



# **Cuban Women - The Revolution, Equality and Nascent Discourse on Domestic Violence**

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#### INTRODUCTION

The victory of the revolutionary forces under Fidel Castro established a socialist regime in Havana that promised such things as national affirmation, human dignity, democratic order and equality for all. What has this meant for women? In comparison with other Latin American countries, whose societies are still greatly controlled by the catholic legacy of patriarchy and suppression, Cuba has made impressive advances in granting women equal rights to education and employment, in the marriage, political and social arenas. Women in Cuba are citizens who can live up to their potential. Enthusiasts praise the achievements of Cuban women:

They traveled to space, to the depths of the sea, were awarded the Nobel Prize, and were entered into the Guinness Book of Records, set Olympic records, held presidential posts. In short, women have dispelled the myth of the weaker sex during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” (Pagés 2007, 311).

Particularly in the early decades of the revolution, which saw the creation of the Literacy Campaign, the Federation of Cuban Women, the Family Code of 1975, *circulos*, *plan jaba* and other social programs, Cuban women experienced an unparalleled rise in education, employment, status, and influence in domestic politics. Fidel Castro himself described these changes in women’s status and roles as “a revolution within the revolution” (Espin 1977, 6).

This is not to say that the revolution magically solved all problems women had been facing for centuries in Cuba. Not even a ban on the objectification of women in the mass media could refute society's stereotypes. Since violence against women is considered to be a side-effect of capitalism, violence against women continues to be widely ignored, and officially its existence is hardly acknowledged - generally only as a side-effect of 'imperialist infiltration'.

In my five months in Cuba I witnessed a very disturbing dichotomy pervasive in almost all sectors and elements of society: Women take equal access to education and equal pay for equal work for granted, but at the same time accept and even feed into the machista attitudes of their male compatriots. Women display sexual confidence and do not see themselves as victims of machismo, even though they complain that men don't share the burden of the double shift with them to the extent that the revolutionary ideals demand. Similarly, women demonstrate great self-confidence in their educational and professional endeavors while still seem to evaluate their feminine worth by how strongly they earn male attention in the streets. This seemingly contradictory aspect of Cuban heterosexual identity speaks for the sexual emancipation of women on the island. In Cuba sexuality is very strongly associated with pleasure – for women as well as men. Yet, as I will argue in this paper, the fact that Cuban women do not experience sexuality as degrading or dangerous, does not mean that gendered violence, particularly domestic violence, do not exist. The existing dichotomy, between a liberal public and scholarly discourse on sexuality, birth control, abortion and the like versus a practically non-existent discourse on domestic violence points to the problem of censorship in Cuba.

This paper will analyze the scholarship on Cuban women found in two very distinct periods of Cuba's post-revolutionary history - that of the "vaca gorda" and the "periodo especial in tiempos de paz". La "vaca gorda" (lit. fat cow) is the phrase used for the period from about

1965 through the early 1980s during which the revolutionary spirit was at its high-point thanks to Soviet-subsidiary arrangements that secured Cuba's economic well-being and political inclusion. The "periodo especial in tiempos de paz" (lit. special period in times of peace) was declared by Fidel Castro after the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1989 and the subsequent inability of the former USSR to support the Cuban economy with subsidiaries. Referred to as 'el mal necesario' (the necessary evil) the Cuban revolutionary regime decided to rely heavily on foreign tourism as a key element in national economic restructuring. Waves of predominantly Western European and Canadian tourists swamped the island, creating a resurgence in sex-tourism, one of the most adverse social impacts of the Special Period.

My project, then, takes two approaches: I examine the scholarship on women's experience in two distinct periods in post-revolutionary Cuba. I analyze both Cuban political discourse and scholarship about women on the island during the "vaca gorda" (1970s and 80s). In my research I have noticed a complete omission of the problem of domestic violence in the earlier scholarship on Cuban women, (1965-1980) where authors highlight women's comparatively successful integration into academia, politics, and the economy. I then discuss my findings of a surprisingly candid acknowledgement of the presence of domestic violence in Cuban films at the time. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement is not extrapolated to inform scholarship or public discourse on the matter but rather to confirm the ideological message of the revolution.

In the context of the Special Period (1989 – present) I explain how nascent social movements and new feminist scholarship have slowly begun to target the revolution's short-falls for women. While both currents attempt to discuss domestic violence they are severely limited. Social movements can only operate under the auspices of a government-mandated work group,

and are thus not free to bring the issue to full transparency. Feminist scholarship on domestic violence has only been addressed by very few international scholars, who published their work outside of Cuba. Only this very recent scholarship (1995-present) has dared to mention the shortfalls of the revolution in eliminating the social conditions that give rise to domestic violence as well as the absence of provisions for police intervention. Domestic scholarship remains very enthusiastic of the revolution and its achievements.

### LA VACA GORDA

While in the U.S. women still fight for the fundamental right for control over their own bodies, including their own reproductive organs, in Cuba, women's development and liberation, according to socialist principles and in the context of integration into the labor force, education and politics, has become such a natural component of their everyday life that "Cuban women do not completely understand the feminist fight for equal pay for equal work, 'but of course' they will say with wrinkled brow, thinking they hadn't understood" (Cositore 2004, C. 38).

Margaret Randall reminds us that only twenty years prior to the triumph of the revolution, women in Cuba's monocrop agricultural society spent "impoverished, male-dominated lives as child-bearers, field workers, maids, or whores" (Randall 1981, 10). As one of the earliest foreign scholars admitted into Cuba, Margaret Randall expressed enthusiastic appraisal of the socialist revolution in Cuba and sees in its social and political ideals of gender equality the holy land for women.

Whether one looks at such indicators as women's incorporation into the work force, the extent of direct union, shop floor, and community participation in decision-making, the division of labor in the home, the security of guaranteed medical care and education from the cradle to the grave, or the general betterment of those worst off in pre-revolutionary times, it becomes clear that at least the material and ideological bases have been laid in Cuba for women to pursue their full capacities as human beings. (Randall 1981, 10)

To reverse some of the effects the corrupt regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have had on Cuba's social stratification, the government introduced intensive programs to rehabilitate and reeducate people all across the country in order to create at least a minimum standard of education and simultaneously to implement socialist indoctrination. Their purpose was to find a role for every individual in society and to link them all inextricably in the complex machinery of the state, in order to give everyone the feeling they're equally important and equally involved in the revolutionary process. One such particular program involved the rehabilitation of prostitutes and former domestic servants:

The FMC launched special schools for domestic servants and it was centrally involved in the plans for reeducation of prostitutes, schools for peasant women, and the dressmaking academies. Through these initiatives, women all over the island were encouraged to emerge from the very protective and limited home atmosphere to learn new skills as well as a new ideology. (Randall 1981, 24)

Authors Romero and Schnitger agree with Randall's assessment, praising Cuba's liberal stands towards sexuality, where unlike any other place in the world I know, there is no shame attached to women's sexuality, where women of all ages wear snug clothing and high-heels in display of sexual confidence, as "a culture that has no stigma on abortion or birth control, that allows women and girls to live without fear of sexual violence, that teaches sex education at an early age and embraces sexuality as normal" (Romero and Schnitger 2003, 1).

Scholarship of the early post-revolution era, in the 60s and after the passing of the family code in the late 70s is, to say the least, euphoric. The case of Cuban women is invoked to illustrate the benefits of socialism world wide. This scholarship considers "the subject of Cuban women is particularly relevant since the Cuban government has made a conscious effort to incorporate women into the economic and political life of the country" (Espin 1977, 6). With women, who before the revolution were allegedly largely passive citizens, especially the illiterate

peasant women, the trend is to agree that “Cuban women are worth studying from two perspectives: First, how women are affected by social change; and second, how women themselves can become change agents in a developing society” (Espin 1977, 6). Particularly the political integration of women gave rise to a new set of problems, since women’s political activism and employment were responsibilities taken on in addition to their traditional obligations as mothers and primary care-takers of household-chores. Scholars agree that despite much propaganda and discussion regarding this subject, it is still unrealistic to assume that even at the high point of revolutionary spirit, in the 60’s and 70’s men really shared 50% of household chores.

#### EL PERIODO ESPECIAL

In contrast, modern scholarship, or shall we say scholarship since the on-set of the Special Period in Times of Peace, focuses on how the economic crisis, the growing tourism industry and the introduction of the dual currency has compromised the situation for women and has put more rocks on the path between women and equality. In the 1990s, women’s celebrated economic independence has crumbled under the devastating economic crisis of the whole nation. This has in turn aggravated gendered social problems. For example, divorced women are often forced to continue living in the same households as their ex-husbands, who not infrequently subject them to verbal as well as sexual abuse. Nevertheless, more recent scholars do agree that thirty years of socialist education has given rise to a new generation of women in Cuba, who are more confident and independent and who take full advantage of the special protections socialism grants them. Yet there is a fundamental lack of scholarship discussing domestic violence within Cuban society.

Velia Bobes points out that although the political discourse of the first years declared the end of discrimination against women as a priority, this goal has not been translated into policies created specifically for this social group. It was simply assumed that the “incorporación de la mujer al trabajo y las políticas igualitaristas eliminarían por sí solas la discriminación”<sup>1</sup> (Bobes 1999, 102). She also insists, however, that “a pesar de que estos cambios no representaron la eliminación del patrón patriarcal ni del machismo en la sociedad cubana, la desaparición de algunas barreras y restricciones a la participación de la mujer en la sociedad implicaron una mejoría de su estatus social”<sup>2</sup> (Bobes 1999, 103).

In that sense, the socialist revolution in Cuba has created an environment that grants women a certain economic autonomy which allows them to live as single mothers, independent from any man without compromising the well-being of their family (Bobes 1999, 104). The elevation of their level of education, Bobes writes, as well as their incorporation into the workforce has resulted in higher incomes for women and for that reason a greater independence, greater “posibilidades de enriquecimiento espiritual y mayor capacidad para incidir en las decisiones dentro de la familia y para elegir a su pareja”<sup>3</sup> (Bobes 1999, 105). Thus, women are not only equal citizens, but can be important communal actors, without the inhibitions of traditional and conservative gender expectations that previously excluded the women from the public sphere. On the other hand, with greater independence of action brings greater responsibility, thus women are also expected to take on communal roles, particularly within organization of the CDR and other structures of the Cuban state.

The idealization of the achievements of the revolution and the assumption that gendered violence is a by-product of capitalism can be very misleading: While the official position holds that the internalization and practice of socialism will solve the problem over time, this negation



of the need for specific feminist policies downplays the seriousness of gender-related violence. It is clear that this kind of attitude helps to make and keep domestic violence invisible. The Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), since not an independent feminist organization, has always acted as a mouthpiece for the State, prioritizing state concerns over those of their constituency – the women of Cuba. In an environment where a central authority claims to “lift every human being to a state of dignity, such a thing as domestic violence is inconceivable. It’s being ignored” (Lang 2004, 20).

My own observations point to a divergence in the behavior of the modern Cuban women, they have not witnessed women’s struggle for equal rights in pre-revolutionary Cuba, but socialist upbringing has indoctrinated them with a belief in their equal status, while the special period has put a strain on their faith in the revolution. They feel the contradiction between revolutionary ideology, still powerful as ever in the nation’s manifold propaganda, and economic reality. Resiliently, they have adapted to this reality and have accepted that they will shoulder additional responsibility: besides child-care, household-chores, their government-paid job, activism in the CDR, they have taken on clandestine jobs that will pay them in CUC so they can afford to buy what is not on their *libretas* for the week.<sup>1</sup> Although a divorce is easy to obtain, the modern woman shies away from marriage – out of practical considerations that the housing-shortage has confronted her with: unmarried they continue living with the family of one of the spouses and can move back in case of separation.

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2004, four currencies circulated in Cuba: the Cuban Peso, the Peso Convertible Cubano – CUC, the U.S. Dollar and the Euro. In November 2004 the Cuban government eliminated the use of the U.S. Dollar throughout the country. A CUC is worth 25 Cuban Pesos. Most imported goods, touristic items and luxury items are usually only available in CUC. While the government pays its employees in Pesos, the Tourism sector pays in CUC, which explains why most Cubans have a job tied to the tourist sector besides their official job.

## CUBAN CINEMA

Certainly more than political speeches and official pronouncements, and more acutely than even the critical scholarship of the turn of this century, the movies of the Special Period, openly discuss the continued struggle of the modern woman against the inherent machismo of the Cuban society, dollarization, revival of prostitution, and the challenge of surviving and maintaining the revolutionary spirit in the face of scarcity of all essential provisions.

Not surprisingly, cinema is a major enterprise in post-revolutionary Cuba, since as a state-controlled and censored art-form it is an effective vehicle for propaganda. Thanks to government subsidies, going to the movies in Cuba is extremely cheap and all Cubans, young and old alike, love to spend a couple of leisurely hours in the comfortable cold of the air-conditioned theaters. Cuban cinema traditionally discusses everyday matters with large or small implications for the nation, but which resonate in some degree or another with all Cubans. Interestingly, since the 1960's, Cuban cinema addressed the silenced issues of women's struggle and domestic violence. Women were not presented as victims, however; instead they were posited as model revolutionaries, juxtaposed to a male bad revolutionary.

In all the three cinematic examples I analyze, the men are extreme machistas and use a violence grown out of their own insecurity in order to curtail their wives' independence<sup>2</sup>. The primary reason why I include this discussion of Cuban movies of the time is that scholarship, strictly censored as it is, could not address domestic violence in Cuba at the time, since it would have been considered a direct attack on the revolution. As Pat Aufderheide intriguingly expressed, Cuban nationalized cinema was the only venue that permitted the degree of risk-

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<sup>2</sup> I chose to discuss *Lucia* (1968), *Retrato de Teresa* (1979) and *Guantanamo* (1995) for two reasons: First, they are set at three distinct points within the time-frame that I am discussing. Second, the incidents of domestic/gendered violence portrayed in them were systematically used as a turning point for the women's liberation within each of their lives.

taking indispensable for the discussion of public issues and sensitive topics (1996b). In the brilliant words of Director Humberto Solas:

I consider all films to be political; though I certainly don't consider all films to be revolutionary [...] I think film is a means of cognition, a way of discovering reality. Cinema takes on a revolutionary character to the extent that it becomes a weapon of struggle. (as quoted by Aufderheide 1996b)

### Lucía (1968)

In the first movie discussed here, famous Cuban director Humberto Solas portrays the lives of women during three distinct revolutions in Cuban history. In an interview with Julianne Burton, Solas explains his choice of a female protagonist, saying that

women are traditionally the number one victims in all social confrontations. The woman's role always lays bare the contradictions of a period and makes them explicit." He argued that machismo feeds underdevelopment. He chose women protagonists, he said, not because of "feminism," but because women's victim status provides more dramatic potential (as quoted by Aufderheide 1996a).

For the purpose of this work, I will be focusing on the third part, which is set in the 1960s after the triumph of the Socialist Revolution. In it Lucía, a "young wife learns how to read and write and work in collective agriculture, in spite of a traditionally macho husband who tries to keep her in the house" (Aufderheide 1996a).

The movie begins with a crowd of women on a truck, who stop in front of Lucía's house to pick her up on their way to the collective farm. They're all cheerfully jesting that Lucía's lateness is due to her new boyfriend, with whom she spends so much time in bed that she's too tired to get up early in the morning. Lucía takes it with humor, remarking that all the girls today have boyfriends, making a statement about the sexual liberation of Cuban women after the triumph of the revolution. She meets Tomás, who she will later marry on her way back home from the farm, when he gives her a ride on his truck. The next scene shows the young lovers in

bed, playfully fighting and teasing each other – sending the message that sex should be enjoyed by both and that the Cuban woman is not submissive.

At a dance in town the dark sides of relationships are exposed: Lucía is taken to the side by Angela, the señora of the chief of the town's Comité por la Defensa de la Revolución (CDR), who reminds her that it is time to end her honeymoon phase and return to the fields. Lucía replies that she would like that, but that Tomás doesn't want her to. When Angela retorts that Lucía must convince Tomás, Lucía simply replies "he says no", showing her as a submissive and unable to determine her own fate. Angela's angry outburst "Y la revolución?" (And the Revolution?) reminds the viewer that in the new social order it is absolutely unacceptable for a man to deny his wife the right to labor and incarcerate her in their home.

Since Tomás is portrayed as the 'bad revolutionary' that is exactly what he does, after the next scene in which he attacks another guy like an angry bull because he sees Lucía dance with him nonchalantly. As the modern woman that Lucía is, she does not consider herself Tomás' property and fails to understand why he is getting so upset. He reveals his backward machismo, yelling at her in a jealous rage: "Do you think I'm going to stand any of these guys drooling over you? I want you to obey me, you hear? That's what you're my wife for. You're all mine. Only for me! [...] All the guys here would like to have you. But no one except me can touch you" (Lucía). Tomás then literally locks her up in their house, even nailing the windows shut and forbidding her to receive any visitors, including her mother.

At first, Lucía seems resigned to her fate, does all the housework, stays in, serves and dotes on him, while "jealousy leads one to make mistakes, what your grandfather did is out of place today", the lyrics of the Guantanamera-song accompanying this scene foreshadow that Tomás will not remain triumphant. The first challenge to his 'rule' comes in the form of an

*alfabetizador*, a young man from Havana, who was sent to their town by the Revolutionary government as part of the Literacy Campaign of 1961, in order to teach the people of the town to read and write. He was assigned to live with Tomás and Lucía, which Tomás opposes on the pretext that he and Lucía are newlyweds. Flavio, the head of the CDR in town, reminds him that he needs to demonstrate goodwill and let the teacher stay with him or be labeled a bad revolutionary: “you aren’t going to oppose a decision that benefits Lucia and everybody else?” (Lucía).

Grudgingly, Tomás accepts the presence of the *alfabetizador* and suspiciously monitors Lucía’s lessons with the teacher. However, he cannot prevent the teacher from planting seeds of doubt and rebellion in Lucía. He teaches her, boosting her feeling of self-worth and reminds her that “Lucía, the wife isn’t the slave of the husband [...] precisely because he’s your husband he ought to be the first one to respect you” (Lucía). All the while the Guantanamera-version tunes “education is the most nutritious and healthy, that’s why he lost the fight, flirts while exploiting his assistant, at home the visitor has succeeded” in convincing Lucía that she should stand up for the rights that the revolution has granted her.

Lucía slowly becomes more self-assertive and begins to express her dissatisfaction with her current situation, she then invites Angelina over and complains that she can’t work and the two of them agree that Flavio should have a one-on-one with Tomás. Angelina goes back home and tells Flavio about the abhorrent treatment Lucía receives from her husband, pointing out that thanks to the revolution his kind of behavior is punishable and Tomás should be sent to prison or a work farm. Hereby, the movie sends the message that the archaic patriarchal machista attitude that Tomás represents is no longer acceptable in post-revolutionary society, even if the current generation of men were brought up like that, as Flavio points out. It is also worth noting that the

community, in the form of Flavio and Angelita, as well as the revolutionary regime, in the form of the teacher and more abstractly through the preferences in housing assignments, exerts pressure on the Cuban people to abide by the new social norms. Lucía's liberation through gaining education and employment, not surprisingly, reflects the agenda of the revolution as a whole.

Lucia's sudden assertiveness comes as a complete surprise to Tomas, who, not knowing how to deal with any opposition, resorts to the last means of his machista-power: physical violence. When he catches the teacher in another attempt to convince Lucia to leave Tomas, he is taken by a blind, violent rage and attacks the teacher and Lucia, jumping over tables and demolishing anything in his path. While he already previously shoved and pushed Lucia around, slapping and bullying her, this scene reveals his brutishness and lets him appear as an uncivilized, almost animalistic barbarian, who clearly has not embraced revolutionary ideals. Lucia then secretly flees to Flavio's house, leaving Tomas a note that says "me voy, no soy una esclaba" (I'm leaving, I'm not a slave) (Lucia). Tomas, waking up from his rage, looking filthy and unwashed, finds the note, searches the whole town for her and finally hunts her down at the salt field, demanding "you're coming back home because I am your husband" (Lucia). When he storms forward to grab her all the women around get involved, restrain him and force him to the ground, showing that this is no longer a private matter, one of concern for the whole community. It stands for the new era in which the camaraderie of those practicing socialist egalitarianism causes people to be take care of each other.

The problems of the quarrelling couple remain unresolved in the movie, leaving the viewer to speculate whether Lucia will leave Tomas or whether he will change and appreciate her independence. In the last scene the two re-encounter at the beach, and from the way they fall

into each other's arms it clear that they are still in love with each other, but again Tomas demands "you're going to obey me", which Lucia refutes under tears, half begs and half insists "I'll keep working and you're going to let me live" (Lucia). The lesson the viewer draws from Sola's movie, then, is that Tomas, the brutish husband is a bad revolutionary, while Lucia embodies the ideal revolutionary woman, who is eager to learn, wants to work, participate in the community, and finally overcomes her patriarchal husband.

### Retrato de Teresa (1979)

The 1979 movie "Retrato de Teresa" (Portrait of Teresa), directed by Pastor Vega boldly addresses the social problematic of women, who with shouldering a job, household, children, and volunteering for the revolution, become overwhelmed with their manifold responsibilities. It acknowledges that women's incorporation into the work and community does not automatically eliminate discrimination. Vega portrays how women in Cuban society, twenty years into the revolution, still face male resistance to their liberation. Teresa, played by Daysi Granados, has a job in a textile factory and "is a dedicated, harassed revolutionary worker who takes on the job of cultural secretary at the factory despite misgivings that she won't be able to handle her many responsibilities" (Aufderheide 1996b). Her volunteer activities as the cultural secretary keep her from home until very late, which leads her jealous and suspicious husband to accuse her of neglecting her three little sons and the household. At one of the union's meetings Teresa complains that "hombres todavia no han evolucionado" (men still have not evolved) and asks how she is supposed to manage all of her domestic responsibilities, work and sacrifice her free time to the revolution, while men still don't lift a finger at home (Retrato de Teresa 1979).

A scene that follows Teresa doing her early morning chores shows the heavy burden Cuban women carry: Teresa gets up before sunrise in order to make breakfast for everyone,

soaks the beans for dinner, wakes her husband and children (who just complain about being woken up so early), dresses and feeds the kids, soaks, cleans and puts up the laundry, and finally makes the beds before she runs off to work herself. In all of that, her husband, Ramón, only contributes to the domestic responsibilities by taking the children to their grandmother and picking them up in the evening (when they've already been fed by their grandmother). Still, as a good revolutionary she accepts the additional responsibilities. According to the philosophy “todo hacen algo para la revolución” (everybody does something for the revolution) she is reminded that she owes it to the revolution to do what is expected of her as Secretary of Culture. Ramón, depicted as the counterexample of a ‘bad revolutionary,’ feels Teresa is doing too much for the revolution and is finally so fed up with Teresa spending time at the rehearsals that he bullies Teresa by forcing their oldest to stay up until Teresa comes back late at night in order to show him (and implicitly her) how bad a mother she is.

In the subsequent fight between Ramón and Teresa, he accuses her of not doing the housework, thereby clearly portraying the traditional machista attitudes of pre-revolutionary society. Teresa counters that she wants to be herself, not a slave like their mothers and that she wants to do more than cook and wash. Ramón then bursts out in anger and attacks her saying, “isn’t it enough that you’re a wife and mother?” His clearly sexist and machista attitude would have resonated particularly powerfully with the lived reality of the female audience. Interestingly, while domestic violence per se is not addressed as a violation of the woman by her husband, a level of physical violence between partners is implied. Ramón grabs and shakes her, clearly trying to reinforce his machista attitude by exerting his physical dominance. This is a scene we are familiar with in the context of domestic violence, but what comes unexpectedly is



Teresa's reaction of reciprocating the violence and beating back at her husband, furiously refusing to be victimized.

After their fight, Teresa as a confident, emancipated *Cubana* throws Ramón out of their house. While he returns to his mother and starts an affair with a girl, Miriam, Teresa gets close to one of the other volunteers at the factory's cultural workshop, Tomás, but the two of them do not begin a sexual affair. When Ramón is eventually offered a promotion that would involve him moving to Santiago, he decides to make up with Teresa, since through the affair he realized that he loves Teresa after all and figures they might be able to start off anew. The two of them meet in a café and Ramón confesses his extramarital relations to Teresa, who remains poised and simply asks "what if I'd done the same?" This not only reveals the moral character of Teresa, but more importantly establishes Ramón's sexist and machista prejudices, since he can't even grasp the mere possibility that Teresa might have had an affair, too. In the end, Teresa gets up and leaves Ramón, since she realized that he simply cannot understand that the situation for women has changed since the revolution and that she is not going to give up the liberty and equality the revolution has granted her for him.

#### Guantanamera (1995)

The movie *Guantanamera* finally takes us right into the Special Period in which a new generation of women has presumably grown up free from suppressive machista state politics and patriarchal social norms. This journey across the island, however, on which famous director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea takes us, shows us that the emancipation of women in Cuba is still an ongoing struggle. After Gina's aunt dies on a visit to Guantánamo, Gina along with her aunt's old love, Cándido, and her assiduous and ostentatious husband, Adolfo, take her body on an odyssey across the island to Havana. Coincidentally, they repeatedly cross paths with Mariano, a

trucker on the same route, who was previously a love-struck student of Gina's at the University. Although Mariano is an attractive play-boy with a sweetheart at every stop along the way, he is a good guy deep down and Gina realizes this during her multiple run-ins with him and begins to scorn her husband for his dominance and disrespect of her abilities.

Gina is the classic case of success in the eyes of the socialist revolution. She is professionally successful, a professor of socialist economics at the university. Privately, though, her narcissistic husband suppresses her, forces her to give up her job and constantly denies her intelligence. He habitually orders her around, dismisses her opinions as invalid and patronizes her. Adolfo thereby challenges and ultimately negates her independence, causing Gina to depend on him economically as well as emotionally. Mariano, on the other hand, is respectful and gentle; his machismo is limited to the bedroom.

When Gina tells Mariano that she no longer teaches, instead of taking it for granted that with a husband who cares for her she does not need a job, he understands her need for the intellectual stimuli of a profession and tells her: "You are an intelligent woman, with a million opportunities" (Guantanamera 1995). For the first time in years she feels appreciated as a woman and this self-esteem boost leads her to spontaneously buy a nice summer dress. Adolfo on the other hand is infuriated by this, slapping her in front of their fellow travelers and yells at her that she "looks like a whore in that dress" (Guantanamera 1995). It is apparent that Gutiérrez Alea wants to show that even superficially 'good revolutionaries' like Adolfo, have not internalized the revolutionary ideals of equality and may not even understand what the revolution is all about.

Adolfo is shown as a man, who not only disrespects his wife as a person, but feels threatened by her intelligence and hence does everything to keep her confidence low. Gina, who has for a long time already scorned her husband's treatment of her and longed to return to work,

is encouraged by Mariano's emotional support and stands up to her husband. She refuses to return the dress, like her husband demands. In the ensuing confrontation she demonstrates her strength, finally breaks-out from the constraints her husband had placed on her and decides to leave him:

Adolfo: There are 60 miles left until Havana. Change that dress. Back in Guantanamo everything will be just as it was

Gina: Nothing will be the same now. I know you too well [...] I'm tired of not thinking [...] that radio show José Luis keeps offering me, I'm going to accept.  
(Guantanamera 1995).

The movies discussed above reveal that, contrary to official discourse and scholarship, the time, equality between men and woman is not a reality that has been achieved by the revolution and its ideals. While women have clearly benefited from access to education, independent incomes, and enfranchisement, it has not become a standard among the population as a whole. Men continue to hold on to machista values, rooted in a deeply patriarchal tradition and therefore continue to feel threatened by independent and emancipated women. In the three examples chosen for this discussion, the three men would prefer to have it the old way: their wives at home with the children, taking care of the household and looking up to their men. In the case of Teresa, her husband accepts that she is employed because they depend on it financially, but disapproves of her volunteer work as the cultural Secretary because that keeps her away from home and allows her to have an independent life of her own. Ramón is so jealous that he denies Lucía the right to work and have a life outside of his house. Finally, particularly Adolfo, Gina's husband, feels threatened by her superior intelligence and prohibits her from working in order to negate her the satisfaction of feeling accomplished.

Scholars, like Carolyn Dejoie, have acknowledged that machismo is pervasive in Cuban society and that is hardly compatible with the socialist ideology. She writes that Cuban culture

still is an environment in which women have to fight hard for the respect and acceptance of men, in professional as well as the private spheres. In an article evaluating the effects of the revolution on women, Dejoie concludes that

Male-female relationships are still dominated by men. Restrictions on women are evident. Their partners dictate conditions in their lives, when and where they may go, with whom and insist on accompanying them to organizational meetings [...] women try anxiously to appease sulking men as they continue to reject the frustrated women (1997, 3).

Their insecurities lead the men to resort to physical violence as the last resort to coerce their will on the women. Not surprisingly though, in the Cuban cinema, the violence does not result in the victimization of the wife, but rather in her empowerment. In the three cases above, the women make the final decision to fight back and leave their husbands, after they have been beaten. Cuban cinema thus propagates the message that men cannot deny women education, personal accomplishment and independence, things that the revolution has granted all its citizens. The revolution stands above the individuals' relationships and its permeation into all sectors of life in Cuba cannot be negated by anyone. So, in the end, individual men are demonized, while "the Revolution" continues to represent the path of liberation for women. Still, in all three movies liberation is a path prescribed by men: "gentle, perceptive, but still very attractive men are often the "emancipators"—they are friends, confidantes, lovers, and they "give permission" to the subjected women to challenge the machista husbands" (Findlay 2009).

In fact, it is interesting that violent men are characterized as 'bad revolutionaries' or backwards, who have not been enlightened by the revolution. Since their 'misbehavior' is blamed on the contenance of the old, patriarchal, pre-revolutionary (therefore capitalist) traditions, Cuban cinema has, unfortunately, been more a vehicle for socialist propaganda than a venue for the discussion of the unacceptability of gendered violence. Cuban film could, a prima

facie, be seen as a politization of domestic violence, but it is not. It presents an intimate look into women's experience with violence but emphasizes that the machista husbands are exceptions to the rule. Consequently, "men and women are not inherently in conflict – certain bad men damage the path toward revolutionary self-realization" (Findlay 2009). This leads to the question then-- where, when, and under which circumstances, domestic violence has begun to be discussed as a social phenomena and a serious offense.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Up to this day a full discussion of domestic violence in Cuba continues to be a taboo for domestic scholars, since the government defines domestic violence as a by-product of capitalism and has barely begun to acknowledge its existence on the island. According to Women's International Network, even "violent crime is rarely reported in the press, and there are no publicly available data regarding the incidence of domestic violence" (WIN News 1996, 7). Some scholarly sources admit that domestic violence "still exists but has been decreased due to efforts to reduce alcoholism, ignorance and other social problems" (Dejoie 1997, C. 3). This insistence on continual improvement underestimates domestic violence's grave impacts on society.

Authors Schnitger and Romero similarly downplay the possibility of domestic violence, arguing that in "a culture that has no stigma on abortion or birth control, that allows women and girls to live without fear of sexual violence, that teaches sex education at an early age and embraces sexuality as normal" the status of women is higher and respect for women is taught boys from an early age on (Romero and Schnitger 2003, 2). Magalys Arocha Domingues, the Secretary of International Relations of the FMC, even claimed in an interview that Cuban

machismo protects women and that the system of familial and communal interdependence bred by Cuba's close-knit society leaves little room for individualism, secrecy and abuse. The institutions and achievements of the revolution thus protect women from victimization and lead to significantly less occurrences of domestic violence, when compared to the rest of Latin America.

In Cuba [...] a man abusing a woman was always frowned on. Perhaps it is a special feature of our machismo, but a man who hits a woman is not a man in Cuba, that is the culturally-coined premise and society condemns this in practice. In any case, I will not deny that there is domestic violence, but never of the magnitude seen in other Latin American countries. Furthermore, Cuban women do not hold the role of victims as they do elsewhere: we know how to react and defend ourselves. And the private sphere in Cuba is not the private sphere that we know from other societies. Beyond that, our legislation has provisions on all types of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and even discriminatory attitudes towards women" (Franco 1997, 1).

Granted, it can be argued that there are advantages inherent in the Cuban social state system that can help reduce the occurrence of domestic violence, including that punishments for rape, sexual abuse and domestic violence are very strict, that the culture of socialism encourages neighbors "to get involved if they see or hear signs of violence and abuse", and that Cuban family doctors are required to make house calls "regardless of whether the person has a known health problem" (Romero and Schnitger 2003, 2). However, only transparency and open public discourse on the matter can really get at the root of the problem and devise mechanisms to help affected women and families.

### The Public Privacy Phenomenon

In an article published by Gender Watch in 2004, Carol Cositore Sitrin asserts that the low incidence of domestic violence is mainly due to the character of the Cuban women and the structure of the Cuban society.

It isn't that it doesn't occur, but Cuban women are not timid, and in general, will fight back before letting their partners abuse them. But as happens, if they cannot handle the

situation, it is nevertheless difficult for a man to get away with it here. Families are not isolated in Cuba and neighbors pretty much know what is going on with a couple. For example, women neighbors might stop in to counsel the woman, and one or more of the men would have a heart-to-heart with the man, letting him know they will report him to the police, and they will. Or they might first call in a social worker or a family member. In any case, the woman would not be left alone to suffer” (Cositore 2004, 39).

Miriam Lang, German Scholar of Latin American Studies at the FU Berlin (Free University Berlin), has proposed that the high density of control and cooperation among institutions can contribute to an early recognition of the symptoms of and rapid intervention in cases of domestic violence, but unfortunately, this does not mean that measures are directed at solving the problem of domestic violence. As the following example in her study shows, the problem lies deep down in the conceptualization of domestic violence as a social problem: An alcoholic husband forced his wife and daughter to sleep in the street, after which both his doctor and employer insisted upon his hospitalization. After his release the family doctor and employer were content with the successful treatment of his alcoholism. The success of this case depended on whether the man stopped drinking and not whether he stopped abusing his wife (Lang 2004, 11).

The second misconception is family doctors and neighbors’ alleged right to intervention is in reality not well received. For example, the police have a dual mandate: to maintain public order and to respect the sacrosanctity of the home. In Lang’s second example, a police patrol intervened when a man abused his wife in public, but because *the couple* was causing a public disturbance—not to protect the woman. Consequently, the state only intervenes to protect women from violence from their partners if it is public and visible. The police officer, when asked by Lang for why he intervened, confirmed that women cannot expect protection from the state and its instruments. Adding, “that should happen in the home. If they do it in the home, it’s their business” (Lang 2004, 12). Therefore, violence against women is not accepted and incidents

of violence between partners generally do not occur in public. In addition a CDR member interviewed by Lang echoed this, stating that “it is possible that these things occur in the home, but in that case it is the woman’s problem Lang 2004, 12).

### Female Employment and Independence

With the beginning of the Special Period in 1989, the two primary factors that have presumably led to the growing independence and emancipation of Cuban woman after the triumph of the revolution, namely equal access to education and employment, were no longer a given. In fact, while the employment of women did not decrease alarmingly, the statistics do not account for women who had to switch to jobs for which they were overqualified. Lang writes that “by ignoring the nature of employment, the negative aspects remain hidden” (Lang 2004, 14). She further indicates that those laid off after the closing of industries subsidized by the Soviets, were given up to “three offers of alternative work these need not be commensurate with their skills or previous remuneration” (Lang 2004, 14). So even if unemployment rates for women did not decline dramatically after the fall of the Soviet Union, statistic do not account for the majority of women who found employment that paid less and for which they were over-qualified.

Further, the introduction of the dual currency and the surge in tourism reversed the social pyramid and introduced social equality. During the special period, those with high levels of education and high qualifications no longer found themselves in the top of the social strata regarding income. On the contrary, now low-skill jobs in the service and tourism sector offered the best wages in the country. Through this, the social pyramid, representing the correlation of higher education and better paying job, was reversed. As a consequence, more and more women drop out of school after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and seek jobs as dancers or waitresses in the dollar-driven



tourist industry or offer themselves to tourists as *jinetas*.<sup>3</sup> Although regular employment in a state-paid enterprise is still considered a respectable position, these posts no longer assure the means for economic independence. The favorable conditions during the *vaca gorda* created by economic independence of women through the high ratio of female employment, which could have facilitated a woman's decision to separate from a violent partner are thus shredded. (Lang 2004, 15).

### Divorce and Separation

Fortunately, while economically women might not be able to afford to separate from a violent partner, Lang proposes that Cuba's liberal divorce laws as well as the provisions for alimony and state-sponsored child care, give women the means to opt for a separation without having to fear grave legal and social repercussions (Lang 2004, 16). In Cuba, women don't have to stay with violent partners and subordinate their own well-being only to maintain public face as a 'respectable woman' or 'good mother'. The Family Code makes obtaining a divorce relatively easy, since the application does not have to be mutual, requires no explanation and is comparatively cheap. Further, since so many couples take advantage of this legislation, a divorce does not represent a loss of 'symbolic capital', like in other Latin American countries with a stronger Catholic legacy.

On the downside, culturally, a divorce does not necessarily represent the actual physical separation of the couple. I met several Cubans who lived in the same house with their ex-spouses, their new lover and their children, which, considering the housing crisis in Cuba, is by no means the exception and not regarded scandalous. The sexual openness championed by the

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<sup>3</sup> Jineterismo is an activity that is economically driven due to the failures of Communist Cuba's various foreign and domestic policies. "Jinetas refer to themselves not as prostitutes, but as being *en la lucha* (the struggle of daily survival to procure essential food and goods) or simply *resolviendo* (taking care of daily basic needs due to the scarcity of consumer goods in the island)" (Marrero 2003, 238).

revolution, as Lang suggests, creates an environment of social acceptance for women with children of multiple fathers (16). Unfortunately, often this also makes men feel that they are still entitled to a woman's body, even if the relationship is over. An anecdote which Lang recounts in her article features the fruitless attempts of a woman to seek police assistance, because she was constantly harassed by her ex-husband. Nothing happened, until one night he stood in front of her door threatening to kick it down if she didn't let him in. She called the police who took the ex-husband in for the night. The next morning, the senior police officer talked to the man, telling him he would take it as an affront to his personal honor if he ever caught him doing something like that again (Lang 2004, 17). Unlike the U.S. and Europe, where the ex-wife could have taken him to court and obtained a restraint order, in Cuba a parallel legal instrument does not exist and so it comes down to a duel of honor between two machos. Thus, recast as a contest between two men, this patriarchal conversation denies women's particular interest and agency (Findlay 2009). It leaves women in the role of a by-stander despite their own attempts at active participation.

#### Public Discourse and Domestic Violence

In the Special Period, when Cuba slowly started to open itself to the rest of the world, it began to send delegates to conferences on human and women's rights and violence in Latin America as well as the United Nations conferences in Vienna and Beijing. The delegates found that they could not participate in the discussions, since in Cuban mass media, family-based violence has only been addressed sporadically. The press in Cuba is a state controlled instrument of education and is very different from our conception of "sensation press". Due to the media's primarily pedagogical role, "sensational stories" travel word of mouth without ever being officially affirmed or denied. When I had just arrived in Cuba an incident where a woman in Havana Vieja was mutilated by her jealous lover (he carved her face with a knife) shocked me to

the core. I never knew whether it was just an urban myth, something the *carpetas* would tell us so that we would be careful and not walk alone at night, or whether it was true, since I never found any confirming mention of it in the newspapers.

Since the revolution officially considers domestic violence a by-product of capitalism, it was assumed that over time, socialism would automatically solve the problem. Scholars, journalists and activists struggling to bring domestic violence to public attention unfortunately is not well-received by the state. Suggesting that socialism did not solve domestic violence equals suggesting that socialism does not work, and automatically places the critic on the list of government-monitored dissidents. Lang writes that “domestic violence is made invisible [by the state actors]. Especially because of the claim of the Cuban society to lift every human being to a state of dignity such a thing as domestic violence is inconceivable. It’s being ignored” (Lang 2004, 20). Particularly in the context of unending regime competition (between socialism/communism and capitalism), every public statement, be it scientific or journalistic, is scrutinized for its ideological content pro or contra the revolution:

Since Fidel Castro himself has elevated the “Women-Question” into the status of decisive criteria for the success of the revolution, topics that question the progress in the areas of equalization of women, such as the existence of violence against women, can be regarded as “counterproductive to the official discourse (Lang 2004, 22).

The socialist regime in Cuba likes to pride itself on the island’s low levels of criminality and would hate to lose this advantage in the context of regime competition. Additionally, socialist states around the globe have used the icon of the emancipated woman as a symbol for the success and modernity of their ideology. This attitude helps explain why many women who live in abusive relationships are accused of ‘somehow liking it’. The state argues that since there are attainable ways for women to leave such a relationship, there is really no reason other than their personal choice, for them to stay. Lang, however, has found that while women feel they can

talk liberally about their sexuality, there is still a great deal of shame attached to talking about experiences of violence. According to her, women in abusive relationships are under the pressure of feeling like they have failed twice – themselves and the revolution:

Precisely because it is considered common knowledge that Cuban women are strong and emancipated, a woman who experiences abuse regards herself as a failure in both ways: individually with regards to the partner and herself and socially with regards to the ideals of emancipation formulated in the name of the revolution and socialism (Lang 2004, 25).

For the longest time, violence in gender relations has also only been investigated in the fields of medicine and criminology, disciplines focused on research questions regarding pathology or health-related aspects, instead of sociological ones (Lang 2004, 26). Thus, domestic violence in Cuba cannot be properly addressed by the state and its institutions because it treats gendered violence as an exception to the rule, as an individual example of pathological behavior rather than an unfortunately common social phenomenon.

### Actions Taken

Unfortunately, even the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (Federation of Cuban Women, FMC) “proceeded on the basis that the revolution had ended patriarchy and that women were free to embrace their new role in society” (Fernandes 2005, 438). It is a shame that instead of adapting their agenda to the real conditions for women on the island, the FMC is little more than a puppet of the state, subordinating women’s needs to the party’s wants without hesitation. Fernandes laments that the FMC, with its “bourgeois concept of moral values” has never been a feminist organization but an instrument of the state. During the Special Period, as the island had to find alternative means to finance their economy, “many women found the FMC unequipped to deal with new problems that were emerging, such as the revival of sex tourism, a growing gender gap, and the circulation of negative images of women in the public sphere” (Fernandes 2005, 432). As a consequence of the new socialist reality and due to meetings with feminists on the

international level and transnational support, an alternative short-lived non-governmental feminist organization came into being. According to Fernandes' case study, "the emergence of the feminist network Magín in Cuba in 1993 challenged the monopoly of the official women's organizations over issues related to women" (Fernandes 2005, 438).

We have already seen how the government's policies to deal with the economic crisis, in particular through the promotion of tourism, as well as the "introduction of mixed enterprises with foreign firms, recuperation of traditional export markets and legalization of the dollar" affected the situation of women adversely (Fernandes 2005, 437). The inability of the state during the early 90s to supply the Cuban people with basic goods, created an increasing labor flow to the tourism industry and illegal sectors of the economy. It is thus plausible, as Fernandes argues, that "the opening up of Cuba to a global market economy, the scarcity of resources that reduced the economic power held by state institutions, and the nature of the economic crisis forced the Cuban government to concede space to other actors" (Fernandes 2005, S. 435). As a result, most Cubans have tried to find a source of income that pays in dollars while retaining a job that pays in pesos to stay in *bona fide* with their government. Fernandes adds that this "increased weight on women to shoulder the burden for survival given their continuing responsibility for the household, women's relegation to an emerging informal and illegal sector and a rise in attitudes of machismo" (Fernandes 2005, 437).

Specifically for women, work in this informal sector has meant an exponential growth of *jineterismo*, which according to conservative estimates has risen to "a figure of around six thousand *jineteras* in Havana in 1995" (Fernandes 2005, 438). The FMC, paralleling the position of the Cuban government, has officially denounced *jineterismo* as immoral. Their founding member, Vilma Espina, has accused *jineteras* of being "decadent trash whose parents had lost

control of them” and they have launched initiatives to “clean it up” (Fernandes 2005, 445, Mas 2003). Magín, on the other hand offered a different approach, while it did not champion *jineterismo* as the solution to women’s problems neither did it demonize the women, who it understood to be in a precarious economic situation. It asserted that women had the right to engage in *jineterismo*, “as long as they retain their dignity and self respect” (Fernandes 2005, 445).

In its work, Magín primarily tried to change public perception of gender and stimulated public debate on social issues using gendered language. For almost three years, members of Magín, primarily female journalists, anthropologists and professors of gender studies, met to discuss themes such as female representation in the media. Fernandes gives an account of their activism.

Magín met on alternate Fridays to debate various themes, including sexism in language, racial imagery in the media, women and change, and film portraits and female subjectivity [...] activists of Magín also organized workshops dealing with broader, more politically provocative themes, such as “Jineterismo and Prostitution” (Fernandes 2005, 441).

In 1996, on the pretext that “many people were being seduced by the enemy with scholarships and money, and that 70% of independent organizations were subversive in some way because foreign money was always given in exchange for political loyalties”, the government began to monitor and harass independent organizations (Fernandes 2005, 432). After a series of crackdowns, the revolution won once again. On March 23, Raul Castro gave a speech “denouncing activities of Cuban NGOs, independent organizations, and research groups, especially those that had relationships with foreign NGOs” (Fernandes 2005, 446). According to López Vigil, one of the former Magín members, the organization failed largely because of machista politics in the county:

Claims of threat to national unity were clearly unjustified, but the women accepted the decisions because they knew there were no other options if they did not want to be considered dissidents and have their professional lives in Cuba curtailed [...] It was clear that behind all the arguments was a basically machista line of thinking ‘you, naïve, little ladies, can be easily seduced by the enemy’s bait, unaware that they want to buy you off with money, with different ideas, and with individualism’ (in Fernandes 2005, 447).

This development was not only the cause for the discontinuation of Magín, but also lies at the nexus for why there is so little international scholarship that objectively evaluates the success of gender equality in Cuba or criticizes domestic violence. Fernandes correctly argues that contrary to claims by the Cuban government “women have a disadvantaged position in a male-dominated world; it does seem that there are no feminist movements to speak of in Cuba” (Fernandes 2005, 434).

While the government has, under external pressure, begun to open *Casas de Orientación y Apoyo a la Mujer y la Familia* to provide women with safe locations of refuge, they are poorly equipped and advertised. In 1997, the FMC created a national working group for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence and violence against women (GNTV), which functions as the primary instrument of public activism. The group publishes and distributes leaflets with information on violence against women as children as well as legal resources for victims of abuse. According to Lang, the group offers the unique opportunity of being able to coordinate initiatives against violence against women at a particularly high level within the political apparatus that allows the cooperation between institutions, as well as the scientific monitoring and public propagation of those initiatives (Lang 2004, 27). The government has also called into being special education and training programs for medical service providers at *policlinicas* and police stations, in order to sensitize them to deal with victims of abuse. Hopeful, as these initiatives might seem, Lang also found during a follow-up visit to Cuba in 2003 that after their inception in the mid-90s, both the working group and the training programs had been disbanded

after only a couple of months, leading to a stagnation and reversal of their previous successes (Lang 2004, 28).

## CONCLUSION

Feminist scholarship of the early decades of the revolution is characterized by the complete omission of domestic violence due to the Cuban regime's heavy hand in censoring what it considers 'counterrevolutionary' discourse. While Cuban cinema of the time has at least acknowledged the existence of domestic violence, this occurrence has not informed feminist scholarship. So far, only Miriam Lang, among a few other international scholars has dared to politicize domestic violence, an endeavor which domestic scholars are unable to pursue due to the constraints placed on them by the socialist regime. Most still praise the achievements of the revolution and compare the favorable situation on the island to the horrid experiences of femicide in other Latin American countries. Thus, the acknowledgement of domestic violence in Cuban film does not serve as a vehicle for politization, since the predominant message is that domestic violence is a symptom that can be solved by adhering to revolutionary ideals.

It is then quite apparent, that the process of instigating public discourse on the status of women in Cuba, and particularly domestic violence, is to this day a very frustrating endeavor. The state apparatus does not put a lot of its already strained resources into the prevention and solution-finding for domestic violence. The police often does not take domestic violence serious enough, so that whether a woman, who has experienced violence and abuse, receives justice depends strongly on the individuals in charge of her case. Lang concludes that there is no general principle of legal certainty in Cuba (Lang 2004, 29). The 'solutions' to domestic violence



proposed in Cuba's legislation, namely fining an abusive husband or putting him in jail are not adequate, since they represent economic repercussions for the whole family.

Although rape, violations, and abuse, particularly of children, are dealt with severely in the courts, violence in conjugal relations does not represent a separate crime under the Cuban criminal code. The small, invisible forms of violence against women, including both physical and psychological abuse are not prosecuted. Abuse, consequently, is juristically speaking, a violation that requires medical attention, nothing more and restraint orders do not exist (Lang 2004, 30).

The housing situation in Cuba has added to the problem, beyond the consequences discussed in the section on separation and divorce: Lang found that the government has literally not been able to provide enough room to open houses of refuge for women, who want to get out of abusive relationships and escape the house of their abuser with their children. She writes that “even the *casas de orientación* do not really represent an alternative for the women, since the government does not provide them with material resources for the alimentation or housing of those women” (Lang 2004, 30). Since *casas* have a primarily educational and advisory function, ultimately every woman is expected to help herself to either get out of the situation or to deal with it. The volunteers most frequently advise women to get a divorce – which often fails because of the housing situation of the family.

In the words of Miriam Lang, the image of the woman created by the revolution has created a false perception of the equality that women in Cuba presumably enjoy. The image of the emancipated revolutionary woman has made it harder for women to admit abuse, since they perceive it as a shameful and feel like they've let down the revolution, or for society to accept

that abuse is a reality. The result is a frustrating circle of inefficiency and neglect regarding the status of women in Cuba:

It prevented timely political reactions to this phenomenon as well as a broad public debate over the issue. It further led diverse social actors that potentially could intervene to adopt a passive willful ignorance of the symptoms of domestic and gendered violence. And this precisely compels Cuban women to stay in abusive relationships (Lang 2004, 32).

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#### Translations

<sup>1</sup> "incorporación de la mujer al trabajo y las políticas igualitaristas eliminarían por sí solas la discriminación" – The incorporation of women into the work place and egalitarian politics would by themselves eliminate discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> "a pesar de que estos cambios no representaron la eliminación del patrón patriarcal ni del machismo en la sociedad cubana, la desaparición de algunas barreras y restricciones a la participación de la mujer en la sociedad implicaron una mejoría de su estatus social"- Despite the

fact that these changes did not represent the elimination of the patriarchal figure or machismo in Cuban society, the elimination of some barriers and restrictions of the participation of women in the society have resulted in a betterment of women's social status.

<sup>3</sup> “posibilidades de enriquecimiento espiritual y mayor capacidad para incidir en las decisiones dentro de la familia y para elegir a su pareja” – Possibilities for spiritual enrichment and a greater capacity to influence the decisions made within the family as well as to choose a partner.