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Cubans Abroad: A Gendered Case Study on International Migrations

ABSTRACT

Cubans who have migrated since the 1990s after living for two decades or more in their country of origin left with an embedded gender ideology that they acquired in a society where gender relations were undergoing radical transformations. As a result, Cuban feminization of migrations has its peculiarities. In this context, there are three issues to consider: explaining how gender relations attained in Cuba, as part of the overall attitudes gained since childhood, influenced Cuban migrants who have left the island permanently since 1990, introduced uniqueness in their migration processes, and made up a different feminization of migration; identifying the features of Cuban social structure that shaped the gender ideology of Cuban migrants; and producing new knowledge about Cuban international migration processes by using a gender perspective and by analyzing the gender relations prevailing in the years before the crisis of the 1990s, as well as since the beginning of the twenty-first century.The first part of this article focuses on gender distinctiveness of recent Cuban migrants, and the second summarizes some traits of the Cuban social structure—mainly referred to female employment—that could explain the gender training of the migrants.

RESUMEN

Las cubanas y los cubanos que emigraron en los años noventa tras vivir por dos décadas o más en Cuba llevaron consigo una ideología de género adquirida en una sociedad que transformó radicalmente las relaciones de género. Como resultado la feminización de las migraciones internacionales en Cuba tiene sus peculiaridades. El artículo tiene tres propósitos: aproximarse a las especificidades de las personas que se marcharon de Cuba a partir de los años noventa, para identificar las singularidades de su ideología de género; encontrar los orígenes de esas actitudes en las estructuras sociales prevalecientes en Cuba a lo largo de su infancia, adolescencia y adultez temprana, así como en la ideología de género prevaleciente en Cuba, y, por último, producir nuevos conocimientos sobre los procesos migratorios externos cubanos usando la perspectiva de género y analizando las relaciones de género prevalecientes en Cuba en los años anteriores a la crisis de los noventa y desde el inicio de este siglo. La primera parte del artículo se dedica a las características genéricas de los migrantes cubanos recientes, mientras que la segunda parte resume algunas tendencias de las estructuras sociales cubanas—sobre todo aquellas referidas al empleo femenino—que podrían explicar el entrenamiento de género de estos migrantes.

Cubans who have migrated since the 1990s after living for two decades or more in their country of origin left with an embedded gender ideology that they acquired in a society where gender relations were undergoing radical transformations. As a result, Cuban feminization of migrations has its peculiarities. In this context, there are three issues to consider: explaining how gender relations attained in Cuba, as part of the overall attitudes gained since childhood, influenced Cuban migrants who have left the island permanently since 1990, introduced uniqueness in their migration processes, and made up a different feminization of migration; identifying the features of Cuban social structure that shaped the gender ideology of the Cuban migrants; and producing new knowledge about Cuban international migration processes by using a gender perspective and by analyzing the gender relations prevailing in the years before the crisis of the 1990s, as well as since the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The worldwide trend of feminization of international migrations is present in the Cuban case.1 Women migrants slightly exceed the total number of males: from 1960 to 2008, they represented 50.89 percent of the 1,332,432 persons who left Cuba.2 However, these women and men differ in their gender attitudes according to the years when they left Cuba and to the gender ''training'' acquired in their native country.

The fifty-five migrants interviewed for this case study were born in the 1970s and left Cuba in their early adulthood—between 1997 and 2008. Therefore, Cuban social structures had influenced them for more than two decades.
The findings in this article were based on a case study with thirty-five Cuban women and twenty men who have migrated from Havana, Cuba, since 1998, and who left with a university degree or with a completed technical education. The majority of the interviewees were between twenty-six and thirty-six years of age upon leaving Cuba, and only three of them were fifty-five years or older. All of them left Cuba legally. As I decided to personally interview individuals in my study but did not have funds to travel to the main countries in which Cubans were living, and because the U.S. Treasury Department was imposing extreme restrictions on visits to the United States by Cuban scholars, I interviewed Cuban migrants while visiting relatives in Havana from 2003 to 2008.
Therefore, their countries of residence were selected randomly. Among the interviewees, there was a relatively high presence of Cubans in the Dominican Republic; thus, I talked to Cuban migrants during my stays in the Dominican Republic as a visiting professor. The rest lived in the United States, Spain, Italy, and Germany. I also consulted Cuban experts on gender and migration, analyzed literature dealing with these topics, and kept a diary with my observations beginning from 2003. I also analyzed statistical sociodemographic data.

Focus on the last decade of the twentieth century in Cuba is important, as it was a period of severe crisis that imposed a turning point in Cuban development strategies because it stopped the upward social mobility that the whole

population had experienced from 1959 to 1989. These were the worst years of the Cuban transition to a socialist order—based on international and national experiences—because society experienced a fall in living standards from which it still has not fully recovered. In the first thirty years of the revolution, the gains experienced at the individual and social levels encouraged Cubans' aspirations. The crisis of the 1990s made many Cubans consider that they could not fulfill their life projects in their home country and decide to emigrate to carry them out in other countries. When they left, they took within them peculiarities in their gender ideology gained in Cuba.

Gender Characteristics of Cuban Migrants

Feminization of Migration

The UN Fund for Population (UNFPA) reported in its State of the World Population 2006 dedicated to women and international migrations: ''Over the last 40 years almost as many women have migrated as men. . . . By the year 2005, there were slightly more female than male immigrants in all regions of the world except Africa and Asia.''3 In Cuba, this tendency has been conditioned by the deep changes in social structures over the past fifty years, by the programs to promote gender equality, and by the migration policies effective in Cuba and in the destination countries, basically the United States. At present, most Cuban migrants live in the United States. The UNFPA report adds that, ''Among developed regions, North America is exceptional in that female immigrants have outnumbered male immigrants since 1930.''4 This quality of the feminization of migrations to the United States and Canada is also present among Caribbean countries. The UNFPA states that ''starting with the decade of 1950, every decade the quantities of Caribbean migrant women to North America have exceeded that of men, and women are well represented in the categories of qualified workers.''5 According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000, 50.8 percent of Cubans residing in the United States and born in Cuba were women.6

Therefore, the flow of Cuban women migrants toward North America, basically to the United States, is similar to the migration currents from other Caribbean countries. The UNFPA acknowledged that Latin American and Caribbean women have also increased their migration flows to other regions of the world. As of 2005, Cubans were living in 148 countries.7

Still, Cuban feminization flows to the United States differ from those coming from Latin America and the Caribbean, at least because of the preferential and selective migration policies that Washington applies to Cuban citizens.8 Susan Eckstein wrote that, in the United States during the Cold War era, ''Cubans became the most privileged immigrant group,'' with the United States

subsidizing many of them and offering them certain benefits to ease their adaption process.9

There are also variations in gender attitudes between Cuban women who left the country in the 1960s and 1970s and those who migrated after 1990. Although my present case study does not render the necessary basis to prove this assertion, I hypothesize that the former did not experience the profound changes in gender relations through which Cubans lived after the early 1970s and that became pre-emigration assets for the Cubans who have left since the 1990s. These transformations benefited women and men in terms of better levels of education, advanced professional job skills, comprehensive health habits, family-planning know-how, sexual education patterns, and equal rights, among other new gender expertise. Changes in gender ideology started with the struggles for female emancipation in the early 1960s and explain why women have changed their gender ideologies much more than men have.

Throughout these transformations, decision making has become one of the new gender attributes that Cuban women acquired in more comprehensive ways than they had before 1959—Cuban working women's high educational standards grant them the ability to organize or ''program'' both their job and their work during the second shift (i.e., at home) at the same time. Cuban women in my sample used this decision-making capacity in the ways in which they left the country. Two-thirds of migrant women whom I interviewed departed from Cuba alone, the majority without a partner accompanying and/or waiting for them in their countries of destination. Three left with prearranged fictitious marriages so as to enter their new countries of residence. The rest traveled with their husbands, followed them to the selected destinations, or left before them. The Cuban sociologists Gretel Marrero and Elpidia Moreno found the same trend in their studies.10 Men in my research behaved similarly. Women and men included in this investigation stated that they emigrated because they were anxious to fulfill their life projects in other countries. They answered that they selected this alternative because they were sufficiently ''independent'' and ''prepared'' to do so: they had a university degree, had worked for two or more years in their professions under conditions of low salaries, and had friends or relatives living abroad who had promised to give them a hand. Several added that Cuba had twenty or more years to revive its economy, and they were unwilling to wait that long to fulfill their life projects. These schemes included having a job with a good salary; founding a family; buying a house, apartment, or car; helping their relatives in Cuba; and traveling regularly to Cuba and other countries. Experts in gender and migration consulted for this research explained that this is a dream common to all migrants that only some can realize.

In my study, professionally qualified migrants represent at least two generations that were trained in Cuba to behave with self-determination regardless of their gender. They studied for at least seventeen years at educational institutions

—from preprimary to university graduation. Two more years could be added if they attended nurseries in their early childhood. Since the seventh grade, they spent at least one month every year working in the fields, attended boarding high schools, and continued living in university dormitories if they lived far from these tertiary-level institutions. Therefore, they shared as much daily experience with members of their cohorts as they did with parents and relatives. Many of their parents studied abroad in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries and/or worked in cooperation missions in other countries; hence, present migrants constructed a close paradigm of what it means to live abroad.

Employment and the Second Shift

Migrants in my study graduated from Cuban universities during the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century. Except for one woman and one man, the rest were employed at jobs linked to their professions for at least two years before leaving the country. In their countries of destination, only one-third of the women and less than half of the men were employed in jobs according to their professions. Almost all have more than one job to cover their budgets, and some have to rush daily from one job to another during rush-hour traffic. Nearly everyone said that they preferred to develop their professions but were satisfied with their present job situation because they earned enough to cover their expenses. Nearly everyone stated that they had little opportunity to upgrade their job training. Gretel Marrero confirmed this behavior in her study. She quoted Sussie Jollie and Hazel Reeves, saying that, worldwide, the majority of migrant women perform nonqualified jobs, such as domestic workers, caretakers, and in manufacturing—mainly in the textile and food industries. They added that gender-segregated job markets discriminate against migrant women such that they are exploited in terms of salaries and risks. Men tend to work in regulated and more visible jobs than women.11

Cuban experts I consulted in my study stated that it was far more difficult for women than men to find jobs according to their professional training in the countries where they emigrated. Cuban women were very disappointed by this, but they said that they had to adapt to the situation in their new countries of residence. They pointed to several discrimination traits: less pay for women than men, little or no paid leave, extremely intense job schedules, and two mentioned cases of sexual harassment by coworkers. It is easier for men to find jobs in general and as professionals, as employers are often prejudiced against pregnancy and childbearing. Experts met few men and almost no women who held leading positions at their new jobs. It is far more difficult to work as professionals in countries where languages other than Spanish are spoken. Women and men alike considered themselves well trained to perform not only their professions but also any ‘‘appropriate,’’ ‘‘decent,’’ ‘‘convenient’’ job that produced income. This capacity could derive from their prolonged educational

training in Cuba that disciplined them to fixed schedules from early morning to late afternoon. It could also stem from working paradigms—of both men and women—that they observed in their parents.

In my previous studies concerning the influence of women's employment on gender ideology in Cuba, I predicted that working mothers' children would be educated to admit that female employment was something natural and—in the case of sons—would be prepared to accept women as coworkers and managers and to marry working women. Cuban migrants took this training to the new places where they are living, and thanks to it, they understood that both members of the couple should be employed. This preparation promoted a new view on the second shift, as husbands and wives—or partners—engaged in domestic chores alike, much more than did their parents. It is a sort of delayed blooming of men's abilities to participate in the private sphere, which they did not observe in Cuba, though they had the training to do so. Cuban migrants who lived in countries where domestic workers were paid very little hired them to perform the second-shift tasks, including taking care of children.

Remittances

The fifty-five emigrants in my study aided family members in Cuba by sending them money and/or goods—footwear, clothing, food, and medicines—with no fixed regularity. Few channeled money through banks or financial institutions; they more often sent it through individuals traveling to Cuba. The amounts varied, as did the regularity of forwarding it. Women and men in my study sent remittances separately, according to their personal incomes. Only two of the fifty-five persons interviewed combined their funds in remitting money to family members. But they generally brought their incomes together when they bought presents for common friends.

According to these findings, it is difficult to infer a gendered pattern of forwarding remittances and administering them in Cuba. It is usually said that mainly women recipients manage the funds in Cuba, but this did not come out of the interviews.12 Interviewees believed that the money that they sent was used to buy food, clothing, footwear, electrical appliances, and cell phones, mainly in the government stores or at agricultural markets. Money went also to repair and enlarge houses. Nobody mentioned that relatives and friends at home saved the remittances for the future. One woman said, ''Cubans live on a day-by-day basis with little perspective on future outcomes.'' And as others observed, there is no need to send money to pay rents or mortgages, to enroll children in schools or at universities, or to pay for health care. ''Nobody buys cars or houses,'' said many, so money goes to everyday needs. Although studies on remittances in Cuba mention buying houses,13 nobody in my research group mentioned this possibility.

A World Bank study has concluded the following:

[T]he share of female migrants has a significant negative effect on remittance flows . . . caused by two forces. . . . First, a higher level of female migration indicates that more people are migrating as families and are less likely to have relatives behind; second, female migrants' labor market participation levels and incomes are likely to be lower in the destination countries, which mean there is less disposable income to be sent back as remittances.14

Neither of these two forces seem to limit interviewees in my study from remitting to Cuba. First, even though the women and men reunited with their original partners, formed new marital unions, or simply stayed alone, they kept ties with members of their extended families in Cuba. I did not ask for amounts sent, so I cannot confirm whether they were sending more or less than they did when they arrived in their new countries of residence. They simply stated that they help relatives and friends back home. Most of their parents and grandparents stayed in Cuba, and the émigrés also supplied money to pay those who aided their family members. Interviewees kept tight bonds with their grandparents, as many were raised by them while their mothers worked for a salary. Second, even if the women were not employed in jobs according to their original professional status, they kept helping their relatives back home. One said, ''As long as the situation in Cuba is depressed I have to help those who raised me.'' Niimi and Ozden also concluded that ''increase in the overall education level of migrants reduces remittances sent'' because ''more educated migrants are likely to come from wealthier families, which are less dependant on remittances''; ''educated migrants can bring their families with them more easily, which also decreases the demand for remittances''; and ''educated migrants are likely to settle permanently and invest in the destination's country assets.''15

The fifty-five persons interviewed achieved university-level education in Cuba, but this does not mean that they come from wealthier families. Universal and free access to education had been practiced in Cuba for almost four decades when they graduated from university. Therefore, highly educated émigrés did not necessarily come from better-off families. When they left, women and men in my study had relatively good living standards compared to Cuban standards. Their families were not wealthier than the rest but were distinctly better off. Yet they considered that they could not accomplish in Cuba their material and spiritual (i.e., relating to the spirit or soul) aspirations. Although I did not directly ask interviewees about the reasons that made them migrate, their needs must have played a very important role in their decision. This would be a paradoxical output of the social mobility promoted by the revolution: potential migrants want more than the educational, job, and living standards that social policies in Cuba allow for and look to materialize their aspirations elsewhere. This is same middle-class aspiration for upward status in the United States and other countries.

Once they started channeling money and goods back home, they started introducing differences between their relatives and the other families who do not obtain remittances. What makes a difference among Cuban families is who receives remittances and who does not. The economic readjustments introduced on the island in the first half of the 1990s to overcome the crisis included allowing the free flow of hard currency inside the country. Mayra Espina wrote, ''Remittances as a differentiating factor alien to work performance in Cuba during the years of the reforms is not sufficiently documented, but its stratifying impact is empirically evident.''16 Remittances grew from 1993 to the present, and their ''differentiated effect widens because they are not a simple additional income but an extraordinary and definite one, since they lead to notoriously higher levels of consumption compared to the devaluated national currency and because they are not distributed homogenously in the Cuban population but according to family links with migrants.''17 Espina cites a study by the Cuban geographer Luisa Iñíguez, who found that ''35 percent of the families included in a sample of the City of Havana received remittances, and this proportion increased up to 63 percent in the highest income strata, while it fell to 5 percent in the lowest strata.''18 A Brookings Institution report found that, ''because most of those who have left the country are Caucasian, far fewer Afro-Cubans enjoy access to foreign remittances.''19

The ''educated'' migrants do not tend to bring the rest of their family members from Cuba permanently but keep helping them economically to make their lives ''more comfortable'' and ''easier'' and to improve their original homes in Cuba. They do not want these relatives to lose access to health care, social security, and their island dwellings. Some even invite their parents to visit them for several months for a double purpose: to give them a break from the difficult conditions in Cuba and for parents to assist the migrants bringing up their children.

Marital Trends

Marital trends among Cuban migrants are of central importance in this study. I asked the research group if they married foreigners as a way to emigrate; if they emigrated alone, without a partner, to construct new life projects; or if they reunited with their partner and/or children in the destination country. I compared their behaviors with marriage rates in Cuba.

Marriage rates in Cuba have decreased and, at present, are at their lowest levels in five decades. In 1995, Cuban marriage rates were 6.4 per 1,000; in 2006, that fell to 5.0.20 Between 1990 and 2006, the median marriage age went up: for women, it increased by eight years, from twenty-four to thirty-two, whereas for men it increased by nine years, from twenty-seven to thirty-six years.21 The trend in cohabitation in Cuba is to live in consensual or common-law unions rather than legal marriages. Although most interviewees left Cuba

without a marital relation, by the time they were interviewed, fifty of the fifty-five lived as couples, including lesbians and gays. They reproduced the same tendency followed in Cuba. Also, the interviewees tended to live with Cuban partners, even those who at some point had established a stable relationship with a foreigner. This situation has to do more with identity than with demography, and it is something that must be dealt with in comparative studies and with the help of anthropology, history, and psychology. It also has to do with the gender relations prevailing in the new country of residence

Male émigrés living in the Dominican Republic acknowledged that the women there were extremely dependent on men, that they only wanted to get married to stop working and become housewives supported by their husbands, and that they valued men by their money and properties; they had ‘‘no conversation topics’’ and were ‘‘not resourceful in bed.’’ They preferred Cuban women with their extreme independence—although ‘‘sometimes they are too independent’’—their willingness to work, and their professional abilities to do so. ‘‘Cubans in general can talk about everything, and I longed for this,’’ added an engineer. On the other side, Cuban female migrants found native men in the Dominican Republic extremely machista, even violent. A woman lawyer said, ‘‘They want to keep their wives at home to raise children, keep everything tidy and let them play around with lovers.’’

Men and women living in Miami believed that it was easier to find Cuban partners either among members of that community or among Cubans visiting the city. It is much more difficult to find Cuban partners in U.S. cities outside South Florida. Cuban men and women interviewed in Canada arrived with their Cuban partners because Canadian migration regulations favor families. They considered it difficult to match with a Canadian in their home country, and they added that it was easier to arrive in Canada with a Canadian partner who they met in Cuba. Gays and lesbians living with Cuban partners related that they can live as couples, but they must be extremely careful so that their neighbors do not learn of their sexual preference. Indeed, lesbian couples are much more accepted in Havana than gay couples.

The interviewees used their marital status to adapt to their new country of residence. Some married citizens of the country to which they wanted to emigrate or legalized their marriage status with their common-law Cuban partner to comply with migration rules at the destination country. Three women divorced legally but stayed with their husbands to be considered single mothers so that their newborn children received services from social welfare. I am not able to calculate with precision the ages at which women and men in my sample married for the first time. However, they related having more than one conjugal union before and after emigrating, which coincides with multiple-marriage trends among Cubans. This behavior does not always suit the rules or values of the destination country. One man commented that, in the city where

he lived with his wife and her son, ‘‘I do not stress that previous to our present marital union my wife and I were divorced and I never mention that we are not legally married. We could be negatively judged and my stepson could be made fun of at his school.’’

Fertility

Cuba is at the end of the first stage of its demographic transition.22 The country simultaneously shows characteristics of an underdeveloped country and those of a developed one. Furthermore, the demographic transition is homogenously coming to an end in all regions of Cuba. In 2006, there was a decrease in population growth: –0.4 births for every thousand inhabitants, the lowest rate in Latin America. Other demographic indicators include a fertility rate of 1.39 children per woman, 0.67 daughters per woman, an infant mortality rate of 5.3 per thousand born alive, and 75.3 percent live in urban settings. In 2003, life expectancy for both sexes was 76.15 years. The sociologist and Cuban specialist Juan Carlos Alfonso stresses that fertility contraction during the past three decades has been the main cause of the aging of the population.23 During those years, Cuba’s fertility rate was lower than population replacement because, on average, there was less than one daughter born to each woman in her reproductive years. During the 1960s and 1970s, there were 250,000 births each year; in 2005, there were slightly more than 120,000, although there were 1 million more women in their fertile years. Alfonso considered that birth rates were low after 1978 because of a complex set of variables, among which were female employment, universal access to family planning since 1964, legal abortion since 1962 (at times used as a contraceptive), lack of housing, one-third of Cuban families being headed by women, and women emigrating during their reproductive years. Alfonso has long been advocating the need to approach demographic studies with a gender perspective.24 This research project does so.

More than half of the fifty-five migrants had no children when they were interviewed—fourteen of the twenty-five men and sixteen of the thirty women. The latter emigrated in their fertile years. They did not give birth in Cuba because they decided to emigrate first; only when they had all necessary conditions would they plan to have children. Women and men defined these conditions as having a stable partner, both partners having a job, owning a house or an apartment and at least one car, and being able to pay for one of their mothers’ plane ticket so she could share in taking care of the young child for a few months or even years. All the mothers looked forward to the children born in the destination country holding dual citizenship: the country of birth and Cuba. This would ‘‘anchor’’ the child and their parents to their new country of residence and, at the same time, allow them to regularly visit Cuba.

All of the interviewees—women and men alike—believed that they bene

fited from the family-planning programs in Cuba in that there is a ‘‘culture’’ of using contraception from an early age. Women consulted with doctors at polyclinics (i.e., local clinics that are the intermediate step between family doctors and hospitals) or hospitals and jointly decided which contraceptive methods were best for them. They usually check their intrauterine devices (IUDs) while visiting Cuba and even carry back with them additional IUDs and/or Cuban contraceptive pills. They acknowledged that, as a rule in couples, women are responsible for using contraceptives. When asked whether their husbands used condoms during intercourse, they answered no and added that, before they engaged with a stable partner, they asked men to wear condoms for fear of AIDS. Men answered the same way: they let their wives use contraceptive methods and they use condoms only in sexual relations outside their marital unions to prevent HIV. Women migrants in my sample did not contribute to fertility rates in Cuba, for they left the country in their fertile years. They also reduced Cuba’s population of potential future mothers because they took their daughters with them.

Another of the needed conditions to give birth to a child in the country of residence is being able to pay for education. The interviewees introduced this provision at the same level as the rest. They wanted their children to attend ‘‘good’’ schools, preferably private, in countries where they considered that public schooling was poor. They were willing to assign funds from their budgets for their children’s education even if they had less to eat. ‘‘It is a need that I inherited from my parents. They told me that it is something that you carry all your life with you.’’ All migrants in my study benefitted from universal and free education in Cuba and were able to surpass their parents’ educational levels.

Gender Roles in Keeping Cuban Traditions

I asked interviewees to name the Cuban ways of life that they practice in their countries of residence and to explain the distinctive roles of women and men in carrying them out. In the first place, they mentioned the relevance of education for their children—whether or not they had children at the time of the interview —and for themselves. One of the conditions for having children was being able to secure a good education for them from preschool to university. Interviewees were also concerned about the need to upgrade their present professional knowledge, such as in training programs to apply for job licenses, by revalidating their university diplomas, studying language, and enrolling in master’sdegree programs. But it is highly difficult for them to comply with all the requisites demanded in terms of money and language skills. Attaining a good education for their children has always been a goal for Cubans. It became true for all citizens since 1961 with the literacy campaign and the nationalization of private schools. Half the women and men in my sample are second-generation

professionals; at least one of their parents graduated from tertiary education after 1959. It is therefore understandable that men and women prioritize education as a Cuban tradition that they are willing to maintain.

They also talked about keeping family links with those relatives who stayed in Cuba and with those who emigrated. They stressed their need to be updated on family matters and to share in caring for the elderly. Those who have access to electronic means of communication at both ends find it easier to keep in touch. Flowing from these desires, they referred to using their native tongue at least at home if they are living in countries where Spanish is not an official language. This turns out to be very difficult, at least for their children, if they are living where there are no Spanish-speaking communities. They in no particular order referred to cooking Cuban food or eating at Cuban restaurants, listening and dancing to Cuban music, watching films and television shows produced on the island, decorating their homes with Cuban elements, and celebrating traditional feasts in a Cuban style (e.g., birthday parties; quinceaños celebrations; Mother's and Father's Days; Christmas; New Year's Eve; and the feast days of St. Lazarus, the Virgin of the Caridad del Cobre, and St. Barbara).

Men and women in this study distinguished at least three scenarios for keeping Cuban traditions and for being updated on what is happening in the island. First, women are the ones who reproduced Cuban traditions in the families abroad when they head them or are engaged in a stable marital relationship. However, I found men in the group who promoted these traditions even more than their Cuban spouses did. I also met Cuban women married to foreigners who reproduced the ethics of care practiced in Cuba; that is, the wife took care of her husband's mother. Second, interviewees mentioned the relevance of keeping in touch with Cuban friends to exchange on Cuban topics whether they lived in the same countries or different ones. Once more, the importance of electronic communications came up, as many interviewees used such media to keep in touch, even daily. The third scenario is the Internet. They accessed electronic media produced in Cuba or in those cities where Cuban émigrés reside; they downloaded Cuban films and music; and they visited blogs related to Cuban issues. I asked them whether they reproduced gender patterns common in Cuba in their daily lives and whether they thought about introducing them in their children's upbringing. Although men and women acknowledged behaving in machista ways consciously and unconsciously, they considered themselves less male oriented than their parents' generation. In relation to their children, those who live in countries with a machista culture confessed that it was very hard because at home they taught their children some of the gender codes brought from Cuba, and then they were trained in others completely different at the schools and among their classmates.

Cuban Development Strategies and Gender Relations

Cubans experienced increasing social mobility for first three decades after 1959 as a result of the Cuban conception of development that implied that economic transformations should provide material well-being to all and contribute to changing the ideological and cultural patterns of inequality and discrimination. Women were among the poorest Cubans and benefited from the very beginning by strategies implemented to change social relationships that conditioned poverty.25 The economy was organized in such a way that the state used the growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) to stimulate those social policies that promoted universal and free access to education, health, social security, nutrition, social welfare, culture, and sports, areas that the Cuban sociologist Mayra Espina has defined as ‘‘spaces of equality.’’26 In Cuba, the state is the main provider of these spaces, or venues, whereas private providers have a very low profile. Such venues initially fractured the cycle of inequalities in society and at home, including discrimination against women. Women benefited much more than men because these venues were feminized almost immediately (i.e., women incorporated themselves quickly in these previously ‘‘male’’ spaces), and in the past women had less access to them than men did.

Another feature of the development strategies benefiting women was that there was no need to wait to accomplish economic growth as a precondition to advance women in society. Therefore, actions were taken from the beginning to implement policies specifically geared at women’s equality; these included economic and legal regulations, social policies, and procedures mainly of an ideological nature to counter gender discrimination. A purely economic notion would have postponed these decisions, thereby reducing the importance of women’s participation and delaying women’s possibilities to become agents of change.

The policies of full employment regarded differentiated treatment for women; as women were more disadvantaged than men, the policies aimed to end this situation by allowing women’s salaries to contribute to their independence as income earners. Nonetheless, early in the 1970s, the Second Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women acknowledged that the instability of the female labor force was due to, above all, the pressure of household chores, the nonexistence in many labor centers of specific work conditions for women, and the lack of economic incentives.27 Among the most successful actions to confront the latter problem in the 1970s was the encouragement to qualify and retrain female workers to increase the number of women who became professionals and technicians. However, the burden of work at home continued to be a great difficulty. Work conditions fit for women were set up slowly and according to the ideas of the men who designed them, not to the real needs of women.

This demand was progressively satisfied when women started to have access to senior leading positions at their jobs toward the mid-1980s.

The feminization of education has had such an influence that, since 1978, working women had higher educational levels than working men.28 The 1961 literacy campaign, the nationalization of the education system from the primary level to the university in the same year, and campaigns for working adults to attain sixth and ninth grades in 1963 allowed women to rise above their low education status. As women who took up jobs continued their education, they qualified to be promoted for more complex and better-paid occupations. Preschool child care began in 1961, when the first public day-care centers with schools to train staff were established. Universal and free access to education guaranteed children the right to enroll from primary school to university. Children in primary schools (on the doble turno system) were provided with free lunch, and teachers' aides looked after them during the afternoon sessions. Furthermore, students at all levels of education were provided with boardinghouses if they required them. Thus, working women relied on the fact that their children regularly attended school during the week and were assured that they did not have to save part of their salaries for their children's education. This allowed them to remain and advance in their jobs.

Before 1959, Cuba lacked a state-controlled social security system. During the 1960s and the 1970s, legislation was passed to make social security and social welfare universal, thus benefiting working women and single mothers. Working women had guaranteed retirement, sick benefits, and pensions upon the death of their spouse. The husbands' pensions also contributed to the family budget. The Maternity Law included in the Labor Code in 1974 regulated maternity leave. Single mothers received small pensions that contributed to raising their children until they began to work. This legislation stipulated that fathers must pay child support to their children if divorced or separated from their spouses or partners, and although this definition was poorly implemented, mothers could legally claim the benefit. Policies of full employment in the public service guaranteed equal pay for equal work.

These processes coincided with the massive incorporation of women into the workforce.29 Women became salaried workers under the same legal conditions as men, though in practice statistical data showed that they earned less than men. Actually, women held jobs with lower salaries; they were absent more because they had to take care of the children, the sick, and the elderly; and they had higher morbidity rates than men. By the end of the 1980s, circumstances seemed to foretell that in the near future, Cuban woman could access leadership positions in the workplace. In the first instance, women workers had high levels of education, which allowed them to perform complex jobs. Second, they were working in all sectors of the economy, even in those traditionally considered nonfemale sectors. Third, women were engaged in all oc

cupational categories, including leadership positions and accounted for more than half of professionals and technical workers. Finally, and paradoxically, although women struggled to divide their work time between their jobs and a second shift at home, doing so trained them in decision making.

An outstanding trait of Cuban development strategies from 1959 to 1989 was how Cuba envisaged using social policy to solve the problems of poverty by promoting new social projects that led to innovative and rational patterns of consumption for all.30 This notion led to a distribution and consumption system based on an egalitarian and homogenized conception capable of satisfying a set of the population's basic needs. However, this conception did not consider two indispensable monetary requirements to comply with the Marxist axiom ''from each according to his/her capacity, to each according to his/her work.'' First, it did not consider that people have different needs and tend to satisfy them in different ways. Second, while distributing goods homogenously, it treated the more disadvantaged sectors of the population in similar ways as the rest of society, disregarding that they required different approaches. Nonetheless, this had a positive effect on women.

As women embodied the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, the homogenized distribution of goods benefited them because they accessed consumer goods that they had not had access to before. In a familial context, this meant improvement in nutrition, toiletries, clothing, and footwear, and even regarding the heretofore-insufficient domestic appliances used by them and their families. Following the patriarchal tradition, women were the homemakers who managed the commodities distributed in an egalitarian manner through the state's centralized decision making, thus creating new patterns of consumption. Whether as sole salary earners who headed their homes and supplied the main revenues for them, as providers additional to the man as the head of the home, or as housewives who did not participate in paid work, they dealt on a daily basis with the results of social policies regarding consumption. This created decision-making capacities in them, especially in working women who had a second shift at home. This training process took place in a social context that promoted women in the public and private life of the country. Women also participated as agents of change in transforming consumption as part of the struggle against poverty. These changes show the importance of understanding the functions of Cuban women in the struggle against poverty and inequality and toward their empowerment.31

During the first three decades of the Cuban Revolution, women led and encouraged changes in gender relationships. They worked harder than men to surmount sexist inequalities because they started dismantling the cultural patterns of patriarchal ideology existing in both society and themselves. They did not stop there because they also built new, nonsexist ideological patterns. In this endeavor, they advanced more than men did. Contrary to what has hap

pened in other countries—including the United States—where women have been ‘‘revolutionized’’ (i.e., have changed their patriarchal attitudes under the influence of various women’s movements but global structures in those same countries have not changed accordingly) but society has stagnated regarding gender relationships, in Cuba, society changed; and women changed because they participated in the social transformation from the very beginning.32

On the threshold of the 1990s, the upward social mobility that Cubans evidenced during the first thirty years of the revolution stopped for at least three reasons: the younger generation could not experience the dramatic increase in living standards their parents had experienced; development strategies of the early 1970s and the 1980s proved ineffective in many aspects and were being rectified; and finally, Cuba entered an overall crisis due to the disappearance of its main trading partners—the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist countries—the strengthening of the U.S. blockade, and the inability to finish its process of rectification.33 Women suffered the most from this downturn, mainly working women burdened by the second shift. In 1994, Cuba started to ‘‘come out’’ of the crisis, and by 2004, GDP reached 99 percent of that of 1989 in terms of 1997 constant prices.34 In 2007, the economy grew 7.5 percent, showing its gradual consolidation based on a 42.5 percent increase in GDP since 2004.35

During the economic readjustment process, the legal and political framework that promoted women’s incorporation and permanence in the labor force stayed and adjusted to the new characteristics of the Cuban situation. Women remained in the labor force during the years of crisis and readjustment, and their participation in labor categories did not deteriorate. The proportion of women among workers had reached 39 percent in 1989, just before the economic crisis began.36 Until that moment, women’s participation had grown steadily, but starting with the crisis, this process stopped and even led to a small decrease.37 The proportion of technicians among women workers increased in the years coming out of the crisis—39 percent in 1996 and 45 percent in 2008—whereas among all working men, the rate grew only from 13 percent to 18 percent.38 Women’s predominance among technical workers is sustained by the fact that, since 1978, they have higher educational levels than working men considered as a whole.39 But women still have the lowest representation regarding senior administrative positions: of all working women, 6 percent were senior administrators in 1996 and 2008. Men’s participation in this category grew slightly: 8 percent of all working men in 1996 and 9 percent in 2008. Participation by gender among senior administrators showed stable rates in 1996 and 2008: 71 percent and 70 percent for men and 29 percent and 30 percent for women, respectively. The latter are present in nontraditionally women-occupied sectors—steel manufacture, the sugar industry, science, telecommunications, and computers—and in traditional ones. Although nominal salaries started increasing in 2005, they have not overcome their deterioration because

consumer prices are still high. This leads to disadvantages among citizens, mainly those dependent on social security and social care pensions.

Part of the labor force that on the threshold of the crisis accounted for 95 percent of the public sector reoriented toward the private, joint venture, and cooperative sectors, and to those state enterprises that paid workers in hard currency. At present, 75 percent of all workers are part of the public sector. Those Cubans whose salaries are paid in Cuban pesos and the population dependent on social security pensions and social care were, thus, most affected in their incomes when the crisis started. On the basis of the scarce information available on incomes by gender, as well as several case studies dealing with this topic, women have been more affected than men in the process of decreased real salary values and pensions. They represent only one-tenth of self-employed citizens in the private sector (11.9 percent), one-third of personnel in joint ventures (35.4 percent), and the majority of the beneficiaries of social care.40

Over the past 20 years, an increasing number of Cubans have had access to hard currency: people receiving remittances from family members; the self-employed who charge for their work in hard currency (men constitute 88 percent of this category); workers in tourism and joint ventures, as well as in state enterprises, where hard currency is the medium of exchange; and small landowners, who are among the most affluent citizens and can convert their peso incomes to hard currency (men are the absolute majority here). According to official calculations, and despite the fact that no data are available on gender distribution, 50 percent of all citizens in 1997 had access to hard currency, which had increased to 62 percent by 2001.41 Overall, remittances are the basic source for individual incomes in hard currency; and case studies point out that women account for the majority in terms of managing these incomes. It is worth studying from a gender perspective this process of receiving and administering remittances.

The crisis and reform processes of the 1990s paralyzed the trend of extending social equality among all Cubans and of eliminating the conditions that generated social disadvantages. An extremely complex situation appeared that demanded rethinking those actions that the state had implemented since the beginning of the decade. Although it maintained social policies, the state allowed incomes and consumption to deteriorate heavily.42 Mayra Espina has argued that the diminishing of real salary values weakened the financing of families. In addition, when some goods that were part of the subsidized family basket started being sold in hard currency, broad sectors of the population had limited access to them. Although this situation especially affected women and men who received public-sector salaries, it had greater impact on female-led households; in 2002, such households represented 32 percent of all families.43 Women had to devise strategies to confront limited consumption while performing the second shift. For instance, to make ends meet, women workers

started taking on other paid employment to supplement their regular salaries; multiple employment was not practiced before the crisis.

Weakening incomes from social security and social care affected families with pensioners. Pensioners' contributions to the family budget shrank precisely when pensioners needed additional care that their incomes could not cover. This was a new situation from the first years of women's incorporation in the workforce until the crisis of the 1990s. The mothers of women workers were usually housewives and took care of their grandchildren. As they aged, their daughters began to take care of them—without abandoning their jobs—and had to create strategies to meet their additional duties, known in Cuba as the ethics of care. Coincidentally, this new situation affected women more than men. Women workers had to ask for unpaid work leaves or simply had to abandon their jobs to look after elderly family members on their side or their husband's side of the family.

Poverty levels rose. In 1985, the poor represented 6 percent of the population; ten years later, they constituted 15 percent; and at present, 20 percent of the urban population falls into this category.44 It is difficult to describe poverty levels by gender, as no national statistics measure population groups according to income. Recent case studies indicate that differences in income range from 1 to 24 in the extreme. This index is very different from the one calculated in 1978 that showed differences in income from 1 to 4.45 The last decade of the twentieth century in Cuba was a turning point in the development strategies that were initiated during the first thirty years of the revolution to improve the population's quality of life and to change gender relations. The readjustment policies to surpass the crisis introduced inequalities that all members of society strongly felt. One of the outcomes was an increase in emigration flows.

Conclusion

The economic, political, ideological, and social aspects of the Cuba's social structures that have characterized its socialist experiment influenced the lives of all Cubans. They have affected the lives of those who decided to emigrate and the lives of those who decided to stay. Therefore, social sciences researchers must understand the individual motivations that led the former to leave the country, linked to the understanding of the social structures that influenced all society. Cuban social structures of the past fifty years are part of a socialist experiment, brought about by the 1959 revolution, which has not been completed primarily because of the U.S. hostility toward Cuba and also internal mistakes committed in this enormous transformation process. On the threshold of the crisis of the 1990s derived from the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Cuba's main foreign economic counterpart, the island had to interrupt its rectification process when the U.S. government intensified its blockade of the

island. Cubans were plunged into the crisis and have not yet been able to come out of it, and they have suffered nineteen years of enormous material shortages, a duration that is comparable to a generation that is now entering adulthood.

In the past twenty years, the differences between Cuban migrants and those from Caribbean and Latin American countries must be found in Cuban economic, social, political, and ideological structures. Three of the distinctions to be considered among Cuban migrants in the past twenty years in relation to the ones coming from Latin American and Caribbean countries are that many of them are highly qualified women and men, with an advanced gender ideology and an ability to act independently. Cuban migrants who have left Cuba since the 1990s did so not only for economic reasons—trying to find better living standards than those they had in Cuba—but also because of the skyrocketing social mobility experienced in Cuba in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that included material and spiritual conditions and was halted by the crisis of the 1990s. They desired to continue moving upward in their ways of life, and considering that they could not accomplish this goal in the short or medium term in Cuba, they decided to fulfill these dreams individually in other countries. A gender perspective will contribute to unraveling these unanswered questions.

NOTAS

1. See Marta Núñez Sarmiento, ‘‘Género y migraciones externas en Cuba entre 1985 y 2005: Resultados preliminares,’’ Novedades de Población 3, no. 6 (2007): 45–70.
2. Calculated by the author on the basis of Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas (ONE), Anuario demográfico de Cuba 2008 (Havana: República de Cuba), chart 4.2, http://www.one.cu/publicaciones/cepde/anuarioe2008/10eanuarioemigraciones.pdf.
3. UN Population Fund, State of the World Population 2006: A Passage to Hope—Women and International Migration (New York: UN Population Fund, 2006), 23.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. CD 25th International Population Conference (Tours, France, 2005), http://www.census.gov/population/cen2000/stp159/stp159-cuba.pdf.
7. Antonio Aja, ‘‘Cuba: País de emigración a inicios del siglo XXI,’’ Anuario CEMI (2006): 152.
8. Susan Eckstein, The Immigrant Divide (New York: Routledge, 2009): 12–13; Ileana Sorolla, ‘‘The Cubans in the U.S. and Their Special Status: 50 Years After’’ (paper presented at the conference ‘‘Measure of a Revolution,’’ Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, May 7–9, 2009).
9. Eckstein, Immigrant Divide, 12.
10. Gretel Marrero Peniche, ‘‘Migraciones internacionales en Cuba y su conexión con la migración externa en el mundo’’ (Havana: University of Havana, 2008), 114–15; Elpidia Moreno, ‘‘Las relaciones de género en la feminización de las migraciones internacionales en Cuba’’ (master’s thesis, Center for Study of International Migrations, University of Havana, 2009).
11. Sussie Jollie and Hazel Reeves, Gender and Migration: General Report (Sussex, U.K.:

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2005), qtd. in Marrero Peniche, ‘‘Migraciones internacionales,’’ 93–94.

12. I could not find information that would allow me to compare the answers of my respondents with gender patterns of remittances in Cuba, worldwide, or according to regions.
13. See Eckstein, Immigrant Divide, 353–90; Lorena Barbería, ‘‘Remesas a Cuba: Una evaluación de las medidas políticas gubernamentales de Cuba y Estados Unidos,’’ in La economía
cubana a principios del siglo XXI, ed. J. Dominguez, O. Everleny, and L. Barbeia (Cambridge, MA:
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, Harvard University, and El Colegio de México, 2007), 391–450.
14. Yoko Niimi and Caglar Ozden, ‘‘Migration and Remittances in Latin America: Patterns and Determinants,’’ in Remittances and Development: Lessons from Latin America, ed. Pablo Fajnzylber and J. Humberto Lopez (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2008), 78.
15. Ibid., 77–78.
16. Mayra Espina Prieto, Políticas de atención a la pobreza y la desigualdad: Examinando el rol del estado en la experiencia cubana (Havana: Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales [CLACSO] and Comparative Research Program on Poverty [CROP], 2008), 174.
17. Ibid.
18. Luisa Iñíguez et al., La exploración de las desigualdades espacio-familias en la Ciudad de La Habana (Havana: Centro de Estudios de Salud y Bienestar Humano, 2001), qtd. in Espina Prieto, Políticas de atención, 174.
19. Brookings Institution, U.S. Policy toward Cuba in Transition (Miami: University of Miami, 2008).
20. Sonia Catasús, ‘‘La nupcialidad en Cuba: Características y evolución en el contexto de la conclusión de su transición demográfica,’’
http//:ivssp2005.princeton.edu/sessionviewer.aspx.sub
mission=50855; ONE, Anuario demográfico 2006 (Havana: República de Cuba, 2007).
21. Ibid.
22. Catasús, ‘‘La nupcialidad en Cuba’’; ONE, Anuario demográfico 2006, 16, 46, 18, 119.
23. Orfilio Peláez, ‘‘Disminución acelerada de la natalidad y envejecimiento poblacional’’ (interview with Juan Carlos Alfonso Fraga, director of the Centro de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo [CEPDE], ONE), Granma, October 30, 2006.
24. See Centro de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo (CEPDE), ONE, and UN Development Programme (UNDP), Información para estudios en población y desarrollo con enfoque de género
200, La Habana; see also quotes by Juan Carlos Alfonso in Marta Núñez-Sarmiento, ‘‘Gender Studies in Cuba: Methodological Approaches, 1974–2007,’’ in Global Gender Research: Transnational Perspectives, ed. C. Bose and M. Kim (London: Routledge, 2009), 202, 204.
25. See Marta Núñez-Sarmiento, ‘‘Cuban Alternatives to Market Driven Economies: A Gendered Case Study on Women’s Employment’’ (paper presented at the UNDP colloquium ‘‘Assessing and Rebuilding Progress through Women’s Knowledge,’’ Rabat, Morocco, October 2008).
26. Mayra Prieto Espina, ‘‘Efectos sociales del reajuste económico: Igualdad, desigualdad y procesos de complejización en la sociedad cubana,’’ in Dominguez et al., La economía cubana, 247; Espina Prieto, Políticas de atención, 144–45.
27. Memoria II Congreso Nacional de la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Havana: Editorial Orbe and Instituto del Libro, 1975), 118, 119.
28. In 1978, of all working women, 5 percent had concluded higher education and 3.5 percent of working men had university degrees; 23 percent of all working women had finished twelve

grades, compared to 13 percent of all working men. In 1986, 12 percent of working women were university graduates; in that same year, 7 percent of working men had university degrees. Of all working women, 35 percent had concluded twelve grades, in comparison with 27 percent of working men. Calculations made by the author from ONE, Anuario estadístico 1988 (Havana: ONE, 1988), chart 4.16.

29. Women in the workforce increased steadily between 1959 (13 percent) and 1970 (19 percent). Between 1970 and 1989 the increase was greater than previously: 19 percent in 1970 and 38.7 percent in 1989. Absolute numbers also grew; see Marta Núñez Sarmiento, ''La mujer cubana y el empleo en la Revolución,'' in Equipo internacional de investigaciones comparadas sobre la mujer (Havana: Editora de la Mujer, 1988), 20; Marta Núñez Sarmiento, ''Cuban Strategies for Women's Employment in the 1990's: A Case Study of Professional Women,'' Socialism and Democracy 15, no. 1 (2001): 43–44.
30. Espina Prieto, ''Efectos sociales del reajuste económico,'' 245.
31. D. Elson, S. Chacko, and D. Jain, ''Interrogating and Rebuilding Progress through Feminist Knowledge'' (notes for the UNDP project Assessing and Rebuilding Progress through Women's Knowledge, 2008), 6.
32. See Arlie Hochschild, with Anne Machung, The Second Shift (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 12.
33. The ''Rectification of Mistakes and Negative Trends'' process began at the end of 1984. It sought not to change development strategies but to mend its failures, caused mainly by mimicking
Soviet models. Based on Cuban experiences and conditions, the process aimed to upgrade the socialist model by learning from the experiences of socialist and nonsocialist societies worldwide.
34. Omar Everleny Pérez, ''La situación actual de la economía cubana y sus retos futuros,'' in Dominguez et al., La economía cubana, 71.
35. José Luis Rodríguez, ''Report on 2007 Economic Results by the Minister of Economy and Planning to the National Assembly of the Popular Power,'' Granma, December 29, 2007, 6.
36. ONE, Anuario estadístico de Cuba 1996 (Havana: ONE, 1996).
37. Between 1996 and 2008, women's participation in the total labor force stayed at 38 percent; in the same period, men's participation remained at 62 percent. See ONE and CEPDE, Perfil estadístico de la mujer cubana en el umbral del siglo XXI (Havana: ONE-CEPDE, 1999), 144; ONE, Anuario estadístico de Cuba 2008, chart 7.9, http://www.one.cu/aec2008/esp/08e7e9.htm.
38. In 1996, women represented 64 percent of all technicians, whereas men accounted for 36 percent. In 2008, women's numbers diminished in this category but they kept their 60 percent majority. Men increased their participation to 40 percent. Taken from ONE and CEPDE, Perfil estadístico; ONE, Anuario estadístico 2008, chart 7.9.
39. For all female workers, the rate of blue-collar workers diminished from 22 percent (1996) to 16 percent (2008). The rate of blue-collar workers among male workers also decreased from 51 percent (1996) to 49 percent (2008).
40. Instituto de Investigaciones y Estudios del Trabajo, La presencia femenina en el mercado de trabajo, en las diferentes categorías ocupacionales y sectores de la economía, la segregación horizontal y vertical, los salarios e ingresos en general (Havana: Instituto de Investigaciones y Estudios del Trabajo, 2007).
41. Pérez, ''La situación actual,'' 79.
42. Espina Prieto, ''Efectos sociales del reajuste económico,'' 251–52.
43. ONE, Censo de población y viviendas de la República de Cuba, 2002 (Havana: ONE, 2002).
44. Espina Prieto, ''Efectos sociales del reajuste económico,'' 255.
45. Ibid., 254.