of lower status were the prostitutes who doubled as waitresses or dancers in local bars, cabarets, and strip clubs (*academias de baile*). But it seems that none

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Victor Franco, *La revolución sensual*, trans. Marta Valentina Gómez de Muñoz (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Pomaire, 1962), 100.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Thomas, *Cuban Zarzuela: Performing Race and Gender on Havana’s Lyric Stage* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 42; Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 307.

<sup>28</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 301-303.

<sup>29</sup> Laurette Séjourné, with Tatiana Coll, *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980), 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

of these women experienced as much disdain and disregard as the streetwalkers (*fleteras*). Not only did *fleteras* have sex in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, they also had to worry about accidentally propositioning an off-duty police officer.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike their female counterparts, male prostitutes rarely worked out of brothels. The few male-only houses that existed in Caimanera and Havana were the exception. Men were more likely to find clients in movie theaters, bars, and other local cruising areas. However, the same-sex clients of male sex workers did not always identify as homosexuals; the distinction between active and passive partners allowed certain men to retain their sense of masculinity and identity as “real” men. Indeed, some individuals were just as likely to pay for sex with men as they were for sex with women. Herminia, the sex worker who became a madam, pejoratively noted that in Caimanera there were “faggots (*maricones*) who worked just like the women. They wore dresses and lingerie, applied make-up, and some wore wigs. The Americans went with the men as if they were women. Exactly the same!”<sup>32</sup> But while clients did not always distinguish between male and female prostitutes, the revolutionary government certainly did. The campaign to rehabilitate and reeducate sex workers was exclusively aimed at women.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Randall, *Cuban Women Now: Interviews with Cuban Women* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1974), 251; Fernández Robaina, 23-26; Viñelas, 49.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Cruz Díaz, 101.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 77; Lumsden, 32, 34.

## Redefining Sex Workers

In practice, revolutionary activists identified women as prostitutes if they appeared to be sexually available.<sup>34</sup> Because the perception of availability mattered more than sexual acts, revolutionary representatives did not seek confirmation that money was exchanged for sex. There was nothing inevitable or definite about this category; indeed, it challenged the definitions of sex work assumed by the prostitutes themselves. For example, elite sex workers (*cortesanas*) felt no kinship with street-walkers, and reformers exerted considerable effort to convince them that their identity was the same.<sup>35</sup> FMC member Olga Ferrer later informed Séjourné, “For me, the classes [of sex workers] that the women established did not really exist, as all of them were the same; they all performed the same services.”<sup>36</sup>

But government representatives did not merely modify pre-existing definitions of sex workers; they also broadened the term. Women laboring or living in red-light districts fell into this category; according to former secret-service member Andrés Alfaya Torrado (who wrote under the pseudonym Juan Vivés), so too did women who slept with foreign men.<sup>37</sup> Former madam Estrella Marina Viñelas recalled in her memoir that females walking unescorted down city streets also occasionally risked being viewed as sex workers.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, early revolutionary activists did not conceive of prostitution as an occupation or an identity; rather, they defined sex work as a pathology of imperialism, one marked for extinction in the

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<sup>34</sup> Juan Vivés (pseud.), *Los amos de Cuba*, trans. Zoraida Valcárcel (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editores, 1982), 238; FMC, 17-19, 22, 30; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7; Séjourné, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Séjourné, 39, 166; Fernández Robaina, 24-26.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Séjourné, 39.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 38; Vivés, 238; FMC, 17-19, 22, 30; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Viñelas, 145-146.

new era.<sup>39</sup> But by identifying prostitutes by perceived sexual availability rather than wages, government representatives demonstrated that an unwillingness to abide by gender norms could also be construed as opposition to the revolution. Reformers believed that eliminating prostitution was only possible by changing the environment, culture, and the mentality of women they identified as sex workers, and this was initiated through intensive rehabilitation.<sup>40</sup>

While anti-prostitution activists made no reference to race in their quest to restructure Cuban forms of intimacy, they adopted the early-twentieth-century rhetoric of cultural evolutionism, which “based racial pronouncements on psychological or cultural criteria.”<sup>41</sup> By early 1960, official conversations about class overshadowed prior conversations about racial inequality.<sup>42</sup> But Cubans continued to talk about race, albeit in less obvious ways. Anti-prostitution reformers sought to improve the behavior, speech, dress, and other forms of cultural expression associated with lower-class women and women of color.<sup>43</sup> Spanish exile and journalist Darío Carmona observed that during rehabilitation, many former sex workers “don’t wear make-up and dress simply, as if they didn’t want to call attention. One passes

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<sup>39</sup> Recasting the Cuban prostitute “as a symbol of the prostituted Cuban nation writ large” was nothing new. Sippial demonstrates that reformers in republican Cuba associated prostitution with colonialism and viewed female sex workers as manifestations of a nation in need of rescue and advancement. Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” *Obra revolucionaria*, 9 October 1961, 5-20, 18; del Olmo, 36; FMC, 36; Sippial, 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *In Cuba*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (New York: New Directions, 1974), 61-62; Francisco Gamboa, *Cuba en marcha* (San José, Costa Rica: Imprenta Elena, 1965), 50; Séjourné, 164; del Olmo, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1997), 32.

<sup>42</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, “Not Blacks, but Citizens! Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1961,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, 128-129, 136.

<sup>43</sup> Amando Fernández-Moure, Jr., *Ámbitos de la nacionalidad* (Puerto Rico: Cumbresa Ediciones, 1967), 134, 141; Darío Carmona, *Prohibida la sombra: Reportajes en Cuba* (Havana: Contemporáneos, UNEAC, 1965), 22; Moore, 10; FMC, 25; Valle, 194;

by, her heels clicking loudly. She swings her hips, but there are few who retain the custom.”<sup>44</sup> By advocating for cultural improvement, activists revealed the desire to reform Cuban sex workers according to white, middle-class ideals. They asserted that sex workers needed to abandon prostitution, engage in productive labor, and achieve cultural advancement.<sup>45</sup>

As the most salient symbol of sexual eroticism, inferior culture, and the U.S. violation of Cuba, the *mulata* quietly existed at the center of the anti-prostitution movement. It is no coincidence that María, the sex worker in *Soy Cuba*, was a *mulata*. While the presence of the *mulata* was rhetorically obscured by discussions of class and cultural advancement, contemporary observers noted that revolutionary leaders conflated racial identity, cultural forms, and sex work. In 1970, Cuban dance instructor Teresa González lamented, “All the boys who went up to the Sierra Maestra with Fidel always believed that the [Afro-Cuban] rumba and prostitution were the same thing... So our music and dance have been marginalized a little, because there are a lot of people at the highest levels of leadership—and I don’t like saying so—who are ashamed of everything Cuban and think our culture is decadent.”<sup>46</sup> As González observed in her conversation with Mexican dancer Alma Guillermoprieto, government officials appear to have viewed sex work as an expression of lower-class, Afro-Cuban culture, and their attempts to foment cultural “progress” revealed a revolutionary ideal that was defined as much by race as class.

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<sup>44</sup> Carmona, 22.

<sup>45</sup> For references to cultural improvement, see del Olmo, 37, 42; FMC, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Alma Guillermoprieto, *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 60.

Between 1959 and 1965, various health agencies conducted research in order to determine why sex workers would refuse reeducation. Dr. Amando Fernández-Moure, Jr. took part in one of these studies, and he claimed that a large number of Cuban women had “exacerbated libidos” that they satisfied through prostitution. He declared that the women suffered from what was commonly known as “uterine fire” (*fuego uterino*). According to Fernández-Moure, women of mixed Spanish and African descent were more likely to experience this sexual compulsion. He argued that when combined, the social and biological idiosyncrasies of these races created the “Latino,” a race endowed with an uncommon and intense desire for sex. According to Fernández-Moure, about three thousand women between 21 and 28 years of age claimed to suffer from “uterine fire.” Their quest for biological satisfaction, asserted Fernández-Moure, underscored why so many prostitutes rejected rehabilitation.

While Fernández-Moure relied on science to explain the sexual urges of “Latina” women, his conclusions were nothing new.<sup>47</sup> Fernández-Moure merely repackaged and reinforced existing notions about *mulata* sexuality, blaming race and gender for the continued existence of sex work. Discussions about *mulatas* indicate “areas of structural instability and ideological volatility in Cuban society, areas that have to be hidden from view to maintain the political fiction of cultural cohesion and synthesis.”<sup>48</sup> By pointing to *mulatas* as the explanation for the persistence of sex work, Fernández-Moure revealed the value that government leaders placed on the anti-prostitution campaign and their willingness to blame prostitutes of color for its perceived failures.

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<sup>47</sup> Fernández-Moure, 134, 141; Valle, 194.

<sup>48</sup> Vera M. Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 172.

In reality, prostitutes of all races faced pressure to reform.<sup>49</sup> But because the *mulata* had been “lionized in verse and song as a skilled and compliant temptress” since the 1830s, it is likely that some white sex workers were invisible to reeducation activists.<sup>50</sup> Cubans today incorrectly believe that most of the island’s prostitutes are people of color.<sup>51</sup> The same was likely true in the early revolutionary period.

During the second month of 1959, Cuban prostitutes expressed both support for the revolution and opposition to its reforms. In one of his first decisions as Fidel-appointed president, Manuel Urrutia ordered the closure of all casinos and brothels.<sup>52</sup> He sought to eliminate the vice associated with Cuba’s recent past, but he neglected to account for the response of Havana’s employees. Faced with the prospect of losing their livelihoods, waiters, croupiers, entertainers, and sex workers traveled on foot to the Palacio de los Deportes (now the Ciudad Deportiva) and loudly complained to Fidel Castro that they could not support their families without jobs. Pastorita Guerra, wardrobe assistant at the Tropicana nightclub, described the moment as festive: “Some people carried *tambores* (drums). Some had hidden bottles. That’s the way we were in Cuba. All of us from the Tropicana went. When we got there, Fidel was waiting for us. He listened to us. Then he talked and talked and said that he understood our problems and assured us that no one would lose his job.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Foreign visitors to reeducation centers often mentioned the inmates’ races. See for example: Marcos Portnoy, *Testimonio sobre Cuba* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones del Litoral, 1964), 165; Carmona, 21-22.

<sup>50</sup> T.J. English, *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba and then Lost it to the Revolution* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 211; Moore, 14; Sippial, 89-91.

<sup>51</sup> L. Kaifa Roland, *Cuban Color in Tourism and La Lucha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 170; Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 227.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Rosa Lowinger and Ofelia Fox, *Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub* (Orlando, FL: Mariner Books, 2007), 327-328.

The casinos subsequently reopened in March. While Fidel was not opposed to the changes, he believed that they should be delayed until the employees found alternative jobs.<sup>54</sup> The changes initiated by Urrutia would eventually be promoted by Fidel under different circumstances. But due to their lobbying, Havana's workers ensured that their jobs would continue, at least for the moment.<sup>55</sup>

While not all prostitutes chose to continue working after the revolution, several of those who did recalled an increase in both demand and income.<sup>56</sup> Various intersecting factors contributed to the rise in profit, including the departure of *matronas* and the owners (*dueñas*) of sex-worker boarding houses. Former prostitutes recalled that these individuals, fearing possible arrest, abandoned their brothels, leaving them in the hands of the prostitutes themselves.<sup>57</sup> Pilar López González, a former sex worker interviewed in 1970 by anthropologist Oscar Lewis' research team, recalled the moment when the *dueñas* of her residence left and earnings increased: "We girls started working for ourselves.... Of course we had to make a contribution toward the upkeep of the house, servants' wages and so on, but it wasn't like half the take."<sup>58</sup> As indicated by Pilar, many madams and *dueñas* kept fifty percent of sex workers' earnings, sometimes in exchange for housing, bedding, toiletries, and food.<sup>59</sup> But prostitutes did not merely retain the money that would have previously gone to

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<sup>54</sup> Gott, 170; Quirk, 227; Sáenz Rovner, 124.

<sup>55</sup> Lowinger and Fox, 326-328.

<sup>56</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276; Fernández Robaina, 109; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 282; Séjourné, 163.

<sup>57</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 282-283;

<sup>58</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276.

<sup>59</sup> Cruz Díaz, 82, 96; Fernández Robaina, 24; Randall, 243.

their *matronas*; they also saved income once allocated towards bribes.<sup>60</sup> In order to protect themselves from arrest or mistreatment, most Havana prostitutes formerly paid the police a daily bribe of one-half to one peso. On a good day, Havana sex worker Violeta could make nearly thirty pesos, and this “tax” was not so onerous.<sup>61</sup> But not all prostitutes charged equally, and *fleteras* especially would have felt this bribe more acutely.

In addition to having more take-home pay, activist Lidia Ferrer noted that sex workers increased their clientele after the revolution.<sup>62</sup> Many Cubans felt hopeful about the future, and their euphoria was unmistakable. One way in which Cuban men seem to have experienced and expressed this euphoria was through sex with local prostitutes.<sup>63</sup> For this reason, Violeta initially refused to leave the profession: “In those days I was earning more money than ever. I didn’t want to throw away that stroke of luck.”<sup>64</sup> Bejuco, an Artemisa prostitute interviewed by historian Berta Martínez Paez, recalled the same boom in business under Fidel: “I tell you that it was under this government that we all made the most money.”<sup>65</sup> Of course, this was not the first regime change for Cuba’s sex workers, and they were both aware and fearful that change was forthcoming.

Rumors (*bolas*) quickly began to circulate that the new government would severely repress prostitution.<sup>66</sup> These *bolas* were given credence by the occasional raids on Havana

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<sup>60</sup> Fernández Robaina, 24.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Séjourné, 163; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 283.

<sup>63</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276; Fernández Robaina, 79, 109; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 282.

<sup>64</sup> Fernández Robaina, 79.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 283.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, 276; Fernández Robaina, 69.

brothels conducted by César Blanco, chief of public order in the Ministry of Government (Ministerio de Gobernación).<sup>67</sup> In the midst of conflicting information from official sources, Cubans created their own interpretations of reality. These and other unofficial stories ultimately threatened the authority of the state. Lillian Guerra notes that in 1962, “the state prioritized *bolas* as the greatest threat to Cuba’s internal national security.”<sup>68</sup> Government officials cautioned citizens to trust only the news provided by official media and to report to the police all individuals who started rumors.<sup>69</sup> As illustrated by its aggressive opposition to *bolas*, revolutionary leadership recognized the power and danger of rumors and sought to discredit them. Of course, the anonymity of *bolas* allowed Cubans to continue promoting their own version of reality.

In the midst of new and inconsistently-applied laws and regulations, rumors also prompted people to leave Cuba. Unsure of their status under the revolutionary regime, high-class sex workers and *chulos* (kept men) fled to such places as Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and the United States.<sup>70</sup> Prostitutes who worked in elite brothels and entertained affluent, foreign men had the means and connections to migrate elsewhere. Many of these women moved to the United States, where they already had children studying abroad.<sup>71</sup> Others departed for the

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<sup>67</sup> The Ministry of Government became the Ministry of the Interior in 1961. Leopoldo Fornés Bonavia, *Cuba cronológica: Cinco siglos de historia, política y cultura* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003), 219; “Nuevos prostíbulos fueron clausurados,” *Revolución*, 24 April 1959, 7; Sáenz Rovner, 201 n. 34.

<sup>68</sup> Juan J. Cordovin, *Lo que yo vi en Cuba* (Buenos Aires: Editorial San Isidro, 1962), 85; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 211.

<sup>69</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 211-212.

<sup>70</sup> English-language scholars of Cuba have historically translated *chulo* or *proxeneta* to mean “pimp,” a translation that appears appropriate for early twentieth century analyses. But the term *chulo* evolved from the early to mid-twentieth century, necessitating that studies of the later period adopt an alternative translation. “Kept man” more accurately reflects the meaning of *chulo* in 1950s and 1960s Cuba. Carmona, 20; Randall, 237; del Olmo, 35; Fernández Robaina, 111; Séjourné, 39.

<sup>71</sup> del Olmo, 35.

nightlife of San Juan, New York, or Miami.<sup>72</sup> Like the abortion providers who transferred their practices to Puerto Rico, Cuban sex workers continued to ply their trade after moving to San Juan. Following the revolution, international crime syndicates also transferred their businesses from Cuba to Puerto Rico, and their support of prostitution converted Puerto Rico into the new “brothel of the Americas.”<sup>73</sup>

Other elite prostitutes remained in Cuba until revolutionary officials pressured them to leave. Following interviews with leaders of the program to rehabilitate sex workers, Venezuelan criminologist Rosa del Olmo reported that “those in charge of dealing with the problem knew that [high-class prostitutes] had nothing to offer the Revolution and would never fit into the rehabilitation program, because they were used to living in luxury and to receiving large sums of money.”<sup>74</sup> This detail underscores the mitigated “success” of the campaign to eliminate sex work. While sex work as an institution certainly disappeared, it did so without the reformation of the island’s most successful prostitutes.

Throughout 1959 and 1960, government reformers implemented various strategies for observing and “sanitizing” sex work in Havana.<sup>75</sup> These early approaches, however, were sporadic, disorganized, and ineffective. In conjunction with the brothel closures carried out by César Blanco, revolutionary representatives conducted raids of the Havana neighborhoods that they perceived as most ridden by vice.<sup>76</sup> They rounded up, fingerprinted, and

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<sup>72</sup> Randall, 237.

<sup>73</sup> Luis A. López Rojas, *La mafia en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Editorial Isla Negra, 2004), 77.

<sup>74</sup> del Olmo, 35. See also Séjourné, 39.

<sup>75</sup> This term is referenced in Cruz Díaz, 134.

<sup>76</sup> “Nuevos prostíbulos,” 7.

photographed prostitutes.<sup>77</sup> They also attempted to restrict the areas in which sex work was practiced by rezoning the city's red-light districts.<sup>78</sup> In the absence of any rehabilitation plan, state activists compelled sex workers to carry up-to-date certificates of their venereal health.<sup>79</sup> But many prostitutes easily avoided observation by providing authorities with fake names and addresses or purchasing certificates from private laboratories.<sup>80</sup>

While revolutionary officials ultimately aimed to eliminate prostitution, they recognized that it was first necessary to make sex work legible to the state. One effective strategy was the 1960 census of Havana's red-light districts.<sup>81</sup> The capital's Tourism Police were initially responsible for registering the sex workers, and they obtained information about the women as well as their families.<sup>82</sup> They canvassed barrio Colón, located between Galiano and Monserrate Boulevards and densely populated by tourists, vendors, and entertainers.<sup>83</sup> Census takers also visited and documented prostitutes operating out of Barrio Atares in El Cerro and La Victoria in Central Havana.<sup>84</sup> Although the data constructed from censuses was likely distorted and inaccurate, the information that the activists obtained informed future reforms and interventions. Havana itself was the testing ground for many projects, including the census, later implemented on the rest of the island.

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<sup>77</sup> Luis Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 100; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276.

<sup>78</sup> Salas, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Teresa Jorge, "La prostitución en Cuba," *Mujeres*, 8 August 1973, 62-69, 69; Salas, 100; FMC, 17-18, 22; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 276.

<sup>80</sup> MININT eventually collaborated with the Ministry of Health and founded local clinics where sex workers were examined and treated for venereal diseases. FMC, 22.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18; del Olmo, 36.

<sup>82</sup> FMC, 17.

<sup>83</sup> Sippial, 177.

<sup>84</sup> FMC, 23.

Throughout 1960 and 1961, government leadership discussed what to do next to eradicate Cuban prostitution. The Supreme Council of Social Defense (Consejo Superior de Defensa Social) was given the responsibility of eliminating sex work, a task later overseen by the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>85</sup> Armando Torres, Secretary General of the Supreme Council, confessed to Oscar Lewis' research team, "At the beginning, we didn't have any definite plans as to how to undertake this work...everything came into being spontaneously."<sup>86</sup> None of the coordinators had any experience working with sex workers or establishing a rehabilitation campaign.<sup>87</sup> María Bosch, one of the early organizers, admitted to ethnographer Séjourné: "At the start, our experience was really very limited."<sup>88</sup> During one brain-storming session, participants suggested arresting and incarcerating all prostitutes on the island.<sup>89</sup> This recommendation was reminiscent of prior campaigns to combat Cuban sex work, movements that merely drove prostitution underground. Aware of Chairman Mao's claim to have completely eradicated sex work, some coordinators proposed flying to China and studying the work of its reformers.<sup>90</sup> In the end, the organizers sought to avoid the mistakes of previous campaigns and chose instead to slowly reeducate non-elite prostitutes.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The Supreme Council of Social Defense was later incorporated into the Ministry of the Interior. Francisco Morán, ed., *La Habana elegante: Número especial por el V aniversario de la edición electrónica de La Habana elegante, diciembre de 2003* (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2004), 69 n. 1; del Olmo, 35; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., Gamboa, 49.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Séjourné, 166.

<sup>89</sup> Comments by Abdo Canasí, Conferencia Nacional de Instituciones Psiquiátricas, Havana, Cuba, 2 June 1963, reprinted in *La Habana Elegante: Panóptico*, [http://www.habanaelegante.com/Panoptico/Panoptico\\_Psiq\\_Conferencia.html](http://www.habanaelegante.com/Panoptico/Panoptico_Psiq_Conferencia.html).

<sup>90</sup> Jinghao Zhou, *China's Peaceful Rise in a Global Context: A Domestic Aspect of China's Road Map to Democratization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 73-74; Séjourné, 166.

<sup>91</sup> del Olmo, 35.

Known for his influence on the Cuban educational system, Soviet educator Anton Makarenko also inspired Havana anti-prostitution activists.<sup>92</sup> At the 1963 National Conference on Psychiatric Institutions, psychiatrist Diego González Martín expressed his admiration for Makarenko: His “work has special meaning for us... [and] contains useful lessons that can be applied to group psychotherapy.”<sup>93</sup> Dr. González Martín was consequently surprised to learn that the Camagüey police officers had not read Makarenko before initiating their rehabilitation effort.<sup>94</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he ran two reform schools for juvenile delinquents in the Soviet Union. He promoted combining work, military discipline, and study and published books about his experiences.<sup>95</sup> When María Bosch recalled that the Havana activists were inspired by the “writings of a comrade who conducted a very basic experiment with just one prostitute,” she likely meant Makarenko.<sup>96</sup> As Bosch correctly noted, the Soviet pedagogue had little experience with sex workers. His writing references only one prostitute, Vera Berezovskaya, who Makarenko persuaded to attend school.<sup>97</sup> His treatment of her was both paternalistic and coercive; Makarenko considered Vera rehabilitated only after she accepted that “life is not an eternal holiday” and became “a careful, affectionate, and rational parent.”<sup>98</sup> By basing their campaign on the

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<sup>92</sup> Mark Abendroth, *Rebel Literacy: Cuba's National Literacy Campaign and Critical Global Citizenship* (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2009), 134; Diego González Martín, “Estado actual y perspectivas de la labor de la higiene mental” (Paper presented at the Conferencia Nacional de Instituciones Psiquiátricas, Havana, Cuba, 31 May 1963), reprinted in Morán, 70; Séjourné, 166.

<sup>93</sup> González Martín, n.p.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Riccardo Picchio, “Antón Semyónovich Makárenko,” in *Handbook of Russian Literature*, ed. Victor Terras (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 269.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Séjourné, 166.

<sup>97</sup> A.S. Makarenko, *The Road to Life: An Epic of Education*, trans. Ivy Litvinov and Tatiana Litvinov (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), 3:33-38, 331-351

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 3:343, 351.

reform efforts of Makarenko, Havana reformers revealed a paternalistic motivation for reeducation.

#### Phase One: Census, Outreach, and Persuasion

With the support of the Federation of Cuban Women, the Havana campaign to eliminate prostitution officially began in 1961.<sup>99</sup> Activists described the first step as “census, outreach, and persuasion” (*censo, acercamiento y persuasión*). Throughout the year, reformers sought to reeducate prostitutes in cities across the island.<sup>100</sup> Activists appeared to have experienced the least amount of autonomy in Havana, where officials from the Ministry of Health, National Revolutionary Police (PNR), and MININT directly participated in the campaign. FMC members (*federadas*) delineated a detailed approach for “capturing” the country’s sex workers, one that began with the census; reformers enacted variations of this plan around the island.<sup>101</sup> In Havana, *federadas* continued the project begun by the police force, approaching *fleteras* and entering brothels, boarding houses, and bars in order to count the capital’s prostitutes. Following the census, the women returned to speak with and persuade the sex workers to abandon their work.<sup>102</sup> While future rhetoric would classify the rejection of rehabilitation as opposition to the revolution, activists initially viewed (lower-

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<sup>99</sup> Salas, 100; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Carlos Franqui, *Family Portrait with Fidel: A Memoir*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 141; Carmona, 19.

<sup>101</sup> del Olmo, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Gamboa, 49; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7;

class) female prostitutes as victims, rejecting traditional, Latin American classifications of sex workers as moral degenerates.<sup>103</sup>

During this campaign, many activists entered Havana brothels for the first time in their lives, and Secretary General Torres recalled, “[W]e were a trifle romantic” about the door-to-door approach.<sup>104</sup> The Supreme Council selected representatives who were “ideologically sound, good revolutionaries, with a big heart, and a desire to solve problems.”<sup>105</sup> Many of these activists were women with no experience in rehabilitation.<sup>106</sup> For example, when Lieutenant Olga Ferrer began working with the prostitutes, she was a self-described “spoiled girl” who wanted nothing more than to “run away from there.”<sup>107</sup> But like many other *federadas*, she became deeply committed to her work. In an interview with Séjourné, Lieutenant Lidia Ferrer remembered, “I was convinced that I would persuade [the women] because I knew that I carried a powerful weapon in my hands...the truth.”<sup>108</sup> The activists replicated official discourse by informing sex workers that they were victims of capitalism, U.S. imperialism, and the men who profited from their labor.<sup>109</sup> The

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<sup>103</sup> See for example: Jorge, 62; del Olmo, 34-35; FMC, 3, 17, 19-25, 29-35; Séjourné, 38-40, 162-164.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7; Gamboa, 49; Séjourné, 38, 165.

<sup>105</sup> Gamboa, 49.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7; Séjourné, 38.

<sup>107</sup> Olga Ferrer was a member of the FMC and MININT, FMC, 21; quoted in Séjourné, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Séjourné, 162.

<sup>109</sup> Juan Vega Vega, “El proxenetismo como índice de peligrosidad: Un comentario a la Ley 993 de 1961,” *Revista Cubana de Jurisprudencia* 3 (1962): 33-36, 33; del Olmo, 36, 39 n. 5; FMC, 20; Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” 18.

representatives offered the women alternative work options, vocational training, educational opportunities, and free childcare.<sup>110</sup>

In Guantánamo and Caimanera, cities in eastern Oriente province, officials viewed prostitution as a consequence of chronic unemployment and the proximity of the U.S. naval base.<sup>111</sup> In this, they were not incorrect. U.S. sailors not only made this revenue possible, they also reinforced the imperial project and Cuba's inferiority; indeed, "access, control, and regulation of [Cuban] women's bodies and sexuality... was the way in which the U.S. military presence exerted its strength on a daily basis and intervened in Guantánamo's social fabric."<sup>112</sup> Josefina Rodríguez was one of numerous rural women (*campesinas*) who arrived to Guantánamo to labor as housekeepers only to learn that a traveling *matrona* had actually recruited them for sex work.<sup>113</sup> After splitting their earnings with the madam, many women remitted this money home to their families.<sup>114</sup> North American military personnel increasingly viewed all Cuban women as sexually available, not merely those classified as prostitutes.<sup>115</sup> This notion was supported by the United Service Organization (USO), which arranged dances for U.S. military officers and elite, Cuban women.<sup>116</sup> These cross-cultural

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<sup>110</sup> Daura Olema, "Hacia una vida nueva," *Bohemia*, 11 January 1963, 40-43, 41-43; Teresa Díaz Canals and Graciela González Olmedo, "Cultura y prostitución: Una solución posible," *Papers* 52 (1997): 167-175, 169; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, 279, 279 n. 7; Séjourné, 162.

<sup>111</sup> FMC, 29.

<sup>112</sup> Lipman, 110.

<sup>113</sup> Cruz Díaz, 91-94.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 94; del Olmo, 36-37; Olema, 42.

<sup>115</sup> Lipman, 110, 115.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 117; FMC, 29; Cruz Díaz, 104.

encounters did not always end with the cha-cha-cha. Resident Benigno Milia recalled to Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, “Many [pregnant] bellies emerged from those dances.”<sup>117</sup>

Revolutionary activists in Guantánamo began their campaign against sex work by intercepting trains that took elite, Cuban women to USO-sponsored dances. The police collected over one hundred women in the first raid. After transporting them to the local precinct, officers registered the women and summoned their parents. These parents were surely furious at the police’s unprecedented treatment of their daughters. Elite Guantánamo families had encouraged their daughters to fraternize with U.S. military officers.<sup>118</sup> Lieutenant Coronel Arturo Olivares Acosta later noted that bourgeois society once looked upon USO events with “pleasure” (*beneplácito*), as the dances occasionally resulted in an “advantageous marriage.”<sup>119</sup> Revolutionary reformers, however, rejected the social arrangement for its acceptance of sexual relations in anticipation of marriage.<sup>120</sup> Activists perceived elite Guantánamo women as sexually accessible to U.S. men and therefore categorized them as sex workers. By classifying elite Cuban women as prostitutes simply because they slept with U.S. sailors, revolutionary activists undid accepted notions of sex work and redefined prostitutes as sexually available women, especially when they directed their charms at foreign men.

*Federadas* deployed alternative strategies to recover prostitutes who worked in brothels, in boarding houses, in bars, and on the streets of Guantánamo and Caimanera. They

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Cruz Díaz, 113.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 110-112; Lipman, 117.

<sup>119</sup> Between 1931 and 1958 in Guantánamo, 101 Cuban women married U.S. men. Lipman, 124; quoted in FMC, 29.

<sup>120</sup> FMC, 29, 31.

referred to this project as “rescue and rehabilitation” (*rescate y rehabilitación*), illustrating the perceived moral component of their actions. These reformers demonstrated that the rehabilitated prostitute was one who both abandoned sex work and formed part of a nuclear family. Activists around the island placed similar emphasis on the importance of marriage, family, and children, underscoring how the anti-prostitution campaign forced part of a larger social project aimed at reforming the Cuban family. Before meeting with the women in boarding homes and brothels, FMC members spoke with local madams, informing them of the impending reforms. MININT members recruited the help of families whose female members worked as prostitutes, summoning many from the countryside to collect their daughters.<sup>121</sup> By relying on the support and consent of parents to “rescue” sex workers, MININT reinforced the hegemony of paternalism, an ideology to which even non-revolutionaries could adhere.

But while Guantánamo activists sought to reunify women and their parents, officers in Camagüey served as substitute partners, uncles, and fathers to the prostitutes. Officers Mora and Fleitas demonstrated their recognition of this role by referring to themselves as “paternal police.”<sup>122</sup> The men not only assumed responsibility for the welfare of the sex workers, but also for that of their children. They informed reporter Carmona that when the PNR determined that the women had sons and daughters who lived elsewhere, they located the children and placed them with the mothers who had abandoned prostitution. Officers Mora and Fleitas viewed female sex workers as victims of madams and *chulos* who

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 29-31.

<sup>122</sup> Quoted in Carmona, 18-19.

supposedly exploited the women and prevented their escape from prostitution.<sup>123</sup> But when activists “rescued” sex workers from their perceived oppression, they rarely left the women unsupervised. Reformers took the place of male partners and *matronas*, overseeing the women’s daily lives in order to ensure their continued rehabilitation.

The discourse adopted by the Camagüey PNR paralleled rhetoric deployed throughout the island, but the origin of their reforms differed from that of many other regional campaigns.<sup>124</sup> Revolutionary representatives in Havana, for example, only entered brothels after receiving orders from MININT.<sup>125</sup> The “self-styled revolutionaries” of Camagüey received no such commands from MININT, and the rehabilitation campaign emerged of the officers’ own initiative.<sup>126</sup> The credentials of their captain likely afford them greater legitimacy. Led by former combatant and Communist Party member Captain Medardo Cabrera Portal, a former companion of Ernest “Che” Guevara, the police claimed to have only been inspired by their own sense of justice.<sup>127</sup> These men appear to have formed part of “an overly enthusiastic vanguard of educated and dedicated young people” who sought to further improve revolutionary society. The new regime unwittingly encouraged these activists, inspiring them to reform the country as they saw fit.<sup>128</sup> In the third and fourth

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 19, 21.

<sup>124</sup> González Martín, n.p.

<sup>125</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 185.

<sup>126</sup> Guerra uses the term “self-styled revolutionaries” to refer to individuals who sought to advance the revolution on their own terms, rather than those defined by the government. Ibid., 256-289; González Martín, n.p.

<sup>127</sup> Medardo Cabrera Portal fought alongside Ernesto “Che” Guevara prior to assuming leadership of the Camagüey PNR. Joel Iglesias Leyva, *De la Sierra Maestra al Escambray* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1979), 319- 320; González Martín, n.p.; Carmona, 18.

<sup>128</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 256.

year of the revolution, the police officers of Camagüey did just that and promoted policies that aligned with those of government officials in Havana.

Like the anti-prostitution endeavors in Havana and Guantánamo, attempts to reform the sex workers of Santiago, the capital of Oriente, began in 1961. But in this case, efforts originated with volunteer teachers and literacy workers (*brigadistas*) stationed in the city. The activists formed part of a large movement to promote literacy on the island.<sup>129</sup> The teachers entered brothels in Santiago and beseeched the prostitutes to join their classrooms and give up sex work. *Federadas* followed the literacy workers, arranging meetings with the prostitutes, just as their colleagues did with Guantánamo sex workers. The PNR of Camagüey likewise relied on education to combat prostitution.<sup>130</sup> But lack of progress prompted the Camagüey police officers to adopt more coercive strategies, such as surprise raids of the city's red-light districts and the ensuing arrests of *chulos*.<sup>131</sup> Indeed, many reformers believed that it was only following the apprehension of *chulos* that practicing prostitutes would finally consent to reeducation. But Santiago activists disagreed and refused to target *chulos*, ignoring Law 993, which classified as "dangerous" (*estado peligroso*) anyone who "exploit[ed] prostitution in any form or way."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 23-27; Denise F. Blum, *Cuban Youth and Revolutionary Values: Educating the New Socialist Citizen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 48-49.

<sup>130</sup> Carmona, 19.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>132</sup> Individuals viewed as acting against the norms of socialist morality could be detained and charged with *estado peligroso*, a preemptive categorization based on their supposed propensity to commit crime. Ministerio de Justicia, *Código Penal*, Law 993, in *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, 20 December 1961, 24688; FMC, 23-24, 30, 32-34; del Olmo, 37; Vega Vega, 33-36.

It is not surprising that the campaigns against prostitutes and *chulos* emerged in 1961, as the revolution quickly transformed at this time. The relationship between Cuba and the United States progressively worsened before finally disintegrating on April 17, 1961, the day the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency sponsored an attack on the island. Opposition to the revolution also surfaced from within, and anti-government guerrillas launched attacks around the country. The government responded by imprisoning all suspected dissidents, centralizing political power, and establishing closer ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>133</sup> The revolution was no longer a mere nationalist insurrection; it was a socialist regime.<sup>134</sup> The reformation of the nation-state occurred through both political and cultural avenues and was visible in the efforts to eradicate illiteracy, vagrancy, unemployment, homosexuality, pornography, gambling, abortions, common-law unions, sex work, and *chulos*.<sup>135</sup>

#### Phases Two and Three: Reeducation and Repression

In early 1962, many provincial reformers reoriented their focus to the rehabilitation phase of the campaign. Members of the FMC identified “reeducation” as the second step of the movement, which was preceded by “census, outreach, and persuasion.” In Havana, Matanzas, Camagüey, and Santiago, activists established reeducation centers and farms where sex workers lived, worked, and attended school.<sup>136</sup> Reformers in other regions offered alternative rehabilitation methods or sent local prostitutes to Havana’s reeducation center.<sup>137</sup>

While most women who abandoned traditional forms of sex work did not undergo

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<sup>133</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 327.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 327, 331.

<sup>135</sup> Jorge, 68; FMC, 24-25; Ley 993, 24687-24688.

<sup>136</sup> del Olmo, 37; Séjourné, 164.

<sup>137</sup> FMC, 3, 19, 25-26, 30-31, 35.

rehabilitation, those who experienced reeducation at this time did so under similar circumstances and programs.<sup>138</sup> In contrast with the initial persuasion phase, the reeducation phase reveals greater oversight and consistency across regions. This transition exemplifies the increased centralization of power within the campaign, even as sex work persisted and some activists operated without official oversight.<sup>139</sup>

Prostitutes began entering the Havana Granja América Libre (Free America Work Farm) in early 1962.<sup>140</sup> Revolutionary leadership situated the work farm (*granja*) on the former Miramar estate of revolutionaries-turned-counterrevolutionaries Amador Odio Padrón and Sara del Toro.<sup>141</sup> Over the next several years, more than five hundred sex workers would pass through its doors. Most originated from Havana, but some women traveled from as far away as Las Villas. The prostitutes arrived to América Libre in a variety of ways: at the recommendation of MININT, escorted by a *federada*, or unaccompanied. Following a medical exam, Director María Bosch placed each woman in a thirty-person brigade consisting entirely of new arrivals.<sup>142</sup> Bosch recalled that the sex workers were initially “dazzled” by the luxury of the rural manor. But their wonder quickly changed to disenchantment, and many women sought to escape América Libre. Bosch noted that some disappeared from the camp in the dark of night, while others attempted suicide.<sup>143</sup> Those

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<sup>138</sup> Séjourné, 163.

<sup>139</sup> See for example: Valle, 193-195; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 256-289.

<sup>140</sup> del Olmo, 37; Portnoy, 95.

<sup>141</sup> Miramar was an upscale, residential area of Havana. Margaria Fichtner, “César Odio’s Low-Profile Style: He Sees Himself as Government’s Good Gray Man—Competent, Not Flashy,” *The Miami Herald*, 31 July 1988, 1G; Luis Enrique Délano, *Cuba 66* (Santiago, Chile: Editora Austral, 1966), 158.

<sup>142</sup> It is likely that sex workers also received treatment for venereal diseases at rehabilitation facilities like América Libre. *Ibid.*, 165; Olema, 42; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, 281.

<sup>143</sup> Gamboa, 50; Salas, 101.

caught trying to leave faced punishment. While some sex workers entered the *granja* voluntarily, the women could not choose when they left. In the same way that prostitutes often experienced persuasion and coercion as analogous and complementary methods of “capture,” they remained inmates at rehabilitation camps for reasons that blurred the distinction between voluntary and compulsory.<sup>144</sup>

Inmates at América Libre followed a schedule carefully designed to create disciplined, productive, and gendered citizens. According to Oscar Fernández Padilla, then vice-minister of MININT, reeducation was a three-step process that involved instruction in political ideology, basic education classes, and collective labor.<sup>145</sup> In reality, there was little difference between the courses on literacy and politics. In the nation-wide “Battle for the Sixth Grade,” peasants learned to read and write through the exclusive study of revolutionary reading material.<sup>146</sup> Alicia, a reeducation-camp graduate, recalled that her curriculum likewise included discussions of Fidel’s speeches and “movies about when they were fighting in the Sierra [Maestra mountains].”<sup>147</sup> Female instructors also led conversation about personal hygiene, sexual health, physical appearance, and proper conduct.<sup>148</sup>

“Rehabilitation” programs directed at former maids, teenage *campesinas*, and the wives of

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<sup>144</sup> In recognition of their internment, I will refer to the former sex workers as inmates, as does Délano, 158 and FMC, 28, 35, 43. Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 24; Séjourné, 163, 164-166, 168-169.

<sup>145</sup> FMC, 26; del Olmo, 37.

<sup>146</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 191.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in Randall, 248.

<sup>148</sup> Délano, 159; FMC, 25-26; del Olmo, 37; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

political prisoners relied on similar techniques to homogenize femininity according to revolutionary guidelines.<sup>149</sup>

MININT officials and staff members at América Libre promoted a version of femininity that was middle-class, white, and fashion-forward.<sup>150</sup> Director Bosch refused to release former prostitutes until “they carried themselves like normal women,” a task that did not come easily to inmates raised in rural poverty and with little education.<sup>151</sup> Government authorities believed that former sex workers had hairstyles that were “over-ornate” and inappropriate for revolutionary life, so they gave the women lessons in hairdressing.<sup>152</sup> They also learned “better,” ostensibly simpler, methods of make-up application.<sup>153</sup> These seminars occurred in beauty parlors, where some inmates also received job training as hairstylists.<sup>154</sup>

Of equal importance were courses on fashion. Former prostitutes were assigned two sets of uniforms while at América Libre, but camp instructors wanted to ensure that the women would accumulate an “appropriate wardrobe” following their release.<sup>155</sup> These fashion lessons illustrated the importance of middle-class femininity to anti-prostitution reformers. They also highlighted the perceived inferiority of lower-class and Afro-Cuban cultures, as reformers believed that sex workers would demonstrate revolutionary

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<sup>149</sup> C.A., “En la educación del pueblo está la gran fuerza revolucionaria,” *Mujeres*, 1 December 1961, 10-11, 11; Justina Álvarez, “Serán más lindas las mujeres de los montes cubanos,” *ANAP (Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños)* 1, no. 1 (1961): 16-17, 17; Lee Lockwood, *Castro’s Cuba, Cuba’s Fidel: An American Journalist’s Inside Look at Today’s Cuba – in Text and Picture* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967), 236.

<sup>150</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 222-223.

<sup>151</sup> Quoted in Séjourné, 167.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>153</sup> del Olmo, 37.

<sup>154</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7; Salas, 101; FMC, 26.

<sup>155</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n.7, 281; Délano, 158; del Olmo, 37; quoted in FMC, 25.

commitment and reform by modeling a simpler, socialist aesthetic, one that was ostensibly white.<sup>156</sup> Ironically, the América Libre staff lauded specific hairstyles, make-up, and clothing at a time when body products, cosmetics, and fabric were increasingly unavailable on the island.<sup>157</sup>

In conjunction with classwork, collective labor and job training formed an essential part of life at the *granja*.<sup>158</sup> At first, job training at América Libre was limited, and staff sent the inmates to work at nearby factories. But some former sex workers experienced significant discrimination and hostility from the other employees, particularly women. Secretary General Torres recalled that extensive efforts were required to eliminate the workplace discrimination.<sup>159</sup> It is seemingly for this reason that Che Guevara approved the construction of a textile factory at América Libre.<sup>160</sup> In this way, inmates could learn a trade without leaving the compound. Other, senior inmates were still permitted to work outside the camp in local factories or laboratories.<sup>161</sup> Administrators considered work to be a necessary part of the rehabilitation of former prostitutes. According to Director Bosch, it was important that the women “not have free time to think about things they shouldn’t.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of the importance of middle-class culture to the FMC activists at the Ana Betancourt School for peasant girls, Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 222-223.

<sup>157</sup> Mohammed A. Rauf, Jr., *Cuban Journal: Castro's Cuba as it Really is – An Eyewitness Account by an American Reporter* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 70-71; Évora Tamayo, “Vísteme despacio que voy de prisa,” *Pa'lante*, 30 July 1964, 14.

<sup>158</sup> FMC, 26.

<sup>159</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7, 282; FMC, 43; Salas, 101.

<sup>160</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7.

<sup>161</sup> Olema, 43.

<sup>162</sup> Gamboa, 50; Séjourné, 164-165, 167; del Olmo, 37, 38.

Staff at the Matanzas reeducation center also championed a combined program of work and study. They referred to the former sex workers as “pupils” and taught seminars similar to the ones at América Libre. The women took courses on etiquette and make-up application and also received job training. In 1962, Nicaraguan expatriate Rosi López worked for MININT and helped found the center. She recalled that the institution was necessary so that former prostitutes “could be taught to work.”<sup>163</sup> Her belief that prostitution did not count as work experience replicated the official discourse internalized by Rosa del Olmo, who later claimed that former sex workers needed to be “taught how to work.”<sup>164</sup> While López asserted that the inmates “were not delinquents; they were more of the victims of capitalism,” her inability to recognize prostitution as a legitimate form of labor victimized sex workers and invalidated their prior activities. López was not alone in this evaluation. As sex workers did not produce material goods, government authorities perceived their labor as nonproductive work and therefore unnecessary to the revolution.<sup>165</sup>

Reformers in the city of Matanzas also placed great importance on the role of motherhood. López believed that many former prostitutes did not love their children and thereby “traumatized” them. In concert with psychiatrists and through group therapy, staff members told the women that there was “honor” in being a mother.<sup>166</sup> By affirming the maternal identity of former sex workers, activists promoted traditional notions of female worth and affirmed the importance of nuclear families. Around the country, MININT and the FMC used information gained from the recent census to locate the families of former

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<sup>163</sup> Quoted in Cardenal, 61.

<sup>164</sup> del Olmo, 37.

<sup>165</sup> Hamilton, 33; Cardenal, 61.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Cardenal, 61.

prostitutes; in some cases, the family members received a stipend to replace the income lost through reeducation.<sup>167</sup> Staff members at the Matanzas center ensured that the children were in school or daycare.<sup>168</sup> The reeducation centers in Havana and Camagüey opened on-site daycare facilities where children could stay while their mothers were in the program.<sup>169</sup>

By nurturing the relationships between pupils and their children, reformers reinforced women's traditional role as nurturers and caretakers. In this way, their actions were similar to those of Guantánamo and Havana activists who aimed to reunite former prostitutes with their families of origin.<sup>170</sup> Government representatives did not merely seek to "rescue" women from sex work, but also to rebuild the nuclear, Cuban family. In 1965, Director Bosch informed Costa Rican journalist Francisco Gamboa that thanks to help from MININT, "many [women] have become reintegrated into family life."<sup>171</sup>

For the former prostitutes of Camagüey, reeducation took place alongside their children in an institution renovated by the police (PNR) who "persuaded" them to abandon sex work. Initially designed as a home for the elderly, the Center for Artisanry (Centro de Producción Artesanal - CPA) opened its door in February 1962. Within a year, the CPA housed 218, mostly *campesina*, women between the ages of fifteen and 72 years of age. This included several former madams, plus fifty children of sex workers.<sup>172</sup> Overseen by Director Carmen Viamontes, *federadas*, and volunteer teachers, the inmates attended classes on

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<sup>167</sup> del Olmo, 37-38; Gamboa, 49-50; Délano, 159.

<sup>168</sup> Cardenal, 61.

<sup>169</sup> Olema, 41, 43; Carmona, 21; Randall, 238.

<sup>170</sup> Gamboa, 50; FMC, 30-31.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted in Gamboa, 50.

<sup>172</sup> FMC, 34.

writing and arithmetic, learned basket weaving, improved their sewing skills, played sports, and farmed the fifty acres of land surrounding the Center. Like Director Bosch, Director Viamontes believed that reeducation should last no less than one year.<sup>173</sup>

At the CPA, many women experienced rehabilitation with their children. The location did not initially contain a space for the children of former prostitutes. But at the request of Director Viamontes and with the coordination of the FMC, one was soon created. Director Viamontes later told her granddaughter that she wearied of consoling so many lonely mothers. Other inmates had not lived with their sons and daughters prior to reeducation, and the new living arrangement would have been an adjustment. But the PNR, FMC, and Director Viamontes made it a priority to reunite mothers and children, highlighting their overlapping agendas of eliminating prostitution, fomenting maternalism, and defining/strengthening the Cuban family.<sup>174</sup>

Since official discourse categorized sex workers as innocent victims who could not legitimately consent to prostitution, it is not surprising that Camagüey activists, as well as others, employed paternalistic rhetoric that infantilized the former sex workers. After visiting the CPA, Darío Carmona wrote glowingly of the facility and the care provided to the “women without a past.” One of the staff members he interviewed spoke about the need “to reeducate these women, recuperate them, and instruct them.”<sup>175</sup> Both of these statements hint at the rebirth and renewal expected of the inmates, a process that required constant

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<sup>173</sup> Elena María Palacio Ramé, “Gioia mía en La Habana,” in *Piezas para armar nuestra memoria (Antología)*, ed. Nora Franco (Havana: Ediciones La Memoria, Centro Cultural Pablo de la Torriente Brau, 2004), 77-88, 77, 80; Carmona, 15, 17-18, 21-24; Portnoy, 95, 106; Séjourné, 167; del Olmo, 38.

<sup>174</sup> Carmona, 21, 23; Palacio Ramé, 81.

<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Carmona, 15, 20.

supervision and patience. If inmates became engaged to marry, Director Bosch of América Libre prioritized meeting the women's fiancés so that the men could see "the responsibility that they assumed." The above comments highlight the importance of male oversight during and after the anti-prostitution campaign. Activists also appear to have viewed former sex workers as children, due to the regression and rebirth they supposedly experienced during reeducation. When journalist Francisco Gamboa commented on the large number of dolls at América Libre, Director Bosch hypothesized that inmates liked the dolls because most had grown up without toys.<sup>176</sup>

Yolanda Carbonell, then-president of the FMC in Oriente, also assumed a maternal role with the former prostitutes of Santiago.<sup>177</sup> In March 1962, *federadas* founded La Fortaleza (The Fortress) house and the América Lavadi School, the latter named after a 1930s female martyr.<sup>178</sup> In order to ensure the rehabilitation and "cultural progression" of the 150 inmates, staff members taught classes similar to those offered at other reeducation centers. The former prostitutes learned to sew, garden, and dress in a more "appropriate" fashion. Carbonell worked alongside 27 other *federadas*, and she recalled that they would occasionally transport the inmates downtown "so that they could see that we had no prejudices in terms of going out with them, and we told them that one day they would come to be better than us." This engagement, added Carbonell, "created a climate of trust that gave the possibility of advising, reprimanding, or suggesting taking a different attitude."<sup>179</sup> Like

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<sup>176</sup> Gamboa, 50.

<sup>177</sup> José Duarte Oropesa, *Historiología cubana: Desde 1959 hasta 1980* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1993), 22.

<sup>178</sup> Enrique de la Osa, *Crónica del año 33* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1989), 32.

<sup>179</sup> Quoted in FMC, 41. Translated by García, 142. FMC, 27-28, 33, 41.

Directors Bosch and Viamontes, Carbonell assumed a maternal role for the former sex workers in her care, demonstrating the proper way to care for their children and therefore become proper revolutionary mothers.

Despite the efforts of government representatives, many prostitutes refused to abandon sex work. Women resisted reform at every step of the campaign. Many high-class prostitutes with money and means left the country.<sup>180</sup> Some women remained and quietly operated out of cabarets, bars, and hotels. Others found safety in their clients' homes.<sup>181</sup> According to journalist Amir Valle, a new class of sex worker emerged at this time, one defined by individuals who exchanged sex for jobs vacated by émigrés and political dissidents. This was particularly true in the entertainment industry, which offered the possibility of international travel and escape from the island. He writes, "Beginning in the 1960s, prostitution assumed forms that were less extensive, less visible, although always detectable. [A]nd it unexpectedly began to touch other zones where relationships between sex and business acquired more complex characteristics."<sup>182</sup> An example of the changing nature of prostitutes is found in the individuals who targeted tourists in order to gain access to foreigner-only stores that sold products otherwise unavailable in Cuba.<sup>183</sup> Dulce Zumbado recalled that by the mid-1960s, "there was a lot of money but nothing to buy in the stores."<sup>184</sup> Nearly everything was rationed, and nylons were particularly difficult to find.<sup>185</sup> Little wonder that former secret service member Alfaya Torrado knew of women who worked "in

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<sup>180</sup> Carmona, 20; Randall, 237; del Olmo, 35; Fernández Robaina, 111.

<sup>181</sup> Rauf, 160-162.

<sup>182</sup> Valle, 195-196.

<sup>183</sup> Vivés, 238-239.

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Dulce Zumbado (pseudonym) by author, 19 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>185</sup> Rauf, 69-70.

exchange for products horribly lacking in Cuba: a pair of shoes, a dress, a pair of stockings, or some dollars.”<sup>186</sup>

While revolutionary leaders and activists sympathized with sex workers, they could not understand or accept the continued existence of prostitution on the island.<sup>187</sup> In October 1961, Fidel declared that sex work was a “social evil” (*lacra social*) and “a consequence of the regime of exploitation, one man by another.”<sup>188</sup> A staff member at the Camagüey CPA echoed this sentiment when she declared, “Prostitution emerged easily from misery, ignorance, and hypocrisy.... But now it doesn’t fit with the cleanliness and essence of a Socialist Revolution.”<sup>189</sup> As government representatives believed that women became and remained prostitutes exclusively because of outside oppression and exploitation, sex work could ostensibly be abolished by eliminating *chulos* and providing the women with education and jobs.<sup>190</sup>

But when presented with the opportunity, many women rejected reeducation.<sup>191</sup> Violeta, a former Havana prostitute, declared, “Many of us opposed the change.... Some alleged that they did not know how to do anything else besides sex work, that they did not have a head for letters or numbers. There was no lack of women who said that they were too old [to change].”<sup>192</sup> In response to resistance, police officers began harassing and

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<sup>186</sup> Vivés, 239.

<sup>187</sup> Carmona, 15; Fernández Robaina, 110; Portnoy, 106.

<sup>188</sup> Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” 18

<sup>189</sup> Quoted in Carmona, 15.

<sup>190</sup> See for example Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” 18.

<sup>191</sup> Valle, 193-194; Délano, 156; Fernández Robaina, 111; FMC, 20, 35; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279 n. 7; Séjourné, 164.

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Fernández Robaina, 110.

arresting prostitutes, even as reformers met with the women to stress the importance of reeducation.<sup>193</sup>

In many regions, threats and coercion became commonplace by late 1962 and 1963. According to journalist Gamboa, América Libre alone had rehabilitated 628 women by the time of his visit.<sup>194</sup> Other sex workers left the island, abandoned their work, or become more discrete in their practices.<sup>195</sup> Those that remained symbolized to government representatives the continued presence of pre-revolutionary norms.<sup>196</sup> In Havana and Camagüey, activists attempted to slowly edge women out of prostitution, restricting the operation hours of brothels and arresting their *chulos*.<sup>197</sup> Revolutionary authorities also made it difficult to rent rooms in Havana, as all leases had to be approved by MININT. In 1962, Guantánamo activists reported to have eliminated all brothels and boarding houses; by mid-decade, they declared that police pressure and public disapproval had aided in the elimination of sex work. Prostitutes in Las Villas also experienced pressure to reform, and those who resisted rehabilitation faced the judgment of the Supreme Council of Social Defense.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Séjourné, 164.

<sup>194</sup> Gamboa, 50.

<sup>195</sup> Valle, 195-196; Fernández Robaina, 111; del Olmo, 35; Cruz Díaz, 134.

<sup>196</sup> Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de la República de Cuba, en el acto de la clausura del Primer Congreso de los CDR en el XVII aniversario de su fundación, en la Plaza de la Revolución, Ciudad de la Habana,” 28 of September 1977. *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1977/esp/f280977e.html>; Salas, 102-103; Díaz and González, 169; Carmona, 15.

<sup>197</sup> Carmona, 19-20.

<sup>198</sup> FMC, 31-33, 35-37. For information about the Supreme Council of Social Defense and its methods for evaluating and judging *chulos*, see FMC, 24 and del Olmo, 37.

While activists could not convince every prostitute of the merits of rehabilitation, they exerted great effort in preventing the recidivism of reeducated sex workers. After inmates learned to read, work, and carry themselves like “normal women,” administrators organized a graduation ceremony.<sup>199</sup> Former sex worker Pilar López González took part in one of these events, and she remembered, “The comrades from the Ministry told us our graduation meant that we no longer owed anyone a debt. From that moment on, they said, we were just like everybody else; we had earned a place in society.”<sup>200</sup> Through this ceremony, former sex workers were symbolically reborn as revolutionary citizens and ushered into the new Cuban society. Some entered jobs assigned to them by the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC), and they began work in factories, shops, and farms.<sup>201</sup> A large number of former prostitutes became taxi drivers in Havana.<sup>202</sup> Others found jobs as prison guards on the Isle of Pines.<sup>203</sup> In certain cases, existing employees knew to expect the women, having met with FMC and other organizations who solicited their help in welcoming and supporting former prostitutes. Director Viamontes organized outings to local factories and farms so that employees could meet the inmates and learn to accept them as something other than sex workers. But del Olmo noted that the women still encountered discrimination from employees who preferred not to work alongside former prostitutes.<sup>204</sup> In this way, the reeducation process impacted everyday Cubans and pressured them to likewise accept the revolution’s new women.

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<sup>199</sup> Séjourné, 167; Salas, 101; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 284.

<sup>200</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 284.

<sup>201</sup> FMC, 35, 42.

<sup>202</sup> Portnoy, 104; Guerra, 286.

<sup>203</sup> Germán Wettstein, *Vivir en revolución: 20 semanas en Cuba* (Montevideo: Editorial Signo, 1969), 56.

<sup>204</sup> del Olmo, 38; Palacio Ramé, 80-81.

In addition to finding jobs for former sex workers, the government also assigned them housing.<sup>205</sup> Just as they had done with the inmates' future employees, reformers met with the neighbors of rehabilitated women, knocking on their doors and informing them that the women "had been victims of the previous system, and that now, through work and education, they had taken on new lives – that the Revolution considered them to be ready to rejoin society." Some individuals returned to their original houses, while others received apartments near their new jobs.<sup>206</sup> Pilar, a former prostitute interviewed by Oscar Lewis' research team, moved into a house owned by a man who immigrated to the United States.<sup>207</sup> When possible, the offices of Urban Reform assigned women homes that were big enough to also hold their children. The government also occasionally prioritized housing for former sex workers. While rehabilitation activists attempted to alleviate discrimination against rehabilitated prostitutes, their task was surely made more difficult by the official privileges granted to the women. When helping former *chulos* find jobs, government authorities encountered resistance from existing employees who were frustrated at the preference given to former social deviants.<sup>208</sup> It is likely that former sex workers confronted similar rejection from Cubans desperate for employment or homes, especially in an era of chronic housing shortages.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> del Olmo, 38; Salas, 101; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 284-285; FMC, 42; Randall, 248.

<sup>206</sup> del Olmo, 38.

<sup>207</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 284-285.

<sup>208</sup> del Olmo, 37-38; Salas, 101.

<sup>209</sup> For discussions about the chronic housing shortage that emerged in Havana in 1963-1964, see Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Diaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: The Population Council, 1983), 63; Barent F. Landstreet, Jr., "Cuban Population Issues in Historical and Comparative Perspective," Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1976, 150, 205; Rauf, 164; Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba*, 105.

Prior to the end of the official campaign, reformers closed brothels and reeducation facilities and transferred prostitutes to the still-operational CPA and América Libre.<sup>210</sup> In 1962, Santiago activists transported former sex workers to the CPA and declared an official end to the city's anti-prostitution campaign. At the same time, reformers in Las Villas closed local brothels and sent to América Libre the women who consented to *reeducción*. The former tourist destinations of Guantánamo and Havana seem to have been the last holdouts in the battle against sex work, and prostitutes who continued to work in the capital city encountered increasing pressure to accept rehabilitation and limited space in which to practice sex work. The final drive against Havana prostitutes began in 1964, and those who still remained the following year faced internment or hard labor.<sup>211</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that Cuban officials ceased to view sex workers as victims and recategorized them as counterrevolutionaries. Officials and activists believed that women who rejected reeducation likewise repudiated the revolution and its opportunities.<sup>212</sup> But the perception and treatment of prostitutes did not change only because the women resisted rehabilitation; internal reorganization within MININT also contributed to the changing policy on sex work.<sup>213</sup>

Former secret service agent Alfaya Torrado noted that prior to 1965, the Department of Social Ills (Departamento de Lacras Sociales) at MININT oversaw the anti-prostitution campaign and the broad regulation of sex work. But at mid-decade, the Mundana, a

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<sup>210</sup> The CPA eventually closed in 1967.

<sup>211</sup> Jorge, 67; Díaz and González, 169; Valle, 194-195.

<sup>212</sup> Castro, "Discurso pronunciado por Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de la República de Cuba, en el acto de la clausura del Primer Congreso de los CDR en el XVII aniversario de su fundación, en la Plaza de la Revolución, Ciudad de la Habana," n.p.; Díaz and González, 169; Carmona, 15.

<sup>213</sup> Vivés, 236-238; FMC, 33-35; Salas, 101-103.

subsection of the Cuban secret police (G2), began to monitor prostitution.<sup>214</sup> At the same time, the Mundana recruited the help of Soviet specialists to restructure its organization, a process that had immediate consequences for prostitutes as well as presumed homosexuals, intellectuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, would-be émigrés, and others. Torrado avowed that unlike the Department of Social Ills, the Mundana prioritized incarceration and blackmail over reeducation.<sup>215</sup> The most symbolic illustration of the transition was the conversion of América Libre into a prison for female dissidents.<sup>216</sup>

Within months of the reorganization, the Mundana established Military Units to Aid Production (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción), better known as UMAP camps. In these work camps "attitudes and behavior were perceived as being nonconformist, self-indulgent, and unproductive – in short, non-revolutionary by the standards of the revolution."<sup>217</sup> Arnaldo Agüero confessed that authorities sent him to an UMAP camp because he was "a member of the bourgeoisie, a stigmatized group."<sup>218</sup> At least one, all female UMAP camp existed in Camagüey, which held women presumed to be lesbians and sex workers.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> The G2 was also a part of MININT. Vivés, 236.

<sup>215</sup> Guerra notes that 1965 was a turning point for the revolution, as the second half of the 1960s "marked a critical phase in the construction of a society in which scrutinizing attitudes and silencing dissent would become normalized as necessary in the fight against U.S. imperialism." Ibid., 237-238; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 227.

<sup>216</sup> For interviews with prisoners formerly interned at América Libre, see Mignon Medrano, *Todo lo dieron por Cuba* (Miami: Fundación Nacional Cubano Americana, 1995).

<sup>217</sup> Lumsden, 65.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Arnaldo Agüero (pseudonym) by author, 20 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>219</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 254.

According to Torrado, the Mundana especially targeted women (and men) who dated or slept with foreigners, threatening to charge them with prostitution if they did not agree to serve as spies. When faced with the possibility of hard labor or jail time, numerous individuals “consented” to work for the Mundana.<sup>220</sup> By entrusting the Mundana with oversight of the country’s sex workers, government authorities officially ended the reeducation campaign. Just as anti-prostitution activists had done, Mundana agents identified women as sex workers if they perceived the women as sexually available. However, instead of treating the women like victims of economic circumstance, the Mundana forced the presumed prostitutes to work on behalf of the revolution.

On May 1, 1966, Fidel declared that the revolution had “nearly eliminated” prostitution; his pronouncement symbolized the supposed success and culmination of the campaign against sex work.<sup>221</sup> But sex work persisted on the island, and not just prostitution sanctioned by the Mundana. The graduates of reeducation centers sometimes returned to their former occupation, other women never abandoned sex work, and new prostitutes began to practice. MININT attempted to limit recidivism by asking CDRs to watch rehabilitated sex workers and report to them if the women did not behave appropriately.<sup>222</sup> Social workers and MININT officials also periodically met with reeducation-center graduates.<sup>223</sup> However, prostitution continued to irk government leaders. Model inmates at *granjas* like América

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<sup>220</sup> Vivés, 238.

<sup>221</sup> Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario, en la conmemoración del Primero de Mayo, Día Internacional del Trabajo, en la Plaza de la Revolución,” 1 May 1966. *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1966/esp/f010566e.html>.

<sup>222</sup> FMC, 42.

<sup>223</sup> Salas, 101.

Libre often professed a desire to become model revolutionaries and labor on behalf of the revolution, but once released from reeducation centers, some women never showed up for their assigned jobs. Activists assumed that they secretly continued to practice sex work.<sup>224</sup>

Other prostitutes practiced without hindrance throughout the first half of the 1960s. It appears that the reeducation campaign overlooked sex workers in small towns like Artemisa, where women only faced (unofficial) rehabilitation in the second half of the decade.<sup>225</sup> A resident of Mayarí, a town in Oriente province, asserted that there was more “degradation” in 1967 than there ever was before. He blamed this on the part-time prostitutes and promiscuous girls.<sup>226</sup> As journalist Amir Valle notes, sex also became an important commodity that women sold in order to gain access to otherwise inaccessible foodstuffs, clothing, and jobs.<sup>227</sup> While the revolutionary government claimed to have created the necessary conditions for women to abandon sex work and seek alternative employment, it unwittingly constructed a society in which men and women had to break numerous laws in order to purchase eggs, diapers, dresses, and other goods lacking in Cuba.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Valle, 195; Fernández-Moure, 163.

<sup>225</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 257.

<sup>226</sup> Quoted in José Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution: Life in a Cuban Country Town* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968), 190.

<sup>227</sup> Cardenal, 20; Vivés, 239; Valle, 196.

<sup>228</sup> Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Secretario del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba y Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario, en la inauguración de las obras de San Andrés de Caiguanabo, Pinar del Río, 28 January 1967. *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1967/esp/f280167e.html>; Monika Krause-Fuchs, *Monika y la revolución: Una mirada singular sobre la historia reciente de Cuba* (Tenerife, Spain: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 2002), 87, 95; Vivés, 239.

By the 1970s, government leaders identified sex workers as delinquents, rather than victims. In a June 1971 speech commemorating the tenth anniversary of MININT, Fidel placed prostitution in the category of social crimes. While still asserting that sex work had been eliminated, he added, “Eradication does not mean that [crimes] cannot appear or that individual signs of prostitution, sex trafficking, gambling, and drug trafficking do not indeed appear on a small scale.... Nonetheless, we should be alert. And we should not simply believe that because the politics of the Revolution in this country are just that they are also humane.”<sup>229</sup> No longer did Fidel view sex workers as victims or seek to rescue them from the exploitation of foreigners and sex traffickers. Instead, sex workers were unofficially classified as living in a “state of danger.”

In 1977, when revolutionary leadership began to worry that sex work was increasing, Fidel proclaimed that “with the Revolution, prostitution became a crime.”<sup>230</sup> With this pronouncement, he ostensibly sought to prevent additional women from becoming sex workers. However, he also conveniently ignored the first several years of the revolution, when prostitutes received sympathy, support, and rehabilitation from government activists. Fidel was incorrect when he claimed that the revolution outlawed prostitution, but his statement aptly foreshadowed the 1979 law that classified sex workers as pre-criminals.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de la República de Cuba, en acto conmemorativo del X aniversario de la creación del MININT, celebrado en el Teatro de la CTC,” 6 June 1971. *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f060671e.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente de la República de Cuba, en el acto de la clausura del Primer Congreso de los CDR en el XVII aniversario de su fundación, en la Plaza de la Revolución, Ciudad de la Habana,” n.p.; Salas, 102-103.

<sup>231</sup> Ley No. 21 Código Penal, 28-30 December 1978. *Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular: Cuba*, [http://www.parlamentocubano.cu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=236:ley-no-21-codigo-penal&catid=46:leyes&Itemid=79](http://www.parlamentocubano.cu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=236:ley-no-21-codigo-penal&catid=46:leyes&Itemid=79).

Eighteen years after the actions of *chulos*, madams, and sex traffickers were deemed “dangerous,” prostitution officially joined them due to “conduct observed to be in clear opposition to the norms of socialist morality.”<sup>232</sup>

The Cuban anti-prostitution campaign exemplifies more than revolutionary perspectives on sex work. It also illustrates the Cuban female ideal, as enforced by government representatives across the country. These activists defined rehabilitated sex workers according to the middle class criteria of femininity, motherhood, and sexual and racial normativity, qualities by which other women were also measured. When prostitutes rejected rehabilitation and the norms of femininity, they faced repression and even incarceration, highlighting the legal component of the standards by which they were gauged. I have argued that the agency and initiative of low-level government representatives was essential to this campaign, especially throughout 1961. But while the methods of reformation differed, nearly all activists relied on a discourse of paternalism and maternalism to rescue prostitutes from their supposed victimization under capitalism. This rhetoric infantilized the women and allowed them autonomy only once they accepted the gendered norms of the revolution. The sex workers who accepted reeducation became important symbols of revolutionary advancement, while those who continued to practice became scapegoats for the perceived failures of the campaign. The twenty-first-century Cuban government continues to classify sex workers as counterrevolutionaries, underscoring the persistence of early revolutionary gender norms and the legacy of the anti-prostitution campaign.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., Salas, 103; Ley 993, 24687-24688.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Sowing Eucalyptus in Guanahacabibes”: The Rehabilitation of *Chulos* and Vagrants, 1959-1965

On October 11, 1961, police officers spread throughout the city of Havana, arresting thousands of individuals whose appearance or conduct, as we will see, threatened revolutionary norms. Squad cars surrounded red-light districts such *barrio* Colón, where officers detained anyone who lacked identification documents. Other people were apprehended in their homes, singled out by neighborhood watch groups (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution – CDRs) as deviant or counterrevolutionary. Cubans remember this operation as the Night of the Three Ps (*Noche de las Tres Ps*), a reference to three of the groups targeted by police (*prostitutas*, *pederastas*, and *proxenetas*). These terms are traditionally translated by English-language scholars as prostitutes, homosexuals, and pimps. But the alliterative title is a misnomer, as the raids lasted more than one night, and individuals other than the three Ps also faced arrest.<sup>1</sup> Classifying this event as the “Night of the Three Ps” obfuscates the arbitrary repression of Cuban citizens unaffiliated with the above categories. It also implies that there existed uniform definitions for *prostitutas*, *pederastas*, and *proxenetas*. Just as Cuban police officers undoubtedly relied on cultural preconceptions to translate official orders into practice, English-language historians have

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<sup>1</sup> Carlos Franqui notes that also targeted were “vagrants, suspicious types, intellectuals, artists, Catholics, Protestants, [and] practioners of voodoo.” *Family Portrait with Fidel: A Memoir*, trans. Alfred MacAdam (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 138-140; Armando Navarro Vega, *Cuba: El socialismo y sus éxodos* (Bloomington, IN: Palibrio, 2013), 143-144; Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, *Virgilio Piñera en persona* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2003), 231-232.

utilized extant words in the English language to document this and other operations.

However, the translation of *proxeneta* to “pimp” has simplified a complex social identity and disguised a campaign to restructure gender roles in families where women were the primary wage earners. Indeed, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Cubans used the term *proxeneta* or *chulo* to refer to a wide range of individuals, usually men, who accepted money from women.

Broadening the definition of *chulo* inevitably reframes the meaning of the early revolutionary campaign to rehabilitate these men. Initiated in early 1961 by government representatives and provincial activists who viewed *proxenetas* as threats to the reeducation of female sex workers, the campaign assumed greater proportions following Fidel Castro’s September 1961 speech in which he announced his opposition to the “corrupt and antisocial” individuals who exploited prostitutes.<sup>2</sup> In December of the same year, revolutionary officials passed Law 993, a ruling that facilitated the arrest of “those who exploit[ed] prostitution in whatever form or way.”<sup>3</sup> However, government activists interpreted “exploit” broadly, and arrested men who “had no economic income, did not work, but lived off one or several women.”<sup>4</sup> In this way, not all *proxenetas* feared arrest, only those without employment. Concurrent with efforts to rehabilitate prostitutes, the detention of *chulos* also paralleled the authorities’ growing discontent with “lumpen,” including vagrants (*vagos*) and other

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<sup>2</sup> Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea de los comités de defensa,” *Obra Revolucionaria*, 9 October 1961, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Law 993, *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, 20 December 1961, 24687-24688; Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), *Programa a la atención a la problemática de la prostitución*, Government publication, October 1993, 30; Darío Carmona, *Prohibida la sombra: Reportajes en Cuba* (Havana: Contemporáneos, UNEAC, 1965), 18-20.

<sup>4</sup> Rosa del Olmo, “The Cuban Revolution and the Struggle Against Prostitution,” trans. Daniel Sudran, *Crime and Social Justice* 12 (Winter 1979): 37.

perceived social parasites (*parásitos*).<sup>5</sup> During the first half of the decade, officials seemed to have viewed *proxenetas* as a separate type of vagrant, a relative of individuals who did not belong to a revolutionary organization or labor on behalf of the revolution.<sup>6</sup> But by 1966, public officials ceased to mention *chulos*, and they were subsumed within the broader category of “lumpen vagrancy.” The supposed elimination of sex work implied an end to the *chulos* who profited from prostitution, and since official discourse had emphasized this type of *proxeneta*, *chulos* became indiscernible from vagrants.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter is situated within the separate, yet overlapping, historiographies of labor regulation and UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) camps in 1960s Cuba. Scholars of the 1970s paid special attention to the various strategies employed by revolutionary leaders to imbue Cubans with new attitudes towards work, specifically manual labor.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, through the use of rhetoric, incentives, shame, and sanctions, Cuban authorities sought to boost production and sever the capitalist-induced ties between exploitation and work. Two decades later, political scientist Julie Marie Bunck argued that

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<sup>5</sup> Lumpen comes from “lumpen proletariat,” the category created by Karl Marx to refer to a “declassed strata of an antagonistic society (beggars, tramps, vagabonds, criminal elements, etc.) living by beggary, swindling, thievery, prostitution, pimping, and so on.” The lumpen proletariat is presumed incapable of “organized political struggle.” Boris Putrin, *Political Terms: A Short Guide*, trans. Valentin Kochetkov (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1982), 42.

<sup>6</sup> “Empleo para todos, a los jefes de familia primero,” *Revolución*, 25 September 1961, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Rosa Miriam Elizalde, *Flores desechables ¿prostitución en Cuba?* (Havana: Ediciones Abril, 1996), 37; Teresa Díaz Canals and Graciela González Olmedo, “Cultura y prostitución: Una solución posible,” *Papers* 52 (1997): 169.

<sup>8</sup> Luis Salas, *Social Control and Deviance in Cuba* (New York: Praeger, 1979), 330-366; Arthur MacEwan, “Incentives, Equality, and Power in Revolutionary Cuba,” in *The New Cuba: Paradoxes and Potentials*, ed. Ronald Radosh (New York: Morrow, 1976), 74-101; Roberto E. Hernández and Carmelo Mesa-Lago, “Labor Organization and Wages,” in *Revolutionary Change in Cuba*, ed. Carmelo Mesa-Lago (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1971), 209-250.

these policies had been largely ineffective and that Cuban workers had rejected official measures to increase productivity.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, attempts to increase productivity existed side by side with efforts to eliminate homosexuality, a behavior perceived as antithetic to Marxism and distracting to revolutionary progress.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, scholars began to explore state repression of gay men and their subsequent internment in UMAP labor camps.<sup>11</sup> More recently, historian Lillian Guerra has revealed the relationship between homosexuals and intellectuals, both of whom experienced repression for challenging gendered ideals of citizenship.<sup>12</sup> Historian Joseph Tahbaz also disrupts the historiography, demonstrating that gay men were imprisoned at UMAP camps alongside many other socially-marginalized groups, and that along with isolating the individuals, the camp's most vital function was "exploiting the labor of Cuba's supposed degenerates."<sup>13</sup>

This chapter explores the rehabilitation of *proxenetas* as part of the broader revolutionary efforts to redress vagrancy. The project built on a century of efforts to

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<sup>9</sup> Julie Marie Bunck, *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1994), 125-184.

<sup>10</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 227-230.

<sup>11</sup> Allen Young, *Gays under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981); Ian Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996); Emilio Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Enrique Ros, *UMAP: El Gulag castrista* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 227-255.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Tahbaz, "Desmystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba," *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies* 14, no. 2 (December 31, 2013), [http://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html#\\_ednref19](http://www.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html#_ednref19).

eliminate *vagos*.<sup>14</sup> Colonial, republican, and revolutionary authorities all emphasized manual labor as the necessary solution to vagrancy.<sup>15</sup> However, revolutionary leaders also believed that by obligating unemployed men to perform manual labor, they could extirpate capitalist-induced opposition to work.<sup>16</sup> The irony of this was not lost on former UMAP internee Arnaldo Agüero, who later queried, “If agricultural work was supposed to incentivize, why was it a punishment?”<sup>17</sup> In 1961, legal changes made *proxenetas* and vagrants virtually indistinguishable by law.<sup>18</sup> By placing unemployed men at labor camps alongside other undesirables, revolutionary leadership reinforced pre-revolutionary laws and demonstrated that *vagos* had no place in Cuba.

Under revolutionary leadership, unemployment seems to have been a carefully-defined term that could include self-employed farmers, street vendors, and anyone “who could not prove regular employment (*empleo regular*).”<sup>19</sup> However, unemployed women were not targeted for reform by manual labor, demonstrating that vagrancy was only considered a counterrevolutionary act for men. The fact that Cuban leaders initially identified *chulos* as distinct from vagrants reveals that an individual’s source of economic support mattered to authorities. But since employed *proxenetas* did not serve time at labor

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<sup>14</sup> José Antonio Saco, *Memoria sobre la vagancia en la isla de Cuba* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, [1931] 1973); Salas, 331-335.

<sup>15</sup> Salas, 332-334.

<sup>16</sup> Ángel Arcos Bergnes, *Evocando al Che* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 255-257; Severo Cazalis (pseud. Siquitrilla), “Un día sin ver un eucalipto,” *Revolución*, 2 February 1964, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Arnaldo Agüero (pseudonym) by author, 20 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>18</sup> Laws 992 and Ley 993, *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, 20 December 1961, 24686-24688.

<sup>19</sup> René Dumont, *Cuba: Intento de crítica constructiva* (Barcelona: Nova Terra, 1965), 159-160; Cuban Economic Research Project, 11-13.

camps such as Guanahacabibes (also known as Uvero Quemado), it appears that the primary problem was with *chulos* who allowed women to support them, even as they did not work themselves. Considering that historically a large majority of the unemployed had been Afro-Cuban, the conflation of *chulos* and vagrants likely had greater consequences for men of color.<sup>20</sup> The internment of perceived social deviants at work camps like Guanahacabibes foreshadowed the 1965 detainment of socially-marginalized groups at UMAP camps. By redefining the term *chulo* and situating the rehabilitation of these men within the history of Guanahacabibes, this chapter reveals the long history of manual labor as a treatment for perceived counterrevolutionary behavior.

#### Background: Unemployment and *Estado Peligroso*

Cuban lawmakers first criminalized *proxenetismo* (acting as a *proxeneta*) in the 1938 Code of Social Defense (Codigo de Defensa Social).<sup>21</sup> Under the Spanish Penal Code (Código Penal Español) of 1870, only the trafficking or corruption of minors had been illegal, not *proxenetismo* as it was later understood by republican lawmakers. The 1938 Code defined a *proxeneta* as someone who “assisted, protected, or in any way exploited prostitution in or outside of Cuba, partaking in the benefits of this traffic or turning it into a way of life.” He was also someone who “blatantly lived from the results of prostitution.” If convicted, *chulos* could receive prison sentences of no less than six months and no more than

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<sup>20</sup> Lazaro Peña, “Debemos combatir prácticamente la discriminación racial desde los sindicatos,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 29 March 1959.

<sup>21</sup> Article 489, *Código de Defensa Social*, ed. Jesus Montero (Havana: Edición Económica, 1949), 132.

three years.<sup>22</sup> By noting that *proxenetas* could be people who relied on sex workers for economic support, lawmakers demonstrated that *proxenetismo* was more nuanced than simply managing the activities of prostitutes.

While the Code of Social Defense defined *chulos* as criminals, it classified vagrancy as “dangerous” (*estado peligroso*). Described as a “predisposition that is pathological, congenital, or acquired through a habit that destroys or weakens inhibitions and favors the tendency to commit crime,” *estado peligroso* encompassed twelve behaviors, including thuggery (*matonismo*), habitual vagrancy, and having a contagious venereal disease. This law marked a change from the 1870 Penal Code, which had classified vagrancy as an “aggravating factor” when combined with a crime.<sup>23</sup>

Since the pre-revolutionary Cuban economy relied heavily on the monoculture of sugar production, the vagrancy or unemployment rate varied from one season to the next. For this reason, it would have been difficult to differentiate the *estado peligroso* of habitual vagrancy from dead-season (*tiempo muerto*) unemployment. The sugar industry created most of the island’s employment, and during the harvest months of January through April, unemployment was often as low as eight percent.<sup>24</sup> But from July to October, during the *tiempo muerto*, it was not uncommon for the unemployment rate to reach 21 percent. Many

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<sup>22</sup> Minors were considered individuals 19 years of age and under. Article 459, *Código Penal*, ed. Ángel C. Betancourt (Havana: Imprenta y Papelería de Rambla, Bouza y Ca, 1913), 217-218.

<sup>23</sup> Article 10, *Código Penal*, 54-55.

<sup>24</sup> This figure comes from census data and an employment survey in 1953 and 1957. Jorge Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 91-92; Samuel Farber, *Cuba since the Revolution of 1959* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 81.

agricultural workers were also chronically underemployed.<sup>25</sup> The Code of Social Defense did little to distinguish inevitably part-time agricultural workers from other underemployed Cubans, highlighting that a “vagrant is understood as one who has the aptitude to perform paid, mental or physical labor, is habitually unemployed, and lives from the work of others, public welfare, or unknown means of subsistence.”<sup>26</sup> Someone who worked full-time in the sugar fields could have easily been classified as a vagrant during the summer months. The definition of *vago* was also strikingly similar to the definition of *chulo*. Indeed, the primary legal difference between these two groups was the source of their revenue: *proxenetas* were supported by prostitutes and vagrants were not. By the 1950s, this distinction was not noticeable in colloquial Spanish.

### Defining *Chulos*

For mid-twentieth-century Cubans, the term *chulo* referred to a wide range of individuals, usually men, who accepted money from women. There existed four categories of *proxeneta*, the most notorious of which was an unemployed man who received financial support from one or more prostitutes.<sup>27</sup> When interviewed by historian Tomás Fernández Robaina, former Havana sex worker Violeta referred to these individuals as “real *chulos*.”<sup>28</sup> The second category encompassed employed men who obtained funds from female

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<sup>25</sup> This percentage reflects data collected in 1943 and 1956. Domínguez, 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> Article 48, *Código de Defensa Social*, 23.

<sup>27</sup> Margaret Randall, *Cuban Women Now: Interviews with Cuban Women* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1974), 253-254; Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Historias de mujeres públicas* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 35-36; Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, *Guantánamo Bay* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1977), 98; del Olmo, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Fernández Robaina, 36.

prostitutes. These men might work as bankers or factory workers; they might also be drug dealers.<sup>29</sup> However, a man did not have to be supported by a sex worker in order to be considered a *chulo*. In *Santa Camila de la Habana Vieja*, the 1962 play by José Brene, part-time stenographer Níco accuses Camila, a Santería priestess (*santera*), of turning him into an “indecent *chulo*.”<sup>30</sup> While Camila was not a sex worker, the mere fact that she financially supported Níco made him a *chulo*. Family members who lived off the remittances provided by their sex-worker daughters and sisters were also classified as *proxenetas*.<sup>31</sup> While *chulo* was typically a term reserved for men, this last categorization underscored its malleability, especially with regard to those who received the salaries of prostitutes. Some *chulos* functioned as pimps, as traditionally understood by English-language speakers. They oversaw the labor of prostitutes and demanded money from women at the end of every day. But as noted above, many others were conventional boyfriends and husbands who lived off the labor of their female partners. By only arresting the *proxenetas* without “regular employment,” revolutionary officials demonstrated that they regarded the unemployed men who were supported by women as the most contemptible type of *chulo*.

Contemporary Cubans viewed *chulos* as inevitably associated with drugs and violence.<sup>32</sup> Spanish exile and journalist Darío Carmona noted that some Cuban *proxenetas* fled to Venezuela, where they “have been able to reinitiate their turbid business in Caracas,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.; Cruz Díaz, 85, 101. For another possible reference, see Oscar Lewis, Ruth M. Lewis, and Susan M. Rigdon, *Neighbors: Living the Revolution: An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 342-343.

<sup>30</sup> José R. Brene, “Santa Camila de la Habana Vieja,” in *Dramaturgia de la Revolución (1959-2008)*, vol. 1, ed. Omar Valiño (Havana: Ediciones Alarcos, 2010), 100.

<sup>31</sup> Daura Olema, “Hacia una vida nueva,” *Bohemia*, 11 January 1963, 42; Fernández Robaina, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Vega Vega, 35-36; Carmona, 20.

expanding it with drug trafficking.”<sup>33</sup> Havana law professor Juan Vega Vega wrote that “the *proxeneta* is necessarily connected to the severest crimes of trafficking and possession of toxic drugs and narcotics.”<sup>34</sup> He added that “into the backdrop of a *proxeneta*’s life are woven various crimes: coercion, threats, assault... [and he] is always prepared to commit greater crimes against life and bodily integrity if someone is an obstacle to the continuation of his parasitic life.”<sup>35</sup> Vega Vega and others believed that *chulos* were participants in a system of physical and structural violence, which allowed them to profit financially from illegitimate labor (drug trafficking) and female employment.

*Proxenetes* were also viewed as working-class versions of the bourgeoisie. In *El gallo de San Isidro*, playwright Brene criticizes the political corruption of the republican era when one of his characters asserts, “The politician employs the same methods as the *chulo*. He beguiles (*enamora*), promises, exploits, and never provides anything.”<sup>36</sup> Fidel made similar comparisons at speeches in mid-July 1962. At an awards ceremony for the summer’s most productive sugar-cane cutters, he accused “addicts, gamblers, lumpen, *proxenetes*, prostitutes, and the bourgeoisie” of “sowing demoralization.” “They are traitors to the nation,” Fidel continued, and Cubans should treat them as one does an “enemy army” who has surrounded the city.<sup>37</sup> The following day, at a gathering of Havana bus drivers, Fidel

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<sup>33</sup> Carmona, 20.

<sup>34</sup> “Juan Vega Vega (1922-2002),” *Revista Cubana de Derecho* 29 (June 2007): 134; Vega Vega, 36.

<sup>35</sup> Vega Vega, 35.

<sup>36</sup> José R. Brene, *El gallo de San Isidro* (Havana: Ediciones Revolución, 1964), 70.

<sup>37</sup> While prostitutes were included in this category, the government considered the women to be victims of capitalism and capable of rehabilitation. Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz... en el acto de entrega de diplomas a los obreros más destacados en la zafra, efectuado en la playa de Varadero,” 16 July 1962, *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz*,

related *proxenetas* to bankers, politicians, landowners, and others, declaring that “today, they form a single legion.”<sup>38</sup> By linking these seemingly diverse groups of people, Fidel demonstrated that revolution only had room for the proletariat, those who produced tangible products for the country. In this way, the unemployed were no better than the bourgeoisie.

Serving as counterpoints to politicians and *chulos* were the sinewy men of newspaper articles, depicted harvesting crops in the countryside. Many images were of individuals recognized for cutting the most sugarcane or overcoming great odds. But others were of men who illustrated the changes fomented by the revolution.<sup>39</sup> Ventura Chirino, the resident of a new cooperative in rural Matanzas province, was featured in the first edition of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform’s (INRA) monthly magazine. While G. González, the journalist who interviewed him, admitted, “The name of Ventura Chirino has no meaning at all.” But Ventura was a man transformed by the revolution from an “obscure farmer to a celebrity,” the ideal everyman. González described Ventura as the “new man of Cuba” who “seemed indefatigable, his shirt stuck to his body by the sweat that ran from his head down his muscular neck like a river of sap to nourish the sugarcane or hold the cement blocks... with a

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*Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/f160762e.html>.

<sup>38</sup> For background information on the reason for this meeting, see Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 174-175; Fidel Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz...en la asamblea de los trabajadores de los ómnibus, celebrado en el Teatro Chaplin,” 17 July 1962, *Discursos e intervenciones del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro Ruz, Presidente del Consejo de Estado de la República de Cuba, Government of Cuba*, <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/f170762e.html>.

<sup>39</sup> See also the public-safety advertisements from the Ministry of Public Health (Ministerio de Salud Pública) in which handsome, muscular men are placed alongside reminders to wash hands, bathe daily, and wear gloves while working in the sugar fields. “¡A la zafra!,” *Bohemia*, 18 February 1966, 108; “¡A la zafra!,” *Bohemia*, 4 March 1966, 79.

smile of incredulity appearing from the corner of his thin lips.”<sup>40</sup> Color photographs reinforced the erotic description of Ventura, showing a young, Afro-Cuban man performing manual labor. Not only did he illustrate the ideal to which Cubans were meant to aspire, but he also represented early government attempts to highlight the role of blacks and *mulatos* in the revolution.<sup>41</sup>

Representations of women at work were also meant to incentivize male laborers. Images of women performing agricultural labor served to both inspire and shame men into volunteering their bodies for the revolution.<sup>42</sup> One article about an all-woman volunteer labor brigade in Las Villas explicitly sought to accomplish both these goals. After working with the women, one *campesino* (rural person) declared, “These thirty women... do not merely help us to plant and harvest the crops; with them we work better and faster. They encourage us; they cheer up the earth, illuminate it... They produce more each time. And their enthusiasm makes us all happy.”<sup>43</sup> With his comments, the farmer underscored the ideology that a good attitude toward work, a revolutionary consciousness, inevitably motivated others to adopt new labor attitudes.<sup>44</sup> But the women were not merely meant to inspire *campesinos* with their excitement. The brigade would also have been used to shame

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<sup>40</sup> G. González, “Una nueva Cuba entra en escena,” *INRA* 1 (January 1960), 14-19.

<sup>41</sup> Devyn Spence Benson, “Not Blacks, but Citizens! Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1959-1961,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009, 1-21.

<sup>42</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 240-241.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Luis Serra, “Treinta mujeres,” *Con la Guardia en Alto* 7, no. 3 (March 1968): 5.

<sup>44</sup> Bunck, 130-131.

into productivity the men who replaced them the following day after being labeled “unsuitable for cutting sugarcane.”<sup>45</sup>

The reward for improved performance could be female adoration. This is suggested by a 1969 cartoon in *Con la Guardia en Alto*, the magazine of the CDRs (Comités de Defensa de la Revolución) (Image 8). In the first scene, a laborer relaxes in his hammock after a long day of cutting sugarcane, and he ponders a female *cederista* performing nightly guard duty in her neighborhood. In the second scene, the same woman fanaticizes about a man, possibly him, who contentedly harvests cane in the sugar field.<sup>46</sup> The comic promoted the idea that it was only through labor that a man could gain the attention of his love interest.



Image 8: *Con la Guardia en Alto* 8 (November 1969): back page.

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<sup>45</sup> Serra, 5.

<sup>46</sup> *Con la Guardia en Alto* 8 (November 1969): back page.

Another cartoon suggested that Cuban men would receive the adoration of the motherland (*patria*), a character gendered female, if they joined the militia (Image 9). The panels show a honeybee listing his many excuses for not becoming a militia member (*miliciano*) until he finally recognizes his obligation to Cuba. The final image depicts the bee in the arms of the *patria*, surrounded by hearts and receiving her caresses. The caption reads: “And you, reader, if you are not yet a *miliciano*... Then don’t wait!”<sup>47</sup>



Image 9: *Trabajo 2*, no. 17 (November 1961): 33.

### The Campaign against *Chulos*, Vagrants, and other Lumpen

Like efforts to rehabilitate prostitutes, the campaign against *proxenetas* was initially a decentralized process, carried out by government representatives and local activists for the first two and a half years of the revolution. Following President Manuel Urrutia’s failed 1959 effort to shut down casinos and brothels, César Blanco, chief of public order in the Ministry of Government (Ministerio de Gobernación), conducted occasional raids in Havana’s red-light districts (*zonas de tolerancia*), detaining people of ill repute (*elementos*

<sup>47</sup> “Abejín te invita a hacerte miliciano,” *Trabajo 2*, no. 17 (November 1961): 32-33.

*del mal vivir*).<sup>48</sup> These sporadic attempts to close Havana brothels and detain lumpen reportedly fueled rumors that *chulos* would soon be targeted for arrest.<sup>49</sup> The following year, revolutionary representatives began collecting census data on sex workers, *proxenetas*, and their families. Police officers, members of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), and others sought to determine the conditions in which these individuals lived and the family members whom they supported.<sup>50</sup> According to Venezuelan criminologist Rosa del Olmo, census takers had accounted for three thousand *chulos* by 1961.<sup>51</sup> This information was later used in the mass raids aimed at *proxenetas*.

For government representatives in the eastern cities of Guantánamo and Caimanera, the elimination of *chulos* was a necessary step in the reformation of prostitutes.<sup>52</sup> Beginning in 1961, activists reinforced their campaign against sex work by having members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (*cederistas*) surveil their communities and having police officers patrol the red-light districts. In an interview with Rigoberto Cruz Díaz, resident Benigno Milia recalled “cleaning up (*saneando*)” Caimanera, remaking the *zona de tolerancia* into a school zone (*zona escolar*) where working-class individuals could

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<sup>48</sup> These phrases were in use before 1959.

<sup>49</sup> “Nuevos prostíbulos fueron clausurados,” *Revolución*, 24 April 1959, 7; Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 170; Robert E. Quirk, *Fidel Castro* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 227; Fernández Robaina, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Oscar Lewis, Ruth Lewis, and Susan Rigdon, *Four Women: Living the Revolution, An Oral History of Contemporary Cuba* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 279 n. 8; Carmona, 19; FMC, 19, 31; Bunck, 96.

<sup>51</sup> del Olmo, 36.

<sup>52</sup> FMC, 20, 29-34.

reside and children would attend school.<sup>53</sup> Authorities also used coercion, ostensibly against *proxenetas*, in order to prevent individuals from undoing their rehabilitative work with prostitutes. The FMC later reported that during this period, the island's anti-prostitution reformers often sought to separate *chulos* from sex workers. They did this, noted the FMC, in order to prevent the men from exploiting the women's labor.<sup>54</sup>

Similar strategies were employed by police officers in the city of Camagüey. After laboring for several months to "capture" (*captar*) sex workers with literacy courses and sewing workshops, Osvaldo Fleitas admitted that "what we achieved with persuasive conversation was partially lost when the women returned to their environment and the people who exploited them."<sup>55</sup> To solve this problem, the men staged a surprise raid on local brothels. They were met with resistance by both *proxenetas* and prostitutes; one *chulo* fatally shot police officer Eduardo Vega Sala. Following this event, the brothels of Camagüey were closed, *proxenetas* detained, and sex workers sent to the rehabilitative Center for Artisanry (Centro de Producción Artesanal - CPA).<sup>56</sup> But prior to December 1961, the detention of *chulos* guaranteed little. The Code of Social Defense deemed *proxenetismo* a crime, but convictions were often impossible without a statement from the "exploited" woman.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cruz Díaz, 134.

<sup>54</sup> FMC, 20, 29-33.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Carmona, 19; FMC, 34.

<sup>56</sup> Marcos Portnoy, *Testimonio sobre Cuba* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones del Litoral, 1964), 95; Carmona, 17-18; FMC, 34.

<sup>57</sup> del Olmo, 37.

Attempts to eliminate *chulos* existed alongside broader efforts to combat vagrancy. Throughout 1961, high-ranking officials and provincial reformers became increasingly frustrated with many Cubans' unwillingness to obtain full-time employment with the state. Their concern was exacerbated by low levels of production, chronic absenteeism, and insufficient volunteer labor. Fidel and Ernesto Che Guevara insisted that Cubans cultivate new attitudes toward manual labor, excising their capitalism-induced disdain for tasks that were necessary to the revolution.<sup>58</sup> In August 1960, Che declared that because capitalist businessmen no longer exploited the labor of Cuban workers, "it is necessary to undergo profound internal changes... especially in the performance of our duties and obligations to society.... We must, then, erase our old concepts."<sup>59</sup> But these verbal exhortations were ineffective, and in August 1961, Che admitted that few companies had met their production goals.<sup>60</sup> Despite the introduction of grievance committees (*comisiones de reclamaciones*) to correct improper conduct and "socialist emulation" to increase production, industrialization had slowed.<sup>61</sup>

Government leaders transitioned from exhorting Cubans to threatening them in the fall of 1961. José Alberto Naranjo, president of the Havana Coordination, Administration, and Inspection Board (JUCEI), proclaimed that labor production was a trench in the battle against imperialism, second only to the defense of the country. "To be absent from work,"

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<sup>58</sup> Cuban Economic Research Project, 49-51; Bunck, 126-133.

<sup>59</sup> Translated and cited in Bunck, 129.

<sup>60</sup> "Lo importante no es justificar el error, sino impedir que se repita," *Revolución*, 28 August 1961, 1, 6, 8-9, 13-14.

<sup>61</sup> Bunck, 130.

he declared, “is to desert the [war] front.”<sup>62</sup> Comparisons like this converted unemployment and underemployment into actions against the government. Indeed, in a September 1961 speech, Che referred to absenteeism as “counterrevolutionary” behavior.<sup>63</sup> Fidel agreed, and when speaking at a gathering of the CDRs, he proclaimed, “The Revolution... is the large union of... people who are useful,” adding that those who lived off the labor of others were “parasites” who should flee to Miami. The audience shouted their support for Fidel, yelling that the parasites should either “leave” or “labor.” The official transcription of Fidel’s speech indicates that audience applause and shouts were particularly strong when he announced the imminent campaign against a specific type of *parásito*, the “exploiters of women.”<sup>64</sup>

In his September 28 speech, Fidel proclaimed his opposition to men who exploited prostitutes, those who trafficked in “white slavery.” He declared, “We understand that of all the trash that imperialism has taken away, the only thing that remains for it to collect is the element dedicated to the exploitation of prostitutes.” The Ministry of the Interior (MININT), he announced, would soon begin the fight against these “corrupt and *antisocial*” individuals. Fidel suggested that those who remained buy tickets to Miami. To the great pleasure of the audience, he even offered to buy their tickets for them. With his comments, Fidel condemned the *proxenetas* who received the financial support of prostitutes, but in practice, government activists targeted unemployed men of all sorts who lived off unknown means of

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<sup>62</sup> “Empleo para todos,” 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Castro, “Fidel Castro en la asamblea, 10-11, 18.

support. In his speech, Fidel claimed that he was giving these men “adequate time” to depart the island, but the official battle against *chulos* had already begun.<sup>65</sup>

Carried out by members of the Technical Department of Investigations (DTI), a section of MININT, Operation Cohete targeted for arrest thousands of Havana’s perceived delinquents. Presumed *proxenetas* were secretly investigated, most likely by undercover police officers.<sup>66</sup> On the evening of September 27, one day before Fidel’s anti-*chulo* speech, police officers conducted raids in Havana neighborhoods such as Colón, San Isidro, and La Victoria, those most known for vice. DTI members detained *proxenetas*, gang members, brothel owners, and sex workers. The size and scope of these raids was unprecedented in Cuba. According to scholar Francisco Arias Fernández, MININT arrested three thousand people in this operation. The FMC later noted that men suspected of *proxenetismo* were evaluated according to an index developed by the Superior Council of Social Defense (Consejo Superior de Defensa Social).<sup>67</sup> The index determined the threat posed by the men and sentenced them to a corresponding prison term.<sup>68</sup> While it is less clear how many men were convicted of the crime of *proxenetismo*, those who received sanctions were sent to jail

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<sup>65</sup> *Antisocial* was often employed as a synonym of sorts for the legal classification “estado peligroso.” Ibid., 18.

<sup>66</sup> The DTI was also the “investigative arm” of the police force. Pepita Riera, *Servicio de Inteligencia de Cuba comunista* (Miami: Service Offset Printers, 1966), 45; Francisco Arias Fernández, *Cuba contra el narcotráfico: De víctimas a centinelas* (Havana: Editora Política, 2001), 66-67; John Bland, “Reds Dim Gayety in Havana: Reporter Tells of Changes in Two-Year Stay,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 September 1962, 3; FMC, 23-24.

<sup>67</sup> By late 1961, the Consejo Superior de Defensa Social had already been incorporated into MININT.

<sup>68</sup> While the FMC refers specifically to the judgment of individuals arrested in Operation Cohete, the evaluation of these individuals seems to correspond with Law 993, which was not passed until December 1961.

or work farms.<sup>69</sup> Operation Cohete symbolized the beginning of a multi-year battle to combat vagrants, including *chulos*.

In the wake of rumors and threats, many *proxenetas* did leave the island. Some reportedly moved to Venezuela. Journalist Carmona wrote, “There, in the shelter of the ‘representative democracy’ of Mr. [Rómulo] Betancourt, they find themselves more in their element.”<sup>70</sup> U.S. activist Margaret Randall also noted that high-class prostitutes and their *chulos* left to work in Miami, New York, or San Juan, Puerto Rico, departing alongside “other gangsters of the international vice ring.”<sup>71</sup> Violeta, a former Havana prostitute, informed historian Tomás Fernández Robaina that certain *proxenetas* fled the island, but others merely “sought work or became prisoners.”<sup>72</sup> Some “killed themselves out of remorse or desperation,” remarked one Cuban émigré.<sup>73</sup> These comments reveal that *chulos* could avoid imprisonment through one of three ways: emigration, suicide, or employment. Violeta’s emphasis on labor as a solution to *proxenetismo* underscores its close ties with vagrancy and the belief that employment would ameliorate social ills.

Two weeks after Fidel’s anti-*chulo* speech, the government carried out the Night of the Three Ps, which targeted more than the *proxenetas*, prostitutes, and gays that the name implies. Author Carlos Franqui recalled that there were two sweeps. In the first one, police

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<sup>69</sup> Juan Vega Vega, “El proxenetismo como índice de peligrosidad: Un comentario a la Ley 993 de 1961,” *Revista Cubana de Jurisprudencia* 3 (March 1962): 33; Arias Fernández, 66-67; FMC, 23-24.

<sup>70</sup> Carmona, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Randall, 237.

<sup>72</sup> Fernández Robaina, 111.

<sup>73</sup> Warren Miller, *90 Miles from Home: The Face of Cuba Today* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1961), 243-244.

officers from the Scum Squad (El Escuadrón de la Escoria) blocked off Havana neighborhoods most known for vice and violently detained anyone without proper identification. In the second sweep, officers entered homes in search of individuals reported to them by the CDRs. The members of this organization had paid careful attention to the speech delivered to them by Fidel the previous month, and they made careful note of anyone who seemed not to belong to the revolution, regardless of their political position. In this way, vagrants, intellectuals, practitioners of voodoo, and *chulos* all initially faced confinement together.<sup>74</sup> Author and known homosexual Virgilio Piñera was also arrested and taken to the police headquarters nearest his home in Guanabo. He was subsequently transported to the Castillo de Príncipe prison in Havana.<sup>75</sup> When Franqui complained to revolutionary authorities about the Night of the Three Ps, Fidel and President Osvaldo Dorticós informed him that *chulos* “would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.”<sup>76</sup> But since the existing law made it cumbersome and difficult to convict a *proxeneta*, revolutionary leaders decided that legal changes were necessary.

In December 1961, two months after the Night of the Three Ps, the government passed Laws 992 and 993, which classified anyone who “exploit[ed] prostitution in any form or way” as dangerous. Lawmakers added *proxenetas* to the extant list of individuals classified by the 1938 Code as in an *estado peligroso*. The laws also authorized the Supreme Council of Social Defense to adopt “legal measures that make possible reeducation and

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<sup>74</sup> Guillermo Cabrera Infante, “Mordidas del Caimán Barbudo,” in *El ensayo hispanoamericano del siglo XX*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. John Skirius (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004), 545; Franqui, 138-140; Navarro Vega, 143-144.

<sup>75</sup> Espinosa Domínguez, 231-232.

<sup>76</sup> Franqui, 141.

rehabilitation... of the affected parties.”<sup>77</sup> With these amendments, *proxenetas* ceased to be classified as criminals.<sup>78</sup> They joined the long list of individuals, such as habitual vagrants and gamblers, who were also in an *estado peligroso*.<sup>79</sup> The reason for this charge was more practical than legal, as it allowed police officers to arrest and sentence *chulos* without the interference of the regular court system.<sup>80</sup> It also no longer posed a problem if the “exploited” woman chose not to speak against the accused *chulo*.<sup>81</sup> The legal changes of December 1961 did more than facilitate the detention of *proxenetas*, they also made vagrants and *chulos* virtually identical by law. *Estado peligroso* equally encompassed *proxenetas* and *vagos*.

While Venezuelan criminologist Rosa del Olmo noted that the Supreme Council of Social Defense targeted for arrest *chulos* who “had no economic income, did not work, but lived off one or several women,” verifying the last point would have been difficult.<sup>82</sup> Ascertaining the origins of an individual’s financial support could also be time-consuming, especially since the law allowed for someone to be arrested if he lived off “unknown means of subsistence.”<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, government agents often relied on intelligence supplied by

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<sup>77</sup> Laws 992 and 993, *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, 20 December 1961, 24686-24688.

<sup>78</sup> Salas, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Article 48, *Código de Defensa Social*, p. 23-24.

<sup>80</sup> Salas, 100.

<sup>81</sup> del Olmo, 37.

<sup>82</sup> I have been unable to determine exactly when del Olmo traveled to Cuba, but it is likely that she met with Minister of Justice Armando Torres Santrayll (who took office in 1973), del Olmo, 37.

<sup>83</sup> Article 48, *Código de Defensa Social*, 23.

*cederistas* who identified which of their neighbors were ostensibly counterrevolutionaries.<sup>84</sup> However, this information was notoriously questionable, as CDR members were often suspected of less-than-revolutionary motives when reporting their neighbors to the police.<sup>85</sup> In an interview with Oscar Lewis' research team, CDR block president Inocencia lamented that so many CDR leaders altered work logs and stole money raised by their neighborhoods.<sup>86</sup> For these reasons, authenticating the employment and membership status of a potential *proxeneta* or vagrant would have been the easiest method for investigating allegations of living in an *estado peligroso*.<sup>87</sup>

This process would have been facilitated by the fact that in late 1961, the state controlled approximately eighty-five percent of the total productive value of industry on the island. By confiscating both North American and Cuban property, the state quickly became the island's primary employer. Large numbers of Cubans would also have sought employment with the government after their jobs as travel agents, rent collectors, and lawyers became superfluous.<sup>88</sup> In charge of overseeing employment activity, Labor Control Offices sought to maintain a register that documented the employment status of all Cubans. While this first labor census of April 1960 was largely unsuccessful, it marked the beginning of government attempts to regulate employment. The Ministry of Labor attempted again to register Cuban employment, mandating in July 1962 that all people carry a labor card (*carnet*

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<sup>84</sup> See for example: Riera, 47; Franqui, 138; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 200, 208.

<sup>85</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 213.

<sup>86</sup> Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 384-285.

<sup>87</sup> Riera, 47; Franqui, 138.

<sup>88</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 328-329.

laboral), indicating whether or not they were employed and where.<sup>89</sup> Of course, many individuals still refused to comply with the orders.<sup>90</sup>

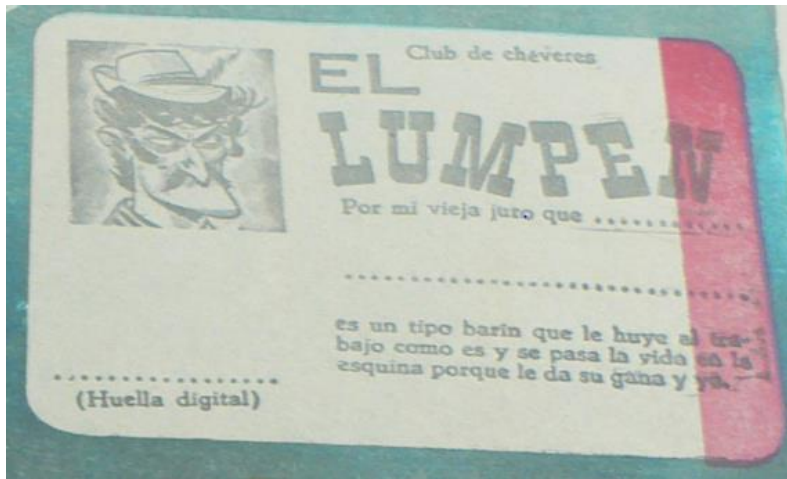


Image 10: *Pa'lante*, 15 October 1964, 8.

As late as October 1964, editors of *Pa'lante*, the humor appendix of the newspaper *Granma*, noted that some Cubans still did not have a “simple, functional, and one-of-a-kind *carnet*.”<sup>91</sup> To this end, the editors proposed ten identification cards, many of them criticizing specific groups assumed to be antipathetic to the revolution (Image 10). Cards were created for gays (*enfermitos*), those who listened to American radio, and “lumpen.” The latter was the broad social category that encompassed individuals who were unemployed and presumed unable to participate in the political struggle. The lumpen *carnet* featured the image of a rakish man with narrowed eyes, followed by the statement, “I swear on my old lady that [name] is a cool guy from whom work flees and who spends his life on the corner because he feels like it, and that’s it.”<sup>92</sup> Vagrants and *chulos* formed part of the lumpen category, an

<sup>89</sup> Cuban Economic Research Project, 11-13.

<sup>90</sup> “El carnet laboral,” *Trabajo* 5, no. 12 (June 1964): 26-31.

<sup>91</sup> “¡Al que le venga bien el plástico, que se lo ponga!” *Pa'lante*, 15 October 1964, 8.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

unknown number of whom did not register with the Labor Control Offices. When an individual was suspected of being an *antisocial*, the absence of state-employment information could be grounds for detention.<sup>93</sup>

### Serving Time at Guanahacabibes

After MININT officials rounded up suspected counterrevolutionaries (of various types) and confirmed that they were unemployed and unaffiliated with a revolutionary organization, the individuals could be classified as living in an *estado peligroso* and sent to one of several work camps across the island.<sup>94</sup> Radio broadcaster Pepita Riera recalled that after Hector Aldama Acosta, head of DTI, received a request to find one thousand volunteer laborers, he ordered his police officers to detain men identified by their CDRs as “counterrevolutionaries.” Riera asserted that the individuals who “could not prove that they belonged to a revolutionary organization or worked for the communist regime were mistreated” and sent to jail or work camps.<sup>95</sup> Work camps existed across the country, but the ones to which vagrants and *chulos* were sent were distinct from the *granjas* where former sex workers were interned. Armando Torres, Secretary General of the Supreme Council, noted that *proxenetas* were “subject to a different kind of rehabilitation program.... More forcible means were required.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, according to visiting French sociologist René Dumont, the

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<sup>93</sup> See for example: Dumont, 159-160; del Olmo, 37; Salas, 100.

<sup>94</sup> Néstor Almendros, “An Illusion of Fairness. Almendros Replies to Alea,” *Village Voice* 29 (14 August 1984): 40; Teresa Jorge, “La prostitución en Cuba,” *Mujeres*, 8 August 1973, 67; Salas, 100; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279, f8; del Olmo, 37; Dumont, 159-160.

<sup>95</sup> Riera, 47.

<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279, f8.

work camps for lumpen prioritized agricultural labor over nearly all other activities.<sup>97</sup> But the violence of these camps and the intense manual labor expected of the men ultimately caused many Cubans to refer to them as “concentration camps.”<sup>98</sup> During the first half of the 1960s, *chulos* were often sent to a work camp on the Guanahacabibes Peninsula or the Diego Pérez Key (Cayo Diego Pérez).<sup>99</sup>

Carrying the name of a sixteenth-century Spanish merchant, Cayo Diego Pérez is located off the southern coast of Matanzas province. Coral reefs and sand bars surround the island, making sea travel difficult.<sup>100</sup> When navigating the area at the turn of the nineteenth century, naturalist Alexander Von Humboldt wrote, “Notwithstanding the small size of our bark, and the boasted skill of our pilot, we often ran aground... [but] sheltered by so many islands, the surface is calm as a lake of fresh water.”<sup>101</sup> The few inhabitants of the region would have also remained unmolested by inland traffic, as journalist Carlos Marten reported

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<sup>97</sup> Dumont, 159.

<sup>98</sup> Paco Ignacio Taibo II, *Guevara: Also Known as Che*, trans. Martin Roberts (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 378; Mohammed A. Rauf, Jr., *Cuban Journal: Castro’s Cuba as it Really is – An Eyewitness Account by an American Reporter* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1964), 179; Arcos Bergnes, 249; Riera, 71-72.

<sup>99</sup> Jorge G. Castañeda, *Compañero: Vida y muerte del Che Guevara* (New York: Vintage Español, 1997); U.S. Congress, Committee on International Relations, *U.S. Trade Embargo of Cuba: Hearings Before the Subcommittees on International Trade and Commerce and International Organizations of the Committee on International Relations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 428; del Olmo, 37; Salas, 100; Almendros, 40; Cuban Economic Research Project, 16, 18; Jorge, 67.

<sup>100</sup> Mauel Rivero Glean and Gerardo Chávez Spínolo, *Catauro de seres míticos y legendarios en Cuba* (Havana: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cuba Juan Marinello, 2005), 454; *Sailing Directions (Enroute) – Caribbean Sea*, vol. 1, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Annapolis, MD: Prostar Publications, 2004), 70; P.M. Alcolado et al., “The Cuban Coral Reefs,” in *Latin American Coral Reefs*, ed. J. Cortés (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science B.V., 2003), 55.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander Von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland, *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Region of America, During the Years 1799-1804*, vol. 3, trans. and ed. Thomasina Ross (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), 183-184.

that the nearby Zapata Swamp (Ciénaga de Zapata) was “a place almost unknown before the triumph of the Revolution.”<sup>102</sup>

Limited information exists about the labor camp on Cayo Diego Pérez, but it seems that many of the *chulos* first apprehended in Havana served time there. Secretary General Torres reflected that hundreds of *proxenetas* were sent to labor camps, but the number is probably higher. Rosa del Olmo noted that three thousand *chulos* performed hard labor at Diego Pérez Key.<sup>103</sup> Former prisoners reported to the U.S. Committee on International Relations that 61 men arrived to Cayo Diégo Perez in 1961, accused of vagrancy, homosexuality, and other behaviors deemed inconsistent with revolutionary morality.<sup>104</sup> Conditions at Diego Pérez were likely similar to those at the nearby Cayo Largo camp, where hundreds of Rebel Army members served out sentences for petty crimes. At the request of Che Guevara, architect Jorge Ruíz visited Cayo Largo around 1961, where he found the weather and work conditions to be so intolerable that he recommended the camp be shut down.<sup>105</sup> “There were no women, no drink,” he recalled, “you had to be in the water between 5pm and 10pm because the air changed, and the mosquitoes would eat you.” Ruíz also described unique forms of punishment; for example, “there was a rock that jutted out 300

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<sup>102</sup> Carlos Marten, “En la Ciénaga de Zapata: Más ciudadanos de la Cuba nueva,” *INRA* 2, no. 1 (January 1961): 63.

<sup>103</sup> del Olmo, 37; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279, f8.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Congress, Committee on International Relations, 428.

<sup>105</sup> Helen Yaffe, *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 216-217.

meters, and the directors at Cayo Largo would make soldiers sit on the rock for four days to punish them.”<sup>106</sup>

Situated off the southern coast of Cuba, these remote keys were the ideal location for labor camps as well as military bases. Widelto Leyva, former inmate at Cayo Diego Pérez, recounted to the Miami newspaper *Diario de las Américas* that he and others helped prepare the twelve-by-eight-kilometer island for the Soviets who arrived in 1963 to construct an air and naval base. Afterwards, the camp at Cayo Diego Pérez was temporarily disbanded. Camp officials released some inmates, including Leyva, who later escaped to the United States. More than four hundred others, however, were sent to finish their sentences at Guanahacabibes.<sup>107</sup>

Guanahacabibes was nearly as remote as Cayo Diego Pérez. On the far western coast of the province of Pinar del Río lies the Guanahacabibes Peninsula, home to stony soil, looming cliffs, and a diverse array of trees. Prior to 1959, the Pan-American Highway (Carretera Panamericana) only extended as far west as La Fé, a town on the “exterior perimeter” of the peninsula. The primary industry was wood-cutting, followed by charcoal production. Some residents would have also worked for Arrochera Guanahacabibes, a family-owned farm of over three thousand acres dedicated to the cultivation of rice.<sup>108</sup> Slicing

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> U.S. Congress, Committee on the Judiciary, *Communist Threat to the United States through the Caribbean: Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 1107; “Cuba and the Hemisphere,” *Cuban Information Service*, 10 August 1963, 6.

<sup>108</sup> Rogelio Luis Bravet, “Guanahacabibes,” *Bohemia*, 22 October 1965, 5-7; Guillermo Jiménez, *Enciclopedia económica de Cuba republicana: Las empresas de Cuba, 1958*, vol. 1 (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2000), 53; Cazalis, 6; Arcos Bergnes, 249-250.

deeply into the peninsula is the Corrientes Bay, at the innermost part of which was the Rehabilitation Center of Uvero Quemado (Centro de Rehabilitación de Uvero Quemado).<sup>109</sup> The location was difficult to access, and after arriving via Jeep in 1965, photographer Mariano Ferré commented that the terrain was so rocky, “I now know how a banana feels inside a blender.”<sup>110</sup>

Hidden from public view, Uvero Quevado was the subject of many a rumor. According to journalist Rogelio Luis Bravet, ordinary Cubans might inform neighbors who acted out of line that they could end up sowing eucalyptus in Guanahacabibes. Che half-jokingly threatened his staff with “vacations” at Uvero Quemado.<sup>111</sup> For his 2008 memoir, journalist Juan-José Fernández interviewed Mario, an anti-revolutionary, who connected the absence of a *carnet* with a trip to the peninsula. Mario recounted: “I didn’t have an ID of any type, and it was mandatory. If not, they sent you to a place in Pinar del Río called Guanacabibe [sic] to sow eucalyptus. A popular refrain at that time was: ‘I was on the street corner, minding my own business, and now I find myself sowing eucalyptus’.”<sup>112</sup> The allusions to eucalyptus likely referenced the Forest Militia (*milicia forestal*), which was

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<sup>109</sup> Antirevolutionaries referred to the camp as the Center of Confinement (Centro de Reclusión). Che preferred to call it the Self-Education Center (Centro de Autoeducación).

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Bravet, “Guanahacabibes,” 6.

<sup>111</sup> T aibo, 378; Bravet, “Guanahacabibes,” 4; Arcos Bergnes, 249; Rauf, 179.

<sup>112</sup> I am grateful to Abel Sierra Madero for his help with this translation. Translated from: “Yo estaba en la esquina de pavo, pavito, y ahora me encuentro sembrando eucalipto.” Quoted in Juan-José Fernández, *El laberinto cubano: Las dos orillas* (Madrid: Ediciones Espejo de Tinta, 2008), 180.

tasked with reforesting much of the peninsula and included many of the first *antisociales* to take up residence in Pinar del Río.<sup>113</sup>

No doubt influenced by forester Vicente Díaz Serrano's use of eucalyptus to reforest areas of Pinar del Río in the 1950s, revolutionary leaders created the *milicia forestal* in 1959 both to replenish the tree population and to monitor *antisociales*.<sup>114</sup> Men who appeared to challenge revolutionary morality might find themselves assigned to the force, obligated to serve out sentences in the woods of Guanahacabibes. In early 1959, a U.S. citizen named Frank moved to Cuba to participate in the revolution, and he found himself "romantically enthusiastic" about the Forest Militia. Unaware of the true nature of the group, Frank asked to join. Only after his arrival to Pinar del Río did he realize that many of his fellow "soldiers" were anti-revolutionaries who did not hesitate to throw rocks at visiting heroes, such as Universo Sánchez, Fidel's sometime bodyguard. Frank sought to distinguish himself from the prisoners by becoming a political instructor (*instructor político*); in this role he gave classes to local *campesinos* on the tenets of communism. Frank also joined forces with renowned painter and inmate José Masiques, and together they offered art classes.<sup>115</sup>

Initially overseen by the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR), internees at Uvero Quemado were categorized as *antisociales*, individuals perceived to be

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<sup>113</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *In Cuba*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (New York: New Directions, 1974), 285-286.

<sup>114</sup> Laurette Séjourné, with Tatiana Coll, *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1980), 106-107; Vicente Díaz Serrano, "Las plantaciones de eucalipto de la Manaja, Minas de Matahambre, S.A., Pinar del Río, Cuba." *Caribbean Forester* (Puerto Rico) 16, no. 3-4 (1955): 55-56; Vicente Díaz Serrano, "Las plantaciones de eucalipto de la Compañía Minas de Matahambre, S.A. en la Provincia de Pinar del Río, Cuba." *Caribbean Forester* (Puerto Rico) 18, no. 3-4 (1957): 49-55; Cardenal, 285-286.

<sup>115</sup> Quoted in Cardenal, 285-286.

acting in opposition to revolutionary morality.<sup>116</sup> Laboring alongside *proxenetas* were presumed homosexuals, vagrants, people without *carnets*, students who had erred while studying abroad, administrators who did not report malfeasance, and others. The number of people interned at Guanahacabibes is difficult to determine and likely fluctuated from one year to the next. Unofficial estimates vary from fifty-six to five thousand men.<sup>117</sup> The types of *antisociales* confined to the camp also seemed to vary from year to year.<sup>118</sup> Frank noted that in the early 1960s, 95 percent of the men interned at Uvero Quemado were Afro-Cubans, an observation that seems to challenge government claims that people of color largely supported the revolution.<sup>119</sup> However, at a January 1962 meeting with colleagues in the Ministry of Industries (MININD), Che (the rumored architect of Uvero Quemado) sought to clarify misconceptions about the camp, asserting, “We send to Guanahacabibes those people who should not go to jail, people who have made mistakes contrary to revolutionary morals,

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<sup>116</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, “Capítulo III: Situación de los presos políticos en Cuba, 1963,” *Organización de los Estados Americanos*, <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/Cuba63sp/cap.3.htm>; Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 179, 231; Arcos Bergnes, 250; Yaffe, 218.

<sup>117</sup> Agencia de Informaciones Periodísticas, *Cuba: Terror and Death, Once Again a Pirate on the Spanish Main* (Miami: Editorial AIP, 1964), 24; “Mensaje de los presos políticos de Cuba, a los pueblos y hombres libres del mundo,” *Estudios Sobre el Comunismo* 12, no. 45 (July-September 1965): 79; Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, n.p.; Secretariat of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, *La Organización de los Estados Americanos y los Derechos Humanos* (Washington D.C.: General Secretariat, Organization of American States, 1972), 231; Rauf, 179; Yaffe, 218.

<sup>118</sup> “Execution-Marked Aide Flees Cuba, Safe in U.S.,” *The Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), 30 July 1965, 4; Secretariat of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 231; Almendros, 40; Jorge, 67; Arcos Bergnes, 250-251, 260-62; Cazalis, 6; Riera, 47; Economic Research Project, 16, 18; Salas, 100; Yaffe, 218; Rauf, 179; Bravet, “Guanahacabibes,” 4-5.

<sup>119</sup> Cardenal, 286; Benson, 1.

to a greater or lesser degree.... When there is a robbery, the thief goes to prison and the director who covered for him [goes] to Guanahacabibes.”<sup>120</sup>

To the consternation of both Che and Fidel, Cubans continued to view Uvero Quemado as the ultimate punishment for both crimes and “good faith” mistakes. In a 1963 speech delivered to commemorate the sixth anniversary of the rebel assault on Fulgencio Batista’s Presidential Palace, Fidel took the opportunity to discuss work that remained to be done and the individuals who remained to be punished. One target of his wrath was the parasite who refused to labor and instead survived through theft. Swept up in the emotion of the speech, an audience member yelled, “Guanahacabibes!” suggesting that such individuals should be sent to labor on the peninsula. But Fidel disagreed. He responded, “Guanahacabibes is for he who commits errors in good faith (*buena fé*), not the delinquent” who deserves to go to jail.<sup>121</sup> Through their comments, Fidel and Che articulated a vision of Uvero Quemado as a place of hard, yet fair, manual labor that the inmates would ultimately value.<sup>122</sup> But their view did not necessarily correspond with the opinions held by ordinary Cubans. At a 1964 meeting with the most productive members of MININD, Che asked which of the 153 individuals would eventually like to become administrators, and only four raised their hands. “What a disaster!” remarked Che. When he asked for a reason, one forthcoming individual noted that he preferred not to “sow eucalyptus in Guanahacabibes.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ernesto Che Guevara, Actas del Ministerio de Industrias, Reunión Bimestral, 20 January 1962, in Ernesto Che Guevara, *Obras completas*, vol. 7 (Havana: Ministerio de Azúcar, 1968), 166, as cited in Castañeda, 227-228; Arcos Bergnes, 256.

<sup>121</sup> Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro en el aniversario del heroico asalto a palacio,” *Obra Revolucionaria*, 15 March 1963, 11.

<sup>122</sup> Arcos Bergnes, 255-257; Cazalis, 6.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Arcos Bergnes, 255.

Apparently he had heard about the number of administrators serving time in Uvero Quemado due to bureaucratic errors.

By questioning official claims about the types of inmates interned at Guanahacabibes, the Cuban public demonstrated an understanding of the malleability of labels. Cubans recognized that no clearly definable characteristic distinguished a revolutionary from a counterrevolutionary; rather, the difference lay in how their actions were interpreted by authorities. For example, in the summer of 1962, Havana bus drivers increasingly avoided work and stole bus fares. But instead of categorizing them as scum or criminals, Fidel described their actions as “faults of the good ones” (*defectos de los buenos*). The fact that most of the drivers were militiamen prompted Fidel to disregard their actions as apolitical. Lillian Guerra has shown, however, that this event was a warning, demonstrating that “crossing the line from revolutionary to counterrevolutionary was a simple matter of adjusting labels to suit behavior, a right that leaders reserved for themselves alone.”<sup>124</sup> While Fidel and Che struggled to articulate an impossible distinction between *los buenos* who made mistakes and the people confined to Uvero Quemado, ordinary Cubans knew this was not possible. Journalist Rogelio Luis Bravet lamented that Cubans applied the threat of sowing eucalyptus in Guanahacabibes “equally to the honest revolutionary who made a mistake and the truly *antisocial*... dedicated to activities that conflicted with socialist morals.”<sup>125</sup>

Guanahacabibes was a self-sustaining camp, constructed and maintained by the prisoners themselves. The men who first arrived to Uvero Quemado found little more than

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<sup>124</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power*, 174-175; Castro, “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz...en la asamblea de los trabajadores de los ómnibus,” n.p.

<sup>125</sup> Bravet, “Guanahacabibes,” 4.

sand and surf. They quickly made tents in which to sleep and constructed buildings where they lived, worked, and studied.<sup>126</sup> In addition to self-preservation, inmates were expected to maintain high levels of productivity and perform defense work. Like the UMAP camps that followed Guanahacabibes, it appears that Uvero Quemado was structured much like a traditional military camp. The prisoners dug trenches and patrolled (without ammunition) the western coast of Cuba against invasion. Cows found wandering the nearby hills were domesticated, as were bees and chickens.<sup>127</sup> Inmates eventually created workshops, where they made baseball bats and leather boots. Authorities sold these and other items, including honey and beeswax.<sup>128</sup> No less important was the runway that inmates cleared to accommodate Che's two-motor Cessna. Reporter Severo Cazalis nervously recalled that the landing strip was only half of the recommended length.<sup>129</sup>

While many of the jobs performed at Guanahacabibes inmates varied over time, other responsibilities remained consistent. In late 1961, journalist Margot Obaya noted that the men labored at creating roads, a task initiated in 1959 by the INRA.<sup>130</sup> Charged with this project was civil engineer Pedro Betancourt, who commented in February 1960, "These *campesinos*... are now civilized. You should have seen them several months ago."<sup>131</sup> Uvero

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<sup>126</sup> Arcos Bergnes, 250, 253; Yaffe, 218; Rauf, 179.

<sup>127</sup> Cazalis, 6; Arcos Bergnes, 250-251; Cardenal, 285-286.

<sup>128</sup> Arcos Bergnes, 252-253; Cazalis, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Cazalis, 6; Yaffe, 218; Arcos Bergnes, 250; Taibo, 379.

<sup>130</sup> Margot Obaya, "Los presos comunes ya no se hacían en almacenes de hombres," *Trabajo* 2, no. 19 (December 1961): 77.

<sup>131</sup> Santiago Cardosa Arias, "Leyenda y realidad de una península: Guanahacabibes," *INRA* 2 (February 1960): 62.

Quemado inmates appeared to continue with this assignment in mid-1963 when they were assigned to break up rocks.<sup>132</sup> The construction of roads consequently served two purposes: to civilize Guanahacabibes natives and rehabilitate *antisociales*. Another consistent assignment was logging. While working as Director of MININT Personnel in 1962, Ángel Arcos Bergnes recalled that Che would sometimes visit Guanahacabibes and cut trees with the prisoners, competing with them to see who could fell the most.<sup>133</sup> In 1964, logging was the first task that inmates performed after arriving to the camp. It was only after passing the “axe test,” noted Cazalis, that they moved on to other assignments.<sup>134</sup>

In addition to manual labor, prisoners attended seminars on the tenets of Communism. Assigned to the camp was a political instructor who imparted information about revolutionary ideology and discipline. As it seems that all military units were required to have an *instructor político*, the presence of one at Guanahacabibes was consistent with its military appearance.<sup>135</sup> When Frank served as political instructor in the early years of the camp, he targeted his message to the *campesinos*, who were in large part Protestant. Frank set up a lecture hall and modeled it after a Pentecostal church. He also adapted the religious hymns of the locals to include lyrics such as “We are / we are communists.”<sup>136</sup> However, Communist Party members ultimately rejected his reforms, as they contained too many

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<sup>132</sup> Rauf, 179.

<sup>133</sup> Che’s seemingly friendly competition was a part of “socialist emulation,” with which he hoped to increase production. Arcos Bergnes, 253.

<sup>134</sup> Cazalis, 6.

<sup>135</sup> C. Fred Judson, *Cuba and the Revolutionary Myth: The Political Education of the Cuban Rebel Army, 1953-1963* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 238-241; Cardenal, 285-286; Arcos Bergnes, 258-260; Rauf, 179.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Cardenal, 285-286.

remnants of religion.<sup>137</sup> Another *instructor político* who worked at Uvero Quemado in 1962 was also chastised, but for different reasons. After receiving reports that the Guanahacabibes company commander and political instructor were abusing their power, Che conducted an investigation and ultimately dismissed the men for maintaining “a repressive and despotic attitude toward their revolutionary comrades [the inmates].”<sup>138</sup> The camp’s remote location and distance from Havana inevitably facilitated liberties, including prisoner abuse.

Reports from former inmates referenced both mistreatment and executions. When Luis Casas Martínez was found floating off the coast the coast of the Bahamas in July 1965, he informed his rescuers that he had escaped from Guanahacabibes, where authorities had sent him to be killed. He noted that he had avoided execution by accepting the Rehabilitation Plan (*plan de rehabilitación*). In memory of his brush with death, Casas Martínez had tattooed an “X” over his heart.<sup>139</sup> According to the Miami-based Agency for Journalistic Information (Agencia de Informaciones Periodísticas), others were not so lucky. It reported that guards had executed at least twelve men at Uvero Quemado in 1964.<sup>140</sup> Another inmate was tied to a tree, given bread and water, and left alone for five days.<sup>141</sup> In addition to the 1962 incident with the *instructor político*, Arcos Bergnes recalled hearing whispers about problems at the camp.<sup>142</sup> These reports are not surprising, as prisoners at other Cuban work

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Arcos Bergnes, 258-260.

<sup>139</sup> “Execution-Marked Aide,” 4.

<sup>140</sup> Agencia de Informaciones Periodísticas, 24.

<sup>141</sup> Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, n.p.

<sup>142</sup> Arcos Bergnes, 258.

camps told similar stories about their treatment.<sup>143</sup> What distinguished Guanahacabibes, however, was the isolation in which the inmates lived. At other camps, prisoners who accepted rehabilitation were sometimes permitted to work off grounds or visit their families.<sup>144</sup> At UMAP camps, certain internees received ten-day passes to travel home.<sup>145</sup> At Uvero Quemado, however, inmates had little contact with people off the peninsula, a reality that likely encouraged abuse.<sup>146</sup>

Laws authorizing the rehabilitation of individuals in an *estado peligroso* combined with work farms like Cayo Diego Pérez and Guanahacabibes allowed authorities to isolate perceived counterrevolutionaries, but because these tools also restricted the type and number of people that government representatives could target, the creation of Obligatory Military Service (SMO) provided an alternative reform method. Instituted in November 1963, Law 1129 required every male between the ages of sixteen and forty-five to serve three years in the military.<sup>147</sup> If an individual was the only source of economic support for his family, he could delay enlisting.<sup>148</sup> While “enlisted,” men served most of their time performing agricultural labor, such as cutting sugarcane. Not only did the draft serve as a form of cheap

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<sup>143</sup> See for example Hilda Perera, *Plantado: En las prisiones de Castro* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1981); Jorge Valls, *Veinte años y cuarenta días: Vida en una prisión cubana* (Madrid: Encuentro Ediciones, 1988); Ana Rodríguez and Glenn Garvin, *Diary of a Survivor: Nineteen Years in a Cuban Women's Prison* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>144</sup> Obaya, 74-79.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Roberto Chaviano (pseudonym) by author, 13 December 2011, Havana, Cuba; Tahbaz, n.p.

<sup>146</sup> Obaya, 77.

<sup>147</sup> “Servicio Militar Obligatorio,” *Con la Guardia en Alto* 2 (December 1963): 42-47, 82.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

labor, but it also re-socialized peasants as members of the revolutionary collective.<sup>149</sup> However, the government did not consider all Cuban to be fit for military service. For this reason, authorities established UMAP camps in the central province of Camagüey. Sent there were the SMO recruits categorized as *antisociales*, including Jehovah's Witnesses, presumed homosexuals, members of the Afro-Cuban society Abakuá, and vagrants.<sup>150</sup> It is estimated that between 1965 and 1968, thirty-five thousand men labored as UMAP internees.<sup>151</sup> In many ways, UMAP camps served the same purpose as Guanahacabibes, but on a larger scale. They relied on manual labor as a form of rehabilitative therapy for men who had supposedly not yet internalized revolutionary morality.

Cuban contemporaries of the 1960s identified Guanahacabibes as the precursor to the UMAP. Cinematographer Nestór Almendros proclaimed that the initial moments of repression against gays in Cuba culminated in their detention at Guanahacabibes and subsequently the UMAP camps.<sup>152</sup> In an interview with Jorge Castañeda, Carlos Franqui noted that Guanahacabibes created a precedent for the detention of undesirables.<sup>153</sup> But poet Heberto Padilla was the only Cuban who both linked and denounced the camps while still living on the island.<sup>154</sup> In a 1968 essay for *El Caimán Barbudo*, Padilla wrote, "In the short life of the Revolution, we have effectively had our miniature version of stalinism, our

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<sup>149</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 191.

<sup>150</sup> Alfredo Echarry, "Donde trabajar se hace un hábito: La UMAP," *Juventud Rebelde*, 18 July 1966, p. 10-11; Tahbaz, n.p.

<sup>151</sup> Tahbaz, n.p.

<sup>152</sup> Almendros, 40.

<sup>153</sup> Castañeda, 227.

<sup>154</sup> Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba*, 354-355.

Guanahacabibes, our own *dolce vita*, our UMAP.”<sup>155</sup> These observations reveal that forced labor camps for *antisociales* originated in 1959 with Guanahacabibes, and the practices later enacted at UMAP camps were refined at Uvero Quemado. As Joseph Tahbaz demonstrates for the UMAP, Guanahacabibes also confined perceived counterrevolutionaries of all types, and *proxenetas* faced imprisonment alongside *vagos*, administrators, and countless others.<sup>156</sup>

By offering an alternative translation of the term *chulo*, this chapter highlights the broad efforts to reform Cuban vagrancy. Men economically supported by women were a unique threat to the revolution’s forward momentum. Through agricultural labor at camps like Cayo Diego Pérez and Guanahacabibes, *proxenetas* and other socially-marginalized groups were expected to overcome pre-revolutionary handicaps. However, these early efforts were largely ineffective, as *antisociales* did not disappear, and economic production did not improve as anticipated. It is difficult to determine exactly when Guanahacabibes shut down, but references to the camp are difficult to find after 1968. Perhaps authorities closed Uvero Quemado in the early years of the UMAP camps. Or perhaps they merely transferred the inmates to another location, hoping to silence Cubans who threatened their neighbors with a trip to Guanahacabibes to sow eucalyptus.

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<sup>155</sup> Heberto Padilla, “Respuesta a la redacción saliente,” *El Caimán Barbudo* 19 (March 1968): 5. Quoted and translated in *Ibid.*, 355. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>156</sup> Tahbaz, n.p.

## EPILOGUE

Last year, in a July 2013 speech to the Cuban National Assembly, Raúl Castro expressed his frustration with the “increased deterioration of moral and civic values like honesty, decency (*decencia*), shame, decorum, integrity, and sensitivity to the problems of others.”<sup>1</sup> He lamented that over the past twenty years, in the economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union (referred to as the Special Period), Cubans had come to accept as normal the illegal sale of goods, the use of tasteless language, disrespect toward the elderly, habitual absences from work, and other actions that he perceived as incompatible with modernity and progress. According to Raúl, the “battle against these damaging behaviors” must first be waged by the family and school, and only as a last resort would the government employ “coercive measures.” With his comments, Raúl articulated that individual behavior could retard the forward momentum of the revolution, and he identified the family as an important tool of change. By politicizing social norms and the family, Raúl echoed discourse of the 1960s, which emphasized specific actions as conducive with state formation. The early revolutionary codes of conduct that I explore in this dissertation continue to be measures of revolutionary advancement.

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<sup>1</sup> Raúl’s speech was a continuation of comments made by Fidel Castro only months before when Fidel had declared war against “the bad habit and errors that many citizens, including *militantes*, commit daily in various spheres.” Raúl Castro: Orden, Disciplina y Exigencia en la sociedad cubana, premisa imprescindible para consolidar el avance de la actualización del modelo económico,” *Cubadebate*, 7 July 2013, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2013/07/07/raul-castro-orden-disciplina-y-exigencia-en-la-sociedad-cubana-premisa-imprescindible-para-consolidar-el-avance-de-la-actualizacion-del-modelo-economico/#.Uz7vSfldVgm>.

While the government legalized abortion in 1979, both government officials and medical professionals currently view the procedure as evidence of female irresponsibility and social backwardness. Anthropologist Elise Andaya writes that these individuals assume that “a ‘modern’ population should embrace rational, risk-adverse, reproductive practices,” not abortions.<sup>2</sup> Demographer María Elena Benítez, in a 2004 interview with Andaya, explained official dissatisfaction with the abortion rate. She noted, “We’re not happy with the rates, it’s true. Why? Because we think that there is no reason to arrive at an abortion, we think that there is sexual education, that there’s free health care, that you can go to a doctor and get a contraceptive method that best suits you.... That’s why we’re not happy.”<sup>3</sup> The state media replicates this discourse, asserting, for example, that the high abortion rate reflects the “traditional” inability of parents to speak with their daughters about birth control. In contrast, Andaya demonstrates that Cuban women view their abortions as evidence of economic and familial responsibility. Women frequently told her that they decided to end their pregnancies following conversations with family members because “*todos estuvieron de acuerdo* (everyone was in agreement) or *no estuvieron de acuerdo* (they didn’t agree).”<sup>4</sup>

The same disconnect between official and everyday discourse exists with regard to marriage. Marriage Palaces remain across the island, and the Central Havana Palacio de los Matrimonios underwent significant renovations only ten years ago.<sup>5</sup> The first director of the

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<sup>2</sup> Elise Andaya, “Reproducing the Revolution: Gender, Kinship, and the State in Contemporary Cuba” (PhD diss., New York University, 2007), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 165, 170-174. Emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> “Se acabó la cola en el Palacio de los Matrimonios,” *Juventud Rebelde*, 6 November 2010, <http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cuba/2010-11-06/se-acabo-la-cola-en-el-palacio-de-los-matrimonios/>.

Palace, Patria Olano Navarete, still works on site. In a 2011 interview, Olano told me that despite being divorced, she remains convinced of the importance of marriage. In fact, she exerted considerable effort trying to marry me to my male friend who was also present at our interview.<sup>6</sup> Mariela Castro Espín, daughter of Raúl Castro and director of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), currently campaigns for the legalization of gay marriage in Cuba. At a November 2013 meeting with Dominican President Danilo Medina, Castro Espín affirmed that Cuban legislators would someday approve “a much more revolutionary law” in support of gay marriage. She added that this change would be consistent with Cuba’s “socialist transition.”<sup>7</sup> Despite official support for matrimony, however, Cubans are increasingly electing consensual unions over marriage.<sup>8</sup> The marriage rate is currently the lowest it has been since the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this is because they are witness to one of the highest divorce rates in the world. As of 2006, 64 percent of marriages ended in divorce.<sup>10</sup>

While the revolutionary government relies on Marriage Palaces to combat informal unions, the police are entrusted with the responsibility of fighting prostitution. Men and

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Patria Olano Navarete by author, 23 December 2011, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in “Hija de Raúl Castro apoya legalización del matrimonio homosexual,” *El Nuevo Herald*, 9 November 2013, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2013/11/09/1610389/hija-de-raul-castro-apoya-legalizacion.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Marta Nuñez-Sarmiento, “Cubans Abroad: A Gendered Case Study on International Migrations,” *Cuban Studies* 41 (2010): 112.

<sup>9</sup> In 2006, 5 out of every 1,000 people on the island were married. This was the lowest marriage rate since 1959, when 4.6 out of 1,000 people legally married. Ibid; Paula E. Hollerbach and Sergio Diaz-Briquets, *Fertility Determinants in Cuba* (New York: The Population Council, 1983), 62, 79.

<sup>10</sup> “Divorce is Easy in Cuba, but a Housing Shortage Makes Breaking up Hard to Do,” *New York Times*, 31 December 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/31/world/americas/31cuba.html>.

women suspected of being sex workers (*pingueros* and *jineteras*) can be detained by the National Revolutionary Police (PNR), charged with being “dangerous” to society (*estado peligroso*), and sent to perform agricultural labor in the countryside.<sup>11</sup> According to anthropologist Ana Alcázar Campos, after one warning and three arrests, *jineteras* may spend several years in a Reeducation Center. She notes that scholars on the island tend to view *jineteras* as illustrations of Cuban youth’s “lack of revolutionary consciousness” and relationship with “standards of capitalist consumption.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, sex workers themselves often identify their actions as part of the economic struggle (*lucha*) necessary to survive in Cuba. Historian Abel Sierra Madero argues that “the term *luchador/ra* serves to manage the stigma and censure that [*pingueros*] practices take on in social discourse.”<sup>13</sup>

Like *jineteras* and *pingueros*, *chulos* are also targeted by for arrest by police officers. In 2012, for example, the government convicted 224 people of *proxenetismo*. In contrast to prostitution, *proxenetismo* is a crime, and Minister of Justice María Esther Reus states that convicted *chulos* can receive “severe sanctions,” including “life in jail.”<sup>14</sup> In 1997, the government passed Decree-Law 175, changing *proxenetismo* from an *estado peligroso* to a crime. But vagrancy, like prostitution, remains an *estado peligroso*, and a vagrant is defined

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<sup>11</sup> Abel Sierra Madero, “Cuerpos en venta: Pinguismo y masculinidad negociada en la Cuba contemporánea,” *Nómadas* 38 (April 2013): 174; Manuel Zayas, “Mariela Castro en el barrio de las putas,” *Diario de Cuba*, 28 October 2011, [http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1319795733\\_1538.html](http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1319795733_1538.html); Laritza Diversent, “Jineteras S.A.,” *Diario de Cuba*, 24 March 2011, [http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1300988564\\_1886.html](http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1300988564_1886.html).

<sup>12</sup> Ana Alcázar Campos, “Turismo sexual, jineterismo, turismo de romance: Fronteras difusas en la interacción con el otro en Cuba,” *Gazeta de Antropología* 25, no. 1 (2009), [http://www.gazeta-antropologia.es/?p=1887#N\\_18\\_](http://www.gazeta-antropologia.es/?p=1887#N_18_).

<sup>13</sup> Sierra Madero, “Cuerpos en venta,” 170.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in “Cuba condenó en 2012 a más de 224 personas por proxenetismo,” *El Nacional*, 15 October 2013, [http://www.el-nacional.com/mundo/Cuba-condeno-personas-proxenetismo\\_0\\_282571841.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/mundo/Cuba-condeno-personas-proxenetismo_0_282571841.html).

as someone who “lives, like a social parasite, from unknown labor or profits from or practices socially reprehensible vices.”<sup>15</sup> Journalist Tania Díaz Castro writes that this law is particularly problematic for the many Cubans who refuse to work for the government or supplement their government salaries by selling “peanuts in cornets, [or] wooden flip-flops for the bath,” or by “pruning gardens, anything through self-employment.”<sup>16</sup> While new regulations allow some self-employed Cubans (*cuentapropistas*) to legitimize their labor with government permits, many others work without official approval and are technically *vagos*.<sup>17</sup>

The persistence of discourse surrounding these four categories of intimacy reveals Cuban officials’ continuous struggle for discursive hegemony. The inertia of prerevolutionary codes of conduct threatens twenty-first-century definitions of progress in the same way that it challenged 1960s conceptions of revolutionary state formation. While behaviors like abortions and consensual unions appear to be more acceptable to leadership now than they were fifty years ago, Cuban officials remain committed to reducing their numbers. Another important component of contemporary discourse is the notion that modern attempts to eliminate prostitution, for example, respond to problems already resolved by the revolution and then undone by the Special Period. What this rhetoric overlooks, however, are the largely ineffective early revolutionary campaigns to reform sexual behavior. The near absence of historical memory about these events suggests the effectiveness of official discourse at papering over campaigns like Operation Family. But its success must be

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<sup>15</sup> Ministerio de Justicia, *Código Penal*, Articles 73.1 and 302.1, in *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, [http://www.gacetaoficial.cu/html/codigo\\_penal.html](http://www.gacetaoficial.cu/html/codigo_penal.html) (accessed 6 April 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Tania Díaz Castro, “En Cuba no hay vagos,” *Cubamet*, 7 January 2009, [http://www.cubamet.org/CNews/y09/enero09/07\\_C\\_3.html](http://www.cubamet.org/CNews/y09/enero09/07_C_3.html).

<sup>17</sup> “Nuevas reglas enfrentan al regimen con los cuentapropistas,” *Diario de Cuba*, 3 October 2013, [http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1380827807\\_5363.html](http://www.diariodecuba.com/cuba/1380827807_5363.html).

considered limited, as sources challenge government claims of newness and reveal silences in the narrative of Cuban state formation.

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