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Transformations in Cuba After the Special Period:

**Economic
Demographic
Societal**



*Tomás Sánchez. Relación. Museo de Bellas Artes, Havana, Cuba

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Workers' Day Parade in Plaza de la Revolución Havana, Cuba 1 May 2007

Chapter 1: Introduction & Background

If the socialist camp breaks up we will continue constructing socialism in our country...If the USSR were to break up, if the USSR were to disappear, we would continue constructing socialism in our country!

Fidel Castro, 1990¹

Cuba became linked to the Soviet bloc both politically and economically in the early 1970's, as was demonstrated in its membership in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA; also, COMECON) beginning in 1972. The trade agreements in this economic council tied Cuba's economy to that of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. Cuba sold most of its sugar to COMECON and in return imported goods and raw manufactures at below-market prices. It was clear that the Cuba received a good deal in this agreement through the preferential treatment from the Soviet Union. Changes within the Soviet Union during the eighties, however, particularly the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as leader, began to worry Cuban President Fidel Castro and strained the long-distance relationship. Gorbachev bore the message that the future for the Soviet Union lay in *glasnost* and *perestroika*, or political openness and economic restructuring.² For Castro, this forebode drastic changes in the relationship and the Soviets even forthright made it clear that much of their support to Cuba, especially in military protection, would gradually be reduced. Castro responded in turn by enacting his own set of reforms, radically different from those of the Soviets, in a "Campaign to Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies," which greatly reinforced Cuba as a command economy.

This campaign lasted until 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Soviet Union, and the termination of Cuba's still significant trade with the Soviets. Soviet oil and petroleum

¹ Quoted in Louis A. Pérez, Cuba Between Reform and Revolution. Oxford University Press. New York, 2006. pp 303

² Richard Gott, "Cuba stands alone 1985-2003" in Cuba A New History, Yale University Press (2004) pp 275

by-products had accounted for an estimated 90 percent of Cuban energy needs and Soviet bloc commercial ships had delivered 85 percent of Cuban foreign trade. Cuba's loss of trade with the Soviet Union was extremely serious. The trade relationship had been keeping Cuba's economy solvent and without it Cuba was forced to confront a dire economic reality. In 1990, the Cuban government announced a new series of austerity measures in an effort to survive its crumbling, exterior, economic relations with the Soviet bloc, a time coined: the Special Period in a Time of Peace, which deepened in severity until a slow recovery began in 1994. The austerity measures in this Special Period consisted of government policies and programs similar to those that are normally implemented in wartime. Food became scarce; the rations that the *libretas* provided hardly covered half a month of nourishment, forcing Cubans to find other, sometimes illegal means of attaining nourishment. Electricity was cut off for long periods at a time; clothing, soap, and spare parts almost completely disappeared; shortages were everywhere and affected everything.³

Periods of significant national hardship and strained daily life, such as the economic conditions in Cuba beginning in 1990, force families to adapt and change. The demographic changes resulting from the Special Period made a deep imprint in Cuban society and the toll it took on the nation as a whole is still evident. Although, today, Cuba has recovered to pre-Special Period levels, the interpersonal relationships of most Cubans still take place in a context affected by this intense period of their recent history. The present study describes how the harsh economic realities in Cuba during the Special Period transformed family dynamics and demographic trends, profoundly impacting Cuban society.

This interrelation is explored through careful analysis of each phenomenon: the economic crisis, the changing demographic trends, and their impact on Cuba's society. The basic

³ Perez, pp 291

assumptions in this study are that families adapt to long-term economic crises by opting for fewer children and combining living spaces, and that the repercussions from such changes will influence society by altering age and dependency ratios. It is also assumed here that the economic depression of the Special Period influenced Cuba's population in normative ways as well, changing aspirations and perceptions among the citizens. Specific indicators will include: fertility and birthrates; life expectancy; marriage, divorces, and consensual partnerships; internal and external migration. The more normative changes will be studied using national survey data.

The research presented here fills a void in academic resources by providing a comprehensive yet fairly concise integration of research on Cuba's economic, demographic, and societal changes in the Special Period in one study. Although there are many papers and studies on Cuba during this time, none has either focused research on the combination of economic, demographic, and societal changes or have emphasized the interconnections between them. Often the approach taken is historic, concentrating on specific events, important actors and short-term outcomes. Studies which do focus on the longer term impacts of the Special Period on Cuba are, by and large, mainly descriptive in nature. For example, Sonia I. Catases Cervera has collected and analyzed a significant amount of data on socio-demographic and reproductive changes of Cuban women through the Special Period.⁴ Likewise, María Isabel Domínguez does an excellent job outlining the changes in the aspirations, social perceptions, and identity in Cuban youth during this time.⁵ What such studies lack however is the important connection to how exactly these changes relate to the economic reality Cuba faced during the Special Period.

⁴ Sonia I. Catases Cervera, "The Sociodemographic and Reproductive Characteristics of Cuban Women," *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 88, Volume 23, No.1 (Winter 1996)

⁵ María Isabel Domínguez, "Cuban Youth: Aspirations, Social Perceptions, and Identity," *Changes in Cuban Society since the Nineties*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, 2005

This present study explores the relationship between the economic severities of the Special Period and the important changes in Cuba's demographics and shows how these will continue to have a lasting effect in Cuban society for years to come. This research topic is significant since a country's culture, including its political culture, cannot be understood without the context of recent economic, demographic and societal transformations. This study will concentrate on how scarcity of food and goods, housing problems, internal and external migration, among other trends, all affected the divorce, marriage, and consensual partnership and fertility rates and other indicators. These changes are then reviewed in their relation to the ways Cuban society has evolved out of the Special Period and the repercussions they hold for Cuba's future.

The research here will be presented in three core chapters, each chapter focusing on one of the three central transformations- economic, demographic, and societal. Chapter 1 continues with background and context on the research topic by going into further detail on the "Campaign to Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies" as well as other conditions in Cuba in the years preceding 1990 and the onset of the Special Period. Chapter 2 describes the major economic changes brought on by the Special Period, paying particular attention to specific reforms and rationing, as well as describing Cuba's path to recovery. Chapter 3 relates these economic changes to the changes in Cuba's demographics. Chapter 4, then, connects these two phenomena to how Cuban society was transformed by the Special Period. This is the longest chapter of the study as it ties in the first two transformations and aims to sufficiently cover the most important changes in society. The following chapter, Chapter 5 will succinctly conclude the study. Methodology and other information will be provided in appendixes at the end. Below is pertinent background to better understand the following chapters.

Background

The new Cuban leadership was still struggling to create a workable economy and had many failings in the 1970s. In the two decades after the revolution, then Prime Minister Fidel Castro aimed to redistribute wealth in his country and in doing so, drew much from the Soviet example. This involved a “rapid transition to communism,” “combining” the transition to communism with socialism.⁶ Castro nationalized most of the businesses and modes of production in Cuba while encouraging a “diversified ‘inwardly’ oriented development.”⁷ But for many reasons, Cuba’s dependency on sugar and its efforts to monopolize the world sugar market being main ones, Cuba’s economy sunk to very low levels in the early 1970s. The partnership and favorable trade program that Cuba gained in its membership in COMECON helped rescue its withering economy. By the 1980s Cuba’s economy was showing promising signs of recovery and growth, but still many fiscal problems remained.

In 1986, Fidel Castro launched a campaign to “Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies,” stressing moral values and incentives over monetary ones, expanding the government’s role in the economy in the process. Instead of continuing a reward system for exemplary work etc. as was tried in the 1970s, the campaign to “Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies” implemented and encouraged much more collective and voluntary labor. The rhetoric behind this campaign was that the crumbling economy that Cubans witnessed in the seventies stemmed from pro-market, capitalist trends and that in these instances, the revolution had gone astray.⁸ To re-equilibrate, or fix these “errors and negative tendencies” the country would have to re-orient itself to the revolution’s original intent- namely its Marxist and socialist ideals. Many pro-market trends in the Cuban economy were discontinued or outlawed. Profiteering became

⁶ Susan Eva Eckstein. Back from the Future: Cuba Under Castro. Princeton University Press, 1994, pp 58

⁷ Eckstein, pp. 58-9

⁸ Eckstein, pp. 60-2

criminal. In place of pro-market business and production, collective forms of labor organization were encouraged by incentives or were forced on businesses and farmers.⁹

One new form of this collective productive behavior came in new semi-autonomous state agencies, or *sociedades anónimas* (SAs) that grew in number especially in the foreign trade sector and in tourism. Through these, the Cuban government aggressively sought much needed hard currency. As earnings from sugar and the oil re-exports (from the Soviet Union originally that were part of the favorable trade agreements Cuba had signed with COMECON) fell dramatically in the mid-eighties, hard currency was hard to come by. The Cuban government's involvement in the SAs allowed them to court foreign sources of hard currency, especially in tourism, without compromising the moral valuations and inward focus of the rectification campaign.¹⁰ Still the entrepreneurial spirit in the tourism projects and courting of foreign investment was something the Cuban "tolerated" during efforts to achieve budgetary solvency.

To make matters worse for Cuba, the Soviet Union began facing its own economic problems, and its support for Cuba started to decline in the late 1980s. The trade deals with COMECON and Cuba were renegotiated or discontinued and imports into Cuba from the COMECON countries became more costly, fewer, and unpredictable.¹¹ When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, Cuba was no longer able to continue the "rectification" campaign or continue placing moral incentives over monetary needs. Indeed, the revolutionary leadership was to experience its greatest trial yet with the collapse of the Soviet Union. To save the revolution during this economic depression, Cuba would be forced to forego many of its moral values and socialist ambitions.

⁹ Eckstein, pp 66-72

¹⁰ Eckstein, pp 72-3

¹¹ Eckstein, pp 88

Chapter 2: Economic Transformations



Three Cuban Pesos. Rough value equivalent= 12 cents US.



The *libreta*, or the Cuban ration card¹²

¹² From Lonely Planet, <www.lonelyplanet.com/.../wgimages/BN2277_12.jpg>

Chapter 2: Economic Transformations

Now, we have a universal responsibility. Ours is the only socialist country in the West...We are alone—all alone—here, in this ocean of capitalism that surrounds us.
Fidel Castro, to the Fourth Party of Congress, 1991¹³

The premise of this study is that the deep economic crisis of the Special Period and the reforms the government implemented in response created such drastic changes in Cuba's society as to dramatically alter its demographics. The present chapter summarizes some of the many economic turns and reforms during the Special Period. Special attention is paid to those with direct impact on family life namely: un- and underemployment, dearth of housing, school and other facilities' construction and repair, restricted nourishment. Economic difficulties affected innumerable aspects of everyday life for a Cuban; these are explored below. A deeper exploration of how these transformed Cuba's demography and society is provided in the following chapters.

The Crisis of the Special Period

The crisis in Cuba from the loss of trade with the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, or COMECON, occurred quickly in 1991. Prior to 1990, Cuba had relied heavily on Soviet support especially as the United States continued extending policies to isolate Cuba economically. Just as the decline of the Soviet Union was sharp, so were its consequences in Cuba. Cuba's trade with the Soviet Union and COMECON had accounted for about 85 percent of its total foreign trade and had provided an estimated 90 percent of Cuba's energy needs.¹⁴ Cuba had also paid for most goods from the Council in nonconvertible currency and at favorable, locked-in prices, conditions that were impossible to find in other trade

¹³ Quoted in Pérez, Louis A. Jr. Cuba: Between Reform & Revolution. Oxford University Press, 2006 pp 303

¹⁴ Pérez, pp 381-387

relationships at the time. By 1993, commercial relations with the former Soviet Union had declined by more than 90 percent, from \$8.7 billion in 1989 to \$4.5 billion in 1991 and \$750 million in 1993. Shipments of consumer goods, grains, and foodstuff declined rapidly and imports of raw materials and spare parts, essential for industry ceased completely. Imports of Soviet oil, Cuba's main energy supply, decreased by almost 90 percent from 13 million tons in 1989 to 1.8 million tons in 1992. In the agricultural sector, imports of fertilizer declined by 80 percent, from 1.3 million tons to 25,000 tons and animal feed supplies fell by 70 percent, from 1.6 million tons to 450,000 tons.¹⁵ Prior to its collapse, the Soviet Union had essentially been subsidizing and almost completely fueling Cuba's island economy. Without the easy and favorable trade conditions, the feeble and decrepit Cuban economy fell into a deep depression.

The magnitude of Cuba's dependence on trade with the Soviet Union and its devastation when the Soviet Union collapsed cannot be overemphasized. Cuba up to this point had been a mono-crop, mono-export country- the crop being sugar. In fact, sugar had been at the center of Cuba's economy before the country even gained its independence from Spain in 1902. At the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, the world market value of sugar was below the price of production. Cuba had had little incentive to modernize its sugar production because of the comfortable Soviet subsidies and was rapidly losing ground on modernizing its production. With the collapse of the Soviet Union there was no market in which Cuba could sell its sugar for a profit.¹⁶ Understandably, the shortage of fertilizers, herbicides, and fuel greatly reduced agricultural production. The sugar crop dropped from 8.1 million tons in 1991 to 7 million in 1992 and by 1993 it was a mere 4.2 million. More than a dozen prominent sugar mills were

¹⁵ Pérez, Louis A. Jr, pp 382

¹⁶ Eva Eckstein. Back from the Future: Cuba Under Castro. Princeton University Press, 1994, pp 126-127

forced to close.¹⁷ In rural areas, such mills were the center and heart of communities and their hard times impacted the lives of local Cubans in countless ways.

Hunger became widespread across Cuba. As Louis A. Pérez describes, “dogs could not be fed and were cast out into the streets; cats were eaten and all but disappeared from the streets.”¹⁸ In 1993, UNICEF’s office in Havana estimated that one-half of all Cuban infants between six and twelve months of age were malnourished and that more than one-third of all women in their first trimester of pregnancy were anemic.¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, crime rates increased dramatically. A black market for meat resulted in an estimated 45,000 stolen head of cattle. Vandalisms, car thefts, home and store break-ins, armed robbery, pan-handling and mugging also increased sharply. As homes fell in arrears and construction materials became practically non-existent, homelessness became much more prevalent across the country.²⁰

Though there has been no official release of these figures, it is estimated that the gross national product declined over 25 percent in 1990 and an additional 15 percent in 1991.²¹ Below is a chart of Cuba’s gross domestic product growth rates in the period between 1989 through 2000. The shift was so drastic, farmers were required to substitute manual labor and draft animals for the mechanical equipment the government had previously been providing. The majority of factories across the island had to be shut down or scaled back significantly from lack of imported inputs and no investment. Cuba economists have estimated that one-third of the labor force came to be underemployed in these years with an additional 7 percent not employed

¹⁷ Pérez, Louis A. Jr, pp 386-7

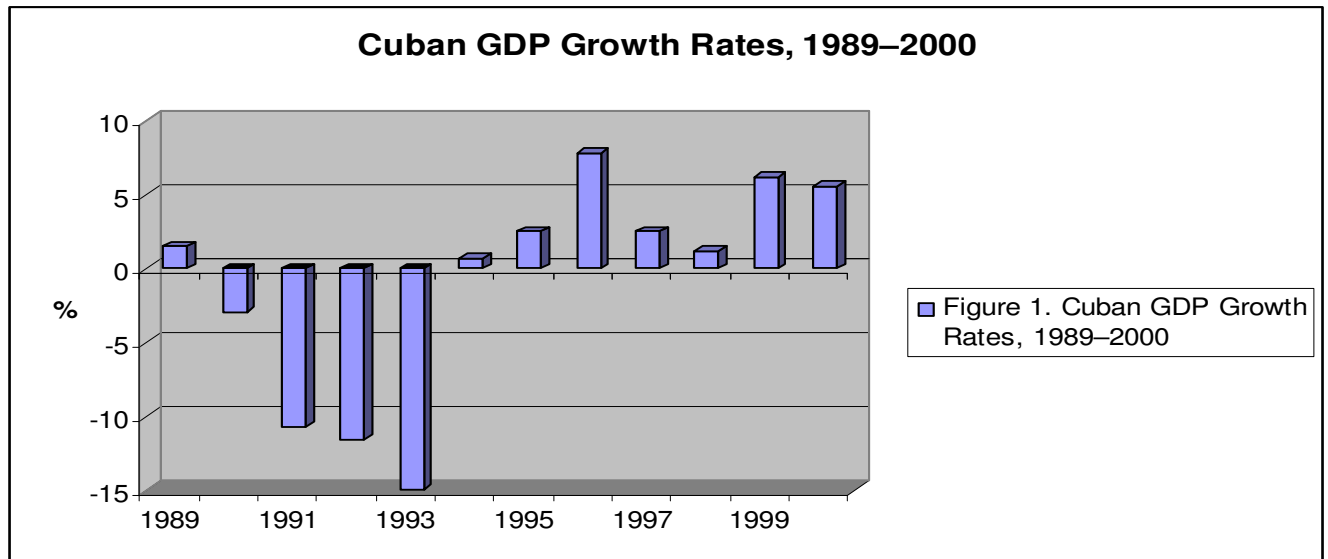
¹⁸ Pérez, pp 296

¹⁹ Pérez, pp 296

²⁰ Pérez, pp 296

²¹ Eckstein, pp 126

at all.²² Much of Cuba's daily economic life came to a standstill and the leadership was compelled to make sweeping reforms.



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Reforms

The Special Period truly became a euphemism for a siege economy. As the country became deeper entrenched in a dire depression, there was no expansion of social services, no new housing construction and even food allotments to schools and day-care centers were severely reduced. In fact, acquiring enough food for a family to live on became a formidable process and procuring basic groceries became an obsession even causing absence from work. Queues for rations lasted for hours and when it came their turn, customers had only meager options to choose from. During the deepest depression, a typical Cuban family would spend upwards of fifteen hours just waiting in food lines.²⁴ Most everything aside from taking care of basic living necessities had to be forgone while living became a day to day challenge.

²² Eckstein, pp 100-101

²³ Jorge F. Pérez-López, "The Cuban Economy in an unending Special Period" *Cuba in Transition* (2002), lanic.utexas.edu, p.3

²⁴ Eckstein, pp 99

It should be noted that throughout the Special Period, Castro still remained faithful to his revolution's emphasis on providing social equity. As common goods became scarce, the government sought "to equalize sacrifice" and keep goods at prices which everyone could afford.²⁵ In speeches, Castro would congratulate himself and his government for not leaving a single person destitute and for not closing a single school, day-care center, or hospital. Yet as scarcities increased and shortages of almost every kind became commonplace, every corner of Cuba's economy was negatively impacted. Likewise, the government's economic response to the crisis was multi-pronged, including a mix of socialist and capitalist strategies. Preparing the country, Castro declared, "If we must spend five years without building a home and that is the price we must pay to save the revolution, then we will spend five years without building a home or a day-care center."²⁶ In fact, that and much more, was what it took to save the revolution.

In response to the economic crisis, the Cuban government was forced to introduce market reforms and strategies. As early as May 1990, President Fidel Castro was giving speeches to brace his country for the imminent war-like and draconian economic conditions. For Cuba to respond to and withstand what Castro described as Eastern Europe's political "catastrophe," it would have to endure an austerity plan he outlined and which he called a "special period in time of peace."²⁷ In the name of saving Cuba's revolutionary project, the Special Period was officially implemented in August 1990. It brought Cuba's economy to a standstill and curtailed a wide range of socialist programs which Cubans had become accustomed to in the period of favorable Soviet trade. Many of these had made up the core of the campaign to "Rectify Errors and Negative Tendencies" (see chapter 2).

²⁵ Eckstein, pp 98

²⁶ Quoted in: "Castro Says Cuba Faces Hard Times". Washington Post. 7 Apr. 1990, final ed. Section A

²⁷ Lee Hockstader. "Castro Says Cuba Faces Hard Times"

In the face of such widespread economic depression, many previously instituted socialist social programs had to be scaled back or discontinued during the Special Period. These programs had not only been greatly inefficient, but they were also quite costly and impossible to continue without Soviet financial backing. However, much of the citizenry had grown accustomed to and even dependent on many government programs. The government's overall economic reforms entailed liberalizing international trade, cuts in state sponsored subsidies, and a reduction of employment within the state sector. One area in particular where state-employment reduction was great was in agriculture, namely the sugar industry but all farming sectors as well. Before the Special Period, the Cuban government had quite heavily controlled the means of agricultural production, which it organized mainly through large state-owned and run farms. No longer able to finance or run all agricultural production, the government reshaped state farms into multiple cooperatives, subdivided cooperative production, liberalized produce markets, as well as ceded land to individual farmers.²⁸ One of the consequences of such a recession in production was to aggravate income disparities between rural and urban areas. Still, despite conceding much to market forces such as "real" pricing, the government retained essential controls on distribution and the small farmer was no more worse off or better than the average Cuban during this time.²⁹ Thus the government was willing to retract itself from the market but was unwilling to sacrifice any nominal commitment to its socialist ideals and ensuring all Cubans bore the impact as equally as possible.

Due to shortages of oil and spare parts, provision of public transportation everywhere on the island declined dramatically. Citizens had to turn to bicycles instead of riding buses, trucks and cars. By 1992, Havana city residents relied on bicycles for over one-third of all their trips

²⁸ Perez, pp 387

²⁹ Laura J. Enriquez. "Economic Reform and Repeasantization in Post-1990 Cuba". *Latin America Research Review*, Vol. 38, No.1 (2003), pp 202-218

and one-fourth of all bicycle owners used them to commute to and from work.³⁰ The government managed to supply nearly 700,000 two-wheelers across the island by 1994.³¹ This transport “revolution”, created its own consequences. Hungry citizens, barely meeting daily nutrient requirements, often had no other recourse than to bike-ride to work, further draining them physically. Also, black-outs, lasting as long as eight to ten hours, became common place as the government was forced to heavily scale back use of electricity. This prevented household use of water plumbing, ovens, refrigerators and freezers. Cubans responded by making their own candles, lanterns, and soap, as well as using charcoal for fires to cook. Such chores often fell upon the women to complete as they were seen as extensions of her daily household care.³²

Practically all construction projects island-wide were terminated, countless plants were shut down and in those that were not, there were significant slowdowns and investment cutbacks. With the contraction of job opportunities the Cuban leadership changed its unemployment policies, cutting most of the previous unemployment benefits available.³³ Before the Special Period, there had been no limitations on the receipt of unemployment welfare. During the depression however, the government was forced to scale back and provide fewer benefits for briefer periods of time.³⁴ The government however remained ever present in the every day lives of Cubans. The country’s leadership still controlled the mass media, namely the two newspapers, the *Granma* and *Juventud Rebelde*.³⁵ Although production of the papers was cut to save paper, when it did go to print it included much encouragement and positive propaganda aimed at reviving commitment to the revolution’s causes as well as tips on how to get by. The

³⁰ LAWR 15 April 1993: 177

³¹ Perez, pp 387

³² Eckstein, pp 110-113

³³ Eckstein, pp 100-101

³⁴ Eckstein, pp 100-101

³⁵ Eckstein, pp 97

government also doggedly upheld its beliefs in equity, welfare and the promise of socialism in various visible ways.

Still, for its desperate hard currency needs, the Cuban leadership was forced to decriminalize the possession of the dollar; the criminalization of which had once been a trademark of Cuba's independence and socialist resolve. On July 26, 1993, Fidel Castro declared:

Today we cannot speak of the pure, ideal, perfect socialism of which we dream because life forces us into concessions. Now life, reality, and the dramatic situation the world is experiencing...oblige us to do what we would never have done otherwise if we had the capital and the technology to do so.³⁶

In part, the legalization of the dollar in Cuba's economy was a mechanism by which the government could get some kind of grasp on the budding black market. With new "dollar" stores, the government was able to amass some hard currency reserves. This was coupled with the encouragement of remittances from abroad and the opening of bank accounts made using dollars.³⁷ However, with the benefits that legalization of the dollar brought, so too came more economic deficiencies. The black market (incorporating the supply and demand for dollars) it encouraged as well as the volatility it caused for the Cuban *peso* only led to greater currency instability.³⁸ Salary and payment discrepancies between the dollar and the peso also caused considerable stratification in society. Those Cubans without access to the dollar were thereby denied the higher quality and greater range of goods only the dollar could be used to buy, creating a tangible situation of the haves vs. the have-nots.

³⁶ Quoted in Pérez, pp 305

³⁷ Pérez, pp 305

³⁸ Pérez, pp 305

Rationing

In contrast to neo-liberal approaches, the strategy Cuba's leadership adopted focused on equitable distribution of the effects on the country. Overall, however, Cuba's macroeconomic situation in the 1990s was bleak: large government budget deficits, very high levels of repressed inflation (expressed through physical shortages and rampant black markets, including a black market for hard currency), large monetary balances in the hands of the population, serious balance of payment imbalances, and an inability to borrow in the international markets.³⁹

Among the previously discussed 1993 reforms (agricultural cooperatives, for instance) the Cuban government took additional policy actions to stabilize the floundering economy. Many of these policies such as: the legalization of the holding and use of foreign currencies, authorization of self-employment, and new tax codes relating to earned income, and consumption, were all relatively liberal economic changes for the communist government.⁴⁰ Still, at least in official rhetoric, the Revolutionary leadership remained committed to its socialist ideals and communist methods to recover from the economic crisis.

One particular socialist strategy employed to deal with the above situation during the Special Period was unsurprising: rationing. During the late 1980s, the government had been trying to reduce state-regulated rationing, bringing it down to account for about a quarter of a family's total consumption.⁴¹ In the midst of major cutbacks in milk, textiles, kerosene, grain, etc. the ration system still entitled each person a monthly five pounds of rice, twenty ounces of beans, six pounds of sugar, two portions of fish, four ounces of coffee, and sixteen eggs per month. Milk was reserved for children under seven years of age.⁴² Often, this was all that

³⁹ Pérez-López, pp 7

⁴⁰ Pérez-López, pp 9

⁴¹ Eckstein, pp 66

⁴² Eckstein, pp 98

Cuban families had to go on each month. It was with their *libretas*, or ration books, that Cubans endured the long lines for their monthly provisions. Part of the reasons the revolution managed to survive and remain in power through the Special Period was its system of rationing, a visible show that the country was in the crisis together. Although the system was far from perfect and a strong black market arose supplying items not on the ration system as well as leeching off it, no one starved and the leadership could count it as a victory.

Recovery

Today, many remnants of the Special Period remain obvious. Sidewalks look like they have weathered earthquakes. *Libretas* still provide Cubans with monthly rations. School buildings have seen little repair or renovation. And Cubans still leave the island in large numbers. However, conditions have been gradually improving and Cuba's economy has been slowly turning around. The market reforms that Castro begrudgingly allowed, including foreign investment, emphasis on tourism, and especially, the allowance of remittances from Cuban-Americans began lifting the country out of economic peril and onto the road to recovery. Beginning in 1998, the cap on cash remittances to Cuba from family members in the United States was raised up to a limit of \$1,200 annually, improving daily life for many tens of thousands of households in Cuba almost immediately.⁴³ Though sugar production would never recover to the mainstay of the Cuban economy it once was, cigar exports expanded as did exports of Cuban nickel and cobalt. Electricity output and food and beverage production, likewise increased in the mid- to late-1990s.⁴⁴ During the mid-1990s signs that the worst was over began to appear. The frequency and duration of blackouts began decreasing. Cars began

⁴³ Pérez, pp 320

⁴⁴ Pérez, pp 320

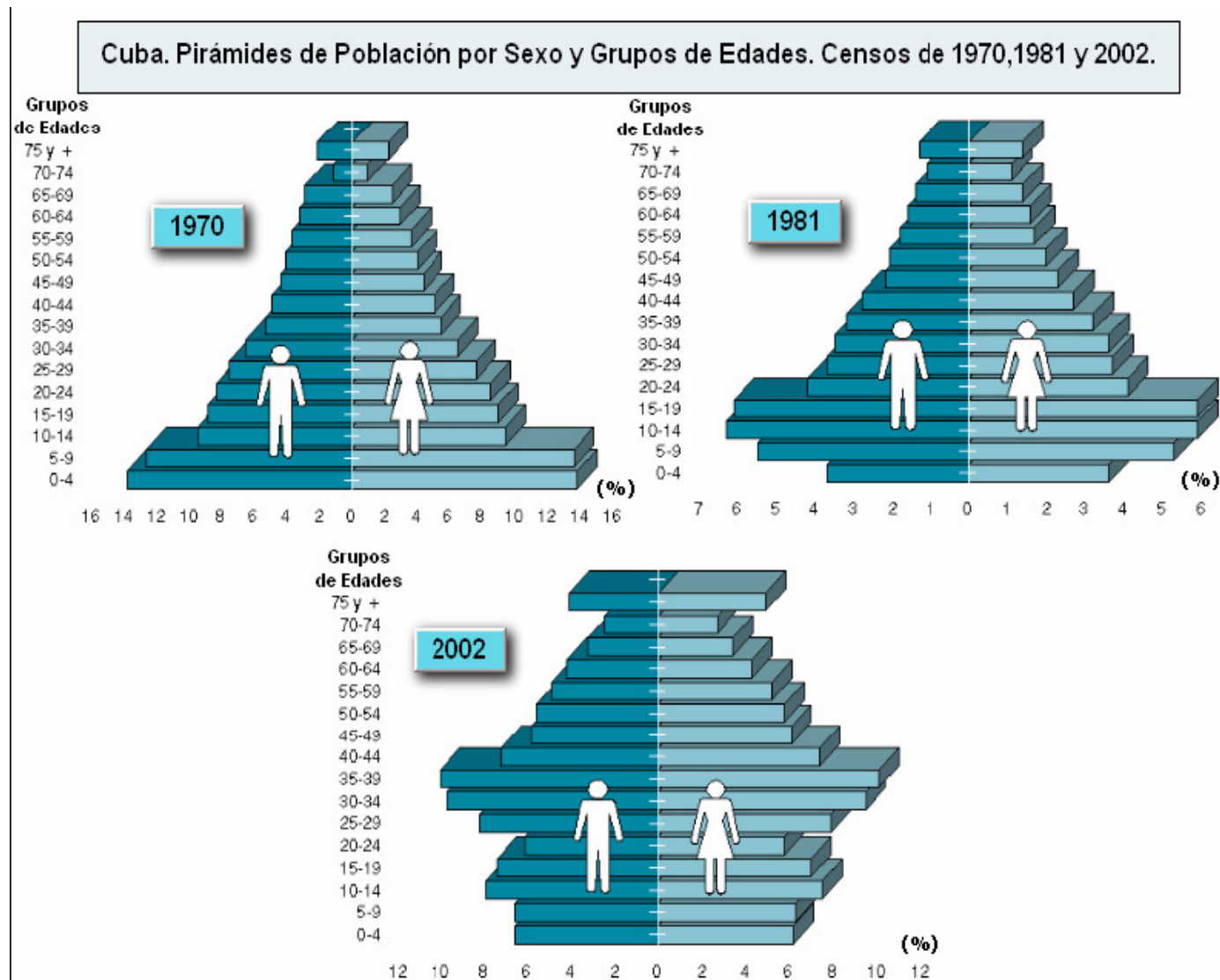
replacing bicycles on the streets and with increasing availability of gasoline, there was once again traffic congestion clogging the city streets of Havana.⁴⁵

Conclusion

During the Special Period it became increasingly difficult to go about one's daily life as normal. The government had avoided imposing unbearable economic measures on specific groups but was instead able to spread the hardship as well as it could across economic sectors and population. Everyone felt the blow of losing significant trade with the Soviet Union and everyone's lives changed in the Special Period. Greater amounts of time and energy had to be used in pursuit of simple necessities of life. Hours were spent waiting; waiting for public transportation, waiting in ration and food lines, waiting for the electricity to come back on. Household chores became feats of ingenuity. Publications would provide tips on how to self-make household products out and making rations and food go a long way in terms of fulfillment nourishment. Such trends were encouraged and exclaimed as Cuban's great ability to *resolver*, meant as not only surviving but overcoming great obstacles with ingenuity. Yet enormous sacrifice was demanded. Not only was it demanded from everyone, but it what it demanded brought everyone nearly to the brink of impoverishment.

⁴⁵ Pérez, pp. 320

Chapter 3: Demographic Transformations



Cuba. Population Pyramids by Sex and Age Group. Censuses: 1970, 1981, and 2002.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002”, *I. Presentación*, Informe Nacional. Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas. Habana, Cuba. From Centro de Capacitación de la Mujer (CECAM), Published September 2006 retrieved 5/4/2007, pp. 172

Chapter 3: Demographic Transformations

The important historical events, economic, political, and social, that have occurred in Cuba in the course of the 20th century have been decisive for the process of demographic transition in the country, given the close relationship between social and economic development, the manner in which the population participates in this process, and the demographic dynamic of the population, of which reproductive behavior is an important manifestation.
Sonia I. Catasús Cervera⁴⁷

The Special Period impacted much more than just Cuba's economy. Indeed, in almost every considerable way, Cubans' everyday lives were changed. In the span of only two years, the country's gross national product fell over 40 percent⁴⁸. The socialist leadership ensured that the hardship was spread evenly among the Cuban people, and by most analyses, this goal was achieved. Still, the economic transformations on the island were considerable and drastic. Despite an egalitarian sharing of the burden, the possibility of total impoverishment was something most Cubans had to confront. From a research standpoint, this means that Cuba from the onset of the Special Period represents a rare demographic case study of an entire country facing the same economic hardships and difficult living conditions. In the field of anthropology, most studies on the economic-family-demographic dynamic focus on longer time spans and a class-specific focus. Indeed, many historical studies of family values and economic circumstances can be grouped into four categories: (a) the family farm; (b) households and development; (c) the family business; and (d) working-class families.⁴⁹ Cuba through the Special Period, on the other hand, experienced a relatively rapid economic progression and significant demographic changes across all of its socio-economic classes and throughout all regions of the country.

⁴⁷ Sonia I. Catases Cervera, "The Sociodemographic and Reproductive Characteristics of Cuban Women," *Latin American Perspectives*, Issue 88, Volume 23. No.1 (Winter 1996), pg. 87

⁴⁸ Pérez, Louis A. Jr, pp382

⁴⁹ Gerald W. Creed, "'Family Values' and Domestic Economies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2002), pp 335

Cuba is not the tiny island country many consider it to be. In fact, the main island is 745 miles across at its widest points and 22 miles along its most narrow points, covering a total land area of 110,860 sq km, which is comparable to the US state of Pennsylvania.⁵⁰ Between 1990 and 1994, over 10,870,000 Cubans bore the burden of the Special Period. The demographic transformations thereof were nearly universal across the country.⁵¹ This chapter analyses the significant demographic changes in Cuba during the Special Period. Cuba's socialist society and the economic conditions of the period will serve as the framework within which the demographic transformations are analyzed. Specific concentration will be on changes in: the fertility rate; divorce, marriage, and consensual partnerships; life expectancy; internal and external migration; and living space. Especially important are the connections of these measures to the changes in the role of women in the workplace and home, concentrations of people in living space, and expectations for the future during the Special Period economic depression. These are studied in greater detail in Chapter 6: Societal Transformations.

The most direct expression of the severity of Cuba's Special Period economic depression is the change in the country's demographics. In many ways, the drastic changes can be attributed to the lack of hope that Cubans had for the future. They had come to rely on the Soviet Union super-power to subsidize their socialist project under the nose and sanctions of the domineering United States just 90 miles away. Cubans had gambled economic solvency and independence for a risky stake in the socialist experiment and when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Cuba was left alone with decrepit industry and manufacturing. The economy bottomed-out and while the government sought ways to rescue the socialist country, the population had to battle daily just to meet basic needs. The rhetoric from the leadership was all Cubans had to go on for hope for

⁵⁰ CIA World Factbook. < <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cu.html> >

⁵¹ Data FAOSTAT, year 2005 : <http://faostat.fao.org/faostat/help-copyright/copyright-e.htm> (last updated 11th february 2005)

the future. In terms of quantity, speeches and official motivation were not lacking. It is less clear and immensely difficult, however, to calculate its effectiveness on citizen morale.

Regardless, throughout the Special Period Cubans reacted with basic survival mechanisms and did their best to prepare for the worst, a bleak future indeed with no end in sight. The following demonstrates how this translated into demographic transformations.

At the end of 1992, the Cuban population was 10,869,218, of which 22.7 percent were less than 15 years of age and 12.2 percent 60 years or older.⁵² From the slowly decreasing fertility rates of the preceding decade and a half, by 1992, Cubans were an aging population. Because of how important fertility rate is as an indicator of the future impact of demographic changes, the demographic transformations analyzed in this study are done by relating them to their impact on Cuba's fertility and birthrates. Looking at the differences between, before, and after the Special Period, namely in the census data of 1981 and 2002, several important trends and their implications on fertility and procreation stand out. For instance, informal unions and divorces became more prevalent while the number of people married, single, and separated decreased. Such changes demonstrate that through the Special Period, Cubans avoided being alone but were more willing to divorce and enter into informal partnerships. These patterns, especially marriage-breakup, increasing female employment, separately or in combination, significantly lowered the likelihood that women would have children.

The Fertility Rate and Babies Born

⁵² Cervera, pp 87-88

Cuba has had, for over two decades, the lowest fertility rate in Latin America.⁵³ After 1978, Cuba's fertility rate dropped below replacement levels (2.1 children per women). From this point, it has slowly continued to decrease, dropping significantly a few years into the Special Period. Some, such as Sonia I. Catasús Cervera relate the rapid decline in fertility of Cuban women to a "genuine process of economic and social development," where the objective of the "full incorporation of women under conditions of equality into education and social, economic, cultural, and political life...is considered one of the principal agents of the substantial change in the level of fertility."⁵⁴ The Special Period, however, was a prolonged episode where Cuba's economy bottomed-out after the Soviet Union, which had been subsidizing the socialistic development projects, collapsed. The ensuing deep depression was hardly a "genuine process of economic and social development." On the contrary, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, such indicators as decreasing fertility during the Special Period are directly tied to the economic hardships Cubans faced and the survival mechanisms they employed to *resolver*⁵⁵.

Unfortunately, reliable data on indicators such as fertility rates is lacking between Cuba's censuses of 1980 and 2002. The reason for this gap is cited in the opening presentation of the 2002 census that says that in 1990, when the next census was to commence, economic difficulty prevented the project from happening.⁵⁶ For consistency, therefore, one must go by the raw numbers of babies born, a more reliable tally which allows for estimation, when necessary, using age indicators with available data, as is done below.

In 1992, a full year from the announcement of the Special Period's onset, only around 157,000 Cuban babies were born. In comparison, almost 23,000 more children had been born

⁵³ Cervera, pp 87-98

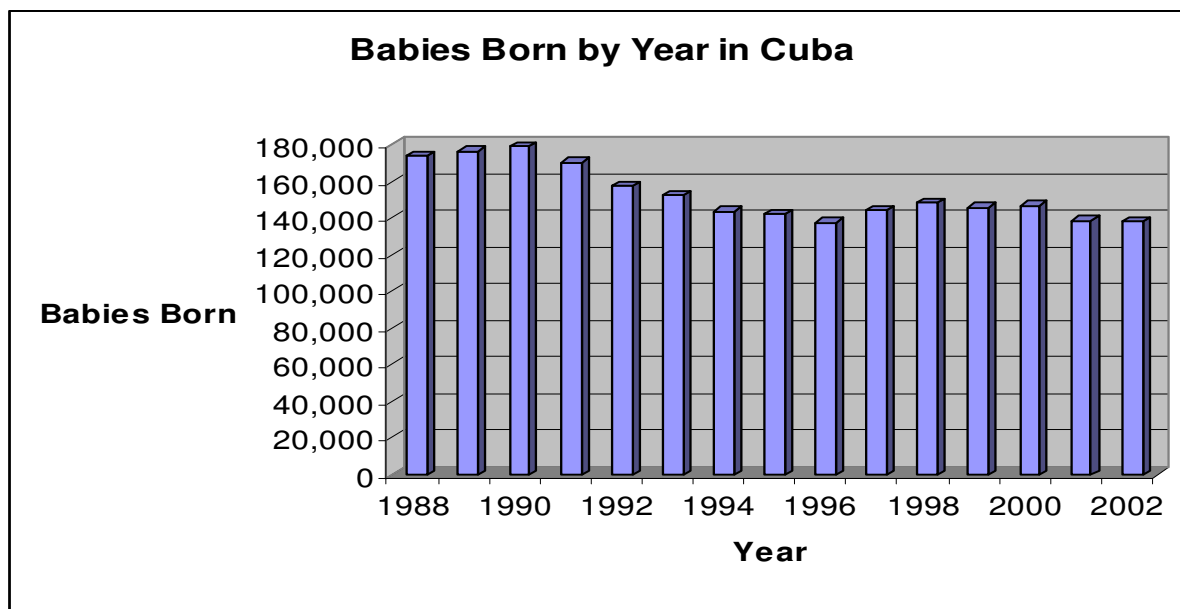
⁵⁴ Cervera, pp 88

⁵⁵ the Spanish term adopted to described the Cuban mentality of survival during the Special Period

⁵⁶ "Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002", *I. Presentación*, Informe Nacional. Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas. Habana, Cuba. From Centro de Capacitación de la Mujer (CECAM), retrieved 5/4/2007,

two years before in 1990, totaling to more than 179,500.⁵⁷ In the years preceding 1990, Cuba had been experiencing a steady increase of over 2,000 more babies born compared to each preceding year. Through the Special Period, however, the birthrate continued declining and reached its lowest point in 1996, with the birth of only 138,000 babies. It should be noted that Cuba's economy by this point was beginning to climb out of the worst of the depression, though it was far from the level achieved earlier, with Soviet support. Thus, there is a corresponding increase of babies born with improved economic conditions on the island. However, like the economy, the fertility rate of Cuban women has yet to recover and reach the higher levels seen before the Special Period.⁵⁸

Below is a chart mapping the number of babies born in Cuba between 1988 through 2002.⁵⁹



Going back to the thesis of this study, it is assumed that the severity of conditions and constraints on everyday living for Cubans during the Special Period is the causal link to the low

⁵⁷ "Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002"

⁵⁸ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002, pp. 160-161

⁵⁹ I created this chart with information on age breakdowns for several periods in the: Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002. The numbers for the graph were rounded to the tens place and all research thus far strongly supports these figures.

birth rates. The rapidity with which the strains of the Special Period were felt by the Cuban population matched the rapidity in which Cubans began having fewer children. Social services, housing construction, and even food allotments to schools and day-cares were suspended. Food in general became scarce and many hours were spent in long lines to obtain, using ration cards, what little was left. Lack of fuel had people walking or riding bikes to work. Black-outs forced households to find ways around use of plumbing, refrigerators, and electricity. Life, everywhere and for everyone in Cuba, became drastically harder after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The onset of deep economic depression heavily influenced many life-choices, particularly those relating to family and procreation.

Abortions

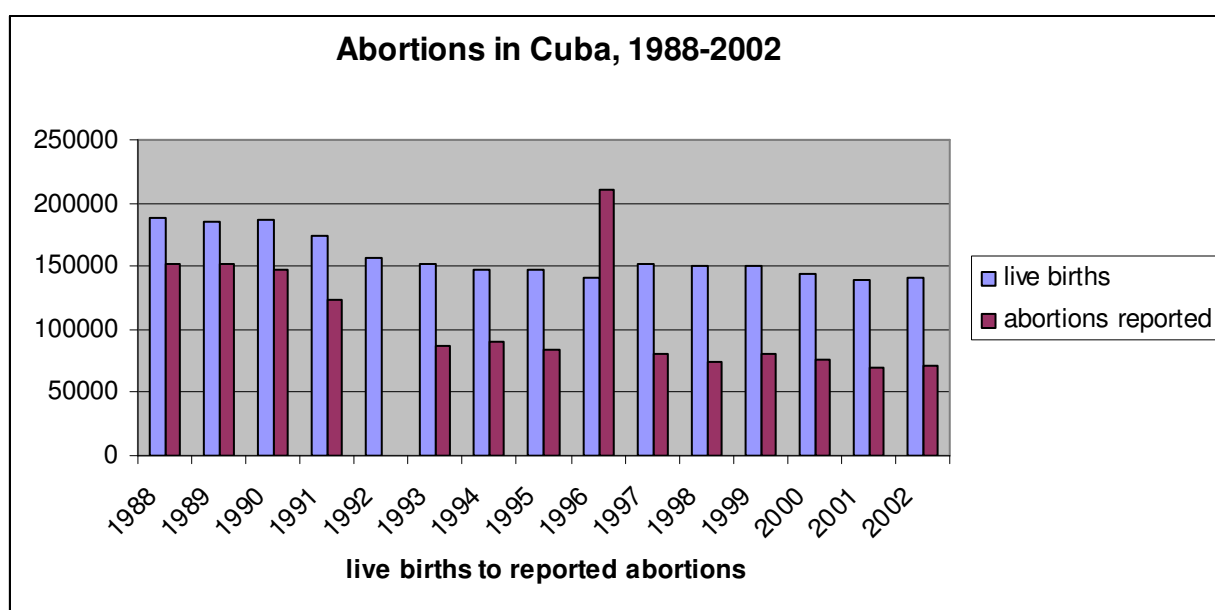
The prevalence of abortions in Cuba increased significantly. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of abortions had already increased by 109 percent.⁶⁰ Between 1988 and 1990, there were nine abortions for every ten births.⁶¹ And this was a period before the large drop in babies born was seen. In fact, as seen in the chart above, birthrates were on the increase in the years directly preceding 1990. During the Special Period, many Cuban women took advantage of Cuba's socialized healthcare system, which is quite exceptional considering its small island-based economy, and used abortion as a principal means of birth control.⁶² During the Special Period, Cuba's rate of abortion was astounding. In comparison, the abortion rate for Cuban women in 1988 was 58 percent of all pregnancies. This figure is quite high to begin with but is made to look modest when we compare the figure to 1991-1996, a period with an average

⁶⁰ Sonia I. Catases Cervera, pp 91

⁶¹ Pérez, Louis A. Jr., pp 386

⁶² NationMaster, Health Statistics> Abortion (per capita) by country, <
http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/hea_abo_percap-health-abortions-per-capita> updated 10 November 10, 2007,
accessed 10 November 2007

abortion rate of 78.85 percent of all pregnancies.⁶³ It should also be noted that these figures are based on abortions officially reported and therefore represent a low, modest estimate. To note, Cubans continue to be outdone in abortion rates only by Russia, Bulgaria, and Hungary- all three countries quite heavily affected during the same time by Soviet Union.



Note: there was no official data on reported abortions for 1992.

Divorce, Marriage, and Consensual Partnerships

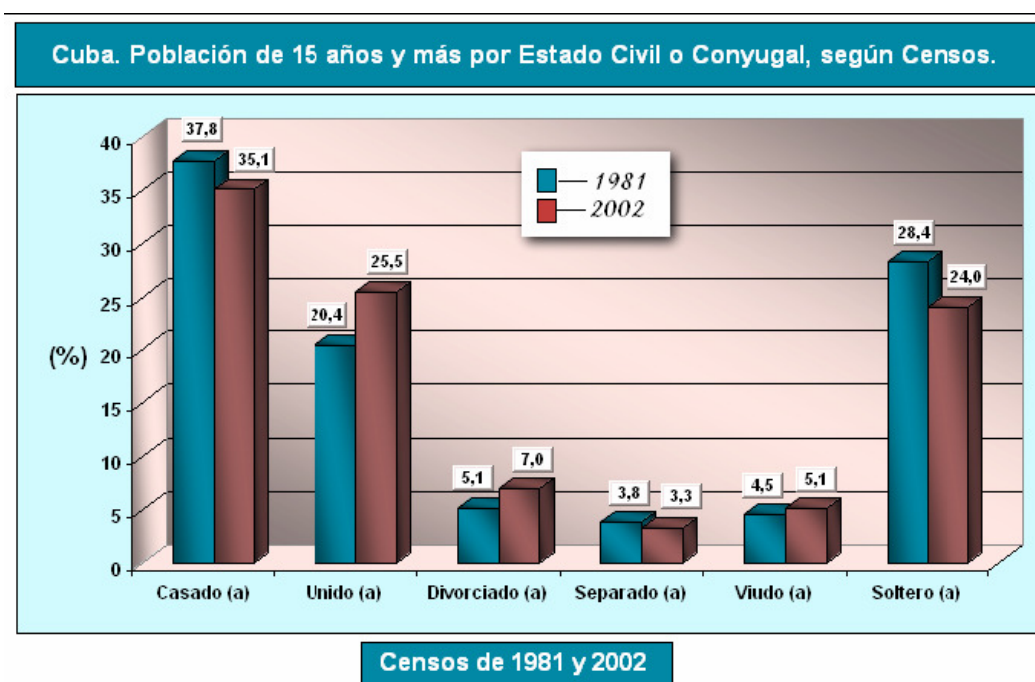
Many studies and anecdotal evidence suggest that increasing numbers of Cubans were delaying marriage and that fertility rates had declined to what perhaps may have been the lowest levels in the twentieth century.⁶⁴ There has been an increase in people in unions, divorces, and widows, which is paralleled by a decrease in the number of people married, separated, and single.⁶⁵ However, marriage still remains the likeliest form of long-term partnership. What this means is that couples are slower to get married and are more likely to divorce but still do not wish to be single. For example in 2002, thirty-five percent of the population was married- a drop

⁶³ See end note for sources used in this compilation which can be found in its entirety in the source: Wm. Robert Johnston, "Historical abortion statistics, Cuba" *Abortion statistics and other data-Johnston's Archive*. 11 Oct 2007. 5 Nov 2007 < file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Owner/Desktop/Historical%20abortion%20statistics,%20Cuba.htm>

⁶⁴ Pérez, Louis A. Jr., pp 386

⁶⁵ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002

from thirty-eight percent in 1981.⁶⁶ Also, divorces rose from a low five percent to seven in this same period. It is estimated that during the worst years of the Special Period, one out of every two marriages ended in divorce and the average length of marriage from 1975 to 1990 was less than five years.⁶⁷ For more casual unions however, it was almost twenty-six percent in 2002, jumping up from just twenty percent in 1981. It can be easily assumed that such unions would be the desirable option based on such factors as not wishing to have children at the time or perhaps a desire to concentrate on things outside the formation of a typical one family household. Below is a chart of Cuban's civil status in 1981 and 2002; notice the difference especially in percent of singles (soltero(a)).⁶⁸



Cuba.
Population, 15 years and older by Civil Status or partnerships, according to the 1981 and 2002 censuses⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002

⁶⁷ Eva Eckstein (1994), pp 146

⁶⁸ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002, XIV. *Tablas Estadísticas*

⁶⁹ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002, XIV. *Tablas Estadísticas*

Role of Women in the workplace and home

The role and status of women continued to evolve during the Special Period in ways that led to additional demographic changes in Cuba. First, it has been widely noted that Cuban women bore the greatest burden for families during this time of severe economic hardship. Not only did female participation in the average workforce increase by thirty-six percent, but they also had to single-mindedly provide for their families on the home-front as well.⁷⁰ Much research confirms that women faced a significantly higher level of hardship compared to their spouses in this time period. More detail on this topic will be given in Chapter 6 which discusses the societal transformations in the Special Period. It is, however, important to look at how the Special Period specifically affected couples. In 1981, seventy-two percent of households were headed by a male; by 2002 this number had dropped to only fifty-nine percent, with women gaining ground by heading the other forty-one percent, up from the twenty-eight percent they held earlier.⁷¹ This significant transition of household leadership can be attributed to several effects of the Special Period on Cuba. If anything, this speaks to the high level of control women obtained in both their lives and that of their collective family. This trend however, at least in the Cuban case, has also correlated with women controlling the amount of children they bring into the family, most often greatly reducing their numbers.

According to the key research from the 1999 anthological⁷² study, “Diversidad y Complejidad Familiar en Cuba”: the entrance of women into the job market, her right to control her maternity, the use of contraceptives, the lengthening of average lifetimes, the increasing psychological burden of raising children, among other causes, has produced a diminution of

⁷⁰ Raisa Pages. “The Status of Cuban Women: From Economically Dependent to Independent.” *Granma International Online*. March 8, 2000

⁷¹ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002

⁷² Definition: a book or other collection of selected writings by various authors, usually in the same literary form, of the same period, or on the same subject.

child births.⁷³ The results have been drastic. Looking at fertility changes, in 1970-75, Cuba had a fertility rate of 3.5 children for each woman; by 1990-95, this had dropped by about fifty-five percent to just 1.6 children per Cuban woman.⁷⁴ The impact of the transformations undergone in the role women play in their families and households as well as increased and free access to birth control and abortion allowed for a high level of family planning and child spacing to a point below population replacement levels.

Internal Migration and Housing

Understanding population living space conditions is integral to understanding the paradigms of family life and changes in family trends especially unions and birthrates. One of the important consequences of the time during and after the Special Period is the worsening housing problem in Cuba. During the Special Period, housing starts fell hopelessly in arrears and the conditions of existing units continued to deteriorate in the absence of construction materials, replacement parts, and the resources for even routine maintenance.⁷⁵ New couples and families were forced to look for housing with family and friends, compacting many people into living space suited for many fewer. The effects of compacting families into a single living space are seen most clearly in the cities, especially in Havana City, and are one result of internal migration during this time period. Often national economic hardship is felt more acutely in rural areas further removed from the normal provision of social services and job opportunities. In Cuba, this was somewhat abated by the leadership's determination to equalize the hardship of the

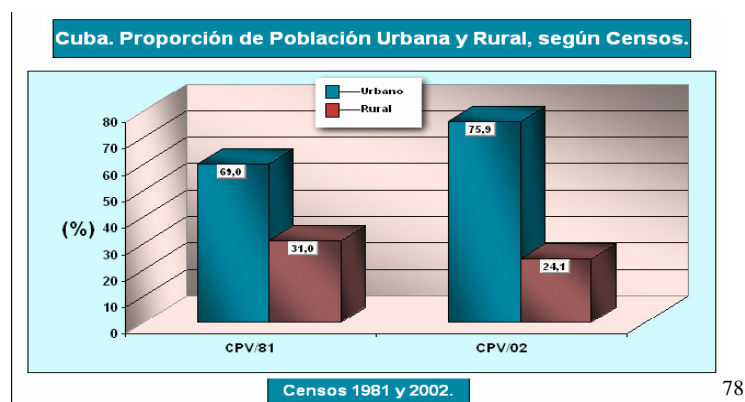
⁷³ Dra. Patricia Ares Muzio. "Familia actual: Realidades y Desafíos" *Diversidad y Complejidad Familiar en Cuba*, 1999. Centro de Estudios Demográficos- Universidad de la Habana; Instituto Iberoamericano de Estudios sobre Familia (IIED) Habana, Cuba.

⁷⁴ "Familia, Hogar y Fecundidad," pp 50

⁷⁵ Pérez, Louis A. Jr., pp 385-6

Special Period across the island. However, trying one's chances in the city continued to look like a viable option for many.

One of the most notable demographic changes after the Special Period was the rapid urbanization that occurred. Looking at migration statistics first, in the period between 1981 and 2002, the proportion of Cuba's population living in urban areas rose from less than sixty-nine percent of the total to seventy-six percent. Tellingly, in 2002, about thirty-two percent of the residents in Havana City were noted as being born outside of the province. The city of Havana became especially dense with a population of 2,201,610 residents at the time of the census in 2002. Within Havana, Centro Habana (Havana Center, the capital of the province) specifically with 158,151 people, has a density index of 39,537.8/ km².⁷⁶ Compare this to Mexico City's population density of 5,626/ km² or New York City proper with 10, 439/ km² (although both, especially Mexico City, cover a far great area of land).⁷⁷ Despite government initiatives to prevent migration to the cities which were overstepping capacity, people trying to find better employment opportunities continued migrating to the city and areas like Centro Habana. Below is a chart comparing urbanization of Cuba between 1981 and 2002.



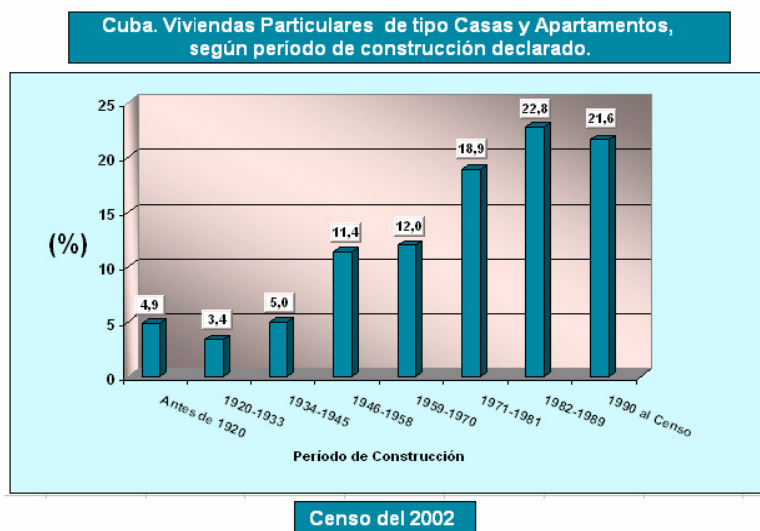
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⁷⁶ Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002, pp 160-161

⁷⁷ "UN world Urbanization Prospects estimate for 2005" United Nations Population Division 2006. 5 Nov 2007 <<http://esa.un.org/unup/index.asp?panel=2>>

⁷⁸ Cuba. Proportion of Urban and Rural Population, according to the 1981 and 2002 censuses. Censo de Población y viviendas Cuba-2002, XIV. *Tablas Estadísticas*

This migration has had a direct impact on the housing capacity in the areas in and around Havana City. Single person apartments and single family homes continued transforming into apartments for entire families and houses for several families or generations. From 1981 to 1995, extended households in Havana rose in number by 267,291. Compound housing consisting of even more extended families rose by 111, 431- an almost five percent increase in less than 15 years.⁷⁹ In Havana specifically, combined, extended and compound family living rose about seven percent.⁸⁰ Such migration and tightened living conditions have resulted in many new characteristics in Cuban family relations, especially in urban areas; one important one being that new couples put everything like starting a family second to finding appropriate living space.⁸¹ Instead of focusing on bringing more or any children into their relationship, new couples have been focused on securing their own personal space and carving out a solid household. The chart below shows the periods of construction in ten year periods of both houses and apartments in Cuba.



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⁷⁹ “Familia, Hogar y Fecundidad” *Perfil Estadístico de la Mujer Cubana en el Umbral del Siglo XXI*. Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas. Febrero 1999, Habana, Cuba. Pp 37

⁸⁰ “Familia, Hogar y Fecundidad”, pp 39

⁸¹ “Familia, Hogar y Fecundidad”, pp 39

⁸² Cuba. Particular Housing by types of Houses and Apartments, according to declared construction period

External Migration

Equal in importance as internal migration to the present discussion on demographic transformations in Cuba is the external migration by Cubans during the Special Period. Although Cubans have a long history of migrating to the United States (the Cuban Children's Program [for unaccompanied children], the Camarioca boatlift, the Cuban airlift, the Mariel boatlift), the exodus of 32,000 *Balseros* (rafters) in 1994 was the only mass migration promoted to meet internal socio-economic pressures.⁸³ The most prominent migration period of Cubans leaving to go to the U.S. that preceded the 1994 *balsero* occurred during the Mariel boatlift in 1980 [notice the years surrounding this event correspond with the first constrictions and the reversal of Cuban population growth, as illustrated on the cover of this chapter]. Starting with a handful of asylum seekers at the Peruvian embassy, within a few days an acute refugee exodus mounted bringing over 125,000 Cubans to the United States.⁸⁴ Mostly consisting of Cubans strongly dissatisfied with internal politics, the migration accelerated as extended family followed fathers and others and culminated with the "undesirables" the Cuban officials sent over. These included those who had been in prison, mental patients, and homosexuals. What unified these immigrants was their legal status; both Cuba and the United States opened their doors (out and in respectively) and the Cubans went.⁸⁵ This openness, however changed in the mid 1990s when both governments signed a New Migration Agreement allowing only up to 20,000 Cubans and 3,000 political prisoners to emigrate to the United States each year (however, in actuality only around 2,000 are granted visas).⁸⁶

⁸³ Felix Roberto Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) pp 2

⁸⁴ Silvia Pedraza, "Cuba's Refugees: Manifold Migrations," *Cuba in Transition*, (ASCE 1995), pp 8

⁸⁵ Pedraza, pp 8

⁸⁶ Pedraza, pp 10

The 1994 *balsero* exodus was different from those before it, and in particular, the Mariel boatlift for several reasons. First because of the New Migration Agreement, these desperate Cubans were illegally migrating by both countries' standards.⁸⁷ However, once these Cubans made it to U.S. soil they could claim refugee status and eventually stay in the United States legally (the U.S. Coast Guard was actually picking some up at sea to bring them to the U.S. during the early years in this period).⁸⁸ During the worst years of the economic depression of Cuba's Special Period, Cubans became so desperate they began leaving Cuba on anything that would float- rafts, tires, or other makeshift vessels (or *balsas*). They risked death by starvation, dehydration, drowning, and sharks. While in 1989 less than 500 *balseros* took to the sea, by 1991 this number rose to over 2,000, then to 3,656 by 1993. August 1994 ushered in a new phase of this *blasero* migration when riots in Centro de Habana resulted in Castro ordering the Cuban Coast Guard to discontinue preventing illegal Cuban emigration.⁸⁹ Unsurprisingly, Cubans took their chances in ever greater numbers to make it to Miami. In 1994, over 37,000 Cubans were rescued at sea.⁹⁰ Because of the magnitude of migration in such a short period, the U.S. changed its posture by signing a new Migration Agreement in September 1994 which promised to give at least 20,000 visas annually to qualifying Cuban émigrés. Up until recently, the U.S. has stayed true to this promise. Overall, it goes without saying, Cubans fleeing the island in tens of thousands has significantly changed the demographics of the country, especially in the urban areas from where the highest concentration of *balseros* departed.

⁸⁷ Pedraza, pp 10

⁸⁸ Pedraza, pp 10-11

⁸⁹ Pedraza, pp 11

⁹⁰ Pedraza, pp 11

Below a brief synopsis of historical Cuban migration to the United States.⁹¹

Cuban Migration to the United States, 1950-2006						
1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2006	Total
73,221	202,030	256,497	132,552	159,037	160,133	983,470

As one can see from the above chart, the decade in which Cuba had close ties with the Soviet Union and was part of the favorable trade network of COMECON registered the fewest numbers of Cuban emigrants to the United States. The triumph of the Revolution caused a spike of emigrants which consisted mostly of well-off business men and Cuba's elite whose interests were jeopardized by the radically new government. The large numbers of Cuban immigrants to the U.S. from 1970-1979 is largely due to President Lyndon Johnson's "open door" policy that welcomed refugees from communism in the mid-sixties but which carried over into the seventies as well.⁹² Starting in 1965 for eight years, the U.S. and Cuban governments (through the Cuban Refugee Program) ran a daily air bridge, known as the *Vuelos de la Libertad*, or Freedom Flights. By 1974, these flights had brought over a quarter of a million Cubans to Miami.⁹³ Even though the total numbers for 1980-1989 were much lower than the decade before, the Mariel Boatlift of 1980 still helped keep the total immigration numbers high for this decade. The jump during the decade of the Special Period, 1990-1999, though not eclipsing the earlier decades of

⁹¹ Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, 2006*. *Note: The data represent Cuban citizens and their dependents who obtained legal permanent resident status (i.e., were issued a "Green Card") per the U.S. government's fiscal calendar (FY). Annual figures have been grouped into decades.

⁹² Pedraza, pp 5

⁹³ Pedraza, pp 5

mass emigration is significant in its own right. The migration of the *balseros* was the first large immigration wave to break the relative break of emigration from Cuba to the U.S. after Mariel.

To explain the why the six-year period of 2000-2006 eclipsed that of 1990-1999, the answer lies no further then in the hardship and lack of hope the Special Period instilled in Cuban society. The Elián González case of 2000 highlighted for many Americans, the fact that many Cubans, of all walks of life, were still desperate enough to board unsafe crowded vessels to risk death by sharks, drowning or dehydration to escape life in Cuba. The “wet-foot, dry-foot” immigration policy has continued as encouragement, as so long as Cubans make it to dry land, they will be able to legally pursue permanent legal residence.⁹⁴ Thus even though the worst years of the Special Period are over, many Cubans who have been disenchanted and lack any hope for a future in Cuba continue to risk it all to pursue life in the United States.

Conclusion:

The demography of Cuba changed during the Special Period in many ways and from many causes. The consequences of the low birthrate, migration, and non-existent development during the worst years of this economic crisis will have serious repercussions for Cubans through the coming generations. The fertility rate and raw numbers of Cuban babies born dropped significantly because of the economic hardships the Cuban population faced after losing their ties to the Soviet Union. Cuban women began opting to abort pregnancies almost, if not, as frequently as opting to carry them to term. Marriages were delayed and divorces took place ever more rapidly. In a desire not to live as a single, young Cubans coupled much more and often outside of marriage. The constricted housing situation brought on by the halt and decline of new

⁹⁴ Ruth Ellen Wasem "Cuban Migration Policy and Issues" Congressional Research Service, Updated January 19, 2006

construction projects during the Special Period then forced these young couples to live within a extended family and in multi-generational households. Finally, when life became completely unbearable in Cuba, there was always the sea and the ninety mile exodus to the United States. The affects of the Special Period changed the demographic story of Cuba's population and irrevocably altered Cuban society.

End Note:

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2000, "Table 5. Live births by age of mother, sex and urban/rural residence: 1948-1997," in *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 1948-1997: Historical Supplement*, United Nations (New York, NY), on line at *United Nations Statistics Division* [<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBHist/HistTab05.pdf>].

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2002, "Table 13. Legally induced abortions: 1991-1999," in *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 2000*, United Nations (New York, NY), on line at *United Nations Statistics Division* [<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYB2000/Table13.pdf>].

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005, "Table 13. Legally induced abortions: 1994-2003," in *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 2003*, United Nations (New York, NY), on line at *United Nations Statistics Division* [<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYB2003/Table13.pdf>].

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2002, "Table 1. Live births by sex and urban/rural residence: 1980-1999," in *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 1999 Natality Supplement*, United Nations (New York, NY), on line at *United Nations Statistics Division* [<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/DYBNat/NatStatTab01.pdf>].

United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, 1991, *United Nations Demographic Yearbook 1989*, United Nations (New York, NY).

Henshaw, Stanley K., Susheela Singh, and Taylor Haas, 1999, "The incidence of abortion worldwide," *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 25:S30-S38, on line at AGI [<http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/25s3099.html>].

Chapter 4: Societal Transformations



⁹⁵ Photos by Grégoire Korganow, Photos are taken from *Avoir 20 ans à La Havane*, by Grégoire Korganow and Jean Springer, published by Editions Alternatives, Paris, 1998

Chapter 4: Societal Transformations

Much more than political bureaucracies or economic systems, society and societal relations are extremely susceptible to dramatic and sudden change. The ability of community institutions to evolve and the patterns of family formation to change can be quite remarkable in the face of such immense changes as those that occur during an unprecedented and deep country-wide economic depression. Cuba during the Special Period provides a telling example of this experience. The focus of this chapter is the notable transformations in Cuban society that arose from both the severe economic crisis of the Special Period and the corresponding demographic changes of the time. In particular, widespread changes in family structure will be examined in relation to the family's overall role in society. Such trends as changing youth aspirations and involvement, changes in class structures and divisions, urbanization, and religious revivals will be reviewed.

The context of this discussion will be the previously discussed economic and demographic changes such as un- and under-employment, housing shortages, lack of new building construction, restricted provisions of basic needs and consumer goods, and changes in family structures and women's roles. Some major differences between rural and urban societal transformations will be discussed here as well. Positive trends such as the maintenance of high education, health levels will be studied in this chapter, along with the more negative trends such as an increasing individualistic ideology, alcoholism, and external migration. A brief discussion of the role of the expatriate Cuban community in Miami in connection to civilian life in Cuba is included as well as the importance it holds for whatever lies ahead for Cuban society in the coming years.

The effects of the Special Period on Cuban society were significant, transforming everyday life in countless ways. These changes continue to be played out on the island and their final impact is yet to be seen. From the dramatic changes in Cuba's demography during and after the Special Period, societal norms and culture changed as well. The clearest link between the two is within the institution of the family. In terms of unit importance, families are critical building blocks of the larger society. The home is the space in which new citizens are raised and endowed with certain values. It is where children's education is reinforced and where their dreams are formed. Most importantly, it is where they develop a sense of self; a sense of community; a sense of their role in society. Therefore, no study of societal transformation can be undertaken without careful analysis of changes in the family as an institution.

The family norms of a country are also integral factors for the country's economy and vice versa.⁹⁶ The value of the family in various economic activities both benefits from and contributes to political and cultural values.⁹⁷ It has been suggested that over the past decades that the family has become the sole real community, supplemented only by imagined and virtual ones. Imagined communities of nation and ethnic group may actually enhance the centrality of the family in that they rest upon essentialised notions of relatedness through blood that reinforce rigid notions of the family and highlights its role as the production site of new nationals.⁹⁸

The case in Cuba is no different. Many of the changing societal trends in Cuba during and after the Special Period have their beginnings within family relations and in the home. As the Cuban demography team at the Centro de Investigaciones Psicológicas y Sociológicas in Havana

⁹⁶ Particularly propounded by German economist Max Weber in the early 20th century.

⁹⁷ Gerald W. Creed, "'Family Values' and Domestic Economies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29, (2000), pp 346

⁹⁸ Creed, pp 348

concludes, “family, in our country, evolves, but continues to be the ‘first resource and ultimate refuge’ for the majority of its members.”⁹⁹ The following reviews several of the most important changes within Cuban families because of the Special Period and how they are affecting Cuban society today. Finally, special attention will be paid to the changes in what it means to be a youth in Cuba as this has particularly significant implications for the fate of all Cubans.

Family as Part of Cuban Society:

To begin with, family in Cuba has several notable and historical characteristics that set it apart from most societies. For instance, the Revolution of 1959 that brought to power the current leader, Fidel Castro, also corresponded with a literacy campaign which in a few years had successfully eradicated illiteracy in Cuba. Today, Cuba continues to boast freedom from adult illiteracy as well as relatively high education standards throughout the country. In addition, the Revolution had a relatively high success rate in institutionalizing its socialist character for reasons such as the mass exodus of dissenters and the antagonistic behavior of neighboring United States which served to unite the population in support of the Revolution. Socialism in Cuba led to community-based programs like the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (Comites del Defenso Revolucionario, CDRs) which set up a sort of town-hall participatory system which answered to national governing boards (as well as monitor citizen faithfulness to Revolutionary ideals and loyalty to the leadership). Additionally, education programs in Cuba were coupled with broad-based support of athleticism allowing Cuban athletes to continue to excel in such sports as baseball and boxing. Such indicators as these place the Cuban family in a

⁹⁹Alberta Durán Gondar, Ernaesto Chávez Negrín, and Mareelén Díaz Tenorío, “La Familia Cubana: Realidades y Proyección Social,” *Diversidad y Complejidad Familiar en Cuba*, Centro de Estudios Demográficos, Universidad de La Habana and Instituto Iberoamericano de Estudios sobre Familia (IIEF), 2004 (a translation by author of this capstone)

context where generalizations about the basic level of education of parents and the level of community participation can be made.¹⁰⁰

When studying changes in the Cuban family through the Special Period several difficulties arise. To begin with, very little was published in Cuba during this severe economic crisis, and there was even less institutional academic research. Although continued studies by such institutions as the Pan-American Institute on Family Studies and Cuba's Center for Demographic Studies were underway during the years 1992-1993, the significant hardship and uncertainty at the time prevented much research especially outside the city of Havana. Therefore, for context it is important to refer to the results of substantial studies on the Cuban family from the late eighties. As is noted by Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío in "The Cuban Family: Realities and Social Projection," several important trends were developing in the years preceding the economic crisis of the 1990s. Those to note are: a decreasing prevalence of prostitution; an increasing ability to plan family development and fertility; legislation equalizing rights within family relations as well as legal, social, and economic protection of children born within or out of wedlock.¹⁰¹ These trends were significantly affected, were changed or reversed by the hardship Cuban families faced during the Special Period.

Although the economic impact of losing Soviet trade and investment and the domestic policies that were implemented as a response in the early 1990s were relatively uniform throughout the country, the reaction of the population was not. One of the most striking changes that occurred in Cuba's society because of the Special Period was the proliferation of varied forms of domestic unions, families, and households.¹⁰² Though it is not necessary to repeat the review of the demographic transformations responsible for this change, the dramatic variation of

¹⁰⁰ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 59

¹⁰¹ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 60-2

¹⁰² Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp s61

these social forms throughout Cuba has important implications for the country's societal development. To note, correlation has been detected between the different familial developments in Cuba during the Special Period and certain levels of socioeconomic status, urbanization of different areas, the socioeconomic class of families at the onset of this period and the particular stage of the family cycle in which each family found itself at the time.¹⁰³ Regardless of the diversification of social forms and families, many of the new societal trends in Cuba were widespread, overarching and influential within the many forms of unions, families, and households.

For the present review of societal transformations in Cuba caused by the economic depression of the Special Period, several trends within Cuban families are particularly central. Such significant patterns in Cuban society during the Special period, recognized by Cuban demographers and family scholars, were:

- declining respect for parents and parental authority by children and young adults
- increasing intergenerational conflicts, through all generation and age levels
- loss or modification of family traditions
- increasing alcoholism and alcohol-related violence
- increasing breakages of linkages between norms of partnership and marriage formations and the levels of formal education (i.e. stage of education of both spouses at the time of marriage or cohabitation).¹⁰⁴

It was noted that the trends and behavior above were not particular to certain areas but were universal changes throughout Cuba at the time. Additionally, large increases in the formation of young couples and families were registered, as were the increases in single motherhood of young

¹⁰³ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 62

¹⁰⁴ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 60, 62

women who were often out of school and/or employment. As was noted in the chapter on demographic transformations in Cuba during the Special Period, this episode also corresponded with:

- increasing rates of abortion
- higher frequencies of divorce (especially after a relatively few years of marriage)
- fertility levels well below replacement
- rising incidence of extended and joint-family households
- limited access and ability to procure individual or exclusive living space for new and young couples.¹⁰⁵

Although it is less well-documented, many researchers have also noted the prevalence of decreased fatherhood involvement in children's lives, especially when fathers were not married to the mother. It is especially important to note that this trend spread in Cuba during a time when economic difficulties were forcing women to work much more than previously in order make some sort of living and attain a minimum provision for their children.¹⁰⁶ Other transformations in Cuban society which may or may not have direct origins within in the family are reviewed in more detail below.

Changing Role of Women:

The transformations that transpired in the role of Cuban women because of the Special Period economic crisis were profound. In 1990, women represented 38.9 percent of the work force. By 2000, the female labor force had grown to 44 percent, increasing especially between

¹⁰⁵ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 60-1; Pérez, Louis A. Jr., pp 385-6; "Familia, Hogar y Fecundad," pp 50

¹⁰⁶ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 61

1992 and 1996.¹⁰⁷ The insertion of such a large population of women into the work force in such a short period of time dramatically changed intra-family relations, and traditional masculine/feminine household and social roles in Cuba. Economically speaking, women gained new and significant independence as well as security to make individual decisions affecting their homes.¹⁰⁸ Although this transformation occurred because of labor needs during the deep depression Cuba confronted, the newly acquired independence for women held important implications for its society.

One visible development in particular was the freedom women now had to alter partnership relations which seems to have led to a noticeable increase in the number of their dissolutions, seen in the research from the Center of Demographic Studies at the University of Havana and the Ibero-American Institute of Family Studies. Another, more positive, change was the noticeable equalization in education that women attained and the decreasing acceptability of gender inequality within education and employment institutions.¹⁰⁹ Just before and during the Special Period, the government in Cuba allowed much more private economic employment than previously, and females were a significant proportion of those who took advantage of this new opportunity to work at home or part-time. However, even with their major insertion into and involvement in the formal workforce, Cuban women still remained responsible for housework and childcare. This “double duty” and the financial independence women gained during this time indubitably increased the divorce rate which has already been examined earlier in this study (Chapter 3, p.9-10).¹¹⁰ In addition, as Susan Eckstein points out, “as women joined the labor force in record numbers they added to the country’s productive capacity...their participation was

¹⁰⁷ Raisa Pages, “The Status of Cuban Women: From Economically Dependent to Independent” *Granma International Online*. March 8, 2000

¹⁰⁸ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 59

¹⁰⁹ Gondar, Negrín, and Tenorío (2004), pp 59

¹¹⁰ Eckstein, pp 146-147

contingent on costly fiscal outlays and it contributed to a drop in the fertility rate and to a ‘graying’ of the population in turn.”¹¹¹ Thus the new level of female participation in Cuba’s workforce during the Special Period is one of the most significant societal transformations of this time.

The extra burden women bore during the Special Period must be highlighted. For instance, the construction of day-care centers came to a halt from lack of materials inhibited the reintegration of young mothers into the work force. Yet Cuban women exhibited great adaptability in finding temporary work when factories and places of work down, as well as in changing jobs in order to be closer to home. If mothers were successful in finding stable employment the decreased reliability on the child-care centers meant that care for young children depended upon retired women or housewives who offered their services as babysitters. However, in Cuba day-care prices in the private sector are much higher than the minimal prices established in state-owned day-care centers. Therefore, such options were extremely costly to working Cuban women.¹¹² In government provided day-care centers as well, food and educational programs are coordinated by skilled personnel in contrast to the services that just a child-minder can provide.

The changing roles of women during the Special Period went beyond the burden they themselves bore particularly. For instance, there may be unanticipated effects on the future of children who were minded and educated outside of day-care centers designed to socialize the young children, endow them with a sense of national pride, and prepare them for future education. Though a number of experts from the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas’ Centro de Estudios indicate that women were the ones hardest hit by the difficulties of daily life in the

¹¹¹ Eckstein, pp 146

¹¹² Raisa, (2000)

Special Period, they also point out the increased domestic involvement by other members of the family.¹¹³ Anecdotal accounts show there had been a noticeable increase in men staying home to care for a sick child, especially if the wife made a higher salary.¹¹⁴ However, unequal relationships within couples, experts argue, did not change to the same degree as did the social role of women even when they contributed a substantial part of the family income.¹¹⁵ The fact that women's traditional roles have largely not changed, despite the added pressure to work outside the home, has likely caused its own share of conflict in the home and household.

Employment and Society- Resurgence of Racism and Prostitution

The economic crisis in Cuba during the Special Period dramatically altered economic life across the country. Many of these changes are discussed in detail in Chapter 2: Economic Transformations. However, it is important to draw certain conclusions about the impact that the changing job sector and employment opportunities during the Special Period had on society at large in Cuba. The readjustment strategy employed by Cuba's government during the Special Period tried to avoid imposing strict economic measures at the expense of one group or another, but instead aimed at "streamlining labor or commercializing basic social services."¹¹⁶ So while no one area in Cuban society was overly burdened in relation to the rest of society, the readjustment indiscriminately changed the lives of everyone.

The significant societal transformations in Cuban society were due to employment factors during the Special Period relating to an increased emphasis on tourism, the presence of foreign capital, growth in self-employment, the privatization of some areas of agricultural production,

¹¹³ From FMC, <http://www.mujeres.cubaweb.cu/>, cited in Raisa (2000)

¹¹⁴ Raisa (2000)

¹¹⁵ Raisa (2000)

¹¹⁶ María Isabel Domínguez, "Cuban Youth: Aspirations, Social Perceptions, and Identity," *Changes in Cuban Society since the Nineties* (2005), Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, pp 155

and the creation of a dual monetary system. The emphasis on tourism and the presence of foreign capital, for instance, led to the rise of prostitution and sex tourism as well as increasing occurrences of racism stemming from hiring selectivity in the tourism and hotel industry. The widespread eradication of prostitution and formal institutionalized racism had been two of the accomplishments the Revolutionary government had especially prided itself on. Unfortunately, the Special Period erased many of its gains.

The resurgence of prostitution in Cuba during the Special Period, stemmed from several economic factors. Some Cuban experts agree that the return of prostitution to Cuba came through the search for easy earnings by young people avoiding work, social and family responsibilities and that at the start of the Special Period, the “jineteras” (or Cuban female prostitutes) were more open and had a certain degree of impunity.¹¹⁷ *Jineterismo*, literally horseback riding, but used to indicate hustling or prostitution, is widely regarded as a consequence of the rapid push for international tourism because of economic reasons during the Special Period. This particular social transformation raised issues not only of morality but also race, class, gender. During the Special Period, it was often young Afrocuban women who began engaging in activities labeled *jineterismo* especially in the cities and nearby vacation resorts.¹¹⁸ They were often harassed by authorities (*jineterismo* being illegal) and were publicly stigmatized though it seems that they often viewed themselves as victims of their situation.¹¹⁹ *Jineterismo*, though, was only one of the dramatic social changes caused by the Special Period’s indirect link to the increase in international tourism.

¹¹⁷ Raisa (2000)

¹¹⁸ Mette Louise B. Bundle, “Tourism, Social Change, and *Jineterismo* in Contemporary Cuba,” in “The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers” 2, *Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, University of Oxford (2001)

¹¹⁹ Bundle (2001), pp. 1

One of the most important changes was racial inequality in Cuba rising to new levels, unseen since pre-1959 Cuban Revolution, during the Special Period, and especially after the significant economic reforms of 1993. Reasons for this dramatic increase have been attributed to trends in accessing dollars through state employment, self-employment, remittances, as well as educational factors. It has been determined that the creation of a dual economy in Cuba (the legalization of the dollar during the Special Period and the designation of economic areas for use of either this and other foreign currency as opposed to areas accepting only the Cuban peso—almost always vending much lower quality food and goods) heightened differences in economic opportunities on racial lines.¹²⁰ These dual monetary discrepancies and the racial inequality they created arose from several causes. One was the fact that few expatriates in Miami at the time were black (the first waves of migration having mainly involved Cuba's elite, during the first year's of Revolutionary rule, then the "petite bourgeoisie").¹²¹ Remittances from these Cuban-Americans were now more important than ever for family finances and purchasing ability. Without access to such valuable funds, coming in strong hard currency once the government legalized holding and use of it, those without family in Miami, mostly black Cubans, suffered disproportionately.

The dominance of the tourism industry, seen as Cuba's main hope for recovery during the Special Period also discriminately disfavored Cuba's black population as well. The Special Period saw an increased gap in race representation within the tourism industry and hotels. Although there was by no means an institutionalized racial segregation policy and attaining jobs in this relatively lucrative sector was difficult for all, there is considerable evidence that blacks were very much excluded from this important source of dollars. As revealed by a white, female

¹²⁰ Sarah A. Blue, "The Erosion of Racial Equality in the context of Cuba's Dual Economy," *Latin American Politics and Society*, (Fall 2007)

¹²¹ Pedraza, pp.3-6

manager of a tourism corporation working in Santiago de Cuba, “(t)here is a lot of racial prejudice in the tourist sector...In my corporation, for instance, out of 500 workers there are only five blacks...they (blacks) never work directly with the tourist, not even in cleaning jobs. All of the personnel is white.”¹²² The reasons that are often cited for this racial discrepancy and unspoken but blatant preference for white workers are attributed to *buena presencia* (good appearance), mostly referring to broad physical and educational attributes.¹²³ Unfortunately, this is not only an issue created by the Cuban hotel managers. Foreign investors and managerial personnel with controlling interests in many Cuban hotels also perpetuated the racial discrimination.¹²⁴ Given the importance of such foreign involvement and their preferences to Cuba’s economic solvency, discriminated blacks had few options for retribution and equal opportunity.

Life as a Cuban Youth:

In defining and analyzing the social transformations in Cuba as a result of the Special Period, it is especially important to address the changes in what it means to be a youth (late teen years to late twenties) and how certain expectations for the future change as well. This is done by adopting a demographic approach that surveys youth aspirations, satisfactions, and concerns as they center primarily on four basic areas: family, social mobility, employment and material living conditions. Increasingly diverse aspirations, arising as new ideas or previously only vague notions, entered into Cuba’s youth society and gained new currency during the Special Period. Unfortunately, these were coupled with dramatic increases in drug use among the Cuban youth

¹²² Alejandro de la Fuente, “Recreating Racism: Race and Discrimination in Cuba’s ‘Special Period,’” *The Caribbean Project*, Center for Latin American Studies, Georgetown University (July 1998), p. 6

¹²³ de la Fuente, pp. 7

¹²⁴ de la Fuente, pp. 7

as well as rising suicide rates.¹²⁵ A variety of priorities changed or was adopted anew by Cuban youth in the nineties. Many saw no future in their lives in Cuba and fled the country. Others entered a phase of what seemed like perpetual waiting.

In terms of the family, this area continues to receive the highest priority in Cuban youths' evaluation of their lives. María Isabel Domínguez, Director of the Centro de Investigaciones Psicológicas y Sociológicas, sees the family sphere as central to the subjective experience of youth, as both a determinant and a result of their attitudes.¹²⁶ She herself, through countless surveys of Cuban youth and families, has developed the study of youth in Cuba's society and their changing role therein. What she finds is that through the years of the Special Period, the importance Cuban youth place on such socially oriented notions as world peace, international solidarity, and the future of humanity, all of which had figured high in importance to them in the eighties, declined dramatically.¹²⁷ Nowadays, Cuban youth are more interested in how specific core objectives of the social system can solve many of the country's main problems than they had been before the Special Period. During and after the Special Period, Cuban youth also came to view the country's main problems as stemming from economic conditions, a notion obviously a result of the Special Period depression. In terms of the future, Domínguez asserts that priority is now placed on family, work, material living conditions, and particularly the ability to have one's own home, although individual spirituality and health are also considered of particular interest.¹²⁸ Thus, the vision youth have of the future tends to reinforce the main individual-family aspirations.

¹²⁵ Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*. Cambridge University Press: New York, pp. 297

¹²⁶ Domínguez, pp.159-160

¹²⁷ Domínguez, pp.158-160

¹²⁸ Domínguez, pp.159-160

The youth in Cuba have always found at least one reason to be proud of being Cuban. They associate their country with the value of courage and struggle for independence, the capacity for resistance, and dignity. This was true even during and after the Special Period. Although there was optimism clearly registered among the youth in Cuba's society in the mid- and late- nineties, so were widely-held pessimistic notions, both of which are important to note here. The pessimistic views of Cuban youth in the nineties seemed to reside in a sense of uncertainty they faced given an unpredictable future, especially in the long term.¹²⁹ On the other hand, the optimism that Cuba's future would be better than the present was seen as contingent upon a series of internal and external economic, political, and social factors. However, perceptions among Cuban youth were not uniform and there were notable differences in their societal views during the Special Period.

A common aspect of the overall social transformations examined here, was that Cuban youth began perceiving more differences than similarities among themselves as a group, especially in terms of social and cultural factors, values, behaviors, and economic and political considerations, than they had previously. As Domínguez rightly points out, "these differences complicate the development of a solid and widely shared generational identity...explain(ing) why it is difficult to observe a sense of identification between youth belonging to different age sub-groups."¹³⁰ Considering that one could assume that having lived through such an intense period in their country's history, youth would perceive the Special Period to be a unifying event; however the disparities identified in youth self-identification are surprising. When youth are segregated into smaller age classifications, for instance, patterns seem to arise. For example, those 25 to 30-years old in 2000, correspond in their views more closely to older generations in

¹²⁹ Domínguez, pp160-161

¹³⁰ Domínguez, pp165

that they are most pessimistic on moral values, character traits, culture and formal education, and political values (in that order).¹³¹ The subjects brought up most by younger youth, namely in their late teens to early twenties were mostly the differences or similarities in their tastes, interests, aspirations, and experiences.¹³² Like the majority of demographic and societal transformations during the Special Period, there were also regional differences as well (see page 21).

Education:

Despite the many negative repercussions Cuban society underwent because of the Special Period, there are several positive and helpful indicators for the future despite the significant changes that Cuba underwent during this time. Two areas in particular, the education system and the health industry, especially demonstrate Cuba's exceptional performance through this hard economic time. To begin with, education has been at the forefront of the Revolution's social agenda since it took control of the Cuban government. The benefits of this concentration remained during the worst economic period Cuba faced, when it managed to maintain high levels of education throughout the country during the Special Period. By the eighties, Cuba had had three decades of an education system that served as a "genuine vehicle for the integration different social classes, racially diverse groups, and especially women."¹³³ Through the early nineties, the total number of university and technical school graduates across the island continued to rise.¹³⁴ However, by the mid- to late-nineties, general enrollment in higher

¹³¹ Domínguez, pp165

¹³² Domínguez, pp165

¹³³ Domínguez, pp158

¹³⁴ Pérez, Louis A. Jr., pp 385-6

education declined somewhat, although unevenly across disciplines.¹³⁵ By the second half of the nineties, 60 percent of university graduate students were women, up from 43 percent in the late eighties.¹³⁶ While this is a positive indicator for advances made by women it is also alarming when one considers the relative decline of males graduating from university.

During the Special Period, an enormous effort was made to ensure universal provision of primary and secondary education despite the significant lack of resources. Still there were many unavoidable structural effects degrading schools and facilities and depleting resources and texts, which particularly affected middle and high school education. Also reduced was college-preparatory instruction which was correlated with an increased focus on polytechnic (mostly in the agricultural field), or other professional training. There were, however, many cases of increased pre-university vocational programs that were substituted for the more traditional, highly-academic, pre-university training during this period.¹³⁷ Still, even those that did manage to continue schooling through university level and graduate with degrees in their field were left facing a very uncertain future. In turn, social perceptions of the formal education system began to change. As described by María Isabel Domínguez, it was no longer viewed as the:

channel par excellence of social mobility, nor the main route to a higher standard of living, nor an essential mechanism for achieving social status once other paths to higher earnings became available (employment in the emergent sector, self-employment, remittances from abroad, illegal activities and so forth).¹³⁸

Such views emerged slowly but surely as the changes in education were varied through fields of studies and fluctuated throughout the decade and were more relevant in some socioeconomic

¹³⁵ Domínguez, pp. 158

¹³⁶ Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE), (2001)

¹³⁷ Domínguez, pp. 158

¹³⁸ Domínguez, pp. 158

groups rather than others.¹³⁹ However, such a transformation in society's view of the education system is significant as Cuba emerged from the deep depression and still continues to make up ground in economic recovery. In the future, much will rest upon the shoulders of this young generation. For many reasons (the considerable aging of the original Revolutionary leadership to name one), significant changes are inevitable in the near future for Cuba's society. The paths and strategies that Cuba will employ as it finds its role in the world in the coming years will be largely determined by the youth of the Special Period. The Cuban government's strong educational emphasis throughout the Special Period hopefully prepared the next generation properly for such significant responsibilities.

Health and Aging in Cuba

One of the Cuban government's shining achievements is its universal free health-care system. Still, like the rest of the economy in Cuba, health-care suffered greatly from the severe shortages following the end of Soviet subsidies. However, before, during, and after the Special Period, Cuba remained able to lay claim to a well advanced health-care system. Several indicators prove this. For example, Cuba ranks among the top countries in such health statistics as:

- pregnant women receiving prenatal care (100 percent)
- births attended by skilled health staff (99 percent)
- immunization for DPT (diphtheria, pertusis, and tetanus), (99 percent)¹⁴⁰

To note, Cuba also has a very low prevalence rate of adult HIV/AIDS (0.10 percent) (despite such a heavy official emphasis on international tourism!) and high life expectancy at birth (77.23

¹³⁹ Domínguez, pp. 158

¹⁴⁰ World Development Indicator database, World Bank (2005) <<http://devdata.worldbank.org/query/default.htm>>

years for overall population).¹⁴¹ According to the World Health organization (WHO) the probability that a Cuban child will die before reaching the age of six years old is seven per 1000 live births. By comparison, this figure is eight per 1000 in the United States.¹⁴² Other comparisons to the United States cast Cuba's health-care in good light as well. The infant mortality rate in the U.S. is seven deaths per thousand deliveries, while in Cuba it is only five.¹⁴³ The number of physicians in Cuba is also relatively very high with 5.91 doctors per thousand people (compared to 2.56 in the United States).¹⁴⁴

All the above indicators are formed with data after 2000. While it is important to recognize Cuba's accomplishments in attaining such a high standard of health-care a decade out from a deep depression, analyzing the changes within the system during the Special Period clearly demonstrates that the health-care system suffered, as did the Cubans searching for care. During some of the worst phases of the Special Period previously bustling clinics and hospitals barely functioned.¹⁴⁵ Factors such as the loss of imported primary materials, medicines, and paper, and the lack of spare parts, pesticides and fuel prevented the provision of many basic services. Many pharmacy shelves were almost always bare during the Special Period and equipment such as x-ray plates (imported from Germany) were no longer available.¹⁴⁶ Limits on clean water access and minimal food contributed to an overall deterioration in hygiene and nutrition. Incredibly though, the Cuban government was able to avoid noticeable severe malnutrition in Cuba's population.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ "Cuba," WHO (2005) July 20, 2007 <<http://www.who.int/countries/cub/en>>

¹⁴² WHO (2005)

¹⁴³ WHO (2005)

¹⁴⁴ WHO (2005)

¹⁴⁵ Kathleen Barrett, "The Collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc: Effects on Cuban Health-care," *Center for Latin American Studies*, Georgetown University (May 1993), p.1

¹⁴⁶ Barrett, pp 2

¹⁴⁷ Barrett, pp. 2-4

Contrary to expert opinions, however, these deteriorations in the health-care did not lead to any real threats by the Cuban population to the government or even much civil unrest.¹⁴⁸ When there was any civil dissatisfaction, the feelings were often expressed in the act of leaving the country. Still, especially notable is the quality of life that free Cuban health-care managed to maintain through the Special Period for the elderly population. In fact, in the early 2000s, a group of Cuban doctors even began the “120-year Club” a campaign to bolster preventative health and promote its strong health-care for the elderly (presumably with the goal of reaching 120 years of age).¹⁴⁹ In addition, Cuba continued many of its substantive benefits for the elderly during the Special Period including a minimum old-age pension.¹⁵⁰ Also maintained were the 178 Senior Citizens Clubs that provide lunch and snacks (less so during the Special Period) as well as a place for social and community life. There are over 778,000 members in these clubs, or about 38 percent of Cuba’s senior citizens.¹⁵¹ Daily care of visiting health professionals to elderly who live alone and cannot make it themselves to the clinics has also been a common feature to Cuba’s health-care.¹⁵²

Even a healthfully aging population carries its burden on a population. With the combination of low birth rates in the Special Period and the quality of health-care available to the aging, those over 60 years old now make up more than 15 percent of Cuba’s population.¹⁵³ Since old-age pension is available to men 60 years of age who have worked 25 or more years, and only 55 years of age for women, this means that well over 15 percent of Cuba’s population

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, pp. 4-6

¹⁴⁹ Eric Sabo, “Cuba pursues a 120-year-old future,” *USA TODAY* 12 August 2004 <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-12-cuba-usat_x.htm>

¹⁵⁰ Social Security Programs Throughout the World: The Americas, 2003 30 Nov 2007 <www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/progdesc/ssptw/2002-2003/americas/cuba.html>

¹⁵¹ “The Elderly in Cuba” EmbaCuba Sudáfrica 2006 30 Nov 2007 <<http://emba.cubaminrex.cu/Default.aspx?tabid=12686>>

¹⁵² The Elderly in Cuba (2006)

¹⁵³ Censo 2002, pp.163

qualify for full pension payment (there are also several partial plan scenarios). Although Cuban workers put in 10 percent of their earnings into the state-run pension system they remain qualified for the same pension funds regardless if they exceed what they put in.¹⁵⁴ If such campaigns like the 120-year Club are successful, and many international experts feel that, with the quality of research and health programs they promote they will be, then Cuba's population pyramid will soon look like an inverted triangle. As Cubans live longer and retire in their sixties, Cuba's economy will undergo heavy stress as there are radically fewer workers coming into working age who could support Cuba's government health-care with what they contribute in earnings. Thus the maintenance of decent health-care producing long lifetimes of many elderly Cubans even through the Special Period coupled with the depression's negative effect on birthrates will continue to play a strong role in Cuba's society for years to come.

Rural vs. Urban Differences

Though in many ways the societal transformations in Cuba during the Special Period were universal throughout the country, there were however, important differences in degrees of change and occurrence of particular trends between rural and urban areas. Unfortunately, much is lacking in terms of studies on regional differences in economic and demographic indicators (presumably due to the government in Cuba's insistence on maintaining egalitarian socialism assuring that all Cubans share the same access to services and opportunities). Still there have been reliable studies showing important variations across regions in Cuba for a number of topics. For instance, when polling youth throughout the country it was found that place of residence at times heavily influences aspirations and motivations. Related to youth and migration, only four percent of all youth in María Isabel Domínguez' survey reported emigration as an aspiration but

¹⁵⁴ Social Security Programs Throughout the World: The Americas, 2003

the majority who did cite this ambition was white males from the Havana.¹⁵⁵ No definitive or official documentation was available on how many Cubans from which localities in Cuba leave the island (illegally in most cases). In terms of the elderly population, 75.9 percent live in urban areas where health-care is more readily available and accessible.¹⁵⁶ Abortion rates are also higher in the cities for reasons most likely to do once again with easier access to health-care and services, although reliable data on regional differences was not available.¹⁵⁷

Religion

One visible, intricate transformation in Cuban society as a result of the Special Period was the revival of religious expression and participation, particularly in Cuba's own Santería (or Regla de Ocha-Ifá) religion. Santería is a syncretic religion rooted in Cuba's African heritage based on the West African religions brought. Perhaps as a direct response to the strains of the Special Period, there was a notable increase in spirituality as a main concern and preoccupation among Cubans.¹⁵⁸ Especially interesting is the evidence that religion during this period became viewed as a route toward culture and information, especially by the younger population leading, some youth cohorts to identify religion as an avenue for social integration.¹⁵⁹ A trend that saw a major boost in the Special Period, one can still walk through the streets of urban areas today and see a constant array of citizens dressed in religious outfits, such as the all-white that corresponds to a year-long Santería ritual. The spike in religious practices during the Special Period also caught on and was supported by the formal, Cuban cultural institutions with state sponsorship, in

¹⁵⁵ Domínguez, pp. 160

¹⁵⁶ Census, 2002, pp.162

¹⁵⁷ Census, 2002, pp.162

¹⁵⁸ Domínguez, pp. 159-160

¹⁵⁹ Domínguez, pp. 159-160

particular, Casa de las Americas and the Fernando Ortiz Foundation.¹⁶⁰ They began devoting editions of their publications to reporting the religious trends in Cuba and some published and reprinted texts on the practice of Santería.

Catholic and Protestant religious groups and churches and Cuba also saw a religious revival. The Havana Synagogue revived as well. Many Protestant, Catholic, and even Methodist churches filled to capacity.¹⁶¹ When Cuba hosted Pope John Paul II in January 1998, the Catholic community experienced even greater civil space. Indeed, this event signaled “a new accommodation between church and state” for Cuba.¹⁶² In the wake John Paul II’s visit, the Cuban government renounced atheism as an official creed.¹⁶³ In particular, for Fidel Castro, who once expelled 100 priests from Cuba, the Pope’s visit was a turning point. For the first time since the triumph of the Revolution, Cuba welcomed foreign priests and nuns, mostly from Spain and Mexico. It also allowed religious street processions and open air public masses, which were becoming popular. Also important to note is that an immediate consequence of the Pope’s visit to Cuba was the release of 300 political prisoners to answer to certain criticisms the Pope had on the Revolution’s governance (which was coupled with strong criticism of the embargo on Cuba by the U.S.).¹⁶⁴ In many ways, the Pope’s visit to Cuba (along with the revival and encouragement of Afro-Cuban religions) was one of the major factors which crystallized the religious expression of the hopes and emotional needs of Cubans coming out of the Special Period in Cuban society.

¹⁶⁰ Lázara Menéndez, “In Order to Wake up Tomorrow, You have to Sleep Tonight” *Changes in Cuban Society since the Nineties* (2005), Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC, pg 272

¹⁶¹ Pérez, pp 297

¹⁶² Pérez, pp 297

¹⁶³ Pérez, pp 297

¹⁶⁴ Pérez, pp 297

Chapter 5: Conclusion



Jardín de los Afectos, Alamar Neighborhood Havana, Cuba 2007

A “garden” of inspirational quotes and jokes (in Spanish) and statues made with things that were thrown out or are otherwise un-usable. An artistic creation from the Special Period; Artist: Gallo

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The *período especial* has served to demarcate the life of a generation, to persist hereafter as the reference point by which people often make those profoundly personal distinctions about their lived as “before” and “after.” Louis A. Pérez Jr.¹⁶⁵

The Special Period in Cuba was one of the most drastic and profound economic crisis’ that any Latin American country has ever undergone. The lasting effects of this long depression are numerous and deeply intertwined within the culture and mindset of the Cuban people today, regardless of generation or age. As stated by Louis A. Pérez Jr., the Special Period “will no doubt be remembered as one of those temporal divides by which people experience the momentous transitions of a historical epoch.” When the shipments of consumer goods, raw materials, spare parts, grains, and foodstuffs ceased arriving into Cuban ports as the Soviet Union collapsed, the Cuban economy fell into despair. The loss of favorable trade and Soviet aid, which had been subsidizing the socialist project in Cuba, meant a severe and desperate existence for the some 10,870,000 Cubans and little hope for the future.

The economic hardships, the lack of food, fuel, electricity, jobs, and transportation, etc. were profound and dramatically transformed daily life for all Cubans across the country. Many of the socialist programs during the 1980’s “rectification” campaign were discontinued or reversed and pro-market reforms were introduced to prevent the country and the government leadership from collapsing. Cubans had to find new means of nourishment and security. In the economy, a black market provided what was not available from the rations or the Cuban-peso stores. In the communities, young couples delayed marriages and having children, abortion rates rose significantly, and many citizens fled the country all-together. The revolutionary leadership, by equalizing hardship across socio-economic sectors of the population was able to avert a

¹⁶⁵ Louis A. Pérez Jr. Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution, Oxford University Press: New York, 2006, pp ix

pandemic of starvation or violence. However, significant repercussions like the revival of racism in the economy, especially in the vital tourism sector, as well as prostitution, marred the socialist program. The Special Period thus altered the demography and society of Cuba as dramatically, if not more so, as it transformed the economy. This period was so severe and prolonged that these changes in Cuba's demography and society will continue to impact what it means to be Cuban for many years to come. The severity of these transformations and the extent to which they are expressed and impact the future is yet to be seen.

Cuba's recovery from the Special Period has been as gradual as the onset was rapid. Today, the economic despair that the country faced during the worst years of the Special Period is still evidenced in the crumbling buildings and neighborhoods, in the rationing of food, and in the lines of Cuban faces. Nearing two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is clear that life as a Cuban has been irrevocably altered by the Special Period. An entire generation came of age during these intensely difficult years. Those who stayed on the island now face a socialist, aging society, a recuperating but impaired economy and continued uncertainty for what lay ahead. Even with slow recovery, however, comes a renewal of hope. During the Special Period, Cubans of all ages demonstrated amazing ingenuity, creativity, and resilience. Their ability to *resolver*, which enabled them to survive such a deep and desperate economic depression, may be what helps them thrive in the future.

Appendix

Methodology

Most of the material used for this study comes from statistical sources generated in Cuba by Cuban research institutions sometimes in coalition with international organizations such as the United Nations. In particular, data from the Cuban censuses of 1970, 1981, and 2002 make up the core sources of information tracing the demographic changes and patterns in Cuba through these years. There was no census taken in Cuba during the 1990s because the dire economic conditions did not allow for such a rigorous investigative undertaking. Additional sources such as the Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (National Statistics Office), the Centro de Estudios de Población y Demográficos (CEPDE, or the Center for Population and Demographic Studies) and the office of Estadísticas Cubanas y Publicaciones Relacionadas (Cuban Statistics and Related Publications) which publish the Demographic Yearbook of Cuba, add to the basic structure of this study's research as well. For the economic data and societal review, a broad compilation of research papers and books were used. Susan Eva Eckstein's Back from the Future: Cuba Under Castro provided the basic grounding for the economic changes and reforms before and during the Special Period. For the review on societal changes in Cuba during and after the Special Period, the anthology "Changes in Cuban Society Since the Nineties" published by the Woodrow Wilson Center and the third edition of Cuba Between Reform and Revolution by Louis A. Pérez were proved to be vital resources.

About the Author

Brittany Bond is an undergraduate in the School of International Service at American University in Washington, DC. She will graduate in December 2007 with a B.A. in International Studies, a concentration in International Politics and Economics, and a Minor in the Spanish Language. The present study is her Senior Honors Thesis, which serves as her capstone culminating her studies in American University's Honors Program. In Spring 2007, Ms. Bond studied abroad at La Universidad de la Habana (University of Havana, in Cuba's capital) where she became keenly interested in researching the transformations in Cuba that make up this present study. Ms. Bond is fluent in Spanish and has also traveled abroad in an academic capacity to Guatemala and Mexico. In 2006, Ms. Bond worked at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, an independent research institution in Washington, DC, as a Research Associate, publishing several press releases on Latin American political and economic affairs. Ms. Bond is a native of the greater Boston area in Massachusetts. She plans to continue her education with graduate studies in Public Policy Analysis beginning in Fall 2008.



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