

Sexual Revolutions in Cuba



ENVISIONING CUBA Louis A. Pérez Jr., editor

Sexual Revolutions in Cuba

Passion, Politics, and Memory

CARRIE HAMILTON

Foreword by Elizabeth Dore

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FOREWORD Cuban Voices

The Cuban Revolution inspired fervent, often acrimonious arguments about its achievements and failures. For some, it was the last bastion of the communist dream; for others, a repressive, authoritarian regime.¹ Largely missing from those debates were the voices of ordinary Cubans living on the island. As the Revolution approached its fiftieth anniversary, I put together a research project to find out what people across the island, from different walks of life and generations, had to say about the achievements and failures of socialism in Cuba.² It was the first large oral history project permitted by the Cuban government in more than thirty years.

In 1968, a decade after the revolutionary triumph, Fidel Castro invited Oscar Lewis, the renowned U.S. anthropologist, to interview Cubans about their experiences living the Revolution. "It would be an important contribution to Cuban history to have an objective record of what people feel and think. . . . This is a socialist country. We have nothing to hide; there are no complaints or grievances I haven't already heard," Castro told Lewis.³ Despite this inspirational beginning, top officials acting for Fidel summarily closed the project eighteen months later. In 1975, another oral history endeavor of sorts came to an untimely end. Gabriel García Márquez, close friend and confidant of Castro, set out to write a book about daily life in the Revolution. After a year conducting interviews across the island, the Nobel laureate abandoned his plans. What people said didn't fit the book he wanted to write, he told friends.⁴ Following these fiascos, doing oral history research in Cuba was taboo.

Hopeful that by the twenty-first century the ghosts of oral history had been laid to rest, I brought together a team of some twelve Cuban and British scholars to develop a project we called "Cuban Voices." When we sought permission from an array of top officials, all were enthusiastic about the importance of recording ordinary Cubans' life stories, but none agreed to support our research. However, instead of saying no, each one sent us to a colleague higher up the

chain of command, who might, they suggested, conjure a way of getting our project approved. After months of frustrating shuttle diplomacy among bureaucrats who couldn't say yes, and didn't say no, my Cuban colleagues on the team suggested that we take our case to Mariela Castro Espín. She was the director of the Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX), the National Center for Sex Education, the leader of a controversial campaign for gay rights, and a charismatic member of the ruling clan. For all of these attributes, they held out hope that she would take our project under her wing.⁵

Mariela Castro understood at once the importance of recording the life histories of ordinary Cubans. Notwithstanding the risks, she immediately agreed to take the project on at CENESEX, and her staff set about obtaining permission. Yet despite her intimate access to the cupola of power—she is daughter of Raúl Castro, then minister of defense and brother of Fidel Castro, and of Vilma Espín, then president of the Cuban Women's Federation (FMC)—authorization was long in coming. Just when our the team was on the verge of calling it quits, we received word that the minister of defense and the president of the FMC had signed statements allowing the project to go forward.

"Cuban Voices" was officially launched in 2005 with considerable fanfare by Mariela Castro and Paul Thompson—sometimes dubbed the father of oral history—in the Great Hall of the University of Havana. Highlights of the ceremony were broadcast for several days on Cuban TV.⁶ After this glamorous beginning, the project proceeded unevenly, surviving one bureaucratic entanglement after another. Our great success was that over the course of six years, from 2004 to 2010, we recorded life history interviews with more than one hundred Cubans across the island: in Havana, Santiago, Holguín, Bayamo, Matanzas, and Sancti Spiritus, on both functioning and decommissioned sugar estates, and in rural towns.⁷

One of our greatest challenges was how to select interviewees. The team came under tremendous pressure to locate people via official channels: through Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Cuba's "neighborhood watch"), local branches of the Ministry of Culture, or recommendations by militants of the Communist Party. Members of the team resisted those conditions, to varying degrees. While the selection process continued to be contentious, in the end most interviewees were chosen rather randomly, not in the sense of a verifiably, quantifiably random sample, but through social networking among people of decidedly different ages, occupations, and political views.

After long, often difficult discussions, the team agreed to adopt a life his-

tory methodology, which meant initiating interviews by asking people to tell us their life story.⁸ In a country where narrators might feel uneasy about diverging from the official version of events, of politics, and of history, especially in a recorded interview, we thought that asking men and women to tell us the story of their lives would be the least threatening method to begin with, and the most revealing in the end. It meant they could describe, in their own words, whatever was important to them, what mattered. They might portray, or omit, personal accomplishments, problems and disappointments, and describe what they took to be the country's collective achievements and failures. Through their stories, their words, body language, jokes, moods, and in particular their silences we hoped to understand people's diverse experiences and attitudes. The team agreed that after listening to the life stories, we would ask questions about racial identity, sexuality, class and gender relations, family, politics, religion, and other topics that had surfaced or had been conspicuously absent in the narratives. That was the plan. In practice, members of the team followed this procedure more or less, depending on their own style and interests, and on the narrators' disposition to talk or their reticence.

By and large the Cuban narrators were surprisingly forthcoming, if not at the beginning of the interviews, almost always by the end. Frequently older Cubans, less frequently younger ones, appeared decidedly anxious at the very start of the process. Trepidation infused their voices, their gestures, and their silences. When we explained that we were changing the names of everyone we interviewed, some asked how, on a small island with a large security apparatus, we could camouflage their identity. However, despite their initial apprehension, most narrators overcame their hesitation in the process of telling their tale.⁹ There is a defining moment, a before and an after, in a great many of the life stories. One woman said straight out, "Ignore what I told you yesterday. Last night I couldn't sleep; I thought it all over, and today I want to tell you what really happened in my life."¹⁰

Many people we interviewed found the process of narrating their life story tremendously cathartic. Some confided that never before had they talked about one or another episode; others said that the interviews inspired them to reassess their past. Toward the end of the interviews, which generally involved two, sometimes three or four, recording sessions, a number of narrators said that they felt a wave of release mixed with apprehension. Cubans' willingness to speak openly, often irreverently, about their lives surprised everyone involved: government officials, project researchers, the narrators

themselves. When it became clear that even those people selected via government channels talked about the Revolution's failures, as well as its achievements, the project was closed down. However, after a lapse of several months, when emotions subsided, some of the researchers and I continued our work.

In its final three years, the project changed considerably. It became less formal, in the sense of team meetings and public events in Cuba; and less official, in the sense that we began to work with Cuban interviewers who were less entwined with the government, and younger, than before. Most important, and possibly linked to the latter, there was a palpable change in the tenor of the interviews. Toward the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, narrators appeared by and large to have lost that initial apprehension—call it fear—that usually had been present at the project's beginning. The greater openness, or outspokenness, in the context of the interviews might well have reflected social changes of a higher magnitude. In late 2010, many Cubans remarked on an increased readiness among the population to complain and to condemn, though not to protest or rebel. The altered atmosphere in the interviews and beyond might be explained by Fidel Castro's virtual disappearance from the political scene, by the endurance of a state that appeared ossified, and by the perpetuation of an aging leadership whose policies seemed increasingly exhausted. The critical mood almost certainly was a reflection of mounting economic difficulties. In 2011, after the government announced its intention to lay off more than one million government workers and to reduce state subsidies for food and housing, many Cuban narrators told me they were fed up, and they wanted to give voice to their anger because they felt that they had little to lose.

Carrie Hamilton's path-breaking study of sexuality and the Cuban Revolution, the book in your hands now, develops new interpretations of how sexuality and desire did and did not change after 1959. Drawing on oral history interviews, Hamilton analyzes Cubans' narratives about reproduction, heterosexuality, marriage, interracial relations, and homophobia, among other topics. One of the book's great advances is that it highlights topics largely left out of past histories of sexuality in Cuba, including female same-sex desire and sexual violence. Far from isolating sexuality from other categories, Hamilton examines sexuality in relation to race, gender, and class. Her book is a major contribution not only to our understanding of the complexity of sexuality under the Revolution, but also to the wider project of writing the social history of the Cuban Revolution.

In addition to Hamilton's book, other studies based on the "Cuban Voices" oral history project are forthcoming, including my book about Cubans' political engagement and disengagement, Daisy Rubiera Castillo's testimonial collection, *Aires de la memoria* (*Gusts of Memory*), and a volume of essays edited by Niurka Pérez Rojas, *La historiografía de la historia oral* (*Historiography of Oral History*).

Elizabeth Dore

London, March 2011

Notes

1. For the former see Gott, *Cuba*; for the latter see Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*. For a balanced interpretation of the Cuban Revolution see Eckstein, *Back from the Future*.

2. Major project funding was provided by the Ford Foundation and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Without Cristina Eguizábal's support, when she worked at Ford, the project might have never happened.

3. Ruth M. Lewis, foreword, in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Men*, viii–xi. See also the other two volumes of oral histories, edited by Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, that resulted from the project, collected under the title *Living the Revolution* (vols. 2–4); and Butterworth, *People of Buena Ventura*.

4. Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez*. See also Jon Lee Anderson, "The Power of Gabriel García Márquez," *New Yorker*, 27 September 1999.

5. For details about the campaigns led by Mariela Castro for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights, see this book, chapter 1.

6. The pilot stage of the project began in September 2004. See the project website, www.soton.ac.uk/cuban-oral-history, for video clips of the inaugural ceremony, including speeches by Mariela Castro and Paul Thompson.

7. The oral history interviews collected under the auspices of the "Cuban Voices" project will become available to the public at a future date.

8. Elizabeth Jelin, an adviser on the project, strongly recommended we adopt this methodology.

9. The Lewis project also found that Cubans spoke fairly openly about their lives. Ruth Lewis writes, "Was it possible to record an honest, believable life history in socialist Cuba? . . . We believe the life histories . . . are as honest and revealing as those we have collected elsewhere. One of the advantages of a long autobiography is that it allows the basic personality and outlook of the informant to emerge" (foreword, in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Men*, xxviii).

10. Quote from an interview with "Olga," born in 1948. See the appendix for a full list of interviewees.

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This book grew out of a collective oral history project, and much of the research upon which it is based is collaborative. It could not have been written without the initiative, generosity, hard work, and backing of many people.

First and foremost, I am indebted and very grateful to Elizabeth Dore, who invited me to partake in the “Cuban Voices” oral history project back in 2002 while we were working together at the University of Southampton. I thank Liz not only for giving me the research opportunity of a lifetime—to work with a fascinating group of colleagues and interviewees in Cuba at a time of tremendous change in the country—but also for being an intellectual mentor, a great *compañera*, and friend over the past decade. Much of the interview analysis in this book arises from regular meetings with Liz, and she also read and made invaluable comments on the whole manuscript. It has been a pleasure to work with her and to see the project she created unfold over the years. Without her, none of this would have been possible.

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Finally, I express my deep gratitude to the many Cubans who gave their time, opened their homes, and shared the memories that are at the heart of the pages that follow. They remain anonymous here but are fondly remembered by all of us who had the privilege to meet and interview them. It is to them I dedicate this book.

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Sexual Revolutions in Cuba



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INTRODUCTION Sex, Politics, and Oral History in Cuba

Do political revolutions bring changes in sexual values and practices? How do people living under a revolutionary regime perceive the relationship between political revolution, on one hand, and both the persisting and the changing patterns in sexual morality and behavior over time, on the other? How do these changes and continuities intersect with relations of class, race, gender, and generation? And why is revolution itself often expressed in the language of love, romance, and passion?

These are some of the questions addressed in this book, through an exploration of the history of sexuality in Cuba from the triumph of the Revolution in 1959 to the early twenty-first century. During these five decades the Cuban revolutionary regime intervened in citizens' sexual lives in myriad ways: through policy and legal reform, mass education programs, pronouncements of leaders on the relationship between good revolutionaries and good sexual subjects, incentives to encourage certain forms of sexual union, and repressive methods to discourage and punish others. But above all the enormous economic, political, and social upheaval ushered in by the Revolution brought transformation to all areas of life, including the family, reproduction, sexual values, and intimate relationships.

Cuban sexual ideology did not change overnight after 1959. New revolutionary values continued to coexist with prerevolutionary ones, in a potent and often contradictory mix of the old and the new. Moreover, revolutionary leaders did not have a coherent set of views on sexuality. In the majority white, heterosexual men from middle-class families, they frequently betrayed views associated with the prerevolutionary dominant classes, in particular about the desired roles of women and men and the undesirability of homosexuality. Finally, like all forms of social change, alterations in sexual values and practices did not depend merely on legal measures and structural changes in the public, political realm, but involved as well longer-term cultural shifts,

especially in the family. In Cuba as elsewhere, some people embraced new opportunities while others resisted them as a perceived threat to respect and decency. Generation was an important—but not the only—factor in this pattern.

This book analyzes sexuality in Cuba during the first fifty years of the Revolution through the analysis of oral history interviews with island-dwelling Cubans. While written documents and speeches provide important information about the views and intentions of revolutionary rulers and elites, oral history allows us to move beyond the legal and political realms to the nuances of how official policy did, or did not, affect the lives of ordinary citizens, and how these citizens contributed in turn to wider social and political change (a fundamental part of any revolutionary process). Because people rarely tell their life stories in a straightforward, chronological way, and because they often measure time not with reference to dates but in relation to generations, oral history provides a particularly useful tool for assessing the impact of policy on everyday life.

THE AIM OF the book is threefold: (1) to provide an overview of the main developments in the history of sexuality in Cuba since 1959, from the perspective of people living in Cuba during these years; (2) to intervene in—and add new dimensions to—ongoing debates, and to make the case for exploring henceforth less-examined themes; and, (3) to interrogate the relationship between history and memory through the theme of sexuality, in the process reconsidering notions of chronology and periodization in relation to the Cuban Revolution.

The book covers a broad territory, its diverse themes brought together through three primary arguments. First, the changes that took place in the realm of sexuality after 1959 were less a result of deliberate policies on sexuality than of wider social, political, and economic transformations. Second, variations and consistencies in sexuality were intimately tied to social power relations of gender, race, and social class. Finally, our understanding of the history of sexuality is enhanced by an attention to the relationship between history and memory. Oral history offers a useful counterpoint to chronological accounts that rely on major policy decisions, public discourses, and statistical evidence. It also provides a necessary antidote to official versions that recount history as progress. Life-story interviews demonstrate that prerevolutionary sexual ideology and power relations, as well as early revolutionary prejudices,

continued to shape attitudes and experiences well after they had been officially overcome or abandoned.

Histories, Theories, and Methods

The book employs a hybrid methodology. It combines detailed analysis of a series of oral history interviews (outlined below) with readings of: secondary sources on Cuban sexuality, comparative histories of sexuality, and feminist theory, gender theory, and queer theory. The interviews are supplemented with other oral and written primary sources, including political speeches, testimonies, newspapers, and magazines. Recognizing that some of the most compelling representations of sexuality are found in cultural texts, the book also cites examples from literature, film, television, music, and theater.

First-person testimonies have long been recognized as a valuable primary source in Cuba. Numerous anthropological and sociological studies of the Revolution are based on interviews.¹ Additionally, during the 1960s especially, foreign journalists used interviews to provide eyewitness accounts of the new revolutionary society.² In the same period, first-person narratives—known in Latin America as *testimonios*—became a popular form of revolutionary history writing,³ many of them government-sponsored narratives celebrating the achievements of the Revolution. But while there is a wealth of eyewitness accounts of Cuba since 1959, there is a relative lack of scholarly historiography on this important period. Similarly, the majority of studies on sexuality in Cuba come either from the social sciences or from literary and cultural studies. This book therefore aims to broaden the scholarship on sexuality and the Cuban Revolution through a specifically *historical* analysis.

By interpreting the interviews against the backdrop of a wider historical narrative, on one hand, and reading them alongside public discourses about sexuality found in official and popular sources, on the other, I make a case for the ongoing importance of oral history as a methodology that provides evidence of a range of aspects of the past. By evidence, I mean both the subjective realm of lived experience—expressed through memory and spoken language as well as the meanings people attribute to their own experiences—and empirical information about the impact of major historical events, political policies, and wider developments on a day-to-day basis. With this approach, I follow the key developments in oral history since the 1970s, paying attention to subjectivity, intersubjectivity, emotion, and memory, while also valuing inter-

views for their capacity to expand the historical record through an exploration of voices “from below.”

Through its association with the subjective, the intimate, and the local,⁴ oral history has often been linked to the emotions. This book is interested in emotions in history, going beyond the study of personal feelings to examine how emotions structure the relationships between sexuality and politics. The Cuban Revolution is an example of what Damián J. Fernández calls “the politics of passion”: the ways political change creates emotional response, and feelings become part of the political process. Taking inspiration from the turn to emotions in the humanities and social sciences in the early twenty-first century,⁵ *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba* expands on the theme of passion and politics by reversing the equation. It examines the relationship between the two through stories of sexuality and relating them in turn to the wider history of the Revolution.

ORAL HISTORY also provides new historical perspectives in relation to chronology and periodization. As Dagmar Herzog writes, “[c]areful attention to the history of sexuality prompts us to reconsider how we periodize . . . history; it changes our interpretations of ruptures and continuities across the conventional divides.”⁶ With reference to the Cuban Revolution, we might question the extent to which sexual morals and practices changed following the watershed dates of 1959 (the revolutionary triumph) and 1990 (the beginning of Cuba’s “Special Period,” brought on by the crisis of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe). The increasing emphasis among Cuban historians and other scholars on overlaps between the prerevolutionary and revolutionary periods is consistent with what Fernández notes is a move away from the Cold War–era thesis of Cuban “exceptionalism.”⁷

One reason oral history complicates conventional chronologies is that interviewees tend to measure historical change less with reference to concrete dates and more through a movement back-and-forth in time with reference to generations.⁸ As such, oral history can be particularly valuable for historians interested in mapping the relationship between wider trends, on one hand, and personal and popular perceptions of historical change, on the other. This is especially true in an area such as sexuality, where public values and policy seldom reveal people’s practices, even when the latter are inevitably shaped by the former.

If oral history prompts us to pay special attention to generations, Cuban

history alerts us to the importance of understanding sexuality in relation to other categories of historical analysis. For this reason, the book takes an intersectional approach, paying particular attention to “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations.”⁹ My understanding of *intersectionality* is inspired by the general meanings of the term rather than by a particular methodological approach.¹⁰ In light of the relative lack of attention to the concept in both gender history and Cuban history, I aim to make the case for the usefulness of intersectionality as a starting point for understanding the *complexity*¹¹ of the history of sexuality in revolutionary Cuba. One of the book’s arguments is that some of the contradictions and ineffectiveness of revolutionary policies around sexuality can be explained because sexuality, race, class, and gender were perceived to be discrete categories. Revolutionaries often overlooked how these categories worked in tandem to create networks of power relations, exclusion, and privilege. Likewise, existing studies of sexuality in Cuba (with some important exceptions)¹² tend to isolate sexuality from other categories, in particular race and class. The interviews demonstrate, in contrast, the extent to which interviewees’ experiences and conceptualizations of sexuality are implicated in their positions as racial, gendered, and classed subjects.

Although one critique of intersectionality has been its tendency to focus on intersections of oppressions (hence “the use of black women as prototypical intersectional subjects”¹³), the concept offers an opportunity to analyze how some subjects are constructed through multiple positions of privilege (e.g., white heterosexual men) or combinations of privilege and oppression (e.g., white homosexual men or black heterosexual men). One key to understanding the historical development of revolutionary sexual politics is examining histories of oppression (for example, the cultural construction of the overtly sexual Afro-Cuban woman) *as well as* those of privilege, especially in relation to the predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual male political leadership.

Cuban Voices

The main set of primary sources for *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba* is a collection of interviews conducted as part of the “Cuban Voices” oral history project created and directed by Elizabeth Dore and initiated in 2003.¹⁴ Over the next several years, I joined a group of Cuban and British academics in conducting

more than one hundred interviews across Cuba. Although numerous academics and journalists had conducted fieldwork in Cuba during the revolutionary period, ours was the first large-scale interview project involving both Cuban and foreign scholars since that of Oscar Lewis and his research team between 1968 and 1970.¹⁵ As such, “Cuban Voices” is a historical project in itself, producing a unique body of primary sources for the study of diverse aspects of the Cuban Revolution.¹⁶

As Dore explains in the foreword to this book, about half the interviews were conducted in Havana and environs (including rural Havana Province) and the remainder in cities and rural regions on the rest of the island. During the early part of the project many of the interviews were “vetted” through preliminary contacts in governmental organizations. But as the project progressed, both British and Cuban researchers conducted a number of unvetted interviews, often using the “snow-ball effect,” whereby interviewees are contacted through one another. While this broadening of the research sample had the advantage of including numerous narrators well outside officially sanctioned circles, the earlier vetted informants were by no means univocal either in their interpretation of the Cuban Revolution or in their level of support for the revolutionary government. As Dore puts it, “these interviews are laced with hidden histories of unsung satisfactions and frustrations. They dramatize the ways people embraced, succumbed to, and resisted conforming to the official model of the good Cuban.”¹⁷

Each narrator was interviewed by one or two researchers using the “free-flowing” or “life-story” format preferred by many oral historians. In this system, a single interviewee is encouraged to tell her or his life story with minimal interference from the interviewer(s).¹⁸ Interviews lasted between one and a half and three hours, and many were followed up with subsequent interviews. While allowing the life stories to take their own course as much as possible, researchers also asked specific questions aimed at eliciting commentary on the key categories we had agreed to make the focus of the project: class, race, gender, religion, politics, and sexuality. This list reflects both the specialties of the research team and an awareness of the centrality of these categories to the social history of the Cuban Revolution.

All the interviewers were conscious from the outset of the political nature of sexuality. In fact, far from perceiving sexuality as a private issue, team members conceived of it first and foremost as a political problem, through an emphasis on homosexuality and the history of state-sanctioned homopho-

bia in Cuba. There were various reasons for this. One of the Cuban researchers was a specialist in the history of masculinity with a particular interest in antihomosexual repression in the 1960s and 1970s (see chapters 1 and 4). Additionally, in the context of a perceived shift in public discourses around homosexuality in Cuba from the early 1990s onward, questions related to homosexuality and homophobia fit relatively easily into the “official history” of the Revolution. Since the early twenty-first century, CENESEX, under the directorship of Mariela Castro Espín, has waged a number of campaigns in support of the rights of Cubans who have same-sex sex and relationships, as well as transgender people (see chapter 1).

The complexity of sexuality and its centrality to the project prompted us to seek narrators of different sexual orientations. Beginning with the pilot interview stage, both women and men in same-sex relationships were contacted, but there was an imbalance toward men. This was probably due to the implicit association of homosexuality with men in most public representations of the early revolutionary regime’s homophobia and therefore in the public imagination. In an attempt to redress this imbalance and to address a largely overlooked area of the history of sexuality in Cuba, in 2006 and 2007 I conducted a series of interviews with women who have sexual relationships with women (see chapter 6). Additionally, as the project progressed, narrators began spontaneously to speak about a range of sexual topics, such as sex education at home, early sexual experiences, marriage, reproduction, and so on.

Our originally rather narrow focus on male homosexuality was not unique. Paula S. Fass notes that the writing of the history of sexuality has often been characterized by a leaning toward supposedly marginal or persecuted sexualities over the more conventional concerns of social history: “contraception, the sexuality of youth and adolescence, the nature of male-female relations in the family, or issues related to fidelity-adultery.”¹⁹ There are signs of change in the early twenty-first century. At a panel on global trends in the history of sexuality at the 2007 American Historical Association annual meeting, Dagmar Herzog called for more integrated histories of sexuality, combining queer and heterosexual practices, birthrates, pleasures, violence, demography, and so on. This book follows that trend. While chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on homosexual and same-sex desires and practices, the others incorporate memories from narrators of different sexualities, while being careful not to assume a given or fixed sexual identity, as I discuss in greater detail later in this introduction.

Using the Interviews

All interviews were conducted in Spanish,²⁰ digitally recorded with the prior permission of the narrators, and transcribed into written Spanish. I listened to and read transcriptions of about seventy-five interviews (those available when I began writing), making notes of key themes (including family history, childhood, education, family life, and work experience as well as sexuality, gender, race, religion, and social class), and writing a synopsis of each life story. My interpretations were enhanced by team meetings, discussions with Cuba scholars on and off the island,²¹ and in particular regular research meetings with project leader Elizabeth Dore. From the interviews, I chose some thirty as the focus of the book, supplemented by evidence from another ten (see the appendix). In the process of interpretation, I took each interview as a whole into consideration, paying attention to how the life story develops, the tensions or contradictions in it, and how it compares/contrasts to other interviews and to outside sources. I have paid close attention to language, both the popular expressions used in relation to sex, sexuality, and desire, and the words used to describe perceptions of changes and continuities in sexual values and practices (whether with reference to specific dates, events, generations, or general terms like “back then” or “these days”), as well as what is *not* said in the interview.

In the text of this book I have tried to place each interview excerpt in the historical context of the narrator's life, providing as much information as possible (date and place of birth, gender, social class, family background, racial identity, and work). Details about social categories are used to facilitate the analysis of intersections of sexuality, gender, race, class, and, in some cases, religion. By giving information on each narrator, I hope to allow readers to pick up on points I may have missed or misunderstood, to disagree with my reading, or to make connections I may not have seen. In order to guard anonymity, all narrator names are pseudonyms and key data (such as place names and professions) have been altered or withheld. Placing the narrator in her or his time and place also required attention, where possible, to the moment and location of the interview. The period when most of these interviews were conducted (between 2004 and 2007) was a particularly uncertain one, as Fidel Castro's failing health preoccupied all Cubans. Ongoing concerns about the economy, material shortages, and the myriad ways in which Cubans deal with these also formed part of everyday life and were frequently voiced in the

interviews. Information on location and circumstances of the interview helps to give a “feel” for the interview and to recognize the importance of elements such as physical environment, body language, and the subtle (or not so subtle) interaction between interviewers, narrators, and other people present. In some cases, I stress the problem of trying to conduct interviews in private in Cuba because of the shortage of housing and cramped living conditions (see chapter 8). Where I know something about the interviewers, I include information that might help to explicate the dynamic created through the process of question and answer. In a couple of cases I include excerpts from my field diaries in order to convey my impressions of a particular interview or aspect of Cuban society.

While oral history can provide valuable information on the everyday that is difficult to access in written sources, there is no suggestion that narrators reveal all. Although some offer compelling descriptions of intimate life in Cuba, others are more reticent, in some cases providing details only when prompted. Oral history interviews are the product of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. In order to convey a sense of this process, throughout the book I frequently provide the interviewers’ questions as well as narrators’ responses. I also point to examples where the interviewer’s questions or responses shape the course of the interview. This dialogical aspect distinguishes oral history from written forms of autobiography. But it is also something oral history shares with *testimonio*. Typically a narrative crafted out of a series of interviews between a subaltern subject and an academic or journalist, *testimonio* is an explicitly political form of literature in which the eyewitness recounts her or his life as part of a collective memory that offers a counter-narrative to official histories. Because they demand solidarity on the part of the reader and therefore an act of faith in the story’s validity, *testimonios* raise important questions about voice, truth, and memory and have been the topic of significant scholarly analysis and debate.²² In contrast to those *testimonios* in which the voice of the interviewer/editor is omitted,²³ this oral history study makes the interviewers, and the process of interview analysis, visible as much as possible. It also draws attention to the complexity of memory in oral life histories. My analysis of memory in the interviews is influenced not only by the literature on *testimonio*,²⁴ but also by the groundbreaking work of oral historians in Europe, North America, and Latin America (especially Luisa Passerini, Alessandro Portelli, and Daniel James).²⁵ My understanding of memory is also inspired by feminist and queer reworkings

of trauma theory. This body of research, coming out of literary and cultural studies as well as intellectual history, emphasizes the importance of emotion and affect in analyses of first-person narratives, which include autobiography, diaries, and letters, as well as interviews.²⁶

Oral history is humbling because it constantly brings the historian to the edge of the chasm between the information we gain through published and archival sources—the public historical record—and personal observation, on one hand, and the sheer quantity and variety of popular local knowledge about the past, on the other. As historians, we can respect that knowledge and accept that we have limited access to it,²⁷ while remembering that individuals always have their own take on history, and that their memories—like all historical sources—are subjective and revisionist. In this way, we can respect our narrators' stories without idealizing them or naively believing them to be the whole truth. In listening to our interviews, many of which contain deeply personal and in some cases painful recollections, I am reminded not only of the privilege of being invited into someone else's history, but also of a comment made by Marielis, a narrator, born in 1964, who also happens to be a friend:

When my foreign friends come over—people I've known all my life, not the typical tourist—they look at you and you feel like you're under the microscope, like you're a rare bird who survives in adverse circumstances. I don't think they're so adverse! I think you have to go to Haiti to see adverse circumstances, or to Nigeria. But well, people look at Cuba with lots of curiosity and that's why I think they make you feel even stranger than you already are. It's logical! A strange country.²⁸

All oral history projects, and fieldwork generally, involve ethical considerations. The methodology and presentation of interview analysis outlined above are aimed at addressing these concerns and at making the role of the researchers as transparent as possible, while foregrounding the voices of the narrators. But the case of Cuba, as Marielis indicates, adds another dimension to research ethics because of the unusual place of Cuba in the hearts and minds of the international community since 1959. Cuba-watching—as well as Cuba-worship and Cuba-bashing—is common sport among journalists, tourists, activists, political commentators, and academics from around the world. All of our narrators were aware of international interest in, and prejudices about, Cuba and Cubans. While some were delighted by the opportunity to share their versions of the past—and present—with researchers from Cuba

and abroad, others were concerned about the country's image, and/or about the possible repercussions of speaking too openly about their perceptions of political, economic, or social problems. All these hopes and fears shaped their stories in some way and are reflected in the chapters that follow.

A Word about Language

Sexuality is a broad concept. Although the book does not aim to provide an exhaustive survey of sexuality in revolutionary Cuba, it does explore a number of its dimensions. I borrow Anna Clark's definition of sexuality "in its widest sense as the desires, relationships, acts, and identities concerned with sexual behavior."²⁹ Following Clark and other historians, I also listen to how sexuality expresses itself through emotion, how it serves as a metaphor for other desires and attachments (including the political), and how fears about violations of social boundaries translate into attempts to regulate or repress certain forms of sexuality.³⁰

In much of the global north in the early twenty-first century we are accustomed to associating sexual desires, practices, and relationships with "identities." As the groundbreaking and massively influential work of Michel Foucault demonstrated in the late 1970s, this association is largely specific to modernity. And as comparative transnational histories of sexuality show, it is not shared all over the world, even in the contemporary period. As I argue in chapters 5 and 6, Cuba demonstrates the coexistence of different models and languages of sexual preference and identity. The words "gay" and "lesbian" are used by some, especially younger, Cubans, and the word "homosexual" is in wide use among men who have sex with men. But many Cubans, including our narrators, do not use these or other terms to describe same-sex desires and practices. For this reason, unless narrators use specific words to identify themselves, I employ the (albeit rather awkward) expressions "same-sex desire," "same-sex relationships," and "women/men who have sexual relationships with women/men." I also avoid assuming that people who present themselves as heterosexual do not have other desires and practices. When I write about changes in heterosexual relations (see chapter 3), I try to do so with reference to narrators' memories of values, relationships, and activities rather than an exclusive identity.

Other categories important to this study also require clarification. I use "gender" to mean social relations between male and female historical sub-

jects (men and women). With regard to “class,” I employ terms relevant to capitalist relations (“working class” and “middle class”) in reference to the period before 1959. Thus, narrators are identified as “from a middle-class family,” “with working-class origins,” and so on. For 1959 onward I use the term “social class” and related terms (“worker,” “professional,” or “poor”) to designate differences in wealth or social status, in order to indicate social and economic inequalities in Cuba while avoiding terminology associated with capitalist societies.

The category *raza* (“race”) in Cuba presents a number of linguistic and political dilemmas when translated into English.³¹ As Latin America’s penultimate slave society (slavery was officially abolished in 1886, two years before abolition in Brazil), Cuba has a long colonial and postcolonial history of racial segregation and institutionalized racism. Notwithstanding significant gains toward equality, racial discrimination and hierarchies persisted after 1959, becoming particularly acute following the crisis initiated by the collapse of Soviet and Eastern European socialism after 1989.³² Another legacy of slavery, combined with centuries of immigration from Europe and the importation of indentured laborers from China and the Yucatan, is a largely mixed-race population. Afro-Cuban heritage is most visible in eastern Cuba, but the island as a whole reflects centuries of ethnic mixing, religious syncretism (seen in the widespread practice of Afro-Cuban religions, often referred to collectively as *santería*), and transculturation.³³

As the example of the interview with Juan in chapter 7 demonstrates, Cubans in the early twenty-first century have a wide lexicon of racial terminology, usually referring to people’s perceived skin tone rather than (or in addition to) heritage. When narrators use such terminology in an interview, I leave the words in Spanish, providing an approximate English translation. When describing individual narrators or groups, I use the language adopted by our interview team: black, white, and *mestizo/a*.³⁴ Reflecting common academic usage in English, I also sometimes employ the term “Afro-Cuban” to refer to black and *mulato* Cubans.³⁵ When narrators have been identified by interviewers, or identify themselves, as “white,” I use this term. It is important to note that although a narrator may be coded as “white” in Cuba, this should not be taken to mean that he or she does not have a mixed heritage.³⁶ Indeed, someone identified as a “person of color” in, for example, the United States, may be “white” in Cuba, reminding us that race is a cultural and historical, rather than biological or fixed, category.

In the case of interviews I conducted myself and where narrators did not identify themselves, I supply information on their family background (e.g., from a mixed-heritage family or background) when I have it, without assuming a racial identity. At other times, I use descriptive terms such as “fair-skinned” or “olive-skinned.” While this system is not foolproof, it allows me to contextualize and analyze the interviews in relation to histories of race and racism, while offering the opportunity for alternative or additional readings by others.

Finally, it is worth saying something about the second word in my title: “revolutions.” I use this term in the plural to differentiate it from the idea of a singular “sexual revolution”—which is largely associated with Western countries in the 1960s—while drawing attention to the fact that sexuality, like all areas of Cuban life, was profoundly affected by the changes ushered in by the Cuban Revolution. The relationship between developments in the area of sexuality and the political changes more typically associated with the term “revolution” is one of the central subjects of this book.

“Revolution,” in upper case, refers in this book to the Cuban Revolution, which is taken to mean an ongoing process instigated by the revolutionary victory of 1959. In Cuba, people often refer to the moment when Fidel Castro and the rebel army took power on 1 January 1959 as *el triunfo de la Revolución* —“the triumph of the Revolution.” Some scholars and other outside observers argue that the Cuban Revolution ended at some point after 1959,³⁷ and that the country is now in a “postrevolutionary” period.³⁸ Inside Cuba, however, the Revolution is typically perceived not as a single moment or epoch, but as an ongoing process. This is reflected in expressions used by several of our interview narrators, such as “the revolutionary project” or the “evolution” of the Revolution.

Throughout the book, I use the terms “revolutionary government,” “revolutionary leaders,” and “revolutionary regime” to refer to politicians, policy makers, and other officials in power after 1959. I realize that there is a risk in using such language that I present the regime as unified and omnipotent, underestimating conflicts within the leadership as well as the process of policy debate in which large numbers of the population take part via mass organizations. Future studies might shed more light on these processes with regard to sexual politics. But the emphasis in this book is less on the machinations of government and decision-making than on Cubans’ memories of sexuality in their everyday lives.

The Seductions of Oral History

By way of demonstrating some of the challenges of interpreting memories of sexuality, I turn to three examples from our sample. My focus is on themes that arise time and again in the book that follows: (1) how the environment, including questions and interactions between narrators and researchers, molds the interview; (2) the different ways narrators respond or not to direct questions about sexuality, and how they sometimes introduce sexuality into a discussion apparently about something else; (3) the problems of silence, language, and “identity”; and (4) the ethical dilemmas involved in interpreting other people’s sexual stories.³⁹

Ileana

A middle-aged *mestiza* woman, Ileana was born to a working-class family in a small provincial city in 1950. She was interviewed by two female Cuban interviewers. This interview is notable because the female narrator speaks at length about her memories of heterosexual relationships. Early on she responds to a direct question about sexual discrimination with a story about her own childhood:

And issues related to sexual orientation in your day. (...) I mean, the kind of treatment of people of another kind of sexual orientation? What do you remember?

Well, thanks to the fact that I have a grandfather, on my father’s side, who was born in 1800 and something. He was a person with a lot of vision. He said the fairest, the correct thing was for women and men to have sexual relations before marriage, to try out, to get intimate, to get to know each other and later sign the paper. But first the couple should have sex before marriage, because marriage was thinking about a family, so the family wasn’t destroyed. And in my family people always supported union. I mean, so divorce didn’t exist. Now it does, but my family isn’t a divorcing family, none of those problems. That’s the case in both my father’s and my mother’s families. And that’s how my grandfather thought. My father’s father thought that way.

After hearing this interview for the first time, I wrote in my research diary:

An interesting aspect of Ileana’s interview is that she speaks openly about her own sexual experiences, the fact of having had a child out of wedlock,

her family's support for this, a grandfather and father with liberal ideas about women's and men's sexuality. She remembers thinking about having an abortion; later she also mentions contraception. She claims she's had a very happy marriage and adores her husband. I think these stories of Ileana's show us that when we think about the theme of sexuality in the interviews, we shouldn't think only about homosexuality, or about discrimination. Ileana's interview suggests a whole story of tradition and change in heterosexual relations. I also think it's important to remember that sexuality is not only about repression and discrimination. In Ileana's story sexual relationships are presented as pleasurable, giving rise to happy memories.

It is noteworthy that Ileana's history makes itself heard not in reply to a direct question, but *against* the question, as it were. Ileana ignores a question about people with "another kind of sexual orientation" and chooses instead to recount her own sexual story. At a certain point one of the interviewers, of a similar age to the narrator, remarks that Ileana's experience was different from that of many women of their generation, for whom having sex and giving birth outside of marriage were "taboo" (for more on taboos around female sexuality, see chapter 3). In this way, Ileana opens up what began as a narrow question, drawing the interviewers into her tale.

Javier

Here is another interview in which the narrator seems to insist on telling a sexual story that goes beyond the framework of the questions. It was conducted by two women, one Cuban and one British. Born in 1939, Javier was sixty-six at the time, a white, retired agricultural worker living alone in a rural area outside Santiago de Cuba, raising and selling animals to make ends meet:

There are no lazy people around here?

No, there are no lazy people. Here everyone . . .

And are there homosexuals?

No, no. That doesn't exist here. That isn't used around here.

Is that something of the town folk?

Yes, that's something of the town folk. I got a fright once. I went to the mountain to pick coffee. No, to cut sugarcane. I went there with some people, up the hill, and some of these people told me about what it was. And I said, "What?! How is that?! Hell!" Because those are things that seem strange to you. [...] That shouldn't be done. [...] Because that's why women were born,

to make women different from men. [...] That's not done [pause]. It's a vice. It's a vice.

There is nothing particularly surprising about this excerpt: an older man expressing common views about homosexuality as a “vice.” But the exchange between the Cuban interviewer and interviewee highlights enduring popular associations about homosexuality. The interviewer’s leap from “lazy people” to “homosexuals” echoes official claims in the 1960s that homosexuals had to be made into men through hard labor in the countryside. Similarly, both interviewer and narrator repeat the cliché that homosexual sex is something to be found in the *pueblo* (town) and not in the *monte* (mountains), a symptom of decadent urban modernity in contrast to an idealized rural purity (see chapters 1 and 5).

Taken alone, the excerpt above could be read as a typically *machista* and homophobic statement that serves to reaffirm the masculine identity of the narrator. But it comes at the end of the interview, in response to a direct question, and stands in contrast to recurring stories of loneliness and old age:

I've always done the same as the goat: I've gone up to the mountains. I've always gone up to the mountains. [...] Everyone else has gone here and there. Not me. Not me. As for me, [I'm] here. In the mountains.

There must be someone you like in the mountains.

The problem is, I was born a little awful here.

Why?

The man who—Look. The female dove always looks for the male dove to live together. And I, well, I wasn't lucky. I live alone. I've almost always lived alone. Not because I stopped thinking about women. They're a, a flower. [small pause] A flower that has to be adored. It's not that I've stopped thinking about that. But, well, in that I've been terrible . . .

How long were you married to the mother of your children?

Well. With one I was about seven or eight years and with the other about four or five years.

So, married twice?

I've been there. As I tell people, when I was a young man I had more than two. But now I'm old, the carnivals are coming to an end now. [laughter]

Do you want one?

Yes, a woman is what you need.

And where do you prefer? There in X or here?

No, no, no. When I was there in X I did better because I was younger. Because when illness gets you. People don't think it's an illness, but old age is an illness. Because when you're young even the old ones go after you. But when you're old. It's like a piece of furniture. Look how that piece of furniture is broken, it's fallen apart now. We're starting to fall apart. Because right now if a young girl sees me, "Ah, that old man." And not before, not before. Before they called after me, they looked for me. [laughter] It's very different.

Listening to the passages above, I considered the wider significance of stories of aging heterosexual men and the implications for ideas and ideals of the revolutionary man and the future of the Revolution. Although the interview was conducted a year and a half before the official announcement of Fidel Castro's illness in July 2006, in the context of insecurity about the leader's health and future I heard in Javier's individual story a more collective tale of male heterosexual vulnerability. If, as Mona Rosendahl has argued, "[t]he Cuban lover is seen as autonomous, strong, sexually active, charming, and a conqueror [*sic*], everything any man, including a political man, should be,"⁴⁰ we may ask what happens when the strong, virile, and conquering male body is replaced by a sick, weak, and failing one. Javier's story of loneliness and fear of aging can prompt us to consider the ways in which the sick figure of Castro weakens one of the founding myths of the Cuban Revolution: that of male heterosexual potency linked to political invincibility. Javier's repeated desire to find a woman alerts us to the variety of stories of male heterosexuality, beyond the narrow self-representation of many of our male narrators as boastful *mujerigos* (womanizers), as well as the importance of considering class and generation in constructions of masculinity (see chapter 3).

Carlos

The final interview I examine here was the source of some controversy among members of our project team. The interview with Carlos, a white man, was conducted in two parts in May 2005, when he was fifty-one. Carlos was interviewed in his home in a rural area of Havana Province by two middle-aged Cuban women. The interview is noteworthy for a number of reasons and could have been controversial for its political views alone. While as a group we spent some time discussing whether certain narrators could be interpreted as expressing opinions critical of the revolutionary process, Carlos's interview

left little doubt in this regard: he is open in both his condemnation of certain aspects of the government and his disillusionment with the Revolution (see chapter 2).

However, the controversies surrounding Carlos arose not from his political commentary but from the question of sexuality. While it is not the only major theme in his interview—stories of family violence (see chapter 7) and a particularly bitter memory of a housing crisis also figure prominently—Carlos returns time and again to the theme of sexuality. The topic arises in the first interview, in response to a question about “other sexual orientations,” and gives rise to an interesting exchange about the problem of labeling:

Have you had partners?

Partners, no. Sexual relationships, yes. But partners, no.

Sexual relationships with someone stable?

No, no. I’m not qualified for that. I have big limitations in expressing my feelings, love and that. I didn’t have that, as a child either. I’m a strange person. And I say that frankly.

But, one of the things we’re doing in this project. We start from the recognition that there has been discrimination against people who have, relationships, well, sexual. A sexual orientation . . .

That’s different.

Different.

Yes.

And we’ve always been of the belief that all sexual orientations are correct.

Yes, I agree with that. That doesn’t bother me. [. . .] I know it exists, that type of discrimination. Because even though they live, normally . . . I remember when I was working on the route, when I was in charge, a girl came to work there, from this town. Her name is Reyes, I still see her around here. She was very disciplined, very good, very bright. But there was a woman who lived here. And that woman said that Reyes, I can’t remember what word she used. It wasn’t lesbian. She used a word, a ruder word. [. . .] In the end they fired her, they kicked her out. Because, they created a situation around her. I find it very painful, I really felt that. It really, really hurt me, that those things happened. They’re laws, let’s say, they’re laws that are written. They’re in the blood of a lot of people. Lot’s of people who don’t know how

to rise above. It's sad. I don't know how to explain it because it really affected me that they kicked her out because she was a really good worker. And then this bright girl, she was cultured, she expressed herself well, she was courteous, respectful. Later she ended up washing dishes, after a few years I saw her washing dishes. I said, "Look what a shame. That girl could have, she could have developed more, she could have had opportunities and been a different person." Not because what she was doing was degrading, because in the end what she wanted was to work. And she wasn't robbing or involved in anything. But they denied her the opportunity, to have more opportunities, to develop, to be more prepared in the workplace, which is more and more demanding.

But you haven't had that kind of...?

No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

And have you felt the weight of, of a...

Not me. Look, I'm a person who's more—I've been lucky that the relationships I've had have been the ones I've chosen. Most of the people who have relations with me are heterosexual. Apart from that I reject, I don't know. Identification. I don't know. People who are stigmatized because they want to be stigmatized. Because everyone may have a different sexual conduct, but you don't have to behave, inappropriately, in a way that goes against the norm. And everyone can identify as whatever at the necessary moment. But no one, no one has to go around in the street with a sign saying his point of view. Political, religious. No one has to go out around here saying "I'm a Jehovah's Witness," another sign that says "I'm a homosexual," another sign that says, "I'm in the Liberal Party." What we need to create is a culture of respect, among people. I prefer to relate to heterosexual people because they behave, generally, in a more stable way, more socially acceptable to others.

This rather long, meandering reply veers between an attack on homophobic injustice and a stated preference for the company of heterosexuals, in which Carlos repeats some stereotypes about the "inappropriate" behavior of homosexuals in public, a theme repeated in interviews with several men who have sex with men (see chapter 5). Interestingly, although he implies at the beginning of the excerpt that he may have experienced some discrimination because of how people perceive him, Carlos never claims a sexual identity and

indeed rejects identities in general. Having failed to get a direct answer from Carlos regarding his sexual orientation, one of the interviewers finally asks him during the second interview:

Can I ask you a very personal question? Do you consider yourself a heterosexual person?

No, I don't consider myself heterosexual.

Do you feel, do you feel something that, I mean, that this changes. Because you have a girlfriend, who you said was very pretty. This change in your life, was it caused by some kind of personal suffering?

I think so, I think so. Because, let's see. How can I explain? Whenever I used to see a woman that I was attracted to, I thought about the family. Woman, man, hitting, and all that. When I'm married. The monotony of the family, everyone in the same house, in the room. Sharing the same bed. I ended up hating it. No, no. I started to reject that. To me, let's see how I can say it. Sex is a diversion. It's a diversion. It's not an idealistic thing, like the sociologists say, the anthropologists. It's a product of the development of the human being. I take all that apart. In that regard I'm a bit of an animal. Sex is a diversion and I'm not interested in its social function, nor in the family. No. I'm not interested in any of that.

So, there's your devaluation of the family in all that as well?

Yes, there is my devaluation of the family. If sex fulfils the role of procreating the family, it's ruined for me.

And that big discretion that you protect, your own choice, in relation to your orientation, is that because you've had some kind of pressure? You said the last time that you felt it in a female workmate, who worked with you.

Some kind of political pressure?

Some kind of political pressure on you. I mean, defending yourself from someone, putting a label on you, you said the last time.

I felt it indirectly, indirectly because they were playing with a workmate. But well, I didn't have any definitions. Let's say there are people who define themselves. "I'm heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual." I'm not into any of that. I'm not interested in those definitions. I'm not interested. I... But even at that time, I had them less. But maybe I thought I was heterosexual, I don't know. Most people believe things. And they act by what they believe, not by what they are. Nobody digs into their essence. People believe things and act that way. But most people are suggestible. They act by hints. They make

you believe something, in the family. They prepare you for something, try to make you something and you believe it and you are that thing. You prepare yourself to be a monk, you're a monk. Because you believed you were a monk, you act like a monk. I don't know . . .

There are echoes here of an excerpt I examine in chapter 2, in which Carlos discusses in more explicitly political terms the problem of people trying to make others believe in something. For now I want to stress a related aspect of this part of the interview: Carlos's refusal to give himself a positive sexual identity (saying simply that he does *not* consider himself to be heterosexual) and his forceful argument against sexual labels. Carlos's interview warns us against the temptation to predefine our subject of study in terms of narrow identities (in this case, "homosexual" or "heterosexual"). Yet a number of the other researchers insisted on referring to Carlos as "homosexual," even while others among us objected, pointing to the language of the interview itself. This is not to say that the interview has nothing to say about sexual orientation. To the contrary, it provides important evidence—often unavailable elsewhere—of ongoing structural and popular homophobia. The interview also offers compelling information about the complex relationship between an individual's account of his or her own sexuality and the sexual politics of revolutionary Cuba. A consideration of the ways we as researchers, individually and as a team, reacted to Carlos's story and chose to interpret it, as well as the silences and conflicts it gave rise to, may be a starting point for greater understandings of this relationship. This is because the value of oral history lies precisely in its ability to alert us to wider historical phenomena that may be largely unaccounted for in "official" versions of history, as well as to the complexities of individual and collective experiences that are often lost in broad historical narratives.

This Book

Sexual Revolutions in Cuba combines a broad chronological approach with attention to specific themes as they emerge in the interviews. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the secondary literature on sexuality in Cuba before and after the revolutionary victory of 1959 and forms the background for the rest of the book. Chapter 2 gives a different kind of backdrop, examining the relationship between passion and politics through the language of love, romance,

and disenchantment in relation to the Revolution. Taking as its starting point Che Guevara's oft-cited declaration that the "true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love,"⁴¹ it focuses on narrators' passionate memories of the first decade of the Revolution (the 1960s) and how these relate to stories of personal intimacies, family life, friendship, and collective activism. Building on the reference to Guevara's essay "Socialism and Man," chapter 3 explores the extent to which the Revolution constructed "new women and new men" through changes in heterosexual relationships.

Chapters 4–6 turn to one of the most controversial topics in the history of the Cuban Revolution: homosexuality and homophobia. Chapter 4 draws on theories of memory to explore the relationship between narrators' tales of homophobia and official and popular discourses of the history of homosexuality and homophobia since 1959. Chapter 5 takes the story of one self-identified homosexual man as the basis for the exploration of a number of themes in the interviews with men who have sexual relationships with men: migration, intimacy, identities, community, and discrimination. We then turn to a largely overlooked area of the history of sexuality in Cuba: chapter 6 explores narratives of female same-sex desire, putting these in the context of the growing transnational scholarship on love between women.

Chapter 7 takes inspiration from the preoccupation in anthropology and oral history with taboos and silence, exploring three areas that narrators identify as "taboo" and that are largely muted in the interviews: HIV and AIDS, domestic and sexual violence, and interracial relationships. Finally, chapter 8 examines two very different issues in relation to sex in the "Special Period." The first, sex tourism, has attracted a great deal of academic attention, and I introduce a particular dimension to this literature through the story of one lesbian-identified narrator. The second issue, housing and home, arises as a constant preoccupation in almost all the interviews. By examining histories of revolutionary housing and memories of home through the lens of sexuality, I emphasize the need for attention to the economics of sexual politics, with reference both to the revolutionary reforms of early twenty-first-century Cuba and comparative studies of sexuality in the global south. The conclusion summarizes the book's main arguments and contributions while making suggestions for future areas of research.

A decorative wavy line in shades of gray and white, starting from the top left, curving down and to the right, and then curving back up and to the right, ending at the top right.

ONE Sexual Evolutions

While there is no single overview of the history of sexuality in Cuba before and after the revolutionary victory of 1959, a number of studies engage with different aspects of that history. This chapter offers a critical overview of some of these works, which come from various disciplines: history, sociology, demography, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies. The aim is to summarize and assess competing interpretations of the history of sexuality in modern Cuba and to provide the historical context for the chapters that follow.

Family, Honor, and Sexuality before 1959

Research on Cuban sexuality in the colonial and republican periods focuses on the relationship between sexuality, family, class, and race.¹ For the era before 1898 the most important contribution is Verena Martinez-Alier's *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-century Cuba*,² a materialist study based on judicial records. Martinez-Alier argues convincingly that the regulation of sexuality, and female sexuality especially, was vital to the construction and maintenance of Cuba's slave society. The value placed on family honor and racial purity, inherited from the Iberian tradition,³ fundamentally shaped sexual values and practices, reinforcing the power and privilege of upper-class white men while stigmatizing Afro-Cuban women in particular. The preoccupation with family honor led elite families especially (but not exclusively) to attempt to control female sexuality, in particular through the valuation of white women's virginity⁴ and the prohibition against interracial marriage. Martinez-Alier's study is a model of what I call an intersectional approach to the history of sexuality, one that sees it as inextricable from relations of class, race, and gender.

Notwithstanding the abolition of slavery in 1886 and the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1898, hierarchies of race and class, as well as gendered divi-

sions of labor, remained entrenched in Cuban society in the first half of the twentieth century. During this period intellectual debate, campaigns for social reform, and changes to laws regulating sexuality took place in the context of competing definitions of Cuban identity and visions for the nation's future. In her study of the Cuban women's movement in the early twentieth century,⁵ K. Lynn Stoner argues that women's demands and the legal changes they sometimes generated must be seen as part of the modernization project driven by Cuban reformers in the period leading up to the Constitution of 1940. Early Cuban feminists, most of them white, middle-class, and urban, sought not to challenge the basic structures of Cuban society (including the heterosexual couple and family), but rather to improve women's status within it and to challenge the worst abuses of male power. Although Cuba was no longer a Spanish colony, in the early 1900s male authority was still formalized through the Spanish law of *patria potestad*, under which men held legal control over their wives and children.⁶

The family remained a cornerstone in competing definitions of Cuban national identity, and the related principles of honor, female sexual purity, and male domination continued to shape social relations well into the twentieth century. Feminist attempts to "legislate morality" in the 1920s and 1930s reflected concerns to preserve families while protecting women and children from aggressive forms of male domination that resulted from traditional ideas of honor and shame,⁷ particularly adultery⁸ and lack of rights for illegitimate children.⁹ Reforms in the areas of family law and "morality" challenged some of the most violent aspects of the Spanish colonial legacy without fundamentally undermining social power relations in Cuba. Although Stoner's book focuses on the efforts of middle-class white feminists, her analysis of the persisting inequalities between informal and formal unions, and between legitimate and illegitimate children, clearly indicates that the concept of honor was widespread during the first half of the twentieth century, helping to maintain hierarchies of race and class, as well as gender.

ANYONE STUDYING the history of sexuality in Cuba since 1959 will be frustrated by the relative lack of academic attention to the two decades succeeding the Constitution of 1940.¹⁰ An important—albeit incomplete and uneven—exception is the unpublished doctoral thesis of Mirta de la Torre Mulhare, which analyzes sexual trends in Cuba in the pre-Castro years.¹¹ An anthropological study based on fieldwork conducted in Cuba and among Cuban migrants to

the United States, de la Torre Mulhare's work focuses largely on what she calls Havana's "respectable" or "decent" classes (that is, white upper-middle and upper classes). Notwithstanding the thesis's limited focus, and its tendency to accept uncritically the assertions of her informants, de la Torre Mulhare offers important evidence of the persistence in the immediate prerevolutionary period of many of the sexual values and practices associated with the colonial era: (1) *machismo*¹² as the essence of maleness, associated with politics, the military, cultural activities, or sex,¹³ and the belief that men are by nature non-monogamous, unfaithful, and untrustworthy;¹⁴ (2) the high valuation placed on the family; (3) a rigid social hierarchy;¹⁵ and (4) the cult of virginity.¹⁶

Prerevolutionary sexual ideology among elite whites was characterized by an extreme view of gender difference, illustrated by a series of binary oppositions: male/female; sexual/asexual; aggressive/passive; unfaithful/loyal; promiscuous/chaste.¹⁷ De la Torre Mulhare's study also provides some important indicators of the intersections of sex, race, and class. Whiteness was a key marker of class status in this period, and upper-class white Cubans expressed persistent anxieties about racial contamination through mixed marriages.¹⁸ Similarly, the Cuban lower classes were associated with blackness.¹⁹ The importance of honor in practice is evident in the persistent stigmatization of single motherhood,²⁰ associated with lower-class women.²¹

De la Torre Mulhare's sample also provides some indications of historical change in the decades prior to 1959. Elite women born before 1940 were brought up to believe that sexual pleasure was the preserve of men and that male infidelity was inevitable and to be tolerated.²² These women had little knowledge of sex before marriage, and menstruation was referred to euphemistically.²³ Interracial relationships persisted in spite of social taboos against them, although Afro-Cuban women who had relations with white men were likely to be abandoned before marriage.²⁴ Lower-class women, who were already stigmatized as "loose" or "bad," were more likely to exercise a degree of autonomy over their sexual lives, including within their marriages, than wealthier women,²⁵ who bore the pressure of maintaining family honor through their chastity. Wealthy men, in contrast, could have multiple lovers²⁶ and were also expected to visit brothels.²⁷ Lower-class women—Afro-Cuban and white—were as likely as not to live in common-law marriages, and in rural Cuba these were generally more numerous than formal unions.²⁸

De la Torre Mulhare notes the central role of the family as the basic institution in Cuban society, in contrast to the relatively weak Church and state.²⁹

The strength of the family in disseminating sexual values contrasts to the lack of effective sexual education in Cuban schools.³⁰ The relatively limited influence of the Catholic Church was evident in the 1943 divorce law, which led to a significant increase in divorces.³¹ By the 1950s divorce was widely accepted among the elite.³² In contrast to the weakness of the official Church, popular religion, deriving from the mixture of African traditions with Catholicism, played an important part in the sexual lives of Cubans of all classes and ethnic groups.³³

Unlike Martinez-Alier's study, de la Torre Mulhare's does not analyze sexual ideology in the context of wider Cuban social and political history. But she does note changes in sexual values. For example, after the 1930s elite married women began to discuss sex more openly among themselves.³⁴ Since that was the decade of the campaigns for family law reform, this observation suggests that the public discourse on sexuality engaged in by a small number of feminists had some influence on other privileged women. By the 1950s Cuban women "resent[ed] more and more their being cast either in the image of a virgin Madonna or in the image of a whore."³⁵ Similarly, the strict courting and marriage rules followed by Cubans born in the early twentieth century were increasingly rejected by younger Cubans,³⁶ suggesting that changes in tradition were already perceptible before the Revolution.

AS THE STUDIES of Martinez-Alier, Stoner, and de la Torre Mulhare demonstrate, late colonial and republican Cuba had a set of sexual mores specific to its particular economic, social, political, and cultural history. For most outside observers, however, Cuba had a reputation as the "bordello of the Caribbean." Cuba's status from the late sixteenth century onward as a port of call for ships sailing between Europe and the Americas meant that the capital city Havana developed an economy based on the demands of crews and passengers passing through, prompting the proliferation of brothels.³⁷ The importance of commercial sex to the Cuban economy meant that officials hesitated to legislate against it.³⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century, a small tourist industry had developed and brothels opened up along much of the Cuban coastline. The first serious attempts to regulate prostitution came in the late nineteenth century.³⁹ As in other countries, measures to control prostitution were introduced in the wake of military concerns about syphilis among soldiers.⁴⁰ Following the Spanish-American War and during the U.S. occupation of the island (1899–1902), there were attempts to regulate prostitution by setting up

special areas—*zonas de tolerancia*—for commercial sex.⁴¹ By the 1950s the social geography of commercial sex in Havana had altered, as brothels, casinos, and nightclubs were increasingly controlled by U.S.-based organized crime,⁴² a particularly visible symbol of the American presence on the island.

A Sexual Revolution?

To the extent that the revolutionary regime “had” a sexual politics in the first decade after 1959, this was driven by a radical rejection of the colonial social structures outlined above, on one hand, and of the American-funded nightlife of 1950s Havana, on the other. The attempt to break with Cuba’s colonial and neo-colonial past, however, was complicated by the fact that revolutionary leaders—most of them male, white, and middle class—had been raised under traditional sexual ideology of the type outlined by de la Torre Mulhare. Moreover, the regime soon adopted a Marxist-Leninist framework that prioritized changes in production and class relations above reforms associated with the private realm, including the family and sexuality. Consequently, early revolutionary sexual policies were aimed alternatively at eliminating the exploitation of working-class women and families, or at facilitating the incorporation of women into the workforce. It would be many years before the revolutionary authorities tackled sexual power relations, and especially heterosexual male privilege. But although sexual mores did not transform immediately, the radical changes in Cuban society as a result of the Revolution brought transformation to all areas of life, including sexuality.

Prostitution, Reproduction, and Youth

The earliest revolutionary policy explicitly addressing sexuality was the eradication of prostitution. By eliminating commercial sex, the revolutionary regime endeavored both to improve the lives of female sex workers and to make a clean break with prerevolutionary Cuban society. A 1961 law outlawed prostitution, and arrangements were made, with the collaboration of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC, founded in 1960 and led by Fidel Castro’s sister-in-law, Vilma Espín), for the rehabilitation and retraining of prostitutes.⁴³ The rehabilitation program has sometimes been hailed as an example of the revolutionary government’s commitment to gender as well as class equality. But it has also been criticized for using coercion to force women out of prostitution.⁴⁴ Officially, commercial sex ceased to exist in Cuba after the early 1960s

and was effectively a taboo topic during the first three decades after 1959. This is reflected in a 2006 novel by Jorge Luís Hernández, in which the narrator tells the story of a fellow author whose book—"a story of prostitution when officially there were no prostitutes"—was never published.⁴⁵

If the eradication of prostitution was an example of how the revolutionary government used the law to repress certain kinds of sexual liaison, a second early policy demonstrated the use of incentives to encourage new behavior. Prior to the Revolution, Cuba had had a relatively low marriage rate in international terms. A significant percentage of Cubans, especially those in the countryside, lived in informal unions. But during the 1960s the formal marriage rate rose to one of the highest in the world.⁴⁶ In part, this was the result of an official marriage campaign, organized through the Ministry of Justice to encourage couples to marry, often in collective weddings.⁴⁷ There have been differing interpretations of this campaign. Some see in it evidence of middle-class prejudice, with privileged politicians promoting legal marriage and nuclear families in place of the informal unions and extended families common to working-class Cubans.⁴⁸ Martínez-Alier offers an alternative view, arguing that revolutionary leaders were aware of a link between social inequality and the large numbers of informal unions and recognized that women in particular were anxious to have weddings and legal papers. By offering poor couples the chance to marry formally (with all the trappings of a bourgeois wedding)⁴⁹ the new government gave poor Cubans the impression of equality without, however, addressing the historical inequalities within middle-class marriage.⁵⁰ Indeed, it would be some time before the regime turned to this issue of power relations within marriage.

Demographic evidence demonstrates that legal marriages did increase significantly in the early 1960s, as did the birthrate.⁵¹ But divorce also rose during this period,⁵² indicating that major social, economic, and political reforms compelled people to make adjustments in their personal lives. This suggests in turn that the most dramatic changes in sexual practices in the 1960s came not as a result of government intervention but in response to wider developments. For example, the early revolutionary "baby boom" is generally attributed to the public optimism generated by the Revolution, which brought more jobs, greater employment stability, free health care, and universal education.⁵³ Unlike one-party states elsewhere during the twentieth century, the Cuban revolutionary regime instigated neither a pronatal policy nor a plan for population control.⁵⁴ During the 1960s the task of enabling Cubans to have,

in Margaret Randall's words, "as few or as many children as they wish,"⁵⁵ fell largely to the FMC. By the middle of that decade, thousands of health volunteers around the country "conducted community discussions about issues such as sanitation, contraception, and cancer; encouraged pregnant women to keep doctors' appointments; and reminded women to have their yearly Pap smear."⁵⁶ As Virginia Olesen observes, the campaigns for reproductive health were partly motivated by the need to protect the labor force through reducing infant and maternal deaths. Survival rates of mothers and children increased significantly during the 1960s,⁵⁷ another factor that contributed to the rising birthrate.

Lois M. Smith and Alfredo Padula concur with other scholars that "a wave of revolutionary optimism" helped to contribute to the baby boom of the 1960s. But they also attribute this to the U.S. economic blockade from 1961 onward and the resultant reduced supply of contraception throughout the first decade of the Revolution.⁵⁸ The increase in the number of births may also have arisen from less ready access to medical abortions.⁵⁹ There is some debate about the politics and availability of abortion in Cuba during the early revolutionary period. In contrast to Randall's assertion that the regime had no policy of fertility control, Smith and Padula claim that the new revolutionary government "began rigorously to enforce existing antiabortion laws."⁶⁰ Paula Hollerbach similarly argues that while the abortion law was "tacitly ignored" before 1959, the revolutionary government put it in force during the first five years after coming to power.⁶¹ But even without legal restrictions, the availability of abortion and other gynecological services fell dramatically during this period as a result of the emigration of most of Cuba's gynecologists and obstetricians.⁶² This led to an increase in death and injury due to self-induced or unprofessional abortions, a situation that improved after 1965, when the first abortions were preformed in hospitals.⁶³

According to Elizabeth Sutherland, by the late 1960s a woman had access to a hospital abortion during the first month of pregnancy, but this could be reported to her family.⁶⁴ Ruth M. Lewis and Susan M. Rigdon write that the availability of abortion in the 1960s depended largely on the attitude of the individual doctor.⁶⁵ That revolutionary leaders had ambivalent attitudes toward abortion (or that they did not prioritize it as a health issue) is suggested by the fact that throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s abortion was regulated by Cuba's 1938 criminal code, which allowed terminations only under limited circumstances.⁶⁶ Abortion, therefore, is a good example of the conflict-

ing and even unpredictable impact of traditional values, political change, and revolutionary enthusiasm.

According to Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, head of the National Institute of Sex Education during the 1980s and one of the few gynecologists to remain on the island after 1959, revolutionary doctors began to introduce contraception into health services from the early 1960s, although they were restricted by the American embargo.⁶⁷ By the end of that decade, contraception was more widely available and free of official restrictions.⁶⁸ But as with abortion, information about family planning depended on the attitude of individual doctors.⁶⁹ Concerns about popular prejudice may also have prevented the government from actively disseminating information on birth control.⁷⁰ Moreover, there is evidence that some Cuban men continued to resist and disapprove of contraception.⁷¹

Revolutionary policy toward marriage and reproduction during the 1960s indicates that the regime aimed to eradicate social inequalities and increase the health of mothers and children, while continuing to associate women largely with maternity. But following an early “baby boom” the dramatic changes of the first five years of the Revolution—women’s greater participation in the labor force, improvements in health and education, the increased availability of contraception, abortion, and divorce—there was a steady decrease in the birthrate.⁷² The fact that Cuban women were working outside the home and having fewer children, however, neither challenged the historical emphasis on motherhood nor decreased women’s family responsibilities. Instead, women increasingly performed the “double shift” of domestic and paid labor (or “triple shift” if political activism and voluntary labor are also considered). Some programs were introduced to communalize domestic labor, but such initiatives were limited both by economic constraints and the belief that women were more suited than men to domestic work.⁷³ The tradition of women in extended family networks caring for each other’s children lessened the pressure on the state to provide childcare facilities.⁷⁴ And while incorporation into the workforce was integral to the construction of the new socialist woman,⁷⁵ it was not welcomed by all male revolutionaries. As Geoffrey E. Fox argues, some men’s objections to women’s work outside the home hid deeper anxieties, including “that the father [would] lose his power to choose or at least approve his daughter’s choice of a sexual partner.”⁷⁶

WOMEN'S INCREASING ENTRY into the labor force was just one indicator of the ways the Revolution transformed Cuban family life. Again, this was less the result of deliberate policy than the impact of wider social change.⁷⁷ Family members were separated when young people from middle-class households went as volunteers to the countryside to teach peasants to read and write during the 1961 literacy campaign; adolescents were sent to the new boarding schools or summer countryside schools (*escuelas de campo*). There was also a reverse move of rural youth to the cities to study on government scholarships. In the same years, hundreds of Cubans went overseas to volunteer, study, or work, and tens of thousands immigrated to the United States.⁷⁸ Even if, as Carolee Bengelsdorf argues, the revolutionary regime effectively ignored the family during the 1960s,⁷⁹ this was the decade when the state replaced the family as the main social institution in Cuba, taking over the education and socialization of young people.⁸⁰

As in other socialist regimes, many early economic measures were “aimed at abolishing the family as an economic unit of production, as production and distribution came progressively under state control.”⁸¹ The reforms of the early 1960s, followed by the Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, removed most enterprise and land from family hands.⁸² Furthermore, many social services historically provided by families, neighborhood networks, or the Church (most notably health and education) would subsequently be taken over by the state. The government was particularly concerned to exert control over the socialization of new generations. Measures to promote new revolutionary values included universal state schooling that took children away from the influence of parents and multigenerational families, and the incorporation of Cubans of all ages into mass organizations. As Smith and Padula put it, by the early 1960s “[t]he state was becoming a member of the family.”⁸³

This led to opposition claims that the revolutionary government was attacking the family. Indeed, some have explained the marriage campaigns described above as a measure to prove that socialism was not destroying the Cuban family.⁸⁴ Some parents resisted sending their children to boarding school because of the perceived threat to young women's chastity, fears encouraged by antirevolutionaries.⁸⁵ But it would be simplistic to understand the early revolutionary regime as antifamily. Such a view ignores the positive impact on most Cuban families of the massive social reforms of the first decade of the Revolution, including improvements in health, education, and housing. Moreover, Fidel Castro's speeches during the 1960s were full of mes-

sages about the importance of family life, including children's obligations to respect their parents and a recognition that parents made a sacrifice in allowing children to leave home to partake in revolutionary activities. Love of family figured alongside socialism and patriotism as the revolutionary values taught to young militants.⁸⁶ "On balance," Olesen concluded in the early 1970s, "... in spite of some loosening of family ties, the extent of which is unknown, the Cuban family as a social unit continues to be individually valued, and to receive official concern and attention."⁸⁷

THE EDUCATION OF young people—the "future of the Revolution"—was a fundamental aim from the 1960s onward. Education was understood in a broad sense, well beyond literacy, numeracy, and academic or professional skills, extending to the concept of "moralism" and total commitment to the Revolution.⁸⁸ Within this all-encompassing view sexuality did figure, albeit not in any straightforward way. The criticism of young people who exhibited "un-revolutionary" cultural tastes in the late 1960s—from listening to the Beatles or American music, to young men with long hair and young women in mini-skirts—has sometimes been interpreted as "puritanical."⁸⁹ But as the American journalist Elizabeth Sutherland, who traveled to Cuba in 1967, suggests, debates about youth behavior and sexuality in the late 1960s were part of a much wider set of tensions within the new socialist society. "The Battle for the Mini-Skirt," as Sutherland calls it, took place at the crossroads of a series of conflicts: between older and younger generations, urban and rural cultures,⁹⁰ "Western" and "Cuban" traditions, traditional and newer sexual values, and debates about sectarianism within the Cuban Communist Party.⁹¹ As such, it encapsulates some of the contradictions of revolutionary sexual politics during the 1960s. But Sutherland's claim that "Fidel and other leaders did not care how long a person wore his hair or how short her skirt as long as the person was Revolutionary"⁹² points to another conflict dating back at least to Castro's "Words to the Intellectuals" in 1961. In this speech, the Cuban leader famously declared that artists and intellectuals were free to do "[e]verything within the Revolution, nothing outside the Revolution."⁹³ This begged the question, "What are the criteria for deciding whether something is revolutionary?" and has generated debate among supporters and opponents of the regime ever since. The vague and highly subjective definition of "revolutionary" meant while in theory a "true revolutionary" could dress as she or he pleased, in practice judgments were sometimes based on a person's clothing or appearance.

In an atmosphere in which good citizenship was defined by productive labor, “the homosexual” and the “prostitute” symbolized nonproductive work and American decadence. Thus to “look” like a homosexual or prostitute was already to risk being labeled counterrevolutionary, regardless of one’s political views or activities. As we will see later in this chapter, this set of equations had particularly devastating consequences for men who had sex with men.

Debates about youth dress are one example of the emergence of new sexual and social values in the late 1960s. But other evidence points to the continuation of older views. Fox’s interviews with male, mostly working-class, Cuban émigrés to the United States indicate that these men’s ideas about family, honor, and gender were strikingly similar to those identified by de la Torre Mulhare among white, middle-class Cubans before 1959.⁹⁴ This in turn suggests that even if the revolutionary regime did not have a consistent set of policies relating to sexuality in the 1960s, the wider social changes, including those to family and married life, were resisted by many men, even some who otherwise supported the Revolution.

Families and Family Planning

If in the 1960s the revolutionary government gave mixed messages about families, scholars are agreed that by the 1970s there was a decisive turn toward a clear family policy. This was part of the wider changes ushered in by the second decade of the Revolution, partly in response to the failure of the much-promoted 10-million-ton sugarcane harvest in 1970. Whereas the 1960s had been a decade when Cuban revolutionaries attempted to forge their own socialist path, by the 1970s the disappointment of the sugar campaign prompted a turn toward the Soviet Union for both economic security and political inspiration. The ensuing institutionalization of the Revolution brought with it a more orthodox socialist view of the family,⁹⁵ formalized in the Family Code of 1975.⁹⁶

The code signaled the government’s recognition not only that the family remained an important site of children’s social and political education, but also that the aim of full gender equality had not been attained. Women’s incorporation into the labor market would have to be accompanied by men’s work in the home,⁹⁷ and the Family Code called for both sexes to take responsibility for domestic labor and childcare.⁹⁸ The code generated widespread debate among the population, challenging women and men alike to revise deep-seated beliefs about essential gender difference,⁹⁹ and marking a major shift in official

and popular discourse about their roles under the Revolution.¹⁰⁰ But numerous studies have emphasized that in Cuba, as elsewhere, such measures had limited success in overcoming women's triple duty of domestic tasks, paid work, and political activism.¹⁰¹ Moreover, by acknowledging the family's ongoing importance in the socialization of youth,¹⁰² and aiming to minimize the impact of older generations by emphasizing the role of parents, the code established the heterosexual couple as the center of the family unit.¹⁰³ Other pieces of legislation during this period likewise reinforced traditional gender and sexual relations,¹⁰⁴ including the 1976 Constitution, which states, "The state protects the family, motherhood, and matrimony."¹⁰⁵

But the nuclear family was not historically the predominant family structure on the island. According to Helen Safa, the Family Code was in part a response to "the increase in consensual unions and in female-headed households" and an attempt "to encourage conjugal ties and especially marriage by making them more egalitarian and prestigious."¹⁰⁶ In this assessment, the code actually reinforced patriarchal traditions, by attempting to reestablish men's authority in the domestic sphere. As Carolee Bengelsdorf and Jean Stubbs assert, the Family Code signified both a major initiative for women's equality *and* a return to a more conventional notion of the family.¹⁰⁷

The Family Code, then, can be understood simultaneously as a recognition of the state's inadequacy to provide solutions to all social problems, and a reflection of a conservative belief in the nuclear unit as the best structure to guarantee social stability. But there is a third dimension—consistent with the first two—to consider. Niurka Pérez Rojas's study of the Cuban family between 1953 and 1970 attributes nuclearization to urbanization, the incorporation of women into the workforce, higher levels of education, and better economic and social prospects.¹⁰⁸ This suggests that the revolutionary government saw the increase in nuclear families as an indicator of economic development and modernization and therefore of the success of revolutionary social policy. This also strongly implies that female-headed households were interpreted as negative, presumably because female heads were assumed not to work outside the home. Similarly to the promotion of formal marriage in the 1960s, Cuban revolutionaries encouraged the nuclear family as part of the struggle for class equality. But as the work of Bengelsdorf, Stubbs, and Safa demonstrates, this view ignored the historical class, gender, and racial inequalities embedded in the institution of the family.

THE EMPHASIS ON the new socialist family was accompanied by a more consistent approach to reproduction. According to Hollerbach, prior to the mid-1970s access to contraception had been limited both by the U.S. embargo and the priority placed on other health issues by the Cuban government.¹⁰⁹ With the economic improvement of the early 1970s, more birth control could be imported from elsewhere as well as manufactured on the island, and the government began actively to promote its use, especially among young people.¹¹⁰ The pressure for a more comprehensive family planning policy seems to have come from both popular demand inside Cuba and population control initiatives outside. During the 1970s, youth sexual activity, menstruation, and contraception were increasingly discussed by FMC members at their meetings and in their official bulletin, *Mujeres* (Women).¹¹¹ In 1974, the Cuban government joined the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, which included funding for the local manufacture of contraception, and from 1975 the International Planned Parenthood Federation began supplying Cuba with contraceptives.¹¹² But birth control continued to be seen largely as women's responsibility,¹¹³ and this may be one explanation for the apparent rise in abortions during this decade.¹¹⁴ In 1979, the 1938 criminal code was finally reformed, including the removal of restrictions on abortion, although terminations had been widely practiced throughout the previous two decades.¹¹⁵

Notwithstanding improved access to and information on contraception and abortion, official policy continued to stress women's special roles as mothers. The 1973 Maternity Law was "based on certain assumptions: that every adult Cuban is a worker, that children will be borne by working women, and that children represent the future of the revolution."¹¹⁶ The law specified a minimum paid maternity leave and stipulated that either mother or father could take one day off a month for medical care of a young child.¹¹⁷ But as Margaret Randall argues, this clause clashed with the socialist ideal of the exemplary worker who was given merit points and material bonuses for good performance in the workplace. While a woman who stayed at home with her ill child was excused, a man in the same position was seen as a bad worker.¹¹⁸ Moreover, revolutionary leaders emphasized women's special relationship to children. In his speech to the FMC's second conference in 1974, Fidel Castro famously called women "nature's workshop where life is formed."¹¹⁹ A decree passed in 1976 debarred women from almost 300 occupations, supposedly in order to protect their reproductive organs.¹²⁰ As Lourdes Casal noted in 1980, "Obviously, concern for female reproductive organs is associated with the

basic definition of woman as mother. The possibility that a woman may choose not to become a mother remains alien to Cubans.”¹²¹

Sex Education

With women’s increased demand for information on fertility control, and growing concerns about adolescent sexual activity and pregnancy, the regime recognized the need for formal sex education.¹²² In 1974 basic instruction was introduced in primary and secondary schools,¹²³ and the next year the first Communist Party Congress proposed a national program of sex education, following the recommendations of the FMC.¹²⁴ The party’s “Thesis on the Role of the Family in Socialism” acknowledged parents’ reluctance to teach children about sexuality, emphasized the full responsibility of both men and women for sexual relations, criticized promiscuity, and upheld heterosexual marriage as the ideal location for the development of egalitarian (hetero)sexual relations and the creation of new socialist generations.¹²⁵ In 1977 the government established the National Working Group on Sex Education (GNTES) to promote a nation-wide sexual education program via schools and the media.¹²⁶ In the late 1970s a number of East German sexual health manuals were translated into Spanish for use as textbooks.¹²⁷ By the mid-1980s Cuban-authored texts began to appear as well, and in 1989 GNTES was renamed the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX).¹²⁸

As Marvin Leiner notes, sex educators in Cuba in the 1970s and 1980s saw sex education as part of the wider program for women’s equality, and healthy sexuality as one aspect of a loving, committed, heterosexual relationship. Although this did not mean prohibiting premarital sex, it did place the emphasis on responsibility, love, and mutual commitment.¹²⁹ The importance of female sexual pleasure was also stressed,¹³⁰ but the increase in the numbers of pregnancies and abortions among young women, as well as a rise in informal unions, suggests that the push toward a socialist morality of heterosexual monogamy was not entirely successful. According to Smith and Padula, during the 1980s a rise in divorces,¹³¹ adolescent pregnancies, abortion, and single motherhood prompted revolutionary leaders to promote stable families.¹³²

During this decade some commentators began to express concern that women—particularly young women with relatively low levels of education—were not using contraception¹³³ and were resorting to abortion instead.¹³⁴ There was also worry about the percentage of children born to unmarried women (over 60 percent by 1989 according to one report),¹³⁵ and

single motherhood among young Cuban women became a topic of national debate.¹³⁶ Some blamed single mothers for the breakdown of the family and other social problems.¹³⁷ Others saw male behavior at fault, and Cuban officials began openly to criticize parents who encouraged their sons to be sexually active while failing to teach them responsibility when their partners became pregnant. Revolutionary leaders likewise called on young men to use contraception.¹³⁸

Cuba was not alone in registering a rise in teenage pregnancies in the late twentieth century.¹³⁹ Adolescent pregnancy and unwed motherhood have often been a flashpoint for debates about values in a given society. Moreover, these anxieties hid complexities in changing reproductive patterns in Cuba in the 1980s. There was evidence that the fertility rate of adolescent women was increasing during this decade,¹⁴⁰ but this was in part the result of a demographic trend initiated by the Revolution itself. By the mid-1980s, the “boom” of babies born in the years immediately after 1959 had reached childbearing age. In addition, the birthrate among women over the age of twenty-five was declining.¹⁴¹ Marguerite Rosenthal suggests that the large numbers of teenage mothers in the 1980s were the result of a “cultural lag”: the combination of a traditional pattern of women bearing children at a young age with a new pattern of decline in overall fertility and increased ability for people to end relationships.¹⁴² As Lois M. Smith notes, “The issue of teenage pregnancy is fraught with tensions between the old and the new,” in particular between simultaneous pressures on young women to be sexually liberal *and* chaste.¹⁴³ While some saw the rise of teenage pregnancies and abortions as signs of failure in social policy and threats to the nuclear family, others saw new forms of sexual and social agency among young women. By the end of the 1980s it was increasingly clear that traditional ideals of female chastity and sexual ignorance were being abandoned. At the same time, some young people felt they were receiving mixed messages about sexuality in a society that emphasized a break with traditional rituals while continuing to promote love and commitment.¹⁴⁴

If revolutionary attitudes toward the family and sexuality were fraught with tension, one area in which revolutionary sexual policy was consistent from the 1960s to the 1980s was in the promotion of heterosexuality as a revolutionary ideal. Because few issues have been as persistently controversial for the Cuban Revolution as homosexuality and homophobia, this history deserves a separate section, to which we now turn.

Revolution and Homosexuality

Although there is evidence of institutionalized homophobia throughout Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century,¹⁴⁵ in no other country has homophobia been such a relentless focus of outside criticism. While antirevolutionary critics have found an easy target in Cuba's history of homophobia, it is equally true that the revolutionary government's record on issues related to homosexuality has been a source of divisiveness among supporters of the Revolution. Well into the twenty-first century the history of homophobia in socialist Cuba remains controversial. This section outlines that history and the debates it has generated, offering an analysis of why homosexuality proved contentious for the Cuban Revolution, and how institutionalized forms of homophobia related to wider revolutionary policy.

The construction of homosexuality as a problem for Cuban national identity predates the Revolution by almost two centuries and has parallels in other nationalist discourses since the late eighteenth century. In their respective studies of sexuality and nationhood in Cuba, Emilio Bejel and Abel Sierra show that the development of a Cuban national identity in the late colonial and republican periods relied on negative representations of masculine women and effeminate men.¹⁴⁶ Most contemporary assessments and explanations of homophobia under the revolutionary regime rest, however, on interpretations of homosexual life in the decade before 1959. Some argue that prerevolutionary Havana offered a nascent homosexual subculture, especially for men, linked to the tourist trade and/or cultural production.¹⁴⁷ Others emphasize the negative impact of American imperialism on the lives of Cubans generally, including women and men who had same-sex relations.¹⁴⁸ Ian Lumsden offers a somewhat more nuanced view, arguing that while some men who had sex with men may have worked in U.S.-run entertainment establishments, their social and intimate lives revolved around the streets, cinemas, and bars of Havana's working-class neighborhoods.¹⁴⁹ While there is evidence, then, that 1950s Havana offered some space for the emergence of a subculture among men who had sex with men, the lives of most people who had same-sex relationships were nevertheless fundamentally shaped by the gender, class, and racial power relations that characterized Cuba in that decade.

The Revolution did not invent homophobia. It did, however, provide new public arenas for the expression of prejudice against same-sex activity. One of the first tasks of the new regime was to break with a past associated with American imperialism and organized crime. The association of homosexual-

ity with these phenomena, combined with a longer tradition of “othering” the homosexual, made men who had sex with men particularly vulnerable to accusations of counterrevolutionary activity. As Bejel writes, “[p]rostitution, drug addiction, and homosexuality were strongly associated with one another in the Cuban cultural imagination.”¹⁵⁰ In the early 1960s men who had sex with men were often caught up in raids on bars designed to crack down on drugs and commercial sex.¹⁵¹ Artists and intellectuals were also particularly vulnerable to “accusations” of homosexuality.¹⁵² Moreover, the new structures of the revolutionary regime provided official channels through which accusations of such activity could be made. For example, the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), established in 1960 in anticipation of a possible U.S. invasion, sometimes reported “suspected homosexuals” to the authorities.¹⁵³ Similarly, homosexuality (along with “woman’s honor,” juvenile delinquency, and a host of other social “problems”) was among the “offences” that could be tried in the new popular tribunals, founded in 1966.¹⁵⁴

The mid-1960s marked the turn toward a series of concerted efforts to persecute, rehabilitate, and/or isolate people who had—or were suspected of having—same-sex sex. In 1965 the Ministry of Health issued a report stating that homosexuality was learned early in life and recommended a series of measures to prevent children from becoming homosexual, including sending “effeminate” boys to schools for children with behavior problems, where they would be taught sports, self-defense, and military exercises.¹⁵⁵ Boys or men identified as “feminine” could be expelled from mass organizations such as the Young Communist League¹⁵⁶ and fired from their jobs or transferred to “less sensitive” ones.¹⁵⁷ The University of Havana adopted a policy of expelling homosexual students,¹⁵⁸ in some cases after they were forced to make public confessions.¹⁵⁹ An article in an official newspaper declared: “No homosexual represents the Revolution, which is a matter of men, of fists and not feathers, of courage and not trembling, of certainty and not intrigue, of creative valor and not of sweet surprises.”¹⁶⁰

Similarly, in an interview that same year Fidel Castro stressed that no homosexual could ever “embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true Revolutionary, a true Communist militant.”¹⁶¹ In particular, Castro expressed concern that children not be exposed to homosexuals,¹⁶² anticipating the declarations of the Congress on Education and Culture six years later, in 1971 (discussed later in this section). Moreover, without stating it directly, El Comandante implied that homosexu-

ality ran counter to the ethic of work at the center of the Revolution. The example of encouraging youth to be involved in sports also implied a contrast with less “manly” activities, such as dance, art, or writing.

The patterns of homophobia established in 1960s Cuba emerged from a combination of a heterosexual masculinist tradition, on one hand, and a socialist morality that identified certain forms of sexual behavior with bourgeois decadence and a lack of productivity, on the other. This cultural and ideological *mélange* became more powerful and dangerous in the mid-1960s as a result of a series of political and economic circumstances. The year 1965 saw the creation of the UMAP (Military Units to Aid Production), one of the most notorious initiatives in the history of revolutionary Cuba. The UMAP camps, run by the army, were where men accused of counterrevolutionary or antisocial activities and attitudes were sent to perform forced labor. Several factors converged to lead to their establishment. By the mid-1960s, shortcomings in revolutionary industrialization plans had led to a renewed emphasis on sugar production, particularly in the central Cuban province of Camagüey, where most of the UMAP camps were located. The internment of people whose contribution to the Revolution was deemed insufficient had the double advantage of “reforming” these people through physical work, while redressing the country’s labor shortage.¹⁶³ The UMAP also provided a specific role for the military. Following the successful defense of the island against the CIA-led Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the army had turned to social and economic initiatives, including “the supervision and rehabilitation of social deviants” and the promotion of economic growth.¹⁶⁴ The UMAP camps brought these two aims together as rehabilitation centers for “the lazy, the corrupt, homosexuals, religious proselytizers, especially Jehovah’s Witnesses, all classified as social deviants.”¹⁶⁵ The establishment of the camps was also consistent with the “ruralism” of the 1960s and the belief that the countryside was the heart of pure revolutionary values in contrast to the corrupting influence of the city.¹⁶⁶ The fact that homosexuality was associated with urban life¹⁶⁷ made men who had sex with men especially easy targets for “rehabilitation.” Some have blamed early revolutionary homophobia on the influence of the Soviet Union and China.¹⁶⁸ But the founding of the UMAP camps, alongside the writings of revolutionaries such as Che Guevara, and especially Guevara’s idea of the “new man,”¹⁶⁹ suggest a strong link between institutionalized homophobia and a particularly Cuban brand of socialist ruralism in the 1960s.¹⁷⁰

According to the American journalist Jose Yglesias, who traveled in Cuba in 1967, UMAP prisoners could be denounced by “[t]he secret police, their colleagues at their study or work center, and mainly, the local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution” and were subject to brutal treatment inside the camps.¹⁷¹ Notwithstanding the official role of the UMAP camps in increasing production and “rehabilitating” antirevolutionaries, a number of former inmates and eyewitnesses have attested to the essentially punitive regime inside the camps.¹⁷² Writers and artists were particularly vulnerable to “recruitment” to the camps. Ultimately, this may also have been the major factor in their demise, since many of those detained had friends and colleagues in influential positions.¹⁷³ Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was aware that visitors to Cuba were concerned about the UMAP facilities,¹⁷⁴ another factor, no doubt, that led to their official dissolution in 1967.

Although the UMAP camps were relatively short lived, they had a definitive and devastating impact on both the individual men sent to them and the wider communities within which they lived and worked. Lourdes Casal claims, for example, that the young generation of Cuban poets who started to publish during the first decade of the Revolution were often accused of “aesthetic (transcendentalism), moral (homosexualism), and, primarily, political (being unreliable revolutionaries) sins.”¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the closure of the UMAP camps did not mark the end of state-sanctioned homophobic repression in Cuba. As the examples of Reinaldo Arenas, Antón Arrufat, José Lezama Lima, and others demonstrate, the Cuban government continued to censor literary works with homoerotic content well after 1967.¹⁷⁶ Nor were male artists the only targets. By the late 1960s, concerns about homosexuality endangering the future of the Revolution, combined with a general toughening of the regime’s social, political, and economic policies, combined to make life increasingly difficult for all men and women who had same-sex sex. Although the UMAP camps were reserved for men, there were also reports of women in same-sex relationships being purged from universities, mistreated in prisons, and expelled from boarding schools.¹⁷⁷ In 1968 police raided numerous bars in Havana, arresting dozens of people—many of them identified as homosexual men—who were later sent to work in the countryside.¹⁷⁸ This was the year of the Revolutionary Offensive, during which the regime nationalized most of the remaining private businesses on the island. The eradication of homosexuality was one explanation used to justify the closure or takeover of private en-

terprises, including nightclubs and bars. One military figure described these establishments as havens of “[s]muggling, pimping, homosexuality, drugs, crimes, fights, scandals, robberies, prostitution.”¹⁷⁹

The Revolutionary Offensive was part of a wider moral, political, and economic campaign that marked the late 1960s as Cuba attempted to blaze its own trail as an independent socialist state. This project came to a halt with the failure of the 10-million-ton sugarcane harvest in 1970. This fiasco not only forced Cuba to turn to the Soviet Union for greater economic support; it also hardened resolve to eliminate dissent and perceived antirevolutionary activity.¹⁸⁰ In 1971 the resolutions of the Congress on Education and Culture brought together existing concerns about youth, antirevolutionary intellectuals, and socialist purity through official declarations that homosexuals were characterized by their “social pathology” and a series of measures designed to prevent suspected homosexuals from exercising influence on young people through their roles in education in particular.¹⁸¹

During the following five years (the infamous *quinquenio gris*—see chapter 4) the mandates of the congress provided the basis for the ongoing dismissal of men and women who had same-sex relationships from mass organizations and jobs in the educational and cultural sectors, although the measures were applied with varying enthusiasm by different government departments.¹⁸² During the early to mid-1970s, the decrees contributed to an atmosphere in which official and popular persecution of homosexuals spread well beyond the realm of culture and education. There were reports, for example, of young men being sent to “youth reeducation camps.”¹⁸³ The blacklisting and ostracizing of supposedly “ostentatious” homosexuals destroyed the careers and social lives of many people, even those with years of proven revolutionary activity.¹⁸⁴ Significantly, the very public denunciation of men who had sex with men effectively created a social category—“the homosexual”—that had not widely existed before. In prerevolutionary Cuba, as in much of the world, male same-sex activity had survived, and in some cases even thrived, in a cultural context in which it was not equated with a homosexual identity.¹⁸⁵

The mid-1970s brought some signs of change in official and popular attitudes. In 1975 the Cuban Supreme Court overturned the resolution that allowed homosexuals to be fired from cultural jobs and condemned to forced labor.¹⁸⁶ But that same year the Family Code reaffirmed the nuclear family and heterosexual couple as the basic social unit. The founding of the National Task Force for Sexual Education in 1977 and the institution of a national sex educa-

tion program, outlined above, marked the first significant change in public discourse about homosexuality. Although some members of the task force expressed the view that homosexuality was a “problem” to be “studied,”¹⁸⁷ collectively their approach to sex education demonstrated a willingness to take a new tack promoting the acceptance of homosexuality. In 1979 the task force published a series of textbooks. Among these was Siegfried Schnabl’s *Man and Woman in Intimacy* (originally published as an advice manual for East Germans in 1969),¹⁸⁸ with a brief chapter entitled “Homosexuality in Man and Woman.” The volume caused some scandal in Cuba but also provoked widespread interest, becoming a national bestseller and topic of general conversation.¹⁸⁹ Schnabl was critical of scientific attempts to uncover the supposed traits of homosexuals, arguing that many of these arose from social prejudice.¹⁹⁰

The fact that Cuban officials turned to East Germany as the model for sex education in the late 1970s was significant. According to Dagmar Herzog, during the 1960s and 1970s progressive East German professionals such as Schnabl used their studies of sexual practices and desires among the East German public to influence debates about sexuality among the largely puritanical leadership of the ruling Socialist Unity Party.¹⁹¹ East Germany makes an interesting contrast not only to Cuba and other socialist states but also to Western liberal democracies. By the late 1950s, when homosexual men were still being arrested and imprisoned in other Eastern European countries and the USSR, as well as in West Germany, Britain, and the United States, the East German government put an end to prosecutions and imprisonment of men involved in consensual same-sex activity.¹⁹²

The 1970s, then, was a time of contradictory sexual politics. By the end of that decade, “the Cuban Communist Party no longer considered homosexual behavior to be in fundamental contradiction with the revolutionary process.”¹⁹³ In the same period, the official newspaper of the Young Communist League, *Juventud Rebelde*, began a daily column that answered young people’s questions about sexuality, including homosexuality.¹⁹⁴ But although the 1978 Labor Law discontinued the ban on homosexuals working as teachers, in practice the prohibition continued into the 1980s, as did a *de facto* bar on homosexuals’ membership of the army and the Communist Party.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, the Penal Code of 1979 continued to penalize “manifestations of homosexual behavior in the public sphere.”¹⁹⁶ In addition, the 1979 code contained the vaguely worded *ley de peligrosidad* (law of danger) that allowed for homosex-

uals and others to be arrested and “reeducated” for performing any number of supposed “vices.”¹⁹⁷

NOTWITHSTANDING THE changes of the late 1970s, in 1980 “[h]omophobia returned with a vengeance.”¹⁹⁸ This was the year of the largest migration of Cubans to the United States since the early 1960s. Twenty years after the triumph of the Revolution, the Cuban economy, damaged by the U.S. embargo and largely reliant on trade with the USSR and Eastern Europe, suffered from a number of deficiencies. In 1979 Cubans living in the United States were permitted to return for the first time to visit their relatives in Cuba, bringing those on the island face to face with the relative prosperity of the émigré community.¹⁹⁹ A year later a group of Cubans wanting to leave the country occupied the Peruvian Embassy in Havana. In the ensuing crisis the Cuban authorities granted permission to unprecedented numbers of Cubans to leave the island from the port of Mariel outside Havana. An estimated 125,000 Cubans migrated to Florida between April and October 1980.

The “Mariel exodus” was notable not only for its size but also for its impact on both Cuban and American societies. Inside Cuba, local CDRs and other mass organizations led popular protests in which would-be emigrants were condemned as traitors.²⁰⁰ Although exact figures are difficult to ascertain, it was reported that a significant number of those who left in 1980 were homosexual or lesbian.²⁰¹ Along with the UMAP camps, the departure of many women and men who had same-sex sex from Mariel—as well as the blatant homophobia of many of the anti-Mariel demonstrations inside Cuba²⁰²—is the most commonly cited evidence of Cuban revolutionary homophobia and continues to leave a scar on the collective memory of the Revolution (see chapter 4).

Throughout the 1980s there were indications of further changes in official policy toward homosexuality, alongside substantial evidence of continued discrimination and repression. Homosexuality was decriminalized in the revised 1988 criminal code.²⁰³ But homosexuals were still vulnerable to accusations of “improper conduct”—a hazy term whose definition was left to the accuser, whether the police, a neighbor, or someone else.²⁰⁴ During the 1980s there were reports of “street sweeps” in which suspected homosexuals and others were cleared away from public areas before large official events.²⁰⁵ Moreover, in spite of attempts by East German-born sexologist Monika Krause and others to address social prejudice against homosexuality, there

was evidence that officials continued to espouse the view that homosexuals were dangerous to children.²⁰⁶ The magazine *Maríel*, published in the United States by exile Reinaldo Arenas and others who had left Cuba in 1980, reported that the FMC still operated a ban on known lesbians, and that members could denounce women suspected of having sex with other women.²⁰⁷

During the 1980s the most controversial measures regarding homosexuality involved Cuba's decision to institutionalize people with HIV and AIDS in special sanatoria. While this policy was not aimed specifically at homosexual men, it certainly had a detrimental impact upon them (see chapter 7). But by the end of the decade general policy toward homosexuality seemed to be taking a more "integrationist" approach that veered away from treating homosexuals as "different."²⁰⁸ This did not end institutional or popular discrimination, but it did indicate a recognition of the need to change Cuba's image as an exceptionally homophobic country.

Into the Twenty-first Century

If debates about sexuality in Cuba during the first three decades of the Revolution must consider the influence of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, an analysis of the years since 1990 must take as their starting point the economic and political uncertainty that have characterized Cuba in the post-Soviet period. Following the collapse of state socialism in the former Soviet bloc, and along with it Cuba's relative economic stability, Fidel Castro announced the "Special Period in Times of Peace," effectively putting the country on a war footing. Over the next few years the Cuban economy plummeted along with Cubans' standards of living. By the mid 1990s the worst of the crisis was over, in part thanks to a decision to increase overseas investment on the island, legalize the American dollar, and promote tourism as a major source of revenue. Sexual politics and practices, like all aspects of Cuban life, would henceforth be intimately tied to Cuba's new place in the global economy.

IN TERMS OF heterosexual relations and family life, 1990 marked less a break than a continuation in trends developing in Cuba since at least the 1970s: a low birthrate;²⁰⁹ widespread use of contraception and abortion;²¹⁰ an increase in extended, as opposed to nuclear, families;²¹¹ and high levels of sexual activity among young Cubans. The issue of youth sexuality continued to concern sexual health specialists,²¹² although some also began to turn their attention to sexuality among older Cubans.²¹³ The ample attention paid to sexual topics

in the Cuban press, even in the early 1990s when paper and other resources were in short supply,²¹⁴ implies that popular sex education remained a government priority during the Special Period. In the 1990s the Cuban press started to carry stories on previously little-commented phenomena: divorce, teenage pregnancy, *machismo*, absent fathers, female-headed households, domestic violence, and interracial relationships.²¹⁵ Similarly, during the same period, Cuban women's fiction increasingly addressed issues such as infidelity, domestic violence, and prostitution.²¹⁶

Family life was strongly influenced by the post-Soviet crisis. Emigration increased, especially among the young, and the construction of domestic dwellings came to a virtual halt. One Cuban demographer argued in the late 1990s that the housing shortage was the most important factor behind the increase in extended families.²¹⁷ Notwithstanding this evidence, some specialists continued to see extended families as symbols of marginalization and poverty, associated with female heads and Afro-Cubans.²¹⁸ Others still expressed faith in the nuclear family as the most desirable family unit, calling upon the state to encourage it and improve its conditions.²¹⁹

But the Special Period also gave rise to new critiques of the sexual and gender politics that had characterized Cuban socialism since 1959. One source of these was the organization Magín,²²⁰ formed in 1994 by a group of female communication workers, journalists, academics, and intellectuals. Many of these women had historical ties to the Revolution and some were members of the Communist Party. Influenced by the transnational women's movement and the development of gender theory, Magín introduced a gender analysis into debates about male-female relations in Cuba, offering an alternative (though not a direct challenge) to the FMC.²²¹ More generally, by the early twenty-first century, studies of sexual health in Cuba were increasingly influenced by gender theory, especially as developed in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Brazil.²²² By the early twenty-first century research on masculinities was also increasingly common.²²³

While the Cuban press and researchers expressed increased interest in sexual relations among Cubans, outside commentators focused more and more on "sex tourism."²²⁴ Notwithstanding the official eradication of prostitution in the early 1960s, commercial sexual exchange had continued in the revolutionary period.²²⁵ Some women had formed intimate relationships with political bureaucrats, directors of state companies, or Soviet bureaucrats in exchange for better access to consumer goods, a phenomenon satirized in the 1987 song

La Titimania by the band Los Van Van.²²⁶ Far from being limited to sexual exchanges, these arrangements were one element of a much wider Soviet-era phenomenon humorously called *socioismo* (cronyism—a play on the word *socialismo*, or socialism).²²⁷ Although most contemporary research on commercial sex in Cuba focuses on relationships between locals and foreigners, fictional accounts also represent domestic scenarios. For example, “Blanquita,” a character in a 2005 detective novel by Lorenzo Lunar Cardedo, is described as a prostitute who had once had many Cuban clients in a marginal neighborhood of Santa Clara in central Cuba.²²⁸

During the Special Period commercial sex entered official discourse once again. What was sometimes called the “return” of prostitution in the 1990s was lamented by Fidel Castro and other leaders in language reminiscent of the early revolutionary period: sex work was portrayed as immoral, unhealthy, and discriminatory against women.²²⁹ Echoes of the early 1960s were also evident in the renewed use of repressive measures, most notably widespread police harassment of women suspected of being *jineteras* (female hustlers) and their internment in special “rehabilitation centers,” once again supported by the FMC.²³⁰ But notwithstanding the similar rhetoric and practice, things had changed. Unlike the campaigns to rehabilitate prostitutes in the 1960s, measures to crack down on *jineterismo* (hustling) during the Special Period proved largely ineffective.²³¹ Moreover, evidence that many *jineteras* were not desperately poor and were well educated²³² challenged official views of work and socialist morality. The Cuban press ran articles accusing *jineteras* of using sex with tourists as a way of “acquiring—with very little effort in their view—the trappings of the good life.”²³³

But the regime’s verbal commitment to combating prostitution stood uneasily against the backdrop of erotic language and imagery used in its own tourist campaigns. As Sujatha Fernandes notes, such publicity typically marketed Cuba as an exotic paradise, often using images of Afro-Cuban women to sell this fantasy.²³⁴ The popular association of prostitution with Afro-Cuban women²³⁵ points to another important aspect of the Special Period: an increase in racial inequalities that had diminished (though not disappeared) over the first three decades of the Revolution. With the legalization of the dollar, Cubans with family abroad—the majority white—received remittances that boosted their official salaries. At the same time, Afro-Cuban women, like men, were marginalized from many parts of the formal tourist industry due to racist hiring practices that favored light-skinned Cubans.²³⁶ Consequently,

in order to access dollars, they had little choice but to work on the informal market. But the association of *jineteras* with dark skin is not merely a matter of material circumstance. It also reflects cultural stereotypes: *jineteras* labeled as *mulata* were often characterized as white in other situations.²³⁷

WOMEN WERE NOT the only Cubans selling sex after 1990. As tourism increased and consumer goods payable only in dollars became more readily available, men too turned to sex work, with both female and male clients.²³⁸ During the 1990s a new set of discourses evolved around another sexual issue of symbolic significance for the Revolution: homophobia. And if the preoccupation with *jineteras* suggested that the regime was anxious to preserve one of the earliest successes of the Revolution, official commentary on homosexuality revealed a desire to set the record straight on one of its most controversial sets of policies. Thus post-Soviet Cuba has seen the apparent move away from institutionalized homophobia to a politics of acceptance and even celebration of sexual diversity.

Following the Rectification period of the 1980s,²³⁹ when official homophobic policy was gradually phased out (even as the words and practices of prominent revolutionaries indicated persistent prejudice), the early 1990s signaled a change in official discourse. In these years major revolutionary leaders, including Fidel Castro and FMC director Vilma Espín, publicly denounced homophobia.²⁴⁰ This period also saw what many accounts of homosexuality and homophobia in Cuba cite as the most significant turning point since 1959: the 1993 release of the film *Strawberry and Chocolate* by Cuba's foremost revolutionary director, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Although the film offers rather stereotypical representations of both gender and sexuality, and all its main characters are light-skinned, both the plot and the dialogue mark a departure from early revolutionary views of homosexuality and a tacit acknowledgment of the damage caused by official homophobia. It would be simplistic, however, to conclude that the release of *Strawberry and Chocolate* marked a definitive change in official policy. By allowing two acclaimed heterosexual directors to make the film, the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) was able to present itself as liberal while continuing to prevent homosexual-identified directors from making homosexual-themed films.²⁴¹ Moreover, if the release of *Strawberry and Chocolate* indicated that Cuba officials were willing to open a limited public discussion about homosexuality and the history of institutionalized homophobia on their own terms, that debate was circumscribed by the eco-

conomic and social crisis of the 1990s. Although all Cubans suffered, people who had same-sex relationships faced special problems, in part because cutbacks in transportation and access to spaces outside the family home made contact with friends and lovers especially difficult.²⁴² The economic changes of the Special Period also saw the return of older forms of homophobic discourse. The renewed emphasis on tourism revived concerns about a threat to public morality posed by the presence of homosexual men in public spaces.²⁴³

Notwithstanding the extreme conditions of the Special Period—or perhaps impelled by them—a small group came together to write a manifesto denouncing ongoing persecution and calling for 28 July to be recognized as “Gay Pride Day of Cuba.”²⁴⁴ The document provides a snapshot of the issues that most concerned Cubans who had same-sex sex during the worst days of the Special Period, as well as their interpretation of the situation of homosexuals under the revolutionary government. It called upon Cubans to “remember” the homosexual victims of the UMAP camps and the purges of the 1960s and 1970s, emphasized homophobia as an international problem, and recognized that the situation had improved. At the same time, it pointed to a number of issues of special relevance to the Cuban context, including the lack of space, meeting places, and means of expression.

While the early twenty-first century continued to produce evidence of both official and popular discrimination against homosexuals,²⁴⁵ a great deal of attention, both inside and outside Cuba, focused on the campaigns of the National Center for Sexual Education (CENESEX) to recognize the rights of homosexuals, lesbians, and transgender people on the island. The high profile of these campaigns was largely due to the fame of the center’s director, Mariela Castro Espín, daughter of Raúl Castro (who took over leadership of the country following his brother Fidel’s retirement in 2008) and the late Vilma Espín, founder and long-time head of the FMC. Under Castro’s directorship, CENESEX hosted a number of support groups, including for transsexuals and “women who love women,” continued the work of AIDS education throughout Cuba, and lobbied the Cuban parliament to legalize gender reassignment surgery and recognize the partnership rights for nonheterosexual couples. At the same time, the increased representation of homosexual men and lesbians in popular culture, including in the widely watched soap operas shown nightly on national television, gave increased visibility to the issue of sexual diversity. While clearly these campaigns were in part an attempt to rectify Cuba’s history of homophobia, they have parallels in other Latin American countries in

the early twenty-first century²⁴⁶ and, as such, can be seen as another challenge to the thesis of Cuban exceptionalism in the area of sexuality.

Conclusions

Although this book argues against the idea that the Cuban revolutionary regime had a single sexual ideology during its first five decades, a number of broad conclusions can be drawn from this opening chapter:

1. Official views and policy around sexuality were shaped by a combination of traditional values and structures (e.g., the history of honor and hierarchies of gender, race, and class); the development of political, economic, social, and cultural policy (from the promotion of the “new man” in the 1960s to the institutionalization of the Revolution in the 1970s, Rectification in the 1980s, and the Special Period after 1990); and external factors and pressures (e.g., the American embargo, United Nations initiatives in the areas of family planning, the collapse of Soviet state socialism, and international pressures to improve Cuba’s human rights record in the area of sexual diversity).
2. Changes in popular sexual values and behavior, as well as the persistence of historical contradictions, were as much in response to wider social and economic transformation as to legal reform.
3. Legal changes were typically ambiguous, with contradictory effects, reflecting tensions between the “old” and the “new.”
4. Persisting prejudices and inequalities in the area of sexuality reflected wider social power relations, especially of gender, race, and class, and a tendency to approach these issues separately rather than to analyze the intersections between them.
5. Changes and continuities in individual and collective sexual values and behavior were uneven and inconsistent, reflecting the complex interaction between “the global” and “the local.”

These conclusions will form the basis for the analysis of the oral history interviews throughout the remainder of the book.

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TWO Love and Revolution

Near the end of his classic essay “Socialism and Man,” Ernesto “Che” Guevara writes, “Let me say, at the risk of sounding ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love.”¹ The text, in which Guevara outlines his concept of the “new man” under socialism, has inspired generations of revolutionaries around the world. It is a meditation on the relationship between the individual and the collective and the roles of the masses, the party, and the revolutionary vanguard in constructing the new socialist society. “Socialism and Man” celebrates the role of the revolutionary leader in awakening and leading the masses and emphasizes sacrifice, heroism, bravery, and hard work as the essential qualities of the revolutionary.

As numerous commentators have pointed out, the “new man” celebrated by Guevara was very much a *man*. The only passage referring to women, following closely on the statement about love, reads:

The leaders of the revolution have children who, when they start to talk, do not learn to say the word for father; wives who must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives to bring the revolution to its destiny; circles of friends that correspond strictly to circles of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside it.²

Guevara’s life reflects the ideals laid out in this passage. “Socialism and Man” was written as a letter to the editor of a weekly newspaper in Montevideo, Uruguay, in March 1965, while Guevara was touring Africa. Earlier that year, the Argentine revolutionary had left Cuba, leaving behind as well a wife and several children, to return to guerrilla warfare and foment revolution in other lands—a move that would lead, ultimately, to his death in Bolivia two years later. But the text also expresses many of the wider expectations and values of the Cuban Revolution during its first decade: solidarity, collective spirit, total commitment to the cause, and sacrifice. Moreover, the passage above reflects an assumption that the nuclear family is the natural basis of

society, the domain of women and children, while public political leadership is the realm of men.

The juxtaposition of revolutionary love and familial/couple love represents the reverse of sociological and historical interpretations of political love as pathological and typical of authoritarian modes of government. This chapter underscores the inadequacies of both these models—the idealization of political love, on one hand, and its pathologizing, on the other. Here I broaden the focus beyond feelings between leader and followers to different ways in which love, romance, and intimacy become associated with political causes at the same time that political change shapes memories and ideals of interpersonal relationships.³ In the stories of revolutionary commitment that follow, love moves between different subjects and objects and between the personal and the political.⁴

Heroes and Sacrifices

The Revolution is a love story, a beautiful romance with life, something lovely. Very few people have experienced that in the world, very few people. (Juana, b. 1935)

I was the girlfriend of that young man who played basketball and was a member of clubs. With the triumph of the Revolution [...] I had to define myself. [...] The Bay of Pigs was April, I went to the literacy campaign in May. We fought. That was the only boyfriend I had. He said to me, "Either the Revolution or me." And I said, "The Revolution." (Rosa, b. 1939)

I think if every honest person who has lived here in Cuba does an evaluation of his or her life, they have to say that the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Revolution as event, is extremely important in the lives of every one of us who lived through that moment. On a very personal level, I want to say that it was the most important thing in my life in every sense. It is the most important event of my life, because it's the greatest thing that has existed in my life. It's been a transcendental event in my life. I imagine that for many people it's been the same, for others it's been bad, but . . . Who would ever have told me that that 1st of January would have meant so much? (Jorge, b. 1942)

Let's say that my father had an excessive commitment to the Revolution during his life and until his death. He had a big commitment. That helped me, obviously, to understand the revolutionary process, to follow it. But it also meant that sometimes he didn't take care of [...] the guidance he could give us. And it was my mother—semiliterate—who tried to guide us. But who didn't have all the elements that could have helped us [...] Without wanting to, I almost became like a father to my brother. (Salomón, b. 1962)

I always thought that I was one of those 100 percent Cubans, always. And that was wrong. I always thought of myself as very Cuban. I always thought that I loved the Revolution. I always believed that. And that wasn't true either. So, I was also hypnotized by the collective hysteria. (Carlos, b. 1954)

Juana: Love and Loss

Metaphors of romance and heartbreak are commonly evoked in explaining the relationship of the international left to the Cuban Revolution, especially during the 1960s.⁵ But inside Cuba too the Revolution is often allegorized as a love story. This is clearly expressed in an interview with Juana, born in 1935 in Havana to an educated, white, Catholic, upper-class, and ultimately revolutionary family. I interviewed Juana, aged sixty-nine at the time, with a Cuban colleague. We went to her apartment in a relatively comfortable Havana neighborhood, where Juana lived with her partner of almost twenty years, Yolanda. Juana was frail and using a wheelchair, and Yolanda, some years younger, dedicated much of her time to caring for Juana.

Although Juana speaks of her family as the most important influence in her life, her interview contains few references to private relationships. Her story is a political one in the elite sense, and she takes obvious pleasure in telling us about her involvement with the Revolution and some of its leading adherents while a young woman in the 1960s. Even when one of us asks Juana directly about her personal life, she returns quickly to politics. Her marriage, her divorce, and her son get brief mention in contrast with the long list of prominent public figures from her political and professional life. But this does not mean that her interview is devoid of feeling. To the contrary: Juana associates the world of high politics with sentiments of romance and intimacy. Her presentation of the history of Cuba, before and after 1959, has an element of the fairy tale about it:

Instead of telling us stories, fables [...] my parents told us things about the history of Cuba. Something I later did with my son. I told him episodes in the history of Cuba. Those were the stories I grew up with, because my father was a historian as well. He was illustrious.

Juana's father will prove the predominant role model in her life as she tells it, a personal and political mentor and one of a series of strong male figures. Her tales of the 1960s are filled with the names of famous revolutionaries,

but the one who stands out is Che Guevara. Juana refers to “Che” during her response to a question about why she has never joined the Communist Party:

I know many people who are activists of little worth. There are people who use the membership card as a step, to climb the ladder. I believe what Che said. For me Che is the greatest figure. The new man and the highest step. *That* was a man. *That* was an activist. That’s why the little children say, “We’ll be like Che.” Ah, if only we could be like Che, all of us. All of us, not just a few more. I feel an admiration and respect for Che like nothing else. [...] [His] very appearance was heroic.

Juana had met Guevara a few years before his death, although the context and length of this meeting are not specified. But her description of him is not purely or primarily personal; in her evaluation, Guevara fulfils the criteria he himself set out in “Socialism and Man.” “Che” is *the* true revolutionary, antithesis of corruption, political cynicism, and ambition: the ultimate hero. Her words of praise, which Juana speaks with tears in her eyes, imply that in her case Guevara’s “revolutionary love” for the people is reciprocal.

A second discussion about problems of corruption among party members stirs similar feelings. In the opening quotation cited above, Juana describes the Revolution as “a love story, a beautiful romance with life, something lovely.” The idea of national history as a “love story” is not new; nor is it unique to Cuba, though it has a long tradition in that country. In her study of the nineteenth-century “foundational fictions” of Latin America, Doris Sommer argues that “[r]omantic novels go hand in hand with patriotic history in Latin America.”⁶ Juana’s loving recollections of Guevara and her early years of political activism are also examples of a gendered memory of the Cuban Revolution. Oral history is sometimes championed as offering challenges, or at least alternatives, to “official memories.” Our Cuban interviews do contain such examples (in dissenting opinions on government policy, for example). However, the advocacy of oral history as a popular, progressive, and even corrective version of history is based upon a limited understanding of memory as a literal representation of past events and a conscious interpretation of those. In Juana’s memories, in contrast, Guevara and the Cuban Revolution acquire the status of myth. By myth, I do not mean a “false” version of the past that can be corrected by the “true” facts of history. As demonstrated by a seminal book on oral history, *The Myths We Live By*, historians can learn more from analyzing the myths in people’s life stories than by simply debunking them:

The memories with which we work bring us close to the processes of mythical construction and transmission. We can observe displacements, omissions, and reinterpretations through which myths in personal and collective memory take shape. . . . life stories . . . should be seen . . . as shaped accounts in which some incidents were dramatized, others contextualized, yet others passed over in silence, through a process of narrative shaping in which both conscious and unconscious, myth and reality, played significant parts.⁷

In hearing Juana's mythic account of the Cuban Revolution, it is valuable to consider this interplay of "conscious and unconscious, myth and reality," as well as the relationship between individual and collective memory. As part of the Cuban national past, the Revolution can be understood as what James Fentress and Chris Wickham call "social memories," that "make up the substructure of national historical consciousness, a largely uncontrollable rhetorical field inside which all political actors themselves have to operate."⁸

If it is difficult to imagine a Cuban memory of the past fifty years that does not revolve around the revolutionary victory of 1959 and its aftermath, it is still worth asking why certain parts of that memory are emphasized above others. Why is Juana's account of the Cuban Revolution a predominantly male affair? Can her interview help us to answer the question, posed by oral historians Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini, and Paul Thompson, "How are stories forgotten, and is it possible to learn more about how a male-defined collective memory is shaped?"⁹ It is not as simple as saying that the history of women and the Cuban Revolution has been forgotten or silenced. There are numerous studies of women under the Revolution.¹⁰ Certainly a woman such as Juana, with her direct personal involvement, would be more than aware of women's roles in her country's history. Yet her life story is dominated by memories of men, with women in the background. Furthermore, she echoes revolutionary rhetoric inside and outside Cuba by citing Che Guevara as *the* model revolutionary.

I suggest a number of reasons why Juana presents a "male-defined" memory. First, as an "exceptional" woman, Juana likely learned early on that to be taken seriously as a professional and political activist it was advisable to be "male-identified" to some extent. Second, as I have argued elsewhere, for female political activists in contexts where feminism or discourses of gender equality are not widespread, political and emotional identification with male role models can prove an important part of the process of becoming an active political subject.¹¹ Third, notwithstanding general knowledge of women's

roles in the Revolution, public memorials and official rhetoric are dominated by representations of male political heroes: José Martí, Camilo Cienfuegos, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and so on. While locally women are sometimes honored as heroines of Cuban history, on a national level commemoration of the Revolution reinforces the association of revolutionary heroism with masculinity. Repeated references to key revolutionary texts and terms, including the speeches of Castro and Guevara's ideal of the "new man," further aid the shaping of a "male-defined collective memory" of the Cuban Revolution. Juana's interview provides some evidence of how this "male-defined collective memory" may become intertwined with individual memories to form a mythic memory of the Revolution as love story. Her interview demonstrates that largely unconscious factors, such as the importance of male role models and the visual and rhetorical domination of male heroes in the public sphere, may prove equally strong forces in shaping memory as daily conscious awareness of women's roles in history.

Emotion also plays an important role in shaping "male-defined collective memory." In her work on love in history, Passerini—a historian whose work on oral history and memory has been particularly influential on my own—argues that people need a narrative to understand their feelings.¹² The romantic love story, with its personal and political pedigree, resonates with both speaker and listener: a tale of a commitment that is not strictly rational and is both beautiful and unique. I do not suggest that the love story has a universal appeal or cannot be analyzed for political meanings. But what Passerini calls "love discourse" functions to naturalize social relations of power in ways similar to the national "foundational fictions" studied by Sommer. Put another way: remembering in the name of love can be an act of political seduction.

Rosa: Love and Sacrifice

For many people who came of age in the 1960s, sexual liaisons, family ties, and friendships were experienced as inseparable from the wider collective process of social and political change initiated by the revolutionary victory. Guevara idealized this collapse of political and personal life when he wrote that "circles of friends . . . correspond strictly to circles of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside."¹³

The all-encompassing nature of the Revolution led to tensions between political and other kinds of relationships (the most obvious example being

the separation of families through emigration). Some male narrators speak openly about their families coming second place to their political commitments. In theory, the Revolution promised to make women men's equals by incorporating them into the labor market. In practice, however, the process of implementing gender equality was fraught with contradictions and met with more success in the areas of work and political mobilization than in the domestic sphere. Consequently, whereas men could typically dedicate themselves to politics while still having a partner and children, negotiating multiple political and personal commitments often proved more complicated for women.

Rosa—white, middle-class, and from a revolutionary family—was in her sixties at the time of her interview. She was interviewed in her home in a rural area of Havana Province, twice by two Cuban interviewers and a third time by a lone British researcher. While the first two interviews tell a fairly straightforward “party line” version of the successes of the Revolution, the third is more revealing of some of the problems Rosa perceives in her hometown in the early twenty-first century (for example, the lack of public transportation, unemployment, and increased migration to the area from the eastern part of Cuba), suggesting that she was more comfortable talking about these controversial topics with a foreigner.

Notwithstanding present-day setbacks, Rosa describes the Revolution as the defining event of her life. Having recently retired, she continues to be active locally and has many contacts in her area. She says she inherited her revolutionary politics from her grandfather (like Juana, her political role model is a paternal figure) but locates her radicalization from the moment of the literacy campaign of 1961. Rosa's sister, until that time a nun, was transformed by the same experience, leaving the convent to dedicate herself to the Revolution (an example that encapsulates the common comparison between religious and political conversion). Rosa also participated in the civil defense against the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961 and in various agricultural campaigns of the 1960s. Later, she worked for a government ministry and as a manager of several agricultural firms. In the midst of Rosa's dizzying account of early revolutionary activity, the young female Cuban interviewer asks, “In those years did you have any romantic engagements?” In response, Rosa recounts the amusing tale above, in which she chooses the Revolution above her boyfriend. She continues:

We fought. After we stayed friends. He got married. But I had to be determined . . .

It hasn't weighed on you?

At the time, yes. But later, no. Because I took that direction and I haven't, I've never diverted . . .

[...]

And afterwards you didn't have other loves out there?

Silly things, but not like that one. That was my first boyfriend, that hope, that thing. But no way! It wasn't the same. And so ever since I've been like that, going here, going there . . .

We have no way of knowing what kinds of romantic and sexual relationships Rosa had in the four decades between her rejection of her first boyfriend and the interview. As I argue in the next chapter, there is a lack of public discourse of autonomous female eroticism and of the sexuality of single, childless women in particular. But Rosa's choices were circumscribed by the gender politics of the early revolutionary period. As Ana Serra notes, the "new woman" was not represented as an ideal revolutionary in those years.¹⁴ This is reflected in Guevara's "Socialism and Man," as Ruth Behar notes:

There is only one specific mention of women in El Che's text, and it is cast in the language of abjection—women's role, he says, ought to be to sacrifice their lives to help the revolution come to fruition.¹⁵

In fact, the tradition of calling upon Cuban women to sacrifice themselves to a national cause predates the Revolution by many decades. As such, Rosa scripts herself into a much older national narrative. In the words of Sherry Johnson:

Although romantic myths contribute to the concept of national identity (often at the expense of historical accuracy), for Cuban women, these myths universally involve sacrifice. . . . [E]ven into the present, the unequivocal measure of womanhood in Cuba remains her duty to sacrifice for the good of the nation.¹⁶

By emphasizing the very different political and personal choices available to women and men in the 1960s, I do not propose a heteronormative reading of Rosa's life that posits marriage as a happier choice than a life in politics. Far from sounding regretful, Rosa's account of her early revolution-

ary activism—like that of Juana—conveys a sense of the delight in recalling that period, one that, although shared by some male narrators, may also be shaped by gender. In her study of Spanish Communist memoirs, Gina Herrmann notes that female autobiographers “recount that the best days of their lives were those infused with a sense of ‘public happiness,’ the excitement and joy they derived from the consuming political and cultural work they performed”¹⁷ in Spain during the Second Republic and Civil War. Drawing on the philosophy of Hannah Arendt, Herrmann argues that “public happiness” is associated with “an explosion on to political subjectivity” and a “sensation of euphoria in collective civic action.”¹⁸ She implies that when female roles are predominantly associated with the private sphere (as in 1930s Spain or, I suggest, 1960s Cuba), the public political activity associated with revolutionary upheaval is the source of a particular form of happiness that expresses itself as well in memory, in the form of written memoirs. Similarly, the passion with which Juana and Rosa recall their activism in 1960s Cuba suggests an emotional charge that exceeds the masculinized memory of the Revolution, even though their choices were limited by the gender politics of their day.¹⁹

Salomón: Fathers and Sons

Before calling upon women to take part in the “general sacrifice” for the revolution, Guevara declares that the children of revolutionary leaders will not learn the word for father. The sacrifice of male leaders will therefore take the form of distance from the family home and in particular from their offspring. If some men, in particular those born before 1940, saw this sacrifice as natural and even desirable, interviews with their female contemporaries and with younger narrators suggest that paternal absence in the name of revolutionary responsibility could be experienced as an emotional loss and a physical burden, for women and children alike.

This feeling is keenly expressed in the interview with Salomón, a black Communist Party activist born in 1962. Salomón had been working for some years for a trade union and was in a long-term relationship with a female partner at the time of the interview, although he wasn’t living with her and had had several liaisons outside their relationship. He has no children (or at least none that he mentions). Salomón’s deceased father is the central character in his life narrative. The relationship between father and son and the mixed personal and political legacy of the older man in the life of the younger are suggested by the move in the interview between an image of a role model

who was the ideal revolutionary, on one hand, and someone who neglected his family in the name of political commitment, on the other. The frequent mention of Salomón's father—defined by his absence both during life and after death—contrasts to the place of the narrator's mother, with whom he lived at the time of the interview, but who is mentioned only occasionally. Salomón's first reference to his father introduces the theme of a double absence, as well as the ambivalence that will circulate throughout the interview:

Let's say that I had a normal childhood with parents who, within their possibilities, gave me what they could. My father wasn't a professional. He was a worker, a carpenter. He's dead now. My mother was a housewife. She never worked. Maybe because of the *machista* sentiment of my father: "Here at home, I'm the one who maintains the home. You take care of the children."

Salomón explains what he means by "normal":

A normal childhood is, let's say that I was raised without a hostile environment at home. I consider an abnormal childhood where there's a couple that throws pots and pans all day, they're angry, the child is in the middle, he's there absorbing all those negative things. That wasn't my case. My parents had a harmonious marriage . . . all the time. A bit with my father's absence because of activities inherent to his responsibilities as Party Secretary, which he was at work. Because of his commitment to the revolutionary process he was almost always mobilized. If it wasn't in the cane field it was in some other activity. So I saw very little of my father. In the first years of my life I saw very little of my father.

Did you feel that absence of . . .

I felt the absence. I don't like to say it but I know that's how it is . . . I have seen it after all those years. I was my father's favorite. It wasn't my brother. So my father was always very attached to me. [. . .] I almost always left school and went to work with my father. I spent my holidays at my father's work, I spent my whole holidays at my father's work, in the workshop. [I have] pleasant memories of his workmates, very pleasant memories of the workmates he had at the time. But I did feel his absence when he wasn't there, when he was mobilized, when he was cutting sugarcane . . . The whole time in the cane fields. That absence was difficult to overcome because on top of it we lived alone with my mother, my father, my brother, and me in one house. We have a small family, it's not a big family. So visits were also

very short. For that reason I say that my childhood was normal. We didn't feel a hostile environment. My parents tried, as I said at the beginning, to give me whatever they could within their reach. My father sacrificed a lot. I remember that I had my first bicycle at age five. It was a huge sacrifice for him because a bicycle was expensive. You had to line up to buy a bicycle in those first years.

Salomón seems to be speaking in two voices at once. There is the party member who recognizes his father's "sacrifice" and describes a "normal" upbringing. This is the assessment of the activist adult who speaks the language of political pragmatism, who knows his country's history, and is conscious of the material constraints faced by his black, working-class parents. But there is also the voice of the son who mourns his father and feels the impact of his father's choice to put politics before family. Later in the interview, in the excerpt cited in the opening above, Salomón judges this choice as "excessive." As the interview progresses, he is more specific:

When I say an excessive commitment to the revolutionary process I mean ... he never doubted going when ... they assigned him a task ... Giving something, let's say, not material but rather something from a spiritual perspective, giving something to the Revolution. If they told him he had to join a mobilization in Camagüey, he didn't think twice about it. He went to Camagüey. There was a hurricane and they told him that there was a restaurant or something that had been damaged, or to make some furniture, he set off ... Maybe he forgot about the family at a certain point. My mother sometimes complained that he spent so little time at home. Because when he wasn't being mobilized outside the province, he was in the sugarcane harvest. And when he wasn't in the harvest, he was in Party activities, like the Party Secretary. And so ... his commitment ... That's why I said his was ... not excessive, because we can never measure the commitment to the revolutionary process. But yeah, he spent a lot of time away from home in activities, be it for the party, or part of his job. Because he was one of the ones who stayed after his regular work hours. [...] All that made him get home late, and me too because I was always with him. It was very difficult. And those things, those complaints. ... I remember my mother complaining. She said to him, "Well, the thing is, you spend more time at work than at home."

The difficulty of expressing the impact of his father's absence and his choices is suggested by Salomón's hesitation before the word "excessive" (*desmedida*). He first declares that his father was *too* dedicated to the Revolution. But later he retracts this, claiming that such commitment is impossible to measure. There is an echo here of Guevara's demand that dedication to the Revolution be total. It is as if, having spoken first as the son, Salomón returns to the voice of the party militant who recognizes a certain heresy in suggesting that one could be too committed to the Revolution. When the interviewer asks Salomón what he got from his father's example, he replies:

I took on something my father had, which was his sense of altruism, giving everything to something in exchange for nothing. He never asked for anything. At the time of his death, I started with my mother to clean out some of the documents in his room and I was ... things ... diplomas, awards that he never talked about. He never talked about those things. He had more awards than you could count and he never asked for anything, ever. That was another of my mother's complaints: "The thing is, you give everything and I never see anything in this house." The first television we had in my house was won by my father, when TV sets arrived through the merit system at work. And the same thing happened with the fridge, the pressure cooker, the blender. He won them all on merit points. But he never asked for anything. To the contrary. I remember when the fridge [laughter] at home ... I was in the Assembly, when the Assembly was set up, and he didn't ask for anything in the Assembly. It was his workmates who decided that he'd won the fridge, through merit points. But he never asked for it. And that was a complaint of my mother. He had a sense of altruism in that sense. Wherever they told him, whatever job had to be carried out, he did it, but he never asked for anything in return. I think he left me that legacy, and I'm a bit ... I don't like to talk about myself, but I've never asked for anything.

Salomón speaks of taking after his father in a number of ways: he is now secretary of the local branch of the party, he is a hard worker, and he shares some of his father's hobbies. He also acknowledges inheriting some of his father's *machismo*:

I remember at the time that ... I don't fight with anyone, but when I was a kid I fought all the time, because my father also handed down that macho feeling to me: "You're a man and no one can take anything away from you.

And you have to defend yourself. You can't come home crying," my father used to say. "If someone takes away your skate, you can't come home crying."

Salomón obviously admires his father's commitment and strives to emulate it in his own life. But his decision not to formalize his relationship with his partner and to continue to live with and care for his aging mother may reflect an attempt to reconcile the political and personal aspects of his father's legacy (they also reflect the tradition of adult children in Cuba caring for aged parents, as well as Havana's interminable housing shortage). A similarly ambiguous heritage can be detected in Salomón's declaration about friendships:

I think . . . everyone in one way or another has inherited from their parents that sense of solidarity, of getting along well with your friends. I've never had arguments with my childhood friends. We've had different points of view. Some of them are part of this revolutionary process, others not, and I respect their ideas.

This principle of respecting one's friends, regardless of political differences, stands in stark contrast to Guevara's claim that there could be no friendship outside the framework of the Revolution. On a political level, Salomón's reflections about the uncertain inheritance from his father help to explain his criticism of some aspects of the Revolution:

I think we have lost some values lately. There's been a loss of values in our society. Maybe that didn't happen at the beginning of the revolutionary process. People had a bit of a blind faith in the process. Afterwards, we've realized that within the process we've made some mistakes. That's why we went through the Rectification of errors and negative tendencies.²⁰ But in those early days there was a blind faith. I remember, and I admitted that my father had an excessive commitment to the Revolution, that led to his neglecting the family in some way, and those were complaints of my mother. Well, over the years he also changed his commitment, because he started to realize, he could be committed but there were also things that had to be corrected. We had made mistakes. [...] I think we've evolved over the years. The Revolution is made up of outstanding moments. We've had many outstanding moments, but we've also had very sad moments.

There is an implied link here between Salomón's father's "excessive" activism and the errors and "sad moments" of the Revolution.²¹ Salomón thus hints at a

parallel between the Revolution losing its values²² and the values that are lost when families, wives, and children are neglected in the name of activism. It is as if to say that loving the Revolution too much can be a *political* mistake, in need of rectification.

Although Salomón sees in himself some of his father's *machismo*, and parts of his interview are openly homophobic, he is one of the few male interviewees to discuss at length ongoing gender divisions of labor, as well as domestic violence (see chapter 7). Furthermore, even though he speaks much more about his father than about his mother, Salomón expresses admiration and dedication to her, as well as recognition of the limitations she has experienced as a semiliterate, poor, black homemaker. In this way, Salomón's interview indicates that he recognizes the shortcomings in the Revolution's construction of the "new woman."

The lives of Salomón's and his parents have also been shaped by the changes in race relations in Cuba since 1959. His father's active participation and leadership roles in the Communist Party reflect the political and work opportunities that opened up for Afro-Cubans during the early years of the Revolution. Likewise, Salomón has benefited from the equal educational opportunities that few blacks enjoyed prior to 1959. At the same time, Salomón's insistence that he has never experienced racial discrimination reflects both the substantial successes of the Revolution in eliminating public forms of discrimination and the lack of an official discourse about race and racism after the early 1960s. Salomón's was the first Cuban generation to experience *both* widespread racial equality *and* an official denial that racism could continue to shape the lives of black and other Cubans.²³

But Salomón's family's story highlights the contradictions of racial politics in revolutionary Cuba. His father's political commitment may in part have been motivated by a realization, conscious or not, that the Revolution had given him an opportunity that, as a working-class black man, he would not have had under the prerevolutionary regime. The experience of Salomón's mother is shared by a number of our black female interviewees who were already adults in 1959 but have never had steady paid employment. Finally, whereas most studies of masculinity in contemporary Cuba focus on the impact of "hegemonic masculinity"²⁴ on women and homosexual men, Salomón's interview indicates that important work remains to be done on the formation of revolutionary black masculinities.²⁵

THERE IS ONE further area in which Salomón voices a guarded skepticism about Cuba's political system. At the end of his interview, when asked if he has uncertainties about the future, he replies:

What will happen to this social project the day our *Comandante en jefe* is no longer with us? [...] I think that a large part of this country is Fidelista, not Communist. And they don't have the roots necessary to defend this social project. [...] This country follows Comandante Fidel unconditionally. But the day when he's not here, are they going to follow the others? [...] Everyday I think that. If one day I wake up and they tell me the *Jefe* isn't there, what will happen? Are we ready for that? I don't think we're ready. [...] Because on top of it all, I consider him a genius. Geniuses like him don't come around every day. Fools do. [...] You can find fools anywhere. But geniuses, people who think about others in a way that they're giving up their own things. When we talk about Fidel, he's given up a lot. He's given up a part of his life to dedicate himself to others.

Although this passage makes clear Salomón's admiration for and dedication to the Cuban leader, it also conveys a sense of the danger to a political process so closely identified with one individual. The risk is that once "Fidel" dies, the whole revolutionary project will die with him. If on a personal level we may detect in Salomón's fear of Castro's death an ongoing mourning for his own father (Castro as father figure is a common feature in the interviews), on a political level there may be awareness of the cost of the model of revolutionary love set out by Guevara four decades before. By sacrificing everything for the Revolution, and by fulfilling so totally the role of revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro has left open the possibility that with his death the road to socialism will come to an end.

Love and Leadership

I'm a revolutionary and I'm a Fidelista and a Communist. (Bebo, b. 1932)

My fear lies in thinking about what will become of us when the Comandante dies. How will the thing be? (Taty, b. 1938)

I especially wouldn't want Fidel to die while I'm still alive. (Roxana, b. 1964)

I think the Revolution is something very big. In spite of my problems, which I have brought on myself, for me the Revolution is something great. Not the Revolution.

Fidel. I go to church and I have faith in the Virgin, I pray to her for things, that my children be well. I have faith in Fidel, that what he says is true. I have that faith.
(Lily, b. 1965)

The success of the Revolution of 1959 depended in part on the affective attachment of citizens to the ideals of the Revolution and to its leaders, especially Fidel Castro. Castro appears in most of the interviews, typically as a larger-than-life figure, as someone with the power to make anything happen, to perform miracles, or threaten the security of the individual speaking and of the entire nation. These portrayals reflect the formidable personal and political authority Castro wielded in Cuba from 1959 until the announcement of his retirement in 2008 (and, indeed, afterward). In practice, as well as in perception, Castro has been inseparable from the revolutionary process. But narrators' references to Castro also bare witness to the importance of feelings in consolidating and maintaining the revolutionary regime. Several of the narrators speak of their "love" for the man whom they typically call "Fidel."²⁶

When we began interviewing in 2004, it was clear from television appearances and rumor that Castro's health was failing. With the official announcement, in July 2006, that he would pass the daily running of the country to his younger brother Raúl, many Cubans expressed uncertainty about the country's future. Even before his illness became public knowledge, several narrators said they feared his death. As indicated by Salomón's interview above, this sense of dread is tied to Castro's close association with the revolutionary process from its inception. In many of the interviews "Fidel" personifies the government; he stands metonymically for the Revolution. But in others "Fidel" is *more* than the system. In other words, he is of the Revolution and above it at the same time, in a model reminiscent of Guevara's "Socialism and Man." The comparison of Castro to Christ is overdetermined, and in several interviews there are allusions to the leader's sacrifices for the nation and his powers of conversion.

It is impossible, then, to answer the question: Who or what is Fidel to "ordinary" Cubans? For most of our narrators "Fidel" stands simultaneously beside and above them; he is both intimately familiar (hence the first-name basis) and awe-inspiringly distant. As Brad Epps notes, "the Cuban leader is special, called not by a patronym but by a relatively more intimate proper name, called in a way reserved for certain saints and prophets, kings and queens, poets and pop stars."²⁷ Epps continues: "A sense of familiarity and accessibility, of friendly collegiality, surrounds the name 'Fidel,' just as it surrounds 'Che,'

and helps to assuage the rather difficult tension between leadership and comradeship, ascendancy and equality.”²⁸

In the expansive literature on the Cuban Revolution, Castro’s leadership features prominently. It has become a truism to say that he is “charismatic.”²⁹ But the concept of charismatic leadership is itself vague and often derogatory, usually associated with “the demagogic, the irrational, the emotional, and the ‘popular.’”³⁰ The qualification of charismatic leadership as “emotional” is linked in turn to its association with religious movements.³¹ Damián J. Fernández argues that the religious feelings of veneration expressed by many Cubans toward the young rebels immediately following the revolutionary victory “constituted the basis of charismatic authority.”³² He claims that after the announcement of the turn to Marxism-Leninism in 1961, many supporters of the Revolution adopted socialism, not out of political commitment, but because of their identification with Fidel Castro. (As one of our narrators put it, “If Fidel is a Communist, so am I.”) But Fernández also reminds us that this emotional identification was successful because most Cubans experienced a notable economic improvement in their lives. In other words, the combined factor of emotional attachment and material betterment worked to consolidate support for the Revolution and its leaders.

Although Fernández recognizes a “gendered and sexual undertone” to the relationship between revolutionary leaders and followers, his analysis implies an assumption of natural gender difference and heteronormativity. “For his fellow men,” Fernández writes, “Fidel and the *barbudos* epitomized manliness in a society that valued *machismo*. For women, the revolutionaries incited romantic feelings.”³³ But other scholars of charismatic leadership have critiqued the gender and sexual power relations at play in this model. In her study of an eastern Cuban town during the 1980s, anthropologist Mona Rosendahl writes:

A good revolutionary and a good leader is [...] an audacious, vivacious man with an insatiable appetite for laughing, making love and enjoying himself—in short, for living. The role of lover may seem to be a totally private one, but much of what this role stands for is also an important part of the public image for men. The Cuban lover is seen as autonomous, strong, sexually active, charming, and a conquerer [*sic*], everything any man, including a political man, should be.³⁴

Furthermore, the masculine ideal of the Cuban leader forecloses the possibility of a “feminine” style of leadership.³⁵ Rosendahl’s observations remind us that, notwithstanding narrators’ attribution of great powers to Fidel Castro and his personal character or “charisma,” his position as leader, and the respect he commands among supporters, owe themselves in large part to a wider set of cultural values and practices. It is relevant that even Castro’s critics refer to him in gendered terms: *ese señor* (that gentleman), *ese hombre* (that man) or, simply, *él* (he).³⁶ For supporters of the Revolution Castro reaffirms widely held notions about what a good leader should be, just as for opponents he incarnates the figure of the evil dictator.³⁷

Jorge: Pleasures and Dangers

Jorge is a white man born in 1942 to a prominent upper-class family in a prosperous Havana neighborhood. Like Juana, his life story focuses very much on politics and public activity. He has been married twice and has three children, but his family and personal relationships feature only briefly in his interview. This is in strong contrast to the prominent place of Jorge in an interview with his wife, Silvia (b. 1948). This imbalance between the political and personal is common in interviews with male narrators for whom a sense of identity is closely linked to their public image. Jorge’s story nonetheless lacks some of the bravado demonstrated by other self-professed male revolutionaries. Although, like many people of their class and racial group, much of Jorge’s family left Cuba soon after the revolutionary victory of 1959, his children have remained in the country. Like Juana, Jorge demonstrates a sense of pride in having passed his revolutionary values to his offspring.

Jorge and Juana share other things in common: they are both from wealthy families that were politically active in the opposition to the Batista government before 1959; both are professionals and enjoy a certain security and stability within the system; both have a commitment to the values of the Revolution, but neither is a party member. This combination of factors gives them a relative privilege that may explain why they are willing to reflect critically upon the history of the Revolution. But notwithstanding their commonalities and Juana’s “male-defined” memory of the Revolution, gender does mark a difference between the two interviews. Jorge’s lengthy discussion of his years at military school, like the detailed narrative of his participation in the early events of the Revolution, follows a common pattern among male narrators. These interviews also echo the scores of revolutionary *testimonios* written by

Cuban men about the early years of the Revolution, which tend to focus on military dramas.³⁸

Jorge recounts the revolutionary victory of 1959 in particularly vivid tones, as he does his participation in some of the key events that followed, including the literacy campaign of 1961 and the Bay of Pigs invasion that same year, in which he fought and some close friends were killed. Like Juana, Jorge displays a sense of immense privilege for having lived through the Cuban Revolution (see opening quotation above). But alongside this dominant story of “living history” he recognizes that this was not *everyone’s* experience. The “others” he refers to are not generic counterrevolutionaries or bourgeois enemies, but people who were persecuted in the early 1960s because they did not share the public views of the majority of revolutionaries. In later parts of the interview Jorge is straightforward about what he sees as some of the Revolution’s errors, including the supposedly “accidental” deaths of some accused traitors during the 1960s. He also speaks with regret about the failure of the 1970 10-million-ton sugarcane harvest and, like several other narrators, expresses shock and shame at the mass protests against Cubans who emigrated from the port of Mariel in 1980 (see chapter 4).

Jorge’s reference to the Revolution as something “transcendental” suggests an experience akin to religion, and he isolates the moment at which he underwent a kind of conversion:

I remember that in March 1959 [...] Fidel spoke for 8 hours on television with doves on his shoulders and all that, very pretty. And right there he said that every family would have a Volkswagen. That should be written down in history. There were so many dreams. [...] For me all that was, let’s say, a bit folkloric. A revolution was a very folkloric thing. But the speech by Pepe Jimenez, I don’t remember what he said, or what Fidel replied, but that wasn’t folkloric. That was something real. [...] I didn’t fall in love. [...] That day I did say to myself that this is something I have to dedicate my existence to. [...] I had to dedicate my existence to the Cuban Revolution. And that’s what I’ve done.

Castro’s promise of a Volkswagen to every Cuban family is a wonderful image of the dreams and aspirations of the early months of the Revolution, a period when many narrators recall that anything and everything seemed possible. But, unlike Juana, Jorge avoids a romantic gloss of this epoch; he explicitly rejects its “folkloric” aspects. He did not “fall in love” with the Revolu-

tion. Instead, he was convinced by the political arguments put forth by Castro and others. Jorge's self-image as someone who chose the Revolution for political reasons, as opposed to being captured by its dreams and promises, can be understood in part as the presentation of an intellectual, masculine persona. After all, emotions (especially love) are often seen as "feminine" states, close to nature and removed from the rational world of political engagement.³⁹ Furthermore, in the light of his later criticisms of some of the regime's excesses and abuses, Jorge's reasoned defense of the Revolution may be a way of distancing himself from what he perceives as the more sinister dimensions of revolutionary fervor.

Referring to the Cuban Revolution as "an affair of the heart,"⁴⁰ Damián J. Fernández argues that the revolutionary victory depended upon an "emotional infrastructure" consisting of "resentment, frustration, indignation, and aggression, but also of fraternity, camaraderie, solidarity, and hope."⁴¹ Examining the early speeches of Fidel Castro as well as visual images from the period, Fernández provides examples of the extremes hinted at in Jorge's interview. Fernández cites in particular the juxtaposition of photographs in the magazine *Bohemia* in early 1959: "Page after page . . . contrasts the festive effervescence of the young with displays of bodies, bruised, stripped, eyes half closed, dead."⁴² Jorge's interview is relatively rare in that it represents both these sides of history: the excitement and optimism of the early revolutionary period, on one hand, and the violence and suffering it engendered, on the other. I suggested above that it may be Jorge's relative privilege that allows him to express these contradictions openly. This advantaged position may also help to explain his ongoing support for the Revolution, in spite of his recognition of its shortcomings. For other narrators, in contrast, witnessing and experiencing persecution leads to feelings of disillusionment.

Carlos: Falling out of Love with the Revolution

If Jorge claims that he never "fell in love" with the Revolution and Salomón hints at the dangers of loving the Revolution too much, another interviewee who came of age during the early years of the Revolution, Carlos (b. 1954), makes more explicit the perceived dangers of attachment to a collective cause. The tone of Carlos's interview is very different from that of Salomón. While the latter expresses ambivalence about his childhood, characterized by a "harmonious" marriage but an absent father and unsatisfied mother, Carlos makes no pretence of a happy childhood. He describes his family as some-

thing imposed by “the devil,” recalls an early life of violence and suffering, and declares that he is not interested in having a family of his own. Like that of Salomón, Carlos’s interview contains a series of reflections on his past, both personal and political. But whereas Salomón makes some guarded references to political corruption and the insecurity of the future, Carlos is emphatic and unapologetic in expressing his disenchantment with the revolutionary process.

I used the interview with Carlos in the introduction as an example of the ambiguities of sexual identity in the oral history interview. The theme of sexuality comes up time and again in the interview with Carlos, although he never claims a single sexual identity. Nonetheless, his experiences as someone who does not define himself as heterosexual and is very aware of discrimination against homosexuals in Cuba seem to be closely tied to his negative assessment of the country’s political system. In the following excerpt Carlos claims that he cannot control what other people think of him. Although this statement appears to ward off the problem of discrimination, the text surrounding it indicates an awareness of both the problem of sexual discrimination and its relationship to revolutionary politics. Following some discussion about how Carlos generally feels out of place in Cuba, one of the interviewers asks if he has ever considered leaving:

Yes, I have considered it. I know, for example, that my character, my personality, and way of being, and the way I think, are not compatible with Cuban idiosyncrasies. I have more of a mentality better adapted to the European mentality. I talk with foreigners, with Europeans, and I’m amazed at how they are, how they think, how tolerant they are. . . I’m really impressed by their way. I met a Norwegian family at the beach, a young couple with two young children. Ah, I fell in love with those people. With the woman, with the man, with the children. I was fascinated. . . and they with me. I was already ready, without any self-interest—because, that’s another thing. I’m very careful because at the beach people tend to think that when you made friends with someone it was because you wanted to take a cut from them, financially. [. . .] So, they give you a label, as a hustler . . . So, I was fascinated with this family. I really liked this family. They came to Cuba twice. They took photos of me. They sent me the photos. [. . .] They helped me out financially as well. They sent me mon, uh, packages with books, with . . . [. . .] and I loved the way, the tolerance they had as people, with all kinds of people. With

blacks, with whites, with homosexuals. They spoke to any type of person in the street, and they weren't thinking. . . I really liked that way of life. Here in Cuba you have to be careful about what others think. And not because I'm interested in what others think. The problem is that behind all that a whole series of things can be set into action, things that can put an end to your life. They can destroy you. That's what I'm scared of, not what they think. In this country any old person can have the power to put an end to someone's life. Your neighbor has that power.

Carlos first claims that his interest in the Norwegians was not financially motivated, but he then reveals that they did "help [him] out." Although at pains to distinguish himself from a hustler, the kind of relationship Carlos develops with the Norwegians can be understood as part of a spectrum of affective relationships (by no means all sexual) that Cubans have established with tourists since the 1990s, and which typically involve the exchange of gifts.⁴³ Carlos is not the only narrator to express an idealization of foreigners as open, free, and tolerant. Although he may exaggerate and even stereotype the qualities of his Norwegian friends, his affection for this Scandinavian family serves to highlight a series of desirable qualities he believes are lacking in Cuba. In particular, he admires the "tolerance" the Norwegians show toward different groups of people, including Afro-Cubans and homosexuals. Following his fond memories of his friends, Carlos makes the observation, cited above, that he was someone who "thought that I loved the Revolution." The interviewers ask him to elaborate:

They make you believe things. I don't know if it's something psychological, the manipulation of collective psychology. I don't know. That must exist because they make you believe things [laughter]. That you love. They make you believe, you applaud. They make you believe. They make you believe, you jump. They make you believe that you're happy. They repeat so many things to you, that they make you believe. And well, I don't believe in anything anymore.

Carlos's narrative of deconversion, the end of his "love" for the Revolution, provides a contrast to his falling "in love" with the Norwegian family. His discomfort with being Cuban seems to stem in part from a realization that what he thought was his love for the Revolution was actually a form of collective hysteria or hypnosis. Carlos's description of "collective psychological manipu-

lation” is similar to critical descriptions of comparative authoritarian regimes of the twentieth century, in which the “masses” are considered vulnerable to the manipulation of charismatic leaders. While some of the research on charismatic authority—including in relation to Cuba—is valuable for an understanding of the history of revolutionary leadership,⁴⁴ this model is problematic when it assumes a distinction between the free, rational individual subject of liberal democracy, on one hand, and the amorphous collective mass controlled by authoritarian rule under Communist regimes, on the other. I do not want to dismiss the potentially destructive power of collective displays of emotion as described by Carlos, or the role of the Cuban state in, as he puts it, “manipulating” people’s feelings and actions. However, I want to put forward an additional, more historically specific, dimension to Carlos’s critique: that of witness to racial and homophobic discrimination. It is not coincidental, I suggest, that the passage about collective psychology follows directly from Carlos’s expression of admiration for the Norwegian couple’s “tolerance” toward blacks and homosexuals. Among Carlos’s memories of his childhood in eastern Cuba are examples of the racism of his white family and neighbors, and he cites a number of examples of the racism he has seen among other white Cubans. But he reserves his strongest criticism for the racism he sees in the institutions of the state. Carlos is not the only white narrator to speak of racism in Cuba, but he is exceptional in insisting that racism is institutional. His accounts of homophobia similarly differ from those who attribute persecution of people who have same-sex sex to Cuba’s historical *machismo*. (See the introduction for Carlos’s story of a young woman fired from a job because she was suspected of being a lesbian.)

The feeling of alienation from the revolutionary process is expressed by a number of narrators. But the repeated theme of sexual difference in Carlos’s story adds an additional dimension to this sentiment. An interview conducted by Ann Cvetkovich with U.S. queer activist Amber Hollibough is suggestive here. Hollibough argues that there is a relationship between social exclusion based on sexuality and the experiences of exclusion that often accompany collective politics. Although feeling isolated or alienated from a political process can be painful for anyone, the close association of sexual deviance with shame makes sexual minorities particularly vulnerable to humiliation within political movements. Cvetkovich calls this feeling “activist shame.”⁴⁵

Carlos’s refusal to claim a sexual identity and the suggestive link in his interview between the pain of being an outsider and the lack of social acceptance

of homosexuals indicate that his position as witness to homophobia and racism contribute to his feeling of political disenchantment.⁴⁶ Returning again to the discussion in the introduction, we may note the overlap of different difficult memories in Carlos's interview—early childhood violence, homophobia and racism, and political disaffection—which evoke similarly strong feelings and may appropriately be called traumatic. Dominick LaCapra has argued that in the modern world the experience of deconversion—whether religious or political—may have a “traumatic role.”⁴⁷ Although the abandonment of a political belief can be the result of a rational reassessment of previously held views, it also involves an “affective disengagement.” For this reason, he adds, deconversion “has been justly compared to falling out of love.”⁴⁸

IT IS PRECISELY because it represents emotional extremes that love is often used as a metaphor for political commitment and opposition. Love is also often portrayed as both universal and natural, something that requires no further explanation, and is also beyond the strictly explicable. But love, like emotions generally, is never ahistorical, never removed from wider political developments, material conditions, “emotional repertoires,”⁴⁹ or power relations. In the 1960s, the Cuban Revolution was often portrayed as a love story, encapsulating its all-encompassing nature as well as the overwhelming feelings it evoked along with the enormous changes it brought in its wake. The love metaphor has maintained its power through public discourse and personal memory, as the oral history interviews demonstrate. At the same time, they show that individual and collective meanings of “loving” the Revolution, and of the political and personal relationships it engendered, were very much shaped by relations of class, gender, generation, race, and sexuality.

THREE New Women, New Men?

Sunday, 17 December 2006

We descend into Havana, strings of clouds outside my east-facing window. A “fair” 26 degrees [79 degrees Fahrenheit] on the ground (the same as in Miami, according to my free airport copy of *The Sunday Times*). Two full hours to get out of Havana airport. At 4:45 I emerge exhausted and fed up, cursing my decision to come to Cuba in high tourist season. In the main lobby of the airport a young woman asks if I need a taxi and quickly finds me an SUV-style white car with driver sporting a moustache. The ride into Havana is miraculously calming. A balmy breeze blowing through the window, I immediately know I’ve packed too many warm clothes, a fact confirmed by the young women standing in the streets dressed in short skirts and tank tops. The roads are nearly empty, but there’s the familiar collection of vehicles from different eras: old U.S. Chevies, motorcycles with side cars, mopeds with helmetless drivers and passengers, bicycles ridden by young boys doing wheelies. Endless palm trees in the semirural landscape; a group of three or four cows chomping grass outside what looks like an old factory; a small crowd of people waiting at a bus stop.

We arrive at Charo’s house in Vedado. She’s a middle-aged white woman, small with short wiry hair. She shows me to my room, expressing amazement that I speak Spanish with a Castilian accent, and invites me into the kitchen. There are seated two other middle-aged white women—Charo’s sisters Vanesa and Sandra, I later discover—and a younger black woman, Yohani, another paying house guest who’s just returned to Cuba with her German husband.

We soon get talking about relationships between women and men in Cuba. Five women sitting together drinking coffee at a kitchen table in Havana, the four Cuban women saying over and over that Cuban men are *machista*. The conversation starts because Charo is recalling her time in

Spain in 1980 and how amazed she was that on Sunday afternoons in a provincial capital the men stayed home and watched football while their middle-aged, middle-class wives, in furs, sat together in cafés. The other Cuban women express surprise: no Cuban man would ever allow his wife to do that. Cuban men go out together, they say, but expect their wives to stay at home. A married woman is not expected to have her own friendships but to be friends with her husband's friends, other couples. If a couple goes out to dance, the woman *never* dances with another man, because her husband would be jealous. But, they insist, Cuban women are very jealous too. Sandra tells a story of her wedding (she's now divorced, as is Charo) in a Havana hotel in the 1970s, when a friend wanted to dance with her and had to ask the groom's permission. They all agree that a good male friend would never ask a woman to dance in front of her husband. I express surprise that these attitudes are still common, but they insist. *Hay excepciones, pero el Cubano es muy machista* (There are exceptions, but Cuban men are very *machista*).¹

This account of a kitchen conversation in Havana in late 2006, excerpted from my research diary, does not necessarily present any truths about gender and sexual relations in early twenty-first-century Cuba. It is my memory—recorded the day after the events—and reflects my impressions and interests as much as the views of the Cuban women involved. These women were, to some extent, performing for me, the only foreigner in the room. My presence as a non-Cuban allowed four women who may not have under other circumstances perceived themselves as a collective to position themselves as “Cuban women” in order to impress upon me something about another (imagined) collective entity, “Cuban men.” If I had not been there, would three middle-aged, white Cuban sisters have shared stories and taken similar views as a much younger, Afro-Cuban woman? Did they share their stories with me because of an assumed common (hetero)sexual identity?

This incident, although not formal or taped, shares some characteristics with an oral history interview, its context being vital to its analysis. This context is not just about sexual, class, racial, age, and national differences/similarities. The conversation was also specific to a historical moment in time. Although the Cuban women repeatedly insisted that Cuban men had not changed (since when, they did not say), the conversation is full of spoken and unspoken historical references. Moreover, the presence of these four Cuban women and a foreigner in one woman's kitchen was only possible given the changes in Cuba since the 1990s.

Although not strictly speaking a “tourist,” I was staying, like many foreigners, in a *casa particular*—one of the bed-and-breakfast-type lodgings legalized by the Cuban government the previous decade as part of the push to increase revenue from foreign tourism. Normally Cubans would not be allowed to stay in the same private house as a foreigner, but exceptions are made for Cubans with foreign passports or residency, which was probably the case of Yohani. Her marriage to a German man twice her age is reflective of a pattern that emerged in the 1990s of Cuban women marrying European and North American men in order to emigrate and send money back to their families on the island (see chapter 8).

Our conversation also reflected, then, the divergent economic options opened to women of different class and racial groups by the economic crisis and the tourist trade. Charo, whose family had owned property before the Revolution and had in all likelihood received money from relatives in Miami for many years, had also enjoyed a privileged position as a state employee in the 1980s, allowing her to travel regularly to Europe. She probably drew on both these resources to fix up her apartment and set up a thriving *casa particular* that attracted European, Latin American, and North American businessman (and, sometimes, their young Cuban wives). With no knowledge of Yohani’s background, I can only conjecture that as a black woman she came from a family much less likely than white Cubans to have had access to remittances from abroad.² Probably born in the 1980s, her formative years would have been profoundly shaped by the economic crisis, as well as the increase in tourism during the 1990s, which made a good university education seem a poor investment of time, given that jobs in the tourist sector gave access to much-coveted foreign currency.³ But during the same time period racially discriminatory hiring practices crept into the tourist trade, as hotel managers believed that European and Canadian visitors expected fair-skinned service staff.⁴ So the tourist revival brought very different economic opportunities to Charo and Yohani, bringing them together in Charo’s kitchen even though their paths may never have crossed under other circumstances.

While Charo’s European experiences came with her previous job, Yohani’s trips to Europe were thanks to her marriage to a German man after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet both drew on their impressions of “Europe” (from vastly different countries and time periods—post-Franco Spain and early-twentieth-century Germany) to emphasize its “difference” from Cuba. The fact that I was presumably perceived as “European” (Spanish? British?)

helped to sustain this narrative of contrasting Cuban/European gender relations.

This story of eternal, essential difference (Europe vs. Cuba; male vs. female) is therefore very much historically conditioned. Although the Revolution does not figure in this narrative directly, it is there implicitly, for example in Sandra's story of her wedding in the 1970s. Not only do she and the other women claim that things have not changed since then; the implication is that things had not changed between the revolutionary victory of 1959 and Sandra's marriage a decade or so later. Never mind, moreover, that historically, before and after 1959, a significant number of Cubans were never formally married. The wedding tale serves as a point of reference for all four women to claim that Cuban men are for the most part, and for as long as they can remember, *machista*. Their claim echoes perceptions expressed in many of our oral history interviews.

NARRATORS' MEMORIES of heterosexual relationships—the sex education they received (or not) as children and youth, early sexual experiences, marriage and other relationships, reproduction, and parenthood and family life—indicate two broad, overlapping trends. First, they emphasize continuity as much as change across generations and, consequently, between the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods. Second, there is a notable difference between the accounts of women and men. Female narrators are more likely to talk about so-called personal matters, including relationships, sex, reproduction, and family life. This gender gap reflects both an enduring—but not universal or uniform—separation between the activities of women and men in Cuba, and a historically entrenched cultural association of women with the home. But the differences in women's and men's stories also suggests bias on the part of the interview team, which was more likely to ask female than male interviewees questions about contraception, childcare, marital relations, and so on. As a result, there is an imbalance in the interview sample that is nonetheless useful in exposing women's perceptions of the extent to which the Revolution was successful in revolutionizing male-female relations and family life. Government policies relating to these areas were, after all, aimed primarily at achieving greater liberation for women under socialism. Here the verdict is largely negative. Female narrators of different class backgrounds, ages, and racial groups tend to present, often with reference to their own mothers or other older family members, an image of ongoing inequalities in

heterosexual relations. Men are less likely to speak of their wives and children, referring as often to their sexual encounters outside marriage. Women, in contrast, rarely talk about extramarital relationships.

At first glance this division suggests that the interviews merely repeat gendered clichés and confirm available demographic data. But oral life stories add complexity to both cultural stereotypes and empirical information about heterosexuality and family structures in Cuba. The most notable example is the issue of mother-headed families and absent fathers. Far from displaying a cavalier attitude to paternal abandonment, several male narrators express deep regret and even anger at their own fathers' lack of parental care. Many of these men are ambivalent about their own roles as fathers, in some cases repeating similar patterns. Others express a desire to act differently and to pass on alternative values to their own children. Discussions of paternity therefore offer compelling evidence of the persistence of traditional forms of masculinity, their complex emotional and social impact on men as well as women, and desires to establish alternative models.

Thinking about heterosexual relations is not only a way of thinking about gender relations. It also prompts us to consider the link between changes in sexuality and relations of class and race. Again, the interviews both confirm and complicate outside evidence. They indicate that notions of decency and honor were still, in the first decade of the twentieth-first century, attached to class and race. At the same time, they challenge some of the existing literature on pre-1959 sexual mores by indicating that values associated culturally with the white, urban upper classes (in particular female chastity) were shared to some extent across class and racial divides, apparent among poor blacks and whites in rural areas as well. This information challenges perceptions that the prevalence of informal unions and illegitimate children among poor and especially black Cubans reflected a fundamentally different set of sexual values from those espoused by wealthy whites. The historical link between single motherhood, poverty, and blackness is confirmed in the interviews, providing limited but compelling evidence that revolutionary policies to address racism, sexism, and class inequalities have not always been successful in overcoming longer-term structural inequalities arising from the intersections of these factors.

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES narrators' memories of changes and continuities in heterosexual relations over the fifty years following the Revolution of 1959.

A common feature is that narrators consider there to have been a change over their own life spans, *regardless of when they were born*. This pattern allows us to explore dynamics between wider historical processes and individual memories. A second pattern involves gendered memories. For several female narrators the sense of change in heterosexual relationships is tempered by a narrative of continuity, with family patterns of domestic conflict as well as male philandering and absence repeated through generations. Men's narratives tend not to emphasize family disputes, and when they do note a family history of *mujeriegos* (womanizers) it is often with a sense of bravado. One area in which intergenerational patterns are noted—and strongly regretted—by both women and men is that of men abandoning their families. While none of the narrators disparages single mothers, many of them are critical of men who apparently fail to carry out their paternal responsibilities. To date the literature on Cuban families tends to emphasize historical factors such as gender, race, and class differences in family make-up. But the interviews suggest that such analysis should consider families as affective economies as well as social structures. Moreover, in the majority of the cases examined below the absence of a husband and father exacerbated existing patterns of poverty, undermining any simple division of national/local and domestic economies, and highlighting the interdependence of the productive and reproductive spheres.

Youth and Sexuality

The first decade of the Revolution disrupted Cuban families in a variety of ways. Middle-class kin especially were separated when many left Cuba. Families from poor urban or rural areas were more likely to remain on the island, but were in many cases relocated to better housing in different parts of the country. During the 1961 literacy campaign some 100,000 young Cubans left home to teach peasants to read and write. Carollee Bengelsdorf notes that over half were young girls, “many of whom went in active defiance of middle-class parents who had rigid and traditional ideas about the proper realm of activities for their daughters.”⁵ For example, one of our narrators, Katia (born 1943), was from a white middle-class provincial family who had moved to Havana in the 1950s. She went to teach literacy to people in her Havana neighborhood, unsure whether her mother would have let her go to the countryside. As Nadine Fernandez argues, middle-class white parents' anxieties about voluntary work brigades also reflected fears of interracial relationships, especially

between white women and Afro-Cuban men.⁶ Young people of different class backgrounds were sent to urban centers to study and live in houses abandoned by middle-class émigrés. Others went to boarding schools in the countryside, where they did agricultural labor and lived away from parents for the first time. The generational conflict sometimes incited by such movements is humorously portrayed in Mirta Yáñez's short story "Beatles contra Duran Duran" ("The Beatles vs. Duran Duran," 1988), in which a middle-aged woman's youthful enthusiasm comes back to haunt her. When she resists her young daughter's departure to do military service during the 1980s, the mother is reminded that years earlier, while "still a girl" herself, she had disobeyed her own parents in order to volunteer in a coffee-picking brigade.⁷

The boarding school, or *beca*, scheme was an example of attempts by the revolutionary government to take over areas of education previously provided by families. By sending students to schools far away from parents and extended families, the regime hoped to inspire young people with new revolutionary values untainted by the traditional views of older generations.⁸ Laura, from a black middle-class family in a provincial city, was six months old in January 1959 and describes herself as "born with the Revolution." I interviewed her alongside a Cuban researcher (designated here as *N*). In the following excerpt, Laura gives an example of how the *beca* she attended in the early 1970s⁹ created a "generation gap" in her own family.

N: In those days, how did people treat the problem of sexuality?

If you only knew that at that time, my generation wasn't into that bad stuff, like young people are today. I'm not criticizing them at all, but we were a bit healthier. There were normal couples, but even in the hostel, which is where we had the most communication, we didn't talk about sex. We spoke very, very, very discreetly. Our parents also pressured us a lot, because they said to me, "Whoever gets pregnant here is out on the street." A pretty repressive method, but it scared you.

Carrie: Are you talking about your own parents?

Yes, of course. My upbringing was very, very quick. Because they made you grow up before your time.

N: So, they didn't talk about. . .

Not at all, not at all. That's why I'm telling you—if I was born again I'd go back to boarding school. Because I developed. I didn't know anything, anything at all. Not why, not anything. I was even scared. I cried a lot because

[...] something happened to me. My mother never had that conversation with me. So in the boarding school, with each other, we started finding out—reading, learning.

Laura's story suggests that for some young people being "born with the Revolution" meant finding oneself caught between two moral systems: the "traditional" family characterized by silence and fear surrounding sexuality, and the freedoms brought by the *beca* system, including new opportunities for sexual knowledge. But Laura makes clear that for her at least, the possibilities for sexual liaisons in the boarding school were tempered by the fear of pregnancy instilled at home. The social conservatism of Laura's parents may also reflect the position of Cuba's small black middle class before the Revolution, a community whose relative privilege in a racist society depended in part upon distancing themselves from the popular culture many white Cubans associated with working-class blacks.¹⁰

Other narrators raised during the 1960s and 1970s recall a tension between sexual mores taught at home and opportunities presented by boarding schools. Lily was born in 1965 to black parents from the working class and was raised by an aunt in a *solar* (tenement house)¹¹ in Central Havana. She remembers her time at boarding school in the late 1970s:

That's where your relationship with your first husband started.

[...] he was about 18, around that.

And you were?

Fifteen.

And is that where you had your first sexual relations? When you were at boarding school?

At that time, during the holidays [...]

And when you got pregnant were you aware of sexual issues and that? Had your aunt spoken to you about those things?

No... at that time, like I said, I was raised the old-fashioned way. [...] And so the question of relations between couples, what they said to me was, "Well, Lily, if you have boyfriends, you can have a little kiss. If they put their hand on your waist, there's no problem. But if they put their hand on your hip, they'll make you a *señora* [married woman]. If you don't get married immediately, because we don't know him, that man will never marry you. You'll never get married again because you'll be totally damaged." So I was scared of having boyfriends, so I didn't let anyone touch my hip because

I'd become a *señora*. And that's how I lived through my childhood, without really knowing things, that with my daughter . . .

...until you let someone touch your hip . . .

Until I let someone touch my hip [laughter].

In many ways the lives of Laura and Lily are very different. Whereas Laura remained childless and by the time of the interviews was in a relationship with a woman, Lily went on to have other relationships with men and to have more children. But what is notable is how each woman, in recalling her respective experience, positions herself between two generations: the conservatism of parents and/or older female family members (characterized by silence and prohibition), and the perceived greater knowledge and sexual activity of young people in the early twenty-first century. Nena, a white woman born to a working-class family in the same neighborhood as Lily ten years earlier, in 1955, also got pregnant when she was fifteen. This was in 1970, and Nena remembers being terrified to tell her grandparents (the ones who raised her), “[f]irst, because he [the father] was *mulato*, and second, because they would have beaten me alive in those days.” When her grandparents found out about the pregnancy, they made Nena have an abortion.

These narratives, typical of oral history, depend less on dates than on a familial narrative that measures time in generational terms. These highly subjective and largely impressionistic accounts create a complementary chronology to that provided by demographic data and major policy initiatives. When I discussed Lily's interview with a Cuban historian of a similar age to her he expressed surprise at the conservative sex education Lily had received at home in the 1970s. But her story demonstrates precisely the extent to which changes in revolutionary society were moderated by the tenacity with which “traditional” values were guarded by members of the generation born before 1959. This generation gap is represented as well in Cuban women's writing from the first three decades of the Revolution. In Mirta Yáñez's short story “Opera prima” (1988) a young gymnast shocks her parents by asking aloud at a family party, “What's an orgasm?” Later, on a team trip to Moscow, she confronts her first period alone, ignorant, and terrified until she is welcomed to womanhood by a group of older Russian women.¹² Similarly, the stories of Lily and Laura suggest the limits of revolutionary policy aimed at removing the influence of parents. But warnings to young women about the dangers of early pregnancy should not be read purely as the influence of “bourgeois” mo-

rality. Laura's mother's cautions against premarital sex and the advice given by Lily's aunt reflect as well older women's awareness of the social and economic limits placed on young women's lives by early motherhood.

It is worth comparing these stories to that of another black woman, Taty, born much earlier, in 1938. This comparison helps to highlight both the perceived historical changes in Cuban sexual politics between the prerevolutionary period and the early twenty-first century, and the intergenerational transmission of sexual knowledge between older and younger women. Taty was born into a poor rural household. As was the case with most narrators born in the prerevolutionary period, sex was not discussed in her childhood home. Her interview is revealing of what she calls the "myths" surrounding women's bodies, reproduction, and male-female relations in the 1940s and 1950s. At age nine Taty was sent to study on a scholarship at a private school in eastern Cuba. She describes the education as "military" in style, with strict segregation of girls and boys. Since the teachers did not discuss sexuality with the students, Taty learned about menstruation from the older girls. She got her first period during a holiday visit to her family in Havana:

I was a girl and so I came in from playing in a street and I went to the bathroom and I said to my mother... I saw that I had blood in my underwear and I say to my mother, "Ah, Mommy. I'm a *señorita* [young lady] now." Because I knew about it from boarding school, not because my mother had ever spoken to us about that. My poor mother was illiterate. "Now I'm a *señorita*." And so the neighbor who heard me said, "You killed the pig, save me the tail." I'll never forget that. And so she says to me, "Well, look. You can't bathe, you can only wash yourself. You can't wash your hair, you can't have a bath, you can't do this, you can't do that." And I had my period, and in the boarding school with the girls it was the same. When someone had her period she didn't bathe. It's so absurd! So I said, it's when you most need to wash yourself. No, no, no. You can't eat fruit because it will stop. You can't eat *guanábana* (soursop) because it will stop your period. You can't have lemon because it will stop your period. You can't have lemonade because it will stop your period. And all that mystery. . . . My other sister, when she got her period, she says, "Well, I'm not going to stop bathing, I have to bathe when I have my period. I can't have my period and not bathe!" So I broke with that myth. And when I gave birth—in the old days women went for forty days without washing their hair. And if you washed your hair you went crazy. All those things from back then.

Like much oral history, Taty's interview is a valuable source of traditional refrains and folk customs surrounding sexuality.¹³ The language in this excerpt is valuable in another way: the words Taty uses to express her memories of her first period and the prohibitions surrounding menstruation—expressions like “I’ll never forget” or “All those things from back then”—express a perceived historical break between the now of the interview and the age of her childhood, a time when attitudes toward menstruation, reproduction, and women’s bodies were based on mystery and myth. As late as the 1970s Cuban sex education manuals stressed the need to demystify menstruation.¹⁴ Similarly, Taty recalls the rituals of courtship and the taboos surrounding sexual representation in her youth:

The myth of courting was another thing that really, really, really marked me. Because it wasn’t like now. I had a neighbor who said, “When a man loves you he has to respect you. You can’t let him do this, or let him touch your breasts, or let him do this, or let him do that.” And I grew up with a fear of relationships in a couple. When I had a boyfriend and I saw that he was getting a bit enthusiastic I got scared, because they traumatized me. Not my mother, a neighbor I had. My mother didn’t guide us. I heard what others said, because she wasn’t prepared. Before they didn’t even let you see a film that talked about venereal disease. My stepfather didn’t let us go to those kinds of films, and didn’t talk at all about that. And much less actual sex. And I remember there was a song, that said, “*Ya los majases no tienen cueva Felipe Blanco . . .*”¹⁵ And my stepfather didn’t let us sing that song because for him that song was bad. And we couldn’t go to the cinema either because for him everything was bad, everything was a taboo. Nothing was talked about, nothing was said. Not even seeing a film about abortion in the cinema.

Interestingly, the direct information Taty received about boyfriends and sex came not from her mother but from a neighbor in Havana, whom she describes as a prostitute who worked in a bar. Contrary to popular stereotypes about such women as licentious, Taty portrays her neighbor as stern in her teachings, leaving Taty “traumatized.” These warnings made her so fearful of sex that she had only one boyfriend before getting married at a relatively late age, in the early 1970s:

I got married after all my sisters were married and had children. I helped them. I got married at thirty-four, single. I’d never had a relationship. I had one relationship that was the man I fell in love with, but it couldn’t be. I

never did anything that displeased my mother. My sisters got pregnant and I helped my sisters. I saw my mother suffer because they had got pregnant. In those days getting pregnant was something. [...] I was very scared of poverty. I was terrified of poverty. I got married at thirty-four. I gave birth at thirty-five. Today I have a grandson who's eleven. I didn't have any more children because I had the luck to fall in love with a man who wasn't well.

Taty explains her late marriage as a combination of fears—of sexual relations, poverty, and displeasing her mother. Yet she still divides history into now and “back then.” Her measure of time is based not on conditions before and after the Revolution, but rather the landmarks in her own and her family's life. But the interview also bears traces of a wider history. For example, Taty's experience of contraception and abortion reflects policy reform during the 1970s (see below):

I had a contraceptive put in and when my son was just two years old, I got pregnant and I had an abortion. [...] Today it weighs on me because I left him without a sibling but after that, well, when I was forty-two I had an operation. That put an end to procreation.

Although Taty and Lily were adolescents almost twenty-five years apart, in the 1950s and 1970s respectively, their tales of cautions against boys' advances are strikingly similar. Lily's professed ignorance about sex indicates the newness and limited impact of the sex education program that was introduced in Cuba in the late 1970s, as well as the persistence of old and new values in Cuban society in this period. This combination of old and new is also evident in the story of Josefa, a black woman born in Santiago in 1953 and raised by her father and aunt. Josefa met her first boyfriend around age sixteen and dated him until they married ten years later. Recalling that she and her *novio* had sex before their marriage, Josefa says:

Well [laughter]. That was the best thing for me, but well ... for my family, for that aunt of mine it was an outrage. In that era. In those days that was an outrage. Not now. Now everything is normal, but at that time ... doing that was [...] That aunt of mine was upright. She was extremely upright.

Like Taty, Josefa juxtaposes “now” and “back then,” and again this division is best understood as a reference not to actual dates but to the passage of time measured in generational terms. As in Lily's interview, Josefa's memory highlights the coexistence, in the early revolutionary period, of older sexual values

and practices with new policies.¹⁶ As Elizabeth Sutherland wrote of Cuba in 1967:

Old ideas in the area of sex—in particular, about the societal roles of women and about relations between men and women—were a subject that came up all the time. The society showed many contradictions between the present, Revolutionary liberation of women and oppressive attitudes hanging over from the past.¹⁷

But the strict views of Josefa's older aunt were not necessarily entirely out of sync with those of revolutionary leaders and young activists. In the years when Josefa became sexually active, the late 1960s or early 1970s, there were debates among revolutionaries about the appropriate dress, cultural tastes, and behavior of young revolutionaries. Some young activists were among the most vociferous defenders of upright codes of behavior. The Young Communist League was the organization charged with providing a revolutionary education to Cuban students. But, like other mass organizations (including the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution [CDRs] and the Federation of Cuban Women [FMC]) it also had a role in social control, and members could be disciplined for engaging in what was perceived as antirevolutionary activity. Sutherland noted that members of the league were often considered to be the most conservative of youth.¹⁸ This view is confirmed by Bebo, a white man born in rural Cuba in 1932. He recalls that when his daughter started to date in the late 1960s he warned her boyfriend not to drive her around in his car because Bebo was worried his daughter, a member of the Young Communists, would be disciplined for such behavior.

A NOTABLE TREND in the interviews cited above with women of different generations is the conviction that young people “today” have sexual freedoms unknown to their elders. Lily implies that she was far more innocent as a young girl than adolescents in the early twenty-first century, and Laura contrasts her experience with the *maldad* (badness) of contemporary youth. Referring to the fact that she and her boyfriend lived separately before they were married in the late 1970s, Josefa declares:

That's evolved like the Revolution, it's made a huge turn. [uproarious laughter]. And we have to adapt to that. What are we going to do? I'm a modern mother.

In an interesting variation on this scenario, Ernesto, a white male narrator born in 1969, also notes the difference between when he was a young boy to young people in the early twenty-first century. Saying he's glad he has sons, Ernesto implies that young people are more sexually active in the early twenty-first century than they were in his youth, and also alludes to the fact that the risks of increased sexual activity are greater for girls than for boys.

Studies of sexuality in socialist Cuba often stress the paradoxes of Cuban sexual politics since the 1960s. The revolutionary regime sought early on to enforce "traditional" values—including marriage and the nuclear family—largely associated with bourgeois society and Catholicism, and historically at odds with local, working-class, and rural practices, where consensual unions and extended families were common. By the 1970s, these policies were accompanied by new measures, such as increased access to contraception, abortion, and state-provided childcare, designed to increase couples' control over reproduction and to enable women to participate fully in the workforce. With the instigation of a national sex education program from the late 1970s, this mixture of traditional with more moderate and modern sexual politics continued, as sex education manuals presented heterosexuality as natural and healthy, stressing its pleasurable elements, while at the same time contrasting supposedly muted female sexuality with naturally voracious male sexuality. Although sex education aimed to temper male sexual aggression, this was taken for granted as a natural force.¹⁹ The ideal of female virginity before marriage was rejected as a remnant of Catholicism, but chaste behavior was encouraged among young women.

The existing literature on sexuality in Cuba (see chapter 1) tends to stress that the value placed on female chastity and the taboo on premarital sex for girls were largely the reserve of the Cuban white middle and upper classes, who were most influenced by the sexual conservatism of the Catholic Church. Female sexual virtue was also regarded as a key to safeguarding the racial purity and social status of elite whites. Moreover, because nuclear families based on marriage were associated with upper- and middle-class status, some black middle-class intellectuals in the early and mid-twentieth century encouraged black Cubans to adopt this familial model. They stressed black female chastity in order to avoid extramarital births and single-parent families, which racist whites demeaned as typical of inferior cultural traditions. Thus the emphasis on black female "decency" was part of an antiracist strategy among some Afro-Cuban men and women.²⁰

The interviews cited above add a further dimension to the historical link between female chastity and hierarchies of class, race, and gender. The stories of Taty, Josefa, and Lily—black women from rural and urban working-class backgrounds born in 1938, 1953, and 1965, respectively—suggest that the value placed on female sexual abstinence before marriage was not specific to upper- and middle-class whites, nor to middle-class blacks, or later revolutionary leaders. Some older working-class Afro-Cuban women also passed ideals of restraint to younger women. The discourse of protecting young unmarried women from the wondering hands of young men is embedded in patriarchal understandings of gender and sexuality to the extent that it assumes that men are naturally predatory and socially irresponsible, and that the responsibility for protecting female bodies and futures lies with women themselves rather than in collective attempts to change male behavior. It may also reflect a desire to protect a family's reputation. However, the motivations for this protection cannot be explained exclusively in terms of social status or moral respectability. The predominant emphasis in the interviews cited above is on protecting younger women from the material and emotional dangers of single motherhood, including poverty and social marginalization. It may also reflect a historical memory of the construction of Afro-Cuban women as sexually available to all men, and their historical vulnerability to sexual assault and abandonment. In this sense, these oral narratives have something in common with contemporary Afro-Cuban women's poetry, in which several scholars have identified traces of the cultural memory of the historical oppression and strength of Cuban women of African origin. For example, Nancy Morejón's 1975 poem "Mujer negra" (Black Woman) traces the voyage of an African woman to slavery in Cuba, where she recalls, "His Worship bought me in a public square. / I embroidered His Worship's coat and bore him a male child. / My son had no name."²¹

The advice given to women such as Josefa and Lily in the 1960s and 1970s indicates that at least some black women of the older generation did not perceive that the dangers of premarital sex had diminished significantly for women in the decades after 1959. Indeed, notwithstanding the official eradication of racism in Cuba during the early years of the Revolution, stereotypes about permissive black sexuality—and white men's assumed access to dark-skinned women—persisted.²² These women's memories of a transgenerational female tradition of educating young women to protect themselves from men's advances highlight the necessity of a history of sexuality that

goes beyond an analysis of official rhetoric, policy, and statistics, to popular memories of sexual attitudes and practices.

Marriage and Domestic Life

The 1964 film *Lucia*, directed by Humberto Solas, pays homage to the revolutionary tradition in Cuba. It represents this radical history through the tales of three women in distinct revolutionary periods: the late nineteenth-century war of independence, the revolutionary movements of 1933, and the early 1960s. In this final segment a young peasant woman marries an unreformed *machista* who locks her in the house and refuses to let her go out to visit or work, in spite of pleas from the local revolutionary council. When a young man arrives to teach Lucia to read and write as part of the literacy campaign, her husband goes mad with jealousy. In the end Lucia escapes to return to her work brigade, but her possessive husband follows her and the film ends with a dramatic chase scene, the conclusion of which is left open. Cuban men will have to change, the film suggests, but the transition will not be a smooth one, or the outcome obviously progressive.

I was reminded of *Lucia* during my kitchen table conversation at Charo's house in 2006 and again a year later when I interviewed Yohanka, born in 1961, who for many years had had relationships with women, but had been married briefly as a young woman:

And the relationships you had with your husband, how did you meet him? Did he know about you?

I met him through a friend of mine. He was an administrator in a hotel. I saw a good catch in my hands. He fell in love with me. I didn't fall in love with him. I liked him at the time and we started a relationship, we went out, spent time together. He was twelve years older than I was and for me it was perfect. I thought I'd hit the mark. This is the man who's going to make me a child. [...] We got married and I prepared for getting pregnant with my daughter, who's the most important thing in my life. Until I had my daughter, at nine months. Then I separated from him. [...]

And he wasn't angry or ...?

No, because he had a lot of women in the street and so he had me punished, locked in the house. He put a padlock on the door and didn't let me go out. [...] Because he said that I was younger than him and I was going to cheat on him. [...]

And was that more or less common, for Cuban men to keep their wives locked up?

Yes, the majority.

There is an element of cunning on Yohanka's part as she tells it: after her daughter was born she promptly divorced and returned to relationships with women. Her last statement that "the majority" of Cuban men kept their wives under lock and key may be an exaggeration. But the image of a young woman imprisoned inside the house while her husband goes out with other women "in the street" contrasts sharply with the ideal of the liberated socialist woman and paints a picture of Cuban men as uniformly retrograde. In interviews conducted by female interviewers with women of different generations there is a familiar refrain: "You know what men are like."

There are alternative narratives, however, showing not only that there are "exceptions" to the rule but that attempts to legislate changes to male domestic behavior did have some success in changing attitudes, if not habits. Cuban cultural production of the 1970s and 1980s sometimes took up the fraught issue of changing expectations in gender roles. As the 1979 Cuban film *Portrait of Teresa* (dir. Pastor Vega) shows, Cuban women during the first two decades of the Revolution suffered not the "double day" of domestic and paid labor, but a "triple day," because they were also expected to engage in political activism. *Portrait of Teresa* tells the story of a young married mother trapped between the pressures of her local trade union to fulfill her duties as a good worker and militant, on one hand, and a conventional husband who believes that her proper place is in the home, on the other. The husband is portrayed as an unreconstructed *macho* who, four years after the passage of the Family Code, needs to change in order to fulfill his revolutionary role. But, like *Lucia*, the film has an open ending. Smith and Padula also cite the example of the soap opera *La Delegada*, aired in 1985, in which debates about gender roles were resolved by the husband and children agreeing to do housework.²³ Like film and television, theater "has served for many years as a public arena for discussing the problems encountered in constructing a new nation."²⁴ Abelardo Estorino's 1980 play "Ni un sí ni un no" (Neither a yes nor a no) stages the strained relationship between a wife and husband adjusting to "the changing script of Cuban identity."²⁵ In Mirta Yáñez's short story "Kid Bururú y los caníbales" (Kid Bururu and the Cannibals) a woman recalls her marriage to a serial adulterer, which eventually ended when she was sent overseas to work: "Enrequito showed one attitude in public, the modern and understand-

ing Don Juan, and another at home: 'I don't feel like letting you go. The one who rules at home is me, the male.'"²⁶ Similarly, the interviews as a whole offer testimony to the ongoing challenges for women of combining paid work, political activism, and domestic labor, as well as the pressure it sometimes put on marriages.

Elisa was born in 1936 in Santiago de Cuba. A *mestiza* woman who remembers the racial discrimination experienced by her family before the Revolution, Elisa has had a satisfying professional and political life as a nurse and later director of her section of the hospital, and as an active member of local political associations, including the CDR and FMC. But she summarizes her life as a tale of "thorns as well as roses." Here she recalls the end of her marriage:

[T]his was in moments of hurricane alert. [...] The man who was my husband got tired. . . . he wasn't happy. . . . [laughter] And he had to look for another *compañera*. . . . I don't blame him. [...] If he had understood, maybe we'd be together. But well, he stopped feeling affection. [...] So we were in that . . . all those hurricanes have passed, the ones from before and the ones from after, that's how it was . . . at the hospital, going in the middle of the night [...] All those . . . with the struggles, the confrontations. Because this isn't a romance novel, it's a novel with thorns . . . with thorns. . . .

What thorns, for example? . . .

Well, the thorns. A time came when my children didn't want to keep going to the hospital with me. . . . For me that was a conflict, because they were teenagers. . . . The most difficult moment. . . . By then the man who was my husband had gone and married someone else. . . . Now it's not the same. . . . It was a house, but it wasn't a home. Because a home . . . With the conception of family is father, mother, child. . . . Otherwise it's a house, because an element of the home is missing. So I had to take up two positions . . . Because there were other responsibilities [...] The love cooled off.

In the Spanish original, *una novela rosa* (a romance novel) captures better the story's irony: *rosa* translates as both "pink" and "rose." Elisa's commentary is an interesting variation on the Revolution as love story or fairy tale (see chapter 2). By weaving together her personal and political lives—along with some dramatic irony in the form of references to the annual hurricanes that bring sudden and often devastating destruction to the island—Elisa implies that neither has been a perfect romance. Elisa's total commitment to the Revolution is accompanied by a rather traditional—and quite middle-class—percep-

tion of family life.²⁷ Once her husband leaves their home is effectively broken—they have a house, but not a home.

ELISA'S STORY highlights the limited impact of policy initiatives aimed at equalizing gender relations in the domestic sphere. The extent of social transformation brought about by the Family Code of 1975 is difficult to measure. But the interviews indicate that among the generation of narrators with a history of political commitment, women's activist duties helped to impel new behavior in women and men alike. One example is Ileana, presented in the introduction. Married sixteen years, she describes her second husband as a loving man who shares in the housework, allowing her to continue her political activities.

Another example is provided by a male narrator, Bebo, born in 1932 on a ranch in Havana Province. From a family with a history of political commitment on the left, Bebo has been an active supporter of the Revolution from the beginning, a Communist Party member since the 1960s, and veteran of the war against the counterrevolutionaries in rural Cuba in the 1960s and later as part of Cuba's military involvement in Angola during the 1970s. Bebo's wife, Marta, whom he married in the 1950s, is also a lifelong revolutionary, active in various organizations. Bebo is proud that both his children and grandchildren have also become party members. He paints a picture of a married couple that has lived the Revolution fully together through good times and bad:

I was called up to go to Angola. Nobody knew anything. It was the first mobilization and Marta found out where I was after three months. So . . . Marta's blood pressure rose when she found out where I was. They brought the news to a woman who lives above the bakery that her son had been killed in Angola and that's when Marta's high blood pressure began and she's never got rid of it. [. . .]

Bebo, your relationship with Marta at home—how has the decision making been, the organization of the budget, the housework? How have you divided that between the two of you?

We're just one. We get angry with each other a lot, but that's an old people's thing now. We're together the whole day. [. . .]

So, is it you who decides what you spend, what you buy? How do you do it?

No. She gave the money to me and I buy what I want and she's never

said to me, “Why did you buy that?” [...] Because the man always hides his money and it wasn’t enough for her and so I say, “No, do it the opposite way.” And she gives me everything. It’s true, when I buy precooked rice she gets furious with me because she can’t eat it. [...]

And the cleaning? Who does it?

Generally she does it, I help her. [...] But I’ve never seen her lying down during the day. She’s like an ant. She’s the treasurer of the local CDR, the second head of the block FMC, she’s an activist in the local party.

Although Bebo does not embrace or advocate full domestic equality and maintains a belief in gender difference, he does not make any statements about women’s and men’s “proper places.” Moreover, he respects his wife’s political commitments and her “ant-like” work habits. As Sutherland noted as early as the 1960s, even when men opposed women’s newfound freedom, they could not stop their wives and daughters from performing political duties for fear of being labeled counterrevolutionary.²⁸

Bebo makes an interesting contrast to Paco, another white man who lives in the same historically working-class Havana suburb. Born in 1972, a full forty years after Bebo, Paco works as a taxi driver. Unlike Bebo, Paco is not a committed revolutionary and does not speak in the interview about political activities. He is openly critical of certain aspects of Cuban politics, deploring his experience at the *escuela de campo* (rural school) as a child because he does not believe people should be forced to “volunteer” for agricultural work.²⁹ He insists that economic differences in a given society are inevitable and provides several examples of corruption in the Cuban system. Paco is open about his activities on the informal market and, unlike the vast majority of narrators (and Cubans generally), did quite well for himself during the Special Period by manufacturing and selling illegal goods.

During the course of the interview with two female interviewers, Paco’s wife wanders in and out and contributes from time to time. Paco presents himself as a reluctantly evolving man, a traditionalist by inclination who has had to recognize the changing times and modify his own behavior and his children’s upbringing accordingly. Married a second time, he claims that in his current relationship he helps out around the house and allows his young son to play with girls, something that he did not do as a child in the 1970s. In reference to Paco’s first marriage, when he was eighteen, one interviewer asks:

*And how did you organize everything in the house related to housework?
Who did what? What roles did women and men play?*

Well, when that happened my mother didn't live here anymore. [...] And I lived with my grandfather, my grandmother, and this person. She did everything here.

She was the one who did all the housework? And you?

No, I'm a man. [...] At that time I didn't do anything. Now, yes. Now I do the dishes and I wash. No, I don't wash. But something, yes. [...]

And did she also have a job outside the house?

No.

Why only at home?

Paco's wife: He doesn't like women to work.

Paco: No, because there's no need.

You don't like it?

No.

So, the woman in the house? ...

And the man in the house and in the street. Imagine!

Paco's ironic twist on the old Cuban expression, "Women in the house and men in the street" shows he is aware of a change in the times, even though he does not think much of it.

I do not suggest that either Bebo or Paco is a "typical" Cuban man. But their interviews point to an interesting dimension in campaigns for gender equality in Cuban households and complicate ideas of historical or generational progress. For Bebo, sharing in some, if not all, domestic duties with his wife is part of a wider revolutionary project, necessary to ensure that *all* members of the family are politically active to their full capacity. Paco, on the other hand, shows no interest in politics and is openly critical of many revolutionary values, including the idea that women should work outside the home. Another male narrator born in the 1970s shares much in common with Paco. Pedro, born in 1974, has also been married twice and has two children. He is from a farm family where the men work in the fields and the women do all the housework (neither his mother nor his current wife has worked outside the home). Like Paco, Pedro expresses little interest in formal politics and is not politically active. Unlike Paco, Pedro claims not to have a problem with women working, and expresses a belief in gender equality and stresses that women in Cuba have the right to study and work, just like men. Pedro's attitude (that

women have equality in theory, so don't need it in practice) is similar to that expressed by men in rural eastern Cuba in the 1980s.³⁰ Unlike Bebo, who was married with children at the time of the nationwide debates surrounding the Family Code, Paco was married for the first time at the beginning of the Special Period. The fact that he was raised in a family in which girls and boys did not play together indicates that the egalitarian spirit of the Family Code and institutions such as the *escuelas de campo* did not reach all Cuban families. Taken together, the stories of Bebo and Paco suggest that revolutionary commitment—as opposed to age or a fundamental belief in gender equality—was what impelled some Cuban men (though by no means all) to accept changes in their domestic arrangements. Where revolutionary politics were weak or missing, there was less motivation to reform old habits.

Reproduction and Motherhood

The majority of women we interviewed were mothers, and most claimed that motherhood had brought both pleasure and meaning to their lives. It is difficult to know whether any of them would have expressed negative feelings about maternity if asked directly. Problems pertaining to reproduction—including infertility—did not feature frequently in the interviews, but these silences should not be taken to mean that difficulties did not exist or that no narrators had ambivalent feelings about parenthood. Several women spoke of the ways they had limited the number of children they gave birth to through the use of contraception or abortion. Others spoke of the struggles of child rearing, especially those who had raised children alone.

Taty had her only child relatively late, at age thirty-five, in the early 1970s. She describes motherhood as “the greatest thing that could have happened in life.” But she also talks about the challenges of raising her son, who seemed to have learning difficulties, and her decision not to have more children. Following his birth she recalls having contraception fitted—probably a reference to an intrauterine device, or IUD, which became available through hospitals from the mid-1960s onward and was the most common form of contraception used by Cuban women.³¹ By the late 1960s, all women who had their first child in a hospital were offered an IUD or diaphragm (although many women still gave birth at home).³² But Taty conceived again and decided to terminate the pregnancy, reflecting the general availability of abortion by the 1970s. Because Taty did not have a formal job until the 1990s (like many women, she

did some work from home both before and after she married)³³ she was able to stay at home with her son. Although she did not have to rely on state childcare when her son was young, Taty expresses gratitude to the Revolution for giving him a job as an adult—probably through the connections of his father, who was considered an exemplary worker.

While the Revolution encouraged women to be both mothers and militants, not all women saw these roles as easily compatible (see Elisa's story above). Ileana, born in 1950, was fully incorporated into revolutionary activities as an adolescent during the 1960s:

When I started university I had relationships at that time and I had my son without getting married or anything. [...] I had my son, he went to the childcare center. My parents, wow—a tremendous support, everything was normal. So I don't get married to the father of my son because immediately I started to work and in 1968 I entered the militia, so I had mobilizations and this and that. So we had a relationship until the year sixty something. We'd gone out since secondary school, and then there were problems after the year 1968, 1969. But well, we were in love. I had my son. I wanted to end the pregnancy. I went to see Dr. X in a clinic here in Havana [...] and he said, look, you have negative blood type and I'm not going to give you the paper. I didn't know I had a negative blood type. So I found out and I had the little guy and after that I didn't give birth again.

Ileana recounts matter-of-factly her original plan to have an abortion and then the decision to have a child alone in the late 1960s. Her memory of her doctor at the time emphasizes his medical, rather than moral or political, concern for her health. Like Taty, after the birth of her first child Ileana decided not to have more children and similarly used the *anillo*, or IUD. Her decision to give birth without getting married was a common one. In the 1970s and 1980s more than a third of Cuban births were to unmarried women,³⁴ although this statistic does not indicate what percentage of the mothers lived with the fathers of their children. For women without partners, single motherhood made paid employment particularly difficult. In the case of Ileana, family support seems to have been a significant factor in allowing her to pursue a career in a government ministry and a university education in the 1980s. A majority of single mothers, in contrast, had low levels of income and education, and many were unemployed.³⁵ Although by the time Ileana's son was born in 1971 the Ministry of Education had taken on some responsibility for childcare fa-

cilities,³⁶ references to her mother caring for her son suggest that Ileana, like many women, continued to rely on the support networks of mothers, sisters, and neighbors to care for their children.³⁷ This situation indicates that the material and emotional support of individual families remained a factor in women's ability to work and be active outside the home.³⁸ Ileana's story underlines the dual importance of the emotional and material support provided by state and family.³⁹

IF FOR SOME WOMEN, such as Taty, the experience of having children provided new perspectives on their own mothers, for others the passage of time and perceived change in traditions is measured with reference to their daughters. Yohanka, born in a traditional working-class neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba, recalls the pressures on young women of her generation to be virgins until they were married. She contrasts this to the experiences of her daughter, born in the 1980s:

[I]f the man knew you weren't a virgin he left you just like that and you didn't get married.

And most of your friends and people were virgins?

Yes, yes, yes. Now the thing about living together with a man before marriage, back then you couldn't do it. You had to go out with a white dress as a *señorita*, because otherwise the man said no.

And yet your daughter, for example, how old is she?

My daughter is twenty-five.

She lives with her partner?

With her partner for three years but they're not married.

[...]

And what type of... How do you talk to her about, about life, about relationships with guys [...]

Well, I told her that the day she had a boyfriend she should tell me. The day she had a sexual relationship too, that she had to use lots of contraception, that if she got pregnant she couldn't study, she couldn't work, she couldn't do anything. And I helped her openly. Everything I knew I offered to her.

At what age more or less?

My daughter was like fourteen, thirteen.

And were they also talking to her about those things in school?

At school they talked, they've always talked. Of course here, with the issue of sex—recently the propaganda has advanced more, the debates, and more when AIDS arrived. But before they also said, “Use a condom,” so you didn’t get pregnant. Because as soon as you have an abortion, your uterus starts to get lost, it deteriorates, that new little uterus. They’re girls that are fourteen, fifteen years old, who don’t even wait till twenty to have sex. They start really early.

And in your daughter’s group, for example, does she have friends who got pregnant very young?

Oh! Quite a few friends of hers got pregnant. But when it came to her she and I had already spoken. That was like an agreement between her and me and there’s no problem.[...]

And the majority had the baby?

No, no, no. They had abortions.

And was that easy, or was it ...?

Yes, because it’s always resolved. They changed their age. For example, “How old are you?” “Seventeen, eighteen ...”

Do you remember friends when you were a girl? When you were a teenager what happened?

Yes, of course. Look, my sister met Marissa’s father and had a sexual relationship and got pregnant and couldn’t get rid of it.

At what age?

My sister would’ve been twenty-one.

But she didn’t get married?

She did it much before getting married and then it was *la corredera* [runner] as they say, when someone gets married with the bump showing. [...] That was like a lack of respect to society, because it was assumed you couldn’t get married while pregnant, if you were a *señorita*. [...]

And you, being born in 1961, you were a teenager in the 1970s. Did they talk to you about those things, at school? About sex?

No, before in school they didn’t—in my day they didn’t talk about that. That’s why you saw so many cases of pregnancies.

If Yohanka’s family narrative lends itself to the idea of difference between “now” and “back then,” her observations, like those of Josefa above, reflect wider historical processes in Cuba, as well as differences of geographical location, among other things. In a 1967 survey conducted by *Juventud Comunista*

(the official paper of the Young Communist League), half of the respondents said they were willing to see an end to virginity as a prerequisite to marriage and approved of couples living together before marriage. But the interviewees were Havana residents, whereas more conventional values persisted in other areas of the country.⁴⁰

Even if the revolutionary triumph in theory marked the end of “bourgeois” values, the state did not take it upon itself to educate young Cubans about sexuality until almost twenty years later. Yohanka says that by the early twenty-first century young Cubans began their sexual relations “very early.” Sexologist Marí Cari García Álvarez dates the start of the Cuban “sexual revolution” to the 1970s, with the coming of age of people of her generation, born around the time of the Revolution. By the late 1970s, with larger numbers of young Cubans entering higher education, she claims most had had their first sexual experiences before they began their university studies.⁴¹ But the stories of Lily and Yohanka suggest that the “sexual revolution” was tempered by the persistence of traditions that actively discouraged premarital sex and in particular pregnancy. There may be a class difference here as well. García Álvarez is speaking specifically of young people who went to university, who were not representative of all Cubans. (Lily’s education, for example, was cut short by teenage pregnancy, and others pursued technical degrees instead of attending university.) The stark contrast between Yohanka’s experiences and those of her daughter suggests that in many cases, the “sexual revolution” in Cuba may have been experienced most directly not by the generation “born with the Revolution,” but by the children they raised.

THE TERM “sexual revolution” is, of course, ambiguous. Although implying a widespread—implicitly positive—transformation in sexual values, practices, and policies, it cannot reflect the vast range of, often contradictory, personal experiences in a given society. Cubans have debated the benefits of (perceived and actual) greater sexual freedom. As in Western countries, where feminist historians have noted that the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s had different meanings for women and men, in Cuba by the 1980s some female revolutionaries began to express concern that sexual “freedom” had drawbacks for young women. Toward the end of this decade a series of articles appeared in the Cuban press on issues such as youth sexuality, abortion, single motherhood, and paternal absenteeism. Prominent journalist Mirta Rodríguez Calderón wrote that these issues reflected the limited success of revolution-

ary social policy in the areas of sexuality and gender relations. She and others stressed the persisting link between adolescent pregnancy and motherhood, on one hand, and low levels of education and income, on the other.⁴² Rodríguez Calderón's interventions constituted a critique of revolutionary sexual politics from within and formed part of a wider reflection on the successes and weaknesses of the Revolution following the Rectification program initiated by the Cuban Communist Party in 1986.

Comparing the articles by Rodríguez Calderón to oral history interviews with Cuban women born before and after 1959, we find uneven developments in sexual values and practices, contradictions in government intervention into heterosexual relations, and very different meanings of those relations for women and men from different socioeconomic groups. If the idea of "sexual revolution" implies positive change and greater freedom, these interviews and articles suggest a more complex picture. For example, Lily, who was born in 1965, was warned by her aunt of the dangers of pregnancy before marriage, and yet she describes herself as someone for whom motherhood has brought her life the greatest joy and meaning. But she adds that if she had followed her aunt's advice, she would not have had children so early:

Well, for me, being a mother is something great, because I love my children. Unfortunately I haven't thought it through well—the situation of the fathers. I haven't looked for a father who would arrange like he should a normal relationship. Because I've had no support, some for one reason, others for another. I haven't had support with my children. And so I've been struggling practically alone, with my children.

Lily presents herself as someone who has had bad luck in relationships and finding stable fathers for her children. But her experiences are perhaps less a question of poor choices or chance than part of a wider pattern of women being left alone to raise children, often with relatively few resources.

Missing Men

Whereas for women such as Lily the choice of a sexual partner is inextricably tied to experiences and expectations of motherhood, for male narrators the relationship between parenting and sexual liaisons is much less obvious. Indeed, they frequently present these two areas of life as separate. Observers of sexual and gender politics in Cuba and elsewhere have often noted, and

objected to, the fact that men are apparently able to separate sexual desire and activity from marital and paternal responsibility. Yet men's experiences and perceptions of heterosexuality and paternity are often not represented in studies of family structure, gender roles, and sexual behavior. Indeed, the expanding literature on gender and sexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean has treated the issues of motherhood and fatherhood unevenly. Whereas there is a substantial literature on *marianismo*, matrifocality, motherhood, and female reproduction,⁴³ fatherhood and paternity have received much less attention. Furthermore, the expansive comparative scholarship on the sociopolitical structures of patriarchy and paternalism in Latin America⁴⁴ contrasts with the relative lack of research on the historical development, social construction, and lived experiences of fatherhood.⁴⁵ By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries this gap had begun to close with the growing field of masculinity studies.⁴⁶

With these observations in mind, the title of this section—"missing fathers"—addresses three related absences: (1) the relative lack of focus on men and masculinity in the academic literature on gender and sexuality, including the history of the family; (2) the perception—evident in many of our interviews as well as in social commentary inside Cuba—that men are often missing from their families, especially in their capacities as fathers and partners; and (3) the alternative meaning of "to miss" as to note and regret someone's absence, as well as the material, social, and emotional consequences of that absence. This dual sense of lack and longing is captured in Laidi Fernández de Juan's short story, "La hija de Darío" (Darío's Daughter),⁴⁷ in which a single mother, María Eugenia, dreams of being reunited with her father's daughter, with whom she had spent a single night years before. "[T]he strength that corresponds to a single mother"⁴⁸ takes an ironic, even tragic dimension as María Eugenia is left alone following the death of her daughter, while the Darío of the title remains, until the end, a vision.

It is virtually impossible to write about the issue of missing men, and especially about absent fathers, without an awareness of public discourses around this issue. These are often embedded in crude ethnic and class stereotypes about Latin American and Caribbean masculinity. As Matthew C. Gutmann writes, studies frequently "disclose one of the more irksome clichés regarding men and masculinities in Latin America: the supposedly uniform significance and value for men in this region of having children to prove one's virility through the procreation of many offspring."⁴⁹ Similarly, Linden Lewis

makes a plea for an “end to the essentialized male Caribbean subject” as he appears in much of the literature on masculinity and the family in the region: “powerful, exceedingly promiscuous, derelict in his parental duties, often absent from the household and, if present, unwilling to undertake his share of domestic responsibilities.”⁵⁰ In addition, Lewis notes, Caribbean men are often portrayed as heavy drinkers who are especially violent against women.⁵¹ More recent research makes an important contribution toward challenging these stereotypes. Thus, contemporary comparative literature on Latin American fatherhood stresses the lack of a singular historical, discursive, or practical model of paternity, highlighting instead a multiplicity of forms and experiences of fatherhood and their often contradictory effects. Such research also stresses the crucial role played by social, political, and religious institutions in shaping the lives fathers and their children.⁵²

To ignore the issue of missing fathers would be to brush over a recurring theme in the interviews and to pass up the opportunity to listen to stories that add a complexity to contemporary debates about Latin American and Caribbean masculinity. With the aim of moving away from one-dimensional representations of *el Cubano* (the Cuban man), this section and the next incorporate the voices of men in different positions—sons as well as fathers—and those of the women in their lives. I also want to stress that, *pace* the clichés cited above, male absence from the domestic realm crosses boundaries of race and social class and is very far from being specific to some mythologized and pathologized underclass.⁵³ Indeed, the widespread speculation about the number of children fathered by Fidel Castro indicates that prerevolutionary associations of male heterosexual potency with fathering children (as opposed to parenting them) persists within the revolutionary Cuban elite, at the same time that they feed outside stereotypes about a universal Latin *machismo*.⁵⁴

THE RELATIONSHIP between political commitment and romantic and family life are highly gendered in Cuba, as elsewhere. For women, the demands of activism and paid labor have sometimes necessitated the sacrifice of sexual liaisons and children. Unless they have supportive partners, married women and mothers frequently claim that activism and work clash with the demands of husbands and children. These conflicting demands exist for men as well, with the important difference that for them putting public life before home life is socially sanctioned. But this does not mean that men’s absence from the

family has gone unnoticed (see, for example, the reflections of Salomón in the previous chapter). Mercedes provides another example of the emotional consequences for women and children of men putting politics before family. Born to parents of mixed heritage in 1963, just four years after the revolutionary victory, in a historically working-class Havana neighborhood, Mercedes opens her interview with a series of unhappy childhood memories and ongoing personal and economic challenges:

I did my secondary school studies, my preuniversity. I finished twelfth grade, I couldn't go on studying. I had to get a job. [...] I started working and more or less at age twenty I got pregnant. I had a pretty good job, I had possibilities. I had a daughter, by the grace of God, very pretty, beautiful. I had to support her alone because the father of my daughter and I separated. He didn't want to recognize the daughter and I had to make a life of mother and father alone. A bit of sacrifice, but well. That way, well, I continued to work. Wait, because my memory, my mind is poor, because I've had so much hunger and so much need and so much suffering in love that there are things I forget. Let's see. Ah-hah! [...] I raised my daughter alone, then I had the other little girl. I had to raise her alone too because the father didn't turn out well. And the jobs I've had haven't been—because since I didn't have a good level at school [...] and in the present time well, I have two daughters, I work and the money isn't enough at all. That's more or less my life.

Can you talk to me a bit more about—how many siblings do you have?

Well, my mother and father come from the east. My father came here to Havana young with my mother. They lived in a little room and they had a lot of need because only my father worked and my mother didn't work. [...] My mother had to start working. She worked for many years in a drycleaners. She had four children and she raised them with a lot of sacrifice. Because my father didn't turn out well. He worked but the salary he earned well, wasn't enough to support four children and my mother had to start working and she had a lot of work with us, a lot of work. [...] Because she was alone. My father hardly took care of her. He didn't turn out well and God forgive me, he's my father, but well, father as such he never was. My mother sacrificed a lot.

Mercedes describes her father as an *internacionalista* who was one of the first Cuban soldiers to be sent to Africa. He was also a member of the Communist

Party. Mercedes's story provides a necessary counterpoint to the memories of Bebo, cited above, and a salient reminder that a man's public commitment to the Revolution did not necessarily extend to solidarity with women and children at home. Although we cannot simplistically draw a cause and effect in Mercedes's life story, the excerpt above presents a parallel between her difficult childhood, when she was raised virtually alone by her mother, and her later life experiences as a single mother. Her husbands, like her own father, "didn't turn out well."

Mercedes's story, similar to that of Salomón in chapter 2, does not conform to clichés about absent Caribbean fathers precisely because it does not present the father figure as lazy and irresponsible. To the contrary, these fathers are impeccable revolutionaries and exemplary workers. But their value to the Revolution can only be measured as positive in a binary model that separates the sphere of production from that of reproduction. Moreover, in men's memories of childhood and paternal absence both the emotional and *material* legacies of this absence stand out.

Arturo is a black man born on a sugar plantation in central Cuba in 1922, just over three decades after the abolition of slavery:

So, to tell it, I've had so much hunger and need I don't even know why I'm here now. But my mother, washing outside the house, ironing, she was the one who raised me until she was thirty-two which was when she died. My father never looked after me. [...] One day it came to me to go and see him, around twenty. So when I was twenty I went to see him, so he hardly recognized me. I said, "Look, I'm your son." [...] I thought he was going to help out with something and what he gave me was a *peso* so I went back. [...] The only thing my father ever lavished on me was a change of clothing he sent once: a shirt and some pants. As far as I know, nothing else.

Revolutionary leaders, including Fidel Castro in his famous "History Will Absolve Me" speech of 1953,⁵⁵ made frequent reference to extreme poverty, especially among rural Cubans, in their rhetorical attacks on republican economy and society. Arturo's story, like that of many narrators born in rural Cuba in the decades before 1959, highlights this state of misery, but additionally stresses the extent to which for women and children it could be exacerbated by the lack of a male earner. Carlos, born in 1954 in eastern Cuba, similarly describes how paternal absence and family crises aggravated wider patterns of poverty rooted in socioeconomic circumstances:

My mother had rural roots. When I was born they'd moved from the countryside to the city. Because my grandfather owned a ranch that had been ruined. [...] In the 1950s peasants who migrated to the city had a huge culture shock and in general they tried to raise their heads by getting into business and well, in the case of my grandfather, he was ruined and the whole family fell into extreme poverty. I remember in the first years those palm houses falling down, a situation of pauperism from the economic point of view, of all kinds. My mother, well, she had rural roots too. I'm the son of a truck driver that never presented himself as a father or anything. Because the peasant girls who migrated to the city were almost always manipulated by urban life, by men. I've never had a father since I was a child. Later it seems that because of the poverty and all that, my whole family migrated to Havana.

But was your mother's relationship—uh, ephemeral? It wasn't a marriage?

It wasn't a marriage or anything. My mother was one of many sisters, they were like seven or eight sisters. Imagine. My grandfather didn't have work. Migrants from the countryside with no work. They had no schooling, they were all illiterate. And well, imagine it, you can imagine that economic situation. It was terrible.

How did she survive?

Well, I was very little. I imagine, use your imagination. I saw that situation, lots of women. I'm sure there was a bit of prostitution. Think about it. I can't give any details because I was very small. But I can imagine the situation.

The story of Josefa (who was introduced previously in this chapter) suggests a different, less deterministic view of intergenerational relations than that recounted by Mercedes earlier in this section. Josefa dated her boyfriend for almost ten years before moving in with him, and her memories of her two long-term relationships contrast starkly with her days of courtship:

We'd gone out since we were sixteen. He was in the youth column and I was here in Havana. I went to visit and he met me. After that I came and went. I came to Havana on my holidays.

Was that your first love?

But little good it did me because the first love lasts a long time. We lasted longer as girlfriend and boyfriend than husband and wife.

And when did you get married?

I was twenty-six. I got married at twenty-six.

Ten years of courtship?

And three years—after two years we fought. When my son was two we fought. [...] When I was pregnant with him, you know what men are like. He started to have his life on the street with other women and that, and since I was pregnant I wanted to preserve my marriage to raise my son.[...] When the boy turned two I said, “I can’t take it anymore. I’m going to get old waiting for this to sort itself out and it’s never going to sort itself out.” So we decided not to be together anymore. But I had a lot of work. The boy had problems, because it wasn’t a happy pregnancy. He was a wanted child but without happiness or anything. [...] He lives with me, he has an eight-year-old child. [...] He attends to him. It’s not like with his father and me. I’ve stressed that because I’ve told him: “I know what that’s like, I’m a woman and everything. . . .” So he’s followed in that. . . .

When did the other love start?

The other love started at twelve years [laughter]. When my son was twelve.

Did you get married?

No. We started to live together. I’ve never been married.

And when was the girl born?

No, that relationship was good until, until my daughter was nine or ten. [...] Look. When I was going to get pregnant I told him, “I don’t want to have more children because I don’t want the same thing to happen.” And he said, “No, no. With you I’ve met . . .” And, well. [...]

Does he attend to the girl?

The girl, yes . . . He attends to her in his way. You know what men are like, and since she’s older. But two years he was gone and didn’t know anything more about us. He didn’t call us or anything. My daughter even turned fifteen and nothing.⁵⁶ He disappeared from the map.

Josefa’s frustration with her partnerships is summarized in her repetition of the refrain “you know what men are like.” By addressing the female Cuban interviewers directly she assumes that they share, or at least are well aware of, this experience. But although she expresses a certain resignation about her own fate, having been left alone to raise children by two separate men, there is also a conviction that change is possible. She is committed to setting an

example her son, so that he will be different (a “new man” in a very different sense from that meant by Che Guevara, as discussed in chapter 2).

The story of Taty, born in 1938 and introduced in the first section of this chapter, opens with a description of a poor and deprived childhood, with an unmarried, illiterate mother and a drunken father who ignored his illegitimate family. Taty cries more than once while recounting this part of her life, which she describes as a struggle:

We lived in a hut with a thatched roof. I remember as a child that the doors were made of zinc. We lived close to an abattoir and the cows escaped and came in one door, flattened the zinc, and went out the other. My father was a drunk. He lived and died drunk. He was a barber. He didn't take care of us and he didn't even give us his name. An aunt of mine, a sister of my mother, the poor thing, struggled selling lottery tickets to give us something to eat.

Yet, in spite of recounting a story peopled by men who are irresponsible, drunk, or mentally ill, Taty, like Josefa, expresses determination that her son will behave differently, helping him to obtain a house so he can raise his son. Other interviews similarly remind us that there is no inevitability to patterns of male behavior. María, whose daughter was born in 1989, when María was twenty-one, provides a particularly positive experience:

[M]y husband, who isn't the one who made her but he's practically raised her, has supported her quite a bit as a father. He tries more or less, with what he has, to make her happy so she doesn't feel left out even though he has a very strong character. But he's always helped her and supported her. And that's helped her to come out where she is.⁵⁷

The stories of Josefa, Taty, and María undermine essentialist clichés about *machismo* with an alternative model of fatherhood as something that can be taught and learned. This more dynamic view of paternity is reflected as well in contemporary ethnographic research on fatherhood in other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean. As José Olavarria notes in his work on working-class fatherhood in Santiago de Chile in the late twentieth century:

Men ... learn what is expected of a father through their own experiences and what they have been taught by their own fathers and mothers. Fathers have been many-sided characters: they are loved, cherished, respected, but at the same time they are feared, distant, and sometimes hated. Their be-

havior has been frequently ambiguous and confusing: they are conscientious in some instances and unprincipled in others.⁵⁸

The interviews show fathers and father figures in this range of characteristics: as one-dimensional types, alternatively abusive, absent, alcoholic, or attentive, or as exhibiting a blend of these and other behaviors. The attention in these life stories to the material conditions of childhood, and poverty in particular, reminds us that men are not unambiguous representatives of patriarchal power. As Rafael R. Rodríguez writes:

Masculine ideologies are embedded in social relations, they are not “autonomous mental projections or psychic fantasies writ large” (Gilmore 1990: 224). This is not, of course, to deny the powerful presence of colonels, patriarchs, and caudillos in our countries, but to recognize that our literature, histories, and ethnographies also highlight that subordination, oppression, and exploitation are, and have been, a fundamental part of the daily life of masses of men and women throughout the region.⁵⁹

As Ramírez suggests, we can appreciate the symbolic importance of patriarchal archetypes in Latin America and the Caribbean without reducing them to explanatory models for individual male behavior. Moreover, although I have emphasized thus far the material conditions and social power relations (of class and race as well as gender) that shape assessments of paternal care among narrators, the psychic dimension and the realm of fantasy should not be forgotten. To conclude this section, I want to cite an interview in which the good and bad father maps on to popular discourses of political paternity. Armando is a white, openly antirevolutionary man born in 1967. His melancholic memory of paternal abandonment stands out in an interview that otherwise focuses almost entirely on his political and economic struggle against the system and has little to say about family or intimate life:

[M]y childhood was nice until my father left my mother. My mother had to struggle with us, with three boys. So she hooked up with my father's brother. But my mother's trajectory, being separated, not having a husband or anything and with us. We had to live barred up in the house because my mother worked and until she got home we couldn't go out to the park to play or anything like that because it was a woman alone with three boys. [...] Well, my mother was a person who suffered a lot after the triumph of the Revolution. [...] Just imagine —the house was big and it has a pool

and everything. At the same time my mother meets my sister's father, the guy always was an SOB, hey, to put it another way, one of those frustrated communists. So he marries my Mom, he takes us out of the house we had, a palace, to stick us in a little room in Central Havana.

Armando's representation of his early years is a dizzying mix of memories of childhood violence and betrayal. He blames his personal fall and that of his family on the Revolution and his stepfather, whom he refers to alternatively as a "son of a bitch" and a "frustrated communist." When I first heard the opening part of this interview I interpreted it as another example of the pain of paternal abandonment: life was rosy until Armando's father left. But listening again I realized that instead of blaming his father for his own and his family's misery, Armando idealizes his birth father, who symbolizes for him an imagined and ideal prerevolutionary existence of affluence and happiness, including a palatial house with a "pool and everything." But the good father is usurped by the evil stepfather who condemns the family to a poor, precarious, and violent upbringing in a tiny dwelling in downtown Havana. Without suggesting that Armando's family life has no individual meaning for him, his account can also be read as a personalized version of "psychic fantasies writ large," of the "bad father" who destroyed all that was good about Cuba and condemned Cubans collectively to a life of misery. A reversal of the majority of our life stories, which emphasize the road from poverty to greater equality, Armando's tale reminds us that childhood stories, like oral history generally, are best understood as a blending of ideological, social, and psychic elements.

New Men, Old Masculinities?

[A] theme common in discussions of sexuality in Latin America is the bellwether term machismo; . . . both popular and scholarly literature maintain a tacit view that machismo is ubiquitous if not universal in the region.⁶⁰

During the revolutionary period new sexual mores have coexisted with older ideas about appropriate gender roles. Observing male behavior in a semirural eastern Cuban community in the 1980s, Mona Rosendahl noted that bragging to other men about having mistresses, like claiming not to do housework, performed the function of male bonding.⁶¹ Research conducted in the early twenty-first century suggested that many Cuban men continued to subscribe to ideals of masculinity similar to those described in studies conducted in

previous eras, and that heterosexual masculinity was still measured in part through the number of sexual partners a man had. Many men expressed the view that having women “in the street” as well as “in the home” was both normal and desirable.⁶²

I want to keep in mind the performance element of masculinity as a way of undermining some problems of generalizations about *machismo* highlighted by Gutmann’s quotation above. The performance of *machismo* is found as well in interview settings, in which a male narrator may boast about multiple sexual exploits and partners as part of his construction of a *mujeriego* (wom- anizing) persona. This is evident in the interview with Juan, a black man born in 1968, who was thirty-six years old and living in a modest house in rural Havana Province at the time he was interviewed by two white, middle-aged women from Havana. Juan both plays up to and challenges stereotypes about black Cuban men, clearly enjoying the opportunity to perform for and even provoke the interviewers. But telling his story also allows him the opportunity to reflect on his own relationships and desires, as well as those of his partners:

Your love life—how has your love life been?

Well, it’s not easy. [...] I don’t like people to get jealous. I don’t like people to watch over me. [...] Apart from that, I have a lot, I always have a kind of complicated situation. [...] I always end up with women, almost, who have some commitment, they have a boyfriend. That surprises me a lot. [...]

You’ve never been married?

Huh? Yah, you’re right, I’ve never got married. [...] I say that in order to be happy you don’t have to get married. [...]

And the woman you say who’s with you now—is she married?

Yes, she has a commitment. Yes, but she doesn’t want ... Materially, yes. He has a post, a good job, in tourism, but what makes her put up with it, carry on, is her son. The son is about twelve or thirteen. [...] But she wants, but I’m the one who doesn’t want to now. ... She has to realize, I don’t tell her directly because [...] I’ll sit down, “Look Nora, I have another girlfriend and I don’t ... I want to make my life.” I know it won’t be easy, but I have to tell her. I can’t spend my whole life ... in this life like this. We’ve been together for eight years. We lived three years together. After that we separated and we’re still going on more or less like that. She comes, she helps me out, she’s here. She comes in the mornings, she leaves at 4 pm.

She does the things for you?

Yes, she does the things for me, she helps me a lot. But that's not a life . . .

And why isn't it a life? Because she lives with someone else?

Yes, the father of the child. Eh, I said to her, "You're putting your life, and you're holding me back too. I'm thirty-six years old." "No, you're a young man." "Yes, I'm young, but you, you're forty, you're going to be forty-one on the second of June." And I have a girlfriend, imagine it. [...] Now I see her, "Do you think you're going to be able to have a child now?" But I wouldn't want her to . . .

Do you want to have a child?

Yes, I want to have one and I want it to be a boy to keep my last name. My grandfather always had a thing about that.

Juan's entangled love life highlights some of the tensions in expectations and experiences of male heterosexuality in early twenty-first century Cuba. His narrative expresses some of the well-worn elements of *machismo*. He does not want to be tied down, or for his partners to know where he is or to be jealous. At the same time, he expects that his lover will take care of things around his house even when she is not living with him, and he wants to have children in order to pass on his surname. His desire to have children may be a reflection of unreconstructed *machismo*; or it may (additionally) reflect a desire to have the family he did not have as a child, having lost both his parents at an early age. Either way, Juan concludes that his older, longer-term partner, now in her early forties, is not the best bet for having children.

As Linden Lewis argues with reference to the Caribbean, "Masculinity is both a set of practices or behaviors and an ideological position within gender relations."⁶³ One of the sets of relations in which the "ideological position" of masculinity is located is the heterosexual relationship. Here, as in other social relations, "masculinity and femininity are dialectally related to one another."⁶⁴ If we understand the process whereby masculinity is produced and receives meaning as a dynamic one, changing notions and practices of heterosexual masculinity will form in relation to changing female heterosexualities. And just as women's narratives of love, marriage, and missing men provide clues to both dominant values of masculinity and the diversity of men's expectations and experiences, so too male narrators' stories about their female partners point to ways of thinking about changing Cuban femininities.

New Female Heterosexualities

While Juan's interview provides reflection on competing elements of masculinity—sexual prowess, fatherhood, domestic life, ageing—we also find in it hints of a story largely untold in the interviews: that of female heterosexual desire. In his description of his longtime partner Nora, Juan reminds us that women too sometimes have multiple partners and that they may also negotiate different relationships and identities (married woman, mother, lover, homemaker) simultaneously. Yet these multiple aspects of femininity are largely missing from oral life histories that focus on sexual double standards and the expectations—material and emotional—placed on women as wives and mothers. There is, in other words, a significant gap between the complexities of women's lives and desires, on one hand, and the language available to articulate this in the interviews, on the other.

Different observers of Cuban society and culture have noted this lack of a language for female heterosexuality outside motherhood, marriage, and domesticity. Mirta de la Torre Mulhare argues that prerevolutionary middle-class sexual values emphasized male sexual prowess and largely ignored the question of female pleasure within marriage, and that before 1959 female sexual desire was associated with “indecent” women.⁶⁵ Cuban women interviewed by Elizabeth Sutherland in the late 1960s described the issue of women's sexual pleasure as “the last taboo.”⁶⁶ In the 1980s Rosendahl noted that the sexual double standard was evidenced by the fact that while for men having several sexual partners was considered a healthy display of manliness, a woman's infidelity was the ultimate source of shame for a man.⁶⁷ Uneven attitudes toward male and female sexual activity outside marriage were also evident in studies around sexual health. Statistics on the transmission of sexual diseases indicate that sexual activity among Cubans increased in the 1970s and 1980s. This was much commented upon in the media at the time and led to a renewed emphasis in the 1980s on stable relationships. But these studies also revealed persistent double standards: sexually transmitted diseases were less a stigma for men than for women.⁶⁸

By the 1980s sex education manuals and discussions in the Cuban media indicated a move toward a more egalitarian model of pleasure, one that claimed women and men experienced similar levels of sex drive and emphasized female satisfaction as much as male. But women were still expected to take responsibility for contraception, and some female as well as male com-

mentators expressed regret that women's liberation was becoming confused with sexual liberation. At the same time, the FMC continued to record and condemn examples of the double standard that meant women were expected to bear all responsibility for sexual virtue and were therefore punished if they transgressed the boundaries of traditionally accepted feminine decency. The public stigma attached to sexually active women was one explanation given for young women failing to ask doctors for contraception.⁶⁹

According to Catherine Davies, revolutionary Cuba has provided relatively little place for verbal expressions of female desire. There have been fundamental tensions between a "collective, patriarchal, national ideology on one hand, and women's personal experiences, desires and feminine subjectivity on the other. Little space has been given to matters private or psychological, much less to the sexed female body outside the reproductive role."⁷⁰ One of the few autonomous spaces for women in this context is creative writing, where "[t]he anxieties, desires and fantasies associated with female sexuality and woman's selfhood are articulated outside masculinist, hegemonic discourse."⁷¹ Cuban women had written erotic literature well before the revolutionary period. But during the first few decades of the Revolution such themes were muted. In the 1980s Cuba witnessed a renewed interest in erotic literature, notable in particular for the new visibility of Afro-Cuban female writers and the presentation of women as "dominant, active, even aggressive agents of the sexual act."⁷² In the poems analyzed by Davies, female authors eroticize the male body, and celebrate heterosexual love and women's sexual pleasure in explicit terms.⁷³

Davies's observations indicate that certain cultural forms—women's writing in particular—may be able to articulate desires that find little expression in other forms of discourse, including speech. It is also notable that hints of different forms of female desire—for multiple partners, independence, domestic support, and children—emerge in Juan's tale above of his romantic entanglements, whereas they are largely absent from women's own narratives. Juan's description of Nora is therefore valuable as what John Howard, in his exemplary oral history of sexuality in the American South, calls "twice-told stories" or "hearsay evidence"—"inadmissible in court, unacceptable to some historians."⁷⁴ Howard describes such stories—tales of desire and relationships told in the third person by witnesses rather than direct participants—as "essential to the recuperation of queer histories."⁷⁵ Borrowing from his innovative methodology, I want to extend this necessity to all examples of "hidden"

or “silenced” desires. In early twenty-first-century Cuba female sexual desire—both heterosexual and same-sex—remains largely muted in comparison to public expressions of male heterosexuality and even male homosexuality.

Yet published evidence indicates that throughout the revolutionary period some Cuban women, like many Cuban men, have had multiple partners and that this is widely recognized, even if it is not always accepted. Would our female narrators have spoken more openly about their extramarital liaisons or their desires for different men and different kinds of sex if the interviewers had asked more direct questions about this aspect of their lives? It is impossible to know. But as with other areas of the interviews, the reticence or cultural assumptions of the interviewers may have worked against opening up certain lines of enquiry. For that reason, Juan’s description of Nora is particularly valuable in displaying the complexity of female heterosexuality beneath the myth of “decent” and “indecent” women.

Juan hints that Nora stays with her husband because they have a child together and because his job in the tourist industry is beneficial to her “materially,” although she would prefer to be with Juan (a claim which surely reflects his Lothario self-image as much as Nora’s love for him). Juan also portrays his relationship with Nora as unsustainable because she is too old to have children with him. But Nora’s own needs and desires—her commitment to her son, her need for economic stability, and her sexuality—have also structured their relationship. She has stayed with her husband not only because he is the father of her child, but also because as someone who works in the tourist industry he (by implication) has access to much-coveted hard currency.⁷⁶ As Helen Safa notes, “[i]n the Special Period it became more difficult for women to raise children on their own because of the economic crisis.”⁷⁷ Whereas Juan positions himself as the one who will decide when their relationship ends, his brief description of Nora suggests that she exercises a fair degree of agency in her relationships with her husband, child, and lover. She protects her financial interests and those of her son and pursues sexual relations outside her marriage, even as she is prepared to engage in domestic duties and bear more children in order to maintain these different relationships. Her situation complicates Safa’s portrayal of Cuban women and family life in the early twenty-first century:

At the core of the Cuban family is the relationship between the mother and her children. Although Cuba retains a patriarchal ideology, women and the

female kin group sustain the family, struggling with inadequate budgets, maintaining relationships with kin (even those overseas), and doing almost all the cooking, cleaning and child care.⁷⁸

Missing from this description—which, barring men’s capacity as breadwinners in the context of serious economic constraint makes men superfluous—is the role of men as women’s lovers.

Nora is hardly unique in contemporary Cuba. In 1990, Manuel Calvino claimed that more women were having extramarital affairs, and that more men, in contrast, wanted to save their marriages. Whether or not this denoted “a significant diminution of machismo,”⁷⁹ as he claimed, it does indicate an increasingly open acknowledgement of female sexual agency. It is likely that Nora’s husband is aware of her relationship with Juan, although it is not clear from Juan’s description whether Nora is formally married to her husband. As Safa notes, the status of legal marriage in Cuba has decreased dramatically since 1959 as informal unions have proliferated across class and race. But Juan’s story reminds us that marriage—formal or not—can be used by a woman to secure support for herself and her children, as well as emotional and sexual satisfaction. According to Safa, the status of legal marriage has been “debased” in Cuba through its increased association with material betterment, whether as a means to obtain property or to emigrate.⁸⁰

To return to the opening of this chapter, Nora’s story, like that of Yohani, the young Cuban woman married to a German man, points to a need for more attention to changing patterns of female heterosexuality. Representations of these are still trapped to some extent in competing clichés of the faithful woman constantly betrayed by macho men, on one hand, and the exotic, sexually liberated Cuban woman, on the other. As with narratives of masculinity that go against the grain of tales of bravado and womanizing to include experiences of fatherhood and attempts at egalitarian domestic arrangements, a consideration of the diversity of female heterosexual desire and relations, as well as the ways in which women exercise agency in sexual liaisons with men, adds a complexity to the existing history of heterosexuality in Cuba. Without underestimating the enduring importance of patriarchal power relations, such research would also act as an important counterpoint to ahistorical portrayals of Cuban male and female sexuality as essential and unchanging.

FOUR Memory, Revolution, and Homophobia

In early 2007 the brief appearance on Cuban national television of an aging functionary gave rise to a spirited debate among Cuban intellectuals about the legacy of the country's cultural policy in the early 1970s.¹ Known alternately as the *quinquenio gris* (five grey years) or the *pavonato* (after the civil servant in question, Luís Pavón Tamayo), this half decade had come to symbolize for many the harshest years of authoritarian control of artistic and intellectual expression under the revolutionary government. The ensuing discussion, conducted mainly via e-mail, raised a number of issues about the legacy of this period, issues posed by several commentators as problems of memory. Of particular relevance to this book, one of the themes that surfaced through the *pavonato* polemic was the widespread persecution of homosexuals during the *quinquenio gris*.

Beginning with an analysis of the *pavonato* debates, this chapter explores the relationship between memory, revolution, and homophobia in Cuba. I argue that the history of early revolutionary homophobia has been neither forgotten, as suggested by some commentators, nor overcome, as is implicit in more official versions of Cuban history. Considering the recollections of narrators of different sexualities, generations, and genders I locate traces of trauma as well as some evidence of amnesia and silence. But the memory of revolutionary homophobia in the interviews, I argue, is best understood as fractured, a metaphor that emphasizes both the impact of history on memory and the uneven transmission of difficult memories across generations.

El Pavonato: Forgotten Histories?

On 5 January 2007 Luis Pavón appeared on *Impronta*, a television program featuring five-minute presentations of figures considered to have left a mark on Cuban national culture. The show focused on Pavón's poetry and did not men-

tion his role as head of the National Cultural Council between 1971 and 1976, an omission that alarmed some viewers. Thanks to the growing use of e-mail communication in Cuba, the following day a number of cultural figures residing inside and outside the country began a series of exchanges in which they debated the legacy of Pavón and the “five grey years.”² Most were outraged that a man associated with censorship and repression had been presented as a notable cultural figure with no reference to his previous political position. The e-mails quickly circulated to people around the world (I received copies from friends and colleagues in Cuba) and prompted reports and commentary in the online press from the United States, Spain, and elsewhere.³

As several of the commentators insisted, the term “five grey years” was a euphemism. One participant proclaimed, “Neither grey nor five years. A decade of horror.”⁴ Others looked beyond the 1970s, making connections between *el pavonato* and previous cultural policy, as well as subsequent acts of repression. Some linked the homophobic persecutions of the early seventies backward to the establishment of the UMAP labor camps in the 1960s, while others looked forward to the mass emigration from the port of Mariel in 1980 and the controversies surrounding the 1993 film *Strawberry and Chocolate*.⁵ A few commentators stressed that institutionalized homophobia was continuing in Cuba at the very time of the debates, most notably through ongoing street sweeps and official concerns about public scandal.⁶

Another notable feature of the debates was commentary on the issue of memory and the related question of generations. The writer Desiderio Navarro asked, “Are we really a country with so little memory that we don’t remember the sorry state to which our cultural institutions were reduced thanks to the work of the National Cultural Council?”⁷ Although, as the poet and essayist Victor Fowler noted, the debate opened with the younger generation, many of the subsequent contributors were sixty or older, that is, people who had lived through the *quinquenio gris* as adults.⁸ In his formal intervention in a symposium organized at the Casa de las Américas cultural center, veteran revolutionary cultural critic Ambrosio Fornet, who is widely credited with coining the term *quinquenio gris*, implied that there was a generation gap in the memory of this period of Cuban history. The young director of the *Impronta* program featuring Pavón, he noted, had not even been aware of Pavón’s political history. But, Fornet continued, this ignorance among Cuban youth was partly the fault of the older generation, who had formed a “pact of silence” to

project their unity in the face of the Revolution's enemies.⁹ If Fornet reminded his listeners of the dangers posed by the failure to engage in self-critique, the *pavonato* debate suggests a desire on the part of many Cuban intellectuals of different generations to remember the *quinquenio gris* collectively.

I introduce the *pavonato* debates of 2007 by way of highlighting the importance of memory to a consideration of the history of institutionalized homophobia in Cuba since 1959. Notably, the terms utilized in the e-mail debate also commonly feature in contemporary transnational popular and academic discussions on memory, in particular silence, trauma, and amnesia. For example, the novelist Leonardo Padura characterizes the *quinquenio gris* as a "trauma" still affecting Cubans in 2007, adding that "Cuban intellectual memory and, even more, the collective memory of the country we live in, needs revision."¹⁰

While trauma, like amnesia, can be a helpful concept in identifying the power relations that shape public discussion about history, I caution against taking these terms literally. They tend to dramatize memory, painting it in stark black and white by highlighting alternatively its profound emotional impact or its total absence. Oral history interviews with Cubans of different generations and sexual orientations, in contrast, indicate that the memory of institutional homophobia is broken but nevertheless present, sometimes faint but never totally silent. Moreover, following Fornet, I locate a "generation gap" in Cuban memories of homophobia, one that can be explained not only by fear of speaking or deliberate omissions, but also through changing dynamics of memory, politics, and desire in contemporary Cuba. Where I depart from Fornet is in his assessment that Cuban homophobia was essentially a leftover from prerevolutionary policy, something that had been overcome by the early twenty-first century. To understand homophobia as "history," is to overemphasize the elimination of institutional forms of homophobia as well as the capacity for official policy to change popular values, and to underestimate the enduring impact of painful pasts on the present.

Remembering Repression

Narrators' memories of homophobic repression in the 1960s and 1970s can be grouped into three categories: (1) accounts of interviewees who self-present as heterosexual and witnessed incidents of homophobia; (2) stories of nar-

rators who, though not directly targeted, witnessed repression at close hand and felt its effect on their own sexual identity; and 3) second- or third-hand memories from narrators who have heard accounts of these repressive years from older Cubans.

Jorge, born in 1942, was interviewed by two male Cubans whose research interests included the history of masculinity and institutionalized homophobia in the 1960s, and who encouraged Jorge to share his memories about this period. Jorge recalled the story of a member of the Young Communist League whose brother had been accused of having sexual relations with another male student at boarding school:

[H]e defended his brother saying that his brother wasn't homosexual. That his brother was a man, that the other one had said, "If you're a man come in with me and we'll do such and such a thing and, to show that you're a man." He went in and performed those acts. If you look at it, it's an interesting defense, because in spite of the errant act there could have been there, if it's all true, that young man went to defend his manliness by engaging in homosexual acts. [...] Now that I'm remembering this I've always thought about that, it must have been like that. Let's take as given that the brother went to defend his manliness, engaging in homosexual acts. It's something extremely interesting, something to make a movie out of, because I've always thought about that, always. When I was working, there was a year I was working in boarding schools, and there were many cases, many homosexuals there. But there was a disposition that you weren't allowed to kick students out. I remember that it was such and such a resolution, nobody could kick anybody out and there were some guys who put out bloomers on the clothesline and the one in charge of the hostel said to me, "Look, professor ..." and whatever. And of course the hostels were administered by the direction of the boarding school there in Tarara.

What year are we talking about?

We're talking about the year '62, which is the year I was in Tarara.

Jorge's fascination with this story not only underscores the way in which memory sometimes dramatizes the past ("you could make a movie about it"). It also has value as historical evidence, pinpointing a time in the 1960s when, even in a state boarding school, a man penetrating another man was consistent with, even proof of, manliness. Moreover, Jorge's memories of the year he

worked at Tarara, on the outskirts of Havana, indicate not only that sexual relations among the male students were common, but also that these relations, in the early years of the Revolution, could not lead to a student being expelled. The importance of this point is noted by one of the interviewers:

There could have been a certain acceptance of certain things because it wasn't as rigid, like maybe it was at the end of the 60s and 70s, with the dictates of Education and Culture and all those problems about "abnormals."

Jorge's story reminds us of the dialectical relationship between history and memory in oral history. His story about Tarara provides valuable evidence of some degree of tolerance for male same-sex activity in the early revolutionary period. But this information arises from the process of subjective memory. It is the juxtaposition of two different memories that alerts both narrator and listener to a wider process of historical change, including developments in official policy toward homosexuality. The importance of this process is confirmed by the next story in Jorge's interview, in which memories of personal events merge with a wider political narrative.

Some years after leaving Tarara and marrying his first wife in 1963, Jorge is living with her and their baby daughter in Havana. Around this time a group of adolescents, probably scholarship students from other areas of Cuba, start making a nuisance in the house next door. Jorge, in his mid-twenties by this time, makes friends with the young people, introducing them to stamp collecting:

So one of those guys ends up in a UMAP camp. He falls into homosexuality and that. I don't know why they'd put him in the UMAP. Because another who was from the neighborhood, who wasn't in this group, they put him the UMAP because he sold perfume. We called him the *perfumista*. [...] He was a well-liked young guy; he didn't have a trace of homosexuality. And this other one I'm talking about was called Miguel. Miguel. They put him in the UMAP. Miguel was a bit. This guy, he was from Miramar. His father was a humble man and he had nothing. He was a corporal. He was where they were holding the homosexual prisoners. I say prisoner in the full meaning of the word. So he had to take them to the doctor and he went with seven or eight sick ones, in a minivan or something that had to take them to a town where there was a medical post. And they called him corporal. That's a tale

Miguel told me: that the homosexuals called him corporal. But of course there were homosexuals, they were practically all raving homosexuals, but it didn't bother him.

This story provides a relatively rare view, albeit secondhand, of the activity in the UMAP camps, with certain prisoners designated as “corporals” in charge of the medical care of those identified as “homosexual.” This is another example of the value of “hearsay” evidence discussed at the end of the previous chapter. If the account reveals Jorge’s ambivalent attitude toward homosexuality (he expresses both voyeuristic interest and clichéd homophobic comments), it is decisive about the repressive nature of the UMAP (inmates were prisoners “in the full meaning of the term”).

The memory of Miguel perhaps gains currency through its association with a certain moment in Jorge’s own history, a time when many of his family had left or were leaving Cuba, when he was starting his own family, and was very involved in revolutionary activities. Maybe the interviewing itself stirs the memory, for Jorge returns to Miguel at the opening of the second interview. He is now talking about a later period, when he has divorced his first wife and moved to another part of Havana:

I left the neighborhood and didn't see any more of Miguel. I don't know if he's in Cuba. I don't know. But Miguel told me about that incident with the homosexuals who were in the UMAP, that he was also in the UMAP. He wasn't a homosexual and they'd put him there in the UMAP. And he never knew why they'd put him there in the UMAP. But he did make an impression on me. That he had been left totally surprised by the friendship and affection that he got from those guys who were homosexuals. That he struggled not to show it, but he was the one in charge of taking them to the doctor.

This passage is weighed down by personal and collective memories of loss. The repeated phrase “he didn't know why he was there” may mean that Miguel never knew why he was arrested, but it also reflects a lingering bewilderment at the very existence of the forced labor camps. Jorge’s version of Miguel’s growing but confused friendship with the “homosexual” inmates is tinged by Jorge’s homophobia, which he projects onto Miguel. Miguel (and through him, Jorge) represents here the new Cuban man, the dedicated revolutionary militant of the late 1960s who, like Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and other revolutionary leaders, defines his manhood through an *expulsion*

of the feared homosexual other. The chain of male friendship (homosexual inmates—Miguel—Jorge—interviewers) spans time, generations, and geographical divides. The statement “I don’t know if he’s still in Cuba” (not “I don’t know what ever became of him”) reminds us both that many of Jorge’s own family members left Cuba and that many of the UMAP inmates also eventually emigrated, of their own will or having been forced out during the 1980 Mariel exodus (as explained later in this chapter). In Miguel’s absence, Jorge transmits to two younger Cuban men the trauma of the generation of UMAP inmates. This secondhand testimony is an example of how the passing of time and the movement of people fracture memory, but do not silence it altogether.

THE MIXTURE OF ambivalence toward homosexuality with memories of the extremity and pain of repression is expressed by another narrator of Jorge’s generation, Olga. Born in 1948 in Santiago de Cuba into a lower-middle-class white family who participated in the struggle against Batista, she lived in eastern Cuba until moving to Havana in 1974. Her interview offers a testimony to operations of homophobia in Cuba’s second largest city during the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. Moreover, her family history reminds us of the wider patterns of repression during this period: some of her relatives were interned in UMAP camps for being Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In relation to her studies at the University of Santiago during the 1960s, the interviewers ask Olga during a first interview about her experience of purges. Olga is somewhat hazy about these memories, emphasizing the role of peer or group pressure rather than institutionalized repression, and speaking at length about the general problem of *machismo* in Cuba, especially in the east. But in the second interview Olga’s memories are clearer, and she relates her impressions of those years to a wider set of political changes during her lifetime:

Yesterday we talked about the question of university courses, men and women, and all that business and a period of our history, which I lived through, which has to do with the UMAP. Did you have any relation in your life, around you?

Around me no. But among us Silvio and Pablito touched us a lot. Silvio Rodríguez and Pablito Milanés, who both went to the UMAP. Because they had long hair. Because they sang something that maybe someone else in-

terpreted as something that shouldn't be. I remember in my day that song, I don't remember now what it's called, "a snow ball, a shot of snow". One that ...

"*Ojalá*."

"*Ojalá*." The song "*Ojalá*" was very controversial in my day and people said that Silvio went to the UMAP because of that song. Because that song, interpreted by certain people very directly part of the government. And because Silvio had long hair, maybe he put on pants with holes. And it was a difficult time, the time of my youth. In the university, people with long hair, they practically analyzed them to take them out of university because it wasn't the standard. It was a disgusting discrimination. And the thing about the UMAP. Look—I didn't even remember that, and people were pretty disgusted with that. People were even scared of being, they even had to change their lifestyle. If you liked having long hair you had to wear it short, otherwise you brought problems on yourself at the university or to get a job. Good grief. People with long hair! That's "*lacra social*" [a social blemish].¹¹ Look. Today I see students who have hair down to their waist. The shell has nothing to do with the intellect. But well, good grief. Those were times and the memories of the UMAP. I remember because those two representatives, those two. And later I see the evolution of man in history. Just so you see [laughter].

The reference to two of Cuba's best-known singers—Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, who were supposedly sent to UMAP camps (something neither of them has ever confirmed publicly)—reminds us that artists were particularly susceptible to the rigor of revolutionary codes of behavior in the 1960s. An interview with a retired Cuban who worked backstage at a theater in Havana during the *quinquenio gris* bears testimony to the persecution of actors in particular. Born in 1922, Arturo was raised in a poor rural environment by his mother. He started working in cinemas during the 1940s and later became a truck driver. In the early 1970s he was among the members of the local CDR assigned to "clean up" a theater in Havana:

A group of comrades from the CDR came because of problems there were here in the theater. Here there were people, young men, homosexuals and that, there was a problem here. [...] No decent person could go in the 70s. Before that, before the thing about Mariel. [...] And we made up a gen-

eral watch group here, so that group was directed by me [...] and we started to clean up.

And what was happening in the Tertulia?

That was a *bayú* [brothel]. Men in the restrooms and when they couldn't get in they started to dance up there like ballerinas and inside the restrooms [...] That was ... and women too. Of course, we had another group, a woman who worked with us and in the women's restroom we sent the woman and she also caught cases. But that was daily. You won't believe it. That was daily. It was frightful and we went to see with the Ministry of the Interior and with *lacra social* and that was when—what do you call it? We kept cleaning up the court. That was at the time of the National Cultural Council.

And in those work relationships, do you think there was some kind of discrimination, if people of that type could work here, homosexual people, lesbians? They didn't let them work?

No, no, young man! In those days they couldn't work here.

And now? Today?

Today, today [laughter]. Today they're working, and they come and ... other things go on, other things ...

Like several of the interviews, Arturo's language echoes official rhetoric about hygiene, which hark back to historical discourses of national cleanliness. Looking forward, his reference to Mariel implies that the mass migration of 1980 helped to "solve" the problem of homosexuality in Cuba by expelling the *lacra social*. Most of the existing literature on Mariel focuses on the experiences of the emigrants. But interviews with those still living in the country demonstrate that more than twenty years after the events of 1980 they continued to be remembered as one of the most dramatic—and, for many, traumatic—moments of the Cuban Revolution.

Memories of Mariel

It is impossible to understand the social and cultural history of Cuba since 1959 without reference to emigration.¹² Since the first groups of Cubans departed in protest at the political and economic changes in the early months of the Revolution, emigration has had a profound impact on all aspects of Cuban life, whether in terms of economic, military, social, cultural, and po-

litical consequences, or the more personal repercussions of the departure of friends and family members.¹³ Emigration features in all the oral history interviews. The words *se fue para Estados Unidos* (“she/he went to the United States”) is repeated often enough to become a refrain. Additionally, many narrators, especially of the younger generations, express the desire to emigrate themselves one day.

Nowhere do histories and fantasies of emigration come together more forcefully than in stories of homosexuality. In the growing field of queer diaspora and migration studies, Cuban migrants to the United States have drawn the attention of a number of scholars.¹⁴ In histories of homosexual life in revolutionary Cuba emigration also figures prominently, intimately tied to the preoccupation with state-sanctioned homophobia in the 1960s and 1970s. The two defining events in most accounts of homosexuality in Cuba are the establishment of the UMAP camps and what has become known as the “Mariel exodus.”

Emigration to the United States is also an important feature of the two best-known cultural representations of Cuban homosexuality to circulate off the island: the 1993 film *Strawberry and Chocolate* and Reinaldo Arenas’s memoir *Before Night Falls*, published posthumously in 1992 and made into a film in 2000 (dir. Julian Schnabel). In both these stories, emigration is presented simultaneously as a solution (to totalitarianism and homophobia in Cuba) and a tragedy (exile, separation, new forms of discrimination, and alienation in the United States). Indeed, outside Cuba at least, male homosexuality is inextricably linked in the popular imagination to exile.

Within Cuba there has also been a conceptual link between emigration and male homosexuality. As José Quiroga demonstrates, the term *gusano* (worm), the insult often applied to those who left Cuba after 1959, is also associated with homosexuality.¹⁵ The American socialist and gay liberation activist Allen Young recounts that during his trip to Cuba in the late 1960s he “heard that Cuban revolutionaries put down *gusanos* [right-wing exiles] by telling them that there is only one thing worse than being a *gusano*—being a *maricón* [faggot].”¹⁶ The association between homosexuality and emigration was also highlighted in the homophobic slogans shouted at the government-organized mass demonstrations against the Mariel migrants.¹⁷ Although narrators’ memories of Mariel are not necessarily associated with homophobia, the interview excerpts that follow demonstrate how traumatic memories of that event are closely connected to images of homosexuality and homophobia.

By 1980 Jorge (introduced above) had been divorced for ten years. He recalls receiving a phone call in the early hours of the morning from his former wife who was living with their children in Miramar, the Havana neighborhood that is home to most embassies. On April 1 of that year a municipal bus had stormed the gates of the Peruvian embassy, initiating a crisis that would see thousands of Cubans flock to the embassy to claim asylum. Jorge describes the ensuing mayhem:

I take the first bus at six in the morning. [...] I see the bus is full. Everyone is going to the beach. And when I get to my stop everyone gets off with me. I say, "Look! What a coincidence!" And I didn't have the remotest idea about the embassy. And when I get to the house and the whole morning people are walking toward the embassy [...] I was especially surprised that one night 11,000 people entered the embassy. The government wasn't prepared for that. And in my very personal opinion the government ... They even offered them little boxes so they could eat. ... Because otherwise people would have starved to death. My children's school was closed to make a kitchen for all those people. The kids were like a week without school to cook for all those people. [...] That was horrible. And I saw—I saw with my own eyes on 84th Street a lot of those acts. Mariel was horrible and it touched me very personally. Mariel touched me because I stayed here in Cuba. My father had died by then. My father's widow, my stepmother, who I loved, and my younger brother. And my stepmother decided to leave and they came to pick her up in a boat. And two days before or three she says to me, "Look. I'm going to leave." And afterwards they made a terrible spectacle. The country turned into a terrible thing, a terrible thing because of the sheer quantity of people who were leaving, and a horrible thing because of the demonstrations against them. The demonstrations against them were frightful. [...] That was—an atrocity. [...] After several days people got into trucks with sticks and said, "We're going to strike down the people who are leaving." That's not—how can we put it?—spontaneous. Because where do those trucks come from and how do people come together, with sticks, to say they're going to strike people down who are leaving? And I called my children and I said, "Look. This business about having demonstrations against people and spitting and throwing eggs. That's an awful mob. That's something incredibly dishonest and no one ..." I was pleased because none of them participated in any of that. [...] That year 1980 I think nationally

brought a reopening. Because later lots of people didn't want to go. They had demonstrations against them here, they were "*gusanos*," "the patria," and all that. [...] The whole "social rottenness." The state didn't realize that that business about creating a new man and all that. You don't do it that way, saying you're creating a new man. That wasn't sufficient. Because in reality there was a huge quantity [of people leaving]. A mass of black people left. [...] We all know what happened. I saw it. First they went to the house of a girl who was homosexual, there near my house, "You—you have to leave." "No. I don't want to leave." And later they went to the house of someone who'd been in prison and had got out, to make him leave. "No, I don't want to go." And he went. I don't know if later that will be erased but I saw it. And I say sincerely it was a terrible moment for such a beautiful Revolution. A horrible thing. Horrible. That should never have happened.

Jorge's lengthy account of the events of 1980—here substantially edited—testifies to the levels of violence, both physical and verbal, directed against would-be émigrés, as well as the revolutionary regime's complicity in this violence.¹⁸ His memory, as someone who witnessed this violence directly and who decided not to leave Cuba, bears traces of collective trauma and shame. The final part of Jorge's testimony also points to the significant shortcomings in the Revolution's ideals of racial and other forms of equality. He notes, as others have, that for the first time in two decades a substantial number of emigrants were Afro-Cuban.¹⁹ His stories of the lesbian and former prisoner who were taken from their homes by police and escorted to Mariel corroborates other evidence that the security forces rounded up certain "undesirables" and forced them to leave the country.²⁰ This account not only highlights the ways in which the Cuban government took advantage of the 1980 crisis actively to divide Cuban society and to discriminate against certain parts of the population. It also contradicts the claim, made by some Cuban émigrés in the United States, that *all* Cubans were anxious to leave the country.²¹

BORN IN 1966, Marcos was fourteen at the time of Mariel. As a black man who speaks at some length about racism in contemporary Cuba, particularly the increased inequalities since "dollarization" was introduced in the mid-1990s, Marcos feels an affinity with the Mariel generation, which included some of his friends and family members. Although Marcos presents himself as someone who fulfills the requirements of a revolutionary, his wife inter-

rupts the interview at one point, declaring, “*Tu eres tremendo gusano*” (You’re a big traitor). At the end of the interview, asked to give three wishes for the future, Marcos includes among them leaving Cuba. His account of the events of 1980 shows another side to the claim that the government was anxious to rid itself of “undesirables”:

I remember that period vividly, how that was here. People left. Understand? “So-and-so left.” First it started at the Peruvian embassy. [...] From there people wanted to leave and there were even lots of people who passed for inverts or thieves. Because they put themselves down, they wanted to leave here. And I remember that they went to the houses of the people who were leaving, to jeer. They threw eggs, they wrote on the houses, “Scum get out!” “Lumpen get out!” Which was the word: “*Los lumpen! Los lumpen!*” It’s someone, I don’t know, a delinquent, “*Los lumpen!* Scum get out!” I remember they jeered, they even wrote on their houses and they threw eggs and—“Leave!” Man. At that time if you left the country you were like a monster. They even hit you and everything because I remember that. “Scum get out!” People leaving. We saw that in photos and everything. It lasted for months. It started in April and lasted like up to July. I remember people leaving and you heard nothing in the street but “Hey—do you know who left?” “Who left?” “So-and-so?” “No way!” And people leaving and leaving behind empty houses. Hell! People went and they put down their names. Just look how anxious people were to leave. Normal people, people like us, we went and we said we had problems, that we were thieves. They weren’t thieves. They weren’t anything. They were normal people. But they wanted to leave. When they blew up the anxiety, they interviewed people to abandon the country. And people went and said, “I’m a thief. I was a prisoner.” Lots of men even pretended to be homosexuals and everything. And women too. So they could go. Back then for homosexuals it was faster. They went and said, “The worst should leave. The scum. The worst.” So they made themselves pass as homosexuals. [...] I remember, let me make an allusion to something I remember. Since the President of the United States was Carter the people said, “Let the Carteristas leave!” Understand? [laughter] [...] It was funny. “Let the Carteristas leave!” And that was the devil. I remember I had a lot of friends who left at that time. Man! I remember a little white guy who studied with me. [...] His parents took him. And I remember Yeyito too, his parents took him and he died there. Yeyito. I remember. I remember

quite a few people who left, friends, neighbors and that. Lots. People from the neighborhood that I remember and that. Who left. A cousin of mine, look. I have a brother who left. My older brother left and in fact we never knew anything more about him. He's never written to us. I don't know if he's alive, if he's dead. My brother's never written again. He must be fifty-something years old by now too. And he left a son, family, wife, everything. He up and left.

Mariel is not the only moment associated with emigration in Marcos's interview. He also talks about people leaving through the U.S.-sponsored lottery instigated by the Clinton administration in the 1990s, and recalls a group of friends who died trying to travel in a small makeshift boat to Miami during the *balsero* (raft) crisis in the summer of 1994. In the interviews, the events of 1980 and 1994 are sometimes "telescoped," merged as if they were one. But the two periods maintain different associations: whereas the *balsero* crisis is linked to wider memories of the economic crisis of the early Special Period, Mariel evokes a language identified with antisocial and counterrevolutionary activity. Words like *lumpen* and *escoria* (scum) are repeated frequently with reference to Mariel. In Marcos's interview, as in that with Jorge, homosexuals are a symbol of this "antisocial" collective, confirming Quiroga's argument about the conceptual link between homosexuality and counterrevolutionaries.

But Marcos's interview adds another dimension to this connection, underlining the performance aspect of sexuality. He claims that many Cubans pretended to be homosexuals in order to get permission to leave the country.²² Marcos's memory echoes a scene in Arenas's *Before Night Falls*, in which the writer has to prove his homosexuality before a group of psychologists at the port of Mariel by declaring that he is "passive" (sexually "active" men were not considered "real" homosexuals and therefore could be denied permission to leave). Arenas was required to walk up and down in front of the officials to make his point.²³ These acts of reverse "passing" highlight what Paul Julian Smith calls "the imprecision of definition" of the category homosexual in revolutionary Cuba.²⁴ While the term was used by some Cubans to identify and repress certain individuals, it could be used by others in an attempt to escape that repression.

RICARDO WAS RAISED in Havana by his mother and a stepfather. The latter kicked him out of the house after Ricardo brought a number of male friends home. Born in 1970, he was ten years old at the time of Mariel and does not have many direct memories of that period. But he has heard stories from older acquaintances. In the interview excerpt that follows, Ricardo and a friend who sat in on part of his interview recount some of these stories:

At Mariel? The time of Mariel? I don't have a lot of experience with respect to that but as far as I understand from the stories I've heard they were very repressed. Everyone who was a prisoner they put in boats and they deported them to the United States, whether they wanted it or not. They forced them to leave because what they tried to do was to clean up, to say that in Cuba there's no homosexuality. What they did was everyone who was a prisoner, everyone they caught in the street dressed as a woman, everyone in the street who was too, too obvious, they took them prisoner and they sent them to Mariel. And today they come to Cuba and they're kings.

But do you guys not think there could be a change (. . .)?

G (Friend of Ricardo): No. No. What's changed is the mentality of the repression. Because in the old days it was a little more open. For example, in the year 1980 as Ricardo was explaining, that was a time when if you wore a bit of makeup you were arrested and put in prison. I mean, you went to a reclusion center where they put you to work. They said to them, "Make yourself a man!" Because I have a friend of mine. He's not here anymore. He was in prison at age fourteen. In the year 1980 they sent him behind his mother's back, directly, to take him so he went to the United States. For no other reason than being gay. And his mother made demand after demand. They had to let him go. He didn't want to leave! He, politically he didn't want to go. He felt good here and for nothing more than wearing a bit of powder, who knows why, he plucked his eyebrows a bit, because he didn't like them thick. I mean, things that don't . . . In the old days they saw . . . Now the repressive mentality has changed a lot.

These descriptions corroborate the evidence, provided by Jorge and others, that some people were forced to leave in 1980 just for "being gay." Like Marcos's tale about people "pretend[ing] to be homosexuals," Ricardo claims that men who "dressed as women" were most likely to be arrested, similarly underlining the association between male homosexuality and certain signs of femininity.

But Ricardo's comment at the end of his description of the events around Mariel adds another aspect to the tale, suggesting a mythical element to the history of the Mariel emigrants. In his account, people who were socially marginalized—whether as prisoners, homosexuals, or other kinds of “deviants” before 1980—return to Cuba in later years and are “kings.” This remark reflects the ambivalent attitude many islanders have toward émigrés. On one hand, most Cubans living abroad have access to significantly greater economic resources than island-dwellers. Remittances sent from overseas constitute one of the most important sources of foreign currency in Cuba and are therefore welcome. Moreover, when émigrés return “home,” they are widely expected to show off their economic success through generosity: bringing gifts and money to family and friends and paying for drinks, food and other luxuries while in Cuba (even if this is beyond their financial means).²⁵ On the other hand, evidence shows that Cubans who immigrated to the United States after 1980 have been much less economically successful than those who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁶ Thus, Ricardo's impression of the Mariel migrants being “kings” actually reflects a general stereotype of the Miami Cuban blessed by the American Dream rather than the actual economic success of those who left in the 1980 exodus. It also highlights the strong element of fantasy invested by many young Cubans in emigration.

Media Memories

The popular association between Mariel and (male) homosexuality is acted out in the best-known cinematic representation of the history of revolutionary homophobia, *Strawberry and Chocolate*. Released in 1993 during the worst years of the Special Period, the film is often considered to signal a tacit recognition of past errors and a move toward greater tolerance. The interviews as a whole corroborate the view that *Strawberry and Chocolate* was a landmark, and narrators who have same-sex relationships express a guarded optimism about the impact of the film. Saray, born in eastern Cuba, who was just ten years old in 1993, provides her assessment:

Well, that film seemed wonderful to me, wonderful. And I think at the same time as wonderful, sad. Because it was sad that a person had to leave his country so he could be accepted in another place, because his country, or the people who live in his country, didn't accept him. And he had to change his views because that artist in *Strawberry and Chocolate* was a revolution-

any person even if, even if it's not obvious in that moment. But yes, he was someone who loved a lot and knew lots of history. Very educated. He wrote a lot about the Revolution and he had a lot of projects to bring his grain to the Revolution and to what was happening in Cuba in that period. And it was very sad that he had to leave because his people didn't accept him and for that reason I want the media to treat this issue. That's how it is, the culture he had, what he could bring. He was someone who dedicated himself to works of art. Who could bring his grain of sand to the culture. Maybe represent his country in other places. And yet he had to leave because he couldn't live in peace in his country because of the discrimination. Because no matter where he went he couldn't be who he really wanted to be.

Saray's interpretation of the character of Diego as a misunderstood revolutionary may reflect her own sense of feeling out of a place in a society she considers home and to which she is committed, but which she senses rejects her because she identifies as a lesbian. Moreover, her reflection on the tragedy of having to leave Cuba may stem in part from her own desire, expressed in a later interview, to emigrate in order to live her sexuality more freely, as well as to find a better economic future for herself.

Roxana, a lesbian-identified narrator born in Santiago de Cuba in 1964, similarly reflects on the changes brought by *Strawberry and Chocolate*, following a discussion about popular Cuban soap operas:

There's a contradiction, because there's a group of people who are in agreement that each one does with her or his life what they want. And there's another group that says, that are shameless, that this shouldn't be on TV, or on radio. They showed a Cuban soap opera that caused a big polemic all over Cuba. [...] Where there was a gay guy, and the story goes that in this relationship he's not protected, he gets AIDS, but well the soap was all about this person who had AIDS. And the story of the homosexual comes out and that soap brought a huge polemic here in Cuba. But it helped us because many people understood homosexuals. [...] Recently, recently. It was called *Del lado oculto de la luna* (The Dark Side of the Moon). [...]

[P]eople have said to me that when the film *Strawberry and Chocolate* came out there was also a change in attitude.

That too. [...] The film *Strawberry and Chocolate* I think was one of the first things that had a real impact on the whole population, because it touches on the theme of homosexuals. And maybe the polemic started among a

part of the population, which is in agreement, and the other that isn't. Because the mentality has started to change, it's started to evolve. The soap that's on now, the Brazilian at this moment, is about a lesbian couple and they treat it so gently and beautifully. People start to understand it better, and I think that if the media kept up this kind of work, demonstrating really how we are and how we think, in the future there will be more acceptance. Because, it's trying to reach the feelings of the person, for the person to understand, that we're people like everyone else. The only thing is that we have another sexual preference. I think that that's helped a lot.

For some readers outside Cuba, Roxana's concerns about what are known in English as "positive images" of homosexuals and lesbians may seem outdated, associated with the period before the influence of poststructuralist and queer understandings of the relationship between representation and identity. But in revolutionary Cuba television and film have historically been important in generating public debate about key social and political issues. Discussions about the relationship between media and social change therefore differ from those in the capitalist West.²⁷ While this does not preclude queer readings or competing interpretations (for example, Saray's qualification of Diego as a "revolutionary" would not necessarily be shared by all viewers), the concern of most of our Cuban interviewees was the elimination of stereotypes and the portrayal of what they considered more realistic and humane homosexual and lesbian characters in the media.

Eusebio, born in 1971, whose stories of homophobic repression are recounted in the next chapter, shares similar concerns:

I don't have a video player so I can't tape a sequence of soaps. The one, for example, that's on now is the Cuban one. It's nice. [...] The Brazilian, well, it has its ... sometimes here they cut a bit out in the sense that they don't copy it, or they copy it in a certain way. It goes, as we say, through the filter. And what isn't convenient gets cut. You never see the soap as it really is. [...]

What gets cut?

Things that, I suppose, don't interest them. Like, for example, there was a soap some time ago, I don't know how many years ago, that had, there was a part where ... there were two women, a couple. And they always tried to cut it, so that people didn't see it on television as a normal thing. I mean, a soap like that is normal, but here in Cuba there are many taboos, and the taboos are not easy to get rid of.

Where was that one from?

Brazilian.

And how did you find out that there were bits missing [...]?

Because there was a person who had it at that time, the whole thing, who had brought it over from there. One of life's little coincidences. And I had already seen that soap before.

And does that happen a lot?

Yes, that happens.

How does it go? Between friends?

Well that, we'll have to leave that there [subtle laughter]. [...] But, for example, here things have been liberated a bit since they showed the film *Strawberry and Chocolate*. Which is when things started to liberate a bit what is, let's say homosexuality. It's liberated. I mean homosexuality, even on television. But let's say to the point that there is depravity at this moment. Depravity. Yes, there's a lot. Corruption, in the sense of homosexuality. A lot of disrespect. As I said at the beginning. You don't have to carry a poster or dress as a woman, to say who you are. That's how it is. So yes, in society ... they "allow it" ... in quotation marks. Because they don't welcome it.

For Eusebio, *Strawberry and Chocolate* has had a mixed legacy, giving rise to a greater degree of freedom but also to what he sees as depravity, a theme that arises several times in his interview (see chapter 5). This passage also highlights the role of state censorship, both through prohibiting the circulation of certain programs and through editing. What Eusebio refers to as a "coincidence"—the fact that he had seen the entire Brazilian soap opera on a friend's video before the censored version was shown on Cuban television—is actually part of a widespread practice in the early twenty-first century, one quite out of the hands of the authorities as the circulation of illicit videos and DVDs increasingly compete with state-run television as viewing among Cubans. In the early twenty-first century, the case of the censored Brazilian soap opera was taken up by the nascent discussion group at CENESEX of women who love women, who complained to Cuban television.²⁸

In a country without commercial television stations, the question of state cultural policy is paramount. A number of participants in the *pavonato* debates introduced at the opening of this chapter noted that while *Strawberry and Chocolate* had received a wide audience and much acclaim outside Cuba

and had been broadcast regularly on “Cubavisión Internacional,” residents on the island had only had access to the film in cinemas.²⁹ These accounts challenge the “official version” of the history of *Strawberry and Chocolate*, replacing the widely accepted tale of rectification and progress with one of caution and censorship. In the spring of 2008, no doubt in reply to these public criticisms, the film was broadcast on domestic television for the first time.

According to Stephen Wilkinson, *Strawberry and Chocolate*, like Leonardo Padura’s novel *Máscaras*, functions to end the “national amnesia” surrounding the “injustices which were perpetrated on homosexuals” in the 1970s.³⁰ While this is one possible (and positive) reading of the release of the film, an assessment of the memory of *Strawberry and Chocolate* must move beyond what may or may not have been the intentions of the director and his supporters in the Cuban government, to a consideration of how official policy interacts with popular perceptions and collective memory. The comparison with Padura’s book is a telling one. Though he is an internationally translated and celebrated detective novel writer living in Havana, Padura’s novels are not easily available inside Cuba. *Máscaras*, first published in Spain in 1997, tells the story of Marqués, an aging theater director whose character is based on the acclaimed playwright Virgilio Piñera. (Piñera was arrested in the early 1960s and his homoerotic writing reportedly provoked the fury of Che Guevara.)³¹ In the course of solving the mystery of the murder of a young transvestite friend of Marqués, the homophobic and *machista* detective Mario Conde uncovers the history of revolutionary homophobia, particularly during the “five grey years” of the early 1970s, which had condemned Marqués and other homosexual intellectuals and artists to internal exile and silence. In his contribution to the *pavonato* debates, Padura locates *Máscaras* in the context of a need to write about the “infamy” of those years and what he calls “the loss of memory and the manipulation of forgetting, encouraged by those who are only interested in recording statistics, facts and favorable moments from their positions.”³²

As this analysis suggests, the “official version” of the chronology of homophobia in Cuba has been to some extent incorporated into popular or collective memory, with *Strawberry and Chocolate* seen as a turning point in official attitudes toward homosexuality. The contested memory of the film indicates the extent to which an officially accepted narrative of historical change can be reflected in popular memory even as historical evidence demonstrates

that the process of events was more complicated. But a comparison of the oral history interviews with the *pavonato* debates also indicates that there is more than a memory gap between official versions and popular history, on one hand, and intellectual history, on the other. There are also different perceptions of which *modes of representation* count most in terms of changing public attitudes toward homosexuality. Padura and the other contributors to the *pavonato* debate focus almost exclusively on the big names of Cuban culture, setting up an implicit contrast between “high art” forms (cinema and literature especially), with their political integrity and ability to challenge the status quo, and popular culture, epitomized by television, which is much more susceptible to censorship and “the manipulation of forgetting.” In our interviews, in contrast, cinema and literature (Padura’s novels are not even mentioned—again, probably because they are difficult to find and expensive to buy inside Cuba) are secondary to televised soap operas in their impact on the general population.

As scholars of transnationalism and globalization increasingly stress, the idea of “national culture,” historically problematic in any case, is made all the more so by the proliferation of new technologies, including satellite television and the Internet, in the early twenty-first century. Contemporary Cuban cultural studies would do well to take into account not only developments in “national” culture, but also the increasing importance of transnational forms, including the ubiquitous Latin American soap opera, produced in various countries and exported around the region. The lack of academic research on Cuban-made and imported soap operas, in contrast to the expansive literature on “traditional” Cuban cultural forms—especially film, literature, and music—also reflects a gendered construction of *telenovelas* (soaps) as “feminine” and domestic (despite the fact that they are typically aired at night and watched by men as well as women). Whereas *Strawberry and Chocolate* and *Máscaras* offer a masculine history of homosexuality, soap operas are historically notable for their strong female characters, which more recently include women who have sex with women. The focus in much scholarly work on a small number of cultural texts, predominantly from film and literature, goes some way in explaining the relative lack of attention to female same-sex desire in studies of homosexuality and homophobia in socialist Cuba.

Forgotten Female Same-Sex Desire?

While most of the interviews cited above highlight the impact of revolutionary homophobia on men, the memories of persecution of lesbians during the Mariel crisis, and later accounts of representations of women in same-sex relationships on television, point to a largely unstudied aspect of the history of sexuality in Cuba. Although there is little published evidence of official policy or views of female same-sex sexuality, a number of narrators recall that women were also affected by homophobic repression during the early revolutionary period. For example, Ileana, born in 1950, whose memories of single motherhood and heterosexual marriage appear in the introduction and chapter 3, recalls that she witnessed discrimination against young women accused of being lesbians when she was at school:

What other reflection do you have about those who have a different type of sexual orientation?

Well. In my period in the countryside there in Camagüey there where some girls in secondary school who people said were homosexual. Lesbians. And with those girls, I interacted with them at school, but in terms of being intimate with them and that, I never, with that type. I never had intimate relationships with that type of person. And so there in Camagüey there was an operation and they were taken away.

And what year are you talking about?

The year '67. [...]

Who took them away?

Directors from Education.

Historically, Ileana's story coincides with the period in Cuban history when persecution of homosexuals was increasing. It was also around this time in the late 1960s that Jorge (see above) heard about a young man trying to have his brother absolved of charges of homosexual activity in a boarding school. Ileana's tale indicates that female as well as male students were vulnerable to accusations of illicit same-sex activity and that, moreover, female teachers could also be deemed a threat to young people. Similar evidence is provided by outsiders. For example, during his trip to Cuba in 1969 gay American journalist Allen Young heard about two young women whose love letters were read aloud at a school assembly before they were expelled.³³

But the clearest evidence of the impact on women of homophobic policy in

the 1960s and 1970s comes from female narrators who lived through that period and had—then and/or later—relationships with other women. Yolanda is the partner of Juana, introduced in chapter 2. The interview with this older female couple reveals substantial generational differences in their memories of homophobia. While Juana, born in 1935, lived through the early revolutionary years as a married woman and then a divorced mother, Yolanda, born in 1944, experienced the 1960s as a young woman who moved from her native Santiago to study in Havana, where she witnessed the impact of growing homophobia directly:

I wasn't a victim of that. But it did affect me. Imagine what it meant for a young person who's there in that glorious and ethical moment of the Revolution, which was freedom, which was a marvel. Like I already told you, I was the daughter of a working-class family. My father had to steer hard to maintain his four children and his wife, my mother, who didn't work. And the arrival of the Revolution, for us, imagine it, was like a fairy tale. [...] I came to Havana with a scholarship. And so, to confront that which had no explanation of any kind. And on top of it, in humanities, where there were people in arts, history, apart from anything else, not because they were my mates, but they were the most intelligent, most talented. Even though the purge started in medicine. The horror was in the faculty of medicine. Then in humanities it was different. People were called by a trio from the Young Communists, from the School. So, living with that anxiety and thinking of your parents and that. But well, nothing happened. Nothing happened to me. But I can't deny that it happened, that I lived with that. [...] It's *machista*, this whole story about women being more sacred than men. It's a lie. It's not true. This thing about women—I'm not going to say that there were women in the UMAP, because that was a camp for men. But women were purged because I knew a number who were kicked out. [...] various *compañeras*. Yes, I did live through it. [...] I was a girl from the provinces, used to dressing in a certain way. Because it's like I say, each one has his or her moment to take on, to come to terms with, youth. And when you realize something is happening in your life, all of a sudden, like that. It's like there are people who from very early on know "this is happening to me." Before that occurred to me I had boyfriends and I loved them a lot and I was attracted to them and I fell in love. So it was a personal world for me. There were other *compañeras* who were, as they say in the street *muy fuerte* [very

strong],³⁴ who were very obvious. But not at all. I didn't have any problems. They never called me up, never. But my friends, yes, my mates. And this thing that you start to internalize, that business about, "Don't meet up with so-and-so, because they say that so-and-so ..." This, that and the other [...]. As far as I know there were no camps for women. I'm not aware of camps for women. I'm not aware either of any women who ended up in prison. Years later I still don't know of any cases of women who were imprisoned for being lesbians. I don't know any. But yes, you see discrimination. And this Cuban culture, there's a very homophobic culture, because of *machismo*, although Cuban society is very homosexual. Because between men there is a subterranean homosexuality that shows when they're in confidence. That's my opinion. [...] I've never been a victim of discrimination. Not racial, or sexual, or economic, or for family reasons or for personal reasons. But I was—that was my moment, you understand? That was my moment of discrimination, against homosexuality. It was very cruel being at university, suddenly saying to someone, "So, where's María? I haven't seen her for a week." And they say, "Ah, but didn't you know? María was kicked out." That, for a young person—I say it and admit it and at some point I'm going to write it down. For me that was traumatic.

Echoing her partner Juana's description of the Revolution as a "love story," Yolanda calls it a "fairy tale." But even though, unlike Carlos from chapter 2, for example, she never became disillusioned with the magical promises of the Revolution, Yolanda's memories of its first decade are marked by "horror," "discrimination," and "trauma," alongside the joys of youth and young love. On one level a history of the public purges of homosexuals from universities in the 1960s, Yolanda's tale is also a retrospective consideration of what she knew and did not know about herself and about life and love in that decade. These were years, she implies, before she had had sexual relationships with other women. Yolanda's memories also indicate the process by which public homophobic decrees were privatized and internalized by young people who increasingly distanced themselves from classmates who had been singled out as antirevolutionary. Her memory also suggests how women were separated into different categories. Yolanda believes one reason she herself was never "called up" was that she dressed in a "certain way." She contrasts this to other women who may have appeared *fuerte* (strong or masculine) and were therefore more likely to be targeted, suggesting that the revolutionary preoccupation with normative gender extended to women as well.

Odalys was born in 1958 to a family of farmers and workers in a small community in eastern Cuba. Her mother was a domestic worker, her father a truck driver and later an agricultural worker. Like many poor Cubans of their age, Odalys's parents were never legally married. Of her rural childhood in the early 1960s she remembers in particular that one of her grandfathers was never afraid to speak in public to stigmatized social figures, including sexually marginalized people: women and men who sold sex or had same-sex sex. Odalys moved with her family to Havana in the mid-1960s where she studied until secondary level and later worked in various administrative jobs. She defines herself as a *mujer fuerte* (strong woman) and says she has always known she was a lesbian. As a schoolgirl, she was in the Young Communist League but gave up her membership in the mid-1970s after seeing a number of young people expelled for various offenses:

I didn't like it. We had a meeting, about whether so-and-so was a lesbian. There were a few. There were five cases. One because she was a dyke. The other because she had coconuts, her mother had coconuts in their house, saints and I don't know what. [...] The other because they were antisocial.

How was "antisocial" defined?

He didn't work or he wasn't revolutionary.

Odalys's description of the purges of the early 1970s is corroborated by wider evidence of the hardening of discrimination in this period. Additionally, the way in which the tale is drawn out, with Odalys insisting that she did not approve of this process but was never reprimanded for turning in her membership card, constitutes a tale of rebellion: the story of the politically principled woman who neither opposes the Revolution nor bows down to it when it goes against her values. This is a common theme in the interviews among narrators who express broad support for the revolutionary system but have never been party members—a position that allows them a certain degree of dissent.

Yohanka, born in 1961 in Santiago de Cuba, is just three years younger than Odalys, and while she knows something about the history of homophobia in Cuba she goes into much less detail about it. Yohanka similarly presents herself as a rebel, but whereas Odalys's story focuses on political rebellion, Yohanka's inhabits the realm of the personal: she boasts of her early exploits with a number of women, including romances at boarding school when she was a teenager. Although she was never punished for this behavior, Yohanka

recalls schoolmates being expelled for their supposed sexual relationships with other girls. She likewise recounts a story of a male teacher and student at a university in the late 1970s:

[T]hat was the scandal of the year. They kicked them out. Both of them. Back then, you couldn't go out to certain places because you were homosexual. Society discriminated against you for everything.

The stories cited above, told by women still living in Cuba in the early twenty-first century, have parallels in reports from people who left the island during the 1960s and 1970s. One lesbian interviewed in the United States recalls that she was refused employment in Cuba because of her sexuality, despite the fact that she had been a dedicated revolutionary, participating in voluntary brigades and other activities.³⁵ Another recalled that during the 1970s political advancement in the Communist Party or mass organizations depended on hiding one's sexuality because the accusation of being a *tortillera* (dyke) was commonly used against people as a way of damaging their careers.³⁶ "Proven" cases of lesbianism could result in months or even years in prison. Where evidence was lacking, the accused would be observed for a month, further damaging their political prospects.³⁷ In order to be admitted to clubs or restaurants, people had to present themselves as heterosexual couples.³⁸ This woman's testimony also underscores the importance of the respect of family members and friends who, even when they knew someone's sexuality, did not discuss it openly or report it to the authorities.³⁹

These examples indicate that homophobic repression during the 1960s and 1970s affected women both emotionally and physically, in some cases damaging their social networks, destroying their relationships, and/or limiting their educational, professional, and political prospects. The cases cited here also help to explain why women's experiences have often gone unrecorded in histories of revolutionary homophobia: many of them took place in spaces, such as boarding schools and female prisons, which have largely been off the radar of such studies, which tend to focus on universities and cultural organizations, the UMAP camps, and men's prisons.

In considering how to incorporate women's stories into the history of institutionalized homophobia in the early revolutionary period, we might turn to recent reworkings of trauma theory in queer studies and feminism. When Yolanda describes as traumatic the memories of the homophobic persecution she witnessed in the 1960s, she points to the wider and lasting impact of this

oppression beyond the individual men and women directly targeted. This resonates with Ann Cvetkovich's innovative work on trauma in lesbian public cultures in the late twentieth-century United States. Cvetkovich's research expands our understanding of trauma beyond what she calls "the most catastrophic and widely public events" and "trauma survivors" to incorporate as well "those whose experiences circulate in the vicinity of trauma and are marked by it."⁴⁰ The interviewees of different sexualities cited above recall with evident shame and repulsion the homophobic tones of the manifestations against those who left the island during the Mariel exodus of 1980. Similarly, Yolanda's memories of the fear and anxiety created by university purges and forced labor camps in the 1960s help us to trace the collective memory of early revolutionary homophobia beyond those most obviously affected by it. That Yolanda and many of the others interviewed remain loyal to the Revolution opens the possibility of a history of sexuality in contemporary Cuba that incorporates trauma without falling into binary categories of good and bad sexualities, or good and bad revolutionaries.

Some of the interviewees cited above are more willing witnesses to the traumatic history of homophobia in Cuba than others. For example, Odalys's story about her objections to purges from the Young Communist League openly acknowledges a history of official persecution at the same time that it reminds us that there was room within the system to protest without punishment, implicitly challenging those versions of history that paint the Revolution as relentlessly authoritarian.⁴¹ In contrast Yohanka, when asked if she was aware of the labor camps where homosexual men were sent during the 1960s, declared emphatically, "No. We know nothing about that," suggesting, rather, that she was not prepared to talk about that aspect of Cuban history, perhaps especially with a foreigner.

These examples remind us of the double bind that many Cuban interviewees find themselves in when talking about their country's history. Oral history in Cuba is viewed with suspicion by many outsiders, who assume that Cubans will be afraid to "tell the truth" (as if any interview or historical narrative could ever be entirely truthful) for fear of recrimination. But without ignoring the potential political and social consequences of certain kinds of open critique in Cuba, I suggest that the reluctance to bear witness to the painful and controversial aspects of the Revolution stems as well from an acute awareness of the ways in which examples of prejudice and persecution have been used by outsiders to discredit the revolutionary project in its entirety. In the

long American propaganda war against Cuba the issue of homophobia has often featured. The anti-Castro alliance forged between gay Cuban exiles, such as Reinaldo Arenas, and the U.S. right during the Reagan era is one example of this.⁴² Cuban oral history narrators are aware, no doubt, of the risk that the history of female and male same-sex desire will become a litany of suffering—all pain and persecution, no pleasure or progress. The reluctant witnessing that characterizes some of the interviews discussed here is neither a denial nor forgetting of history, but points to an awareness of the personal and political price of talking about painful pasts in the context of the ongoing controversy inside and outside Cuba surrounding revolutionary homophobia.

Fractured Memories: Children of the Special Period

In a 1986 interview Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, then director of the National Institute of Sex Education, said that the “mistake” of the UMAP was best relegated to history: “Those camps are a fact of the past that everybody considers a mistake, and they are over. I’m convinced that the young people under 25 years of age don’t even know about them and don’t even know what it means—UMAP.”⁴³ Similarly, in his assessment of the 1988 film *No porque lo diga Fidel Castro* (“Not Because Fidel Castro Says So,” dir. Graciella Sánchez), in which young Cubans who have same-sex relationships appear to live and gather openly, Marvin Leiner writes, “The film implies that UMAP is ancient history for these young people—if they even know it occurred.”⁴⁴

These assessments from the 1980s mark a time in Cuban history—the decade of “rectification”—when official attitudes toward homosexuality were beginning to change and past “errors”—including the UMAP camps and purges of the 1960s and 1970s—were increasingly acknowledged. They also express a vision of history as progress: now that past mistakes have been recognized, institutionalized homophobia is no longer an issue in Cuba and the oppression of past decades is best forgotten. Interviews with younger Cubans (those born during the 1970s and 1980s and whose childhood or young adulthood was fundamentally shaped by the economic crisis and changes of the 1990s) suggest otherwise. For them, state-sponsored homophobia remains a problem in the early twenty-first century (especially in the form of police harassment: see chapters 5, 6, and 7), and the history of persecution in the 1960s and 1970s is not “ancient history.” Rather, this period is a fractured memory for those who came of age in the Special Period. They have some awareness of

events, often garnered from stories handed down by older friends, but there is no collective memory that lends itself to the construction of a counter-narrative to the official story that early revolutionary homophobia has been rectified.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. First, notwithstanding the release of *Strawberry and Chocolate* (which, as argued above, was not universally viewed inside Cuba as is often assumed) and the more recent *pavonato* debates, there is relatively little public representation of the history of institutionalized homophobia inside Cuba. This is not part of the history of the Revolution taught in schools or through other official channels. Thus a number of the younger Cubans interviewed claimed never to have heard of the UMAP and the labor camps did not come up in most of the interviews with people born after the 1960s. Equally importantly, most of the interviews with people under age thirty-five focus on the present and future much more than the past. Younger narrators identify the challenges they face as Cubans with same-sex desires not with historical homophobia, but with contemporary prejudice, social problems, and economic restrictions. There is no suggestion that these young people have not experienced homophobia. But they live it as a daily reality and connect it to wider personal and social challenges around them in the immediate present.

An interview with a self-identified gay man, Ricardo, born in 1970, just before the “five grey years,” indicates that memories of the UMAP camps and early revolutionary repression have to some extent been “passed on,” but that, as with much popular memory, these memories do not map neatly onto official knowledge of this history. Living in a historically working-class neighborhood of Havana at the time of his interview in 2006, Ricardo was asked by a British interviewer:

And do you have an oral history, for example, of the UMAP?

With respect to what?

UMAP—the camps where they put gays as prisoners.

No. I’ve never had any knowledge of that. [...]

They’re forced labor camps.

Yes, yes. I mean, I have a few stories that I’ve been told. Look. I tell you they see them in the street dressed as a woman, or when they passed a paper over your face and if you had a bit of powder you were taken to prison, to a camp. And there they put them to work. They cut their hair, and everything,

and they made them work hard, in the quarry, and things like that. Yes, yes. I do know that they say. It's true. Because friends of mine who are much older lived through that period, they saw a lot in that time. It was when the majority of gays, all gays, were gays but repressed. So those who had the courage to show it were, those who went out in the street, they were taken prisoner.

While initially he claims not to have heard of the UMAP, Ricardo's declared lack of knowledge does not indicate an unwillingness to discuss Cuba's history of homophobic repression, as was the case with Yohanka. Once prompted with some key terms—prisoners, forced labor—Ricardo begins to recall stories heard from older friends. His second- or thirdhand account of what he knows about the camps echoes some of the recorded testimonies of men who were interred there—head shaving, hard labor, quarry digging⁴⁵—suggesting that certain details have become particularly associated with these camps in popular memory. Ricardo's original lack of recognition of the term "UMAP," however, indicates that for Cubans living on the island memory of the camps is not attached to their actual name but rather to a series of associations with them. Whereas among Cuban intellectuals and outsiders "UMAP" by now has a (however inappropriate) resonance similar to "gulag" or even "concentration camp"⁴⁶—a synonym for state terror—among the general Cuban population the horror of the camps is not necessarily evoked by their name alone.

Ricardo identifies strongly with his sense of sexuality, speaking early on about discovering his "true self" as a teenager when he became sexually involved with other men. He also speaks at length about the discrimination he has experienced as "gay"—the term he uses for himself. Like most young narrators who identify as homosexual or lesbian, he has many stories of police harassment in public places and provides numerous examples of social marginalization in the areas of work, housing, and day-to-day life. When asked to comment on whether life had improved for gays in Cuba since the 1980s, he provides an interesting assessment of the complex dynamic of change and continuity:

No, well, from what they tell me, gay people years ago it was worse than now. Because before, for example, for being homosexual you were sent to prison. For being homosexual, for having a bit of powder on your face you were put in prison for years. Now it's got a bit better but it's still the same, practically the same because when they want they take you, for example,

they take all the transvestites when they want. Understand? From one perspective it's got better but changing in time, I mean, now they're smarter.

This excerpt implies an irony in claims that the homophobia of the 1960s and 1970s is subject to “amnesia” in Cuba. In Ricardo's accounts, institutionalized homophobia has not been forgotten; but nor is it *history*. It is an ongoing reality that, while having undergone certain changes, nevertheless continues to impact negatively upon the lives of many women and men in Cuba in the early twenty-first century.

I do not argue that everyone in Cuba is aware of the history of institutionalized homophobia in the early revolutionary period, anymore than citizens in most countries have detailed knowledge of the shameful aspects of their nation's histories. But the idea of “amnesia” is too general and simplistic to capture the complexity of memories of the UMAP and other forms of homophobic repression in Cuba, even if these memories are sometimes fractured and do not attach themselves to accepted official historical terminology. In considering the relationship between history and memory in relation to homophobia in Cuba, we must also be aware of how historical events have intervened to fracture memories of homophobic repression. The interview with Ricardo underlines the role of homosexual men who lived through the 1960s and 1970s as adults in passing their memories on to the younger generation. An obvious deterrent to the *public* dissemination of this knowledge is the ongoing official and self-censorship in Cuba that substantially restricts access to information on the island, especially among nonelite Cubans. When I mentioned the *pavonato* debates to Laura, born in 1958 and in a same-sex relationship, she reminded me that most Cubans neither have access to email nor attend cultural events at the Casa de las Américas. While there is widespread speculation that the singers Silvio Rodríguez and Pablo Milanés, spent time in an UMAP camps in the 1960s, they have remained silent about whether these rumors are true. The majority of eyewitness accounts of the UMAP have come from abroad, from men who left Cuba in the years after the camps were closed. Access to these testimonies is limited inside Cuba, and they are inevitably caught up in wider debates about the legitimacy of “exile” memories of the Cuban Revolution. The dissemination of personal memories of the 1960s and 1970s even outside Cuba has been affected by emigration and a terrible accident of history: the generation most likely to be interned in the UMAP—that is, men born between 1930 and 1950—coincided closely with the age group

most directly affected by AIDS during the 1980s. It is difficult to know how many Cuban men, like the writer Reinaldo Arenas, having left the island via the port of Mariel in 1980, later died after becoming infected with HIV in the United States. But one anecdote provides an idea of the scale of the tragedy: a friend who attended an AIDS conference in Montreal in the early twenty-first century recalled that an older Cuban man thanked the Cuban delegation for addressing the injustices of the country's homophobic past and bringing justice for all those whose lives had been affected by it. This man was the sole survivor among a group of male acquaintances who had left Cuba at the time of Mariel.⁴⁷

As the following two chapters make clear, the impact of popular and institutionalized homophobia remains a central concern for women and men with same-sex desires, even as they recognize historical change and the efforts since the 1990s to combat homophobia. One paradox, however, of initiatives in early twenty-first century Cuba to recognize the equality of homosexual and transgender people in Cuba, a process that offers tacit acknowledgement of the history of revolutionary homophobia, is that it may actually reinforce rather than challenge unequal access to historical knowledge. If, as the interviews as a whole suggest, the popular memory (as distinct, though not entirely separate, from intellectual debate) of institutionalized homophobia is at best a fractured one, the contemporary celebration of sexual diversity may come at the price of a truly democratic history that recognizes the ongoing and complex legacy of early revolutionary homophobia.



FIVE Homosexual Histories

This chapter uses an interview with one man as the basis to explore a number of themes in relation to male homosexuality in contemporary Cuba. Pachy is a white, self-identified homosexual man. He was born in rural Cuba in 1964 but at the time of the interview with two female Cuban researchers in 2005 had lived for twenty years in a popular suburb of Havana, was in a long-term relationship, and worked in a local state-run factory. Pachy's life story does not follow a clear chronology but is recounted instead as a series of anecdotes. In analyzing these alongside excerpts from different interviews with men who have sex with men, in addition to other cultural and historical texts, the chapter highlights a series of themes: migration, sexual identity, the body, homophobia, sex, work, and community. It suggests a further exploration of these issues may contribute to both the history of Cuban sexuality and contemporary transnational queer studies.

A Poor Rural Childhood

Like many narrators, Pachy recalls a poor but happy childhood. Stories of his upbringing also prompt memories of sexual discovery. After framing his early years—a modest rural family, an unhappy mother, a neglectful and unfaithful father, his parents' divorce, two older sisters, his early studies, his love of dancing—Pachy announces:

I fell in love with a young girl from school. A contradiction since you two know I'm a homosexual. And in those days I had my relationships, well—I left out some things from my childhood that, where things started.

Pachy states his sexual identity early on, implying that he was chosen as a narrator precisely for this reason. Later in the interview he returns to some of the things that he had originally "left out":

That adolescence I told you about and all those things happened in my childhood and I didn't have a father and I always said to my sister: "I hate Dad," because I didn't have a father. I had a lot of sexual relations, because that's normal in the countryside as you both know. I had lots of relations with animals. That's normal. I went out with my friends, we went with cows, with calves, with all those things, all the animals. There wasn't a single one that escaped [laughter]. Because that's a period when you want. . . . And since the countryside isn't the same as the city where maybe you have more opportunities, maybe with a woman. I was a very, very, very bad person. When I was a child I was very, very, very bad. Imagine—there was a lady who had a daughter who said if I married her daughter I would kill her. Just look how I was! I went out and got all muddy and threw things. I was bad. I was very bad.

You didn't have work? You didn't work?

To this last question, Pachy replies, "No, thank God," and briefly explains that he wasn't "born" for farm work. But then he adds, "Well, I deviated from what I was saying," brushing aside the interviewer's question about work and returning to his main theme, his earliest sexual experiences:

At age thirteen or fourteen this person had a taxi, his name was Manu, a fat guy, very fat. He lived in the countryside. [...] He told us how he had a woman here in Havana, that he was going to take them there, that they were looking for young guys who had quite a big "thing." In those days they talked to you about that. And you're driving along and you're getting excited. And so the man tells you to show it to him to see if it's big, not to wear you out, the guy coaxes you so much that in the end I fell for it and he took it in his hand. Afterwards he did whatever he wanted until I was satisfied. And I liked that because it was someone who was taking what I wanted. So when I passed in front of Manu's house I got aroused. [...] Between how I was raised and this man who gave me a little push, I fell into this. I started in the army, and I went out for a stroll and I bumped into Manu, he picked me up in the taxi and took me wherever, but before we went by a street and parked and there we were. So he started to teach me that homosexuals also kissed. Because I was just the active one, as we say, I was the active one with him and I finished and I went home. So I went, "homosexuals kiss too." What he wanted was for me to get involved in that. [...] And my parents never imagined a thing because Manu was a married man with two children, etc.,

etc. He put me in that life. I was studying at the time and I had my girlfriend and all that but I liked it. With my girlfriend I had quite an active sex life. It wasn't anything. . . . I have photos of her, she had an amazing body. They called her the attacker because I was very skinny, small. And well. That man was the one who practically got me into that.

There are more than a few crossovers between Pachy's story and that of Reinaldo Arenas as recounted in his autobiography *Before Night Falls*: the dirt poor but erotically charged rural childhood where young boys have sex with animals and older married men, the absent father and repressed but loving mother, and, later, the homoerotic world of male-only spaces (the army for Pachy, work brigades in the case of Arenas). In our team discussions of the interview with Pachy one of the Cuban researchers noted that Arenas's memoir—which has circulated clandestinely in Cuba since it was published in 1992—had served as an important example for the framing of homosexual male narratives in late twentieth and early twenty-first century Cuba. Among the elements shared by the stories of Pachy and Arenas is the largely unstudied topic of sexual migration inside Cuba.

A number of historians, theorists, and ethnographers studying same-sex desire in different countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries note the frequency with which rural women and men migrated to large urban centers in search of same-sex sex, relationships, and community.¹ In the early twenty-first century, growing interest in globalization and transnationalism has shifted the focus from people's movements within national borders toward their movements across and between them. But some scholars nevertheless stress that "sexual migration" must be considered in relation to passages across *and* inside national boundaries.² According to Kath Weston:

the symbolics of urban/rural relations figure in the peculiarly "Western" construction of homosexuality as a sexual identity capable of providing a basis for community. The part played by urbanization in the creation of a homosexual subculture is already well established. The part played by urban/rural contrasts in *constituting* lesbian and gay subjects is not.³

The urban/rural contrast is an important element in the constitution of sexual subjectivity in the narratives of Pachy and Arenas. But there is a significant difference in how what Weston calls the "sexual geography" is mapped in these Cuban accounts and in those of the U.S. queer subjects in-

interviewed by Weston. She notes the importance of imagination and fantasy in constructing cities as places where others “like us” exist.⁴ The countryside, in contrast, is characterized in many American rural “coming out” stories as a place of isolation, where the narrator remembers being the “only” gay person.⁵ Another common theme in Weston’s interviews is the contrast between the representation of the countryside as a place of surveillance, persecution, and a lack of gay presence, versus the city as a space of tolerance, anonymity, and queer community.⁶

A similar imaginary functions in the stories of Pachy and Arenas, but in reverse. For them, the rural landscape is a space of sexual openness and possibility, while the city (in this case, Havana)⁷ is marked and marred by danger and surveillance. The city/countryside juxtaposition has an additional relevance to Cuban revolutionary history. As elsewhere, much popular discourse in the 1950s and 1960s contrasted rural innocence to urban immorality. This ideology had a particular hold on Cuban revolutionary leaders. Many of the Revolution’s early radical policies—in education, health, and work—were aimed most directly at the countryside. Peasants were often portrayed as the essence of the new Cuba, and early revolutionary rhetoric celebrated the purity of the countryside in contrast to the “decadence” of 1950s Havana, associated with U.S. imperialism and capitalism. This juxtaposition relied in part on the construction and condemnation of an urban underworld populated by gamblers, prostitutes, and homosexuals. According to Marvin Leiner, Cuban psychologists and doctors in the 1960s “seemed to be unaware of homosexuality in rural areas and perpetuated the myth of the ‘purity of the countryside.’”⁸

A number of commentators on homosexuality in 1950s Cuba have nonetheless reiterated this view. Havana under Fulgencio Batista was, according to the U.S. gay activist Allen Young, both an aggressively *machista* and homophobic environment *and* the only place in Cuba where homosexual men could live relatively openly and find employment.⁹ Other scholars have argued that there was a migration of Cuban homosexual men to Havana in the period before 1959, away from the restrictions of the countryside and in search of sexual freedom, social anonymity, and economic opportunity.¹⁰ Even Leiner claims that, “[a]s in all parts of the world, homosexuals in rural areas, where deviance from patriarchal culture was not easy to sustain, left for the big city.”¹¹

However, while portrayals of life in rural Cuba before and after 1959 do sometimes present an image of a constricting “patriarchal culture,” with rigid

male-female roles and social hierarchies, such a scenario does not necessarily preclude male same-sex activity. To the contrary, the childhood memories of Arenas and Pachy present a proliferation of such activity as an integral, if unspoken, part of prerevolutionary rural life. In his accounts of his poor rural childhood near Holguín in eastern Cuba in the 1940s, Arenas describes a pastoral paradise in which youthful male eroticism knew only the bounds of nature, and boys and men freely and frequently had sex with each other and with animals, without threatening the traditionalist, patriarchal, heterosexual values of the countryside. The importance of silence in maintaining the status quo is underlined by Arenas's remark that being called a *maricón* (faggot) in rural Cuba was tantamount to disaster.¹² Arenas implies that this status quo was maintained in part by the fact that male-male erotic activity was a secret *among men*.¹³ Thus, in Arenas's world, male sexual pleasure is predicated simultaneously on silence and a gendered economy of knowledge. The coexistence between same-sex practices and overt homophobia can be explained by the cultural and historical distinction between sexual practices and identity. In mid-twentieth-century Cuba, as in many places, male-male sex was not necessarily seen as a threat to heterosexual relations and family life, whereas public life as "a homosexual" was.

While recognizing the evidence provided by life stories of male same-sex activity in pre- and post-1959 rural Cuba, we should be wary of taking childhood tales of endless erotic adventures at face value. As with Weston's American "coming-out stories," we could interpret the "sexual geographies" of Cuban male homosexual life stories not as literal portrayals of country life, but as part of a spatialized "gay [or homosexual] imaginary." Accounts of childhood sexuality are recounted, like all stories, within and against a set of wider discourses, including, in this case, revolutionary rhetoric about rural purity and the association of homosexuality with undesirable, unproductive, and counterrevolutionary behavior. *Before Night Falls* is a passionate cry against the injustices of revolutionary homophobia, and Arenas's descriptions of a childhood characterized by limitless rustic sex have to be read in part as a reaction to the revolutionary regime's association of the countryside with political, and by implication sexual, virtue.

This is not to say there is no truth-value to these tales. But understood within a wider polemic we can see that such stories may be exaggerated for both political and narrative effect. In any case, who had sex with who or what, and how much, is ultimately just one set of questions pertaining to the his-

tory of homosexuality before and after the Revolution. If anything, the attention accorded the autobiography of Arenas, including speculation about the accuracy of his accounts of his promiscuity, may serve to draw attention away from the lack of historical research on male—and female—same-sex sexualities in the years before and after 1959. Pachy's testimony contributes to this project. His story is by no means universal, but it does suggest strong links with other interviews and life stories with Cuban men who have sex with men.

A Soldier's Life

At age seventeen, after winning a scholarship for military school, Pachy travels to Havana, some way from his family home, for the first time. Notwithstanding his original fears of the army as a life of "slavery," Pachy performs well at military college and enjoys his studies, recalling with evident pride his graduation ceremony in 1984, which took place in the Plaza de la Revolución with Raúl Castro, then head of the armed forces. By the time he graduates and begins to work, Pachy says, he already has "an active homosexual life." But he makes clear this was lived *outside* his studies and military work:

My studies were above everything else and I went by the principle, "Where you eat you don't shit," to put it vulgarly. In the military I was studying with an entire hostel full of men. And I never, ever had sexual relations or even provocations with any of them. Not because I wasn't interested, because in a unit with 800 people there must be 300 who might interest you. But well I said I was going out the door, on top of it dressed in a uniform. Which they had to respect.

Pachy is aware of the paradox of living in a barracks full of men and leaving that homosocial space to seek male lovers outside. This pattern eventually becomes too much; he is sent away to work in his home province and finds it increasingly difficult to get leave to return to Havana to visit his partner. He eventually decides to apply for a discharge on the basis of incompatibility with army life. In the course of the investigation into his case Pachy learns that his attempts to conceal his sexual liaisons with men have been in vain:

Counterintelligence read the paper that said I was asking for a discharge based on that, and said to the chief colonel, "No, he can't ask for a discharge

based on that. He's asking for a discharge for something else." So they call me in and they sit me down. They had been following me for some time, because it looks like they realized I was homosexual, but they had never been able to catch me with anyone. Because I'm telling you I was very discreet and I tried to make sure no one realized. This is a funny story. At school, at work people realized perhaps because I'm a bit weak. You always show something, even if you don't want to and I tried not to, but it showed. So they called me a *mariposa* (butterfly or "queer") and I didn't know it.

Pachy is interrogated at a military tribunal, where the counterintelligence forces reveal that they have been following him for some time and know much about his sex life and partners. Hearing this, Pachy concedes and declares: "Yes, it's true, I'm a homosexual." To his surprise and relief, the colonel in charge of his case allows him to take leave discreetly and without further repercussions.¹⁴ One of the interviewers asks Pachy how his family reacted, and whether they were homophobic. He replies:

No, no, no. They were a very humble rural family. Country people are very humble, very simple and so to have a problem like that in the family. But no, people didn't talk about that there. Never. People didn't talk that way back there. I think I was the only one in that neighborhood. And there were like twenty houses, each with a family, and there was never a case of "so-and-so is homosexual."

This is an example of the commonly cited principle that in rural Cuba, like much of Latin America, *se hace todo, se dice nada* ("everything is done, nothing is spoken"). This is not the only time Pachy refers to the humility and simplicity of rural life and people. In migrating from the countryside to Havana Pachy not only takes up an "active" homosexual life; he also aspires to hide his rural roots:

I'm a very forward person, I'm from X. I fool around a lot with people because I say I studied in Europe. I don't tell anyone I was born in X—just fooling around, understand? Because I'm very much from there. I've been lucky no one's been able to say to me, "You're from X" or "You're a peasant." And that makes me very proud. Because, for example, if I say a word wrong I want people to say to me, "You don't say that, you say this." So I don't say it anymore.

Pachy portrays the move to Havana, and the decision to stay there, as both a necessity and a sacrifice. He contrasts himself and his determination to make it in the city in spite of the significant challenges (work, money, and housing, for example) with friends who have left Havana to return to their *tierras* (places of origin). The image of the city as a tougher environment than the countryside runs counter to official discourse celebrating rural labor as necessary for the building of revolutionary character. This image may reflect a nostalgic image of the countryside (where Pachy never actually worked) as well as the harsh realities of life in Havana from the 1990s onward. But it also implies a challenge to stereotypes that homosexual men are too weak to work. Pachy's image of himself and his partner Raúl as hard workers is an important element in their identity as respectable citizens.

The Uniform and the Body

Visually, Pachy's passage from countryside to city is represented through descriptions of the body and clothing. The dominant image of his childhood is of being *descalzo* (barefoot), a word he repeats several times. Bare feet signify the carefree nature of childhood at the same time that they represent the rural poverty of the 1960s (like the wooden houses with thatched roofs described by many narrators). They are one of many representations of the body and clothing in Pachy's interview. His military uniform becomes a particularly striking symbol and tool in negotiating professionalism and sexuality inside and outside the army barracks. He associates his uniform with the ability to present himself as heterosexual. Military dress also represents physical attractiveness and sexual allure. The uniform and the army have the magical ability to change Pachy's body:

I was an ugly person. People told my mother I was the ugly duckling. I was an ugly person, I'm telling you, very ugly. And I really changed. I wasn't a star, but well. And it's not just because I'm saying it. People said it to me. I had a good body. It's like the military, the exercise, all those things and my adolescence did that and it changed me. And my face changed a lot.

On one of his early trips back to his hometown, Pachy picks up a young woman on the bus:

As soon as the girl saw me she went crazy, because everyone said that dressed in uniform I looked great, very elegant. I caught people's attention. Even homosexuals in [my hometown] said, "You're really attractive! How handsome you look in your uniform."

The uniform's apparent ability to transform Pachy's appearance, to attract both women and men, and to aid in his passing as heterosexual, can be attributed to what Marjorie Garber, following the early theorist of homosexuality and homosexual rights activist Magnus Hirschfeld calls the "'fancy dress' aspect of soldiering."¹⁵ Noting the high incidence of cross-dressing in the army, among both female and male soldiers, Hirschfeld claimed that "[m]en who wore uniforms did so in part because they unconsciously understood them to be 'fancy dress.'"¹⁶ While there is no indication in Pachy's interview that he cross-dresses in the sense of wearing women's clothing, his descriptions of the transformations afforded by his military uniform do suggest the "interplay of forces" listed by Garber, especially "acknowledged and unacknowledged homosexual identity, . . . the erotics of same-sex communities, and the apparent safety afforded by theatrical representation."¹⁷ Combined, these help to explain the complex and even contradictory appeal of the uniform for Pachy. By wearing it in order to attract men as well as women, he may imagine that the uniform allows him to display his homosexuality when and as he chooses. As such, Pachy is aware of it as a kind of costume.

The uniform represents both the secret pleasures of the all-male barracks *and* Pachy's apparent ability to hide this pleasure by passing as heterosexual. Pachy's use of the uniform plays with the cross-cultural tension between the military as an officially sanctioned space of upright heterosexual masculinity, and the illicit erotics of the all-male homosocial space. In the Cuban context, the conflict between the dangers and pleasures represented by the uniform is heightened by the historical fact that men who had sex with men were targeted for internment in the UMAP camps of the 1960s, designed to "discipline" them through rural labor and turn them into "new (heterosexual) men" and good revolutionaries.¹⁸

Pachy never mentions the UMAP. This may be because the interviewers do not raise it, or this silence may attest to the fractured memory of early revolutionary homophobia, as argued in the previous chapter. But a number of moments in the interview bear witness to the persisting vulnerability of the male homosexual body. One example is the memory of the suicide of an ex-

partner, Andrés. Pachy's is not the only interview in which the suicide of a loved one brings back painful memories. In his cultural history of suicide in Cuba, Louis A. Pérez Jr. notes that since the mid-nineteenth century suicide rates on the island have been among the highest in the world.¹⁹ Pérez does not offer a single explanation for Cubans' propensity to take their own lives in disproportionate numbers; but he does explore relevant social discourses:

Suicide was possessed of multiple gender protocols in, for example, the distinct ways that men and women brought an end to their lives, generally apprehended as methods of a death "properly" pertaining to the different ways that men and women lived their lives. The diversity of ways that men and women killed themselves entered popular consciousness as gender-fixed attributes of the act of suicide. Men killed themselves in certain ways by virtue of being men.²⁰

These "certain ways" typically involved guns or hanging; women, in contrast, usually killed themselves using poison or household products.²¹ There was an element of practicality here: "Men and women tended to commit suicide by the means most commonly available."²² But these divergent methods also reflected deeply ingrained views about gender difference. Thus, "conventional wisdom suggests that women who chose to die by their own hand were averse to methods of death involving disfigurement," for example, shooting.²³ For men, in contrast, guns represented social expectations of "male dispositions toward violence."²⁴ Social relations and cultural values also shaped the reasons given by Cubans for killing themselves. For example, from the nineteenth century through the twentieth, male domination of the household and domestic violence were major factors in female suicide.²⁵ At the same time, popular cultural forms such as the bolero (a musical form derived from Spain), as well as "a larger moral environment," represented suicide as a "culturally appropriate response" for women abandoned by a male lover. In contrast, "male suicide for love was commonly perceived as an unmanly act."²⁶

Pérez does not discuss the relationship between sexuality and suicide, or whether homophobia was a factor in high suicide rates.²⁷ However, his analysis of the different forms and representations of male and female suicide indicates that taking one's life was shaped by, and in turn shaped, the understood gender of the suicidal person. Expanding on this, I suggest that in reacting to the loss of his male lover by attempting first to kill himself by cutting his wrists, and then successfully taking his life with prescription drugs (forms of

self-destruction more common among Cuban women than men),²⁸ Pachy's ex-lover Andrés died a culturally "feminine" death. That such an association endured well into the revolutionary period is indicated by the example of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez's Special Period novel, *Dirty Havana Trilogy*. A chapter entitled "Suicide of a Faggot" describes the attempt of a homosexual man to kill himself with an overdose, contrasting this to "real men" who take their lives successfully by shooting or hanging themselves, or jumping off buildings.²⁹

Pérez also observes that following the Revolution of 1959 there was a moral prohibition against suicide.³⁰ This marked a shift away from earlier Cuban nationalist discourse that praised death for the *patria* (especially among soldiers) as noble sacrifice. As indicated by official reaction to the death of one of the heroines of the 1950s resistance movement, Haydée Santamaría, Cuban leaders considered suicide an affront to the ideal revolutionary life.³¹ Within this context, the death of Andrés can be understood as doubly transgressive. His suicide by overdose in reaction to the loss of a male lover marks him as a feminine man *and* as a traitor to the Revolution.

On Being "Homosexual"

In considering the gendered codes of suicide in Cuba, I refer to wider social discourses around suicide and not to how Pachy, Andrés, and other homosexual men identify themselves. Much of the literature on male same-sex practice in Latin America stresses a traditional model that differentiates between "active" partners who do not identify as homosexual and are not socially marginalized, on one hand, and "passive" or receptive partners who are stigmatized as feminine and homosexual, on the other.³² Pachy indicates that he is aware of this model, but does not associate it with himself. In reference to his relationship with Andrés and his decision to end it, he says:

We were together for three months and we never made love because he wanted to be the active one, to be the man, and I didn't. We'll have sex but complete sex—you to me and I to you. And that thing about him wanting to be the man and so we kissed, we caressed each other, but we never had sex as such. [...] He always wanted—and since I'm not like him. Because, how is it that you're going to do more than me? You're equal to me, not more. And I always confronted him. And it looked like no one had ever confronted him. May he rest in peace, poor man.

In an earlier section of the interview, cited above, Pachy implies that his first venture into same-sex activity as a boy or adolescent involved his being the active partner and that he had to be taught—by the taxi driver, Manu—that others forms of erotic activity, including kissing, were possible between two men. Pachy's recognition of different forms of same-sex desire and activity suggests that in the Cuba of the 1980s different varieties of male homosexuality coexisted with one another. There are parallels here with the case of Brazil, where from the 1960s scholars began to notice a pattern in which the traditional *homen-bicha* ("real man" and "fairy") coupling was joined by new forms of sexual identity. According to James Green:

Urbanization, the expansion of the middle class, an endogenous counterculture, changes in gender relations, and international gay cultural influences all contributed to the construction of this identity, which was similar to the gay identity that developed in the United States in the 1930s and '40s.³³

In the case of Cuba, the coexistence of different understandings of male homosexual identity suggests the influence, dating from the prerevolutionary period, of American and European homosexual forms alongside traditional Cuban, Caribbean, and Latin American patterns of male same-sex desire and practice.

Pachy is notable in being one of the few narrators who speaks directly about sex *acts*: kissing, caressing, and active and passive roles. He also refers to nonmonogamy, at one point stating that he and Raúl "sleep with other people." The centrality of sex and sexuality in the interview is demonstrated by the fact that the only mention of race comes in the context of a direct question about interracial relationships:

And in terms of the skin color of the young men and your partners?

Well, *chica*, I've had partners of color. Not dark but well, they were *de la raza*.³⁴ Because we met and they attracted my attention. I never had, we never, our family was never against, racism, never, that was never talked about. In our neighborhood there were very few, but there was a house that was the only house that there were some *negritos*, but they got along well with us.

This excerpt goes on at some length, describing other childhood encounters with *negritos* (literally, "little blacks")³⁵ and ending with the question, "What were you going to ask me?"—as if to indicate that the diversion into race has

now ended. Pachy's comment that race and racism were never discussed in his childhood probably reflects the lack of public discourse on these issues during the first thirty years of the Revolution. But this silence did not necessarily equal a lack of racial discrimination, as Pachy's use of popular and patronizing language to describe Afro-Cubans indicates. The decision of the interviewers (two middle-aged women, one white and one black) not to pursue this issue further may reflect a desire to avoid encouraging further painful exhibitions of racism in the interview. But Pachy's own quick dismissal of the issue hints at a largely unstudied aspect of male same-sex desire in Cuba, that is, the common cultural association of male homosexuality with whiteness, and the need for further interrogation of the relationship between race and same-sex desire.³⁶

IN REJECTING the (implicitly outmoded traditional and rural) active-passive model of homosexuality in favor of more "equal" relations, Pachy seems deliberately to distinguish himself from other homosexual men. With reference to his seventeen-year relationship with Raúl, he says:

We're people who all our lives haven't liked socializing with homosexuals as such. Because we've always been like, "He who walks alone, pays alone," understand? And Raúl and I are alone from start to finish.

This echoes an interview with another narrator, Eusebio, born in 1971 and thus some ten years younger:

I almost always go out alone. Either I only go out when I'm alone or when I'm in company or when I have a partner I go out in a couple. But not to look for groups, because I don't like that. I say I can go out but I don't like to go out with a sign announcing the thing. It's not my ego, it's not because I'm a saint. It's not that society is going to censure me. I don't live by society. I live my life because if I live by society I won't live. It's because we're very . . . um, scorned. We're marked. So I can go out, I can make visits, but I don't go on parade.³⁷ Like people live nowadays. Wherever you go you see a transvestite. Wherever you go you see depravity. These days wherever you go you see it being done. In the park, at the bus stop, everything. In any old place, wherever you go you see a scandal wherever you go you see, as they say, *un play*. It's a famous Cuban word we use, it means a show. So I don't like it.

Both Eusebio and Pachy construct a sense of sexual identity through distinguishing themselves from certain “others.” The issue of presenting oneself as respectable and being treated with consideration in public runs through both interviews, as it does with that of a third man of Pachy’s age, Guillermo, born in 1963. The latter stresses the importance of privacy at home, of not allowing other people to meddle in his affairs or invade the small domestic space he shares with his partner. It might be tempting to read these interviews as examples of “internalized homophobia” or hypocrisy. Certainly the persistent portrayal of the transvestite and the *loca* (“queen”) as examples of what Eusebio calls “depravity” point to the limits of solidarity in the midst of both economic crisis and homophobic repression. But in all three interviews the recurring preoccupation with privacy and security in the streets implies that presenting oneself in a certain way in public is a survival strategy. This is borne out by Eusebio’s story of being attacked in his own neighborhood and being dismissed from his job after being wrongly accused of corrupting a minor.

In these interviews, the dangers of the street are closely related to the social stigma associated with certain looks, especially those associated with femininity. As Pachy says of his long-term partner:

Raúl’s been a teacher for me. He’s taught me a lot about life. He’s taught me things. For example, I was quite effeminate. You could really tell about me. And Raúl, maybe you can see things as well but he’s different from me. Raúl taught me that. That nobody has to know just by looking at us that we’re like that. So now we go out in the street and people ask us, “Are you brothers, twins?”

The image of Raúl as Pachy’s teacher recalls earlier references to Manu, who taught Pachy that homosexuals kiss, among other things. These examples of being “taught” how to be homosexual and to appear in public underscore the theatrical element of sexual identity and undermine the notion of sexuality as something natural or biological. But Pachy also shows an interest in theories of male homosexuality that interpret it as a medical condition with roots in early childhood:

My mother always dreamed of having a son [...] and in the end I was a boy, but I was homosexual. I know that hurts her, that it’s brought her a lot of pain. But at least I’m relaxed because I know she’s never wanted for any-

thing from me. I've given her everything. If I have two pesos one is for her. I've lived. We homosexuals have always been like that, generally speaking. Not everyone, but well we've always struggled for our mothers.

Pachy's interview veers between an oft-repeated desire to distance himself from any sense of homosexual community or collective identity, on one hand, and his repeated declarations on the nature of homosexuals and homosexuality, on the other. Here he attempts to explain the origins of his sexuality:

I tell everyone because we homosexuals, it happens to us. I don't know anything about what theories there are but I know parents influence a lot in the deviations of their children. Because I never had a masculine presence in my family. It was always my mother, my two sisters, and me. My mother watched TV and said to my sister, "See that handsome man, how good looking," and whatever. And so I looked at that man, didn't I? And when I was dressing I was with my two sisters and my mother. I didn't even know when my father shaved, or how my father did anything. My father was always [...] working in the dairy, there was no relationship with him. He never took me to a house by the beach. Never. Nothing like that.

Pachy's use of the word *desviación*—deviation—suggests that he understands his sexual orientation as a departure from a norm, or a form of perversion. (In Spanish, the term *desviado*—deviant—means, as it does in English, "sexual deviant" or "pervert," as well as one who deviates from a given route.)³⁸ The interview makes other allusions to official rhetoric around homosexuality. Although Pachy claims ignorance about "theories" regarding sexuality he also expresses awareness of medical explanations of its "causes" and even that he conceives of homosexuality to some degree in these terms. At one point he appeals directly to the interviewers for their opinion, referring to their professional status: "Sometimes people say that homosexuals are homosexuals because they want to be and you two must know about that because you're professionals and that's in the mind and it can't be avoided." But this claim that homosexuality is "in the mind" is contradicted by Pachy's repeated references to his absent father and his close relationship to his mother. In reiterating this scenario, he echoes earlier medical opinion on the "causes" of homosexuality. In the 1960s and 1970s Cuban doctors and social scientists borrowed from American medical diagnoses of homosexuality, developed in the 1940s and 1950s, emphasizing the absent father and the overly protective

mother.³⁹ Even though official rhetoric began to change in Cuba by the late 1970s, with the introduction of sex education programs that viewed homosexuality as one of many varieties of sexuality as opposed to a form of deviation, Pachy's repetition in 2005 of older medical theories is testament to the enduring force of the view that homosexuality is "caused" by an excess of feminine influence and a lack of an adequate paternal role model in childhood. This view is not restricted to Cuba, of course. But it is notable that Pachy seems to accept this theory of sexual "deviation." The persistence of such theories into the twenty-first century is indicated by the comment of another man in a same-sex relationship, Guillermo: "Lots of people think this is an illness, a plague, that we're corrupt. But it's not like that."

As suggested above, Pachy and Eusebio distinguish their own homosexual identity and public behavior by contrasting themselves to the stereotypical *pájaro* or *loca*. In differentiating among different kinds of homosexual men, their interviews are reminiscent of Arenas's list of "Las cuatro categorías de las locas" ("the four categories of gays"),⁴⁰ which can be read as a parody of ethnographic classification of different homosexual "types." Nonetheless, the distinctions he makes draw attention both to the different ways of performing or hiding homosexuality and to the levels of social and political risk involved in these different performances. Transvestites and effeminate men bear the brunt of popular homophobia and public censure for sexual impropriety.

Another group that Pachy identifies is what Arenas terms the *loca tapada*—"the covered up" or "hidden" gay:⁴¹

I don't know if I should say this because you two must have your husbands and all that. But in normal life there are tons of married men who are in *el closet*, and it's sad.

It is noteworthy that Pachy, like many Cubans, uses the English word "closet," instead of the Spanish term *armario*, underscoring its foreign origins. Although the idea of the married, hidden homosexual man is hardly foreign to Cuba, the closet is most often associated with an Anglo-American model of homosexuality and "coming out." As Eve Sedgwick declares in her seminal contribution to the development of queer theory, *Epistemology of the Closet*, "[t]he closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in [the twentieth] century."⁴²

Yet a number of writers have stressed the limited value of the closet as a

model for understanding queer identities and communities outside the English-speaking world.⁴³ Scholars of Hispanic queer studies, for example, note that the emphasis on the closet may “seem inappropriate to some Spanish speakers.”⁴⁴ As Ian Lumsden writes, “even though some gays in Cuba have adopted terms such as ‘coming out of the closet,’ it is not clear that these terms have the same meaning and political significance they do in North America.”⁴⁵ With reference to the use of the concept of the “closet” in much English-language queer theory, Gayatri Gopinath argues that the problem lies less with Sedgwick’s original theory than with the fact that “her formulations of the closet and concurrent tropes of silence and invisibility have become totalizing narratives in theorizing queer existence.”⁴⁶ Gopinath cites the closet as an example of a “universalizing tendency within queer theory” that “disregard[s] other possible epistemic categories or tropes of spatialization that may exist outside, or indeed within, a Euro-American context.”⁴⁷

Pachy’s story does *not* fit the dominant Anglo-American model of “coming out of the closet.” In fact, it signals in some ways a reversal of the coming-out story as popularized in the American context in particular, where, as Judith Halberstam writes, “it is easy to equate the physical journey from small town to big city with the psychological journey from closet case to out and proud.”⁴⁸ In Pachy’s story, in contrast, childhood male same-sex relations in the countryside are relatively easy and risk-free, and his rural family is quietly accepting of his adult sexual choices. It is in the city, both in the army and on the streets, that the dangers of an open homosexual existence become apparent. Although Pachy uses the term “closet” to identify some men, he does not use it as a trope for his own life story, and we should be wary of its “universalizing tendency” in relation to same-sex relations in Cuba as elsewhere.

Pleasure and Danger in the City

In Pachy’s story, the move from the countryside to Havana brings sexual discovery and love, as well as a series of insecurities and dangers. Many of these can be found in any metropolis in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But others are particular to the history of Cuba in this period, and in some cases to the experiences of men who have sex with men.

Pachy’s life in Havana from the mid-1980s onward is accompanied by ongoing money and housing problems. After leaving the army and starting to work in a factory, he lives alternately with lovers, friends, people he picks up,

or on the street. One passage tells the story of a few months in his life after he leaves the house of a boyfriend he has been living with:

I left off when I was at that girl's house, the one I told you yelled that she was a dyke. I told you that story because from JR's house, when I managed to get out of JR's house, I went to live in her house and with a stable job. I was working in a shop and I went to her house. When I started living with her we used to go out arm in arm, like a married couple. She went her way, with her partner, and I went with mine. We went out together. So after a couple of weeks, it seems her mother had a bit to drink. I went to my hometown to visit and when I got back the house was dark and the girl wasn't there and the mother was upstairs and she says to me, "Wait! I want to talk to you," she says. "There are all your things. You have to leave because I kicked Almita out and I'm kicking you out, because Almita yelled that she was a dyke and now she can't go out with a man on her arm, ha-ha-ha." So, she kicked me out of there. And I felt terrible and started to cry. [...] It was eleven at night. I was in the street with nowhere to sleep. I was going to call a friend of mine. I called him but I couldn't talk to him. I start to cry and cry, and I had to hang up, and I say, "Well, what do I do now?" Go out on the street and see if someone notices me who has a house and takes me to their house. Well, I slept in the park that night, and I was there for about a week. Going to work. I worked mornings. I slept a bit in the cold room and my friends at the shop covered for me. I slept a bit like that. I ate at work and at night I went to the cinema until the last film ended and then out on the street. There were nights when I met someone and slept in a house but other nights, lots of nights, I slept in parks. One day the police stopped me and asked me what I was doing sleeping in the park. I had a few very bad days. But, well, I didn't go to my hometown. And, well, after all that coming and going one day I went to the bus station, and in the station I met an older man, thirty-two years old. I was twenty, twenty-something. And the man says, "Are you going on a trip?" And I said, "Yes, I'm going to X. I have a ticket for five in the morning." It was midnight. It was a lie. I was there killing time. You could sleep the whole night in the station. And so he says to me, "Well, if it's at five in the morning, let's go to my place. I live close by." He lived in Vedado. You took the seventy-four bus and it left you right there. And I said, "Perfect, let's go." So I said to him, "But I'm going to be honest with you." And he said "No, no." But I said to him, "Before we take

the bus I have to be honest with you. I'm not here because I'm going to X, or anywhere else. I'm here because I have nowhere to live and I work, but nowhere to live. They kicked me out from where I was and I'm staying in the street." And he says, "Let's go, let's go to my house." He took me there and en route he told me that he had a partner who was from the island. He lived in a little room with an attic. "Let's go to my place and there, later we'll sort things out. Let's see what happens." So he told me he had a partner, who was coming the next day. "When my friend comes tell him that you're a friend of mine and I let you stay here because you had nowhere to stay." Perfect. The friend arrived the next day and well, thank God, we all got along well. I helped him out a lot. [...] I cleaned, I washed the dishes. [...] He was a star with me, a star, a star. I didn't have to be with him anymore. That night. He had his partner. Just that night. And well I was there for about a month and on the weekends I went to the beach, to Mi Cayito, which is the beach where the homosexuals meet.

The lengthy excerpt encapsulates both the dangers and the pleasures of life in the city—the problem of homelessness and police control, but also the solidarity of people Pachy meets along the way and the weekends spent with other men at the beach. It is at Mi Cayito that Pachy meets his long-term partner Raúl in the late 1980s. Although Pachy values their committed relationship, the couple find themselves mired in a series of financial and housing crises that only get worse with the onset of the Special Period in 1990. At one point they are evicted from a house that in theory belongs to Raúl, but only "in name." Pachy also talks about the various "little jobs" he and Raúl do "on the street," probably referring to selling things on the illegal market. Toward the end, the interview becomes a lengthy list of financial figures in both Cuban pesos and dollars (reflecting the legalization of the U.S. dollar in 1993).

If work and housing are two areas where homosexuals (as well as women in same-sex relationships, as indicated by Pachy's tale above of the woman whose mother threw her out of her house) encounter a specific set of problems,⁴⁹ the street is another. Toward the end of the interview, the interviewers ask:

Do you have any fears, any uncertainties?

Well, in life you have uncertainties. As for fear, fear that this will happen, or something else will happen. Look. We homosexuals, for example, get together in the Payret cinema. This has nothing to do with what you're asking

me but it came to my mind so I'm going to tell you about it. In the Payret all the *pingueros* [male sex workers]⁵⁰ meet, the people who are looking, and there's a lot. . . . The police are really going after that, and there are things that shouldn't be. Because if you see me *pinguenando* [selling sex] or if I'm an illegal, fine. But if I live here in Havana. . . . The other day I was sitting down in the park. The police know. That we're homosexual, I guess. And we were talking with a homosexual we had met there. I'm telling you like it was, he wasn't even a *pinguero*, he was a homosexual, and we met him and we were standing beside a bench, and the police comes along: "ID". That doesn't bother me because they have every right to ask for our ID. When they give back the ID: "You can't stand around here." I'm a bit bossier than Raúl. "Why can't I stand here? What am I doing?" Either you sit down or you can't stand around." "I don't understand." And Raúl said to me, "Pachy. Shut your mouth. Because they'll take you in the van and they'll take you to a cell and knowing on top of it that you're a homosexual and they'll have you there all night and tomorrow morning they'll say, "Sorry." And you'll have a bad night." It's a war out there. A constant fight, constant, constant against us homosexuals. The police are fighting against promiscuity. I'm not against that. But I am. . . I'm homosexual, I want to go there, because a friend of mine is there. And I want to go hang out a bit to amuse myself for whatever reason I please. [. . .]

Your uncertainties and fears?

Right. Sometimes I say to Raúl, "Let's go out." And he says, "But, where are we going to go?" I don't like to get together with homosexuals all the time. Sometimes they can be fresh with you. That happens. And that's why we've avoided. But sometimes you want to go for a walk and surround yourself with your own people, understand?

This testimony to the ongoing police harassment in the early twenty-first century is echoed in all the interviews with men and women who have same-sex sex and relationships (see also chapters 6 and 7). It contrasts with the claim made by Marvin Leiner about the early 1990s: "These days groups of gay people gathering openly in Havana experience little harassment and no violence against them."⁵¹ The explanation for this difference may be one of perception, including the possibility that even sympathetic foreigners underestimate the degree of ongoing daily homophobic harassment. But equally it may indicate that a decade or more of growth in the tourist trade and accompanying police surveillance of public spaces has had a particularly harsh impact on women and men who have same-sex sex.⁵²

Once again, Pachy positions himself apart from other homosexuals, this time *pingueros* and those he perceives as promiscuous, saying that the police have the right to control such people. At the same time, these references recall earlier sections of the interview, in which he tells of his own discreet ventures into sexual exchange in order to find a place to sleep as a young homeless man in Havana in the mid-1980s, as well as his accounts of earlier days of his “active homosexual life.” Moreover, the final words of the extract—“sometimes you want to go for a walk and surround yourself with your own people”—imply that the line between those “other” homosexuals and Pachy himself is blurred at best, and that these “others” belong, in some sense, to him, or at least with him.

I suggested above that Pachy’s presentation of Raúl and himself as hard-working and respectable citizens can be understood in part as a challenge to earlier revolutionary rhetoric that qualified homosexual men as unproductive. A pride in hard and supposedly legitimate labor features as well in the interviews with other homosexual men, including Guillermo, a hairdresser, and Eusebio, who works in a state firm. Noelle M. Stout has found a similar outlook in what she calls “Havana’s same-sex enclaves.” She warns against narrow interpretations that attribute such attitudes to “blind allegiance to the Cuban state,” arguing that “many gays distinguished between hard-working members of same-sex enclaves and sex workers who they described as ‘young people who did not want to work.’”⁵³ But “[a]s gay Cubans critique *jineterismo* [hustling], their positions are often complicated by their participation in transactional sexual relationships with *pingueros* and long-term friendships with both *jineteras* and *pingueros*.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Pachy’s life story suggests familiarity with the world of commercial sexual exchange at the same time that he attempts to disassociate himself from it.

Pingueros, *locas*, and *pájaros* are just a few in a cast of urban characters peopling Pachy’s tale. Although he reserves a special place for himself and Raúl as respectable homosexual men, Pachy’s Havana is filled with types often described on the covers of popular novels as “marginal”: *invertidas* (female inverts),⁵⁵ *tortilleras* (dykes), and *jineteros* (hustlers). Pachy describes his popular neighborhood as “a block of delinquents and robbers,” full of drug users, drinkers, old homosexual men, and *santeros* (practitioners of Afro-Cuban religion), images that may also be implicated in racist stereotypes. These figures recall popular fictionalized accounts of the Special Period, such as Gutiérrez’s *Dirty Havana Trilogy*.⁵⁶ While at pains to distance himself from this “marginal

world,” Pachy nevertheless uses language that will both resonate with his listeners and draw them in.

Same-Sex Cuban Migrations and Transnational Queer Studies

At the time of the interview in 2005, Pachy’s partner Raúl was in the process of applying for a visa to leave Cuba. Some years afterward both he and Pachy left the country to settle in Europe. As with most of the narrators in same-sex relationships, their decision to emigrate was probably motivated primarily by the difficult economic situation. But the ongoing persecution of men and women identified as homosexual in public is also often cited as a reason to want to leave the country.

Many popular representations, as well as much academic research into homosexuality and the Cuban Revolution, have highlighted emigration and especially the phenomenon of homosexuals and lesbians leaving or “escaping” state-sanctioned homophobia in Cuba in search of freedom elsewhere, especially in the United States. There are a number of problems with this interpretation. First, it privileges sexual oppression over other factors—such as economic and family motivations—in the case of lesbian and homosexual emigration. Second, the emigration of homosexual men and lesbians from Cuba is sometimes portrayed as proof of the exceptional levels of institutional discrimination in Cuba. This ignores evidence of widespread homophobia in other Caribbean and Latin American countries, as well as in “host” countries such as the United States, Canada, and those of Europe, in addition to the xenophobia and racism many Cuban migrants experience in those nations. Third, the focus on emigration implies that alternative sexual identities and communities can only be constructed *outside* Cuba, drawing attention away from wider themes in the construction of nonheterosexual sexual identities and communities *inside* the country.

As this chapter has demonstrated, sexual identities among men who identify as homosexual in Cuba are grounded in local traditions and changing material conditions. They are also shaped by transnational influences, including discourses about homosexuality from the United States and Europe, and the travel of North Americans and Europeans to Cuba in both the prerevolutionary period and since the 1990s.⁵⁷ In other words, any consideration of the movement of queer bodies in relation to homophobia, homosexuality, and the Cuban Revolution must consider passages *on* and *across*, as well as *off* and

out of, the island. To date, Cuba has figured in queer transnational and diasporic studies primarily in relation to queer Cuban emigrants living *outside* the country.⁵⁸ An attention to internal migrations prompts us to (re)consider oft-repeated assumptions about the historical attitudes toward, and practices of, male same-sex sexuality in Cuba. Pachy's account of childhood—like that of Reinaldo Arenas before him—cautions against the cliché that the countryside is more oppressive of same-sex practices than the city. By drawing attention to the different descriptions between sexual practices in rural and urban areas, the importance of rural-urban migration in the stories of Cuban men who have sex with men, and the symbolic place of the rural/urban imaginary in these male homosexual life stories, I hope to challenge the notion of Cuban exceptionalism in relation to sexuality and migration and to help place it in a comparative context.

These stories may also contribute to early twenty-first-century developments in queer theory that problematize the rural/urban binary and the attendant stereotype of rural homophobia typical of many representations of queer life in the “West” and elsewhere. Such projects draw on postcolonial queer theory and queer diaspora studies to offer possible comparisons between examples of rural queerness in the “West” and other “nonmetropolitan” sexualities.⁵⁹ For example, in her recent study of queer time and place, Halberstam suggests that there may be similarities between “nonmetropolitan sexual system(s)” in rural areas in different countries.⁶⁰ Further historical and ethnographic research on people who have same-sex sex in rural Cuba would be needed to illuminate similarities between sexual systems there and rural communities elsewhere, but greater attention to sexual communities *inside* Cuba, especially in “nonmetropolitan” areas, could add new dimensions to this scholarship.

six Listening for Female Same-Sex Desire

When I was coming home on the bus I wrote a poem, which was a rather humorous poem, not totally humorous. But I remember the last phrase said "Green hope converted into rose/pink," because I [laughter] I felt very pleasant [laughter] without there being anything [...] So when she invited me for tea—I can tell you, I haven't talked about this before because I haven't spoken about my private life to anyone. So she invites me to tea and I was shaking like never before in my life, like a teenager, shaking, I couldn't speak! Because that was when I was faced with a different look, I said to myself. . . . So that look, which drilled right through me, I didn't even want to believe. That was how it was. And so I remember, I remember that I said to her "Look, I think there's a mistake here." She didn't say anything [laughter], just the look, and I said, "I think there's a mistake. I mean, our relationship is a friendship, it can't be anything else." So she replied, "You know that you and I can't be friends." That's what she said to me, and well, sure enough, life showed that we couldn't be friends. So there was more. (Katia, b. 1943)

I was a very daring person, very in love. I started my relationships with three people at once. A bit promiscuous I'd say I am. I felt good, I divided my time, three different people. But what I didn't find in one I found in the other. [...] I got married because I wanted to have a child, because my desire was really—I like women. From when I was tiny I wanted to have a sex change in Denmark, I didn't like being called by a woman's name, I liked being called by a man's name, and that was destiny. (Yohanka, b. 1961)

Do you have a memory of your awareness that there were people with different sexual orientations, not heterosexual?

Well, I realized when I was twelve. I went to study in secondary school. That there were girls as well as boys who were not the same as the others. They had other ways of walking, of talking, of gesturing. There were girls who looked like boys, and boys who looked like girls. So those differences made me think that there were other things I didn't know. And in that period I had my first homosexual experience in that same secondary school, at the rural school, which is where young people go to [study and work in] the countryside. I met a girl, and that's where my relationship with the world of homosexuality began, without knowing how it even happened. And after that moment things changed for me, so I started to ask, to read books. Up until then I didn't

know anything. And so I started to look for books about sexuality in order to learn and find out what my place was. (Roxana, b. 1964)

I've had two relationships that have been really important to me. Look, for me all relationships are important, absolutely all of them. Even the relationships with people who've had a really close friendship with me and haven't actually been my partners. But all the interpersonal relationships I've established in my life I give lots of importance to. I've had two long-lasting relationships, and I don't know if it's a coincidence but the two people have been alcoholics. I've never discovered the reason for that. It didn't work out well for me those two times because, well, everyone knows that alcoholism leaves a series of consequences. But I've had many other very important relationships in my life. I think that every time I'm in a romantic relationship I learn a lot. I feel like a little kid sitting at a desk learning, and I love that kind of relationship. I love them. Every kind of love relationship with women, even if it only lasts a second, I love it. I love them all. They have a special charm. I think women are the ones who have a special charm. (Marielis, b. 1964)

Look. I'm twenty-seven in January. From the first moment I identified with my sexual orientation. I mean I never felt guilty for being different. I didn't think it was risky or, maybe because of my family's history as well, because my aunt is a lesbian. She's never told me but I've always known—her friendships, their way of being together. I never felt different or less appreciated because of that. [...] I don't think I'm a very complicated person, but yes, I do believe in that person who is your world, who fills you. And I thought that with that relationship of many, eight years, nine years, I had found that. I feel that I love her but not... I mean, another person could come along and take me away from this story. (Marisa, b. 1979)

In my life, a really important moment in my life was when I knew what I wanted. I knew what my preferences were, but I didn't decide to accept them, even accept them for myself, much less confront other people with them. And a great friend of mine came one day and I was always talking about the same topic, talking about a classmate of mine who was like me, my utopian love. And this friend said to me one day, "Nancy, you're a lesbian." And I said to her, "No, no, no. I'm not a lesbian." "Accept it. I'll still be your friend. But first you have to accept it yourself." So well from then that's when this rather long process began. It's a process that includes my family, society, the people in the groups around me, at school or at work—they're not really your best friends. And that in itself has a negative influence on how they react to the news. It was a moment that marked me a lot. (Nancy, b. 1980)

[L]ater I went to university. That's where I studied philosophy. [...] I met a girl at university. We had a lovely romance that lasted a year, with many problems because in my family there was a lot of prejudice about love between women. They see it as, mostly in the past, they used to see it as something inadequate, immoral. They didn't accept it. They realized, but they didn't accept, they didn't take it on. And they made

my life pretty impossible at the beginning. But I kept going! I kept going because I was in love. (Margarita, b. 1981)

This chapter is located at the crossroads of oral history and the history of female same-sex desire. It opens with a series of excerpts from interviews with Cuban women who have relationships with other women in order to highlight the different ways each conceives the very idea of sexual orientation or difference. Taking inspiration from comparative lesbian historiography and queer theory, the chapter focuses on the challenges of listening for female same-sex desire in a context in which this desire has rarely been represented in public versions of history and frequently is not given the label “lesbian.” As Leila Rupp writes in her book *Sapphistries: A Global History of Love between Women*:

Too broad use of the term *lesbian* . . . downplays the differences among women, especially when the concept and identity of lesbian is available and women choose not to embrace it, as occurs in many parts of the world today where a transnational available lesbian identity is known but women who desire women have different ways to think about themselves.¹

Female Same-Sex Desire in Cuba

The interviews analyzed here were conducted in Havana and Santiago de Cuba in 2006 and 2007. Most of the women in this chapter were part of a small network of self-styled “women who love women.” The different ways I encountered these women, as well as the diverse ways they spoke—or didn’t speak—about sexuality, underlines the complexities and contradictions of “looking for” lesbians in contemporary Cuba. This dilemma has been identified by scholars of female same-sex desire working in other cultural contexts and time periods.²

Nevertheless, my interviews coincided with a period when female same-sex desire was in a spotlight—albeit a small one—inside Cuba. This new interest in women who have sexual relationships with other women in the early twenty-first century was due in large part to the efforts of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), its high-profile director, Mariela Castro Espín, and its campaigns for the acceptance and celebration of “sexual diversity.”³ These political initiatives were paralleled by a small surge in representations of female same-sex desire in Cuban popular culture. In the 1990s, at the

height of the Special Period, a small number of female Cuban writers began to explore lesbian desire in their novels and short stories.⁴ During the early part of the twenty-first century Havana's thriving hip-hop scene was home to an all-female group, *Las Krudas*, whose songs frequently feature feminist, antiracist, and antiimperialist lyrics.⁵ The official press carried articles on lesbianism, calling for acceptance of different sexualities,⁶ and a number of the nightly soap operas watched by millions of Cubans featured lesbian subplots. At the same time, feminist scholars and political activists in Cuba engaged in debate about sexism and homophobia in the media, taking the state-run television to task for censorship and stereotyping, and calling for more varied and nuanced representations of female sexuality.⁷ And in December 2007, while I was carrying out my second set of interviews for this chapter, the play *Of Hydrangeas and Violets*, about a female same-sex couple preparing to have a child and debating the question of parental roles, played in one of Havana's central theaters.⁸

That same month, I attended the wedding of two young Cuban women at CENESEX. The marriage was not legally recognized; nor was it the first ceremony in recent Cuban history where two women declared their love and commitment to one another (narrators told me about others). Nevertheless, the fact that it was held in a state institution gave the ceremony—and the women's relationship—a degree of official recognition, signaling yet another change in government attitudes toward homosexuality.⁹ Whether interpreted as a sign of "progress" and rectification for past errors, or as a deliberate strategy to clean up Cuba's image—or both—the increasingly public representation of LGBT issues in Cuba since the turn of the twenty-first century marked a significant shift. In the light of these social and political developments this chapter examines the stories of a handful of Cuban "women who love women" for what they say about the relationship between representation and lived experience, and the history and memory of female same-sex desire in revolutionary Cuba.

Love, Desire, and Identity

I want to return to the interview with Juana (b. 1935) and Yolanda (b. 1944), introduced in chapters 2 and 4. With my Cuban colleague I had originally planned to interview only Juana, but because she was largely incapacitated by illness, Yolanda came and went throughout the interview, bringing Juana

glasses of water and checking on her. This interaction brought a strong note of the personal to a spoken story dominated by high politics, and the intimacy between the two women became woven into the narrative of the interview itself, even though on tape their relationship remains unspoken. This is a salient reminder that oral history is much more than a transcript of someone's spoken words. It involves as well the emotional and material environment in which the interview is conducted, including the often subtle interactions of the bodies in that space. "Listening" for same-sex desire in this case was as much about observing the bond between these two women as asking and hearing about their experiences of being older women in a same-sex relationship.

At one point, after Juana asked her something quite specific about a story she was recounting, Yolanda pulled up a chair and joined us. From this moment onward the tone of the interview changed almost entirely, moving away from big players of the 1960s to the wider social and cultural atmosphere of the early revolutionary regime and the marks it had left on Yolanda's life. It is here that she recalls witnessing the homophobic purges from universities, describing these years as "traumatic." Unlike Juana, who never uses the word "lesbian" or any other terminology to describe her relationship with Yolanda or her sexual preferences generally, Yolanda declares how she sees herself early on: "I tell you with absolute frankness, because I don't have anything to hide, because I'm not ashamed to say, I'm a lesbian. A word I don't like much, but I have to say it."

Yolanda's ambivalence about the word "lesbian" implies a wider uncertainty about the very idea of sexual identity and its relationship to politics and other areas of life. "What does one's sexual condition have to do with their activism, with their view of the world?" she asks. Later, she insists, "My private life is my private life. For me being homosexual doesn't prevent me from writing, or thinking." But Yolanda's lengthy story about the traumatic legacy of early revolutionary homophobia reveals the explicitly political history of same-sex sexuality in Cuba, one that she refuses to silence, even while she claims a space of privacy for her own desires.

The relationship between personal and political life, the desire to keep them separate at the same time that they overlap, is apparent in an interview with another older woman, Katia. As was the case with Juana, the first interview I conducted with Katia focused almost entirely on her work and activist experiences. Born into a white, middle-class family in 1943, Katia's adult life

was shaped by the opportunities the Revolution opened to women both professionally and politically. Married in the 1960s and mother of two children born in the early 1970s, Katia spoke at length of the challenges of the so-called triple day: paid work, domestic labor, and activism—a dilemma at the heart of debates about gender politics and women's roles in the Cuban Revolution (see chapters 1 and 3).

When I returned to interview Katia a year later, sitting once again on her large veranda in a neighborhood once home to Havana's upper and upper-middle classes, she opened with these words:

I'm going to talk about the part of my life that takes much more work. Because I'm going to tell you something. As people say, private life, your life as a person and yours alone, for me is much more laborious because I've also tried—with good reason!—I've always tried to keep the private, private, and that's how it's been for many years. Just that in the last few years, perhaps because of my maturity—pretty mature! And because of life itself. And the world that changes, so, you start to open up to certain things.

This excerpt is an interesting reflection on the emotional costs of talking about painful and even pleasurable personal memories in a context where these may be considered marginal, even illicit or antirevolutionary. It is notable that as someone proud of her long life of activism and paid work, for Katia to talk about “the private” is more “laborious” than revealing her political and professional past. The remainder of this long second interview concentrates on Katia's intimate relationships—her twenty-five-year marriage, its end, her relationship to her mother, children, and extended family, and her long-term relationship with a woman that began after she left her husband. The separation of the two dimensions of Katia's life bears testimony to the difficulties of constructing an integrated narrative out of a “double life.” We should not make the mistake of assuming, however, that the emotional dimension of the narrative is present only in the second interview, or the political only in the first. The first interview is full of passion, of the joys and disappointments of a long professional and political life. And Katia's memories of love are intimately entwined with the dramas of politics.

Her meeting with her first female lover is recounted complete with poetry, gleeful anticipation, and adolescent-like nerves. Having met this woman through her role as a local activist in her Havana neighborhood, Katia takes a trip to her hometown (see opening excerpt above). The oral tape of this pas-

sage evokes more fully the delights in recounting happy memories of early romance, as well as the discovery of a new kind of emotional and sexual feeling toward another woman, full of images of journey and new beginnings. The relationship lasted seventeen years and—contrary to the image offered in the poem—was not all roses. As their liaison became publicly recognized, Katia recalls, the gossip and recrimination among neighbors and political comrades intensified. Although she stresses that this was at the local level only, and that she never had any problems from “higher up,” the questions asked by other activists about her intimate life are reminiscent of the meetings of the 1960s and 1970s in which individuals were asked to justify their behavior. Katia’s story blends the personal pleasures of discovery, transformation, and sexual and emotional intimacy with the difficulties of public rejection and prejudice.

Space, Place, and Community

A recurring theme in the interviews with women and men in same-sex relationships and communities is the persistence of different forms of prejudice in the early twenty-first century. While most of the narrators consider prejudice a social problem rooted in traditional *machismo*, the interviews also reveal ongoing inequality in the workplace and in political organizations. This includes both direct discrimination (for example, women in same-sex relationships not being given jobs they were qualified for, or being fired on false pretences) as well as a more general homophobic environment that forces people, in the words of another narrator, Laura (b. 1958), to adopt a *doble moral*, or “dual morality.”¹⁰ In particular, all the narrators speak of the problem of discrimination in public social spaces, from name-calling (*tortillera*, or “dyke”) and being denied access to clubs unless accompanied by a man, to cases of police harassment and arrest in popular gathering places such as parks or squares.¹¹

These problems are exacerbated by the lack of housing (see chapter 8) and legal spaces for social gathering. Most of the narrators make and maintain relationships with friends and lovers through informal community networks, family and neighborhood contacts, unofficial private and public gathering places, and fledgling organizations for “women who love women.” In Havana, some participate in such a group held at CENESEX, where meetings and parties are sometimes held. Private parties (*fiestas privadas*), organized clandestinely, communicated by word-of-mouth, and held at people’s houses, are an-

other important meeting place in Havana especially. Marielis (b. 1964), who was able through her work in the tourist industry in the 1990s to obtain a good-sized apartment that she shares with her teenage daughter, recounts both the possibilities and challenges of holding these *fiestas*:

And you've had women's parties at your house?

Yes, every once in a while. Look, in Cuba there is no place where lesbian women and gay men can meet and spend time together and have parties. So that means that some of us, who are lucky enough to have a private space where you're the owner, you invite your friends. I almost always look for a pretext, to get friends together and make some money, have a party, put on some music, so people have a good time.

And have you ever had any problem with the authorities, with the police, with these parties?

[P]eople are so grateful that I didn't want to give it up, but well, like almost everything that is persecuted, I had to let it go because [...] it's an illicit activity and I had to let it go because the risk is very high. [...]

When you talk about a high risk, what can happen?

Well, you can end up in prison. Like a woman I know who was my partner in a long-term relationship was in prison for two years, from 2003 to 2005.

Do you know other people who've had similar things happen, who've been arrested?

Yes, I've seen a lot of things happen with gays. There are things I've seen, the police acting really bad in the street with gay guys in front of me. I've seen it. They aren't stories people have told me. I've seen it. A lot of injustice in relation to gays. Hitting guys in public places, the police arriving with a truck and they take them in what they call a special brigade, because they don't have their ID or maybe because they're drunk. I don't know if it's a pretext but [...] I've seen them intervene in a gay *fiesta* in an abrupt and very violent way, with people running outside, scared of the police. I've seen those things.

And do you think the situation is getting better in that sense? Is life for gays and lesbians better now?

I don't think so. I think it's the same. There's still no place where gays can go to meet up. There's no legal place.

The complaint of a lack of public space and the problem of police persecution in parks and on the street provide a link to the experiences of men cited

in the previous chapter. In Santiago, women, transgender people, and some homosexual men gather in the Plaza Dolores, sitting on benches and meeting friends in the daytime and evening, although they are often told by police to leave. Roxana (b. 1964) recalls that at least once a group was taken to the police station, and she and others had to go to get them out.

As the quotation from Marielis indicates, the theme of public persecution underscores continuity in experiences of women and men in same-sex relationships across different generations. But the interviews also bear witness to social and political reform, and to the impact this has had on the lives of women loving women. I asked Roxana, a *mestiza* woman from eastern Cuba, born in the early 1960s, if she had a memory of when she became aware of people with different sexual orientations. In her reply, she mentions starting “to read books” in order to find her “place” in the world (see opening quotation above). The books Roxana talks about were Spanish translations of East German textbooks that were distributed in Cuba after 1977, when the National Task Force for Sexual Education initiated the first nationwide program of sex education (see chapter 1). This move brought information and discussion about homosexuality directly into Cuban schools and homes. On a personal level, for Roxana these books provided the first external evidence of others “like her.” On a more public level, they signaled a change in official policy and a move away from the interpretation of homosexuality as an illness, to recognition of it as one expression of sexuality. Memories such as Roxana’s—like accounts of changing images of homosexuality in television soap operas (see chapter 4)—are important examples of the perception of positive change that must be read alongside tales of repression.

Listening for Gender, Race, and Social Class

The wedding I described earlier began almost two hours late. After the first hour or so a joke began to circulate among the women waiting for the ceremony to begin: “If the bride always arrives late, imagine when there are two!” The young women who married each other that day were dressed in almost identical white gowns; both had long hair and wore makeup. Although we cannot know the complexities of their relationship, from the perspective of the audience this was a marriage of feminine with feminine.

As Rupp argues, alongside sources that show the sheer variety of female

same-sex expression and practice across time and space, we should take into account the equally compelling evidence of recurring themes in the history of love between women, or what Valerie Traub has called “cycles of salience.”¹² Chief among these are the eroticization of gender difference, on one hand, and of sameness and female friendship, on the other. The interviews with these Cuban women show evidence of both these dynamics—the erotic play of masculine and feminine subjectivities in same-sex relationships *and* the mutual sexual and emotional attraction of femininity. These two forms of female same-sex desire coexist in Cuba in the early twenty-first century, as in other places and historical periods, and they may also exist within individuals and relationships. But their expression and attraction has a historical dimension as well, shaped by local customs, experiences of prejudice, and transnational cultural flows, as well as by the desires of individual women and dynamics between couples.

IN MY INTERVIEWS, the topic of gendered lesbian identities arises frequently and usually spontaneously. With the exception of Katia, who had her first lesbian relationship in the 1990s, the women born before the 1980s talk about the variation in female gender as an accepted and valued aspect of female same-sex relationships. The following excerpts are from interviews with two women: Odalys, who was born in 1958, just before the revolutionary victory of 1959, and Yohanka, born in 1961, just after it:

Odalys: In my case, I dress as I dress, I am who I am, I got used to walking comfortably, as I like. And when I want to do it more like this, or like that, I do it. Because I want to do it like that. It's my business. I did it in a difficult period, when I wasn't afraid. Just for dressing like that, people looked at me, and they were scandalized. In fact, in the case of lesbian women, as they say here, *mujeres fuertes* [strong women] look more like men. It's one thing to want to appear like a man and another thing to want to be a man. In my case, I don't want to have a penis or anything like that. I'm not interested. I don't need it. Because I like being as I am. I feel good like this. When I speak sometimes my voice is a bit rough. [. . .] Each person is how they are, how they want to be. It's like, for example, the homosexual man who dresses as a woman, and can enjoy his penis. I take pleasure from my sexuality and I don't want to lose anything I have.

And this expression “strong woman”—is that how you define yourself?

I consider myself a strong woman. Yes, of course. Because on top of it [...] I’ve always been an authentic person. And I like being that way.

Carrie: And your mother said that when you were little you wanted a boy’s name?

Yohanka: Yes, I wanted to change my sex and all my toys were for boys and everything.

Tell me about Denmark.

I had heard people say that’s where you had a sex change. I wanted to change into a boy. I didn’t want to be a girl. Today I don’t want to change sex because I feel good with the one I have.

Since the late twentieth century, queer theorists and activists in the United States, United Kingdom, and other countries in the global north have dedicated much energy to defining and negotiating the boundaries around different forms of what, following the work of Judith Halberstam, is sometimes called “female masculinity.”¹³ Discussions about nomenclature—trans, butch, gender queer, and so on—and pronouns (he, she, s/he, they) underscore the crucial relationship between recognition and naming in these communities, and the political importance of self-labeling in particular. At the time I conducted these interviews in Cuba I was in a relationship with a trans-identified person, and my long-standing interest in queer gender fed my desire to hear how women such as Odalys and Yohanka understood the relationship between gender and their love of women.

In this regard, my own desires for a certain kind of knowledge shaped the dynamics and content of the interviews. In considering my role as interviewer, it is also worth remembering, as Esther Newton and others have noted, that there can be an erotic dimension to fieldwork, whether on the level of fantasy or acted out through flirtation or playfulness.¹⁴ For example, I conducted the interview with Odalys on the terrace of the house of a mutual friend, Marielis, who had suggested Odalys as an interviewee. These are my notes following interviews with the two women:

During this last part (of the interview with Marielis) I was aware of Marielis speaking in part to Odalys—and was reminded again of the performance aspect of interviews. Something similar happened during Odalys’s interview. For about a half hour Marielis was present and I could sense that during this time Odalys was speaking more to her than to me, and I even found

myself feeling a bit jealous! I reflected once again on the sheer difficulty of doing an interview in private in Cuba. But my jealousy stemmed from the fact that Odalys is the only woman I've interviewed whom I find quite sexy.

This brief description of my feelings and role as interviewer not only highlights the different levels on which desire circulates in interviews, but also points to a danger: that my own longing to understand gender and sexuality for these Cuban women will translate into labels or categories they would not use themselves. It may be tempting, for example, to translate the term *mujer fuerte* as "butch," but that rendition would erase the specific juxtaposition of "strong" and "woman" in the Spanish term. The blending of strength and womanhood is expressed in very specific ways in the interviews with Odalys and Yohanka. Each woman describes herself using a series of characteristics typically associated in Cuba with masculinity and even *machismo*: a low voice, commanding respect in the street, dressing in comfortable clothes, being a rebel and/or promiscuous, and being "authentic." At the same time, each expresses confidence and pleasure in her female body.

I WANT TO TURN now to another interview in which the theme of gender in female same-sex relationships emerges. In December 2006 I conducted a second interview with Laura, a black woman born in 1958 who works in a state firm and lives in a poor Havana neighborhood. I had originally interviewed her in 2005 with a Cuban colleague at the home where Laura lived with her mother. Fifteen months later, I called Laura to propose a second interview. She agreed, but requested that I meet her alone and somewhere other than her house. In this second interview, I asked Laura whether she was in a relationship. When she answered in the affirmative, I asked to know more about her partner. She laughed, protesting, "You want to know too much!" But she then talked about how she had met her partner, using the masculine pronoun *él*. The conversation continued for some time until I introduced the topic of Laura's experience as a woman, asking her about her views of women's and men's positions in Cuba.

This society has changed a lot. Now men take children to childcare, pick them up from school, take them to the doctor. In that sense society has advanced quite a bit. My father, never. He paid for the clinic but that was my mother's problem. In my house I never saw my father cook. Cook or help out. I see my brothers-in-law cooking, washing, cleaning, everything, wash-

ing the dishes, everything. Not my partner. My partner is lazy. Lazy. [Laughter] He doesn't do anything. You have to . . . You have to do everything for him.

Following this interview, Laura asked if on my next trip to Cuba we could meet “as friends.” A year later, in December 2007, we met to go to the beach, and at that point Laura introduced me to her partner—Nachy, a woman, whom she had been dating for a couple of years. This was apparently the same person Laura had described as a lazy male the year before. But Laura’s coding of her partner as masculine in this previous interview, I suggest, was not a mere substitution of the male for the female pronoun. She attributes to “him” a series of characteristics popularly associated with men in Cuban society (see the attributes cited by Odalys and Yohanka, above). While Laura evidently chose to present her partner as male in response to my quest “to know too much” about her love life, her characterization of her partner as masculine may also reflect a playful and eroticized gendering of their relationship; Laura laughed as she recounted this story, after all. I do not argue that Laura thinks of Nachy as “a man” or as “male identified.” Nor do I argue that we should interpret Nachy and Laura’s relationship as butch/femme, with its evident Western heritage. Certainly when Laura eventually introduced me to Nachy, it was as her *novia* (girl friend). But I do want to make some tentative suggestions for further consideration of gendered subjectivities in Cuban female same-sex relationships.

Laura, seemingly wary of “lesbians” in general, did not mention *mujeres fuertes*. But nor did she express negative attitudes toward women she associated with culturally coded “masculine” gender characteristics, including her partner. Listening for female same-sex desire in Laura’s interview cannot be only about searching for signs of lesbian identity. It must also take into account the intersections of sexuality with class, race, age, and other factors. In particular, I suggest that Laura’s representation of her relationship with Nachy should be understood in relation to changing constructions of black masculinities and femininities in Cuba. Notwithstanding the growing literature on race and blackness in Cuba, in addition to the substantial work on gender and sexuality, this scholarship has not to date focused on the relationships between race, class, gender, and same-sex sexuality.

Listening for these intersections requires more than asking direct questions about narrators’ experiences of racism, sexism, or homophobia. The ten-

dency in our interviews to separate out these areas of experience may have made it more difficult for us to hear the connections among them. Nevertheless, an attention to the language used by narrators may help to illuminate some of these. The three interviews with Laura provide an interesting example. Two topics that were virtually absent from the first interview emerge as central concerns in the second: the importance of Afro-Cuban religion in Laura's life, and homophobia at work and in the Communist Party. In interview two, Laura makes a direct link between the persecution of religious practice and homophobia, citing both as examples of the *doble moral*. Although she does not refer to it, there is a wider historical link as well: homosexual men and religious practitioners were the main groups committed to forced labor camps as suspected antirevolutionaries during the 1960s (see chapters 1 and 4). Given this historical association between religious persecution and homophobia, we might speculate that for Laura, Afro-Cuban religion provides a space relatively free from religious and sexual discrimination. When I ask her, in the third interview, how the issue of sexuality is treated in the Yoruba religious tradition, Laura replies that some high-ranking figures are openly homosexual, although she also insists that she keeps her religious and "private" lives separate, and that religion has nothing to do with sexuality. The importance of religion as a refuge is also suggested by Laura's repeated assertion that she became involved in *santería* because of health problems, in particular, depression. While she does not discuss the origins of her depression, the fact that Laura identifies religion both with tolerance and healing, in contrast to the repressive atmosphere of work and political life, suggests that social and institutional discrimination may have had a negative impact on her mental health.

Religion relates as well to a third aspect of Laura's story: her Afro-Cuban heritage. In the early twenty-first century, Afro-Cuban religion is practiced by Cubans of all racial identities. Many of our narrators, from different ethnic backgrounds, embraced *santería*. Nonetheless, it has a strong historical and cultural association with Cubans of African descent, and Jean Stubbs and Pedro Pérez Sarduy interpret its revival since the 1990s as "a deep and genuine expression of an old African spirituality."¹⁵ The central place accorded to *santería* in Laura's life story may therefore represent a way of claiming an Afro-Cuban heritage in the context of a society that discourages open discussion of racial identity generally, and racism in particular. Laura was part of the first generation in Cuba to experience the significant structural changes

in race relations brought about by the Revolution. After 1962, however, the government declared that racism had been eliminated in Cuba, thereby stifling public debate about ongoing discrimination. Thus, while Laura and her generation enjoyed the benefits of greater equality after 1959, they lacked a framework within which to discuss racial difference and racism.¹⁶

It should come as no surprise, then, that Laura denies having experienced racism, at work or elsewhere, even though in the first interview the Cuban interviewer asks her directly about this more than once. The fact that Laura was speaking to two white women, one of them a fellow party member, may have made her particularly wary of this line of questioning. But there are indications in this first interview that racial identity and racism have shaped Laura's life. For example, her remark that she passed counterintelligence tests without a problem because she had led a "normal life" and came from a "quiet" family may be a reference to the stereotype of black families as rowdy or trouble making. In the second interview, Laura tells us that her grandfather was a *mambí* (a soldier in the Cuban War of Independence, 1895–98) who was buried with full honors, giving this as an example of her family's "revolutionary roots." By telling this story, Laura locates herself and her family firmly in a political tradition that has been dominated publicly by white men.

OTHER INTERVIEWS and discussions I had with women in Cuba in 2007 indicated that women identified as or with "male" characteristics were sometimes stigmatized in terms of race and social class. At a party for the Havana discussion group of "women who love women" I spoke to Daisy, a middle-aged Afro-Cuban woman from the same neighborhood as Laura. She told me she liked feminine women ("the more feminine the better") and that she didn't like *mujeres fuertes*, whom she described as women who dressed "with men's shirts and closed shoes." Daisy called them *mujeres de bajo mundo* ("low-life women") and said she often saw them on the Malecón¹⁷ at night. This remark reminded me of the comments made by twenty-something Nancy (b. 1980), an olive-skinned woman of mixed heritage whom I had interviewed in Santiago de Cuba a few weeks before:

As a woman and as a lesbian, I like other women for that essence, because she's a woman. Because to be with a woman who looks like a man, well, I can be with a man without any problem. I like you because you're a woman, because I like femininity and you like me for the same reason. I have some

friends who are like that, very, very *fuerte*, as we say, who are very masculine. But well, that's their choice. I stay away from that. I like how you are as my friend. But look, a little while ago I saw in the park, at night, there was a group of those lesbians who were like men and because of jealousy for another one who was there, who was more feminine, they got into a fight with knives and stones.

Margarita is another lesbian-identified woman in her twenties (b. 1981). From a white provincial family, her background is more privileged than Nancy's, though Margarita is by no means free from financial worries. When I asked her at the end of her interview whether she wanted to add anything, she said,

Look. Something that I feel, for example, that lesbian relationships—we're still very, very stuck. We have only one vision, it's the division of roles [. . .] I'm a lesbian because I like girls and I feel that there's not only one way to define it, where two women, one has the male role and the other the woman. That's not how I experience it. I respect couples that live like that, they often even perceive it that way, but I think it's much bigger. I mean, it's not necessary to be that way. I think the love between two women can be beautiful because both are women. That's the way I like to experience it. And sometimes I think, I don't experience it that way because I think it reproduces *machismo* in lesbian relationships. We fall into the same thing. But I also respect it.

Margarita's critique of gender in contemporary Cuba incorporates her own desires, as well as her reading of Spanish and Latin American feminism and gender theory, and is much more than a criticism of roles in lesbian relationships. She also challenges restrictive ideas and ideals of femininity. In revolutionary Cuba, womanhood remains strongly tied to motherhood in the popular imagination (see chapters 1 and 3). But Margarita has chosen—for now, anyway—not to be a mother, and her intervention can also be read as an attempt to construct alternative strong femininities not linked to maternity—an intellectual and political project that parallels transnational work on queer femininity.

But Margarita's and Nancy's defenses of lesbian femininity and sameness may also reflect wider trends in Cuban society in the early twenty-first century. These include both the historical impact of homophobia and the increas-

ing influence of transnational feminism and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) cultures. I want to close with a final reflection from Roxana, born in 1964 and the partner of Yohanka, who had dreamed of having a sex change when she was a child:

You said that when you were twelve you went to secondary school and you started to see men and you wanted to be more feminine or more masculine. Is that a tendency that happens a lot here? I mean, are there many women, some women who identify more with masculinity or even with men?

Yes, yes, yes. There are a lot who feel comfortable and who prefer to wear masculine clothing and identify more like that. They feel better that way. There are others who dress in a totally feminine way. But they have their orientation, they're lesbians. But in recent years there have been changes. There are changes in that we're women and so we have to show off our womanhood. So there's a bit of a decrease among women who feel male, who feel *fuerte*. That's decreasing. What's more you see, it's been shown, they see that if they maintain those male, masculine attitudes, they're less accepted. So, if you're "normal," as we say, no one realizes that you're anything, because you're very feminine and they accept you better. I even have a lot of friends who've been *fuerte, fuerte, fuerte* and now, as the years pass, they've changed. They wear make-up, they have long hair, they wear dresses. They've changed because of the very problems they've faced. And if they wore male clothing they were rejected and with the other image they're better accepted. And I think in men too. But, well, men, young guys, there are lots, lots, lots who stay the same, with those very feminine traits. But I think gay men are a bit more accepted than lesbians.

The important point here is not whether Roxana's consideration of the changes in lesbians' dress habits, or the different levels of acceptance of lesbians and homosexual men, reflect reality. It is not a question of creating hierarchies of oppression. Rather, we can understand her impressions as another intervention in the historical narrative of same-sex desire in Cuba, an intervention that considers women as well as men, underscoring the necessity for a feminist approach to the history of same-sex desire and homophobia in Cuba. Historians of homosexuality in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Cuba, have shown that local traditions of same-sex desire have been influenced by, and in turn have influenced, outside models, while still retain-

ing strong elements of local traditions. In the conclusion to her global history of love between women, Rupp writes:

The importance of nondifferentiated intimate connections between women suggests the need to think about the different patterns of male and female erotic attraction and to ponder what conditions—such as women’s confinement to sex-segregated space and lack of access to the heterogeneity of public places—may be responsible for the prominence of the eroticization of sameness in the history of female same-sex sexuality. We might also consider what lies behind the long history of the eroticization of difference in male same-sex sexuality.¹⁸

My small study of same-sex desire in contemporary Cuba is not enough to confirm or challenge these conclusions, but it does suggest that something rather different has happened there. The interviews cited in this chapter present compelling evidence of a tradition of “eroticization of difference” in female same-sex relationships, which by the early twenty-first century was more and more marginalized because of two factors: (1) local prejudice and institutionalized homophobia, and (2) an increased influence of certain transnational models of feminism and lesbianism that value and eroticize sameness among women, and are suspicious of gender roles among lesbians and of “masculine” women in particular. Comparative histories of female same-sex subcultures and relationships outside Western, urban, middle-class contexts demonstrate the importance of gendered subjectivities to the growth and survival, as well as the erotic identities, of these communities.¹⁹ Such studies also note the conflicts between gendered traditions among working-class women, or those with relatively little access to economic resources and formal education, on one hand, and intellectual and/or middle-class lesbian feminists, influenced by Western feminism, who sometimes criticize gendered roles as patriarchal imitations of heterosexuality, on the other. It would be wrong to identify most of the Cuban narrators as middle class, or as feminist in the Western tradition. But the wariness expressed by some narrators of *mujeres fuertes*—associated with popular street culture, and implicitly with poorer and Afro-Cuban and mixed-heritage women—may reflect economic, racial, and educational privilege and prejudices. It also suggests a desire among younger lesbians to dissociate from the historically stigmatized *mujer fuerte*,²⁰ who represents an older tradition of Cuban female same-sex desire that is, as Margarita implies, outdated. Roxana’s suggestion of the dangers for women

who presented as *fuerte* in public and Odalys's remark above that she dressed as she wished "in a difficult period" recall Yolanda's testimony in chapter 4 that *mujeres fuertes* were particularly vulnerable to persecution during the 1960s and 1970s. All three stories indicate that institutionalized and popular forms of homophobia have had a particular role in marginalizing masculine women in Cuba.

In relation to Rupp's final comment about the "long history of the eroticization of difference in male same-sex sexuality," we can recall the large scholarly literature on the so-called Latin American model of homosexuality, structured around the "active/masculine" and "passive/feminine" dyad. This is frequently distinguished from the Anglo-American model of gay identity and community (see chapter 5). Although on one level interested in the relationship between gender and sexuality, this literature refers exclusively to sexual relations among men. A consideration of Cuban female same-sex desire and its relationship to gender encourages us to expand this literature to consider women, adding a new dimensions to the history of same-sex desire in contemporary Cuba, as well as in a transnational context.²¹

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SEVEN Silence and Taboo

This chapter explores two themes—silence and taboo—often associated with both sexuality and fieldwork. Oral historians, influenced in large part by psychoanalysis and literary theory, have argued that what remains unsaid in an interview is as important as that which is spoken.¹ Silences also interest historians of sexuality, who grapple with how to identify sexual desires and acts that are unnamed in the historical record, whether because they were prohibited or pursued in secret in the past.² “Taboo” is another term long linked to sexuality. The common anthropological definition of “taboo” is that which is ritually forbidden in a given society, whether particular acts—sexual or otherwise—or contact with certain people.³ Anthropological understandings of taboo draw on theories of pollution and the sacred, and are often associated with people in a state of liminality.⁴

The understanding of taboo in this chapter additionally draws on common usage in early twentieth-first-century Cuba. Our interview narrators frequently refer to certain topics as “taboo.”⁵ These include issues related to sexuality as well as more general topics. What these issues have in common is their relationship to revolutionary policy. Some (most notably male homosexuality and religion) involve acts or beliefs formerly prohibited and/or punished, that retain this sense of stigma. Others are problems (for example, racism, domestic violence, and the informal market) that, when mentioned, may embarrass a socialist society based on the principle of social and economic equality by challenging the moral legitimacy or practical functioning of the regime.

Not only are certain topics perceived as taboo in contemporary Cuba, but the ways in which they are addressed also pose problems. When asked in early 2010 to identify the main taboo topics in contemporary Cuba—those which are subject to state censorship—a Cuban colleague in London identified three: the health of Fidel Castro, failings in the health system, and prob-

lems with universal education.⁶ These issues are “taboo” because they call into question both the historical successes of the Revolution *and* the regime’s future. Similarly, the three topics analyzed in this chapter—HIV and AIDS, domestic and sexual violence, and interracial relationships—are not so much absent or silent in the interviews as perceived by narrators as hidden, forbidden, or difficult to express because they challenge widely accepted versions of revolutionary history.

AIDS

AIDS is not necessarily a taboo topic in itself. But it lies at the crossroads of topics perceived as taboo: crises in the provision of health care and education, and the history of institutionalized homophobia. Although health care is often hailed as one of the greatest successes of the Cuban Revolution, the revolutionary regime’s approach to the AIDS crisis was highly controversial. Following the first confirmed cases of HIV infection on the island in 1986, the Cuban government instigated a policy of compulsory HIV testing; those who tested positive were confined to sanatoria, and people who developed AIDS were hospitalized.⁷ Compulsory quarantine was lifted in 1993, but at the turn of the twenty-first century testing was still compulsory among certain groups,⁸ and people who tested positive for HIV had to spend some time in a sanatorium receiving instruction on how to live with the virus and to protect others from exposure.

There is evidence that quarantine was relatively successful in minimizing levels of HIV infection and deaths from AIDS. In 2009 Cuba had the lowest HIV infection rate in the Caribbean, and death rates from AIDS-related illnesses were around 7 percent.⁹ But critics have condemned the quarantine system for (1) undermining sex education initiatives by creating the impression that HIV infection is not an issue for the general population; (2) reflecting the authoritarian nature of the Cuban political system, which restricts public debate about policy, stifles dissident voices, and prevents the formation of grassroots organizations; and (3) restricting the freedom of people with HIV and AIDS and increasing the stigma associated with them.

In his important study of sex education, sexuality, and AIDS in Cuba, Marvin Leiner highlights the contradiction between the country’s generally outstanding achievements in education, on one hand, and the revolutionary government’s failure during the early years of the epidemic to develop a co-

herent AIDS education policy, on the other.¹⁰ AIDS education required a much wider public campaign than the sex education program introduced into state schools in the late 1970s. Without this, throughout the 1980s and 1990s the quarantine system may have given the impression that most Cubans were safe from HIV infection. By the late 1990s, this situation began to change, with the founding of the National Center for the Prevention of STDs and HIV.¹¹ Then, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX) conducted numerous studies into HIV and AIDS,¹² organized national education campaigns, participated in international AIDS conferences, and campaigned against the social stigmatization of those groups most affected by AIDS, especially transgender people and men who have sex with men.

Both the National Center for Prevention and CENESEX are government organizations. Although they can facilitate the participation of nongovernmental actors in AIDS education and activism, they are not led by people with HIV and AIDS. Government agencies provide little opportunity for those most affected by the epidemic to participate in decision-making about their own care. “Those in Cuba who have questioned the quarantine policy,” wrote Leiner in the mid-1990s, “are labeled ‘enemies of the Revolution,’ thus effectively excluding the possibility of public advocacy” for quarantine patients.¹³ This example demonstrates how certain topics are made taboo inside Cuba not through direct censorship,¹⁴ but via the construction of dissident voices as “counterrevolutionary,” a technique dating back to the early years of the revolutionary regime. One of the first groups to be targeted by this technique were men identified as homosexual.

UNLIKE IN NORTH AMERICA and Europe, where AIDS was quickly labeled a “gay disease,” in Cuba men who have sex with men were not singled out for testing in the early stages of the epidemic. Instead, efforts to limit the spread of HIV focused on Cubans who had traveled abroad or had had contact with foreigners, most notably troops returning from the war in Angola.¹⁵ This has led some to claim that the quarantine policy did not discriminate against homosexual and bisexual men.¹⁶ But this argument fails to take into account both the wider sets of discourses that worked to associate AIDS with male homosexuality, and the legacy of institutionalized homophobia in the 1960s and 1970s.

Even if AIDS was not initially associated with male same-sex practices, the

Cuban media quickly picked up on outside reports of a “gay disease,” helping to create the impression that heterosexuals were safe from infection.¹⁷ Since the media are state-controlled in Cuba, their reporting of AIDS essentially reflected official policy. As Shawn Smallman writes, the construction of AIDS as a disease of gay American men was common throughout Latin America during the 1980s.¹⁸ Fidel Castro, in one of his famously long speeches, even blamed the United States for bringing AIDS to the region.¹⁹ This kind of language echoed over three decades of revolutionary rhetoric, which positioned the United States as an imperial aggressor that had corrupted Cuban innocence before 1959 by exporting vice and decadence to the island. This association of the United States with moral deprivation, and with gay promiscuity in particular, was reinforced during the AIDS crisis when the first death from AIDS-related causes to be reported by the Cuban press was that of a theater designer who had supposedly become infected during a trip to New York.²⁰ Cuba was hardly unique in the 1980s in having media that associated AIDS with homosexuality. But whereas the aggressively homophobic tone of media representations of the epidemic in countries such as the United States and United Kingdom led to a militant reaction among gay activists, decades of state-sanctioned homophobia, as well as the prohibition against self-organization, prevented the formation of a community response among Cuban men who have sex with men.²¹

The pattern of HIV infection in Cuba differed from that in the rest of Latin American and many other parts of the world.²² By the mid to late 1990s, the majority of new HIV cases diagnosed in Cuba were among men who engaged in same-sex sex.²³ Consequently, by the early years of the twentieth-first century, the majority of the residents of Cuba’s largest AIDS sanatorium—Los Cocos, in Santiago de las Vegas outside Havana—were identified as homosexual and bisexual men in their twenties and thirties.²⁴ A number of observers and sanatoria patients argue that quarantine worked against attempts to destigmatize people with AIDS by making them more isolated and vulnerable to discrimination.²⁵ Although the link between quarantine and the stigmatization of men who have sex with men may not have been deliberate, it was reinforced by a series of historical resonances with previous homophobic policy in Cuba. During the early 1990s, when quarantine was still compulsory, Leiner outlined the double bind of AIDS patients in a regime that had historically defined some groups—including homosexual men—as “antisocial” and “counterrevolutionary”:

Thus far, a handful of people have been deemed responsible enough to return [from the sanatoria] to society. . . . Being among these requires approval by a group of psychologists, medical personnel, and social workers who consider epidemiological records, psychiatric data, relations with family members, and the person's behavior while at the sanatorium. . . . But, what is "responsible" or "trustworthy"? This is an Orwellian/Catch-22 nightmare. If you're a homosexual resident in a sanatorium and put on makeup or are considered "effeminate," is this "irresponsible"?²⁶

This scenario, which emphasizes the performance aspect of male homosexuality, is the reverse of descriptions of men "acting" homosexual in order to leave Cuba during the Mariel exodus of 1980 (see chapter 4). But both examples underscore the extent to which homosexuality was treated as a security problem, as well as a disease. It is worth remembering that until the end of the 1980s the AIDS sanatoria were run by the Cuban Ministry of Defense.²⁷ As Smallman writes, "While these facilities with their small cabanas and manicured lawns appeared attractive, they initially had guards, gates, and in some cases fences topped by barbed wire."²⁸ This description is eerily reminiscent of the UMAP labor camps of the 1960s. It would be simplistic to argue that AIDS policy in Cuba was designed explicitly to punish and control male homosexuality. Policy toward homosexuals, as well as AIDS patients generally, changed in Cuba in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But the example of the sanatoria suggests that the stigmatization of homosexuality continued to inform state policy.

PARALLELING THE comparatively late development of a cohesive AIDS education program, public representations of the epidemic were relatively tardy. The most widely recognized Cuban AIDS narrative is Reinaldo Arenas's memoir *Before Night Falls*. But since Arenas left Cuba in 1980, his writing bears witness to the AIDS crisis in the United States, not inside Cuba.²⁹ On the island, AIDS was one of the previously taboo sexual themes addressed during the Special Period. In the 1990s, Cuban theaters began to stage foreign plays about prostitution, homosexuality, and AIDS.³⁰ The prominent revolutionary writer Miguel Barnet published the poem "Hijo de obrero" ("Worker's Son"), depicting a beautiful young man who is seduced by imported clothing, turns to hustling to earn money in order to buy foreign consumer items, contracts HIV, and later dies.³¹ While Barnet's poem is a satire of the new consumerism

and a warning against the consequences of mass tourism, film and television representations of AIDS often had a pedagogical element. In the early twenty-first century the filmmaker Belkis Vega made a number of documentary and fictionalized films with AIDS themes.³² More significant in terms of audience, in 2006 Cuban television drew international attention when one of its enormously popular soap operas, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, featured an HIV-positive bisexual man.³³ But while by this time there was increased visibility of fictionalized representations of people with AIDS, public narratives from people living with the syndrome were still rare,³⁴ which is what makes the interview with Miguel particularly valuable.

Miguel was born in Havana in 1972 to what he describes as a poor and humble family. The Cuban researcher who interviewed him in 2006 describes him as white, and he has four siblings. His father left the family when Miguel was a child and Miguel was raised by his grandmother, with whom he was living at the time of the interview. He was diagnosed as HIV positive on his thirtieth birthday, in 2002. Although much of the interview focuses on Miguel's experience of living with AIDS, it opens and closes with stories of police persecution.

Well, I'll start by telling you that before gays were not seen as they are now. For example, in the old days if they saw you with a bit of makeup, with your eyebrows plucked, it wasn't well received. Back then. Now they don't do it directly, but there is mistreatment just the same. For that very reason we don't have a place [to go]. We don't have anything. So the police don't treat us as people, they treat us as homosexuals. So they send you to the station where they charge you.

Miguel's use of the word "gay" likely reflects his age, as someone whose adult life has been conditioned by the increase in tourism to Cuba since the 1990s, including foreign gay visitors. But in spite of his youth, Miguel is knowledgeable about the history of homophobic prejudice in Cuba, possibly recounted to him by older friends (see also the interview with Ricardo in chapter 4). Miguel's perception of what has changed for homosexuals is actually the opposite of "official" versions of history. According to him, gay men are no longer poorly treated by society generally, but they *are* still targets of police harassment, arrest, and violence. His opening words are followed by a pair of anecdotes about being arrested while socializing with friends on the streets of Havana. These tales are very similar to those recounted by other self-identified male homosexual interviewees in chapter 5.

Miguel's stories demonstrate an understanding of the wider politics behind police harassment of homosexuals. He and his friends are charged with "laying siege to tourists." In other words, although there is evidence of homophobia in the police treatment of Miguel and his friends (he complains that they call him *maricón*—"faggot"—for example), the legal excuse for the arrest is the general ban on Cubans frequenting tourist areas, a prohibition designed in part to curb hustling.³⁵ But although in theory any Cuban can be subject to arrest for being caught in the company of tourists, men who have sex with men are particularly likely to be targeted because public spaces are their main location for socializing. Moreover, Miguel recognizes that there is a more sinister threat behind the arrests: the police always have recourse to the "danger" law, which targets people who pose a threat to public decency.

Following on from these stories of police harassment, the interviewer asks Miguel:

In your personal life, do you have a fixed job?

No. I have AIDS. I have emphysema and that prevents me from working because I have a lung that doesn't work thanks to an operation I had here in this country, in X hospital.

In this statement a chain of related factors emerge—AIDS, unemployment, poor health, and inadequate health care—that will constitute the main topics of Miguel's interview. The story of his diagnosis with HIV and later development of AIDS goes through a series of dramatic and tragic episodes: the announcement of his HIV status on his birthday, for which he accuses the doctors who visited him at home with the news of a "lack of tact"; his development of emphysema due, apparently, to the insufficient antibiotics given to him after a previous operation; and his generally disastrous experiences of the Cuban health-care system, including deteriorating and filthy buildings (some of the descriptions of which are gothic in their detail), incompetent doctors, and a lack of medicine.

Although Miguel's stories are corroborated to some extent by reports of problems in Cuban hospitals in the early twenty-first century,³⁶ I am less interested in proving whether his claims are factually accurate than in considering how they relate to his story of survival as a gay AIDS patient. Faced with a potentially fatal illness and a repeated fear of "drowning" in the night (as a result of his failed lung), Miguel's life is saved, in his account, by an act of God and a group of gay male nurses. A fluke fall in the bath clears his lung and the

nurses manage to get medication not available in the hospital. The religious tone of Miguel's tale may reflect a Catholic upbringing, with its emphasis on mystery and miracle—a set of beliefs that coexist, if awkwardly, with the rational discourse of materialism in socialist Cuba. Metaphorically, the gay male nurses in this tale play the role of angels. But their actions also demonstrate the solidarity among Cuban gay men in the face of ongoing discrimination. Additionally, the nurses form part of a booming underground economy in which everything—from medication to houses to sexual services—can be bought illegally, at a price. Miguel's later tales of surviving AIDS abound with stories of buying medication in the street. Like most Cubans, Miguel has become adept at making his small monthly salary and food ration stretch. "We have to become magicians," he says, in a brilliant description of the creative ways in which Cubans get by in the chaotic dual economy. But if Miguel's story demonstrates the trickster side of living with AIDS, it also paints more sinister scenarios: people with AIDS haunting tourist areas to hustle and beg, and male sex workers continuing to sell services to tourists after they test positive for HIV. In a classic vicious circle, Miguel blames what he says is an unofficial rise in HIV transmission on the fact that people have to earn a living any way they can.

It is impossible to verify these claims, and there is a moral tone to this last argument that ironically echoes the Cuban government's condemnation of sex workers as decadent and selfish, a view also expressed by some of the homosexual men cited in chapter 5. Like them, Miguel presents himself as someone responsible both for his own physical and emotional health, and that of others. Having AIDS has had a profound impact on Miguel's relationship to his family, as well as his sexual relationships. He was slow to reveal his HIV status to his family because he did not want to hurt them. "I don't have to give them the details," he says, "because I don't want to make anyone sad." But his reluctance may also be related to the memory of his relatives' negative reaction when he had told them, years previously, that he was gay. His deteriorating health makes it more difficult to hide his HIV status, and one of his sisters eventually confronts him directly—after watching an episode of the soap opera *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

Miguel also takes on the role of mentor and teacher in his interview. He wants to ensure his siblings know how to protect themselves by using condoms. When asked if he has a partner, he replies:

No. It has a big influence on relationships. Do you want to know the truth? If I found a relationship I'd want someone who wasn't healthy, someone who was sick. That's contradictory at the same time because it's not caring for one person, but caring for two. But I wouldn't want to deceive anyone. I always have condoms on me, when I don't I try to avoid it altogether, even though I have to deny myself sex.

Miguel goes on to say that there are other things that make it difficult for him to have a relationship: the facts that he lives with his grandmother and cannot rent a place of his own—a reflection of the housing shortage (see chapter 8)—and that although his family love and accept him, they have more difficulty seeing him “with someone.”

There is an element of self-sacrifice in Miguel's narrative, of putting the wellbeing of others ahead of his own. In a further ironic twist, given his harsh criticism of the Cuban health-care system, Miguel's actions make him the epitome of the good revolutionary—a contemporary version of the “new man” celebrated by Che Guevara in the 1960s. Like the religious tone of the tales of his recovery in the hospital, this may be a legacy of Miguel's childhood in the 1970s and 1980s, when Cuban school children were—as in the early twenty-first century—taught the basic values of egalitarianism and solidarity, and encouraged to “be like Che.”

By teaching his siblings about safer sex and showing a good example by always carrying condoms, Miguel also plays the role of AIDS educator. This commitment arises in part from what he perceives as the inadequacies in AIDS education inside the sanatoria, which he describes as

[h]orrible, the most unpleasant thing in the world. I didn't want to go in, but later I became aware—it's called the course on learning how to live with HIV. [. . .] There was little information for me. They didn't provide any books, they didn't provide any anecdotes. [. . .] They don't get to the depth of what one's living. [. . .] Shall I tell you the truth? If I've learnt about this it's because I've read books about it, because I've arranged them with my friends the nurses. But lots of people don't get that! [. . .] Much of what I've studied about the illness that in some way or another can help us psychologically. Things like that I try to teach to people who don't live with HIV. That's why I accept any question, so tomorrow they don't fall into the same. It's a mistake, well, so they don't get infected. Most of all so they inform themselves so they can help other people sociologically. Because

living with my illness isn't easy, it's waking up everyday without knowing what's waiting for you tomorrow.

Although this commitment to popular education is on some level reminiscent of the mass literacy campaigns in Cuba in the early 1960s, its do-it-yourself pedagogy perhaps has more in common with the popular health movements of Western second-wave feminism, or with the American Gay Men's Health Crisis.³⁷ Such initiatives arose not from the state, but out of distrust in the ability of traditional professional medicine to address the health needs of women and gay men, and in reaction against the shortcomings and prejudices of state sex education programs. Such movements are impossible in Cuba because of the restrictions on nongovernmental organizing.

An important element in Miguel's model of popular education is the emphasis on psychological as well as physical health. The words "depressed" and "stressed" come up frequently in the interview. At several moments he describes his experiences of AIDS treatment as "depressing." At one point he stops his story for a minute, saying, "I'm getting stressed and I have to loosen up!" After hearing about his experiences of police persecution, the interviewer asks:

And in your own case, how do you feel personally when the police bother you because they feel like it?

Very, very, very bad. Very depressed. It's very stressful.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to construct a history of AIDS in Cuba based on one short interview analysis. But what this interview allows us to do—and what oral history brings to history more generally—is to trace the connections between different dimensions of recent history that are frequently told separately. Miguel's brief narration of his life demonstrates that the history of HIV and AIDS treatment in Cuba can only be understood in relation to other aspects of the country's history over the past fifty years, many of which remain highly sensitive: these would include health care, education, the economy (both the official one and the informal market), religion, housing, tourism, sex work, and family structures, as well as a history of male homosexuality that stresses, as the examples in the previous three chapters demonstrate, patterns of persistence as much as transformation.

Domestic and Sexual Violence

A number of scholars have noted the lack of public discussion, both by political leaders and in the media, of sexual and domestic violence in revolutionary Cuba.³⁸ According to Lois M. Smith and Alfred Padula, as late as the 1980s there were few official statistics on rape and domestic violence.³⁹ Writing about the period before the 1990s, they argue:

While Cuban officials recognized the existence of tensions within the family, they insisted, sometimes very vehemently, that Cuba did not suffer from domestic violence. Thus there were no shelters for battered wives, no stories in the media about child abuse or violence in the home. Domestic violence and rape were portrayed as problems that plagued capitalist countries. Neither was mentioned in government statistics of crime in Cuba, nor in public addresses by the minister of the interior.⁴⁰

One reason for what they call the “great official silence on domestic violence and rape” was the lack of women in positions of political power in Cuba.⁴¹ Moreover, unlike in many Western countries, where domestic violence and rape had been central issues for second-wave feminism, the Federation of Cuban Women did not prioritize violence against women, focusing instead on women’s economic equality.⁴²

But outside observers of the Revolution from its early years had noted, in some cases with surprise, the persistence of male violence against women. Douglas Butterworth, one of the American researchers on Oscar Lewis’s oral history project of Cuba in 1969–70, wrote that he was not startled to encounter spousal violence among the older generation of poor Cubans who had been relocated from a Havana shantytown to new dwellings in the early 1960s. But he was taken aback to find it prevalent among younger Cubans, especially since they had recourse to both the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) and People’s Courts, which could intervene in disputes between couples.⁴³ Butterworth’s observations imply that he and other researchers associated domestic violence with prerevolutionary values and assumed it would wane and even disappear with greater social equality. The association of domestic violence with retrograde, prerevolutionary *machismo* is portrayed as well in the 1964 film *Lucia* (see chapter 3).

During his 1967 visit to a small city in eastern Cuba the American journalist

Jose Yglesias encountered the case of a Hungarian woman married to a Cuban man who abused her and threatened to kill her if she had an abortion, all the while going out himself on drinking binges and having other lovers. When Yglesias mentioned the case to a local male official, the latter's response was: "She puts up with him because she wants to. Love, if you want to call it that. In case you have not noticed, there has been a Revolution here and women do not have to put up with that kind of treatment."⁴⁴ I am not suggesting that such scenarios are particular to Cuba or other socialist countries. But a delay in acknowledging and confronting domestic violence is attributable in part to the Marxist principle that gender inequality and patriarchy (including, by implication, male violence against women and children) would disappear with the abolition of class relations. As long as both violence against women *and* feminism were associated with Western capitalism, Cuban revolutionaries were unlikely to prioritize the issue.

By the 1990s official attitudes in this area, as in many others, had begun to alter. Cuban scholars started to investigate violence against women and children, including sexual violence, and to report their findings in the official journal of CENESEX, *Sexología y sociedad*.⁴⁵ One impulse behind this shift was the growing influence of a global women's movement, one no longer associated exclusively with Western capitalist states but also with initiatives from the United Nations and countries of the global south, as demonstrated at the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference.⁴⁶ Another possible explanation is that the economic emergency of the Special Period constituted an exceptional case in which social problems could be explained as a result of the crisis rather than contradictions within Cuban socialism. There is, moreover, some evidence that problems such as domestic violence and alcoholism worsened during the 1990s, with particularly serious repercussions for the mental health of women and children,⁴⁷ though comparison with earlier periods is hindered by the lack of statistics.

Another group that began to discuss the problem of domestic violence in the 1990s was Magín (see chapter 1). Individual women within the group also used their writing to publicize what one outside observer called "a formerly taboo subject in Cuba where most men and women believed or pretended it didn't exist."⁴⁸ The journalist Mirta Rodríguez Calderón, who had written numerous articles about abortion, teenage pregnancy, paternal absence, and related issues in the journal *Bohemia* during the 1980s (see chapter 3), pub-

lished pieces on domestic violence in the same magazine in the 1990s.⁴⁹ The writer Daisy Rubiera Castillo also collected testimonies from women who had experienced spousal abuse.⁵⁰

Revelations of domestic and sexual violence are particularly painful for women in communities marginalized by racism, class exploitation, religious discrimination, or other forms of oppression. For this reason, as well as the social stigma and trauma associated with such violence, these accounts may be largely absent from oral testimonies, or may be implied rather than referred to directly.⁵¹ Historical context and language are also relevant. The ways in which sexual and domestic violence was—or, more likely, was not—discussed or named in earlier times shapes the way in which a narrator can discuss past violence and, equally important, whether the oral historian can hear it.⁵² In the “Cuban Voices” oral history project, sexual and domestic violence did not figure among the topics we originally intended to pursue in interviews. Yet examples of violence against women and children (including rape and sexual assault) came up time and again, in relation both to narrators’ childhoods and, in the cases of women, to sexual partnerships. I do not claim that the forms of violence in this section are in any way particular to Cuba. Rather, by addressing issues hitherto largely unaddressed by the revolutionary regime, these interview excerpts challenge the thesis of Cuban exceptionalism in this area.

SEVERAL NARRATORS RECALL a violent family life. Carlos (b. 1954), whose description of family as something “imposed by the devil” was discussed in chapter 2, says,

I remember when I went out for a walk I preferred to go to a friend’s house instead of coming here. I felt better. I saw other environments. I saw that life wasn’t that sordid environment, where I lived. Where there were arguments, friction between people, people didn’t understand each other. You said something and everything was a motive for violence. So I really liked the world outside, everything far away from my family was wonderful. Everything inside my family [laughter] was ugly, it had an ugly face, very, very ugly. That’s how I was raised. Maybe it’s a trauma, I don’t know. The family terrifies me.

María (b. 1968) is more explicit about the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse of her early years:

I liked boarding school because it had everything. Even though my father never went to see me and when we came here we came under my father's regime. We even had to fornicate with our father. Otherwise he locked us in and didn't let us go out. And all that stuff. And so we grew up without a mother and almost without a father. [...] he doesn't even deserve the word "father," nor my mother the word "mother." I started working in hospitals, I got pregnant. The father of my daughter never helps me with my daughter. He never gave her a name or last name or anything and my daughter suffered all those things. [pause] Ay, I'm not going to tell any more. [...] This whole old story traumatizes my mind, more than I have. Can't we talk about something else? Another question that isn't about this?

Contrary to the fears of parents that the *beca* posed a danger to young women's chastity (see chapter 1), María's story demonstrates that for some young people at least it was a welcome refuge from sexual abuse at home, and cautions us against generalizing about the impact of revolutionary policy on family life. María's request—met by the Cuban interviewer—to move on to a different topic underscores the potential problems in any interview context of asking narrators to recount their past. Both these brief passages highlight the extent to which early memories of abuse shape later life: in the case of Carlos through a rejection of family life itself and for María through difficult adult relationships. María's is not the only interview that conveys a sense of familial violence repeating itself across the generations. Nena, a white woman born in 1955 to a family with some economic means in a mixed-race neighborhood, opens her interview with the following set of stories:

Well, my name is Nena. I'm fifty years old. I was born on the coast. My grandmother on my father's side raised me. My mother left and left me with my grandmother when I was three and she came back when I was about ten. My father found her in a bar and he went for a gun and he shot her like two or three times in the stomach. He left, he did a runner, and later they arrested him. My mother had an operation and was saved. [...] So around age nineteen I got married, I made my life. I got married, I had that husband. Later that one didn't suit me and I married another one, and I married another, and I've been married to a few. And I had a daughter, who is now twenty-three. [...] I've always lived here in this neighborhood, with my ex-husband who went to the United States in 2000. And from 2000 to now I've rented here. And now, I went to rent a house and the young woman

told me she would rent it to me because she had a good reference for me and she knew I'd been with her father, who's the owner of the house. [...] She says, "Look. You go to visit him in prison and you don't have to pay me anything, and I'll give you this and that." So I started this new relationship with him. I'm taking care of him. I go to see him at all the visiting times, I go to the prison, even if it's one day after the next [...] He's a prisoner because he killed his wife, with a knife. He killed her in the door of their house and when the neighbors came to help her he got aggressive and he didn't want anyone. . . until the police arrived and took him away. They gave him twenty-five years.

Nena's narrative presents an unstable and dangerous world, with the central theme of male violence against women that spans the decades. But oral history, as argued throughout this book, offers the opportunity for reflections upon change as well as continuities. Irina was born in 1963, just a few years after the triumph of the Revolution, to a family of mixed heritage that she describes as poor, strict, and violent:

When I was nine I had to help my mother wash, clean, and cook and do everything because my mother. . . Since my father was an alcoholic, well she was always anxious (*enferma de los nervios*).⁵³ Depressed. And I had to help her and well [...] I went to school to study and I came home from school and they didn't let me go out, they didn't let me go to birthday parties or any party. I couldn't have a boyfriend because they didn't let me. And if I had a boyfriend I had to go with my brother wherever I went with him because they didn't let me go out. My father was a drunk and when he came home everyone had to be locked inside the house. Because when he arrived you had to do what he said. You had to be there and so he started a fight about any old thing. He got home and broke everything, what little we had, because we didn't have much. We had a television set, because they'd given it to him at work. But no clothes. The clothes we had we washed and hung them up and then put them back on. And that's how I lived until I got married. [...] And then I got married and my life has changed a bit more. [...]

And how was the issue of sexuality treated in your house? Were there restrictions, prohibitions?

Yes. In my house everything was prohibited and we couldn't go out. After seven at night in my house we couldn't go out. My brother and me. Neither of us. Until, well, I had a boyfriend and I was determined to get married.

And when I got married I separated from them and now I have another life. But when I was single they didn't let me go out. The issue of sexuality was a terror in my house. In my house you couldn't talk about that. Not about dating or anything like that. And the boyfriend I had had to be a friend of my father's so he could be a drunk like him so he could fight with him [...]
At nineteen I got married and I separated from them and I've made my own life.

There is an interesting parallel here between the way Irina speaks of marriage and work and the way some narrators talk about the revolutionary victory of 1959: a complete break with the past, a positive change that allows for a new life. Irina describes her husband as someone totally opposite to what she experienced growing up: a marvelous, generous man who helps around the house. The relationship between high politics, or wider political and social change, and experiences of domestic violence, can never be a simple one, never direct cause-and-effect. There are, however, ways in which memories of these two areas of life converge, diverge, and inform one another. Thus, for example, both Carlos and María, cited above, weave their tales of violent childhoods with commentary on their disillusionment and unhappiness with the social and economic achievements of the Revolution. Lily (b. 1965), in contrast, interprets her difficult relationship experiences as a result of poor choices on her part. With reference to her second husband, she says,

Our separation came about because he—I attributed it to the fact that he had problems with his nerves. Because he was a soldier and so he says he came here at age twelve, he was in the struggle in the Escambray. I attributed it a lot to his bad nerves because he treated me really bad, he argued a lot, and because of that the kid started to have problems, which is when he went to boarding school.

And did he ever hit you?

Yes, at some point. Yes. My son started to have problems. He's still—he's not abnormal or anything but he has a disorder. [...] The father, they gave him a lot of injections for his nerves. But he's still the same. At this point he walks around dirty. He's not interested in anything.[...]

And the relationship with your third partner? How do you see that relationship?

Well. My relationship with him. What I see is that at the end of the day I'll

have to separate from him. At this point I need someone who will help me. [...] Because it's an illness. Alcoholism is an illness. A person who's sick [...] Before it was a disaster and sometimes he even wanted to break things. He never—that's true—he's never raised a hand against me. But well, not letting you sleep, those silly things—"Hand me the water," "Get me a match," repeating conversations and that. That's what he's like. I know that sooner or later. Because I often feel like a nervous wreck.

The impact of violent and alcoholic partners on the mental health of both Lily and her children parallels commentary in other interviews and strongly indicates a structural problem, rather than an individual one as Lily claims (perhaps in order not to appear to be complaining before two Cuban interviewers with connections to the Communist Party). The reference to Lily's second partner as a veteran of the Escambray (the resistance against counterrevolutionary insurgents during the early 1960s) implicitly links forms of violence normally associated respectively with the "public" and the "private," and points to a possible relationship between the traumas of combat and interpersonal violence in civilian life.

Lily's passage, like that of Irina, associates parental and spousal abuse with alcoholism. This issue also arises in a number of the interviews, often posed in relation to the specific cultures of drinking in Cuba. In the course of the interview with Armando, an openly antirevolutionary white man born in 1967, his wife intervenes at one point to say that he likes his rum. He retorts:

Look. My wife's always on about "drinking, drinking, drinking."

Do you like drinking?

It's not that I like drinking. It's that we Cubans always find refuge in drink. Every time we have a problem. And the only entertainment we have in this life is to have a drink so we can keep going, have the strength to keep fighting for what you want to get in this country at least.

Debates about the social and cultural causes of alcohol use are not unique to Cuba. But some narrators do perceive a link between alcoholism, domestic violence, and the crisis since 1990. Salomón, a black man born in 1962 and a Communist Party member, is one of the few male interviewees to identify domestic violence as an acute problem:

Why do you think there are differences between the older generations and the ones today?

Look, I haven't done an exhaustive analysis, but I think that in some way the kind of education we get at home makes a big difference. [...] The education we get at school. The teacher isn't just there to transmit knowledge; he's also there to educate or to contribute to education because supposedly at home, parents, the family form part of that education. And it seems to me that that's been lost. I don't know if it's because of the dynamic we're living in. We're people very susceptible to stress. But I sense that children are sometimes mistreated. I've sensed it and at times I feel indignant but I don't end up telling the person for fear of the reaction they might have. But sometimes I've seen how a child has been mistreated. A child isn't just mistreated when he's hit; it's also the actions people take out on him. He's also being mistreated. I think children are being mistreated with a terrible frequency. I'm not going to deny that at a certain moment my father or my mother gave me a spanking. But it was different. [...] Domestic violence is terrible. You see it everywhere. Everywhere. The father gets angry with the mother and the child is present.

Salomón's interpretation may reflect official views of interpersonal violence in early twenty-first-century Cuba as something best explained in terms of the economic crisis and not as a problem of gendered power relations. Yet his own insistence on a "normal" childhood (see chapter 2) strongly suggests that he was aware of other children growing up around him in the 1960s and 1970s in families where violence was common. Moreover, Salomón's observation may be interpreted not as just a claim that domestic violence has increased since 1990, but also as a reflection of the fact that in the context of crisis it is something that can be discussed as a serious political issue.

A final excerpt underscores the extent to which certain forms of violence remain largely silenced in Cuban society, while economic conditions put additional pressures on marginalized communities. I asked Marielis (b. 1964), who grew up with an alcoholic father and later had relationships with alcoholic women, whether she had seen much violence in female same-sex relationships:

I think so. Look, Carrie. When I was for many years in all those things I've done [...] I've been here for a long time and I've had the opportunity to have parties for women. I had the opportunity to be very close to the inti-

mate lives of three hundred, five hundred, who came to my parties regularly. And I found out about their lives, about what goes on. And one of the serious problems in their lives together is the real violence between them. Whether they live together or not. I think the violence comes from the time that the family doesn't accept them and then they transfer that violence a bit to the couple. To the sustenance of the couple. [...] And when you live in two square meters with your granddaughter, your daughter, your brother ... Well, someone has to end up damaged. It's basic, respecting limits. There can be no respect because there's no space. It's not because they're less educated than others, it's simply that they have less space. And they don't recognize the limits. That's where a whole series of problems starts.

Marielis's observations, like Salomón's, are impressionistic. But they indicate that much remains to be said about the causes and effects of interpersonal violence in Cuba and its implication in material conditions and structural inequalities, as well as individual and family histories.

Interracial Relationships

Race and sexuality have historically been closely entwined in Cuba, and interracial marriage was simultaneously forbidden and practiced in both the colonial and republican periods (see chapter 1).⁵⁴ After the revolutionary triumph of 1959, when racism was officially declared to have been eliminated, interracial coupling was in theory socially acceptable and evidence suggests it did become more common and less stigmatized (though the lack of statistics makes this difficult to verify).⁵⁵ But studies indicate that such unions continued to be the subject of social sanction, especially among white Cubans with high social status.⁵⁶ As Nadine T. Fernandez wrote in the mid-1990s, "Continued resistance to interracial couples indicates that racist or discriminatory thinking endures in popular ideologies despite the dramatic structural changes and racial integration achieved by the revolution."⁵⁷ Our interviews confirm that this issue remained controversial and was considered taboo in Cuba in the early twenty-first century.

A number of the narrators recall the segregated social clubs of the decades before 1959. Memories of anxieties among white Cubans about people who crossed racial boundaries bear witness to the fact that such concerns were often based on fears of interracial unions, especially between Afro-Cuban men

and white women. Arturo, a black man born in the community of a sugar refinery in central Cuba in 1922, recalls:

There were two or three associations where you couldn't enter, where blacks couldn't enter. Another where *mulatos* couldn't enter, because the *mulatos* had their own association. El Liceo was for whites and the black association was for blacks. In none of those associations could you . . . Well, friendship, yes, but you couldn't coexist in those associations. The discrimination—you couldn't go. Whites and blacks couldn't go. Or if you got involved with a *mulata*, because the *mulatos* also discriminated against you.⁵⁸ Blacks and whites, that was taboo. I'm telling you because I had a relationship, a secret relationship, and when people found out—because the girl was white. Well, I almost had to leave town. And she was a girl, we'd grown up together. But when the family found out. You know how that was.

Taty, a black woman born in 1938 in a racially mixed working-class suburb of Havana, recalled similar attitudes in the 1950s:

We had a friend who still lives here, who's white. She'd been with us since she was a little girl and she did come into our association, the black association. And people said to her father, "You're going to spend so much time with black people that your daughter is going to marry a black man just for hanging out with those *negritas* [little black girls]." And we were the *negritas*!⁵⁹

It is worth comparing Taty's experience to that of Nena, born in 1955 in the same racially mixed neighborhood. Raised by her maternal grandparents following her parents' separation, Nena was prohibited in the 1960s by her grandparents from visiting her mother, her mother's black partner, and their mixed-race children. In the early 1970s Nena dated a man she described as *mulato*, a relationship opposed by both her family and his, possibly in the latter case because the young man was a medical student and his parents considered Nena, who was not university educated, to be below his status.⁶⁰ Nena's story points to the complexity of the relationship between gender, sexuality, class, and race in both prerevolutionary and revolutionary Cuba. Whereas in her working-class neighborhood interracial relationships were likely common even before 1959, there was a particular stigma attached to the unions of Afro-Cuban men and white women, demonstrating the persistence of historical values, dating to the colonial period, that emphasized white fe-

male chastity as the key to white racial “purity” and constructed black men as potential violators of white women and white society generally.⁶¹ While the revolutionary commitment to end racial discrimination did not eliminate such attitudes, the increased educational and work opportunities opened to Afro-Cuban women and men after 1959 may have added new dimensions to family ideas about social status and betterment.

The story of another woman—Elisa, a *mestiza* born in 1936 in eastern Cuban, where she experienced racial discrimination in the education system and later was married for twenty years to an Afro-Cuban man—hints at another element of the complex legacy of the prohibition against unions between fair-skinned women and dark-skinned men. Speaking of her divorce as one of the “thorns” in her life, she says of her ex-husband:

At that time he was a very elegant young man, very attractive, and he had lots of options. On top of it we had lived through the period of capitalism, when black men had limited options as far as white women. . . . all those things, all those thorns [laughter] . . . those are the thorns.

In Elisa’s version of history, if socialism brought with it the partial elimination of old prejudices, it may also have increased the appeal of previously prohibited unions. Another indication that the old taboo against relationships between white women and black men has transformed into a cultural cachet comes in the interview with Juan, a black man born in 1968, less than a decade into the Revolution, and living in a rural area of Havana Province:

Your girlfriends—are they white or black?

I’ve never had one that was of color. They’ve always been *trigueñas* (olive-skinned) and *mulatas*.

Why?

Because—I don’t know. But the young girls who know me say, “What you like is white girls.” And I say, “Because I haven’t had much luck, because . . .” I fell in love with a young girl, *una prietecita* [a little black girl], sh-sh-sh. She was blacker than I am. And one time someone said to me, “You’re not into black women. You don’t cruise black women.” And that’s the truth. The other day there was a little girl there, a little black girl, beautiful. And she says, “I don’t like black guys.” Ladies and gentleman, they don’t let me go.

You’re drawn to white women?

Yes. It makes me laugh. It seems that . . . And now there’s that race, the

Dalmatians, the black man with the white woman. That's in fashion now all over the world. Because I thought it was just in Cuba, but it's all over the world. But I'm very careful about my partners. I don't like girls who are too *fiñe* [picky, snooty], sometimes the little ones are always screwing around. But I don't like the little ones. Those girls don't [...]

Most are white?

And some dark-skinned. Blonde. Because the color I like most is *indiado*, that oriental color. It's the color I like the most for breeding, as I say, for breeding. Because it's the color that's most ...

You don't think that has an element of discrimination against your own, against people who have your skin color?

I don't think so. Because look. I don't like—I criticize black men with blonde women. I don't like that race, very white. It doesn't hook me. I wouldn't like that. Dark-skinned, tanned, a little *mulata* can pass. But a blonde? No. They say, "But you had one." I did have one but that was, like one guy said, "one of those little adventures." But as a relationship, arm in arm and that, no. I don't like it. I don't know. It's a bit sad. A black man with a blonde. I don't like that mix. People say, "But how strange, hey, a black guy who doesn't like blondes." And I go out with them and I fool around with them but not ...

Have you ever had discrimination, in that sense?

Yes, yes. Of course. I felt it once. At primary school. "Hey, *negrito* [little black boy]!"⁶² And nowadays the mother of the girl I'm with, the one who comes here a lot ... her father-in-law, says, "When she goes up there she's going to the black guy's house," "When the black guy finishes at home, ..." "She goes to the black guy's house."

So do you think your town has been an area where ...

Yes, around here they've always talked like that. It's less—it develops later. In Havana it's very unusual to see that, "Hey, he's black." Very difficult. In Havana there's a lot of familiarity. I saw it there myself. Black guys, look, with dreads, they look like, those dreads that look like they haven't combed in a year ... With a white girl with a great body, hugging, kisses. [...] I said to my friends there, "Look, in that neighborhood everything is OK." Before, here, gentleman, a black man with a blonde? That was a scandal. . . Then later everything's started to hook up. There are still idiosyncrasies, here and there, in some areas. There are still idiosyncrasies. The world adapts, that's

the way the world is. The world adapts and everything becomes normalized. But ya, I've felt it. I've felt it.

This exchange between a thirty-something black man from rural Cuba and two middle-aged white female academics from Havana is a dizzying journey through the complex language and politics of race, sexuality, racism, sexism, and social class in early twenty-first-century Cuba. The sheer number of terms Juan uses to describe different racial groups reads like a veritable dictionary of popular language around race (the interviewers, in contrast, stick to the terms “white” and “black”) that will be unfamiliar and even uncomfortable for many English-speaking readers, evoking as it does centuries of racial profiling implicated in slavery, segregation, and genocide. While the interviewers seem to want to get to the bottom of what they presumably perceive as Juan’s internalized racism, his rejection of dark-skinned black women and experience of racism from the families of the fair-skinned women he dates, as well as his perception that in Havana relationships between black men and white women are accepted, suggest a complex picture of the intersection of class, race, gender, and sexuality, as well as the differences between rural and small-town Cuba and the capital (although other evidence indicates that interracial couples are not as socially accepted in Havana as Juan seems to believe).⁶³ Implicit in this exchange—as in much of the interview with Juan—is the *material* importance of sexual relationships as forms of social acceptance and advancement since the 1990s—a period of economic crisis, when revolutionary promises of equality have lost much of their practical meaning. It is to the politics of sexuality in the Special Period that we turn in the final chapter.

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EIGHT Sex in the Special Period

Sex came back into focus in Cuban studies during the 1990s. The “Special Period in Times of Peace,” announced in August 1990, and the ensuing expansion of the tourist industry in an attempt to bring foreign currency to Cuba, gave rise in particular to a series of studies on *jineterismo* (hustling) and sex tourism. This chapter engages with some of this material, but it also moves beyond the topic of commercial sexual exchange to consider the myriad ways in which the post-Soviet economic crisis affected the sexual lives of Cubans in the 1990s and into the twenty-first century. One area where this is particularly apparent is housing. Following a brief consideration of the issues of sex work and emigration, this chapter examines how the persistent shortage of dwellings on the island created new sites of crisis and contestation in intimate relations, and new developments in sexual politics.

New Forms of Consumption and Desire

Following the collapse of the Soviet bloc, Cuba experienced a period of acute economic hardship and shortage. Narrators’ memories of the early 1990s especially are filled with references to the lack of food and transportation and to other everyday forms of scarcity. At the same time, the crisis generated new economic initiatives, not only at the government level, but also among the general population. Thus as the state legalized the American dollar and embarked on a campaign to promote tourism in the mid-1990s, individual Cubans increasingly engaged in a number of enterprises in order to get access to coveted foreign currency, scarce imported consumer goods, and necessities such as food and household products. While some of this activity took place within the formal economy, which features many joint ventures between the Cuban government and foreign investors, much of it was informal or illicit.¹

While the academic literature on the Special Period pays special attention

to how the economic crisis led to an increased commodification of sex via sex tourism,² the interviews highlight the flip side of the coin. They exhibit a new language of desire for all forms of consumption, including clothes, cars, travel, electronic devices, and domestic appliances. In this terminology there is a notable move away from the language used to describe the 1960s especially—a lexicon of love and sacrifice for the Revolution (see chapter 2)—to expressions of passion for accumulation, apparent especially among the generation born after 1980. Yet the interviews are not devoid of nostalgia for the values of the pre-Special Period era, in particular the ideals of equality and solidarity. Metaphorically this nostalgia sometimes emerges in the form of a fetishization of Soviet-era domestic appliances.³

The interviews also provide evidence of how Cubans played the system to get by—or better—in the 1990s and beyond. Narrators speak of selling and buying goods on the informal market, employing or working under the table to fix cars and appliances, tracking down illicit supplies in order to build extensions on their homes, and even “buying” or renting houses illegally (see below). Ricardo, a gay-identified man born in 1972, explains one of the ways he makes ends meet:

And how do you pay for your electricity?

Well, I pay for my electricity, my water, gas, through my inventions [laughter].

What are the inventions?

[F]or example, since I’m in the gay world I know lots of guys who are with foreign women. They knock on my door at night to have sex and I charge them fifteen dollars. Ten are mine and five for the guy who brought the foreigner to the house. Another example is they say, “Hey, tomorrow I need you to make a meal in your house, I’m coming over with a foreigner.” I buy food and I make the meal. But afterwards I charge them. Even among Cubans. For example, a girl who’s with this guy and they don’t have anywhere to have sex and I take advantage of the situation and I say they can do it in my house and I charge two dollars. Now with regards to the food my mother is a cook and she helps me out too. She brings me oil, rice, beans. Things I don’t have to buy. I also have lots of friends abroad, who help me. They send me money from time to time or they send me someone I can rent to. Secretly of course. Because it’s not legal. Everything I do is illegal.

Ricardo's story is illustrative of the ways in which having one's own home can be a lucrative business, detailing the link between sex tourism and housing matters. Although some narrators are wary of specifying their illicit economic activities, Ricardo shows some pride in his inventive moneymaking. The frequent references to such schemes in the interviews indicate that they are both common knowledge and widely accepted. Interestingly, the one area that is relatively rarely mentioned is sexual hustling or *jineterismo*. There are a number of possible explanations for this. In both official and popular views, selling sex is categorized as implicitly or explicitly different from other forms of informal entrepreneurialism. Some narrators may have been engaged in selling sexual services but were unwilling to acknowledge it. The official "eradication" of prostitution in the 1960s effectively made sex work antirevolutionary activity. Thus, unlike the "rehabilitated" prostitutes of the early 1960s, who were generally represented as victims of corrupt and foreign capitalism, the *jineteras* of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are often represented as individualistic and greedy, lazy women who do not want to do "real" work.⁴ Some of the older narrators—women in particular, perhaps reflecting the historical position of the FMC on prostitution—make disparaging comments about *jineteras* and, as we saw in chapter 5, some homosexual men are critical of male sex workers.⁵

There is another reason sex work does not feature prominently in the interviews: in Cuba, as in many countries, the erotic market involves an array of activities and forms of exchange, and those who engage in them on either side of the arrangements often do not perceive of them as prostitution or sex work.⁶ Ricardo, for example, presents his illegal work as a kind of catering and hospitality service; he does not explicitly mention sex tourism. Another example is found in Nancy, a twenty-six-year-old woman I interviewed in Santiago de Cuba in December 2007. Born in 1980, Nancy grew up in a poor family in rural eastern Cuba and her father was imprisoned in the 1990s for buying and selling illegal agricultural goods. In addition to money sent to her from her girlfriend living abroad, Nancy gets by through a series of informal *negocios* (businesses). Since 2005, she has been in a long-distance relationship with Marco, a middle-aged Italian who visits her a few times a year and sends money for Nancy and her family.⁷ Marco has promised to marry Nancy on his next trip to Cuba so that she can move to Italy with him.⁸ Nancy is frank about the fact that she feels no love or sexual desire for Marco, but says he

has treated her kindly and with respect. She thinks she is taking advantage of Marco's feelings, but believes he is also benefiting from their arrangement:

In this relationship I know perfectly well that he's found a Third World woman from a poor country who doesn't know—or he thinks doesn't know—how the standard of living is in other countries. Maybe because he knows that to marry an Italian woman they're quite demanding economically and we here, since we're so poor, will make do with much less. And that part must attract him, the fact that I'm more profitable, more economical.

It is not clear from this account whether Marco went to Cuba looking for the kind of relationship he found with Nancy, to what extent he perceives it as a mutual financial exchange as well as a sexual and emotional one, or whether Nancy has been involved in similar arrangements previously. It is unlikely that Nancy considers herself to be a *jinetera* or is perceived as such by her friends and family. This may be because, as a relatively light-skinned woman, she does not fit the stereotypical and stigmatized image of the *mulata* sex worker.⁹ Additionally, the success of Nancy's relationship with Marco probably depends on their constructing it as something other than a direct commercial exchange. Being a "girlfriend" rather than a *jinetera* increases Nancy's chances of marrying Marco and leaving Cuba—her ultimate goal.¹⁰

Nancy's relationship with Marco, with its gendered, racialized, and economic dimensions, shows many of the complexities and subtleties of sex and tourism in Cuba. But her case points to other dimensions missing from most research in this area. Although there have been reports of lesbians working as *jineteras*,¹¹ those women are made largely invisible in the academic literature on the topic, which tends to define its subject in relation to the sexual preferences of the clients, whether male or female. A consideration of how women who have their primary sexual/emotional relationships with other women participate in the complex of sexual/emotional/economic relations between Cubans and foreigners would add new dimensions to the history of female same-sex desire in Cuba. It would also contribute to the growing literature on sexuality, tourism, and globalization, including in queer studies, where lesbians remain largely absent from studies of transnational commercial sex.

NANCY WAS NOT the only young lesbian-identified woman I interviewed who aspired to leave Cuba. Among the women cited in chapter 6, all those

born before or in the early years of the Revolution were settled in Cuba and did not aspire to leave. In contrast, almost all the lesbian-identified women born in the 1970s or later were planning to emigrate. The exception, Margarita, was committed to staying in Cuba but would consider leaving if she could not find a house to live alone or with her partner.

Notwithstanding the historical association between emigration and homosexuality in Cuba (see chapter 4), and although a number of the narrators who have same-sex relationships cited homophobic persecution as a motivation for leaving the country, the majority, like all narrators, stressed material and economic considerations. Among these that which featured most prominently was the lack of housing. The relationship between poor housing and emigration is multitiered. Margarita and many others, living in cramped quarters with extended families with little chance of moving, considered emigration one of the only possibilities for solving her housing dilemma. Nancy, on the other hand, was able to “rent” an apartment for herself and her ex-partner Saray (b. 1983) through money received from Nancy’s girlfriend, who had married a European and emigrated. At the same time, one of Nancy’s main motivations for leaving the country was to send money to her family so that they could renovate their precarious rural dwelling. Nancy’s story highlights, through the links it makes between economic crisis, tourism, and emigration, the sexual politics of the housing crisis, a relationship worth exploring in greater detail.

Revolutionary Homes

Even before the Revolution of 1959 Cuban revolutionaries declared themselves committed to providing adequate and affordable housing for all Cubans. In his 1953 “History Will Absolve Me” speech Fidel Castro recognized what he called the “tragedy of housing”: excessive rents, frequent evictions, high utility rates, and crowded and unstable dwellings that plagued poor tenants in both urban and rural areas.¹² Like most large, mid-twentieth-century Latin American cities, Havana was surrounded by extensive squatter settlements and shantytowns.¹³ In the countryside, peasants typically lived in *bohíos*, wooden huts with thatched roofs and mud or cement floors, without toilets or bathing facilities.¹⁴ Estimates put the overall housing deficit in 1959 at between 250,000 and 700,000.¹⁵ As Sergio Roca notes, “The task of the Revolution in the housing sector was nothing short of formidable.”¹⁶

During the early years after 1959 a series of new housing laws were passed to introduce affordable rents and end property speculation, and there was an initial flurry of new construction.¹⁷ The Self-Help and Mutual Aid program allowed for the destruction of shantytowns and the relocation of their occupants in newly built units.¹⁸ Additional housing was freed up by the departure of some 200,000 mostly middle-class residents during the first years of the Revolution, especially from the wealthy neighborhoods of Havana.¹⁹ But early promises of adequate housing for all proved difficult to fulfill. Additionally, as Nadine Fernandez notes, the housing reform actually made it very difficult for people to move home, meaning that traditional neighborhoods based on class and race were largely maintained.²⁰ Roca calculates that by the mid-1960s two-thirds of the population (almost 5 million people) was still living in sub-standard or overcrowded housing.²¹ Scholars cite a number of explanations for the persistent shortfall. Kosta Math  y argues that revolutionary leaders never dedicated the same attention to housing as they did to improving health and education services, or to programs of agricultural and economic reform.²² Furthermore, adequate planning and construction were hindered by the departure of many of the country's architects,²³ as well as by the lack of building materials due to the U.S. embargo.²⁴ The Revolutionary Offensive of 1968, under which all remaining nonagricultural small businesses were nationalized, allowed the government to convert some commercial buildings into dwellings, although the premises often provided inappropriate accommodations.²⁵ Indeed, one of our interviewees recalls moving with her family around 1970 to a cafeteria in Central Havana that was being converted into a dwelling: "There were holes and from out of the holes crawled rats. It was awful, with those iron doors" (Irina, b. 1963). By the end of the 1960s Fidel Castro estimated that during the first decade of the Revolution only 10 percent of required housing had been built.²⁶

Yet housing provision, especially in Havana, continued to fall behind other priorities, and Castro himself declared it the most urgent social problem facing the Revolution.²⁷ During his annual 26 July speech in 1970, following the 10-million-ton sugarcane production failure, the Cuban leader announced a plan for the formation of *microbrigadas* (microbrigades). A certain number of workers would be relieved of their normal duties to build dwellings for themselves and their colleagues.²⁸ The principle of freeing workers from their regular duties to do community construction work contrasted to much of the rest of Latin America, where those without shelter were typically left to build their

own homes after regular work hours.²⁹ (Such informal practice did continue in socialist Cuba, however, especially in rural areas.)³⁰ During the 1970s, microbrigades built tens of thousands of units, particularly in new neighborhoods around Havana.

But the success rate of the microbrigades, which were disbanded by the end of the decade and reformed in the 1980s, was not enough to remedy the crisis. Carmelo Mesa-Lago claims that housing was the area in which reform was least successful during the revolutionary regime's first two decades in power.³¹ By the 1980s, the coming of age of the "baby boom" generation born in the 1960s added further pressure.³² In response to the shortage, Cubans increasingly constructed their own homes or put additions on existing ones.³³ The 1984 Housing Law legalized self-help construction and introduced some forms of renting as well as the *permuta* system, whereby tenants could move by exchanging houses.³⁴ The 1984 film *Se Permuta* ("House Swap," dir. Juan Carlos Tabío) provides a humorous take on this new scheme and, as Nadine Fernandez notes, also shows how Cubans' desires for better housing were tied to romantic relationships including, in this case, anxieties about race and interracial unions.³⁵ Moreover, various scholars have argued that inadequate housing provision in the 1970s and 1980s perpetuated prerevolutionary inequalities, reinforcing what Alejandro de la Fuente calls a "traditional geography of race and poverty."³⁶ The economic crisis of the Special Period brought a halt to most construction, further worsening the situation. Whereas the microbrigades (also represented in *Se Permuta*) could be read as a metaphor for the collective construction of the new nation, during the 1990s theatrical productions, such as Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez's *Vereda tropical* (1994), presented crumbling buildings as symbols of "the deterioration of the socialist family and nation in Cuba," while stage sets reproduced poor and cramped conditions in which tense family relations were played out.³⁷ In these years Cubans increasingly had to find creative ways to make more living space, dividing apartments into separate lodgings, constructing additions,³⁸ or renting or buying properties illegally.³⁹ As our interviews attest, in the first decade of the twenty-first century a substantial number of Cubans still lived in cramped conditions with extended families. But although families were most affected by the shortage of dwellings, few have considered the history of socialist housing strategy in relation to ideas about the family.⁴⁰

Revolutionary housing policy developed alongside wider measures that both increased the power of the state in relation to families and aimed to in-

corporate women into the paid labor market. One of the Revolution's early goals had been to reduce the economic and social power of families, especially those with significant wealth and property. In addition to economic motivations, the revolutionary government was concerned to exercise as much influence as possible on the socialization of new generations. Extended families and local social networks saw their traditional influence additionally challenged by the incorporation of most Cubans into mass organizations. But revolutionary family policy was fraught with contradictions, which in turn reflect conflicting messages about gender and the role of women in the Revolution. Most experts on this topic agree that while the regime made significant advance in incorporating women into the labor force and promoting their economic, political, and social equality in the workplace and the "public sphere" generally, it was much less successful in tackling gender divisions in the home. At the root of this imbalance is the revolutionary emphasis, drawn from classic Marx and Engels, on eliminating gender inequality through the eradication of capitalist class relations, defined in relation to production.

In addition to the contradictions of 1970s family policy, including the Family Code of 1975, the construction of family homes continued to reflect the assumption that cooking, cleaning, and other tasks would be carried out largely in individual family units.⁴¹ In this area, Cuban policy was similar to that of other socialist countries, where state housing projects privileged dwellings for nuclear families.⁴² How can we explain this substantial gap between pro-family rhetoric and policy, on one hand, and the failure to provide adequate housing for individual families, on the other? Economic shortage alone cannot account for the lack of priority accorded to housing. Comparative studies of gender and socialist housing policy provide some insight. In their study of women, work, and housing in the Soviet Union, Cedric Pugh and Susan Lewin make a direct link between the undervaluation of women's domestic labor and the lack of priority accorded to housing. Because in classical Marxist economics housing is considered to be unproductive, it is viewed as secondary to socialist planning in the productive sector. Unequal housing provision, while acknowledged in socialist theory as a feature of social inequality, is not perceived as a *cause* of such inequality. This is conceived instead in terms of class relations, which can only be eradicated through the transformation of productive relations. In this model, housing belongs to the "domestic economy," which in turn is associated with women's unpaid (and therefore nonproductive) labor.⁴³

Socialist feminists have argued for decades that production is fundamentally dependent on women's unpaid labor in the domestic sphere. But, as Pugh and Lewin write, "Notwithstanding their significance, the domestic labor, the child rearing, and the family roles of women are, like housing, subordinated in socialist theory. Although they have implications for productive work in firms and enterprises, they are essentially seen as unproductive."⁴⁴ The argument put forth by Pugh and Lewin makes explicit what is only implicit in most references to family, gender, and housing in revolutionary Cuba: the low priority accorded to housing is linked to the hierarchy of production over consumption, which in turn reflects the valuation of "masculine," "productive" labor in the public sector above "feminine," "unproductive" labor in the home.⁴⁵

Following this comparison, it is clear that the gendering of Cuban history must go beyond a focus on changes in women's and men's roles, or policies on issues related to reproduction and the family, to an analysis of how gendered ideologies have shaped revolutionary politics in all areas. Comparisons between Cuba and other socialist states must also take into account significant economic, social, and cultural differences. In the case of Cuba, an integrated history of housing, gender, and sexuality would have to consider the ideological framework of Marxism and the particular historical patterns of family, gender, and sexual relations, as well as the complex and sometimes contradictory impact of revolutionary policy on these areas. For example, the official status accorded the nuclear family from the 1970s onward did not reflect the proliferation of extended and multigenerational families throughout Cuba. According to Helen Safa, matrifocal, or mother-centered, households, historically strong in Cuba and most of the Caribbean, actually increased after the revolutionary triumph of 1959, as did consensual unions.⁴⁶ If Safa is correct that such patterns reflect "the leveling of class and racial hierarchies produced by the Revolution, combined with greater economic autonomy for women,"⁴⁷ the regime's attempt to impose a family model historically associated with the white middle classes clashed directly with its commitments to class, racial, and gender equality.

While in agreement with Safa, I caution against her tendency to interpret matrifocal families as indicative of greater levels of equality, female autonomy, and choice. The impact of the Revolution on family forms went beyond increased equality to the radical transformation of most areas of life, including the household economy, often with contradictory effects.⁴⁸ Furthermore,

Safa's analysis does not consider adequately the substantial material constraints that determine to a great extent where Cubans live and with whom, as well as changing values vis-à-vis family relations, including the different needs and desires of Cubans who have same-sex relationships. As early as the 1970s, Butterworth cautioned against interpreting extended families as a sign of emotional closeness in the context of a lack of housing.⁴⁹ Similarly, our interviews suggest that, given the choice, many Cubans would opt to live with greater space and fewer family members.

Memories of Home

Housing is a recurring theme in most of the interviews. Childhood homes figure prominently in early memories; adult tales of moving or struggling to find an acceptable place to live dominate many of the life stories. Several narrators describe their childhood homes in language similar to that used by Castro in his 1953 speech. A miserable dwelling often symbolizes humble origins, prefiguring a narrative of revolutionary commitment. Some tell how they acquired houses after 1959: occupying the abandoned mansions of emigrants in wealthy Havana neighborhoods, building their own houses, participating in the microbrigades, or acquiring a house illegally during or after the Special Period. For most narrators, however, stories of housing revolve around the ongoing dilemma of finding or keeping a home.

The interview with Taty (b. 1938) incorporates many of these elements and highlights the multiple meanings of housing as memory, crisis, and desire, as well as the interconnectedness of housing and fantasies of home. Her interview opens with a series of memories of her childhood—the thatched-roof hut with zinc doors, where cows wondered in and out, an alcoholic father, a poor and struggling mother (see chapter 3)—which bring her to tears. Following the 1944 hurricane that devastated parts of rural Cuba, Taty moved with her mother and sisters to Havana, where they lived in a *solar* (tenement house). When her mother remarried, the family moved to a poor, racially mixed area on the outskirts of the city.

In this neighborhood, where the nearby river frequently overflowed and flooded the residences, sending sewage into the streets, Taty's stepfather built a wooden house, made from materials bought at a flea market. With the arrival of the Revolution, there were plans to demolish the dwellings in the

area and relocate the tenants, but this was never carried through, and many families were still living in the same deteriorating buildings at the turn of the twenty-first century. At the time of her interview in 2005, Taty's son was living in the wooden house her mother had lived in since the 1940s, even though Taty described it as "ready to be pulled down." She remembers that in the 1990s she called inspectors from the Housing Ministry to inspect it, but that could only offer to put the family on a waiting list for emergency shelter. In the early 1970s Taty lived with her husband and son for about ten years in the attic of her mother's house. In the mid 1980s the three of them moved to a suburb of Havana, where Taty's husband had been given an apartment after his participation in a microbrigade. A decade later in the 1990s, with her mother increasingly ill, Taty moved back to her old neighborhood through the *permuta* system. In 2005 she described her current dwelling as a place where she "lived well." Her thirty-one-year-old son, on the other hand, was living alone in the leaky wooden house, raising pigs in addition to his regular job at a fishery in order to make renovations and accommodate his partner and her small son.

Taty's interview reflects several wider trends in the history of Cuban housing: the miserable conditions in rural Cuba and working-class Havana during the 1940s and 1950s; the failure of the revolutionary government to fully implement its policy of relocating tenants in the 1960s, and the particular impact this had on poor black families; the limited successes of the microbrigade projects, and the rewards given to exemplary workers in the 1970s and 1980s in the form of dwellings; and the function of the *permuta* system and the self-help approach since the 1990s, with people working on the informal market in order to make improvements to their living spaces. Moreover, the interview highlights how family, gender, and sexual relations shape, and in turn are shaped by, housing issues. Most interesting is the evidence of a cross-generational pattern of women relying for housing on marriage and their husband's financial standing, a pattern that continued after 1959. Taty's mother got accommodations for herself and her children by marrying in the 1940s; Taty was likewise able, eventually, to have a family home thanks to her husband's employment and political connections. For the younger generation, however, opportunities are scarcer and Taty's son finds himself repairing an old building for his new family.

Sex, Gender, and Housing

Taty's interview is not the only one in which themes of family, gender, race, and sexual relations merge with tales of housing. A notable feature of the interviews as a whole is the way they serve to complicate the popular myth of the exceptionally close Cuban family. Although families served as an important source of economic and emotional support, especially during the Special Period, in narrators' stories family is often also a source of conflict and pain, and tensions with relatives are invariably aggravated by claustrophobic living conditions.

Lily is another black woman from the same neighborhood as Taty, but some twenty-seven years younger. Born in eastern Cuba in 1965, Lily moved as a child to Havana, where her parents were given a house. At the time of the interview, Lily, then age forty, was living with her three children in the upstairs of her mother's house, with her siblings residing downstairs. Lily's life story is characterized by instability in many areas: work, accommodations, and relationships. She recalls the difficulty of having to share a living space with her ex-husband (whom she describes as "a bit of a womanizer") and his demanding mother. In remembering this stressful situation, Lily addresses the two Cuban interviewers directly, assuming that they know exactly what she is talking about: "You know what the housing situation is like." At another point she expresses faith that "El Comandante" (Fidel Castro) will help her solve her housing problems.⁵⁰

The case of Lily underscores the problems faced by many Cuban single mothers with limited economic resources. Whereas Taty and her mother found homes through heterosexual relationships, for Lily marriage meant being trapped in cramped quarters with an unfaithful husband. Nena, a white woman from a working-class family, was born in the mid-1950s in a neighborhood close to that of Taty and Lily. Her situation demonstrates that although black Cubans have been disproportionately affected both by weaknesses in revolutionary policy to decrease inequality and the economic crisis since 1990, patterns of social exclusion are also shaped by class and gender, and in racially mixed poor areas white women may face similar challenges to their Afro-Cuban neighbors. Nena's life story revolves around tales of domestic violence, prison, difficult relationships, abandonment, and struggles to find adequate work and accommodations (see chapter 7). By 2005, after a number of marriages, Nena was "renting" a house from a prisoner: a man she

had had a relationship with several years earlier and who had subsequently killed his wife. Nena visits the prison regularly to bring provisions, talk, and have sexual relations with this man. In exchange, she lives in his house.⁵¹ She describes this as an amicable arrangement, one she engages in contentedly, but without much affection. But at the time of the interview it was under threat because one of the prisoner's daughters wanted to come and live at the house. When asked about any fears or uncertainties she has, Nina cites the threat of losing her home.

The stories of Taty, Lily, and Nena incorporate some of the ways in which housing and heterosexual relationships converge in socialist Cuba, producing both conflict and creative solutions. The cases of Taty and Lily, living with problem husbands and extended families, are representative of a wider social trend. During the 1960s and 1970s living conditions were often cited as a reason for marital breakdown.⁵² Even after divorce, many couples were forced to continue to cohabit, separating areas of their small dwellings however they could.⁵³ Furthermore, in contrast to official rhetoric celebrating the family and sex education programs locating sexual relations in the intimacy of the domestic space, most narrators stress the difficulties of private sexual encounters at home. The challenge of finding an adequate place for sexual relations predates the Revolution. One solution was *posadas*, private rooms rented for sexual encounters. During the early 1960s, as part of a wider campaign to “clean up” public vices, the revolutionary government attempted, unsuccessfully, to shut down the *posadas*.⁵⁴ In a 1965 interview with Fidel Castro the journalist Lee Lockwood asked the Cuban leader if the *posadas* were still permitted because of the housing shortage in Havana.⁵⁵ In response—and avoiding further discussion of the housing shortage—Castro defended the decision to maintain the *posadas*, saying they satisfied a “social need.”⁵⁶ However, this was clearly perceived as a heterosexual need only, as Luis Salas noted in the late 1970s:

Many of the Cuban attempts to curb homosexuality have been directed at making homosexual encounters difficult, if not impossible. While “posadas,” motels operated for brief encounters between heterosexuals, are available to single heterosexuals, homosexuals are specifically prohibited from entry. Housing is in short supply and top priority is given to couples, especially those with children, so that stable relationships between homosexuals are inhibited.⁵⁷

Queer Homes⁵⁸

As the quotation at the end of the previous section indicates, the themes of sex and housing converge in particular ways in interviews with narrators who have same-sex relationships.⁵⁹ There are a number of reasons for this. Such people often migrate to Havana from provincial cities and rural areas in search of sexual relationships and community, as well economic opportunities. In the context of the housing shortage and the lack of an open rental market, many of these internal migrants have to fend for themselves. Pachy (b. 1964), for example, recalls that after moving to Havana from his hometown in the provinces in the 1980s, he had relationships with men he picked up at the bus station or in parks in order to find a place to sleep for a few nights or weeks (see chapter 5). Furthermore, as Salas notes, popular and institutionalized homophobia made same-sex encounters particularly difficult. Homophobia among family members often prevented people from bringing home lovers of the same sex, or even receiving friends in their small quarters.⁶⁰ One lesbian-identified narrator who lives alone, Marielis (b. 1964), acknowledges that her lack of experience of discrimination is due in part to having her own apartment. Even female same-sex couples that manage to find a place together may be subject to surveillance by neighbors, as indicated in the interview with Elisa (b. 1936), charged with “watching over” two lesbians in her block as part of her work for the FMC.

The double bind of housing for homosexuals is exemplified in a pair of interviews with Eusebio, a white homosexual-identified man born in 1971 in the same neighborhood where Taty, Lily, and Nena live. Eusebio’s case underscores the fact that access to housing is about more than acquiring a physical place of residence. The youngest of three siblings with a deceased father, in 2005 Eusebio was living alone with his mother in what he describes as “[a] big house, but not remotely pleasant. I have a room of my own, but little good it does me.” Eusebio’s mother does not approve of his sexuality or his friendships and does not permit him to receive guests or even to take phone calls. Consequently, Eusebio spends most of his time “in the street,” at the houses of acquaintances or meeting with friends in public places, returning to his home only to sleep. This is in spite of the fact that he finds the street violent and has more than once narrowly escaped attack in his own neighborhood. Furthermore, he does not identify with what he perceives as the unsavory behavior of homosexual men who frequent public places (see chapter 5). He has

proposed to his mother that they divide their living space in two (a common solution to housing problems), but she refuses. Living on her pension and his small state salary, they cannot afford to rent another dwelling.

Unlike most of the interviews, this one was conducted away from his home, and Eusebio begins by explaining why: “The situation we have here, that a certain group of people don’t have their own home, we have to live with our parents, we cannot live with who we want. This is something fundamental here.” He returns time and again to this theme, along with related stories of family conflict, problems at work, and fear of aggression in the street. Although many of these problems go beyond the realm of sexuality, Eusebio’s stories of discrimination, violence, and family rejection converge to form a narrative fundamentally shaped by homophobia. Asked about his plans for the future, he makes clear that he wants to follow many of his generation (including his ex-boyfriend) by emigrating. He cites the housing crisis and homophobia as his main motivations.

Laura (b. 1958) is a friend of Eusebio and the aunt of his former partner. More than a decade older than him and living in another area of Havana, she does not share his dream of leaving the country. But she does suffer from similar housing problems. The three interviews with Laura were conducted in different places (see chapter 6). When not in the cramped apartment shared with her mother, Laura spoke at length about the impossibility of resolving her living situation, since according to the state she was registered as housed. In an effort similar to Eusebio’s, Laura had attempted unsuccessfully to convince her mother and brother to divide their house. I conducted the third interview with Laura in the home of a friend of hers, a middle-aged single woman whose one-bedroom apartment acts as a space of social gathering and refuge for a small community of people of different sexualities. At the time of this final interview Laura was sleeping on the couch in this place, returning daily to clean her mother’s house and to prepare her meals.

Laura’s situation not only highlights the particular problems faced by Cubans in same-sex relationships, especially those with limited financial resources. It also points to one of the ironies of contemporary Cuban history for the generation “born with the Revolution,” as Laura calls herself. Laura speaks at length about the importance of the boarding school, which she experienced as a form of liberation from what she described as a stifling and strict upbringing (see chapter 3). Several decades later, still politically active and working for a modest salary at a state firm, Laura finds herself living with

and caring for her aged mother, who continues to exercise control over her social and personal life.

Scholars of race in Cuba have shown that, notwithstanding significant advances in racial equality, during the Revolution poor housing has continued to be concentrated in regions or neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by Afro-Cubans. At the same time, the lack of new construction contributed to the dominance of multigenerational households in which traditional views about race and racism were transmitted in private, countering the regime's attempts to educate young people in the ideals of racially equality.⁶¹ I want to extend this argument to incorporate gender and sexuality. While popular rhetoric in Cuba—like in most countries—celebrates the family as the center of national identity, many of the interviews highlight family conflict, repeated across generations and exacerbated by gender inequalities, homophobia, and the housing shortage. But by focusing on how Cubans seek to build homes in the face of poverty and adversity, we find sites of resistance and creativity as well as oppression. Nena's arrangement with the prisoner whose place she rents in return for sex is one example. Another is the small apartment where Laura often sleeps and where Eusebio and others come together for meals and visits. What I would call this "queer home," created out of necessity but also friendship and solidarity, in which Habaneros of different racial, gender, sexual, and generational groups share their lives, represents its own kind of revolutionary social space.

Sexuality in the Special Period and Beyond

Much research remains to be done on the interconnectedness of housing and relations of power in revolutionary Cuba, including sexuality. The intergenerational pattern of women attaining accommodations through formal or informal heterosexual relationships tends to confirm the overall conclusions of studies of gender in Cuba, that the Revolution has been much more successful at challenging inequality in the "public" sphere than in private. However, more detailed studies of such patterns, and their relationship to housing policy and provision, would be needed to substantiate this thesis. With regard to histories of homosexuality, the issue of housing likewise points to new areas of scholarship. To date, research on queer Cuba has been characterized by a focus on male homosexuality, especially in relation to cultural representation and use of public spaces. These studies frequently cite the "invisibility"

of lesbians and their relative protection from official homophobia that targeted gay men.⁶² But the stories of Eusebio and Laura, cited above, indicate that official and popular homophobia affects men and women in similar ways in relation to housing. Further investigation into this area could therefore contribute to a more inclusive history of same-sex desire in Cuba.

The example of sexuality and housing also highlights some of the challenges of a transnational history of sexuality. On one hand, existing studies of queer homes conducted in Western capitalist contexts stress similar issues of marginalization, family conflict, and the urge for private space as a refuge from day-to-day forms of homophobia, whether in public or at home,⁶³ cautioning us against the temptation to see Cuban homophobia as exceptional. These studies challenge the idea that homes are always a refuge for people who have same-sex sex, especially when forced to live with their families of origin. But they nevertheless tend to assume that most people have access to private spaces (either because they have separate rooms or can move to another house) even if access to privacy is unequal and mediated by class, race, and geographical location. In other words, the availability of adequate housing is largely taken for granted, as is the existence of communal public gathering spaces, such as bars, saunas, parks, streets, and so on. The widespread access to both private and public queer spaces in Western, capitalist urban areas contrasts radically with Cuba, and with much of the rest of the world.⁶⁴ Not only do Cubans who have same-sex relationships contend with an acute scarcity of living space; they also struggle to find meeting places in public, since there are no private bars and public spaces are subject to frequent police and public harassment. As Abel Sierra argues, to speak of a “gay community” in Cuba is to import terminology inappropriate to the contemporary Cuban context.⁶⁵

While Sierra and others correctly warn against writing a Cuban history of sexuality on the model of the West, there may be more valuable parallels with other countries. Comparative studies of housing and sexuality outside the global north indicate that even when governments name housing as a top priority, this often clashes with other political and economic priorities. In the case of socialist Cuba, housing, defined as an item of consumption, was subordinated to the “productive” sphere. In his study of the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, Glen Elder argues that housing policy, like much else, has been refracted through a “heterosexualized fog”⁶⁶ and that provision has privileged nuclear families and men at the expense of working mothers and

women generally.⁶⁷ Moreover, early promises of better accommodations for all citizens were soon sacrificed to a macroeconomic plan, constructed in consultation with the World Bank, which marginalizes women as both producers and consumers.⁶⁸ The case of South Africa, with its radical differences from Cuba, nonetheless serves as a salient warning. In the early twenty-first century, as outsiders anticipate and sometimes celebrate reforms in Cuba that indicate a possible transition to a more “free market” economy,⁶⁹ historical and comparative evidence strongly suggests that such reforms will exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, existing inequalities. This final example fits one of the central arguments of this book: the history of sexuality in socialist Cuba, including ongoing forms of inequality and discrimination, are intimately tied to wider social, economic, and political changes since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959.

CONCLUSION

The Cuban Revolution has had a profound impact on all areas of life, including sexuality. But as I've argued in this book, the transformation in sexual values and practices did not happen from one day to the next. Nor did the Revolution sweep away all remnants of conventional sexual mores. Indeed, sexuality is one area where we see most clearly the coexistence of the old and the new in revolutionary Cuba. The changes in Cubans' sex lives since 1959 are best understood not as a singular event—a "sexual revolution"—but as a process that has been, like the Cuban Revolution itself, both uneven and ongoing.

Furthermore, notwithstanding specific policies designed to encourage certain behavior (for example, formal marriage) and punish others (most notably same-sex relationships), changes in the area of sexuality came about less as a result of official policy and more as a consequence of the general social upheaval ushered in after 1959. Cuban revolutionaries sought to create a radically new society, challenging historical divisions based on class, race, and gender, although, in spite of enormous gains in equality in these areas, traditional hierarchies and prejudices proved remarkably tenacious.

This book has explored the relationship between sexuality, revolutionary policy, and social relations of gender, race, and class through an analysis of a series of oral history interviews. I have made the case for the value of oral history as a source and methodology to explore the relationship between sexuality, memory, and history. Through a particular attention to narratives of generation, I have argued that oral history asks us to reconsider straightforward notions of historical progress and to reexamine familiar landmarks in the periodization of the Cuban Revolution. Measuring time in subjective terms with reference to community and family, interviews emphasize continuity as much as change and point to intergenerational traditions and memories often obscured in official accounts of history.

The book adds new dimensions to a number of ongoing debates around key

issues in Cuban sexuality: the relationship between passion, intimacy, and revolutionary politics; developments in heterosexual relations, reproduction, and family life; the history of homosexuality and revolutionary homophobia; interracial relationships; commercial sex and sex tourism. By intervening in these areas, I have brought a historical perspective to topics hitherto studied primarily by anthropologists, sociologists, and literary and cultural critics. One purpose of the book, therefore, has been to contribute to the ongoing project of writing the social and cultural history of the Cuban Revolution. By emphasizing the importance of prerevolutionary influences for understanding sexuality in the period after 1959, the book joins other recent scholarship in Cuban studies in challenging the idea of Cuban exceptionalism. It also does this by incorporating a comparative framework that points to similarities as well as differences between developments in Cuba and those in other countries. For example, chapter 3 draws on new studies of Latin American and Caribbean masculinities. In chapters 5 and 6, I put the themes of sexual migration and female same-sex desire, respectively, in the context of transnational queer studies. And by looking at interviewees' memories of sexual and domestic violence, chapter 7 argues against the revolutionary thesis that these issues are specific to Western, capitalist nations.

In all the chapters in *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba* I have engaged with contemporary feminist and gay and lesbian/queer studies, applying some of the major insights and methodological tools from these areas of study to the history of contemporary Cuba. I was particularly interested in the intersections of sexuality, social class, gender, and race. Thus, one of the central arguments of the book developed from engaging with theories of intersectionality: many of the weaknesses in Cuban revolutionary policy toward sexuality arise from the tendency to understand—and manage—sexuality separately from other social categories, and the concomitant failure to address problems of privilege (e.g., hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity) as well as oppression/discrimination (e.g., sexism and homophobia). In using intersectionality as a method of *historical* analysis, I hope to demonstrate the usefulness of this theory/method for historians as well as social scientists and feminist and critical race theorists. In chapter 3, my analysis of the historical memory of the risks of premarital pregnancy and vulnerability to abandonment and poverty among black female narrators of different generations borrows from the black feminist insight that no analysis of female sexuality is complete without a consideration of the long history of colonial and postcolonial sexual assaults on the

bodies of women of color. But following some recent developments in studies of intersectionality, I argue for consideration of categories of *privilege* as well as oppression. Thus I provide examples of how whiteness or heterosexuality intersect with other categories, even when the former are largely taken for granted or assumed rather than articulated. For example, in chapter 5 I draw attention to the racialized language used by one white homosexual-identified interviewee, as well as to the general lack of attention to questions of race in the existing literature on male homosexuality in revolutionary Cuba.

But an attention to intersectionality must go beyond the words in the text (in this case, interviews) to a consideration of what is not said. My attentiveness to silence draws as well on insights from oral history. For example, in chapter 6, on female same-sex desire, I interpret the intersection of race, religion, and sexuality in three interviews with Laura, through an analysis of what is not said in the interview as well as spoken associations. Silences may also point to memories too painful to speak aloud. I have drawn upon theories of gendered memory and queer reworkings of trauma theory to explore how emotionally charged memories of activism, repression, and violence leave traces that may counter “masculinized” histories of revolutionary triumph (for example, in chapter 2), or disrupt official silences around taboo or supposedly “forgotten” topics (female same-sex desire, childhood sexual abuse, or institutionalized homophobia).

In addition to contributing to the existing literature on sexuality in Cuba, I wanted the book to give attention to themes that have received less scholarly attention: female heterosexual and same-sex desire; sexual and domestic violence; and the relationship between sexuality, home, and housing. I hope the work presented here will encourage other scholars to conduct more detailed research in these areas. Certainly, there seems to be ample interest in the topic of sexuality and the Cuban Revolution. The changes in Cuban society since the collapse of state socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe after 1989 have prompted a flurry of new studies on sexuality. The emerging research on masculinity is one area that promises to enrich the field. But this new scholarship also serves as a reminder of what is still missing, most notably *historical* research on the prerevolutionary and early revolutionary periods. This is especially evident in the case of commercial sex and sex tourism. We now have a number of studies on this topic for the Special Period and after, but there is very little academic work on prostitution in 1950s Cuba. We likewise lack detailed research on the revolutionary campaign to eradicate prostitution and

rehabilitate prostitutes in the early 1960s. This means that comparisons between the post-1989 scenario and earlier periods rest on a handful of sources (most problematically, official speeches and writings) and not a small amount of speculation. A similar shortage of historical research is evident in the case of early revolutionary homophobia, including the founding and running of the notorious UMAP labor camps (1965–67). Although much has been written on this topic, there is as yet no in-depth study. While to date lack of access to official documents has been a problem, changes in official policy toward homosexuality may bring with them new opportunities for investigation.

If the study of sexuality in Cuba cries out for more historical analysis, it also demands a spatial expansion, beyond the current concentration on Havana. As the experience of the “Cuban Voices” oral history project demonstrates, the problems associated with conducting fieldwork in Cuba multiply beyond the capital city. This is no doubt why a significant number of ethnographic studies conducted by outsiders since the 1990s appear to center on Havana. But this produces a distorted picture of the country, and it is to be hoped that this will change as scholarly interest in Cuban sexuality continues to grow. Research conducted by island-dwelling Cubans (including some of the important demographic research upon which this book draws) is much broader in scope. But there remains a strong Havana bias in studies with the title “sexuality” or related topics published in English. There are political implications here as well. In particular, historical and/or ethnographic research on sexuality in rural Cuba would help us better to assess to what extent the changes many have noted since the 1990s (e.g., the rise of sex tourism and greater official tolerance of homosexuality) have been experienced throughout the country.

As I argued in the Introduction, the Cuban Revolution is a process rather than a singular event, one that persists as this book goes to press, even as speculation about its future abounds. To write the history of sexuality in Cuba in the early twenty-first century is therefore to write a history that is still happening. Although, like all books, this one must come to an end, the materials contained within it, especially the interviews upon which it is based, are meant to be dynamic, like the Revolution itself. While I have made a number of arguments and drawn a series of conclusions, these are by no means the definitive or final ones. In providing a range of examples from oral history interviews with Cubans of different groups and social categories, my aim has been not to impose my interpretations as the last word on their life stories, but rather to make available a rich resource for ongoing research and debate.

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APPENDIX List of Interviews

The pseudonym of each interviewee cited in the book is listed here alphabetically, followed in each case by year of birth and by place and date of interview(s).

- Armando, b. 1967; Havana, November 2006.
Arturo, b. 1922; Havana, November 2005.
Bebo, b. 1932; Havana, April 2005.
Carlos, b. 1954; Havana province, March 2005 (2 interviews).
Elisa, b. 1936; Havana, December 2005 and January 2008 (2 interviews).
Ernesto, b. 1969; Havana province, May 2005.
Eusebio, b. 1971; Havana, September 2005 (2 interviews).
Guillermo, b. 1963; Havana, September 2004.
Ileana, b. 1950; Havana, September 2004.
Irina, b. 1963; Havana, November 2005.
Javier, b. 1939; Santiago province, October 2004.
Jorge, b. 1942; Havana, November 2005 (2 interviews).
Josefa, b. 1953; Havana province, February 2006.
Juan, b. 1968; Havana province, May 2005.
Juana, b. 1935; Havana, September 2004.
Katia, b. 1943; Havana, December 2006 and December 2007 (2 interviews).
Laura, b. 1958; Havana, September 2005, December 2006 and
December 2007 (3 interviews).
Lily, b. 1965; Havana, May 2005.
Marcos, b. 1966; Havana, November 2006.
Margarita, b. 1981; Havana, December 2007.
María, b. 1968; Havana, November 2006.
Marielis, b. 1964; Havana, December 2006 and December 2007 (2 interviews).
Marisa, b. 1979; Santiago de Cuba, December 2006 and December 2007
(2 interviews).
Mercedes, b. 1963; Havana, November 2006.
Miguel, b. 1972; Havana, December 2006.
Nancy, b. 1980; Santiago de Cuba, December 2007.
Nena, b. 1955; Havana, April 2005.

Odalys, b. 1958; Havana, December 2007.
Olga, b. 1948; Havana, March 2005 (3 interviews).
Pachy, b. 1964; Havana, March 2005.
Paco, b. 1972; Havana, April 2005.
Pedro, b. 1974; Havana province, November 2005.
Ricardo, b. 1970; Havana, October 2006 and April 2008 (2 interviews).
Rosa, b. 1939; Havana province, May 2005 (3 interviews).
Roxana, b. 1964; Santiago de Cuba, December 2006.
Salomón, b. 1962; Havana, January 2006 and January 2008 (2 interviews).
Saray, b. 1983; Holguín and Santiago de Cuba, December 2006 and December 2007 (2 interviews).
Silvia, b. 1948; Havana, November 2005.
Taty, b. 1938; Havana, May 2005.
Yohanka, b. 1961; Santiago de Cuba, December 2007.
Yolanda, b. 1944; Havana, September 2004.

NOTES

Introduction

1. Examples cited in this book include Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*; N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Living the Revolution*; Randall, *Cuban Women Now*; and Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*. For a discussion of life-story methodologies in Cuban research, see Nuñez Sarmiento, "Gender Studies in Cuba."

2. See Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*; Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution*; and Young, *Gays*.

3. See Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos*; and Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita*. For an analysis of women's revolutionary *testimonios*, see Kumaraswami, "'Pensamos que somos historia.'"

4. Portelli, "So Much Depends," 30.

5. See D. Fernández, *Cuba and the Politics of Passion*. See also Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*; and Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions."

6. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 1.

7. D. Fernández, "Politics and Romance," 166–68.

8. M. Zeitlin argues that "Cubans themselves see their history to a great extent in generational terms, a fact that is not at all surprising given the dramatic and profoundly traumatic nature of the events that formed several Cuban generations" ("Political Generations," 494). See also N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 60–61.

9. McCall, "Complexity of Intersectionality," 1771. The term "intersectionality," which emerged from feminist and critical race studies in the United States in the 1980s, is generally credited to Kimberlé Crenshaw. See Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing."

10. For overviews, see McCall, "Complexity of Intersectionality"; Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality"; and Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics."

11. See McCall, "Complexity of Intersectionality."

12. See especially Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*; and N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*.

13. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality." See also G. Lewis, "Celebrating Intersectionality?"; and Yuval-Davis, "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics."

14. See Elizabeth Dore's foreword to this book for details of the project.

15. See Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Living the Revolution*.

16. The project was conceived in large part to redress the lack of first-person accounts

of the Revolution from Cubans living on the island and for this reason does not include interviews with exiles. A database of interviews and transcripts is under construction, and it is planned that in the future interviews will be made available for consultation by other researchers. For a partial list of project publications, see <http://www.soton.ac.uk/cuban-oral-history/pub.html>.

17. Elizabeth Dore, <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/cuban-oral-history/>.

18. For a discussion of the advantages of this method, see Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, 7–8; Slim et al., “Ways of Listening,” 145–46; and Thompson, *Voice of the Past*. The “free-flowing,” or “life-story,” format resembles the unstructured or semi-structured interview in anthropology, though the length and focus of the interview may be different.

19. Fass, “Cultural History/Social History,” 42.

20. All three British researchers have near-native fluency in Spanish. My two colleagues lived for several years in different parts of Latin America, and I spent four years in Spain, where I conducted another oral history project in the 1990s. See Hamilton, *Women and ETA*.

21. In addition to the other members of the project team, I am grateful to Norma Guillard, Ana Vera, Marial Iglesias, and Alejandro de la Fuente in particular.

22. See Arturo Arias, ed., *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

23. For an interesting discussion of the the role of the scholar/editor in the “foundational” Cuban *testimonio*, Miguel Barnet’s *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* (1965), see Sklodowska, “Spanish American Testimonial Novel.”

24. For a selection of some of the most important work, see Gugelberger, *Real Thing*.

25. See James, *Doña María’s Story*; Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*; and Portelli, “Peculiarities of Oral History.”

26. See especially Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*; Herrmann, *Written in Red*; LaCapra, *History in Transit*; and Passerini, “Emotions.”

27. For an insightful discussion, see James, *Doña María’s Story*, 139–41.

28. All interview excerpts are my translations. Interviewers’ questions are in italics. A full list of narrators (pseudonyms), including their year of birth and the place and date of interview, is provided in the appendix.

29. Clark, *Desire*, 3.

30. *Ibid.*, 10.

31. For a discussion of the complexity of race, identity, and language in contemporary Cuba, see N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 17–25.

32. The most thorough study of race and racism in Cuba in the twentieth century is de la Fuente, *Nation for All*. For the late colonial and early republican periods, see Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

33. The term was first used by Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) to describe the cultural convergences found in colonial societies.

34. In popular language, *mulato/a* is still widely used to refer to Cubans of mixed

African and Spanish heritage. In choosing the term *mestizo/a*, commonly used in Latin America to refer to mixed Spanish/indigenous heritage, the team recognized both the inadequacy of *mulato/a* to describe people with Chinese and/or indigenous Cuban heritage and also its increased use on the island.

35. See Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices*.

36. The use of the term “white” in this book is consistent with contemporary studies of race and racism in twentieth-century Cuba, for example, de la Fuente, *Nation for All* and N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*.

37. For example, Marifeli Pérez-Stable argues that, with the failure of the 10-million-ton sugarcane harvest, “the year 1970 poignantly marked the end of the revolution.” *Cuban Revolution*, 120.

38. See, for example, Mark Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a discussion of the problems associated with the term “post-revolutionary,” see N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 26.

39. I take this term from Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*.

40. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 85.

41. Ernesto “Che” Guevara, “El hombre nuevo,” 331. All translations of Spanish texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

1. An important literary analysis of these themes is found in Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets*.

2. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*.

3. *Ibid.*, 15.

4. *Ibid.*, 1.

5. Stoner, *From the House to the Streets*.

6. *Ibid.*, 148.

7. *Ibid.*, 146.

8. *Ibid.*, 148.

9. *Ibid.*, 162.

10. Pérez Rojas similarly notes the lack of studies of the family in prerevolutionary Cuba. *Características sociodemográficas*, 6.

11. De la Torre Mulhare, “Sexual Ideology.”

12. For a discussion of the term *machismo*, see chapter 3.

13. De la Torre Mulhare, “Sexual Ideology,” 49.

14. *Ibid.*, 15.

15. *Ibid.*, 45.

16. *Ibid.*, 50.

17. *Ibid.*, 141–52, 181, 186.

18. *Ibid.*, 60–64, 72.

19. *Ibid.*, 70.

20. *Ibid.*, 120.

21. Ibid., 121.
22. Ibid., 154–58.
23. Ibid., 236.
24. Ibid., 161.
25. Ibid., 251.
26. Ibid., 255.
27. Ibid., 168, 258.
28. Ibid., 255.
29. Ibid., 112. Lowry similarly attributes the family's important status to the weakness of other institutions. *Rural Cuba*, 174.
30. De la Mulhare, "Sexual Ideology," 236.
31. Ibid., 257–58. See also Lowry, *Rural Cuba*, 198. Another contributing factor in this rise may have been an increase in the number of Americans flying to Cuba to get divorced.
32. De la Torre Mulhare, "Sexual Ideology," 258.
33. Ibid., 265–68.
34. Ibid., 235.
35. Ibid., 269.
36. Ibid., 252.
37. Pérez, *Cuba*, 28.
38. Beers, "Murder in San Isidro," 104.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 104–5.
41. Ibid., 103.
42. Ibid., 114–15; Pérez, *Cuba*, 231.
43. Lutjens, "Remaking the Public Sphere," 370. See also interview with Armando Torres, one of the organizers of the rehabilitation project, in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 279.
44. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 40–41. See interviews with former prostitutes in Fernández Robaina, *Recuerdos secretos*; Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 235–319; Murray, "Socialism and Feminism, Part 1," 67; and Randall, *Cuban Women Now*, 237–57.
45. Hernández, *Últimos mensajes*, 20.
46. Randall, *Cuban Women Now*, 96–97.
47. MacGaffey et al., *Twentieth Century Cuba*, 64. Three decades after the revolutionary victory, in the late 1980s, the FMC and Communist Party still encouraged couples in rural areas to marry formally, and collective weddings continued to take place. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 57.
48. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*, 140.
49. Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, xviii; Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba*, 261–79.
50. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*, 140.
51. Fidel Castro made various references to the rapid rise of the Cuban population in his speeches during the 1960s. For example, see speech delivered on 13 March 1968, cited in Kenner and Petras, *Fidel Castro Speaks*, 242.

52. Randall, *Women in Cuba*, 96–97. Heidi Steffens notes that divorce rates increased at least tenfold during the first decade of the Revolution. “A Woman’s Place,” *Cuba Review* 4, no. 2 (1974): 29, cited in Azicri, “Women’s Development,” 468. This trend slowed, but continued, between 1970 and 1996. See also Benítez Pérez, *Panorama sociodemográfico*, 118.

53. Pérez Rojas, *Características sociodemográficas*, 18; Randall, *Women in Cuba*, 96–97. Pilar López González remembers being given her first house in the early 1960s: “Never had I seen such a house as this, and it filled me with hope. It even made me want to have more children!” Quoted in Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 284.

54. Casal, “Revolution and *Conciencia*,” 199; Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba,” 346.

55. Randall, *Women in Cuba*, 68.

56. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 61. Local Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were also involved in maternal health, keeping track of pregnant women in their neighborhoods and ensuring they attended medical appointments. Olesen, “Confluences in Social Change,” 405.

57. Olesen, “Confluences in Social Change,” 405.

58. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 71. See also Álvarez Vázquez, *La tendencia de la fecundidad*, 34.

59. Hollerbach cites this reason, along with a real rise in incomes and the increase in marriage rates. “Recent Trends,” 100.

60. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 71.

61. Hollerbach, “Recent Trends,” 100. According to Dr. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, before 1959 abortion was illegal but available to anyone who could afford it. He claims that contraception was not widely used in the prerevolutionary period because doctors could charge more money for abortions and therefore were not likely to prescribe contraception. Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba,” 344–45.

62. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 71. According to Álvarez Lajonchere, the number was 97 percent. Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba,” 346.

63. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 85.

64. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 178.

65. Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, xxv. See also Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 73–74.

66. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 73.

67. Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba,” 345.

68. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 178.

69. Lewis, Lewis and Rigdon, *Four Women*, xxv.

70. *Ibid.*, xxv; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 71–73; Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 178.

71. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 179.

72. Hollerbach, “Recent Trends,” 97. See also Pérez Rojas, *Características sociodemográficas*, 18; and Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 166.

73. Murray, “Socialism and Feminism, Part 1,” 66.

74. *Ibid.*, 65; Molyneux, “Socialist Societies,” 3.

75. Murray, “Socialism and Feminism, Part 1,” 64.

76. Fox, "Honor, Shame, and Women's Liberation," 287.
77. Bengelsdorf, "On the Problem of Studying Women," 121; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 144.
78. Bengelsdorf, "On the Problem of Studying Women," 121; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 147.
79. Bengelsdorf, "On the Problem of Studying Women," 121.
80. Ibid.; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 146–47.
81. Molyneux, "Socialist Societies," 17.
82. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 146.
83. Ibid., 147.
84. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour*, 140, cites an article in *Granma*, 15 January 1968, 3, that defends the marriage campaigns.
85. Fox, "Honor, Shame, and Women's Liberation," 279. See also Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 14. According to Sutherland, the government responded by segregating girls and boys and imposing strict mores (184).
86. Olesen, "Context and Posture," 553.
87. Ibid., 551.
88. See Kapcia, "Educational Revolution," 404–6.
89. See, for example, Thomas, *Cuba*, 1434–35. Thomas claims young women in mini-skirts were sent to labor camps, but I have seen no other evidence that any women were sent to camps during the 1960s or at any other time.
90. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 127.
91. Ibid., 128–29.
92. Ibid.
93. Castro, "Palabras a los intelectuales."
94. Fox, "Honor, Shame, and Women's Liberation."
95. Bengelsdorf, "On the Problem of Studying Women," 122.
96. For a review of different interpretations of the Family Code, see Bengelsdorf, "(Re)considering," 248–49, note 5.
97. Fox, "Honor, Shame, and Women's Liberation," 279.
98. Molyneux, "Socialist Societies," 16.
99. See Randall, *Gathering Rage*, 147–48.
100. Ibid., 147.
101. See various sources cited in Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 140–41. During her fieldwork in a small town in eastern Cuba in the 1980s, Mona Rosendahl noted that men continued to resist domestic labor, arguing that it was their wives' work. *Inside the Revolution*, 51.
102. Bengelsdorf, "(Re)considering," 249, note 5.
103. Ibid., 233.
104. Murray, "Socialism and Feminism, Part 2," 102.
105. Cited in Pérez-Stable, "Cuban Women," 64–65.
106. Safa, "Hierarchies," 46.

107. Bengelsdorf and Stubbs, introduction, 155. See also Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*," 199.
108. Pérez Rojas, *Características sociodemográficas*, 19–20. See also Bengelsdorf "(Re)considering," 232.
109. Hollerbach, "Recent Trends," 104.
110. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 71–72. Rates of actual contraceptive use are difficult to determine owing to lack of statistics.
111. *Ibid.*, 174.
112. Hollerbach, "Recent Trends," 104.
113. *Ibid.*, 105.
114. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 72. See also Rodríguez Calderón, "Con el índice en alto."
115. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 74.
116. Cole, "Women in Cuba," 174.
117. *Ibid.*, 164. See also Bengelsdorf and Hagerman, "Emerging from Underdevelopment," 4.
118. Randall, *Gathering Rage*, 148–49.
119. Cited in Stone, *Women*, 68 (full speech, 55–72). Originally published in *Granma Weekly Review* 8 (December 1974).
120. Casal, "Revolution and *Conciencia*," 198.
121. *Ibid.* Just a decade later, Rosendahl wrote, "As a mother, a woman has a high status, and very few women would consider not having children voluntarily." *Inside the Revolution*, 65.
122. For a detailed description and analysis of sex education programs between the 1970s and 1990s, see Leiner, *Sexual Politics*.
123. L. Smith, "Sexuality and Socialism," 182.
124. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 68. According to Sutherland, in the late 1960s the government was planning to introduce the first sex education program via radio. *Youngest Revolution*, 179. It is not clear whether this materialized.
125. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 174.
126. This included articles, surveys, interviews, and advice columns in the national newspaper *Granma*, the magazine *Bohemia*, the publications of the FMC, *Mujeres* and *Muchachas*, and the Young Communist League publications *Juventud Rebelde* and *Somos Jovenes*. For summaries of some of this material, see Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, and Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*.
127. The choice of East Germany as a model for sex education came as the result of an FMC commission that traveled to Eastern and Western Europe in 1977 to examine different sex education programs and concluded that East Germany "was the most advanced in the field." Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 70.
128. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 174–75.
129. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 75, 77.
130. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 175.

131. Ibid., 153–55.
132. L. Smith, “Sexuality and Socialism,” 180. The 1980s also saw a rise in the numbers of sexually transmitted diseases in Cuba. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 66.
133. Catasús Cervera, “Sociodemographic and Reproductive Characteristics,” 91.
134. Rosendahl says that in semirural eastern Cuba in the late 1980s most young women had had at least one abortion, and some as many as four. Some of these women had not used contraception. Abortion was freely available to women less than 12 weeks pregnant. *Inside the Revolution*, 71.
135. Rodríguez Calderón, “Madres solteras,” 21.
136. According to Marguerite Rosenthal, by 1984 adolescent women accounted for one-third of all births in Cuba. “Problem of Single Motherhood,” 167.
137. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 162–63.
138. L. Smith, “Sexuality and Socialism,” 181.
139. According to one Cuban article, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s births among women between ages 15 and 19 rose 200 percent in Europe. Matamoros and Rodríguez, “Embarazo en la adolescencia,” 27. Rosenthal argues that debates about single motherhood in Cuba “echo those of demographers and policy researchers in other parts of the world who are increasingly aware that families headed by single mothers are particularly vulnerable to economic and social stress.” “Problem of Single Motherhood,” 161.
140. Catasús Cervera, “Sociodemographic and Reproductive Characteristics,” 90.
141. Rosenthal, “Problem of Single Motherhood,” 167.
142. Ibid., 173. Leiner claims that many Cubans believed that the best age for women to have children was 15–19, a belief strongly challenged by sex educators in the 1980s. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 80.
143. L. Smith, “Sexuality and Socialism,” 181.
144. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 176–77. Nadine Fernandez similarly notes that young people received mixed messages about interracial relationships. *Revolutionizing Romance*, 155.
145. Lind, “Out of the Closet,” 4.
146. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*; Sierra Madero, *Del otro lado del espejo*.
147. Fowler, *La maldición*, 8–9; Young, *Gays*, 3–4.
148. Argüelles and Rich, “Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution, Part I.”
149. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays*, 34. The picture Lumsden paints of 1950s Havana is reminiscent of the description given by María de los Reyes Castillo of her working-class, multiracial neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba in the 1920s, where female prostitutes and men known as homosexuals lived, worked, and socialized alongside other inhabitants. Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita*, 72–76.
150. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 97.
151. Ibid., 97; Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 134–35.
152. One of the country’s most prominent authors, Virgilio Piñera, was arrested in the early 1960s. The Catalan writer Juan Goytisolo, who visited Cuba during the early 1960s, later recalled the deteriorating situation for homosexuals and intellectuals in that period. *En los reinos de Taifa*, 65–66.

153. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 67.
154. Domínguez, *Cuba*, 256.
155. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 33–34. See also Salas, *Social Control*, 164–65. Marvin Leiner, an American professor of education who spent several years in Cuba studying the country's educational programs, reports that his teenage son remembered suspected homosexuality was identified at school through supposedly "feminine" behavior in boys. *Sexual Politics*, 31–32.
156. For a testimony of a "purging" meeting of the Young Communists in the mid-1960s, see the interview with César Bermúdez in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 29.
157. Young, *Gays*, 28.
158. Ibid., 53. See also Casal, "Literature and Society," 459.
159. Thomas, *Cuba*, 1435.
160. Samuel Feijoó, "Revolución y vicios," *El Mundo*, 15 April 1965, 5, translated and quoted in Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 172–73.
161. Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba*, 107.
162. Ibid.
163. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 66. According to a former inmate interviewed by Lumsden, prisoners were paid much less than regular agricultural workers and could only leave the camps under military supervision.
164. Domínguez, *Cuba*, 356.
165. Ibid., 356–57.
166. See especially Salas, *Social Control*, 166.
167. Ibid., 166–67; Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 12. See also this book, chapter 5.
168. Several of our interviewees made this claim.
169. Guevara, "El hombre nuevo"; Salas, *Social Control*, 166. For more on Guevara's "new man," see this book, chapter 2.
170. Salas makes a particularly compelling argument for this link in *Social Control*.
171. Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution*, 269.
172. Ibid., 268–80; Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 31–40, 141–42; Guillermprietio, *La Habana*, 109–10; Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 66–71. See also the testimony of Jorge in this book, chapter 4. A group of UMAP survivors formed in Miami calculates the number of prisoners as between 20,000 and 25,000. <http://www.cubanet.org/CNews/yo3/jano3/2001.htm> (September 2008). As the back cover of a fictionalized account of the UMAP by Felix Luis Viera, *Un ciervo herido*, notes, the history of the camps has been passed down largely by word of mouth.
173. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 70–71; Domínguez, *Cuba*, 357.
174. Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution*, 268. See also Michael Frayn, *Observer*, 12 January 1969, cited in Thomas, *Cuba*, 1435.
175. Casal, "Literature and Society," 450. Gathered around the publishing house "El Puente," the group disintegrated when its founder, José Mario, was sent to a labor camp.
176. Lezama's acclaimed masterpiece, *Paradiso*, was originally banned because of its "explicitly homosexual passages." Ibid., 459.

177. See interviews in this book, chapters 4, 5, and 6. On the maltreatment of female prisoners who had same-sex relationships, see interview with Ana María Simo in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 97–98.
178. Interview with Javier Sáez, in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 268–80.
179. Wilfredo Rivero Roldan, “Vida, pasión y muerte del Señor Bar,” *Verde Olivo*, 14 April 1968, 26, translated and quoted in Salas, *Social Control*, 155.
180. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 74.
181. “Declaración del Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura, 30 abril de 1971,” cited in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 176–78.
182. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 75.
183. Allen Young cites an interview with a 23-year-old who left Cuba in 1980 during the Mariel boatlift and who had been interned in a “youth re-education camp,” along with 300 other boys age 12–15, “all of them homosexual,” during this period. *Gays*, 50–51.
184. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 76.
185. For a discussion of revolutionary homophobia and the construction of the category “homosexual,” see Quiroga, “Homosexualities,” 135.
186. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 71, 77.
187. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 86.
188. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 203.
189. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 44.
190. Ibid.; Siegfried Schnabl, *El hombre y la mujer en la intimidad* (Havana: Editorial Científico-Técnica, 1979).
191. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 202.
192. Ibid., 197, 219.
193. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 106.
194. Randall, *Women in Cuba*, 102.
195. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 36.
196. Ibid., 43. Álvarez Lajonchere, in contrast, claimed that the 1979 penal code said nothing about homosexuality. Fee, “Sex Education in Cuba,” 350.
197. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 43. The law has also been used against women accused of selling sexual services to tourists since the 1990s. See Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.
198. Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 108.
199. Argüelles and Rich, “Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution, Part I,” 694.
200. For a description of the exodus and protests and testimonies from emigrants, see Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 44–52; and this book, chapter 4.
201. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 78.
202. Ibid., 78–79; Young, *Gays*, 40. See also this book, chapter 4.
203. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 173.
204. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 45–46.
205. Ibid., 46. Avelino Victor Couceiro Rodríguez describes being harassed, arrested, or imprisoned several times during the 1980s, accused by the police of causing “a public

scandal" (for talking to male friends in the street or being part of a group of men leaving the theater, for example). "Más allá del ciberespacio."

206. See the Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines for 1981, cited by Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 48–49. For a description of the ongoing prejudice against homosexuals, including in the workplace and the Communist Party, in spite of changes to official policy, see Fee, "Sex Education in Cuba," 352.

207. "Los cubanos y el homosexualismo," *Mariel*, Spring 1984, 8.

208. See interview with Monica Krause, cited in Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 108.

209. This is one of the lowest birthrates in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to one Cuban study published in 2004. Colectivo de autores, *La investigación en salud sexual y reproductiva*, 20.

210. Benítez Pérez, *Panorama sociodemográfico*, 118–20. According to one study, Cuba had one of the highest rates of abortions per births in the world. Colectivo de autores, *La investigación en salud sexual y reproductiva*, 22–25.

211. Benítez Pérez, *Panorama sociodemográfico*, 123–24.

212. González de la Cruz et al., "La sexualidad en los adolescentes." See also Peláez Mendoza, "Aborto en las adolescentes."

213. Díez Noriega, "Mujeres mayores."

214. Lutjens, "Remaking the Public Sphere," 376.

215. Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, 194; N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 151.

216. López-Cabrales, *Rompiendo las olas*, 65.

217. Benítez Pérez, *Panorama sociodemográfico*, 123–24. See this book, chapter 8, for more on sexuality and housing.

218. Más, "Familias y mujeres."

219. For example, Benítez Pérez describes the family as "the essential component of society" (*Panorama sociodemográfico*, 123).

220. For an analysis of Magín, see Fernandes, "Transnationalism and Feminist Activism."

221. After two years of very active organizing, Magín was shut down by the Cuban government in 1996, as part of a general crackdown on dissidence and independent organizations. *Ibid.*, 446.

222. See various articles on sexuality and gender in the CENESEX journal *Sexología y sociedad* from 2000 onward.

223. See, for example, Díaz Álvarez, "Algunos hallazgos."

224. The foreign fascination with sex work in the Special Period is reflected in much Cuban fiction of the 1990s as well, particularly that directed at the international market. See this book, chapter 5, note 56.

225. Murray "Socialism and Feminism, Part 1," 67. The official press did carry some coverage of prostitution in the 1980s. See, for example, Luis Manuel, "El caso de Sandra," *Somos Jovenes*, September 1987, 68–81, cited in Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 224, note 57.

226. Valle, *Habana Babilonia*, 218. This sensationalist book nevertheless provides a valuable overview of commercial sex in Cuba since the 1950s, including some testimonials.
227. Cabezas, "Between Love and Money," 994–95, note 18.
228. Lunar Cardedo, *Que en vez de infierno encuentres gloria*.
229. VI Congreso de mujeres cubanas, *Juventud Rebelde*, 5 March 1995, 8. As Noelle Stout writes, the view that sex workers are people who do not want to do hard work and that the government should criminalize *jineterismo* (hustling) is shared by many ordinary Cubans as well, in part because of the experience of eradication in the early 1960s. "Feminists, Queers and Critics." One organization that offered a different analysis of *jine-terismo* was Magín, whose members accused the FMC of moral conservatism. Fernandes, "Transnationalism and Feminist Activism." For an analysis of the complexity of debates about Cuban sex tourism, both on and off the island, see Stout, "Feminists, Queers and Critics."
230. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*, 143–51.
231. Azicri, *Cuba Today and Tomorrow*, 78.
232. *Ibid.*, 79.
233. Elizalde, "Prostitution in Cuba."
234. Fernandes, "Transnationalism and Feminist Activism," 437–38.
235. N. Fernandez, "Back to the Future?," 86.
236. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 318–22.
237. *Ibid.*, 326–27.
238. Fosado, "Gay Sex Tourism"; Hodge, "Colonization of the Cuban Body," 20; Stout, "Feminists, Queers and Critics."
239. Rectification denotes the process of reform and critique of past errors initiated at the Second Communist Party Congress in 1986.
240. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 173.
241. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays*, 195. Similarly, according to Leiner, a 1988 film about lesbians and homosexuals, *No porque lo diga Fidel Castro*, was not shown publicly in Cuba. Furthermore, the American-Brazilian film *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* (dir. Hector Babenco, 1985), which features a homosexual protagonist, was not distributed in Cuba. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 51.
242. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones and Gays*, 193–94.
243. See Ricardo Luis, "Cazadores de inocentes."
244. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 197–98. The manifesto is reproduced, in English translation, in *ibid.*, 211–14.
245. See, for example, Sierra Madero, *Del otro lado del espejo*, 229; and Couceiro Rodríguez, "Más allá del ciberespacio," on campaigns against immorality in 2005–6; and testimonies to police harassment and violence in this book, chapters 5, 6, and 7.
246. For example, in 2009 same-sex marriage was legalized in Mexico City, and in 2010 it became legal in all of Argentina.

Chapter 2

1. Guevara, "El hombre nuevo," 331.
2. Ibid.
3. Catherine Davies notes that by the 1980s Cuban women's poetry expressed political dissent in sexual terms. *Place in the Sun?*, 212.
4. For the idea that love moves and attaches itself to different subjects and objects, see Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*.
5. See, for example, Lekus, "Queer Harvests," 250. More generally, scholars have noted the frequency of metaphors of love and romance in relation to Communist commitment in Europe and elsewhere. See Herrmann, *Written in Red*.
6. Sommer, *Foundational Fictions*, 7.
7. Samuel and Thompson, introduction to *Myths We Live By*, 5.
8. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 129.
9. Leydesdorff, Passerini, and Thompson, introduction, 6.
10. See chapters 1 and 3 for some examples. It is worth noting, however, that most of these are not *historical* studies. A comprehensive history of women and the Cuban Revolution has yet to be written.
11. Hamilton, *Women and ETA*, 33–34.
12. Passerini, "Emotions."
13. Guevara, "El hombre nuevo," 331.
14. Serra, "New Man" in Cuba, 109.
15. R. Behar, "Post-Utopia," 139.
16. Johnson, "Introduction," 4–5.
17. Herrmann, *Written in Red*, xix.
18. Ibid., 90.
19. For a "queer" reading that argues that women's political activity conveys a public memory not restricted by patriarchal "bad scripts," see Cecilia Sosa, "On Mothers and Spiders: A Face-to-Face Encounter with Argentina's Mourning," *Memories Studies* 4, no. 1 (2001): 63–72.
20. On Rectification, see this book, chapter 1, note 239.
21. Salomón gives the example of Arnaldo Ochoa, a prominent army general, veteran of Cuba's military campaign in Angola, and longtime member of the Communist Party Central Committee. In 1989 Ochoa was arrested and imprisoned on charges of corruption and drug trafficking and subsequently executed. The affair is mentioned in many interviews as a particularly difficult moment for the Revolution.
22. This is a common theme in reflections on the Revolution since the 1990s. See, for example, Chanan, "We Are Losing All Our Values."
23. For a detailed historical assessment, see de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 259–316.
24. The term "hegemonic masculinity" was coined by Raewyn Connell in *Which Way Is Up?: Essays on Sex, Class and Culture* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983). See Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity."
25. In the early twenty-first century a number of U.S.-based scholars have begun to

broaden the research on masculinity in Cuba to include race and changing definitions of manhood. Much of this work remains in the form of doctoral dissertations. See, for example, the bibliographical entries for Allen, Forrest, and Fosado in N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*. I became aware of these studies too late to incorporate their findings into this book.

26. I use “Fidel” in quotation marks to distinguish between the representation of the Cuban leader in the interviews, on one hand, and Fidel Castro as individual, on the other.

27. Epps, “Proper Conduct,” 247.

28. Ibid. It should be noted, though, that although Cubans often refer to Castro as “Fidel” in conversation with others, they would not address him thus in person.

29. Fagen, “Charismatic Authority,” 277, note 12; Pérez-Stable, “Charismatic Authority.”

30. Fagen, “Charismatic Authority,” 275.

31. Ibid.

32. D. Fernández, *Cuba and the Politics of Passion*, 64.

33. Ibid., 75. The rebels were commonly referred to as *barbudos* (bearded ones).

34. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 85.

35. Ibid., 85–86.

36. Miami-based opponents of the Revolution similarly avoid using Castro’s name. See West, “My Life with Fidel Castro,” 377.

37. I focus here on the gender and sexual dimensions of these discourses and practices, but Castro’s leadership is also racialized. As José Quiroga has written of Castro’s popularity in the early revolutionary years, “He had panache and charisma, and it certainly helped that he was coded as ‘white’ for the population at large” (*Cuban Palimpsests*, 43).

38. Kumaraswami, “Pensamos que somos historia,” 526–27.

39. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, 3.

40. D. Fernández, *Cuba and the Politics of Passion*, 62.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 76.

43. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*, 123.

44. Fagen, “Charismatic Authority,” 277, note 12; Pérez-Stable, “Charismatic Authority.”

45. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 202–4.

46. This argument is different from the more common assumption that disenchantment and alienation, especially among Cubans who came of age after 1989, is explicable primarily in terms of material deprivation. See D. Fernández, “Cuba and *lo Cubano*,” 85.

47. LaCapra, *History in Transit*, 53.

48. Ibid., 54.

49. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions,” 842.

Chapter 3

1. This idea that Cuban men never change can be compared to what Nadine Fernandez identifies as the “common sense” discourse about racial differences in contemporary Cuba. *Revolutionizing Romance*, 112–13.

2. De la Fuente identifies the unequal access to remittances as one of the main causes of the increase in racial inequality in Cuba since the 1990s. *Nation for All*, 318–19.
3. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.
4. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 319–22.
5. Bengelsdorf, “On the Problem of Studying Women,” 121. The statistic is from Jolly, “Education,” 200. See also Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*, 67–68.
6. N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 56.
7. Yáñez, *El Diablo son las cosas*, 98.
8. In turn, according to Pérez Rojas, young people would return to their families and educate them with the revolutionary values inculcated in schools, helping to correct errors in the family and to politicize them. *Características sociodemográficas*, 56.
9. In 1973–74, 45.29 percent of students in middle school were sent to boarding school. *Ibid.*
10. For an example of this attitude in the late 1960s, see the interview with a young black woman from a middle-class family in Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 152–53.
11. A substantial number of tenants of Havana *solares* are Afro-Cuban, and there is a close association in the Cuban imagination between *solares*, poverty, blackness, and social problems, including crime. See N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 91–95.
12. Yáñez, *El Diablo son las cosas*, 65–77.
13. Compare Roberts, *Woman’s Place*.
14. L. Smith, “Sexuality and Socialism,” 188.
15. This is a reference to a song by Eliseo Grenet. See *Juventud Rebelde*, 23 April 2006; http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/2006/abril_junio/abril-23/print/lectura_eliseo.html (July 2007).
16. Thanks to Alejandro de la Fuente for his useful comments on the old and new in Lily’s interview.
17. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 171.
18. *Ibid.*, 128.
19. L. Smith, “Sexuality and Socialism,” 184.
20. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 157.
21. Cited in English translation in Howe, *Transgression and Conformity*, 130. For other analyses of race, gender, and cultural memory in Afro-Cuban women’s poetry, see Davies, *Place in the Sun?*; Dawn Duke, *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2008); and Flora González Mandri, *Guarding Cultural Memory: Afro-Cuban Women in Literature and the Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).
22. See the conversation among a group of young black actors in Havana in 1967 in Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 153.
23. Smith and Padula, “Sex, Socialism and Soap Opera.”
24. Stevens, *Family and Identity*, 167.
25. *Ibid.*, 191.
26. Yáñez, *El Diablo son las cosas*, 60. As Catherine Davies notes, this book of short

stories often reads like a *testimonio*, a series of commentaries on women's everyday lives in 1980s Cuba. *Place in the Sun?*, 150.

27. Thanks to Ana Vera for her thoughts on this interview.

28. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 175.

29. The *escuelas de campo*, or rural schools, were piloted in 1965–66 and put into place three years later. Pérez Rojas, *Características sociodemográficas*, 56.

30. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 54.

31. Celestino Álvarez Lajonchere, cited in Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 85; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 71.

32. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 178. The FMC actively encouraged women to have their babies in hospitals and attempted to find midwives for those who could not.

33. Taty worked as a craftswoman at home for years before getting a job in a factory in the 1990s. It is not clear whether she worked “under the table” or was part of the FMC's homework program, which recognized that one way to solve the conflict between domestic and paid labor was to administer women's paid work at home. See Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 138.

34. *Ibid.*, 160.

35. *Ibid.*, 161.

36. *Ibid.*, 133.

37. *Ibid.*, 132.

38. As Pérez Rojas notes, in 1970 the still insufficient number of childcare places meant that many women depended on extended families to look after their children while they worked. *Características sociodemográficas*, 43.

39. The construction of childcare centers remained well behind demand throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and during the 1990s there was still only an estimated one childcare space per ten working women in Cuba. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 133.

40. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 182.

41. Conversation with author, Havana, December 2007.

42. See, for example, Rodríguez Calderón, “Con el índice en alto,” “Mamá de espaldas,” and “Por qué papi, por qué . . .”; and Matamoros and Rodríguez, “Embarazo en la adolescencia.”

43. For overviews, see Chante and Craske, *Gender*; and Dore, *Gender Politics*.

44. See, for example, the indexes of two major edited volumes: Caulfield, Chambers, and Putnam, *Honor, Status, and Law*; and French and Bliss, *Gender, Sexuality, and Power*.

45. Gutmann, “Introduction,” 1.

46. See, for example, Gutmann, *Changing Men*; and L. Lewis, *Culture of Gender and Sexuality*.

47. Fernández de Juan, *La hija de Dario*, 39–46.

48. *Ibid.*, 45.

49. Gutmann, “Introduction,” 15.

50. L. Lewis, “Caribbean Masculinity,” 107.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Viveros Vigoya, "Contemporary Latin American," 37–42.

53. In the Latin American and Caribbean context this myth owes much to Oscar Lewis's theory of the "culture of poverty," which named paternal absence and female-run households as characteristics of entrenched poverty among the urban poor. See "Culture of Poverty"; and Goode and Eames "Anthropological Critique." Interestingly, Lewis, who conducted fieldwork among poor Cubans relocated after the destruction of Havana shantytowns in the early 1960s (see, for example, Lewis, Lewis, and Rigdon, *Four Women*), speculated that the "culture of poverty" did not exist under conditions of state socialism. O. Lewis, "Culture of Poverty," 400–401.

54. "When journalist Ann Louise Bardach asked Castro how many children he had during an interview with *Vanity Fair* in 1993, he smiled and answered 'almost a tribe.'" Philip Hart, "Fidel Castro's Cuba Full of His Offspring after Years of Womanising by El Comandante," *The Telegraph*, 26 September 2009.

55. Castro, "La historia me absolverá."

56. The celebration of a girl's fifteen birthday (*la quinceañera*) is an important rite of passage in Cuba.

57. Bebo (b. 1932) similarly has a fond memory of his stepfather who raised him after his father died, leaving his mother alone and poor with three young children.

58. Olavarria, "Men at Home?," 342.

59. Ramírez, "Masculinity and Power," 236, quoting David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

60. Gutmann, "Introduction," 18. For a discussion of the development of the academic literature on *machismo* (which he describes as "mostly descriptive and superficial," 235), see Ramírez, "Masculinity and Power," 234–36. See also Ramírez, *What It Means to Be a Man*, 7–24.

61. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 53–54.

62. Calero et al., "Percepciones y significados." An alternative to the *machista* model of male heterosexuality is suggested in an excerpt from a therapy session conducted in 1987, in which a concerned patient said, "I just can't satisfy her . . . we just begin to make love and bam, I'm finished . . . I can tell that she is disillusioned" (Monika Krause, ed., *Compilación de artículos* [Havana: Grupo Nacional de Trabajo sobre Educación Sexual, 1987], 25, translated and quoted in Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 168).

63. L. Lewis, "Caribbean Masculinity," 95.

64. *Ibid.*, 96.

65. De la Torre Mulhare, "Sexual Ideology."

66. Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 179.

67. Rosendahl, *Inside the Revolution*, 63.

68. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 66.

69. *Ibid.*, 177.

70. Davies, *Place in the Sun?*, 200.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*, 212.

73. Ibid., 211–20.

74. Howard, *Men like That*, 5.

75. Ibid.

76. Juan may have lost out on the opportunity to work in tourism and earn foreign currency after he lost his job as a laborer on the seafront (*estibador*) in 1993 when the dollar was legalized and tourist companies took over the area where he was working. Like many Afro-Cubans, he would not have been considered as employable in tourism, which has been dominated by fair-skinned Cubans due to discriminatory hiring practices. Thanks to Alejandro de la Fuente for his useful comments on this aspect of Juan's interview. Juan doesn't tell us about the racial identity of Nora's husband.

77. Safa, "Hierarchies," 44.

78. Ibid., 42.

79. Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, "¿Se acabó el amor?," *Bohemia*, 24 August 1990, 5, translated and quoted in Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 168.

80. Safa, "Hierarchies," 47–48.

Chapter 4

1. Many of the e-mails can be accessed at <http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/articulos/index.shtml> (June 2007). For a summary of the events that led up to the debates, as well as their origins and character, see in particular the contribution by Fowler, "Pavonato."

2. <http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/articulos/index.shtml> (June 2007).

3. The debates were not fully reported in the Cuban press. In 2007 relatively few people in Cuba had regular access to private computers with Internet and e-mail facilities. Public Internet cafes were and are expensive and subject to surveillance.

4. Estévez, "Mensaje de Abilio Estévez."

5. See this book, chapter 1, for details of all of these.

6. Couceiro Rodríguez, "Más allá del ciberespacio."

7. Navarro, "Mensajes de Desiderio Navarro."

8. Fowler, "Pavonato."

9. Fornet, "El quinquenio gris."

10. Padura, "Mensaje de Leonardo Padura."

11. *Lacra social* was a common term for people with supposedly antisocial tendencies.

12. For a small sample of the literature on Cuban emigration to the United States, see Eckstein, "Transformation of the Diaspora"; Garcia, *Havana USA*; and O'Reilly Herrera, *Remembering Cuba*.

13. The U.S. Census Bureau provides the following statistics on emigration from Cuba to the United States between 1960 and 2000: 1961–70, 208,536; 1971–80, 264,863; 1981–90, 144,578; and 1991–2000, 169,322, for a total of 787,119 over the four decades. Corrales, "Civil Society in Cuba." By one estimate some 80 percent of Cuban emigrants live in the United States, from which we can deduce that a further 200,000 emigrants live elsewhere, for a total of around 1 million by 2000. José Alejandro Aguilar Trujillo, "Las remesas desde el

- exterior," in *Cuba: Investigación Económica* (La Habana: Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Económicas, 2001), cited in Eckstein, "Transformation of the Diaspora," 207.
14. See, for example, Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 118–55; Peña, "Visibility and Silence"; and Sánchez-Eppler, "Reinaldo Arenas."
 15. Quiroga, "Homosexualities," 136.
 16. Young, "Cuban Revolution," 222.
 17. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 78.
 18. See also Peña, "'Obvious Gays,'" 485.
 19. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 305.
 20. For example, Reinaldo Arenas recounts that he traveled with a distraught adolescent boy who had been put on a boat and forced to leave behind his family. Arenas, *Antes que anochezca*, 304. According to Peña, some men were given the choice of leaving or going to prison. "'Obvious Gays,'" 488.
 21. See, for example, the interview with María González in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*, 69.
 22. Peña's evidence corroborates this point. See "'Obvious Gays,'" 489.
 23. Arenas, *Antes que anochezca*, 301. See also Peña, "'Obvious Gays,'" 482–83. Peña conducted interviews with Mariel migrants resident in the United States, some of whom described performing as *locas* ("queens") in order to leave Cuba.
 24. P. Smith, *Vision Machines*, 75.
 25. This observation is based on numerous accounts from island-dwelling Cubans as well as those living outside the country.
 26. Eckstein, "Transformation of the Diaspora," 212–15.
 27. Afro-Cubans have engaged in similar discussions about the representation (or lack of) black and dark-skinned Cubans in the media. N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 117–20.
 28. Guillard Limonta, "Cuba and the Revolutionary Struggle," 67–71.
 29. See contributions from filmmakers Enrique Colina and Jorge Luis Sánchez and cinema critic Juan Antonio García Borrero: http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/articulos/33_01.shtml; http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/articulos/13_01.shtml; http://www.desdecuba.com/polemica/articulos/34_01.shtml (November 2007).
 30. Wilkinson, "Homosexuality," 111.
 31. Goytisolo, *En los reinos de Taifa*, 175.
 32. Padura, "Mensaje de Leonardo Padura."
 33. Young, *Gays*, 29.
 34. *Fuerte* (literally "strong") is used in Cuba to describe masculine women. See chapter 6 for further discussion.
 35. Young, *Gays*, 38–39.
 36. Carmen, "¡No, no, yo me voy!," 57.
 37. *Ibid.*, 58.
 38. *Ibid.* Several women interviewed in 2006–7 told similar stories about the early twenty-first century.
 39. *Ibid.*

40. Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 3.
41. This accusation has frequently been made about Arenas's *Antes que anochezca* and the film *Conducta impropia* (dir. Nestór Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal, 1983).
42. See Argüelles and Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution, Part II."
43. Fee, "Sex Education in Cuba," 352.
44. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 50.
45. See various testimonies in Almendros and Jiménez-Leal, *Conducta impropia*.
46. This association is made, for example, in the film *Conducta impropia*.
47. Personal correspondence.

Chapter 5

1. Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire*; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*; Green, *Beyond Carnival*, 11; Luibhéid, "Introduction," xxv.
2. See, for example, Carrillo, "Sexual Migration."
3. Weston, *Long Slow Burn*, 31.
4. *Ibid.*, 33.
5. *Ibid.*, 33–34.
6. *Ibid.*, 40, 44.
7. I use the example of Havana in this chapter because (1) it is where Pachy lived and was interviewed, and (2) most literature on homosexuality in Cuba is centered on Havana. However, I do not mean to generalize from the example of the capital. No doubt studies of other Cuban cities would underscore differences as well as similarities in the experiences of homosexuals.
8. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 37.
9. Young, "Cuban Revolution," 213–14.
10. Argüelles and Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Part I," 685–86. Lumsden cites in particular the case of the writer Virgilio Piñera, who migrated to Havana from the town of Cárdenas. *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 33.
11. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 23–24.
12. Quoted in Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 33.
13. For a discussion of the limited representation of female sexuality and agency in Arenas's memoir, see Hamilton, "Happy Memories."
14. It is difficult to know whether to take this story of Pachy's discharge without consequences literally. The interviewers do not question him further about this story. But given the historical role of the Cuban army in persecuting homosexual men, the story leaves questions unanswered.
15. Garber, *Vested Interests*, 55. See also Magus Hirschfeld, *Transvestites: the Erotic Drive to Cross Dress* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991).
16. Garber, *Vested Interests*, 55–56.
17. *Ibid.*, 56.
18. We may recall here Pachy's earlier claim that he was not "born" for farm work, but

also his later suggestion that life in the city is more difficult than in the countryside. According to one witness interviewed by Jose Yglesias in 1967, the inmates in the UMAP camps did wear uniforms, but they were blue. This suggests that even though the camps were run by the army they were conceived as prisons. Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution*, 271.

19. Pérez, *To Die in Cuba*, 5.

20. Ibid., 254.

21. Ibid., 138–42.

22. Ibid., 138.

23. Ibid., 141.

24. Ibid., 142.

25. Ibid., 212–28.

26. Ibid., 294.

27. There is anecdotal evidence of high suicide rates among homosexual men in Cuban prisons in the 1970s. See Young, *Gays*, 53. On the case of the writer Calvert Casey, who committed suicide in 1969, see Bejel, *Gay Cuban Nation*, 104.

28. Pérez, *To Die in Cuba*, 142–43.

29. Ibid., 254. Gutiérrez, *Dirty Havana Trilogy*, 38.

30. Pérez, *To Die in Cuba*, 351–2.

31. Santamaría was one of the celebrated female leaders of the Cuban Revolution, having participated in the attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago in 1953. She was arrested and imprisoned during the attack, and both her brother and fiancé were tortured and killed in custody. Santamaría was later director of the Casa de las Américas cultural center. She committed suicide in 1980.

32. For example, Almaguer, “Chicano Men.”

33. Green, *Beyond Carnival*, 7.

34. *De la raza* (literally “of the race”) is a popular expression meaning Afro-Cuban.

35. The term *negrito* is historically associated with racist, blackface representations in popular Cuban theater before the Revolution. N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 122.

36. The association of male homosexuality with whiteness is reinforced off the island by the fact that the protagonists of the best-known cultural representations of male homosexuality—Arenas’s memoir *Before Night Falls* and the film *Strawberry and Chocolate*—are fair skinned. Arenas’s text includes some sexually and racially stereotypical representations of black Cuban men that have gone largely unremarked in the expansive critical literature on the text. Similarly, critics of *Strawberry and Chocolate*, while quick to point out the film’s stereotypical portrayal of gender and sexuality, usually fail to engage with its racial politics.

37. The expression Eusebio uses is *no vivo de carrozas*. *Carroza* is a float (as in parade or carnival), so he is saying that he does not live as if he is on parade, or in a carnival, like a homosexual stereotype.

38. Another narrator, Elisa (b. 1936), similarly refers to one of the lesbians living on her block as a *desviada*.

39. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 41–42. Epps notes the overlap between Cuban and U.S. discourses and practices of homophobia in the Cold War period. “Proper Conduct,” 239–40.
40. Arenas, *Antes que anochezca*, 103–4.
41. In her translation of Arenas’s autobiography, Dolores M. Koch translates *la loca tapada* as “the closet gay.” Reinaldo Arenas, *Before Night Falls*, trans. Dolores M. Koch (London, Serpent’s Tale, 2001), 78. This is certainly the best translation for an English-speaking audience. However, I use the direct translation here to signal the problem, outlined below, with the use of the term “closet” in the Cuban case.
42. Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 71.
43. Indeed, the “closet” model may also be of limited value within the English-speaking world, given Sedgwick’s focus on elite Euro-American male subjects, and Sedgwick herself recognized the dangers of generalizing from this model. See *Epistemology*, 13–14.
44. Smith and Bergmann, introduction, 2. Other scholars of Latin American sexuality have nevertheless used “closet” and the related concept “coming out” to describe the growth of homosexual rights movements in Latin America since the 1990s. See, for example, Lind, “Out of the Closet.”
45. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 131.
46. Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*, 215, note 42.
47. *Ibid.*, 145.
48. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 37.
49. See chapter 8 for more on the housing crisis and Cubans in same-sex relationships.
50. According to G. Derrick Hodge, the term *pinguero* developed in Cuba during the Special Period, with the legalization of the dollar and the growth of tourism in the mid 1990s: “[T]o the slang term for ‘dick’ [*pinga*] was added the suffix ‘ero,’ meaning a man whose activity, or profession, has to do with his pinga. Thus, soon after the legalization of the dollar, the word ‘pinguero’ was born.” “Colonization of the Cuban Body,” 20.
51. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 51. Leiner cites as his source an article by Jorge Socarras, “Quba Libre: a Near Queer Havana,” *NYQ*, 8 December 1991, 43–46, 68.
52. In addition to homosexuals, unaccompanied women suspected of hustling and dark-skinned Cubans are particularly susceptible to police harassment in tourist zones. See Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*, 143–46.
53. Stout, “Feminists, Queers and Critics,” 722.
54. *Ibid.*, 729.
55. With reference to Latin America generally, Stephen O. Murray and Wayne R. Dynes define the masculine version of the term *invertido* as “a pseudo-scientific term from the late 19th century still in occasional ‘polite’ usage” (“Hispanic Homosexuals,” 184).
56. Literary critics have identified the rise of a “Cuban Dirty Realism” in the 1990s, characterized by novels populated by prisoners, prostitutes, drug users, alcoholics, thieves, and murderers whose lives involve lots of sex, drinking, drugs, and violence. See S. Behar, *La caída del hombre nuevo*, 50–69. Cuban critic Arturo Arango has criticized the “sociological” tendency in Cuban literature of the 1990s, arguing that the writing of someone like Gutiérrez is often read as *testimonio*. He argues, moreover, that the frequent appearance

of *jineteras* in Cuban fiction of the Special Period is largely in response to the demands of foreign readers; cited in Whitfield, *Cuban Currency*, 89–91. Linda S. Howe gives an additional explanation for the common representation of sex in 1990s Cuban literature, stating that by that time “sex was no longer an adventure or curiosity. Rather, as many Cubans have said, it was the only satisfying and affordable activity a Cuban could experience without having to wait in long lines or use the official socialist rationing card.” *Transgression and Conformity*, 63.

57. There was some foreign tourism in Cuba from the 1960s to the 1980s, especially from the Soviet bloc, Canada, and parts of Latin America. But my interest here is in the impact of U.S. discourses and cultures of sexuality before 1959, as well as the increase in international “gay” tourism and the transitional discourse of “gay rights” since the 1990s.

58. See the examples cited in chapter 4, note 14.

59. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 28.

60. *Ibid.*, 38.

Chapter 6

1. Rupp, *Sapphistries*, 3.

2. See, for example, Castle, *Apparitional Lesbian*; and Weston, ““Lady Vanishes.””

3. For more on the activities of CENESEX, see Guillard Limonta, “Cuba and the Revolutionary Struggle.”

4. López-Cabrales, *Rompiendo las olas*, 83. The best-known is probably Havana-based author Ena Lucia Portela, who has published a number of short stories exploring female same-sex desire, a theme also featured in her novel *Cien botellas en una pared* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2003).

5. The members of *Las Krudas* left Cuba around 2006 and now work out of the United States.

6. “¿Mujer contra mujer?” *Somos jóvenes*, August 2007, 36–39.

7. See Guillard Limonata, “Cuba and the Revolutionary Struggle,” 67–71; and this book, chapter 4.

8. For a list of other representations of lesbians in recent Cuban theater, film, and television, see Guillard Limonata, “Cuba and the Revolutionary Struggle.”

9. Acosta, “La boda de Mónica y Elizabeth.”

10. The expression *doble moral* is used widely in Cuba to describe the ways people adopt different views vis-à-vis delicate issues such as religion or politics, depending on the company they are in. It implies a division between the “official” revolutionary stance that must be followed in public and a more nuanced, private position.

11. These stories of police harassment are similar to reports in Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.

12. Rupp, *Sapphistries*, 6–7; Traub, “Present Future of Lesbian Historiography.”

13. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*.

14. Newton, “My Best Informant’s Dress.”

15. Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, "Introduction," 6.
16. See de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 259–316. See also the interview with Salomón, this book, chapter 2.
17. The Malecón, the area along the seafront in Havana, is a popular gathering place for women and men who have same-sex sex, as well as transgender people and others.
18. Rupp, *Sapphistries*, 230.
19. Chao, "Performing like a P'o"; Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*; Nestle, *Persistent Desire*; Wieringa, "Desiring Bodies or Defiant Cultures."
20. See this book, chapter 5, on a parallel tendency among homosexual men to distance themselves from effeminate men and transvestites, those groups historically most vulnerable to homophobic persecution.
21. For an example of how an emphasis on the Latin American model of male same-sex sexuality creates a discourse about Cuban homosexuality that excludes women, see Lancaster, "Comment"; and Argüelles and Rich, "Reply to Lancaster."

Chapter 7

1. Passerini, "Memories between Silence and Oblivion"; Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, 154–57.
2. Anna Clark proposes the term "twilight moments" "as a metaphor for those sexual practices and desires that societies prohibit by law or custom but that people pursue anyhow, whether in secret or as an open secret" ("Twilight Moments," 140).
3. See Barfield, *Dictionary of Anthropology*, 464; and Winthrop, *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology*, 295–96.
4. Barfield, *Dictionary of Anthropology*.
5. Anthropologists also recognize this dimension of taboo as something that, according to Douglass and Zulaika, "regards the unspeakable" (*Terror and Taboo*, 149).
6. Private conversation, January 2010.
7. This summary of Cuban AIDS policy is based on Anderson, "HIV/AIDS Treatment"; D'Adesky, *Moving Mountains*, 70–92; and Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 117–57.
8. According to Barksdale, the list included "expectant females, sexual contacts of HIV patients and people with sexually transmitted diseases." "Success Story."
9. Ibid.
10. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 123–24.
11. Smallman, *AIDS Pandemic*, 57–58.
12. De la Guardia Delgado and González Nuñez, "Información del diagnóstico"; Trinquette Díaz, "Adolescentes y VIH/SIDA."
13. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 2.
14. Some critics have claimed that the Cuban government concealed exact numbers of HIV and AIDS cases during the early years of the epidemic, though Smallman argues that by the early 1990s the statistics were verifiable. *AIDS Pandemic*, 45–46.
15. For a brief overview of the testing policy, see Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 122. Cuban soldiers participated in the Angolan war between 1975 and 1989.

16. Anderson, "HIV/AIDS treatment," 95–96.
17. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 136.
18. Smallman, *AIDS Pandemic*, 12.
19. Fidel Castro, speech, September 1988, cited in Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 131; and Smallman, *AIDS Pandemic*, 12–13.
20. Lumsden, *Machos, Maricones, and Gays*, 165.
21. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 147.
22. Smallman, *AIDS Pandemic*, 35.
23. D'Adesky, *Moving Mountains*, 71; Anderson, "HIV/AIDS treatment."
24. D'Adesky, *Moving Mountains*, 72.
25. *Ibid.*, 78–79.
26. Leiner, *Sexual Politics*, 120–21.
27. Smallman, *AIDS Pandemic*, 42.
28. *Ibid.*, 41–42.
29. Similarly, Cuban exile writer Severo Sarduy's AIDS memoir, which was published posthumously as *Pajaros de la playa* (2001), recounts his illness in France.
30. Howe, *Transgression and Conformity*, 47.
31. Barnet, *When Night Is Darkest*, 118–19. Reprinted and discussed in Howe, *Transgression and Conformity*, 146, 173–80.
32. *Viviendo al límite* (2004); *Donde no habita el olvido* (2005); *El futuro es mi sueño* (2006).
33. Armas Fonesca, "Un rostro revelado."
34. But see Pérez Ávila, *SIDA*.
35. For similar stories, see Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.
36. As Whiteford and Branch wrote in 2008, "shortages of medical supplies abound." They add, however, that "there is no shortage of medical personnel to provide care" (*Primary Health Care*, 2).
37. The American Gay Men's Health Crisis was founded at the start of the AIDS crisis in New York in 1981.
38. One place where traumatic memories of violence, including childhood sexual abuse, may be voiced is in poetry. See, for example, Catherine Davies's discussion of Excilia Saldaña's "Monólogo de la esposa" (The Bride's Monologue, 1985) in *A Place in the Sun?*, 190. Amalia L. Cabezas's interviews with women who sell sex in Cuba since the 1990s also contain several accounts of male violence against women in the home. *Economies of Desire*, 139–41.
39. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, viii.
40. *Ibid.*, 65. Rape and incest were similarly not discussed publicly. *Ibid.*, 179.
41. *Ibid.*, 182.
42. See *Ibid.*, 201, note 60.
43. Butterworth, *People of Buena Ventura*, 56–57.
44. Yglesias, *In the Fist of the Revolution*, 267.
45. See, for example, Pérez González, "Homicidio y género"; and Rondón García and Santiago Garrido, "Perfil actual."

46. See, for example, Pérez González, "Homicidio y género."
47. Pérez, *To Die in Cuba*, 355.
48. Lee, "Changing the Image."
49. See, for example, Rodríguez Calderón, "Violencia doméstica."
50. Personal correspondence.
51. Roberts, *Woman's Place*, 16.
52. Epp, "Memory of Violence"; Sangster, "Telling Our Stories," 90–91. For a counter-example in which women's tales of domestic and sexual violence figure prominently, see Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*, 62–65.
53. *Estar enfermo de los nervios* (literally, "to be sick in the nerves") is a popular expression in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean that refers to a variety of mental health problems: depression, bad nerves, anxiety, and so on.
54. For a summary, see N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 27–43.
55. Casal, "Race Relations," 479; de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 308. On the difficulties of obtaining accurate statistics, see N. Fernandez, "Color of Love," 102.
56. N. Fernandez, "Color of Love," 102; Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution* 146, 150.
57. N. Fernandez, "Color of Love," 113.
58. According to Alejandro de la Fuente, even after the Revolution of 1959 some *mulatos* resisted racial integration as a threat to their own precarious social status, which depended upon their differentiation from black Cubans. *Nation for All*, 265.
59. *Negrita*, the diminutive of *negra* (black female) is a term commonly used in Cuba and which, as in this example, often has racist overtones. See chapter 5, note 35.
60. Thanks to Alejandro de la Fuente for his insights on this interview.
61. For the resistance of white parents against their daughters marrying black men in the late 1960s, see the interview with a group of young black Cubans in Sutherland, *Youngest Revolution*, 150. See also N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 58–66.
62. See chapter 5, note 35 for an explanation of the term *negrito*.
63. See N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*.

Chapter 8

1. For examples of the different forms the informal and illegal markets take, see Barbassa, "New Cuban Capitalist." I would call these people the "new entrepreneurs" rather than "new capitalists." See also Moreno, "From Capitalism to Socialism."
2. For a sample of this literature, see this book, chapter 1.
3. Cuban homes often have a museum-like quality, with mid-to late twentieth-century domestic appliances from the United States as well Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. During the period I was conducting interviews, from 2004 to 2007, many—in particular refrigerators—were being replaced with Chinese products.
4. Elizalde, "Prostitution in Cuba."
5. Much recent scholarship on sex work in the context of globalization has moved away from the "sex worker as victim" model to analyze the complex ways in which women, men, and transgender people make choices in attempts to improve their own situations

and those of their families. With reference to Cuba, writers such as Amalia Lucía Cabezas, Nadine Fernandez, and Coco Fusco locate sex tourism from the 1990s onward in a wider set of social relations, including persisting inequalities of race, social status, and gender. See Cabezas, "Discourses of Prostitution"; N. Fernandez, "Back to the Future?"; and Fusco, "Hustling for Dollars."

6. For details, see Cabezas, *Economies of Desire*.

7. I use Marco as an example here, but not all foreigners married to Cuban women are middle-aged Europeans. Some are younger or older and come as well from other countries in the Americas (including Mexico, the United States, and Canada).

8. A couple of years after the interview, in spring 2010, Nancy moved to Europe with Marcos. As noted in chapter 5, Cuban novels of the Special Period are full of references to *jineteras*. Although some claim that these references are to satisfy overseas markets, novels published in Spanish in Cuba also pick up the theme of Cuban romances with foreigners. For a portrayal of people getting by in the informal economy in Cienfuegos, see Riverón, *Llena eres de Gracia*, which tells of a Cuban woman with an older Spanish boyfriend.

9. Cabezas, "Between Love and Money," 1001. For the common association of *jineteras* with *mulatas*, see de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 327.

10. See Cabezas, "Between Love and Money," 1000.

11. See La Fountain-Stokes, "Travel Notes," 29, note 12, citing Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Historias de mujeres públicas* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1998), 130–31; and Rodolfo González Almaguez, *Yemayá los bendice, jineteras* (Elizabeth, N.J.: Majestic, 1997), 96–97.

12. Castro, "La historia me absolverá." See also Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 186.

13. Roca, "Housing," 63; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 149. For a description of one of Havana's largest pre-1959 shantytowns, Las Yaguas, see Butterworth, *People of Buena Ventura*, 3–17.

14. Roca, "Housing," 63.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 186–89.

18. Ibid., 131.

19. Mathéy, "Recent Trends," 67; Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 187.

20. N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 86.

21. Roca, "Housing," 64.

22. Mathéy, "Recent Trends," 67.

23. Kapcia, *Havana*, 127, citing N. Torrents, *La Habana* (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 1989), 129.

24. Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 188.

25. Kapcia, *Havana*, 127.

26. Roca, "Housing," 66.

27. Ibid., 68.

28. Mathéy, "Recent Trends," 69.

29. Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 203.

30. Roca, "Housing," 70.
31. Mesa-Lago, *Economy of Socialist Cuba*, 172.
32. Math  y, "Recent Trends," 70.
33. Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 208–9.
34. Kapcia, *Havana*, 149–50.
35. N. Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, 69–70.
36. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 313. See also Mesa-Lago, *Economy of Socialist Cuba*, 174. Nadine T. Fernandez notes that a 1992 study of housing in Havana indicated that areas with high numbers of black residents tended to have higher proportions of housing in poor condition than predominantly white neighborhoods. "Color of Love," 107.
37. Stevens, *Family and Identity*, 195–96.
38. Segre, Coyola, and Scarpaci, *Havana*, 214; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 150.
39. Various interviews.
40. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, is an exception.
41. *Ibid.*, 145.
42. Molyneux, "Socialist Societies," 17. Butterworth's study of the relocation of the residents of Las Yaguas reaffirms this pattern during the 1960s. See *People of Buena Ventura*.
43. Pugh and Lewin, "Women, Work and Housing."
44. *Ibid.*, 339.
45. Of course, gendered hierarchies in relation to work and production also exist in capitalist societies, but the different ideologies and roles of the state must be taken into account in comparisons with socialist societies.
46. Safa, "Matrifocal Family," 315–16.
47. *Ibid.*, 315.
48. For example, the extension of families to include members outside the neighborhood was sometimes motivated by material incentives: a new member of the household meant an addition to the food ration book. Butterworth, *People of Buena Ventura*, 51–52.
49. *Ibid.*, 57.
50. The interviews cited here were conducted before Fidel Castro announced his retirement in early 2008.
51. In Cuba this practice is known as *hacer pabell  n*.
52. Butterworth, *People of Buena Ventura*, 59; Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 150.
53. Smith and Padula, *Sex and Revolution*, 150.
54. Thomas, *Cuba*, 1434, note 38.
55. Lockwood, *Castro's Cuba*, 105.
56. *Ibid.*, 106. Smith and Padula report that in the 1980s married couples living together sometimes lined up to get into *posadas*. *Sex and Revolution*, 150.
57. Salas, *Social Control*, 171.
58. I use the term "queer" here both to point to nonheterosexual relationships and to underscore the often unexpected and imaginative living arrangements engendered by the housing crisis.
59. As Nadine Fernandez notes, the housing crisis also makes interracial relationships

trickier, as couples in such unions are more likely to be prevented from taking partners home to racist families. *Revolutionizing Romance*, 163.

60. For an example of the centrality of housing issues in life stories with women who have same-sex relationships, see the interview with a woman identified as “Carmen,” who constructed an illegal extension to her mother’s house in Havana during the 1970s in order to have some privacy. “¡No, no, yo me voy!”

61. De la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 313, 337; N. Fernandez, “Color of Love,” 106–7.

62. Epps, “Proper Conduct,” 232, note 2; Young, *Gays*, 3.

63. See Egerton, “Out but Not Down”; Elwood, “Lesbian Living Spaces”; Gorman-Murray, “Homeboys”; Johnston and Valentine, “Wherever I Lay My Girlfriend”; and Peake, “‘Race’ and Sexuality.”

64. For the argument that understandings of female same-sex desire in India and South Africa, for example, must take into account women’s daily struggles for survival, including violence, poverty, and housing problems, see Lock Swarr and Nagar, “Dismantling Assumptions,” 506.

65. Sierra Madero, *Del otro lado del espejo*, 225.

66. Elder, *Hostels*, 12.

67. *Ibid.*, 138.

68. *Ibid.*, 137–39.

69. Among the key reforms announced at the Cuban Communist Party Congress in April 2011 was a plan to allow Cubans to sell and buy property privately for the first time since 1959.

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