

Premio Elsa Chaney 2001  
Género, sexualidad e identidad en América Latina

Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres

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## PRESENTACIÓN

El Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres ((Inmujeres), organismo público descentralizado del gobierno de México, se congratula en respaldar esta valiosa iniciativa de la Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas de la Asociación de Estudios Latinoamericanos (LASA).

Una de las tareas fundamentales del Inmujeres es impulsar la transformación de las instituciones y la cultura, con miras a lograr la equidad de género y la igualdad de trato y oportunidades para hombres y mujeres. La generación y difusión de conocimientos que apresuren y consoliden dicha transformación es una de las estrategias que hemos adoptado para alcanzar tales objetivos.

Coincidimos con LASA en que es importante premiar el esfuerzo de quienes se dedican con todo rigor a conocer y a difundir la problemática de la mujer en América Latina, en el marco de los estudios de género.

Por ello, nos sumamos con todo entusiasmo a los trabajos de publicación de los textos ganadores del Premio Elsa Chaney 2001. Extendemos una felicitación tanto a las personas e instituciones organizadoras, como a las ganadoras de este importante premio.

Lic. Patricia Espinosa Torres  
*Presidenta del Inmujeres*

Las compiladoras agradecemos a todas y todos los que hicieron posible la edición de este volumen.

- A las autoridades actuales y anteriores de UNIFEM, con sede en Nueva York, por su apoyo financiero a este proyecto de la Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas, que ha tenido tanta difusión entre nuestros miembros. Especialmente, agradecemos a Ana María Brasileiro, Liliana de Pauli y María Jose Alcalá, quienes en sus respectivos periodos hicieron posible la creación y la continuidad del concurso, así como la publicación de los trabajos premiados.
- Queremos expresar nuestro reconocimiento al Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (México), a su Presidenta, Lic. Patricia Espinosa Torres; a su Secretaria Ejecutiva, Lic. Margarita Ortega; y a la Mtra. Teresa Hevia, por la confianza en nuestro trabajo y el apoyo para la publicación.
- Nuestro agradecimiento para las coordinadoras de la Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas, Graciela Dimarco y Karin Weyland, y en especial a la Tesorera de la Sección, Claudia Andre.
- A los miembros del jurado para el Premio Elsa Chaney: Graciela Dimarco, María Mulero-Díaz, Viviana Rangil, Ilja Luciak y Sara Poggio.
- A las autoras, Julie Shayne, Florence Babb, Adriana Piscitelli, Silvia Tanderciarz, Elena Azaola y Kelly Ready.
- A todos y todas las concursantes por la calidad de los trabajos presentados.
- A las autoridades de LASA por su respaldo institucional, especialmente a Sandy Klinzing, por su incomparable apoyo a lo largo de muchos años.

Sara Poggio y Beatriz Schmucler  
México, marzo de 2003

## Introducción

Este es el tercer volumen publicado por la Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas de la *Latin American Studies Association* (LASA) y reúne los premios Elsa Chaney 2001<sup>1</sup>, otorgados por la Sección y financiados por UNIFEM, con sede en Nueva York.

El principal objetivo de la Sección, al otorgar el premio, fue el de promover entre los miembros los trabajos de investigación más recientes sobre género y estudios feministas y de esta manera contribuir a la divulgación de los mismos.

La Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas de LASA está dedicada a promover redes de diálogo y debate sobre asuntos relacionados con las mujeres y el género en América Latina y el Caribe, y las latinas en Estados Unidos, incorporando diferentes aspectos de los estudios feministas en las ciencias sociales y en las humanidades. Esta sección tiene como antecedentes el grupo WOCLA (Women's Caucus of Latin Americanists) que se creó en LASA, en 1972, por un grupo de feministas de la costa este y oeste de los Estados Unidos y que se disolvió con la creación, en 1982, de la Task Force on Women in Latin American Studies (Grupo de Trabajo sobre Mujeres en América Latina), el único grupo de LASA que elegía a sus propias coordinadoras y que siempre ha incluido a mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe en puestos directivos. El 15 de mayo de 1997 se propuso un cambio para reestructurar los grupos de trabajo, los cuales se transformaron en secciones que se ocupaban activamente en proponer temas, paneles y talleres para los congresos. Al transformarse en Secciones, los miembros aportan una cuota, lo que da mayores posibilidades al trabajo

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<sup>1</sup> En sus inicios, el premio de género creado por la Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas adoptó el nombre Elsa Chaney para el primer año y el nombre Helen Safa para el segundo, pues la intención era rotar el nombre entre todas las miembros co-fundadoras de la Sección y pilares de los estudios de Género en América Latina. En el año 2001, después de la muerte de Elsa Chaney, la Sección decidió que, a modo de homenaje a quien tanto trabajó por la disciplina y la Sección, el premio adoptaría para siempre su nombre.

de las mismas, derecho a becas de viaje, invitación a conferencistas y organización de encuentros. Como resultado de este proceso, la *Task Force on Women in Latin American Study* se transformó en *Gender and Feminist Studies Section* (Sección de Género y Estudios Feministas), con una mayor influencia formal en la programación de LASA. La Sección, además, colabora con los investigadores, estudiantes y líderes de organizaciones sociales o de instituciones vinculadas con los temas de género en la región. La institucionalización del premio Elsa Chaney: *Gender Award*, tuvo muy buen recibimiento por parte de los miembros de la Sección, que se manifiesta en el continuo aporte de trabajos de calidad en los concursos realizados. Ese mismo interés, compartido por todas las integrantes, nos dio el aliento necesario para seguir trabajando en la publicación de este volumen.

El tribunal de selección estuvo conformado por Graciela Dimarco (Universidad de San Martín, Argentina), María Mulero-Díaz (Universidad de Puerto Rico-Magayez), Viviana Rangil (Skidmore College), Ilija Luciak (Virginia Polytechnic Institute) y Sara Poggio (Maryland University, Baltimore County).

El tribunal seleccionó dos primeros premios y dos segundos premios:

Julie Shayne, con "Unconscious Feminist Consciousness: The politics of Gender in Post Insurrection Cuba (1959-1999)", y Florence Babb, con "Out in Nicaragua: Local and Transnational Desires after the Revolution", recibieron el primer premio.

Adriana Piscitelli, con "Visões Imperiais: Gênero e Sexualidade no Contexto do Turismo Sexual Internacional em Fortaleza", y Silvia Tanderciarz con "Writing for Distinction? A Reading of Cortázar's Final Short Story 'Diario para un cuento'", obtuvieron el segundo premio.

Ambas categorías, recibieron un estímulo financiero.

En el momento de comenzar la publicación de esta colección, y después de consultar a colegas de la actual dirección ejecutiva de LASA, decidimos incluir los trabajos que quedaron en tercer y cuarto lugar, por su excelente calidad académica, a pesar de que no fueron premiados. De esta manera, Kelly Ready y Elena Azaola forman parte del presente volumen con "Between Local Constituencies and Transnational Funding: Situating Salvadoran Feminism" y "Mujer y Justicia penal en México", respectivamente.

El conjunto de trabajos reunidos en esta edición es una muestra del alcance y diversidad de los estudios de género en América Latina. En este ejemplar, los trabajos destacan las relaciones entre el momento histórico-político de los países latinoamericanos y los procesos de formación en la identidad de género, vinculados con los movimientos sociales de mujeres y su diferenciación de otros movimientos populares; asimismo, señalan las relaciones de subordinación que se establecen en el plano de la sexualidad.

Tanderciarz devela cómo el narrador describe la sociedad peronista argentina como un mundo en donde quedan atrapados tanto los personajes masculinos como los femeninos. Sin embargo, en el relato son los hombres quienes pueden consumir a las mujeres como mercadería y apropiarse de la mercadería que las mujeres obtienen, sometiéndose y entregándose, o traicionando y entregando a otras mujeres: los hombres se manifiestan como viajeros, marineros o traductores; trascienden la clase social, las ciudades y los pueblos. Las mujeres son invisibles y desde ese lugar su desaparición parece natural, no merecen el discurso ni la denuncia. Los lazos entre hombres configuran esa complicidad silenciosa. Cortázar denuncia una cultura política que durante el peronismo se posibilitó por la existencia de una clase obrera que tuvo las facilidades económicas de una posguerra que no vivió de cerca. Y como relator traductor de relaciones interpersonales sabe que, junto con una cultura consumista, también se instaló la posibilidad de que una mujer, "cabecita negra" y "lumpen", pudiera "visibilizarse" durante el peronismo como clase social, pero no como mujer.

El mundo de las prisiones en México, que nos describe Elena Azaola (no diferente de otras prisiones en distintas partes del mundo), también invisibiliza a las mujeres. Son las marginadas de los marginados y, si bien su número es proporcionalmente menor al de los hombres, la sociedad es mucho menos tolerante frente al delito de las mujeres. El doble estándar existente al juzgar a las mujeres es muy claro en este aspecto. Abogados y miembros del sistema judicial tienden a ser más duros en sus evaluaciones; las mujeres cumplen penas más largas que los hombres por delitos similares. No sólo en el ámbito de la sociedad global hay un doble estándar, las familias también tienen patrones de conducta diferentes hacia los miembros de la familia recluidos en prisión: las mujeres reciben menos visitas, menos apoyo que los hombres en situaciones similares. Muchas mujeres presas son olvidadas por sus familias. Un aspecto que se destaca en el trabajo de Azaola son las diferencias de género que existen en la forma de expresar angustia y depresión entre las y los reclusos. Las instituciones carcelarias tienden a reprimir más la depresión y el estado de autocuestionamiento, que es más común en las mujeres. En general, los hombres encarcelados, cuando expresan sus emociones, lo hacen en forma violenta. No sólo el delito, sino también las consecuencias emocionales que acompañan la sentencia, la expresión del dolor, la rabia y la violencia, son acalladas cuando los médicos "prescriben" más tranquilizantes a las mujeres reclusas que a los hombres. De esta manera, las marginadas (numéricamente menos que los hombres) son silenciadas, olvidadas y por lo tanto invisibles a los ojos de la sociedad.

Adriana Piscitelli, en "Visões Imperiais: Gênero e Sexualidade no Contexto do Turismo Sexual Internacional, em Fortaleza", explora la naturaleza de las intersecciones entre género, sexualidad, nacionalidad, clase y color en las relaciones que los turistas extranjeros establecen con mujeres prostitutas de clases bajas que buscan una forma de salida a la pobreza.

En las relaciones con "turistas sexuales" que viajan a Brasil y a otros lugares del Caribe y América del Sur en busca

de relaciones de sexo heterosexual, la identidad de estas mujeres de clase baja, marginales y prostitutas, se deconstruye y construye en la visión de la industria del turismo internacional, que las vende como criaturas sexualmente insaciables. Esta definición está más relacionada con la fantasía de los compradores de *tours* que con la realidad de las mujeres disponibles en la zona turística. Así son percibidas por los turistas extranjeros que establecen con ellas relaciones de romance-servicio sexual, en donde no faltan lágrimas, cartas, correos electrónicos y promesas. Los estereotipos que definen a la mujer brasileña a los ojos del turista, se extienden al país. El carácter amistoso, agradable y simpático atribuido a las mujeres es considerado propio de los brasileños. Lo interesante es ver que esos estereotipos positivos tienen su contrapartida en los correspondientes negativos: negligencia, holgazanería, falta de carácter. Dichas ambivalencias permean la sexualización de la que es objeto el país en su totalidad. Agrega Piscitelli que, en el discurso colonial, los estereotipos son la principal estrategia para otorgar carácter fijo al otro. También es común relacionar clima (cálido) con sensualidad, y así, Brasil, asociado con clima caluroso (caliente), es de una sexualidad exuberante y femenina que se vincula con un elevado grado de prostitución (en palabras de un entrevistado-turista extranjero).

De este modo, las relaciones entre países y nacionalidades son atravesadas por el género en la medida que, en las conceptualizaciones de los extranjeros turistas, las naciones europeas aparecen masculinizadas, vinculadas con una racionalidad objetiva y una frialdad opuesta a la calidez y apertura del Brasil (feminizado), habitado por un pueblo receptivo y cariñoso. En ese contexto, las mujeres europeas (modelo con el que son comparadas las brasileñas) aparecen frías, exitosas, egoístas e independientes. Las brasileñas, por el contrario, son definidas como más atentas y cariñosas con los hombres, expresando sus sentimientos de una manera especial con su cuerpo. Esta característica tiene doble significado: por un lado, motiva el turismo sexual y, por el otro, inferioriza a las mujeres.

En El Salvador, dentro del movimiento revolucionario, las mujeres debieron luchar para terminar con su invisibilidad. Según Kelly, este trabajo analiza el movimiento de mujeres salvadoreñas "Las Dignas", que, como otros movimientos de mujeres en Latinoamérica, comenzaron a desarrollar su autonomía respecto al partido de izquierda del cual formaban parte. "Las Dignas", al igual que otros movimientos de mujeres en El Salvador, consolidaron sus propias organizaciones antes de terminar la guerra. "Las Dignas" se fundaron en 1990 e iniciaron su lucha dentro del partido casi de manera inmediata. En el periodo que se firmaron los acuerdos de paz, el Frente de Liberación Nacional promovió dichas acciones para legalizar su organización lo más pronto posible; sin embargo, "Las Dignas" ya habían iniciado su lucha dentro de la Resistencia Nacional.

La autora plantea que la terminación de la guerra fría y el comienzo de la transición hacia la democracia les permitió a "Las Dignas" visualizar objetivos propios y obtener financiamiento internacional. Hay que considerar que ya habían transcurrido las reuniones internacionales de mujeres dentro del marco de las Naciones Unidas, en las décadas de 1970 y 1980, que éstas ya habían impactado en la cooperación internacional y que existían ONG internacionales de mujeres que estaban apoyando a los grupos de mujeres nacionales en la obtención de financiamiento.

El partido de izquierda en El Salvador constituyó la organización dentro de la cual las mujeres pudieron investigar su propia subordinación de género y salir a la legalidad a luchar por proyectos de desarrollo para ellas mismas con total legitimidad. Además, este proceso les permitió resolver necesidades de sobrevivencia e ir creando una identidad común que comenzó a ser visualizada como una identidad diferenciada de género, al darse cuenta de sus necesidades específicas respecto de las de sus compañeros de lucha en la izquierda. Pero la resistencia de sus compañeros para reconocer esas necesidades les hizo sentir el peso de su invisibilidad dentro de la Resistencia y su subordinación de género.

La identidad diferenciada que fueron construyendo les permitió organizar el movimiento de Mujeres 94, una campaña de mujeres que tuvo una plataforma propia, con sus propios líderes, y que les permitió obtener candidaturas municipales y afianzar una ciudadanía femenina.

Tengamos en cuenta que en la década de 1980 ya había un movimiento organizado en América Latina, donde grupos de mujeres en todos los países ya estaba reconociendo su subordinación en la esfera privada y su invisibilidad en los partidos y organizaciones populares; y donde dichos movimientos ya habían establecido redes para luchar por sus intereses y habían empezado a tener un impacto en las agencias internacionales. Mujeres latinoamericanas establecían objetivos autónomos y se diferenciaban de los grupos de izquierda donde se habían originado y donde habían vivido décadas de invisibilidad.

Tal es el caso que describe Shayne en su capítulo sobre la conciencia feminista y la organización de mujeres surgida de la revolución cubana. A pesar del triunfo de la revolución cubana y el intento por terminar con las diferencias entre hombres y mujeres respecto al acceso a los recursos económicos y sociales, el movimiento de mujeres no tuvo la misma fuerza que en otros países de América Latina. La organización de mujeres creada por la revolución impide, según la autora, el proceso autogenerado de concientización que desarrollan en su lucha las mujeres en otros países de América Latina. Sin negar los beneficios que obtuvieron las mujeres en ciertas áreas de la sociedad, el peso de la influencia del partido, de la ideología del partido, no permitió el espacio para analizar, repensar y modificar problemas específicos de las mujeres y de las relaciones entre los géneros. La Federación de Mujeres Cubanas focalizó sus energías en la lucha por la incorporación de las mujeres en la fuerza de trabajo, que a pesar de ser muy importante para la independencia económica, no es el único elemento a tomar en cuenta en las relaciones de género. La Federación nunca se ocupó por detectar y denunciar otros problemas que enfrentan las mujeres en una sociedad machista, como la subordinación en las relaciones familiares, la violencia



doméstica, el constante incremento de la deserción escolar femenina por ausencia de guarderías infantiles, por ejemplo. La Federación de Mujeres Cubanas también es descrita como autoritaria y vertical, al mismo tiempo que señala como un importante cuerpo revolucionario que preparó a muchas mujeres para el liderazgo revolucionario y su incorporación a la política. No obstante, la autora sugiere que toda la energía de las mujeres en Cuba fue usada para incorporar a las mujeres a la sociedad revolucionaria, lo cual agotó la energía que podía haberse usado en la lucha por llevar a cabo una agenda con los problemas de género en primer lugar. Esto es muy distinto de lo que se ve en el caso de las mujeres salvadoreñas y otros movimientos de mujeres de los años 1990 que, como ya dijimos, comienzan a consolidar sus propias organizaciones antes de terminar la guerra.

En una línea similar, Florence Babb discurre sobre si a pesar de las diferencias culturales entre Nicaragua y Estados Unidos, el movimiento *gay* en Nicaragua fue inspirado por la difusión y presencia del movimiento *gay* internacional. En esta discusión analiza la presencia de grupos minoritarios de homosexuales varones y mujeres antes, durante y después del gobierno de izquierda. En esa revisión, se hace evidente que a través de la movilización de las masas la revolución nicaragüense proveyó a hombres y mujeres la oportunidad de pensar y redefinir su sexualidad; si bien el gobierno de la revolución abrió el espacio para la discusión de género, sexualidad y otros aspectos de la vida social y política. En el primer periodo posrevolucionario, la visibilidad obtenida por los hombres homosexuales era mayor que la de las lesbianas. En una sociedad machista como la nicaragüense, aun entre los grupos de distinta orientación sexual continúa la norma de reclusión de las mujeres, quienes pueden ejercer su sexualidad pero, discretamente. Esto, sumado a que las mujeres en general tenían menos recursos, hacía que se las viera menos. Son los hombres homosexuales los que se benefician del movimiento *gay* internacional, son ellos quienes incorporan lenguaje, prácticas políticas y referencias culturales de los Estados Unidos y de Europa; por el contrario, las mujeres lesbianas no tienen esa posibilidad.

En la actualidad, bajo el neoliberalismo, el Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) está enfrentando un momento de redefiniciones en esas áreas, que por lo demás se encuentran lejos de resolver en el marco de la sociedad machista nicaragüense. Por su parte, aunque el gobierno liberal tiene su propia agenda en términos de modelos de familia, las ONG y los grupos de derechos humanos están trabajando para ayudar a los que antes debían ser silenciados.

La etapa de globalización, con su fluir de ideas, información y tecnologías, significa un avance para la sensibilización de la sociedad en temas de sexualidad y género, y no algo impuesto a la sociedad nicaragüense desde el exterior.

Sara Poggio  
Beatriz Schmukler  
Compiladoras



## CAPÍTULO I

### Writing for Distinction? A Reading of Cortázar's Final Short Story, "Diario para un cuento"\*

Silvia Tanderciarz  
(The College of William and Mary Virginia)\*

[The] logic of identity-formation involves distinctive associations and switching between location, class and the body, and these are not imposed upon subject-identity from the outside, they are core terms of an exchange network, an economy of signs, in which individuals, writers and authors are sometimes but perplexed agencies. A fundamental rule seems to be that what is excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire.

-Peter Stallybrass and Allon White.  
*The Politics and Poetics of Transgression.*

If Julio Cortázar is so widely read today, it is because his fictions —short, long, and "testimonial"— raise issues that are very much at the center of cultural debates currently raging in diverse academic circles, particularly those touched by Cultural Studies. As an intellectual, Cortázar's "ethics of writing" (Gonzalez) and efforts to elicit a "politics of reading" (Sorensen) prefigured the kinds of shifts in discourse analysis that consume critics writing today. What I propose to do here is to read the last short story he published, "Diario para un cuento" (1983), as a touchstone for exploring some of the issues that obsessed Cortázar in the early 1980s and

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\* Publicado como "Writing for Distinction? A Reading of Cortázar's Final Short Story, 'Diario para un cuento'", *Latin American Literary Review*, 29:58 (July-December 2004): 73-100.

that continue to drive many critical interventions almost two decades later: the relationship between symbolic representation and socio-political repression; the cultivation of distinction and taste through reading and writing; the continued viability of "high art" and the impact of mass culture in this "age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin). In so doing, I intend to show that Cortázar's trajectory was determined, as Jean Franco most recently has noted ("Comic Stripping" 38), by his experiences in Peronist Argentina.<sup>1</sup> But I would like to go a step beyond Franco to suggest that the reorganization of culture that Peronism effected mid-century in Argentina anticipated the global reorganization of culture-driven by the spread of mass, audio-visual, and information technologies that Literary and Cultural Studies currently engage. If, as Jon Beaseley-Murray suggests, the emergence of Cultural Studies is genealogically linked to Peronism, it follows that the lessons Cortázar derived from the time he spent in Peronist Argentina, filtered through his later political awakening via the Cuban Revolution, would speak to the kinds of questions recent shifts in intellectual production and reception have generated in our (more and more interdisciplinary) fields. As prisms for studying the shifts in cultural production that destabilize hegemonic assumptions of what constitutes cultural capital at any given time, Cortázar's and Peronism's texts offer us an exceptional opportunity to disentangle the fantasies of consumption driving both the political allegiance to and/or repudiation of Perón, and the strong fear-attraction generated by Cultural Studies work today.

## 1. The Crime

First and foremost, "Diario para un cuento"<sup>2</sup> is the story of a crime. It is not only the story of a murder, but rather of

1 While many critics have addressed Cortázar's contributions to current debates through provocative, theoretically informed readings of his fiction—the collection *Julio Cortázar: New Readings* (1998) edited by Carlos Alonso is particularly noteworthy in this respect—the role of Peronism in shaping this fiction remains largely unexplored.

2 All citations are from the 1985 edition published by Alianza, and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

a series of crimes determined by efforts to achieve some form of social distinction through repression, the acquisition of valued goods, and the elimination of competition. This desire for distinction, achieved in part through the cultivation of taste, is not only constitutive of identity; it further serves to re-inscribe the paradigm of repression that defines the socio-symbolic order and drives the need for consumption in the first place. It verifies to the actors caught up in this cycle, and the readers who identify with them, "the deep divisions which bar the constitution of an integrated civil sphere" (Sorensen 364). But contrary to what a cursory overview of the story might suggest, this dynamic describes both the "lumpen de puerto y pieza de mala muerte" (324) Cortázar evokes, and those who already occupy "higher" ground (far from "las chicas del bajo," privileged by the "high-low" cultural divide).<sup>3</sup> In his own desire for distinction, the narrator of the story is as guilty of violence resulting from unethical modes of consumption as the "lumpen de puerto" about whom he writes. And if he finds himself trapped at the end of the narrative in a closed Derridean circuit that denies him access to the object he desires—"no (me) queda casi nada: ni la cosa, ni su existencia, ni la mía, ni el puro objeto ni el puro sujeto, ningún interés de ninguna naturaleza por nada" (342)—it is because he is trapped in a paradigm of consumption based on exploitation, colonization, and uneven exchange with which he has been unable to break (in the end he still traffics in women's bodies and words, even if now this process is mediated by high theory).

Structured as a diary—a text that substitutes for the short story our narrator really wants to write—"Diario para un cuento" resists the narrative order its writer would impose. It inscribes the narrator's efforts to approximate an event that happened "many and many years ago" (317) in

3 *El bajo* refers to the lowest-lying part of the city, geographically speaking, that closest to the river. In the Buenos Aires of the forties, *el bajo* referred to the port area full of brothels and generally associated with prostitution, tango, and criminality. *El bajo* is, in short, literally the margin, the city's dark underside, and it is inhabited by what Stallybrass and White denominate "low-Others".

Peronist Argentina while refusing the conventional narrative forms in which its author attempts to clothe it. Hence, it defies generic categorization, straddling the fictional realm of the short story and the non-fictional genres of diary and testimonio. Given the multiple autobiographical coincidences, one is tempted to take Cortázar at his word when he claims to speak in the first person: "yo que hablo en mi nombre (error que no hubiera cometido nunca Bioy), sé penosamente que jamás tuve y jamás tendré acceso a Anabel como Anabel\_" (319). But the question of how to read the diary is complicated by his choice to include it in his last published collection of short stories, *Deshoras* (1983). In what follows, for the sake of clarity among other reasons, I will refer to its author as the narrator or translator. By safeguarding the distance between writer and narrator the diary's claim to fictionality demands, I am not proposing the text be read as pure fiction; rather, I am attempting to respect the struggle between fictionality and memory it inscribes, an issue to which I will return at the end of the article. Before moving on to examine this question, however, a brief overview of the diary's contents seems necessary. The story that emerges in the diary is not only the story of the narrator's relationship with Anabel Flores, a prostitute from el bajo, and the murder he helped to commit; it is also the story of Peronism, and of the violent rending of Argentina that, as an intellectual more concerned with personal distinction than justice and mass representation, he failed to prevent.

## II. The Story

Once stripped of its self-indulgent reflection and theoretical angst, the story at the heart of the diary is rather simple, more a melodramatic "radionovela" (340) than the finished work of fiction à la Bioy Casares its author so desires. The narrator inherits a translation practice and its clientele; among those requesting his services are four prostitutes who pay a token fee for their translations (so they won't become a bunch of Madame de Sevigné, he argues, 323). One day Anabel appears, disrupting the structure the

translator has inherited and maintained "dentro de las mismas líneas por inercia" (323). She needs him to translate her correspondence with an American sailor named William, letters in which the mundane and the cosmic are juxtaposed, in which consumption functions as the subtext for romance, in which words of love and plans of death are mixed with requests for material goods she cannot access in Argentina: "ropas de nylon" (325), "medias cristal y blusas color tango" (325), size thirty-six silver sandals and a little poison (334). Although up to then he has limited his services to the "mercadería" (323) he inherited from his old partner, he agrees to help Anabel and quickly becomes involved with her. He explains this choice stating that "Anabel fue como la entrada trastornante de una gata siamesa en una sala de computadoras" (322); she introduces life and passion to what had been mechanized, stultifying work, the formulaic task of translating patents. If before her, he already trafficked in women's words and stories, his connection with Anabel revitalizes his creative writing and storytelling potential. As his muse, she opens a back door, leads him into a marginalized world he has rejected for the sake of professional appearances, a rejection upon which his identity as "un traductor público con oficina y chapa de bronce en la puerta" (324) has been based. He will become sexually involved with Anabel ("una relación tarifada entre cliente regular y mujer de la vida", 329) while maintaining his socially sanctioned relationship with his girlfriend Susana intact.

In this arrangement, Anabel satisfies his "urgencia de sumersión, una vuelta a tiempos adolescentes con caminatas solitarias por los barrios del sur, copas y elecciones caprichosas, breves interludios quizá más estéticos que eróticos, un poco como la escritura de este párrafo\_" (326). She enables a crossover that revitalizes him but that he must keep secret, separate from the world that legitimizes him as a member of a certain class with certain tastes: "puesto que Susana, puesto que T.S. Eliot, puesto que Wilhelm Backhaus" (326). His aesthetic (writerly) and erotic (gendered) choices years later continue to be confused in his narration of them because, in their interdependence, they

subtend a process constitutive of his bourgeois identity: he still writes like he makes love, always seeking to preserve that distance, "guardando esa distancia" (316) his place in the social register and his aesthetic sensibility demand. And he never quite manages it: "me falta el juego de piernas y la noción de distancia de Bioy para mantenerme lejos y marcar puntos sin dar demasiado la cara" (317). Threatening to "invadirlo de entrada," his memory of Anabel continues to destabilize a system of social relationships in which the erotic encounter functions as a vehicle for thinking the self and (his) art as aesthetic creations separate from the dangerous flood of feeling. She denies him the distance so necessary to his craft, and to his sense of self, as he has tried to construct and understand them. Thus, while providing him with that certain something "other" he lacked (still lacks) in his everyday life—"ese mundo [...] demasiado pequeño y demasiado confortable" (326)—she also surfaces through his telling as a dangerous addiction, a necessary and forbidden passion that, as such, must be kept at arm's length if it is not to shatter the foundation upon which his life is built.

It is, appropriately, the doorman, Fermín, who polices this shifting identity for him. The translator projects onto Fermín how an alliance with a woman like Anabel would be read, resisting the risk public exposure would entail. Hence, he resists taking Anabel to the comfort of his own apartment, explaining: "me contuvo la idea de que Fermín el portero con más ojos que Argos la viera entrar o salir del ascensor y mi crédito con él se viniese abajo, él que saludaba casi conmovido a Susana cuando nos veía salir o llegar juntos, él que sabía distinguir en materia de maquillajes, tacos de zapatos y carteras" (327). He chooses discretion, not to protect Susana, or the doorman from his disappointment, but to protect the distinction he has cultivated and the privilege status confers. In a world propelled by appearances, his alliance with Susana situates him in a class above, separate from the doorman, commanding his respect; it assures him a measure of social power, the price of which seems to be the rigorous exclusion of those "elementos" (332) not deemed worthy by the social class to which he aspires, but who thereby become all the more invested with desire.

While translating Anabel's correspondence, he becomes aware of a plan to kill another prostitute named Dolly, who is stealing clients from one of Anabel's friends, Marucha. On his next visit, William has promised to bring a lethal poison that they can slip undetected into Dolly's drink, thereby eliminating the competition that is increasingly endangering Marucha's survival. The translator tries to dissuade Anabel, and when that fails, unbeknownst to her slips a note into her next letter asking the sailor to meet with him in private the next time he's in port. He tries to convince William—who he reads from the start as "primario y sensiblero y peligroso" (335)—that giving Anabel the poison would be folly, that it would jeopardize all their lives. Instead, he suggests William trick Anabel by giving her something that looks like poison but is benign. His motives are not, however, as noble as he would make them appear. If he assesses William as "dangerous," it is due to more than a gut reaction; it is because he threatens to take Anabel away from him: "en el segundo whisky supe que estaba enamorado de veras de Anabel y que quería sacarla de la vida, llevársela a los States en un par de años cuando arreglara, dijo, unos asuntos pendientes" (335). In the symbolic battle that ensues between William and the translator, what is at stake is literally the translator's access to Anabel, to a way of living and, by extension, to "la vida," itself—an access that Anabel has mediated for him. In order to defend this way of life, the translator will engage in a range of unethical conduct, first by violating one of the cardinal rules of translation—he inserts himself into Anabel's correspondence, thereby disrespecting the original and its author—and later by taking advantage of the almost confessional prestige his role as translator grants him in order to manipulate his clients (335). For him what is at stake is the breakdown of a structure of power from which he has benefited and outside of which, figuratively and literally, his life as he has known it would cease.

Following their encounter, the translator *believes* he has succeeded in foiling the murder plan and leaves on a short vacation with Susana. While away, he reads about Dolly's murder in the paper, *La Razón*, and realizes he's been left

out of the loop: William has chosen to help Anabel despite the translator's machinations. He later deduces that William changes his mind when he discovers that the translator has been sleeping with Anabel, that despite his proclaimed allegiance and punty of purpose he is, in fact, an interested player, a rival: "Enterado de que yo hacía algo más que traducirle las cartas a Anabel, ¿por qué no había subido a decírmelo, de buenas o de malas? No me podía olvidar que me había tenido confianza y hasta admiración, que de alguna manera se había confesado con alguien que entre tanto se meaba de risa de tanta ingenuidad, y eso William tenía que haberlo sentido y cómo..." (338). From the translator's perspective, helping Marucha commit the murder consists of William's revenge: he trusted and admired the translator, who, it turns out, was thinking of no one but himself. "Se vengó, pensaba [...] sintiendo el calambre que me subía de las ingles hasta el estómago, se vengó el muy hijo de puta, lo que estará gozando en su barco, otra que té o coca-cola, y esa imbécil de Marucha que va a cantar todo en diez minutos" (339). The American sailor gets the last laugh, and thus also establishes his clear allegiance to Anabel and the rules that organize her world. The translator, on the other hand, worried about being held responsible for Dolly's murder, essentially shuts down his practice, opts to "colgar un cartel de ausente y cerrar con llave la oficina" (335), stops seeing Anabel, and eventually relocates to Europe. Although Marucha never implicates any of them, the translator loses Anabel to William, and ends up feeling the fool.

On the surface we have here a love triangle, one that could be understood as a battle between two men for the love of a woman (Anabel). But there are various layers to this worth exploring—we have an American sailor courting an Argentine prostitute; we have an Argentine professional desiring that same woman, while simultaneously hanging on to a more properly bourgeois alliance (another triangle). We have a translator straddling several languages, a split world ruled by different laws, and a persistent desire to cross over. We have a translator who fails to understand the worlds he serves, the languages these others speak, and hence, who fails to communicate across borders that remain intact. In short, he fails to meet the potential of his professional task,

instead feeding from the divisions and differences that grant him a place, give him power, define his role in that social structure.

We also have a narrator returning to a point in his life that is constitutive of his identity, a time when ritualized crossovers into the world of *el bajo* were still possible, the boundaries still fluid. The diary describes a dynamic akin to that Peter Stallybrass and Allon White map, in their groundbreaking study of eighteenth century England, as integral to the formation of middle class identity:

*A recurrent pattern emerges: the 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other (in the classic way that Hegel describes in the master-slave section of the Phenomenology), but also that the top includes that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflicted fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level. It is for this reason that what is socially peripheral is so frequently symbolically central (like long hair in the 1960s). The low-Other is despised and denied at the level of political organization and social being whilst it is instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture. (5-6)*

Anabel remains, in this account, "a primary eroticized constituent of [the narrator's] fantasy life," proving "symbolically central" precisely because she has been "rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level." By returning to a point that proved definitive, not only for the translator, but for the country he chose to leave behind, the narrator forces a re-examination of the social and political interests that led to the betrayal of those "low-Others," the multiple Anabels/Dollys/Maruchas, that Peronism hailed. The diary forces the question of responsibility for their systematic repression, a

repression finally institutionalized, in its most grisly manifestation, by the military junta that assumed power shortly after Perón's death.

It's curious, in light of this, however, that the more obvious crime that emerges at the plot level—murder, disappearance—turns out to be the least interesting. Dolly's death is almost a foregone conclusion in this dynamic, and the narrator is more upset about being made to look a fool and a coward than about the part he has played in the murder plot. He does not know or love Dolly, but he desires Anabel; hence, his real crime consists of betraying Anabel, going behind her back, trying to establish, through a male-bonding he takes for granted, an allegiance with the sailor he assumes will reason as he has. His crime is one of hubris: he assumes he knows more than Anabel or Marucha or William; he believes himself of superior intellectual faculties. But his reason and his self-interest lead him astray. He has misunderstood the codes—male-bonding does not function as a guarantee in this other world. Other codes, other allegiances, take precedence: "Lo jurado jurado, pónale la firma" (339). In the end, he's proven wrong, the murder is committed, Anabel and William survive unscathed while Marucha receives what most likely will prove a very light sentence. And why? Probably because Dolly is as invisible and as insignificant within the social and legal structures that will prosecute her murderer, as she is to the translator. He has failed to understand what Marucha, Anabel, and William already know: that Dolly is sacrificeable and replaceable and hardly worth the investigation (within the world of professionals, intellectuals, and cops share-the dominant order) that could link her death to him. In the same way that he fails to understand that bourgeois, male-bonding laws do not apply, he fails to understand that Dolly can disappear because she is already invisible—due to her gender, class, and socio-cultural markers—both to him and to the laws that rule his world. She represents the "lumpen," another *cabecita negra* that had a chance to become visible under Perón, and whose fate—in which the translator and his petit bourgeois world are implicated—was to disappear. This is the mechanism of repression constitutive of identity: the translator collaborates in this murder and in its silencing as but a "perplexed agency,"

simultaneously ensuring for himself a higher rung in the social hierarchy and maintaining the socio-symbolic order intact.

Before moving on to more carefully consider Peronism as the text's point of departure, it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the story's gender and class features, as they have been revealed thus far. The Argentines are split into two camps: in one we find (masses of) female "sobras marginales" (324) by and large; the translator lives with his woman on the other side. Mention is made of some peripheral men who interact with the women as "merchandise," the crossover in some ways "cleaned up" and legitimized by the monetary exchange that takes place. The bulk of the diary is concerned with uncovering and narrating this largely feminized world, the eroticized center of this symbolic economy. Within that world, a death to restore "justice" (economic equilibrium, status quo) and eliminate competition is planned; but, the narrative tells us, the women are dependent on outsiders—men—to bring about their brand of "justice" or death, to restore a balance they claim Dolly has disrupted. Two men marked by their respective cultural, political, and economic contexts—the Argentine translator and the American sailor—stand between these women and Dolly's disappearance, two men who suggest diverging alliances and forms of engagement. Dolly's disappearance is effected through an international alliance, unwittingly bolstered by national cooperation. The translator—representative of a professional middle class and an intellectual elite—fails to intervene, to help, in an adequate way; he thus leaves the door open for the American sailor—a man of working class extraction—to resolve things in a way that suits him (but not necessarily the Argentine world of *el bajo*). The sailor's actions preclude the possibility of an internal national/Argentine alliance, the coming together of these two worlds coexisting in the same territory. But the stage for his entry is already set by the dynamic of exploitation the Argentine translator enjoys: by failing these women who are struggling to survive in a world that has given them nothing; by accepting the structure of power and privilege that marks their possible interactions, the translator seals



their and his own fate. Given the translator's ethical lapse, his refusal to become engaged, the only viable solution presented to this feminized nation—a certain sector—is to accept foreign intervention and to resolve conflict through murder. The dominant order is restored, new/old borders get reinscribed, and violence (fascism) proves the only answer.

The translator feels himself excluded from the "happily ever after" ending that finds Anabel and William dancing a milonga and abandons ship—an option that, in contrast to the girls of *el bajo*, is open to him. In the forty-year period that transpires, he metamorphoses into the narrator of this story, a man bewildered by the position he assumed in his youth: "Como con tantas otras cosas en ese tiempo, me manejé entre abstracciones, y ahora al final del camino me pregunto cómo pude vivir en esa superficie bajo la cual resbalaban y se mordían las criaturas de la noche porteña, los grandes peces de ese río turbio que yo y tantos otros ignorábamos" (324). As our guide into the world of *el bajo*, the narrator points to other possible responses, ones that might have led to a "happily ever after" for all. And he serves as a guide for the reader in the eighties, suggesting what kind of human being that reader must be when confronted with a similar choice, the kind of choice an Argentina defined by human rights violations, torture and disappearances presents. While the positions, the kinds of involvement imagined, are still gender-coded—we all must become male heroes (or "lectores machos") to save the feminized victims of a very macho (now military) regime—the way is open to every reader, regardless of gender, to become a "lector comprometido," to assume this male-coded role and change history.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> By now infamous, the reference to the "lector-hembra" and "lector macho" dates back to *Rayuela*. Cortázar differentiates between passive and active readers along gender lines: the "lector-hembra"—as opposed to the "lector macho"—presumably—is a passive reader who likes the author to fill in the gaps so as to make the reading experience approximate the cinematic. Everything is neatly resolved for her. The other kind of reader (macho, by default) enters the text fully, like an adventurer, helping to shape the characters' destinies through his reading. The "lector macho" hence anticipates Cortázar's later formulation of the "lector comprometido". For Cortázar's own detailed description of these various kinds of readers, see chapter 109 of *Rayuela*.

### III: Peronism

*"Is it high culture's representation of Argentina that has left it in fragments?" - Jean Franco*

Narrated from Europe in February 1982, as the dictatorship that has ravaged Argentina for six years embarks on a final, bloody attempt to remain in power by recovering the Malvinas from the British, the diary makes no direct reference to the Proceso (1976-1982). Instead, the story at its center is set in a Buenos Aires that, "al final de los años cuarenta" (316), has been transformed by the rise of Perón. Although mentioned only peripherally in this article thus far, and directly in the diary only once, Peronism is key to decoding the crimes and desires the diary inscribes. First and foremost, as I have begun to argue above, the diary can be read as a metaphor of the middle class Argentine intellectual's reaction to and struggle with Peronism: it reassesses the binary that the relationship between an oligarchic, Europeanizing, liberal vision of Argentina (the translator's) and a Peronist, nationalist and populist "other" (Anabel) set up. If on one level it interrogates a moment that defines its narrator, on another it signals his complicity—as a professional and intellectual—in the silencing of a popular subject (the working classes, Perón's "cabecitas"), in the suppression of the masses for the sake of reactionary economic, political, and social structures. It underlines as it questions the failure of those "on high" to grant representation and interpretive power to another world with another ethic; and it signals a libidinal investment in this world that remains deep, even as, for the sake of power, distinction, and increased cultural capital, on a political and structural level it must be denied. The repression of Anabel, recoded as the repression of Peronism (in its most expansive, promising phase, the Peronato), thus prefigures the murder at the plot level.<sup>5</sup> And along these lines, the diary lays some of the responsibility for the violence that increasingly erupts,

<sup>5</sup> The *Peronato* refers to Perón's first two terms as president, its period extending from 1945 to 1955. This period is generally recognized as the most promising in terms of political and social reorganization/representation.



culminating with the Proceso, on the shortsightedness of intellectuals who, while engaged in their fantastic literary games, consistently ignored "una humanidad humillada, ofendida, alienada" (Cortázar cited by Gonzalez Bermejo, 120) coexisting with them in the same national territory.

Indeed, Cortázar, himself, like his narrator, would come to see more than a decade after the Peronato (1945-1955) that, despite its limits, Peronism represented "la primera gran sacudida de masas en el país" (Gonzalez Bermejo, 119-120), a chance for wider cultural and political representation, for a reorganization of power. In his own words, "había empezado una nueva historia argentina. Esto es hoy clarísimo, pero entonces no supimos verlo" (Gonzalez Bermejo, 119). Cortázar's position as an intellectual more interested in listening to Alban Berg than to the roar of the multitudes and Peronist propaganda outside his window echoed a reaction that the majority of established Argentine intellectuals shared at the time. As Angel Rama noted, Cortázar was among those who, having rejected Peronism in its earliest manifestations later returned to the movement to affirm its renewing potential:

*Un escritor como Julio Cortázar, que se fue de la Argentina a comienzos de los 50 por no poder soportar al peronismo, volvió a Buenos Aires para decir su esperanza en la acción renovadora de la juventud peronista. Tal comportamiento define la actitud asumida por escritores más jóvenes, pertenecientes a doctrinas de izquierda (como David Viñas) que si no se incorporaron al peronismo, se situaron a su lado como compañeros de ruta, desde lo que aspiró a ser una izquierda radical del peronismo. Otros ingresaron alborozados a las filas, sin ninguna suerte de discriminación, en una actitud destinada a redimir la vieja culpa -haber incomprendido los aspectos positivos del movimiento en su década triunfal de 1945 a 1955-. (207)*

This "vieja culpa" is precisely what Cortázar's return (as narrator) through Anabel might exorcise. In this renewed

attempt to access Anabel and understand the period she embodies, his narrator owns up both to his complicity in the murder, and to the crime his lack of engagement constituted. In both cases, the consequences are the death of a popular subject: the disappearance of that subject and her story from his (story). By returning, moreover, he is also owning up to the central role Anabel and the Peronist masses she embodies has played in the constitution of not only his identity, but the "shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture" (Stallybrass and White, 6). By writing about her directly, by making her central to his story, and by assuming responsibility for her marginalization, his return has the potential to intervene and disrupt those dominant repertoires that have persisted through ritual exclusions.

But Peronism is present as more than mere referent in this extended metaphor. Beyond describing one intellectual's love-hate relationship with the low-Others Peronism brought to the fore and his complicity in their systematic repression, the diary links the very model for achieving the plenitude associated with social distinction to the dizzying ascent of Juan Perón and Eva Duarte. It is a model disseminated by the Peronist state and eagerly consumed by the masses, from which the translator distances himself (since ostensibly, he already has the kind of distinction class extraction, diplomas, and "cultured" taste afford): "Esos tiempos: el peronismo ensordeciéndome a puro altoparlante en el centro, el gallego portero llegando a mi oficina con una foto de Evita y pidiéndome de manera nada amable que tuviera la amabilidad de fijarla en la pared (traía las cuatro chinchas para que no hubiera pretextos)" (323) While the Peróns' ubiquity helps explain (as "pretexto") the translator's disgust with a State that intrudes in his private sanctum and denies him the right to exercise his own good taste in choosing what to display on his walls, Evita's exemplar social mobility clearly underlies the desires expressed through the practices of consumption in which the "chicas del bajo" engage. The tension these two positions reveal has to do with the upper classes' desire to maintain their distinction in light of the menace the masses-and mass reproduction-

represent; and with the desire of those from el bajo to acquire the very commodities that might place them in a class above. As Sorensen comments, "every choice depends on what is construed to be of value in the upper classes' eyes; social anxiety marks these options because the desire to belong is foreclosed" (370).

Anabel's requests for material goods, her preoccupation with fashion and appearances take on a deeper significance read in this light. On the one hand, Peronist culture has given her both a figure to emulate—Evita—and a reason to believe appearances, careful self-representation, can alter seemingly intractable material/economic circumstances.<sup>6</sup> On the other, as the narrator notes, there are always those like Fermín, "el portero con más ojos que Argos," who will be able to distinguish between the "real" thing and the copy, blocking the kind of upward mobility scripted by the Peróns, at least within Argentina.<sup>7</sup>

But whatever the limits of the script, it is clearly Evita's life story that precedes Anabel's. Beyond the hate or adoration with which accounts of her life are inflected, they all emphasize the upward mobility she embodied, the rags to riches fairy tale she cultivated. Whether rendered as a prostitute who slept her way to power (Alan Parker's recent cinematic adventure, "Evita," comes to mind), or a saint who worked tirelessly to transform the lives of the disen-

6 The film version of the story, also titled "Diario para un cuento" (1997) makes this association explicit when it adds an exchange between the translator and Anabel not part of the original text. In this exchange, Anabel, while gazing in the mirror and tying her hair back in a knot, asks the translator if he sees her resemblance with Evita. The film by Jana Bokova was screened at the 15th Annual Chicago Latino Film Festival (April 1999).

7 The diary does suggest, despite itself, perhaps, that entry into the United States can effect the erasure of difference, the blurring of class/race/gender attributes that lead to marginalization in the national sphere. As such, it suggests not that the United States is a non-racist, non-classist, non-sexist place, but rather that the category of the foreign and/or immigrant can supersede other discriminatory categories that limit individual possibilities. In this sense, it is "the land of opportunity," as long as it remains far from the discriminating vision of those (compatriots) in the know.

franchised, the image of Evita marketed by the Peronist state is that of a taste-full, well-coifed, lusciously dressed young woman in full control of her domain. In the words of Tomás Eloy Martínez:

*El pueblo la imaginaba rubia y de ojos celestes pero Evita Duarte no era como la pulpera de Santa Lucía cuando llegó a Buenos Aires en 1935: no cantaba como una calandria, no reflejaba la gloria del día. Era (dicen) nada, o menos que nada: un gorrión de lavadero, un caramelo mordido, tan delgadita que daba lástima. Se fue volviendo hermosa con la pasión, con la memoria y con la muerte. Se tejió a sí misma una crisálida de belleza, fue empollándose reina, quién lo hubiera creído. (256)*

Her ascent to the center of power proved that even a bastard daughter could become a princess. And it is the interpretation with which she laced her "crisálida de belleza" that determined her transcendence: by presenting herself in this national melodrama as Perón's creation, she helped people believe that even if their own lives were not exemplary, by following her lead, with Perón and Peronism, they could become so. If she was useful to Peronism, still mobilizing its militant Left ("Si Evita viviera, sería Montonera") years after her untimely death, and hateful to the aristocracy, it is because by making her own life and body exemplary, she managed to script a model for the masses to follow: she gave birth to a new social body, and helped discipline it within a Peronist frame.<sup>8</sup>

Evita's prominence within Peronism—she was so important, key foundational moments in the movement were rewritten to make her present<sup>9</sup>—also helps explain the femi-

8 As John Krutauskas articulates it: "On the one hand, Eva Perón appears to mobilise an increasingly powerful working class whilst, on the other, her image and words disseminate a love story that pedagogically matches subjects—newly enfranchised women and men—to an authoritarian order headed and organized from the state by General Perón" (128).

9 See Marysa Navarro, "Evita and the Crisis of 17 October 1945: A Case Study

nization of Peronism within the diary. That the two worlds presented are gendered, that Peronism is coded female via Anabel, makes sense not only given Evita's protagonism in Perón's success, but also that of the masses of working class women who joined men and children in the physical take over of the city's symbolic center during the October 1945 manifestations that brought Perón to power.<sup>10</sup> The case of Argentina during the Peronato represents another stage on which the dynamics explored by Andreas Huyssen in a European context once again played themselves out:

*[W]hen the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conjured up the threat of the masses 'rattling at the gate,' to quote Hall, and lamented the concomitant decline of culture and civilization (which mass culture was invariably accused of causing), there was yet another hidden subject. In the age of nascent socialism and the first major women's movement in Europe, the masses knocking at the gate were also women, knocking at the gate of a male dominated culture. (191)*

Because the rise of Perón coincided with the much increased participation of women in the public sector—a phenomenon brought on by accelerated industrialization, import substitution, and rural migration into Buenos Aires—and because Peronism proved instrumental to female suffrage, its associations in the Argentine imagination with the feminine, working class, and subaltern have since loomed large.

But if Evita's story captivated the masses, it was able to do so in part because of the real economic changes Perón's administration staged. As Catalina Wainerman has noted:

*[F]or several years, at least until approximately 1949\_ the working classes enjoyed unprecedented*

of Peronist and Anti-Peronist Mythology," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 12, 1 (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> For an insightful and provocative reading of these events, see Daniel James, "October 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, 1945: Mass Protest, Peronism and the Argentine Working Class," *Journal of Social History* 21:3 (1988): 441-461.

*privileges, with increases in their real wages that extended from 10 to 50 percent. During those first years, on the other hand, ceilings were placed on food and transport prices, and the government began building low-income housing projects. The worker thus had access to the purchase of a bicycle, a radio, a refrigerator or washing machine, manufactured in Argentina. (32, my translation)*

Félix Luna's impression echoes this view of the early Peronist years as a grand "fiesta" marked by the "new, magical purchasing power" salary increases from 1944 to 1947 made possible (466). The impact of increased consumer capacities among all sectors, but particularly working class sectors, is worth underscoring because it, too, left its mark on Peronist mythology and nurtured a belief in modernization, increased consumer freedom, and "progress" that, for better and worse, came to be embodied by Evita and associated with Perón. For many, these years suggested how far Argentina and all Argentines, with Peronism, could go.

It is in the context of this Peronist fiesta, then, that we must understand the gifts scattered like red flags throughout the story. If Anabel must prostitute herself to receive gifts, it is because she only has her body to offer in trade; but she nevertheless can exercise discriminatory taste in selecting those gifts to craft an appearance that can maximize her social mobility, enable her to travel, to empower herself, to find legitimacy elsewhere. Consequently, what we must read as ciphered in Peronism is the advent of a mass culture industry and a re-distribution of capital that potentially turned every hard working Argentine into a discriminating consumer. And if Peronism threatened to erase distinction through the consumption of mass cultural products, it also forced those invested in preserving traditional power structures to redefine themselves in the face of this challenge.

Jean Franco argues that this is precisely what Cortázar does when he becomes a discriminating consumer of mass

culture; her observations about Cortázar's "epic of consumption" (Piglia quoted by Franco, 39) become intelligible in this context, underlining "what will afterwards constitute, for Cortázar, the grounds for sociability and identity—namely, taste" (38). She goes on to explain:

*Because, in the contemporary world, taste can no longer be grounded in firmly established values or universal criteria, it becomes a matter either of market classification or of elective affinities. The arbitrariness of these affinities in Cortázar's work—the bond may be forged just as effectively through the mediation of Louis Armstrong, or of Gesualdo, or a shared project such as traveling slowly along the freeway from Paris to Marseille—destroys "distinctions" on the grounds of nationality, class, or gender [...] [G]roup cohesion also depends on the exclusion of those who do not understand, of those who are bound by routine, are lacking in imagination and emotionally crippled. [...] Because Cortázar repeatedly constitutes ephemeral groups on the basis of arbitrary and unmarketable taste, it follows that value, once thought to be intrinsic in the work of art, has migrated to the aesthetic experience itself. (38-39)*

Franco also points out that Peronism was instrumental in shaping this aesthetic (39). Cortázar's shift from an appreciation of high culture to an identity based on the discriminating consumption of all culture (mass included) can be read in the diary as a response to the democratization of culture driven by Peronism's inversion of cultural hierarchies. Although this link is never made explicit, it is this context that provides the explanatory framework for the narrator's emphasis on taste. His preoccupation with protecting the distinction he has cultivated prompts his recurring observations regarding Anabel's choice in dress, for example: "me acuerdo más de la cartera de hule y los zapatos con plataforma de corcho que de su cara ese día" (322); and earlier, "lo que más se veía de ella era la cartera de hule

brillante y unos zapatos que no tenían nada que ver con las once de la mañana de un día hábil en Buenos Aires" (320). His memory of Anabel is constantly associated with the purses and shoes she wore to their meetings, accessories he finds flashy and inappropriate, out of context. He does not read her fashion statements as part of her charm or as evidence of a newfound financial freedom; rather he uses them to distance himself from her, underlining the differences between the two of them, differences now confirmed not by access to consumer goods, but by the tasteful vs. uncultured/low-class consumption of (cheap imitations of) them.

But if Franco is correct in mapping this aesthetic, it seems that by the end of his life, Cortázar himself was attempting to deconstruct it, signaling the kind of damage such "short-lived heterotopias" (Franco, 39) could cause. By returning to Peronism, he returns to a moment that propelled this shift through an unprecedented economic and cultural revolution; but he also returns to re-examine and critique the positions he adopted as a response. While tracing its genesis, the diary thus also problematizes this mode of engagement/representation. Seen from the perspective of its narrator, the problem is that this aesthetic of consumption (possession) to establish distinction/taste (through distance) cannot deliver the kind of plenitude access to the desired object represents. Integral to its very functioning is the distance/separation that prefigures it as primary condition of possibility: because writing in Cortázar, as Franco so eloquently has argued, as process of identity formation has to do with the elaboration of taste, it cannot function simultaneously as a vehicle for solidarity (or "access" in the diary's vocabulary), no matter how much that solidarity may be desired. All it can do is prove the intractability of a symbolic system predicated on structures of exclusion, an aesthetic of consumption, the defense of distinction. No matter how rigorously he searches for that access/solidarity, the critical and creative languages he has at his disposal will fail him because they preempt, through their very *modus operandi*, the erasure of difference that dispossession, true solidarity entail.

This becomes particularly clear in another story the diary contains. It is the story of a rape, of routine violations that occurred in pre-Peronist Argentina and that Peronism promised to change. The story of Anabel's rape, told through the story of "la Chola" (332), is helpful both because it sheds light on a symbolic economy based on uneven exchange and violence, and on the difference in this triangulation of desire the Peronato might have made. It underscores Peronism's challenge to entrenched structures of domination while suggesting, simultaneously, that if this challenge in the end proved cosmetic at best, its failure was due, at least in part, to the elitist and intellectual resistance with which it was met.

#### IV: Rape as Paradigm

The story of the rape emerges two-thirds of the way into "Diario," after a brief commentary on a patriotism located in a "pampa" that Anabel rejects: "Tanto lío que arma ése por la pampa, Anabel despectiva encendiendo un cigarrillo, tanto joder por una mierda llena de vacas. Pero Anabel, yo te creía más patriótica, hijita. Una pura mierda aburrida, che, yo creo que si no vengo a Buenos Aires me tiro a un zanjón" (331). Her experience of that pampa has not been one to inspire loyalty, a longing to return; her memory of "la pampa" does not occasion any nostalgia; in fact, her survival, her sense of self, depends on the distance she has managed to establish between her urban present and her pampa past. The myth of "la pampa" as the seat of Argentine identity does not ring true for her—a sign, among others, that patriotism and national identity for her (and those like her) diverge from popular and commercial constructions, urban versions created by those located far from a pampa they therefore desire. It is not clear from this exchange where Anabel would fix her own sense of national pride, if, indeed, she has any—except perhaps in the economic opportunity the city offers her, as it offers her access to the translator-narrator, access to voice, access to his world and its interpretive power.

In contrast to this mythological pampa, the story of Anabel's rape reveals an eroticized world constructed

through violations enacted on the bodies of women. The story, told here through the rape of another woman by another rapist, disrupts what might otherwise have been conceived of as a failed romance, an uncomplicated longing for the lost body of the nation. It signals the incongruity of a nationalism defined through the rape, torture, and disappearance of (women's) bodies, Anabel's among them. It signals the incongruity of a heterosexist, patriarchal and classist national identity that destroys the objects it simultaneously desires and denies. And it signals the incongruity of an economic system that transforms repression into profit. The translator's attempts to access through Anabel an Argentina he lost—perhaps Alberto Castillo's Argentina—thus are disrupted on all these levels by Anabel's uneasy fit in that Argentina, and by the impossibility of embracing and loving Anabel as she deserves to be loved.

We encounter the story of the rape in bits and pieces:

*Poco a poco los recuerdos confirmatorios y de golpe, como si le hiciese falta contármelo, la historia del viajante de comercio, casi no había empezado cuando sentí que eso yo ya lo sabía, que eso ya me lo habían contado. La fui dejando hablar como a ella le hacía falta hablarme (a veces el frasquito, ahora el viajante), pero de alguna manera yo no estaba ahí con ella, lo que me estaba contando me venía de otras voces y otros ámbitos con perdón de Capote, me venía de un comedor en el hotel del polvoriento Bolívar, ese pueblo pampeano donde había vivido dos años ya tan lejanos, de esa tertulia de amigos y gente de paso donde se hablaba de todo pero sobre todo de mujeres, de eso que entonces los muchachos llamábamos los elementos y que tanto escaseaban en la vida de los solteros puebleninos. (331-332)*

Anabel brings the narrator-translator back to this past he has left behind; he hears her story through this other one, in which he has participated on slightly different terms. The narrator classifies this story of rape in the same way he will classify the story of the murder Anabel (and he) will



later help commit: "a veces el frasquito, ahora el viajante" (331). They are both stories, he argues, Anabel feels she must tell him, both entailing crimes of passion that conclude with female victims. The story of the rape illuminates a dynamic that later repeats with the murder-one that, in turn, illuminates larger crimes, a pattern that defines their common Argentine history, albeit one they inhabit differently.

In the diary, the narrator writes the story as he heard it from a friend, "el pelado Rosatti," (332) not Anabel. By telling the story from his perspective, he resists counterfeiting Anabel's experience, he resists an easy ventriloquism that would pretend to deliver Anabel to us-her readers-but ultimately would prove a lie. Although he does not explicitly say so here, the story's semi-confessional frame sets up this preferred reading, whereby he resists violating Anabel all over again, this time with words that, not being her own, would only falsify her story. He believes that the only way he can tell the story of her rape, the story she tells him, is as he has heard it from the perspective of the rapist, Rosatti. What we read, then, is Chola's rape, not Anabel's, becoming with the narrator its passive witnesses, a new audience consuming the violation: Rosatti is a traveling car salesman who visits a widow when it proves convenient for his route, brings her presents and sleeps with her. The widow has a daughter for whom he also brings gifts. They are satisfied with this arrangement for a while, until one day he shows up with bigger gifts than usual:

*[H]abía vendido un Plymouth y estaba contento, la viuda agarró por el hombro a la Chola y le dijo que aprendiera a darle bien las gracias a don Carlos, que no fuera tan chúcara. Rosatti, riéndose, la disculpó porque le conocía el carácter, pero en ese segundo de confusión de la chica la vio por primera vez, le vio los ojos renegridos y los catorce años que empezaban a levantarle la blusita de algodón. (332)*

Later, in bed, he feels different with the widow: "y la viuda debió sentir las [diferencias] también porque lloró y le

dijo que él ya no la quería como antes, que seguro iba a olvidarse de ella que ya no le rendía como al principio" (332). Because, we are led to believe, the widow is afraid he will abandon them-*cease to come by the ranch bearing gifts*-she presents him with her daughter instead. We are told that they-the narrator and his friends-never knew the details of the arrangement, how it came about. But the end result is the complicit rape of la Chola by the widow and her traveling car salesman: "en algún momento la viuda fue a buscar a la Chola y la trajo al rancho a los tirones. Ella misma le arrancó la ropa mientras Rosatti la esperaba en la cama, y como la chica gritaba y se debatía desesperada, la madre le sujetó las piernas y la mantuvo así hasta el final" (332-332).

The story, when Rosatti tells it, is met with silence. Years later, when Anabel tells her own, the narrator again remains silent, resists telling her that he has heard it all before:

*¿Qué le podía decir? ¿Que ya conocía cada detalle, salvo que había por lo menos veinte años entre las dos historias, y que el viajante de comercio de Trenque Lauquen no había sido el mismo hombre, ni Anabel la misma mujer? ¿Que todo era siempre más o menos así con las Anabel de este mundo, salvo que a veces se llamaban Chola? (333).*

The questions with which he ends this story are basically a reflection on the power relations involved, on how crimes get perpetrated, repeated over and over again within certain symbolic, political, and economic systems. The rape of la Chola/Anabel marks the erasure of their selves in ritual acts of violation-acts that become necessary, it seems, through poverty and become possible because men like Rosatti, and men who have been conditioned to treat women like "mercadería" will not be called upon to assume the monstrosity of their crimes. But they are also possible because women become accomplices of power in their search for economic security; in this case, a mother turns against her own child in an act of ultimate betrayal. As with Marucha and Dolly, this is an instance of a woman, as a member of a

subaltern group, turning against another in a desperate battle for capital and basic, material survival. Economic motives determined by patriarchal, capitalist structures thus shape the possible interactions between women and men, the violence by which they are defined.

In the rape of la Chola, all the issues raised by the diary implode: we have a crime that reveals power dynamics constructed through gender, race, and class privilege; we have the impossibility of accessing the victim of that crime, of reading the story in her voice, because we stand on the side of those who write the stories, on the side of men, on the side of power. Their privilege and desire, constructed through rigid exclusions (I am not that: not poor, not racially mixed, not illiterate, not a woman whose role in life is to service men), coupled with their sense of entitlement, thus make possible a spectrum of violations—rape, death, neo-colonial impulses. And women, in ultimately self-destructive, desperate efforts, become their accomplices, seeking satisfaction through the very structures that ensure their submission, through those structures that keep them subject.

The narrator's inability to recount Anabel's rape directly—like the difficulty he encounters when he tries to write the short story that generates the diary—has to do with his refusal to speak for Anabel: "¿Cómo hablar de Anabel sin imitarla, es decir sin falsearla?" (317). But it also reflects his resistance to narrate the story from a perspective of power, and the difficulty of finding another way to tell it, in the absence of Anabel's own testimonio. Telling Anabel's story through the rape of la Chola, as narrated by Rosatti, is as close as he can come to narrating what happened to her before her move to Buenos Aires. In so doing, at least he can expose the power dynamic the episode encodes, the fact that "todo era siempre más o menos así con las Anabel de este mundo, salvo que a veces se llamaban Chola" (333). His mistake, however, is to believe that its meaningfulness is limited to the structural level on which the rapes repeat, and does not include the specificity of each story. Anabel's rape might echo Chola's rape as seen from a site of privi-

lege; but if we are able, finally, only to see that structural dimension we run the risk of losing Anabel, of erasing her, the specificity of her experience, of her history, from the realm of representation. We run the risk of losing the details that make the crime possible, differently, each time. Because the story remains one of power, told from the perspective of those in power—the rapist, his accomplices—it fails to suggest how the outcome might change could it be written differently, from another perspective, in a different voice.

The elements of this story echo the other stories captured by the diary: the same poverty, the same sort of exploitation by one who has recourse to gifts, the same betrayal by trusted ones, the same silent spectator who collects stories failing to change them, believing he is simply an innocent bystander receiving them because others—Rosatti, Anabel—need to tell them. What repeats in the case of this story of rape is not only the first instance of violation, but the complicity of silence that does not hold the perpetrators of violence accountable. The men who hear Rosatti's stories from their desert of women, aching for "the elements," voyeuristically participate in Chola's rape, united at once in pleasure and shame, a bond their shared silence seals: "Ninguno de nosotros hizo el menor comentario, el silencio espeso duró hasta que el pesado Salas soltó una de las suyas y todos, y sobre todo Rosatti, empezamos a hablar de otras cosas" (333). It is a bond the narrator breaks years later in the privacy of his diary, to ruminate, through Anabel, on what happened to Rosatti and la Chola; but it is also a bond that has constituted him as historical subject, as part of a brotherhood (a not so "short-lived heterotopia") that has shaped his sense of identity, his choices, his future. His failure to respond or intervene as an "actor comprometido" then and again, with Anabel, make him a silent accomplice, a criminal. It is a silence, a complicity, which has determined the outlines of history, permitting the crime to be committed again because the perpetrators are not denounced by the male fraternity that constitutes the nation to which they belong.



If the translator misreads William when he makes his appearance years later, it is because he assumes William subscribes to the same fraternal code that bound him to Rosatti in their vow of silence. Hence he responds to Anabel's request for help by deciding to ignore the problem she's signaling, and by trying to make her American lover complicit in that denial through trickery, another form of silence. But William, as interested outsider, disrupts this system, chooses Anabel over the translator, and thus also disrupts the triangulation of desire off of which the translator feeds. He disrupts the commercial circuit into which the translator, another "viajante de comercio," has inserted himself and from which he profits (Frölicher, 340). William chooses to see and love Anabel as more than "mercadería" to be used, kept, or put aside according to one's whims. By recognizing her, privileging her needs, he repeats a classic Peronist gesture, legitimizes her story and substitutes the language of propriety with the language of love.<sup>11</sup> And his rejection of the translator's codes—echoing the melodramatic, Peronist emphasis on loyalty and love—threatens not only the translator's livelihood, his writing economy, but the fraternal, social and political institutions erected precisely to police such dangerous allegiances.

#### V: On Writing: in search of an alternative "economy of signs"

So what are we to make of all this? In the dizzying structure of concentric circles through which the diary weaves its stories of violation—the innermost being Chola's rape, the outermost, the rape of Latin America through the demands of globalization—a continuum of criminality emerges, a continuum predicated on a desire for power, capital and distinction. If Peronism attempted to alter the configuration of

11. John Kraniuskas' reading of Evita is particularly rich in this respect. As he puts it, "Peronism was a politics of intensities and emotions, and love figured large in the discourse of Evita as it was circulated, accompanying her image as both propaganda in newspapers and newsreels and pedagogy in schools" (127). I am grateful for the generous support of a summer research grant at the College of William and Mary that enabled me to research and write this article.

the national in Argentina, it did so by giving voice to those masses marginalized in liberal, traditional histories, the same masses the military would later re-discipline through their own systematic, state organized repression. But despite the new alliances Peronism forged, despite the revolutionary momentum that created new historical subjects and for the first time gave them a voice, in the end traditional structures of power remained intact. What it nevertheless managed to do, however, was expose intellectual work that trafficked in signs, codes, languages, spaces, bodies in order to achieve distinction, cultural capital, social status, dominance. If it also eventually revealed itself as fabrication, more spectacle and fireworks than true revolutionary transformation, it nevertheless conveyed an important lesson when it helped expose the links between repression, (discriminatory) consumption, and representation. All three proved integral to the construction of (national/personal) identity, itself a mobile, fluid thing.

Given the struggles for interpretive power the Peronato foregrounded, literature's ability to represent (in the literary and political senses of the word) and its ethical responsibility to do so become all the more urgent. The diary links the failure of Peronism encoded in Dolly's murder to the narrator's failure to prevent it; and these failures in turn subtend his "failure" to change history, write the story he wishes he could write—that story of access, of solidarity, that "cuento capaz de mostrar[se] la de nuevo" (324). The diary ultimately reveals, as Aníbal González puts it, "The writer's craft [as] a sublimated version of the mechanisms of aggression used by those in power and those who wish to have power" (250); that is, the complicity of language—as a symbolic system constructed through processes of differentiation and exclusion—in socio-political violence, in the reproduction of identities predicated on repression. This is why the absence of Anabel's/Chola's versions, their testimonios, produce a cognitive irritability in the narrator's account, begging the question of whether the task of writing—of fixing stories, through inscriptions, in history—is a task always necessarily allied with the dominant sectors in fields

of power. In other words, can a writer disaffiliate with power (Mohanty)?

It is this cognitive irritability that drives Cortázar's formal experimentation in the diary, his appeals to high theory (through Jacques Derrida) and to literary fathers (Adolfo Bioy Casares, Edgar Allan Poe, Aldous Huxley) who might help him carve out a different path to follow. But each of his appeals proves futile because each of them entails repression, ellision, sublimation in the name of "good taste" and intellectual sophistication (González, 242), "el juego de piernas y la noción de distancia [...] sin dar demasiado la cara" (317). It is Derrida who best articulates the futility of his attempt to capture Anabel in a short story when he cites him at diary's end: "Ahora que lo pienso, cuánta razón tiene Derrida cuando dice, cuando me dice: No (me) queda casi nada: ni la cosa, ni su existencia, ni la mía, ni el puro objeto ni el puro sujeto, ningún interés de ninguna naturaleza por nada. Ningún interés, de veras, porque buscar a Anabel en el fondo del tiempo es siempre caerme de nuevo en mí mismo, y es tan triste escribir sobre mí mismo aunque quiera seguir imaginándome que escribo sobre Anabel" (342). In other words, the lesson to which Derrida and the others lead is that access, "real" representation is impossible—that in our attempts to represent the other, all we accomplish is self-representation, all we do is expose ourselves. The act of writing condemns the writer to solitude, distance, because it is predicated on separation from one's subject; it is this separation that enables the writer to see, to tell. And it is also this separation that guarantees the distinction the literary work confers.

Derrida also alludes, in the passage Cortázar quotes, to a second problem this writer faces. When he refers to "el puro objeto" and "el puro sujeto," concluding "no tengo jamás acceso a lo bello en tanto que tal," (318) he is elaborating a theory of representation in which all representation is perceived as copy: that is, all representation—high, middle, and lowbrow—necessarily lacks the aura of the original. Following this line of thinking to its logical conclusion would lead one

to believe that only through solidarity with the original, through political action, might one recover the lost aura. If in Jean Franco's estimation, Cortázar has reoriented his search for distinction by focussing not on the product, but the process, a shift that enables incorporating into his discriminating taste mass culture objects (i.e. reproductions), what this reading of "Diario" suggests is his final disenchantment with literature, itself, with representation. *Diario* suggests that in the age of mechanical reproduction, all that is possible in search of the auratic, is solidarity, collaboration, allegiance with those low-Others, the subaltern, previously relegated to the printed page. Plenitude can only be accessed beyond the literary, beyond representation.

Aníbal González's powerful question à propos Cortázar's story "Press Clippings," "But is a literary reply ethical?" (252) follows this same line of thought. He argues that: "In 'Press Clippings,' Cortázar addresses the question of how to react ethically as a writer to acts of violence and evil, only to discover that literature itself is violent. [...] The best literature can do, it seems, is to 'graft' the Argentine mother's clipping onto its own textual body and pass it on to the reader, along with the ethical dilemma it poses" (252-3). That is, to borrow from Diana Taylor's language in another context, to act as witness: "to make visible again, not the invisible or imagined, but that which is clearly there but not allowed to be seen" (27). In González's formulation, certain literary genres are less violent and lend themselves more to producing this desired response, like melodrama and testimonio, the combination of which produces the press clipping Cortázar grafts. He writes: "Despite their frequent claims to objectivity, moralism is pervasive in testimonial narratives, since, like melodrama (to which many of these texts recur), they always deal with fundamental polar oppositions: truth versus falsehood, justice versus injustice, society versus the individual [...]. Testimonial narratives impose upon the reader the burden of making a moral choice, partly because they make ethically unacceptable the option of reading them as fiction" (251-252). But this moral choice usually results from the manipulation of the readers' emotions (252), a method that in the end also makes them suspect;

they remain complicit in a system that "is not innocent" (253), that is founded upon the violence it ostensibly writes against.

And yet, "Diario para un cuento," suggests a more nuanced argument and response to the question of ethical representation. Because it shifts the emphasis from the act of writing, as something objectifiable and disinterested, to the writer's loci of enunciation, his positionality, it foregrounds the issue of engagement, of method as well as product and intent. It articulates not what literature can do, as if it were an animate object with a will of its own, but what writers can and cannot do within this signifying system. It suggests that while Derrida's postmodern observations about *écriture* may be provocative and alluring, they are also potentially misleading. Hence the statement Cortázar's narrator makes just before re-telling the story of Anabel's/Chola's rapes: "no siempre hay invención o copia" (331). I read this to mean that there may be some forms of writing that are up to the ethical challenges representations of the subaltern pose. Some forms of writing might prove equivalent to other gestures of solidarity-among these, those forms that tend more to the historical/real than to the fictional, and that demand of its authors the kind of engagement "good" translation models.

This is why preserving the distinction between translator/narrator and writer/Cortázar, mentioned at the outset, proves so important. While the diary-as-genre presents itself as historical and subjective "truth," Cortázar's decision to include it in a collection of short stories (fiction) enables him to add a critical layer to his narrator's observations, and particularly to the sense of failure with which the diary concludes. Its publication transforms that theoretical failure into a kind of triumph: something has been accomplished here, even if it is not what this translator/narrator intended. Its publication demands that we read the diary as another construction subject to interpretation, that nevertheless alludes to a reality that its witnesses no longer can ignore: not everything is invention, fabrication, copy. Because the

violence the diary represents is real, it "impose[s] upon the reader the burden of making a moral choice" (González, 252); but because it is also reconstructed, it is able to direct an interpretation that underscores the role of story tellers and readers in the interested manipulation of those realities. It demands an active engagement with the testimonios offered within it, while simultaneously stressing the role of the reader in reproducing or changing the stories these subjects tell.

What is more, it signals a particular writerly/readerly posture as deeply imbricated with the violence it describes. The auto-critique it contains refers to a translator who traffics in the world of *el bajo* "sin dar la cara," as though this were a game and the goal were to "marcar puntos" rather than achieve economic and social justice. It critiques a writer so preoccupied with personal distinction, he willingly plays a game predicated on the absence of justice-without an underclass, the search for and preservation of distinction would be impossible. And it condemns intellectual interventions that make writing complicit with other socio-political mechanisms of repression.

But it also opens a door to a different form of engagement. If Cortázar's translator is a "bad" translator, in that he violates translation's most sacred codes, "Diario para un cuento" does not for this reason proclaim an end to all translation. In fact, translation surfaces as the very model to follow if it is an "ethics of writing" or a "politics of reading" that we seek. Walter Benjamin describes good translation by invoking the work of Rudolf Pannwitz. He writes, "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language" (81, my emphasis). In other words, as readers and writers we must al-

low ourselves to be transformed by the other, thereby enabling the other to speak through our texts (also the task of testimonio). By critiquing the translator he was, Cortázar thus opts to privilege a different kind of writing, one that can minimize Ego (despite Derrida's proclamations) for the sake of solidarity, and the material transformation of those social, political, economic conditions that silence the subaltern and sustain violent hierarchies of power. With this last story, he suggests that while writing can be used to secure social privilege, it also can be used to upset and transform a social contract predicated on the search for distinction. Instead of renouncing literature (as essentially violent), it is up to us, its practitioners, writers, readers, critics, to expose the interested nature of writing and begin to dismantle the hierarchies of power that continue to structure our institutional practices.

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## CAPÍTULO II

### Visões Imperiais: Gênero e Sexualidade no Contexto do Turismo Sexual Internacional em Fortaleza

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#### Resumo

Neste trabalho exploro as intersecções entre gênero, sexualidade, nacionalidade, classe e "cor" presentes no contexto de uma modalidade de turismo sexual internacional, em Fortaleza, capital do Estado do Ceará, no Nordeste do Brasil. Refiro-me a um estilo de turismo heterossexual, vinculado ao projeto de ascensão social de uma parcela da população local e à migração concreta de algumas mulheres. Através dele estrangeiros de diversas nacionalidades estabelecem contatos sexuais e amorosos com "nativas" das camadas baixas e médias baixas. Denominado por alguns cearenses de "turismo sexual de classe média", esse estilo de turismo é diferenciado, pelos locais, de modalidades de prostituição envolvendo estrangeiros e garotas imersas num grau extremo de pobreza. Focalizando relacionamentos que integram prostituição e romance, argumento que compreender a dinâmica desses encontros transnacionais exige levar seriamente em conta a maneira como essas categorias de diferenciação são ativadas nas percepções mútuas de estrangeiros e locais.

#### Apresentação<sup>1</sup>

Ao discutir pesquisas sobre turismo, alguns antropólogos chamam a atenção para a necessidade de embasar esses trabalhos em teorias que possibilitem lidar com represen-

<sup>1</sup> A pesquisa na qual se baseia este texto, financiada, na primeira fase, pela Fundação Carlos Chagas/Fundação MacArthur, através do JII PRODIR, é

tações e poder, prática e discurso, noções relativas aos "simulacros" e à "autenticidade". Inserindo-se nessas discussões, Edward Bruner afirma que diversas modalidades do turismo contemporâneo, entre elas, o turismo sexual, convertem o Terceiro Mundo num playground do imaginário Ocidental. Segundo esse autor, os tours organizados nos países industrializados falam mais das representações que os turistas têm dos Outros que, de fato, sobre as sociedades visitadas (Bruner, 1989). Essas reflexões são sugestivas para pensar o turismo sexual. No entanto, ao considerar, nessas sociedades, os contextos nos quais essas viagens têm lugar, percebe-se a necessidade de tornar mais complexas as idéias sobre esses tours.

Centrandome nas construções de gênero acionadas no marco de uma modalidade específica de turismo sexual internacional, em Fortaleza, capital do Estado do Ceará, no Nordeste do Brasil<sup>2</sup>, argumento que essas viagens, longe de envolverem apreciações unilaterais, estão marcadas por considerações divergentes e, também, convergentes, entre estrangeiros e locais. Esse jogo de concordâncias e discordâncias é, aliás, central na compreensão da dinâmica desses contatos transnacionais.

Atualmente apoiada pela FAPESP/Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo. O trabalho de campo, que foi possível graças ao envolvimento de inúmeras pessoas, contou, em suas diversas fases, com a colaboração de Jane Guedes Horta. Agradeço a Alberjina de Oliveira Costa, Ana Maria Medeiros da Fonseca, Antônio Jonas Dias Filho, Flávio Pierucci, Kamala Kempadoo, Magali Marques, Maria Filomena Gregori, Maria Luiza Heilborn, Mariza Corrêa, Mary Castro, Monica Tarducci, Sérgio Carrara, Suely Kofes e Verena Stolcke comentários sobre pontos aqui desenvolvidos e aos meus colegas do PRODIR o apoio ao desenvolvimento do projeto.

2 A cidade, situada numa das regiões mais pobres do Brasil, considerada pólo industrial e turístico, em função de suas belas praias e agitada vida noturna, é uma das que mais crescem no Nordeste e é, também, uma das regiões metropolitanas mais pobres do País. O turismo, cujo crescimento se intensificou aceleradamente a partir da década de 1980, responsável pela elevação do PIB em aproximadamente 5%, é considerado a fonte de empregos que mais cresce no Ceará. (GOVERNO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ. SECRETARIA DE TURISMO. *Id.*, CORIOLANO, 1998: 88).

Desenvolvo esse argumento a partir da análise de um estilo de turismo sexual, heterossexual, denominado por alguns cearenses "turismo sexual de classe média", através do qual visitantes de diversos países se relacionam com nativas de camadas baixas e médias baixas, originárias do Ceará e de outros estados do Nordeste do Brasil. Ele está vinculado ao projeto de ascensão de uma parcela da população local e à migração concreta de algumas mulheres. Partindo de gênero, exploro quais são as distinções mais significativas nesse contexto e reflito sobre como essas diferenciações são acionadas nos processos de sexualização presentes nesse universo. Mas, antes de prosseguir, é necessário explicitar a que me refiro quando falo em turismo sexual.

No Brasil, essa problemática vem atraindo a atenção da opinião pública, de pesquisadores e formuladores de políticas, a partir do início da década de 1990. Nesse período, a intensificação do turismo internacional no Nordeste, vinculada à chegada de vôos internacionais diretos para essa região, tornou visível a prostituição voltada para os visitantes internacionais. Nesses anos, nos quais as meninas prostitutas de Fortaleza foram foco de preocupação internacional, chegou-se à conclusão de que o Nordeste do Brasil tinha sido integrado ao circuito mundial de turismo sexual (Piscitelli, 1996). Mas, se o Brasil faz parte dos países da América Latina, Canbe e África que, nas décadas de 80 e 90, se tornam novos alvos para os turistas sexuais, o Sudeste da Ásia vem sendo espaço privilegiado para esse tipo de turismo a partir dos anos 50 (Mullings, 1999).

Os esforços para compreender essa problemática originaram um instigante corpo de conhecimentos que, em constante confronto com pesquisas disseminando-se em diversos lugares do mundo, apresenta uma pluralidade de abordagens. Parte importante desses estudos tem como referência o trabalho pioneiro de Truong (1990).<sup>3</sup> Nesse estudo, o turismo sexual é vinculado às relações entre

3 Há trabalhos anteriores sobre essa problemática (COHEN, 1982; 1986), mas o estudo de Truong marcou as discussões sobre turismo sexual.



homens de países desenvolvidos e nativas de nações pobres e à prostituição, e é considerado resultado de uma série de relações sociais desiguais, incluindo relações entre Norte e Sul, capital e trabalho, produção e reprodução, homens e mulheres. Essa concepção sobre turismo sexual é corrente na bibliografia sobre o tema, na qual o turismo sexual é freqüentemente vinculado a viagens organizadas ("pacotes"), destinadas a um público masculino entre 35-50 anos, sempre no sentido "centro-periferia" (Leheny, 1995; Richter, 1994; Pettman, 1997; CHAME, 1998; Carpazoo, 1994; Dias Filho, 1998).

Em leituras marcadas pelo caráter político, diversos estudos foram alargando o campo de discussões sobre o turismo sexual. Entre esses trabalhos, a produção da segunda metade dos anos 90, centrada em países da África, Caribe e América Latina, é particularmente interessante na medida em que chama a atenção para a extrema diversidade presente no universo do que é considerado turismo sexual. Essa diversidade expressa-se na existência de várias modalidades de turismo sexual (Mullings, 1999; Hall, 1994); em significativas distinções entre turistas sexuais — homens (O'Connell Davidson, 1996) e mulheres (O'Connell Davidson e Sanchez Taylor, 1999; Oppermann, 1999; Phillips, 1999; Dahles e Bras, 1999; Pruitt e LaFont, 1995; Meisch, 1995) — e no amplo leque de relacionamentos estabelecidos entre estrangeiros/as e nativos/as, envolvendo tanto contatos múltiplos, anônimos e imediatamente remunerados, como ligações duradouras e atravessadas por emoções românticas que, embora não excluam o interesse econômico, não incorporam pagamento monetário direto.

As análises que consideram esse amplo leque de diferenças vêm desestabilizando várias suposições generalizantes sobre o turismo sexual. A idéia de que o turismo sexual envolve homens do Primeiro Mundo, geralmente velhos, viajando aos países em desenvolvimento à procura de prazeres sexuais não disponíveis, pelo menos pelo mesmo preço, em seus países tornase mais complexa através da contraposição com modalidades, em diversos

países da África e do Caribe, nas quais as mulheres do Primeiro Mundo à procura de sexo superam os homens (Oppermann, 1999). A presença maciça de turistas sexuais viajando, em várias partes do mundo, de maneira isolada e autônoma (Kempadoo, 1999) é um elemento a partir do qual se discute o suposto de que o turismo sexual envolve, basicamente, pacotes turísticos organizados. O ponto mais importante, porém, é que essas pesquisas contestam a adequação da idéia de prostituição, concebida em termos de serviços sexuais remunerados, indiscriminados e emocionalmente neutros, para pensar o conjunto de relações que surgem desses encontros sexuais entre turistas (homens ou mulheres) e locais.

Procurando estabelecer marcos que permitam refletir sobre a diversidade de modalidades conhecidas desse tipo de turismo, certas abordagens têm procurado conceitualizar o turismo sexual confrontando a associação linear, que se tornou habitual nos estudos sobre o tema, entre turismo sexual e prostituição. Alguns autores propõem a utilização do conceito de prostituição "aberta" para caracterizar esse tipo de relações. Esse conceito possibilitaria considerar processos que, apesar de terem início em serviços "neutros", em termos emocionais, podem tornar-se relações personalizadas envolvendo emoção e interesse econômico (Cohen, 1993). Indo além dessas reflexões, outras aproximações consideram o turismo sexual à maneira de um continuum que, integrando relações sexuais com um amplo leque de mulheres (e homens), incluindo aquelas/es dedicadas/os à prostituição, pode ou não envolver intercâmbio monetário direto. Em outras palavras, embora o turismo sexual seja considerado como turismo voltado para a procura de sexo, algumas modalidades desse tipo de turismo poderiam ser consideradas parte da prostituição, enquanto outras não poderiam ser nela englobadas (Opperman, 1999: 261). Nessa linha de pensamento, que compartilho, o turismo sexual é conceitualizado como qualquer experiência de viagem na qual a prestação de serviços sexuais da população local em troca de retribuições monetárias e não monetárias é um elemento crucial para a fruição da viagem.

Focalizo as construções de gênero acionadas no "turismo sexual de classe média", em Fortaleza, levando em conta as abordagens que alargam a conceitualização sobre turismo sexual. Considerando "turistas sexuais (internacionais)" aqueles/as estrangeiros/as viajando a procura de sexo, penso nas noções de gênero acionadas nesse contexto à luz das perspectivas preocupadas em compreender a imbricação dessa categoria com outros marcadores de diferença.

Nessas abordagens, gênero, pensado como uma maneira de criar e expressar diferenças, é necessariamente relacional — na medida em que põe categorias em relação (Strathern, 1988). Essas perspectivas afirmam que compreender como as categorizações de gênero são acionadas em interações específicas e refletir sobre sua intensidade metafórica exige uma análise contextualizada (Strathern, 1980; Corrêa e Piscitelli: 1998). Essas aproximações insistem, também, na necessidade de por em relação não apenas masculinidades e feminilidades, mas gênero em relação com outras categorias de diferenciação (Anthias e Yuval-Davis, 1993; Moore, 1994). Essa última exigência apresenta uma dificuldade particular. Essas abordagens convergem em assinalar a limitação de, simplesmente, adicionar diversas formas de opressão, para compreender a inferiorização de grupos "marcados" corporalmente. Elas convergem, também, em destacar a importância de perceber as intersecções entre a multiplicidade de diferenciações que "marcam" esses grupos (Stolcke, 1993). No entanto, nas análises, essas interconexões nem sempre são claras.

Centrandome nas construções de gênero acionadas nas interações estabelecidas no setor específico do circuito do turismo sexual mencionado, em Fortaleza, me detenho sobre os processos de sexualização presentes nesse universo, prestando atenção à maneira como as distinções nele presentes se imbricam. E se a idéia de contexto como marco no qual adquirem sentido as idéias (Strathern, 1992) é crucial para qualquer análise simbólica, considerar essas intersecções levando em conta as conceitualizações forâneas e nativas sobre essas viagens exige ter em conta um aspecto nem sempre contemplado na produção internacional sobre

turismo sexual: a pluralidade de dimensões ("globais" e "locais") presentes nos contextos nos quais se produzem esses encontros transnacionais.

Levando em conta essas dimensões, penso sobre as intersecções entre diferenciações presentes nessa modalidade de turismo sexual, baseandome nos resultados de uma pesquisa qualitativa, desenvolvida numa abordagem antropológica. Os dados, colhidos durante um trabalho de campo realizado entre outubro de 1999 e março de 2001, foram obtidos através de observação direta, entrevistas em profundidade e diversos tipos de fontes. Parte importante do trabalho de campo consistiu em acompanhar o trânsito de turistas internacionais e mulheres locais pelos circuitos vinculados a esse estilo de turismo sexual. Tratase de bares, boates, forrós<sup>4</sup>, hotéis e restaurantes da Praia de Iracema, partes do calçadão nessa Praia e na Beira-Mar, hotéis e restaurantes nesse trecho da orla e barracas de Praia na Beira-Mar e na Praia do Futuro.<sup>5</sup> São espaços eminentemente turísticos, nos quais, majoritariamente, convivem turistas estrangeiros e brasileiros, camadas médias locais, e jovens mulheres de setores mais baixos, algumas das quais fazem "programas". Nesses circuitos, centrei a observação nas modalidades de aproximação, corte e interações estabelecidas entre eles e elas.

A informação gerada pela observação foi suplementada por entrevistas com mulheres que mantêm relacionamentos amoroso-sexuais com estrangeiros; com turistas de diversas nacionalidades à procura de sexo<sup>6</sup> e com estrangeiros que,

4 Espaços nos quais se dança um tradicional ritmo nordestino.

5 A observação incorporou, também, interações em apartamentos habitados por garotas que namoram estrangeiros, na Praia do Futuro e em bairros da periferia de Fortaleza.

6 Embora levando em conta a informação oferecida pelas estatísticas sobre turismo internacional em Fortaleza, o critério seguido na escolha das nacionalidades dos entrevistados — italianos, portugueses, alemães, holandeses, argentinos, franceses, ingleses — foi considerar as relevantes na experiência das garotas que estabelecem relacionamentos sexuais e amorosos com estrangeiros.

fascinados pela sua experiência como turistas, fixaram residência sazonal ou definitiva na cidade. Realizei, também, entrevistas com diversos agentes envolvidos com turismo internacional e/ou prostituição local.<sup>7</sup> Adicionalmente, obtive de agências do governo, instituições educacionais e ONGs dados secundários, estatísticas e estudos de caso sobre turismo e prostituição local. Essas fontes secundárias possibilitaram situar a pesquisa num marco de informações que relativiza a intensidade do fluxo de turistas internacionais na cidade<sup>8</sup> e o peso absoluto a eles concedido, no passado, na incidência da prostituição infantil em Fortaleza.<sup>9</sup>

#### "A prostituição chique da Praia de Iracema"

Ao falarem em "turismo sexual de classe média", ou, alternativamente, na "prostituição chique da Praia de Iracema", os cearenses aludem a distinções entre modalidades de prostituição voltadas para os estrangeiros. Com esses termos diferenciam esse estilo de prostituição de outra "mais pobre", com tarifas em torno dos R\$10,00

7 Este texto foi elaborado com base em informações proporcionados por 37 entrevistados/as: 15 estrangeiros, 16 mulheres que "namoram" estrangeiros, e 6 agentes vinculados ao turismo internacional e/ou a prostituição, na cidade. Não incorporei estrangeiras à procura de nativos porque elas são escassas em Fortaleza, concentrando-se em praias afastadas, tais como Canoa e Jericoacoara.

8 Em 1999, Fortaleza recebeu 91.000 visitantes estrangeiros e pouco mais de 1.296.000 visitantes brasileiros. "Agregados turísticos", GOVERNO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ, 2000.

9 A divulgação de dados de pesquisas encomendadas pelo Pacto de Combate ao Abuso e Exploração Sexual de Crianças e Adolescentes, em 1998 e 1999, mantém relação com essa relativização. Concebidas paralelamente à organização da Campanha Nacional pelo Fim da Exploração, Violência e Turismo Sexual contra Crianças e Adolescentes —lançada, nacionalmente, em 1995— essas pesquisas mostram que, nas áreas contempladas, incluindo aquelas frequentadas pelos turistas, a prostituição infanto-juvenil envolve basicamente adolescentes —e não crianças —e aponta, definitivamente, para o fato de que, embora os turistas representem um percentual importante da clientela, os turistas brasileiros (16,7%) ocupam um lugar próximo ao dos visitantes estrangeiros (18, 8%) —e, no cômputo total, a soma de ambos é inferior a 50% do total dos clientes— que são predominantemente locais (PACTO DE COMBATE AO ABUSO E EXPLORAÇÃO SEXUAL DE CRIANÇAS E ADOLESCENTES, 1998; CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE FORTALEZA, 1999; JUBITSCHKE, 1997).

(US\$)<sup>10</sup> de setores da Beira-Mar. Na Praia de Iracema, o valor dos "programas"<sup>11</sup> raramente é inferior a R\$50,00, chegando a triplicar essa cifra.<sup>12</sup> Esses valores sintetizam diferenças que parecem evidentes, observando as garotas vinculadas pelos locais a uma e outra das modalidades de prostituição. As protagonistas da prostituição "pobre" são meninas e adultas, com baixíssimo nível de instrução, imersas num grau extremo de pobreza que se expressa em aspectos corporais. Elas usam chinelos de praia, às vezes, tênis, e têm o cabelo e a pele ressecadas pelo sol. Vestindo shorts ou saias bem curtas e tops deixando à mostra barrigas, geralmente flácidas, como resultado de sucessivas gravidezes, oferecem seus serviços, explicitamente, a turistas e locais. Não é raro ouvir, em plena tarde, uma oferta de "chupetinha"<sup>13</sup>, aos gritos, a algum carro que transita na Avenida Abolição.

Esse universo feminino é diferenciado daquele formado pelas mulheres de "melhor nível" que se relacionam, de maneira praticamente exclusiva, com visitantes internacionais. As entrevistadas vinculadas pelos cearenses ao "turismo sexual de classe média" compartilham, entre si, certas características. Elas moram em setores de camadas médias, camadas médias baixas e, inclusive, pobres, mas

10 Na época em que foi realizado o trabalho de campo, um dólar era, aproximadamente, equivalente a dois reais.

11 O termo "garotas de programa", utilizado, segundo Gaspar, para designar mulheres de conduta sexual estigmatizada e, também, prostitutas, é utilizado, na cidade para referir-se a mulheres e adolescentes, de diferentes camadas sociais, em situação de prostituição. Mas, ele expressa, também, hierarquizações no universo da prostituição local. GASPAR, 1985.

12 Diversos agentes entrevistados, inclusive garotas envolvidas na prostituição, utilizam o valor das "tarifas" como medindo o "nível" da mesma. Esses níveis, ligados à pobreza e ao grau de instrução, têm expressões territoriais. A prostituição "chique" da Praia de Iracema, com programas entre 50 e 150 reais, situa-se nos níveis intermediários/elevados. Para uma síntese da história da prostituição em Fortaleza ver: SOUSA, 1998.

13 Termo utilizado para referir-se ao sexo oral.

não necessariamente miseráveis, da cidade<sup>14</sup> e têm um grau de escolaridade comparativamente mais elevado — algumas completaram a oitava série e, até, o segundo grau.

Tratando cuidadosamente da “aparência”, essas mulheres, várias das quais estão na casa dos 20 anos<sup>15</sup>, exibem corpos esguios. A idéia corrente é que, diferentemente dos nordestinos, os estrangeiros não sentem atração pelas mulheres gordas — “meu namorado francês”, comenta uma garçonne de 25 anos que namora exclusivamente estrangeiros, mãe de uma filha de 8 anos, “me dizia para não comer pão, para não engordar”. Elas apreciam perfumes importados e usam roupas da moda, ocasionalmente de grifes estrangeiras, e relativamente discretas. Nas palavras dessa garçonne, “ando bem vestida, não gosto de roupa curta para sair. Ou é calça, ou vestido comprido”. Essas mulheres concedem cuidados especiais à pele, controlando, através de filtros e bloqueadores, os efeitos do sol, e aos cabelos, relaxandoos, hidratandoos, tingindoos, às vezes, de cores claras. Esses cuidados adquirem sentidos particulares. Eles são expressões de uma produção corporal voltada para os critérios de seleção atribuídos aos visitantes internacionais, entre os quais aspectos vinculados à cor adquiririam particular importância. Uma das entrevistadas, de 33 anos, mãe de três filhas, para a qual um “programa” semanal na Praia de Iracema proporciona a metade da renda familiar mensal, afirma, referindo-se aos “clientes” internacionais:

*Eles não querem aquela... de cabelo ruim.  
Cabelo ruim, eles acham que é negro. Pode*

<sup>14</sup> As jovens entrevistadas consideradas “de programa” pelos cearenses, algumas das quais provêm de cidades do interior do Ceará (São Luís do Curú, Itapipoca), de outras cidades do Nordeste (Natal) e do Norte do Brasil (Belém e Manaus) — moram em bairros diversificados: Sérviluz, Leste-Oeste, Henrique Jorge, apartamentos compartilhados na Praia do Futuro e pensões na praia de Iracema. Algumas das que moram em locais afastados (Messejana), ou trabalham como empregadas domésticas, residindo na casa dos patrões, passam os finais de semana em apartamentos de colegas, na Praia do Futuro ou, inclusive, na Beira-Mar.

<sup>15</sup> Durante o transcurso da pesquisa não percebi, nos locais observados, crianças em situação de prostituição. Entretanto, em altas horas da madrugada, encontrei, em diversas oportunidades, garotas que aparentavam ter entre 13 e 16 anos.

*ser escurinha, mas não muito, cabelo lisinho  
pra ele já tá bom... Tem que ser morena e  
esbelta.*

*Mas esses cuidados estabelecem, também,  
distâncias em relação às imagens tradicionais  
da prostituição local, que tendem a vinculá-la  
com aquela de menor “nível”. Um cearense de  
20 anos, freqüentador da Praia de Iracema,  
casado, universitário e ex-educador de rua,  
afirma:*

*Um dos sinais indiscutíveis é o cabelo. Se ele  
não estiver tratado, bem penteado, com brilho,  
há indícios de tratar-se de prostitutas.*

O efeito dessa produção corporal é uma relativa indistinção entre essas garotas e outras, de camadas mais elevadas e desvinculadas da prostituição, que por ali transitam. Os penteados, com cabelos na altura dos ombros, ou mais compridos, cacheados ou lisos, a maquiagem, destacando a boca e os olhos, e a cor da pele, em diversas tonalidades localmente consideradas entre “moreno” e “moreno claro”, os saltos altos, calças de materiais sintéticos, blusas de suplex, deixando as costas à vista, vestidos ou saias de malhas aderentes, na altura do joelho ou do tornozelo, e de cores muitas vezes neutras não diferenciam, necessariamente, umas e outras meninas. A relativa indefinição expressa na corporalidade dessas jovens integra-se numa série de marcas que dotam de um caráter particular as aproximações entre essas garotas e os visitantes internacionais. Diferentemente da sexualização explícita e do caráter definido presente em diversas modalidades de prostituição, em Fortaleza, os encontros, carregados de sensualidade, entre turistas estrangeiros e essas nativas estão perpassados por indefinições.

Na maior parte dos espaços “misturados” da Praia de Iracema — misturados, no sentido em que neles convivem pessoas envolvidas na prostituição com outras que não estão a ela vinculadas —, as aproximações adquirem as caracterís-

ticas de uma paquera. Elas lançam sinais, através da gestualidade. Nesse sentido, as impressões de um turista português, casado, de 55 anos, residente no Porto, funcionário de uma fábrica de automóveis, fazendo parte de um grupo de 40 homens desfrutando, durante uma semana, de uma viagem “prêmio” da empresa, sintetizam as de visitantes de diversas nacionalidades. “Percebes no olhar, o olhar é uma língua internacional. Às vezes é um engano, mas não é”. Aos estrangeiros cabe, porém, a conquista —são eles os que se aproximam, convidam. Esse estilo de aproximação, remetendo a padrões tradicionais de corte, é significativo— e as cenas de rejeição às mulheres “de nível inferior” oferecendo-se abertamente aos visitantes são frequentes. A essa dinâmica de aproximação somase o fato de algumas garotas só explicitarem sua expectativa de pagamento após terem passado a noite com os estrangeiros (e não antes). De outro lado, os relacionamentos que extrapolam em muito a duração atribuída a um programa são correntes.

Esses procedimentos distanciam essas garotas de estereótipos locais da prostituição e, ao mesmo tempo, de imagens da prostituição na Europa e em outros pontos do circuito mundial de turismo sexual. Eles redundam num clima de confusão que envolve turistas e locais. Jovens trabalhadoras no setor de serviços, na Praia de Iracema, com salários em torno dos R\$200,00 mensais, se queixam, com frequência, de serem confundidas, pelos turistas, com garotas de programa. Igualmente frequentes são as reclamações dos estrangeiros que, pela manhã, enfrentam a exigência de pagamento de suas acompanhantes, descobrindo assim não ter vivido, na noite anterior, uma experiência de conquista amorosa. Essas queixas tornam-se mais agudas nos casos em que essa descoberta é realizada de uma maneira mais violenta. Refirome às situações em que eles acordam, após terem sido drogados, e descobrem que foram roubados.

Mas, se as garotas procuram propositalmente afastar-se dos estereótipos da prostituição, as práticas de corte e namoro desenvolvidas por alguns visitantes internacionais à

procura de sexo os diferencia, também, dos “clientes” e, inclusive, dos namorados locais. Em relatos nos quais a fidelidade durante a estadia, as lágrimas e a intensidade dos contatos após a partida adquirem o estatuto de medida do grau de amor envolvido, a garçonete descreve as aproximações de um namorado estrangeiro:

*Todas as noites me esperava, sentava na minha mesa. Mandava rosa para mim no meio da noite. Tão bom!... E aí, aquilo, você vai se apegando mais, entende?...*

Esses namoros, às vezes intensos e duradouros, são alimentados por telefonemas, presentes —correntinhas e brincos de ouro, bichos de pelúcia, colchas, roupas— cartões e cartas, numa correspondência que dribla os problemas de comunicação decorrentes da diversidade de línguas envolvidas. Assim, as indefinições, longe de dizer respeito, apenas, às atitudes das garotas, estão vinculadas também às desses turistas internacionais.

Os circuitos nos quais se produzem esses encontros permitem perceber que o turismo sexual em Fortaleza extrapola a idéia de “esquemas” fechados envolvendo crianças e/ou adolescentes. Buscando mulheres, os visitantes estrangeiros percorrem amplos roteiros que se entrecruzam, parcialmente, com o “ciclo” semanal dos eventos noturnos locais. E, pelo menos parte dessa procura adquire um certo grau de ocasionalidade. Quero dizer que, embora esteja direcionada para garotas consideradas “de programa” pelos cearenses, essa busca integra um leque vasto de nativas. Essa idéia tornase mais clara considerando casos concretos.

No jantar de despedida de um grupo de oito napolitanos que passaram uma semana em Fortaleza, em fevereiro de 2000, apenas um deles não tinha arranjado “namorada”. Alguns desses turistas, ligados por relações de amizade e/ou de parentesco —no grupo havia, inclusive um pai na faixa dos cinquenta anos com seu filho, na casa dos 20—, de diferentes idades e profissões —proprietários de micro-



empresas, vendedores, empregados de indústrias—, estavam acompanhados por garotas “de programa”, de “nível” médio, conhecidas em diversas partes do calçadão. Um deles, por uma garota “de programa” mais sofisticada, encontrada na boate considerada centro do esquema de prostituição da Praia de Iracema. Finalmente, outro, por uma advogada, filha de uma juíza, que conheceu quando o grupo visitou uma boate freqüentada pelas camadas médias locais. Este relacionamento sofreu oposição do grupo uma vez que o “namorado” demorou vários dias para ter acesso sexual a ela. Apenas as duas últimas despediram os estrangeiros no aeroporto, situação na qual a advogada deu carona para a garota “de programa” —o grupo barrou a tentativa das outras meninas irem ao aeroporto, deixando-as chorando na entrada do hotel de quatro estrelas, no qual se hospedavam—.

Esse exemplo é significativo. Ele mostra como as práticas desses visitantes, aproximando diversas classes sociais, oferecem a algumas garotas a possibilidade de atravessar, de maneira temporária ou mais permanente, a (severa) segmentação social local. E mostra, também, a diversidade presente entre as mulheres que, nesses circuitos, estabelecem relações com os visitantes internacionais à procura de sexo. Uma distinção importante entre essas mulheres é que algumas não trocam serviços sexuais por dinheiro.

Nesses circuitos encontrei jovens que fazem “programas” com estrangeiros à maneira daqueles destinados à clientela local, isto é, com tarifas, durações e, inclusive, práticas sexuais previamente acordadas. Achei, também, garotas que “namoram” exclusivamente estrangeiros, mantendo com eles relações, carregadas de indefinições, muitas vezes duradouras, envolvendo pagamentos cujo valor não é fixo e tanto no que se refere às primeiras como a essas últimas foi impossível estabelecer uma renda mensa. As palavras de uma mulher de 24 anos, originária de Natal, separada e mãe de dois filhos, cuja subsistência depende inteiramente dos estrangeiros, aludem à elasticidade desses

“programas”, explicitando a fundamental importância da troca monetária nessas relações.

*Não gosto de brasileiro, Deus me livre! Sem futuro demais. Só gosto de gringo. Só gosto de coisa boa... Have money! Muito simpáticos, românticos, sei lá, é diferente... Quando eu vejo um homem que seja pão duro, é rabiscado na mesma hora. Homem tem que soltar dinheiro. Tem que pagar tudo, levar para shopping e tudo mais. Eu ferro, mesmo. Amanhece o dia e digo, Amore, me dá 100 para o táxi. (...) tem que me dar dinheiro. Esses homens vão e voltam... Se não aproveitar, aí tchau... Saí com um português. Ele era bom. Neno era o nome dele. Me deu 450 dólares para passar quatro dias com ele, em Jericoacoara.<sup>16</sup> Ainda me deu um banho de loja, no shopping. Esse homem foi incrível... Comprou umas coisas para meus meninos, comprou roupa de praia, chinelo... gastou uns 800 paus, no Iguatemi.<sup>17</sup> E eu passei esses dias só na maravilha, lá, curtindo praia, comendo do bom e do melhor, andando de buggy. E Jericoacoara é belíssima, né? Só mordomia. O homem era lindo, tenho uma foto. Vou te mostrar como ele é lindo, poderoso.*

Encontrei, também, meninas que, com empregos fixos e baixos salários, entre R\$200 e R\$500, recebendo presentes e, ocasionalmente, “ajuda” financeira dos estrangeiros, delimitam diferenças entre elas e as “moças de programa”. Mas, embora rejeitem qualquer ligação com os “programas”, aceitam e, ocasionalmente, procuram presentes e contribuições financeiras a médio e longo prazo —roupas, relógios, perfumes, celulares, pagamento do aluguel ou do tratamento médico para as crianças.

<sup>16</sup> Praia muito procurada pelos turistas, a aproximadamente 8 horas de viagem, por terra, desde Fortaleza.

<sup>17</sup> Um dos *shoppings* mais apreciados da cidade.

*Apareceu um velho, Armando. Tinha 58 anos. A primeira vez que me viu, disse para mim: você é muito linda. E eu, nem liguei. Ele disse que estava indo embora e que ia me mandar um presente da Itália... Quando chegou meu aniversário, chega um envelope com 50 dólares dentro. E, eu não tinha tido nada com ele, só conversa. Na época, o dólar estava a 2 reais. Com esse dinheiro paguei o aluguel, paguei umas coisas que devia e ainda comprei outras. Um dia, ele avisou que estava chegando. Trouxe um relógio para mim, três perfumes e queria sair comigo. Eu trabalho de noite, e não queria sair com ele, aí eu tentava não ter folga. No fim, saí com ele. Fomos para o melhor motel de Fortaleza, com piscina, com luzes, cascata, 280 reais por duas horas. Minha amiga insistiu tanto, que acabei saindo com ele. Ele disse: quero que você vista uma roupa. Comprou uma roupa chique para mim. Custou 240 reais. Era um vestido cinza, com alcinha, tinha penas tudo aqui. Me deu mais 100 reais para arrumar o cabelo. Quando terminamos de jantar, por volta das 3,30, 4 horas, eu disse que ia embora e ele ficou furioso. Aí eu liguei para minha amiga e ela me aconselhou, "não faça isso". Então, convidei ele para ir ao motel. Quando nós terminamos, que ele ia gozar, eu achei que ele ia morrer. Foi horrível. Parece que fazia tempo que ele não dava uma.*

Depareime, ainda, com jovens que saem exclusivamente com estrangeiros, mas não têm qualquer expectativa com relação a dinheiro ou presentes. Elas aspiram penetrar no mundo acessível aos turistas, compartilhando passeios, restaurantes, hotéis. Uma desempregada de 22 anos, filha do proprietário de uma pequena oficina mecânica, falando sobre os namorados que teve no mês de janeiro, cerca de um por dia, explica:

*Não preciso de dinheiro. Meu pai dá, minha tia, ou quando preciso, pego. Essas roupas, comprei*

*quando ainda trabalhava. Do Lars, fiquei com a blusa dele, de lembrança, a lembrança ninguém apaga, né? O que tu querias, que eu pedisse dinheiro para eles? Não, acho assim, não me interessa muito por presentes, para mim, não é nada. A amizade, para mim, é muito importante..., só eu conhecer... E eu vivo tudo o que os turistas vivem. Com o Lars fui para o Cumbuco, foi muito legal.*

Encontrei, também, mulheres de camadas médias, com elevado nível de instrução e, inclusive, profissionais liberais, na faixa dos 30, 40 e 50 anos, que se ressentem das características de um mercado matrimonial por elas percebido como extremamente desigual, pela saturação de mulheres — "mulher demais, é uma disparidade", afirma uma delas — e pelo fato de os homens terem amplo acesso a mulheres 20, até 30 anos mais novas. Entrevistei algumas frequentadoras da Praia de Iracema com essas características. São mulheres desvinculadas da prostituição, que procuram relacionar-se exclusivamente com visitantes internacionais. Uma psicóloga de 35 anos, separada, mãe de um filho de 13 anos, que, após ter namorado um amplo leque de brasileiros e estrangeiros, está, atualmente, dividida entre um português e um holandês, diz:

*[Os estrangeiros] são diferentes do homem cearense. Os cearenses, quando te conhecem querem logo te levar para a cama. O primeiro objetivo é esse. Se surgir uma coisa mais forte que... é muito difícil, pela facilidade aqui, hoje tem uma, amanhã outra, e eles têm medo também de se envolver... Os estrangeiros são diferentes, no sentido do carinho. Nas experiências que eu tive, o sexo não era só sexo... Ficava o carinho, aquela troca, a conversa...*

O romantismo está longe de restringir-se aos relatos dessas mulheres de camadas médias. Mas, nas histórias das entrevistadas de camadas inferiores, a idealização dos estrangeiros convive com a esperança de viver fora do Brasil.



Entre essas últimas circula uma narrativa que, minimizando os maus tratos e escravidão aos quais são submetidas as brasileiras no exterior, sublinha namoros e casamentos bem-sucedidos, com particular destaque para a aquisição de apartamentos, bares ou restaurantes, que expressam uma nítida ascensão social. Os países almejados variam mas essas meninas, versadas em questões ligadas às viagens internacionais, freqüentando o café-internet para receber as mensagens dos namorados distantes, e atualizando, através de tradutores, a velha tradição dos analfabetos procurarem quem escreva para eles, sonham com um futuro melhor, sobretudo, na Europa.

Se parte importante dos espaços associados à "prostituição chique" da Praia de Iracema abriga uma diversidade de mulheres, neles há uma heterogeneidade análoga no que se refere aos estrangeiros. Italianos, portugueses, alemães, holandeses, noruegueses, franceses, ingleses, holandeses, argentinos, bolivianos, circulam pelos bares, boates e restaurantes dessa praia. Contrastando com a produção corporal específica das garotas que namoram estrangeiros no circuito do "turismo sexual de classe média", os visitantes internacionais exibem uma ampla diversidade nos estilos de roupas, penteados e, até, nas tatuagens. Nesses espaços convivem homens de cabeça inteiramente raspada e brincos, cinquentões com cabelos louros cortados à Príncipe Valente, jovens de longas cabelos escuras amarradas em rabos de cavalo. Há homens de pele muito branca, avermelhada pelo sol, outros luzindo bronzeados intensos. As roupas utilizadas são igualmente diversificadas. Alguns vestem bermudões, sandálias e blusas coloridas. Muitos circulam de calça jeans e camisetas justas, sem mangas, mostrando braços inteiramente tatuados, enquanto outros vestem discretas calças e camisas sociais.

O tempo de permanência desses turistas na cidade é variado. Alguns se hospedam em hotéis quatro estrelas, outros preferem pequenas pousadas na Praia de Iracema ou na Beira-Mar e/ou certos flats.<sup>18</sup> Entre eles há solteiros e/ou separados e, também, homens casados. No que se refere às profissões, há seguradoras, eletricitas, cozinheiros,

garçons, açougueiros, vendedores, tripulantes de navios, maquinistas de trem, mas, há, também, professores de línguas, jornalistas, esportistas profissionais e micro-empresários —proprietários de restaurantes, salões de cabeleireiro, pequenas tecelagens—. Entre os turistas que entrevistei, os salários e/ou retiradas mensais variam entre US\$1000 (um argentino) e US\$4000 (um italiano).

Nesses circuitos, há estrangeiros que viajam inteiramente sós, mas é freqüente encontrar pares de amigos, pequenos grupos de três ou quatro e, ocasionalmente, grupos de 30 ou 40 homens. Os visitantes internacionais que chegam a Fortaleza tendem a reunir-se seguindo critérios regionais, nacionais e/ou lingüísticos. Existem roteiros parciais e pontos de encontro privilegiados pelas diferentes comunidades que reiteram, na cidade, simpatias e tensões regionais e nacionais existentes na Europa. Essas grupos são, muitas vezes, espontâneos, mas há estrangeiros "residentes", alguns dos quais casaram com cearenses, que contribuem, de diversas maneiras, para estimular esses encontros. Além disso, os turistas internacionais que retornam repetidas vezes à cidade apresentam os recém chegados aos conterrâneos residentes.

As garotas pobres que namoram exclusivamente estrangeiros fazem distinções entre aqueles que andam nos circuitos vinculados ao "turismo sexual de classe média". Elas preferem os turistas "novos" visitando pela primeira vez o Brasil. Os visitantes "habitués" e os residentes transitando e, ocasionalmente, "saindo" com meninas que fazem "programa" são os entrevistados que manifestam uma percepção mais nítida do caráter desses relacionamentos. Essa percepção é registrada por essas jovens. Nas palavras de uma dessas meninas:

*Sempre os estrangeiros que vem a primeira vez  
ao Brasil é melhor de você conquistar, entende?*

18 A liberdade de levar mulheres, existente em algumas pequenas pousadas, flats e apartamentos, é um critério relevante para essas escolhas. Após as atividades do Pacto de Combate à Prostituição, vários dos grandes hotéis denunciados, no passado, como coniventes com o turismo sexual, restringiram severamente o ingresso de mulheres não hospedadas e baniram, inclusive, a prática de utilização de "books", oferecendo mulheres.

*Porque quando estrangeiro se apaixona, ele se apaixona de verdade.*

*Essa particularidade somase a outro aspecto, crucial no estabelecimento das diferenciações que elas fazem entre os visitantes internacionais. Segundo a garçonete:*

*Sabe, tem homens que vêm para cá, só atrás de aventura, entende? Só de trocar de mulher todas as noites. Mas, esses já que arranji, vêm mais atrás de carinho, mais atrás de atenção...*

*Nesse contexto, os argumentos através dos quais essas garotas e os estrangeiros que com elas se relacionam explicam suas escolhas mútuas adquirem particular importância. Essas formulações permitem chegar à compreensão dos procedimentos através dos quais esses agentes acionam as categorias de diferenciação que permeiam a escolha de parceiros/as.*

### **Gênero, nacionalidade**

Estrangeiros de diversas nacionalidades à procura de sexo assinalam a importância das mulheres locais nas suas escolhas de conhecer, regressar ou permanecer na cidade. Eles convergem na apreciação positiva do caráter amigável, traço de temperamento distintivo atribuído às brasileiras. Esse caráter faz parte de atributos que, corporificados nas nativas, são associados, alternativamente, ao Brasil e ao conjunto de seus habitantes. Os estrangeiros entrevistados coincidem em considerar temperamento cálido e espírito aberto, simpatia, alegria e descontração como traços específicos que marcam o caráter nacional, distinguindo-o daquele atribuído a outros países.

Nas relações estabelecidas por esses estrangeiros, a apreciação dos atributos que marcam o Brasil é, aparentemente, positiva. No entanto, cada elemento positivo torna-se, também, parte de uma análise negativa: a alegria

brasileira adquire conotações de imprevidência e irresponsabilidade, a maleabilidade e paciência atribuídas à população nativa são associadas a passividade e indolência. Ao contrário, os países da Europa e seus habitantes são considerados frios e individualistas. Mas esses países são tingidos, também, por atributos positivamente avaliados que remetem, sobretudo, à idéia de racionalidade, organização legal e planejamento para o futuro, inexistentes no Brasil. O que estou querendo destacar é que essas relações entre nacionalidades estão permeadas de ambivalências. E é importante considerar a relevância adquirida pelas ambivalências na perpetuação dos estereótipos. Refirome à análise desenvolvida por Bhabha. Segundo esse autor, no discurso colonial, os estereótipos são a principal estratégia discursiva para outorgar um caráter fixo ao "outro". Eles adquirem força, precisamente, através dos jogos de ambivalências que articulam crenças múltiplas, misturadas e divididas numa corrente de significação (Bhabha, 1994).

Essas ambivalências permeiam a sexualização da qual o Brasil é objeto. Num procedimento que parece ser corrente na leitura que as culturas Anglo/Européias fazem das latinoamericanas e caribenhas, o temperamento associado ao caráter nacional deriva do clima (tropical) e este é associado a um grau extremo de sensualidade (Aparicio & Chaves Silverman, 1997). Neste sentido, um dos turistas portugueses afirma:

*Em Portugal, a gente vive muito afastada... A confiança tem limites... Somos mais retraídos. Talvez pelo clima [os brasileiros] sejam diferentes. Em Portugal a temperatura é totalmente diferente daqui. Eu diria que as mulheres aqui atingem a maioridade com menos idade. Uma moça aí com treze, quatorze anos é uma mulher que está farta de fazer sexo... o próprio clima lhe dá um comportamento diferente.*

Nessas impressões o Brasil, associado ao clima (quente) e a uma sexualidade exuberante, é vinculado, também, a um elevado grau de prostituição: "o que se sabe do Brasil",

diz um residente sazonal italiano, "é que há 50 mulheres para cada homem, e muita prostituição".

Essas relações, entre países e entre nacionalidades, são atravessadas por gênero. Nas conceitualizações desses estrangeiros, as nações européias aparecem masculinizadas, vinculadas a uma racionalidade, objetividade e "frieza" que se opõem à calidez e abertura do Brasil, habitado por um povo pobre, receptivo e "carinhoso". Entretanto, olhados internamente, uns e outros países mostram diferenciações de gênero. Nessa perspectiva, o Brasil, inserido no Sul, apresenta distinções agudas e "tradicionais" entre feminilidades e masculinidades. Os países ricos, ao contrário, parecem apresentar deslocamentos das diferenciações de gênero. Essas distinções são enunciadas estabelecendo relações entre masculinidades e entre feminilidades, nativas e forâneas.

Do ponto de vista desses entrevistados, os atributos alocados ao Brasil, corporificados no sangue, marcam a masculinidade nativa com um temperamento explosivo e perigoso, em contraposição ao sangue "frio" dos europeus. "Brasileiro tem o sangue quente, perde a cabeça, é violento, capaz de matar", comenta um residente sazonal italiano. Nessas visões, a masculinidade nativa, associada a uma certa indolência, à propensão a um consumo excessivo de álcool e à "burrice" se expressa num temperamento belicoso e, sobretudo, na atribuição de uma sexualidade exacerbada, primária e pouco elaborada.

As masculinidades européias, ao contrário, são apresentadas como evidenciando sinais de romantismo e delicadeza. Os estrangeiros entrevistados insistem, também, em destacar a dedicação ao trabalho e a valorização da responsabilidade em relação à família, particularmente, da paternidade —vários desses estrangeiros estabelecem relações causais entre estar em Fortaleza e a inexistência de obrigações familiares—, como elementos centrais na

constituição das masculinidades positivamente avaliadas. Nesses pontos, essas noções de masculinidade reiteram as presentes em outros contextos (ocidentais) (Vale de Almeida, 1995). Mas, é importante não perder de vista que essas formulações se integram em relações entre masculinidades européias e brasileiras, nas quais estas últimas são invariavelmente inferiorizadas.

No que se refere aos estilos de sexualidade, não há, necessariamente, convergências entre esses entrevistados. Residentes e turistas italianos à procura de sexo aludem abertamente à importância de um certo estilo de sexualidade como componente das masculinidades positivamente avaliadas —"não faço nada quando não quero, porque eu sou bem porquinho quando quero... bem mulherengo", me explica um residente sazonal. Alguns dos entrevistados "que falam inglês" —assim denominados por garotas locais já que é em inglês que holandeses, alemães, noruegueses se comunicam com elas— explicitam a importância assumida pelas "fantasias" nos seus relacionamentos sexuais com as nativas e a excitação provocada pelo fato de poder manter relacionamentos sexuais com diversas mulheres, de tonalidades diferentes, num único dia. Nas palavras de um turista inglês, proprietário de um salão de cabelereiro, solteiro, de 33 anos:

*I have been to bed with some of them. Dark, medium and light. In the first two days I went crazy.*

Mas, simultaneamente, aludem à propensão a estabelecer relacionamentos igualitários com (todas) as mulheres, sublinhando sua capacidade de "amizade" intersexual, orgulhando-se, também, da maneira como encaram as tarefas domésticas, inclusive nos relacionamentos com as "namoradas" das férias. Num jogo no qual nenhum traço de personalidade e/ou temperamento escapa à relação entre nacionalidades, umas e outras características são contrapostas ao "machismo", considerado aspecto distintivo da masculinidade local.

As percepções dos estrangeiros entrevistados mostram uma valorização aparentemente positiva das mulheres locais. Os traços vinculados à feminilidade nativa são delineados através do contraste com aqueles associados às mulheres dos respectivos países de origem dos entrevistados. A acessibilidade e “calidez” do temperamento das brasileiras são, assim, contrastados com a arrogância das alemãs, o “fechamento” das portuguesas e a autoapreciação exageradamente positiva das inglesas, a frialdade, o espírito calculista e a altivez das italianas.

*Ah, le italiane, non può parlare niente para elas. tutto se offendono... le donne italiane tem um conflito de identidade, estão cheias de idéias feministas.*

Nessas percepções, os atributos alocados às feminilidades européias se traduzem, geralmente, em elevados níveis de exigência em relação aos homens. Esses estrangeiros percebem as feminilidades das mulheres do Norte, corporificadas em mulheres independentes que, priorizando o sucesso profissional, a carreira, o dinheiro e, inclusive, consumindo sexo pago e/ou exótico — “Italiane, muita mulher vai na África para transar com negro, compreende?” — agem “à maneira de homens”, como que masculinizadas. No entanto, alguns comentários apontam para traços que remetem a certos estilos de feminilidade tradicional. Trata-se de registros de homens de países relativamente mais “pobres”. Os entrevistados portugueses contrapõem o temperamento das brasileiras ao caráter fechado e contido das mulheres de seu país; os argentinos à falta de movimentação sexual de suas conterrâneas.

Por sua vez, nas impressões dos entrevistados dos países mais ricos, o temperamento carinhoso, a calidez, simplicidade e submissão das nativas, integram-se numa idéia de feminilidade que, revestida de traços de “autenticidade”, remete a uma submissão, desaparecida na Europa: “A mulher aqui ainda é mulher, mais carinhosa”, diz um turista italiano. Mas, as leituras, aparentemente positivas, dessas feminilidades, nas quais converge a ânsia de autenticidade

desses estrangeiros, sexualizam essas garotas, inferiorizando-as. As maneiras locais de ser mulher são percebidas como marcadas por uma sensualidade singular que se expressa corporalmente. Nas palavras de um residente alemão:

*Uma coisa que eu adoro é essas gatinhas... de quinze, dezesseis anos de idade, às vezes até de trinta, é o jeito de se vestir, de andar... e passear na rua. Chama a atenção de todos os homens. Aquelas roupinhas... A calça jeans que só vai até aqui, a blusinha começa aqui, em baixo dos seios... Eu fico ali sentado olhando, só olhando, eu acho a coisa mais sexy no mundo.*

Essa sensualidade é revestida de simplicidade. “Sono semplice, molto semplice, não tem malícia”, afirma um turista italiano à procura de sexo. Ela é, também, associada à falta de inteligência: “Só pensam em namorar e dançar forró” afirma um residente italiano, aposentado, de 60 anos, dando-me como exemplo a amiga, “muito jovem e muito ciumenta” que mora na casa dele. Desenhando com as mãos acentuadas curvas femininas que balançam de um lado ao outro, adiciona, estabelecendo uma relação causal:

Falta cérebro, não consegue aprender, paguei a escola para ela durante dois anos, mas não sabe nem a tabuada.

E a “fogosidade” das nativas, atribuída às mulheres que fazem “programa” e, também, às que não, é ligada à propensão para modalidades (mais ou menos) abertas de prostituição. Visitantes estrangeiros de diversas nacionalidades compartilham essa percepção. Nas palavras de um turista português: “O Brasil, a mulher brasileira, é um fenômeno diferente. Vejo meninas de dezesseis, dezessete anos que já praticam...”

Nas conceitualizações desses estrangeiros, as noções de masculinidade e feminilidade adquirem sentido na sua imbricação com a nacionalidade. E essa intersecção é central na sexualização através da qual masculinidades e feminilidades nativas são inferiorizadas. Chamo a atenção

para essa imbricação, observando que a peculiar atração (erótica) mediando esses encontros transnacionais é perpassada, também, por outras diferenciações. A idade é uma delas. Os entrevistados concedem importância ao acesso à sensualidade nativa corporificada em mulheres muito jovens. Esse acesso está longe de limitar-se aos estrangeiros. No entanto, as interseções entre gênero e nacionalidade que dotam esses encontros transnacionais de um caráter de intensa desigualdade facilitam amplamente essa possibilidade aos visitantes internacionais.

Esses estrangeiros mostram, também, certa percepção das diferenças locais de classe, lidas através da distância afetivo/sexual estabelecida pelas mulheres das camadas sociais mais elevadas em relação a eles. Refiro-me, especificamente, às camadas médias altas de Fortaleza. Apenas as mulheres desses grupos sociais parecem, ocasionalmente, escapar do jogo de inferiorização que, intimamente vinculado à localização estrutural dos respectivos países nas relações transnacionais, afeta as nativas das camadas baixas e dos setores menos favorecidos das camadas médias. E observo que, nesse contexto, a localização se torna fundamental para a compreensão de como operam as diferenciações que confluem na inferiorização dessas brasileiras —alguns desses estrangeiros estão situados, em seus respectivos países, em camadas sociais análogas às das jovens com as quais se relacionam em Fortaleza—.

No universo de nativas que se engajam em relacionamentos amoroso/sexuais com visitantes internacionais reitera-se o procedimento de delinear masculinidades e feminilidades contrastando noções associadas às maneiras de ser homem e mulher atribuídas aos diferentes países. Estabelecendo relações entre construções de gênero e nacionalidades, entrevistadas de diferentes camadas sociais, vinculadas ou não à prostituição, inferiorizam as masculinidades locais associando os atributos mais valorizados às maneiras de ser homem dos estrangeiros. A percepção das masculinidades nativas está, aliás, imersa numa permanente

oposição “dentro”/“fora”, constantemente redefinida. Nesse universo, essa oposição aponta para relações onde as concepções sobre o “local” se definem, ora em relação ao “estrangeiro” de outras nacionalidades, ora em relação aos forasteiros nacionais — e, nesses casos, o Sudeste do Brasil, reiterando em escala nacional uma valorização vinculada à localização, ocupa o (privilegiado) lugar de “fora”.

Nessas relações, os estilos de masculinidade local, invariavelmente considerados “machistas”, são percebidos como marcados por traços de intensa possessão, agressividade, distanciamento afetivo, falta de respeito e infidelidade. A atribuição desses traços distintivos aos nativos é implementada pelas entrevistadas para explicar a escolha dos homens “de fora”. E, ao contrário, os forasteiros, particularmente os estrangeiros, aparecem corporificando estilos de masculinidade vinculados a uma certa “abertura” e um maior grau de igualitarismo. Essas qualidades, vinculadas a diversas nacionalidades européias são apresentadas como se integrando em maneiras de ser homem que aparecem marcadas por romantismo, delicadeza e cuidados. Nas palavras da garçonne, descrevendo sua relação com um namorado alemão:

*Chegamos em casa, ele aprontou um café pra mim; queijo, presunto, pão... Eu fiquei lá sentada e ele foi fazer as coisas. Ele nunca deixava eu lavar um prato, mas sempre quando eu podia, eu lavava a roupa dele. Eu lavava e ele engomava. Então ele engomava e eu lavava. Era assim. Então, quando eu tinha roupa, ele mesmo lavava a minha roupa e ele engomava... Ele varria a casa, eu lavava os pratos, ele fazia comida, eu lavava o banheiro, ia arrumar a cama. Ele não tinha essa frescura de um fazendo e o outro ficar olhando.*

*Essas relações entre masculinidades envolvem atributos e aspectos presentes nas comparações estabelecidas pelos estrangeiros. Mas, nas conceitualizações das entrevistadas, o trabalho*



*está longe de aparecer como referência substancial na constituição das masculinidades. As maneiras de ser homem positivamente avaliadas estão necessariamente associadas a um certo padrão social. Nesse sentido, o tipo de emprego integrase num conjunto mais amplo de indicadores que, combinando país de residência, posses e disposição para gastar o dinheiro, inclusive pagando viagens ao exterior, estão associados aos estilos de masculinidade mais bem considerados. E a alusão ao país de residência está longe de ser redundante uma vez que há latino-americanos transitando pelos circuitos de turismo sexual de classe média, procurando, eles também, aproximações com as garotas que "namoram" estrangeiros. Mas, as maneiras de ser homem associadas aos portadores dessas nacionalidades não são incorporadas no quadro das masculinidades mais valorizadas.*

Nessas relações, outras diferenciações estão longe de operar de maneira estável. A idade, indiferente, para algumas entrevistadas, é, ao contrário, um aspecto relevante nas preferências de outras, particularmente no caso das mais apreciadas dos estrangeiros. Nesse ponto, a garota que se considera "rainha" da boate percebida como centro da prostituição voltada para estrangeiros na Praia de Iracema, apaixonada por um italiano de 24 anos, é taxativa: "Com velho, não puxo nem papo".

No marco dessas distinções, os estilos de sensualidade associados às diversas maneiras de ser homem adquirem significados particulares. As conceitualizações de masculinidade apresentadas por essas entrevistadas mostram relações nas quais sensualidade e sexualidade estão intimamente vinculadas e esta última é percebida como expressando características essenciais da pessoa. Essas características, particularmente temperamento e caráter, aparecem como inscritas nas práticas sexuais que, revelando a presença ou ausência dos atributos básicos na apreciação

das masculinidades, sobretudo "generosidade", "atenção" e "companheirismo", são vinculadas com as nacionalidades em jogo. Em relações análogas às estabelecidas pelos estrangeiros, as nativas atribuem aos locais uma intensa carga de sensualidade que se revela na corporalidade, particularmente nas práticas sexuais. O estilo de sexualidade associado a essas práticas, porém, percebido como exacerbado e desconsiderado, está distante de ser incorporado nas masculinidades positivamente consideradas.

A apreciação dos estilos associados aos estrangeiros não é linear. Latinos, particularmente argentinos e italianos, são, também, vinculados a uma intensa carga de sensualidade. Os estilos latino-americanos estão longe de serem positivamente considerados pelas entrevistadas de camadas baixas que "namoram" exclusivamente estrangeiros. Ao contrário, essas entrevistadas convergem no que se refere à avaliação positiva da sensualidade alocada aos italianos: o "calor" associado a essa nacionalidade é matizado por um intenso romantismo que "suaviza" o estilo de sexualidade atribuído a esses estrangeiros e propicia envolvimento emocional e relacionamentos duradouros, com potencial saída ao exterior, precisamente, para um dos países mais visados. Nas palavras da "rainha" da boate:

*Italiano é romântico. Se apaixonar, sai de baixo, mulher, eles dão até as cuecas. É, minha filha, se apaixonar, é amor mio para todo lado.*

Numa valorização que mostra relativa autonomia em relação ao "desempenho" sexual, as percepções dessas entrevistadas apontam para relações nas quais os estilos de sensualidade e sexualidade vinculados às masculinidades positivamente avaliadas, para além do grau de sensualidade envolvido, revelam, sobretudo, cuidado, companheirismo e generosidade. Esses atributos podem estar alocados a uma ou outra nacionalidade. Mas, em relações que tornam evidente a crucial importância da intersecção gênero e nacionalidade, nas conceitualizações das garotas pobres que namoram estrangeiros, elas tendem a ser aquelas dos visitantes dos países do Norte.



As relações entre feminilidades estabelecidas pelas entrevistadas reiteram, também, atributos presentes na apreciação dos estrangeiros. Nessas leituras, as feminilidades européias aparecem como marcadas pela autonomia e, de maneira análoga ao "clima" associado aos respectivos países, pela "frieza". Opondo-se a esses estilos de feminilidade, as maneiras de ser da mulher brasileira aparecem marcadas pelas qualidades que os visitantes internacionais lhes atribuem. Temperamento carinhoso e submisso fazem parte desses atributos, associados, por algumas entrevistadas, à idéia de dependência, baseada na necessidade econômica. "As brasileiras somos mais carinhosas", afirma uma cearense casada com um italiano. As reflexões da garçonete da boate, com base em suas experiências, esclarecem esse ponto:

*É o tipo da coisa, é você agradar ele... As mulheres dos países deles não são dependentes, tem o dinheiro delas, carro, liberdade, não precisam de um homem para ir a um bar. Brasileira, não, brasileira precisa. Eles gostam disso, e elas, as brasileiras, gostam que eles tomem conta. Delas olhar algo e dizer, que bonito e eles comprarem para elas. Elas gostam dessa dependência e elas gostam do jeito deles.*

E as idéias sobre o temperamento nativo são incorporadas na intensa carga de sensualidade atribuída pelas entrevistadas às feminilidades locais. "Somos mais caldas", afirma a "rainha" da boate. À maneira de atualizações do pensamento dos deterministas geográficos, as relações entre clima e temperamento perpassam, também, as percepções que algumas dessas mulheres têm de si próprias. Nas palavras de uma cearense de camadas médias, desvinculada da prostituição, que namora estrangeiros:

*Acho que é a coisa do dado, do conversar, de ser mais alegre, de ter aquela coisa, eu acho que o clima influencia nisso, se você observar pessoas que moram em regiões frias, elas são mais fechadas... Eles dizem que nós somos mais*

*"calientes". Mas, tem, a brasileira tem uma coisa mais assim... A minha libido é muito forte.*

Essas percepções atribuem traços distintivos, não isentos de conotações negativas, às feminilidades brasileiras. Revelando a presença, no pensamento nativo de elementos presentes nos procedimentos através dos quais os estrangeiros sexualizam as mulheres locais, as entrevistadas reiteram, uma e outra vez, a idéia de que a sensualidade, marcando o temperamento das nativas, se expressa numa excessiva "disposição" para o "namoro" que, sem observar limites, redunde no assédio do qual são objeto os homens, particularmente, os estrangeiros, na cidade. Essas impressões são expressas com particular nitidez pela garçonete:

*Porque homem de fora, se você ver eles são muito bonitos... E quando eles tão aqui as mulheres dão em cima. Se tiver 3 casais ali, eu, pelo menos, paquero. Eu paquero. Tou nem aí... Eu tiro por mim, Adriana... Eu paquero, por que é que ela não paquera?*

Ao mesmo tempo, essa sensualidade, percebida por essas garotas como o aspecto que as singulariza, tornase o elemento central através do qual elas garantem o sucesso e permanência desses namoros, negociando, inclusive seu posicionamento nesses relacionamentos. Explicando a evolução de seu romance com o namorado holandês com o qual está prestes a morar, na Europa, levando, também, a filha, essa garçonete explica:

*Eu estava muito apaixonada por ele, fazia tudo por ele, sabe. Às vezes, quando ele chegava, acendia umas velinhas, comprava vinho... Eu esperava ele só de calcinha... Era uma vontade tão grande de dar minha bunda para ele. Mas eu tinha medo dele não gostar. Ele tinha vergonha. E eu queria, né?... Ai nos fomos tentar. Só que eu não consegui de tão tensa que eu estava. Só que na nossa rua tem uma loja de*

*coisas prá, de sexo. Vamos lá na lojinha comprar uma pomada? Acho que tu também quer, porque ficou alegre... Aí nos fomos, tomei um banho... E fomos brincando, brincando, brincando. Aí eu falei, é hoje... Eu gosto daquelas brincadeiras, assim, que lambuza ele, sabe? Olha, isso tudo na vida dele é novo, sabe? Ele diz, minha mulher nunca passou... papinha de maçã, geléia, danone. Ninguém nunca fez isso com ele. Ele fica, assim, besta. Toda carta que ele escreve para mim ele diz, você é um animal, você é um animal que eu nunca vi isso na minha vida... Depois eu visto roupa para dançar, para ele mesmo, dentro de casa, só nos dois. Isso para ele é muito novo. Pois, é hoje! Menina. Consegui. Ele falou. Meu Deus do Céu! Eu tenho 31 anos e nunca vi isso na minha vida. Olha, eu sempre queria com ela. Mas, ela nunca queria. E não porque é holandesa, porque o país é liberal. Ela achava que isso era coisa de gay, essas coisas. E falei, não... Isso, no Brasil, é comum, brasileiro gosta... Eu sempre pedia para ela, mas ela não me dava. Mas, você, não precisei nem pedir. Você me deu.*

Nas interrelações entre categorias de diferenciação permeando as práticas envolvidas no "turismo sexual de classe média", gênero e nacionalidade tornam-se, assim, indissociáveis. E essas imbricações expressam-se através da "cor" corporificada por estrangeiros e nativos: as relações estabelecidas através da "cor" completam os procedimentos de valorização dos estilos de masculinidade atribuídos a certas nacionalidades e de sexualização das nativas.

"cor", estetização, racialização

Pode parecer paradoxal que fale em cor, referindo-me a visitantes (e residentes) de países do Norte. E, mais ainda que, numa pesquisa centrada em Fortaleza, aluda à noção de "racialização", isto porque, quando se fala em "cor", nem

sempre a "brancura", implícita nas considerações sobre racismo, é levada em conta. Por outro lado, entre as capitais do Nordeste vinculadas ao turismo sexual internacional, no Brasil, essa cidade está situada no estado que apresenta a menor taxa de população negra.<sup>19</sup> Explicar-me exige pensar tanto nas noções de "brancura" e "racialização" quanto na maneira como a "cor" opera no marco das relações transnacionais em Fortaleza.

Falo em brancura, referindo-me a algo que vai além da cor da pele. Trata-se —e sigo aqui o pensamento de bell hooks (1990), autora que contesta abertamente a vinculação exclusiva da raça ao Outro não branco; negro, marrom, amarelo ou vermelho— de considerar a brancura como conceito subjacente ao racismo, à colonização e ao imperialismo cultural.

No que se refere à "racialização", essa noção, utilizada no início da década de 1960 por Fanon (1979), tem sido recriada no marco das discussões contemporâneas sobre os contatos transnacionais e multiculturais associados à globalização. Entre essas perspectivas, contam-se as abordagens feministas que, interessadas em compreender a imbricação entre gênero e outras categorias de diferenciação, conferem um lugar destacado à "raça". E se o conceito de "raça" tem um estatuto ambíguo nas correntes antropológicas (Fry, 95-96; Cowlshaw 2000) nas abordagens feministas que o adotam, nem sempre o conteúdo dessa categoria fica claramente delineado. (Anthias e Yuval Davis: 1993) nem há, sequer, acordo, sobre o estatuto conceitual dessa categoria (Moore, 1994; Haraway, 1991). Entre essas linhas de pensamento há, entretanto, convergências no que se refere a pensar em racialização para aludir ao modo complexo de operação das desigualdades através do qual se excluem grupos corporalmente marcados. Utilizo esse termo aqui nesse sentido, considerando, porém, que na superioridade concedida a certos grupos nesses

19 Em 1991, essa taxa era de 2,95%, enquanto Pernambuco apresentava 3,3% e Salvador 20,2%. É importante destacar que, segundo o Censo do IBGE (1991), a população "parda", nos três estados apresenta cifras próximas: Ceará contava com 67,4%, Pernambuco com 63,4% e Bahia com 69%.

processos de exclusão, a "cor" também está presente.

Quando digo que a "cor", indissociavelmente ligada à nacionalidade, é vinculada às masculinidades mais valorizadas, refiro-me à invariável marca da "brancura" na corporificação dessas maneiras de ser homem. Em procedimentos nos quais o temperamento marca o corpo, que é apreciado através de critérios estéticos, os traços distintivos das masculinidades mais apreciadas são, sempre, associadas a uma beleza contrastante com a feiúra atribuída aos locais. E penso em critérios estéticos como julgamentos de beleza e gosto (Overing, 1996), indissociáveis de um processo de educação dos sentidos no qual as qualidades são incorporadas em sistemas de significado através dos quais se avaliam as propriedades das coisas (Morphy, 1996). Nas palavras das entrevistadas:

*Os homens aqui, a maioria, são mais baixos, a cabeça, assim, o formato da cabeça é mais arredondado, barrigudos, relaxados...*

*O homem [pobre] no Ceará é feio que dói. Feio, cabeça grande, achatada, tem um [aspecto] cinzento porque o sol é muito intenso, a ignorância é muito grande.*

A estetização envolvendo os homens "de fora" não obedece a padrões corporais fixados com precisão. A beleza atribuída aos estrangeiros sintetiza atributos corporificados por homens jovens ou não tão jovens, carecas ou com cabelo. A garçonete da boate descreve um dos namorados estrangeiros nos seguintes termos:

*[Ele] é lindo.*

*Tem 1,80, é muito alto, 1,90, por aí. É careca, tem seus 38 anos. Ele tem olhos azul da cor do mar. É lindo, muito carinhoso.*

Essa beleza, exprimindo critérios implementados na hierarquização das masculinidades, está associada à brancura, que se expressa em traços fenotípicos: na cor da pele, do cabelo, dos olhos. Uma das garotas de camadas

baixas que "sai" exclusivamente com estrangeiros descreve o namorado norueguês nos seguintes termos:

*Ele era louro, de olhos azuis, ficava verde. O olho, ficava verde... Era alto! O físico, sabe? O físico dele era diferente.*

Mas, essa estetização, vinculada aos europeus e remetendo à localização, envolve aspectos que vão além dos traços fenotípicos. Nessa ótica adquire sentido um dos critérios centrais que orientam a "rainha" da boate para selecionar seus "namorados", preferentemente italianos intensamente bronzeados: "Gosto de alto, louro, branquinho. Tem que ser branco!.." Essas relações são percebidas pelos estrangeiros que circulam no circuito do turismo sexual de classe média. Nas palavras de um alemão, residente:

*Aqui, tudo é maravilhoso, é claro, porque sou louro, sou estrangeiro e todo mundo pensa que eu sou rico! Para onde vou é assim. E não é prostituta, não. E mulheres de todas as idades, de todas as classes...*

De maneira análoga, a leitura das feminilidades nativas realizada por esses estrangeiros é marcada pela "cor". Uma cor, aliás, "morena", contraposta à brancura vinculada aos/às habitantes da Europa, sintetiza a imbricação de diferenciações corporificada nas mulheres locais. No entanto, se a "brancura" marca os estilos de masculinidade positivamente avaliados, o ser morena/o, implementado na sexualização das/os nativas/os as/os inferioriza, racializando-as/os. E nesse ponto é importante observar que na relação entre masculinidades estabelecida pelos entrevistados não se trata apenas de afirmar a superioridade de um estilo de masculinidade "civilizado" e "suavizado". Trata-se, também, de afirmar o valor superior de maneiras de ser do homem europeu e branco.

Ao falarem nas morenas, os estrangeiros utilizam a cor, muitas vezes, em termos descritivos: elas têm uma pele que não é branca, nem negra. Nesses termos, nos quais ser

morena remete a uma determinada tonalidade, ser queimada pelo sol não basta. Um dos entrevistados italianos, procurando descrever essa cor, alude com gestos à forma da boca e do nariz. Diferentemente do que parece acontecer em outros contextos de turismo sexual no Brasil, em Salvador e no Recife, nos quais os turistas estrangeiros procuram morenas e negras (Carpazoo, 1994; Dias Filho, 1998), em Fortaleza, as "negras/negras" são rejeitadas por estrangeiros de diversas nacionalidades que, às vezes, se assumem como racistas. Nas palavras de um turista português à procura de sexo,

*Gosto das brasileiras, mas das brasileiras morenas, até das mulatas, das negras nunca, sou um pouco racista.*

Um italiano, residente, se expressa em termos análogos:

*A morena é a melhor mulher, má próprio a mulher negra, negra, não. Il mio tipo ideale é morena. Qui, a maior parte é morena.*

Leclerc chamou a atenção para a relação entre o processo de tornar o Outro exótico e a impossibilidade em perceber a "interioridade real" das culturas, característica da visão imperial. O autor afirma que essa visão não seria pura e simples negação dos "outros": a diversidade cultural seria convertida em algo a ser degustado... "explorar apenas o outro é pouco. É necessário ainda saboreá-lo como tal."<sup>20</sup> A influência das perspectivas imperiais nas atitudes culturais do presente, particularmente no que se refere à atualização das velhas divisões que ressurgem nas relações Norte-Sul é, hoje, tema de um intenso debate (Said, 1995), no qual se insere a discussão sobre o turismo internacional nos países do Sul. Nas palavras de Alexander (1994), para quem o turismo (sexual) internacional se baseia numa sexualização da terra e das pessoas, na qual a Alteridade é pensada como instrumento de prazer:

<sup>20</sup> Citação de Berque em LECLERC, 1973: 33-34

*As fantasias européias da conquista colonial, o exótico, o erótico, o escuro, o primitivo, o perigo, medo e desejo convergem nas praias virgens e são traçados através dos contornos da geografia imperial.*

Seguindo essa linha de reflexão, Kempadoo (2000) chama a atenção para as maneiras como o exotismo está presente nos processos contemporâneos que, ligados a movimentos econômicos e culturais globalizantes, perpassam procedimentos de dominação e exploração. Segundo a autora, essa forma diferenciada de racismo, alimentando a ilusão de admiração e atração pelo Outro, não deixa de inferiorizar a Alteridade. Referindo-se ao Caribe, Kempadoo assinala que, no passado, esses processos estariam centrados, particularmente, na sexualidade das mulatas. Na virada do século, a atualização desses processos ampliaria o leque de sexualidades racializadas, dominadas e exploradas, incluindo as corporificadas em pessoas de pele clara e cabelo "sedoso".

Uma leitura das percepções dos estrangeiros à procura de sexo, em Fortaleza, sugere relações com as perspectivas que pensam o turismo sexual internacional como expressão de concepções "imperiais". Essas percepções coincidem em subordinar, através do consumo, a sexualidade nacional. O exótico, delineado na intersecção entre "cor" e sexualidade participa nesses jogos de subordinação. Mas esses estrangeiros estabelecem através da cor, implementada em termos descritivos, limites nos espaços de exotismo nos quais estão dispostos a transitar. Tendo lido em seu livro de viagens sobre o Brasil que quanto mais claros os nativos, maiores as possibilidades de eles fazerem parte das classes "educadas", um turista inglês dedicou-se às garotas mais ou menos escuras, que imaginava oferecessem maiores facilidades, em termos de acesso sexual.

*Skin, there are black, brown, light brown to white. Brazilians are of different colours, and I've read in a book, my Brazilian book, that the lighter the skin, the more educated, so to speak, the darker they are, the less.*

Excluiu, entretanto, as negras: "I don't really like, black, black girls"

Essa rejeição surpreende levando em conta idéias correntes sobre as preferências dos turistas sexuais no Brasil. No entanto, ela não é estranha quando se considera o turismo sexual internacional no plano global. O'Connell Davidson e Sanchez Taylor afirmam que alguns dos turistas sexuais no Caribe, imaginando as mulheres negras como corporificação de tudo o que é baixo e devasso consideram essas mulheres parceiras apropriadas para sexo degradante, para encontros breves e anônimos. As mulheres procuradas para relacionamentos a longo prazo e/ou relacionamentos sexuais comerciais quase românticos teriam a pele relativamente clara e o cabelo liso.<sup>21</sup>

Os estrangeiros entrevistados em Fortaleza convergem amplamente no que se refere à exclusão das negras. Isso não quer dizer que as mulheres por eles escolhidas não sejam racializadas. Entre esses entrevistados a cor é utilizada, também, em termos categóricos, isto é, em termos que, mais do que descrever, possuindo autonomia em relação aos sinais corporais, remetem a uma classificação (Kofes, 1976). Na visão dos visitantes estrangeiros, incluindo alguns latino-americanos, a cor morena é intimamente ligada ao Brasil e é associada à "melhor mulher", a mais "fogososa". Nas palavras de um argentino à procura de sexo:

*Las morenitas son más fogosas. Quieren más veces, tienen otra movilidad en la cama, se prestan, por ahí, para otras posiciones, hablando mal y pronto, el culo. La mujer argentina, no lo encara de esa manera.*

Nesses termos, as nativas, para além de tonalidades específicas e numa classificação que, atravessando diferentes classes sociais, sexualiza mulheres vinculadas ou não à

21 Esses racistas não considerariam essas mulheres "niggers", mas LBFM's "Little Brown Focking Machines", uma categoria ampla que englobaria qualquer mulher que não seja "branca" ou "africana" (O'CONNELL DAVIDSON e SANCHEZ TAYLOR, 1999).

prostituição, são consideradas "morenas", corporificando a intensa carga de sensualidade associada a essa cor. E as ambivalências atravessando a apreciação dessa cor mantêm relações com os procedimentos de estetização que, associados às feminilidades, situam numa posição relativamente inferior a "beleza" atribuída às brasileiras. Os italianos entrevistados, encantados com a sensualidade das cearenses, expressam abertamente a superioridade de suas conterrâneas. Um turista dessa nacionalidade me explica:

*Le italiane sono più bele, má, non para mim.  
Gosto delas. É elas que non gostam de mim. É verdade*

Os entrevistados argentinos, apesar de localizados, do mesmo modo que o Brasil, no Sul, manifestam percepções análogas<sup>22</sup>:

*Son más gustosas las brasileras. Yo creo que si la mujer argentina fuera como la brasilerera sería la mejor mujer del mundo. Porque las argentinas son más lindas...*

A estetização, sintetizando as valorizações que permeiam esse universo, espelha as relações desiguais nele presentes. A beleza associada à brancura e intimamente vinculada à localização marca os estilos de masculinidade mais valorizados que se corporificam em estrangeiros das nacionalidades mais apreciadas. E, ao contrário, a estetização expressa o lugar subordinado atribuído às brasileiras, racializadas. Algumas, consideradas corponificação da mais pura sensualidade; outras, (quase) inteiramente rejeitadas.

22 Trabalhos centrados nas representações acionadas pelas migrações de brasileiros a Argentina afirmam (FRIGERIO, 1997): diferentemente de outros migrantes de países latino-americanos que, "estigmatizados", são excluídos, os brasileiros e, particularmente, as brasileiras, são "integrados" através do processo de torná-los exóticos. No caso específico das mulheres esse processo envolve a idéia da extrema facilidade de acesso sexual. Do meu ponto de vista, esses processos, embora ofereçam possibilidades de serem "explorados" em termos de ascensão social, não podem deixar de ser considerados mecanismos de inferiorização.



As garotas de camadas baixas que “namoram” estrangeiros são plenamente conscientes de seus atributos aos olhos desses estrangeiros:

*O que é que eles gostam de mim? A minha cor. Sempre, todos que me conhecem sempre falam, amam muito minha cor, sabe? Porque sou morena, tenho cabelo enrolado, e sou simpática, carinhosa, sou muito natural, da terra, isso que eles sempre falam...*

Nesse contexto, a sexualização/racialização das nativas não é operada exclusivamente pelos estrangeiros. Ela é implementada, também, pelos locais. Entretanto, enquanto na perspectiva dos visitantes internacionais esse procedimento, perpassado por ambivalências marca, em termos amplos, todas as brasileiras, na perspectiva dos locais, ele afeta as nativas, basicamente, quando estão acompanhadas por estrangeiros.

Aqui em Fortaleza, chegou um estrangeiro, arranja logo uma brasileira, aí vai para o forró, entende? Eu fui barrada lá. Foi justamente quando eu estava com Lupo, foi chato. É um racismo. Mas depois de um tempo eu voltei, mas voltei só e me deixaram entrar, numa boa. Foi aí que não entendi nada. Entro normalmente. Agora se eu entrar com estrangeiro, é cerção, esse procedimento pode adquirir prioridade sobre as distinções de classe locais. Nas palavras de uma guia de turismo cearense:

Aqui ta todo mundo mimetizado, ninguém sabe quem é quem, o que faz, não é a cor, não é o cabelo, não é a roupa que identifica a categoria social, a profissão, nada. Quinta feira, a minha colega, que é guia também, acompanhou um pessoal para jantar, um grupo de portugueses, gente de alto nível de um banco português, diretores e tal. No [forró] tinha uma blitz, uma dessas blitz de carnaval, parando tudo que era estrangeiro e pedindo passaporte. Chamaram ela de prostituta: “se você está com eles é porque é puta”... Eu mesma, já sofri esse preconceito em hotéis, aqui na praia, acompanhando meu marido, que é italiano, “olha ali o gringo se garantindo com a morena”.

## Conclusão

As diferenciações acionadas no contexto do “turismo sexual de classe média”, em Fortaleza, adquirem sentido no marco de hierarquizações estreitamente vinculadas à localização estrutural das nacionalidades em jogo. Precisamente, a crucial importância da localização relativiza a relevância da classe que, respeitando certos limites, se dilui frente à nacionalidade. E, nesse marco, gênero e raça “agem” como operadores metafóricos do poder econômico e cultural inerente a essas relações transnacionais. Essas duas categorias têm parte ativa na atualização de conceitualizações imperiais através das quais são inferiorizadas/os as/os nativas/os e privilegiados os estrangeiros. Essas conceitualizações se expressam através de construções de gênero ou, alternativamente, através daquelas vinculadas à “cor”. Em outras palavras, conceitualizações criadas na intersecção entre gênero e nacionalidade ou entre “cor” e nacionalidade são alternativamente implementadas na sexualização e desvalorização das nativas.

Nesse âmbito, porém, a sexualização da terra e das pessoas está longe de restringir-se aos visitantes internacionais. Precisamente esse é aspecto que torna mais complexas as idéias sobre as viagens desses turistas. Essa sexualização perpassa a percepção que as entrevistadas têm de si próprias e a (dura) maneira como são avaliadas e discriminadas pelos nativos quando acompanham estrangeiros. No marco dessas convergências e divergências, as nuances adquiridas por essa sexualização, intimamente ligadas às possibilidades de agência dessas garotas, permitem compreender a dinâmica desses encontros transnacionais.

Marcando, na leitura desses estrangeiros, todas as brasileiras, essa sexualização facilita a criação do clima de indefinição que perpassa esses encontros transnacionais, propiciando “romances” com eventual saída para o exterior também às garotas que fazem “programa”. E a extrema sensualidade atribuída a essas meninas, por elas literalmente



"incorporada", lhes abre caminhos que desestabilizam critérios lineares de desigualdade. Não se trata, apenas, da possibilidade de atravessar, mediante esses relacionamentos, as barreiras de classe locais. Essas garotas, que integram um "saber" sexual e amoroso nas essencializações estratégicas mediando suas relações com os estrangeiros, negociam a partir da sexualização da qual são objeto, também, seu posicionamento nesses relacionamentos.

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## CAPÍTULO III

### Mujer y Justicia Penal en México

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#### Introducción

En este trabajo me propongo exponer de manera breve, y necesariamente esquemática, algunos resultados de diversas investigaciones que hemos llevado a cabo en establecimientos penitenciarios para mujeres en la República Mexicana (Azaola y Yacamán 1996, Azaola 2001). Paralelamente, mi intención es formular algunos interrogantes que me surgieron tanto de la escucha de las ponencias que se presentaron en el Taller sobre Mujer y Ejecución Penal, que se celebró en el Instituto Internacional de Sociología Jurídica (IISJ) en Oñati, España, en junio de 2001, así como de la revisión de algunos textos que durante los últimos años se han publicado sobre el tema en distintos países.<sup>1</sup>

Me propongo, asimismo, resaltar aquellos puntos en que la situación de la mujer que se encuentra en prisión se distingue respecto a la de los varones. Es decir, aquello que tiene de específico la experiencia de la mujer que se halla privada de su libertad. Como distintos estudios lo han mostrado, esta especificidad se ha hecho visible apenas muy recientemente, como resultado de la introducción del enfoque de género al análisis de la conducta infractora de la mujer, así como de la crítica que el feminismo –o los feminismos– han dirigido hacia las teorías criminológicas tradicionales (Smart 1989, Carlen 1992, Facio 1993, Rafter y Heidensohn 1995, Janeksela 1997, Tyler 1997, Bodelón 1998b). Para algunas especialistas, esta crítica es la que mayor peso y consecuencias ha tenido para el desarrollo del pensamiento criminológico contemporáneo (Larrauri 1994, Del Olmo 1998).

<sup>1</sup> Los textos a que me refiero se encuentran citados en la bibliografía.

Como punto de partida tomo los enunciados tanto de Facio como de Zaffaroni (1993), en el sentido de que la mujer ha sido excluida tanto del discurso dominante en la criminología y el derecho, como del discurso punitivo. Ambos autores coinciden en señalar que la visión estereotipada de mujeres y hombres y la invisibilización de las mujeres han sido factores que han impedido que exista un trato justo para la mujer criminalizada.

Respecto a la visión estereotipada de la mujer delincuente, ésta tuvo su origen en las teorías premodernas de la criminología positivista de finales del siglo XIX, que situaban en la biología y en lo que postulaban como la esencia o la naturaleza femenina la explicación de sus comportamientos desviados (Lombroso y Ferrero 1973). Como es bien sabido, estas teorías dominaron el pensamiento criminológico durante la primera mitad del siglo XX y tuvieron una gran influencia que todavía no puede considerarse del todo superada.<sup>2</sup>

Después de los estudios realizados en numerosos países durante las tres últimas décadas (1970-2000), la mujer apenas comienza a ser un sujeto visible para el derecho penal, sin que esto quiera decir que la disciplina hubiera abandonado su lógica predominantemente masculina. La tardía introducción de la mujer sorprende puesto que, una vez más, la ciencia llega con retraso respecto de fenómenos que ya antes habían sido percibidos tanto por los poetas como por los periodistas, los guardias o los capellanes de la prisión. Es decir: antes de que la ciencia tomara a la mujer como sujeto/problema de conocimiento, ya sus carceleros y otros personajes cercanos al ámbito penal habían notado que su pasaje por los circuitos de la justicia tenía rasgos que lo hacían distinto del de los varones.

Con algunas excepciones (vgr. Pollack 1950), la introducción de la mujer delincuente como objeto de

<sup>2</sup> Para el caso de México, la influencia que esta corriente ha tenido puede apreciarse en los textos que aparecen en el mismo volumen que el de Jiménez-Olivares 1983.

conocimiento científico tuvo lugar propiamente en la década de los setenta, no por casualidad sólo después de que el feminismo hubiera cobrado fuerza como corriente política. Entre los primeros trabajos cabe mencionar los de Freda Adler, *Sisters in crime*, y Rita Simon, *Women and crime*, ambos publicados en 1975.

Aunque hoy en día estos estudios han sido puestos en cuestión, tanto por carecer de evidencia empírica como porque sus pronósticos no se realizaron, considero que sus premisas no carecían de fundamento y que la razón por la cual sus predicciones fallaron sigue siendo una de las interrogantes que hoy en día estamos obligados a responder. Me explico: tanto Adler como Simon postularon —con matices diferentes que en este momento dejo de lado— que en la medida que se incrementara la participación de la mujer en la vida pública y en todo tipo de actividades, seguramente su participación en el crimen también se incrementaría, siendo previsible que con el tiempo hombres y mujeres estuvieran igualmente representados en las cifras de la criminalidad.

Como sabemos, esto no ha ocurrido. En promedio, las mujeres solamente representan 3.3 % de la población en prisión en el mundo. Más aún, sabemos que la criminalidad masculina supera a la femenina en todas las naciones, en todas las comunidades que forman parte de naciones, en todos los grupos de edad, en todos los períodos de la historia para los que existen datos disponibles y en todos los delitos, con excepción de aquellos ligados con la condición de la mujer como son el aborto, el infanticidio y la prostitución (Janeksela 1997).

De este modo, y aunque la participación de la mujer en la vida pública se ha incrementado, ello no ha modificado sustantivamente su escasa participación en la criminalidad. En México, por ejemplo, mientras que la mujer representaba 17% de la fuerza de trabajo en 1970, su participación se elevó a 35% en el año 2000. En cuanto a la educación, durante el mismo periodo el porcentaje de analfabetismo se redujo de 26 a 10%, habiéndose prácticamente igualado el

ingreso de niñas y niños al sistema escolar (Garza 2000). No obstante, en México las mujeres continúan representando sólo 4% de la población total en prisión, y lo mismo o algo semejante ocurre en otros países del mundo.

Así, por ejemplo, en Estados Unidos, las mujeres representan 5% de la población interna en las prisiones estatales y 6% en las federales, proporción que se mantuvo estable entre 1970 y 1990. En Egipto, las mujeres representan 4% de la población total en prisión, mientras que en otros países de la región, como Argelia, Marruecos o Túnez, representan menos de 1%. En India, las mujeres representan 4% de la población en prisión, mientras que en Holanda 8%, en Canadá 12% y en Bulgaria 14% (Janeksela 1997, Badr-Eldin-Ali 1997, Hartjen 1997).

En síntesis, la proporción de mujeres que se encuentra en prisión muy rara vez llega a sobrepasar 15% del total de la población interna, mientras que el promedio de mujeres presas en el mundo se mantiene por debajo de 4% respecto a los varones. De aquí surgen algunas de las interrogantes para las cuales todavía no contamos con respuestas satisfactorias, a pesar de que han sido planteadas desde hace tiempo: ¿cómo podemos explicar esta escasa representación de la mujer en la criminalidad?, ¿puede hablarse todavía de mecanismos de control informal (Larrauri 1994, p.1) que resultan más eficaces para contener la transgresión en la mujer?, ¿la distinta forma en que la mujer es socializada, explica que se encuentre subrepresentada en el crimen?, ¿existen elementos transculturales en las relaciones hombre/mujer que den cuenta de este fenómeno?, ¿cuáles son? A mi modo de ver, éstos constituyen algunos de los temas que deberían agregarse a la agenda de trabajo de la criminología que durante los últimos años ha venido incorporando la perspectiva de género a sus análisis.

Por otra parte, la lectura de las ponencias que se presentaron en el Taller sobre Mujer y Ejecución Penal celebrado en el IISJ nos permite identificar una serie de coincidencias en la situación de las mujeres que se encuentran en prisión en regiones y circunstancias tan distintas como

las que se observan entre países de la Unión Europea y América Latina, lo que nos lleva a formular las preguntas: ¿qué produce estas coincidencias?, ¿existen patrones de relaciones de género que se sitúan por encima de las diferencias de clase, etnia, lengua, cultura, etcétera?

Haremos ahora referencia a la situación de las mujeres presas en México y al final retomaremos algunos de los cuestionamientos anteriores.

### Mujeres en prisión en México

Como desde hace tiempo nos lo han hecho saber los especialistas, la cárcel no es sino una estrategia más de perpetuación de los poderes establecidos. Las posturas extremas sostienen que constituye un abuso intolerable por parte del Estado o, por lo menos, una violencia excesiva que no se justifica, dado que sus fines manifiestos están lejos de haberse alcanzado. Otros se han ocupado en denunciar sus excesos, así como en señalar lo irracional que resulta imponer una misma sanción a todo tipo de transgresiones, sin considerar su diferente naturaleza y gravedad (CNDH 1995). No pretendo, por mi parte, ahondar en esta polémica sino, en todo caso, enfocarla desde la perspectiva que nos arroja el análisis de la situación específica de las mujeres que han ingresado a los circuitos de la justicia en mi país.

Los datos que a continuación expongo son el resultado de un estudio que llevamos a cabo dentro del Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de la Mujer de El Colegio de México, con el propósito de conocer la situación de las mujeres que se encuentran privadas de su libertad en la República Mexicana (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

Existen en México un total de 446 establecimientos penitenciarios de todo tipo, desde los reclusorios preventivos de las grandes ciudades y los centros federales de alta seguridad, hasta las cárceles de las comunidades más pequeñas y remotas que, en conjunto, albergan, al mes de mayo de 2001, una población de 160 mil internos, entre los



cuales poco más de siete mil son mujeres. En aproximadamente 230 de los establecimientos, existe una pequeña sección que alberga población femenina, puesto que, con excepción de unos cuantos centros, no existen en México instituciones penitenciarias exclusivamente para mujeres, lo que constituye la primera fuente de desventaja para ellas.

La falta de establecimientos para mujeres intenta a menudo justificarse con el argumento de que ellas sólo representan 4% de la población penitenciaria en el nivel nacional, dato que tiende a oscurecer otras razones por las que, al igual que en otros espacios, se concede a las mujeres menos importancia que a los varones. En este caso se trata, en buena parte, de las razones de orden y seguridad ya que, en la medida que las mujeres pocas veces hacen uso de la fuerza, se fugan, se amotinan o representan un riesgo para la seguridad de las prisiones, su situación no es vista como prioritaria y sus demandas tienden a postergarse de manera indefinida.

En el estudio que realizamos se obtuvo información de fuentes primarias acerca de 79% de las mujeres internas entre 1993 y 1994, la mitad de las cuales se encontraba en centros penitenciarios que visitamos en 11 estados de la República, y la otra mitad se hallaba dispersa en pequeños centros a lo largo del territorio nacional, de los cuales se obtuvo información mediante el envío de un cuestionario.

Puesto que nos parecía que el estudio debería realizarse empleando el enfoque de género, consideramos que era importante dar voz a las mujeres internas con el fin de poder conocer desde su propia perspectiva tanto las características de los hechos delictivos que con mayor frecuencia cometen, como las condiciones de vida que enfrentan en las prisiones y que permiten cuestionar los fundamentos y supuestos en que se basa el actual modelo penitenciario, como más adelante veremos (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

Para comenzar, considero necesario señalar que existe en México una desconfianza muy generalizada hacia las

instituciones encargadas de asegurar el orden e impartir la justicia. Las palabras de un expresidente de la República no dejan duda a este respecto: "La sociedad está profunda y justificadamente agraviada... con toda razón se exaspera al comprobar que en muchos casos son los propios encargados de garantizar el orden y procurar la justicia quienes la atropellan. Arrastramos una fuerte desconfianza, muy justificada, hacia las instituciones, los programas y los responsables de la seguridad pública... Con toda franqueza reconozco que el retraso y la magnitud de este problema son graves; mucho muy graves".<sup>3</sup>

Lo anterior permite vislumbrar un panorama en el cual los abusos, la corrupción y los malos tratos forman parte de la rutina que deben enfrentar quienes han sido acusados por la comisión de un delito. Si bien ello ocurre tanto a presuntos delincuentes hombres como a mujeres, los estudios que hemos llevado a cabo nos han permitido documentar que ellas son más vulnerables a los abusos. Por una parte, y ya que en su mayoría son primodelincentes, las mujeres no han tenido contacto con las instituciones de procuración de justicia, por lo que desconocen sus derechos y son menos proclives a exigirlos. Por otra, son más susceptibles a las amenazas que la policía suele dirigir a sus familiares, lo que a menudo las hace aceptar su responsabilidad fuera de las garantías del debido proceso. Asimismo, es más frecuente que ellas reciban agresiones y amenazas de tipo sexual que los varones (Lagarde 1993, Makowsky 1995, Azaola y Yacamán 1996, Lagunas y Sierra 1997).

En efecto, en numerosos testimonios que pudimos recabar entre mujeres que se encuentran en establecimientos penitenciarios de la República, llamó nuestra atención tanto el desconocimiento de sus derechos por parte de las mujeres, como las expectativas que ellas tenían respecto a cuál es la manera en que debe ser tratada una persona que ha sido acusada de la comisión de un delito.

3 Ernesto Zedillo, *Primer Informe de Gobierno*, México, 1995, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx> (1994 - 2000).

A menudo podían señalar que no tenían motivos de queja pues habían recibido un "buen trato" por parte de las autoridades, mientras que al indagar con mayor detalle nos dimos cuenta que al ser detenidas se les había mantenido incomunicadas o no se les habían proporcionado alimentos, en ocasiones durante varios días, o no les habían informado acerca de sus derechos. No obstante, lo calificaban como un "buen trato", puesto que comparaban su situación con la de otras compañeras a las que, además de lo anterior, las habían golpeado o violado. Escuchamos también frases como "a mí me trataron bien, sólo me dieron unas bofetadas" o "me fue bien, sólo me insultaron". Sin embargo, también nos llamó la atención que muchas mujeres dijeran haberse sentido más ofendidas por las palabras que por los golpes: "hubiera preferido que me golpearan y no que me dijeran tantas cosas..." (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

De igual modo nos llamó la atención la frecuencia con la que referían haber sido tratadas como "la peor de las delincuentes", expresión que, según entendimos después de algún tiempo, tenía un doble significado. Por un lado, que ellas no se identificaban a sí mismas como delincuentes pero, al mismo tiempo que, dentro de su modo de ver, resultaban perfectamente justificados todo tipo de malos tratos para los y las verdaderos delincuentes. De aquí que consideraran que cierta dosis de malos tratos era completamente previsible y aceptable y que, inclusive, se mostraran extrañadas si no los recibían.

Ello, por lo que se refiere muy brevemente a sus experiencias en el momento de haber sido detenidas por la policía. Por lo que respecta a la etapa del juicio, la mayoría de las mujeres había experimentado, o bien la extorsión por parte de abogados particulares que prometieron ocuparse de su caso y nunca lo hicieron, o el completo desinterés por parte de los abogados de oficio. Asimismo, fue frecuente que señalaran que nunca tuvieron la oportunidad de conocer ni de haber sido escuchadas por el juez que las sentenció. Muchas habían quedado con el deseo de poder manifestarse ante ellos y se soñaban una y otra vez enfrentándose a esa audiencia que no llegó, o bien se habían quedado con la

curiosidad de saber qué es lo que en definitiva había motivado que los jueces las condenaran.<sup>4</sup>

En otro estudio que realicé para comparar las conductas de extrema violencia que cometen hombres y mujeres, me fue posible comprobar que las mujeres que han cometido el delito de homicidio en la Ciudad de México reciben sentencias que, en promedio, resultan ser una cuarta parte más elevadas que las que reciben los varones por el mismo delito (Azaola 2001). En este caso, como se analiza en el estudio en cuestión, la desigualdad tiene mucho que ver con los estereotipos de género que hacen que las conductas de extrema violencia sean vistas como más aberrantes en la mujer, lo que, a su vez, provoca que el repudio social sea mayor y las sanciones que recibe más severas.

Respecto a las condiciones de vida de la mujer en la prisión, quisiera señalar en aquellos aspectos en los que su situación difiere de la de los varones. Para comenzar, ambos se enfrentan por igual a un sistema que los extorsiona permanentemente, ya sea que se les haga pagar por bienes y servicios a los que tienen derecho, por protección o para asegurarse que se les llamará cuando reciban visitas; o bien para evitar las labores más pesadas o para evadir el pase de lista, el caso es que la prisión exige de cada interno/a tantos recursos como esté dispuesto/a a ofrecer para mejorar las precarias condiciones de vida que se les proporciona. Existen también algunas prisiones en donde los reos pueden comprar su propia celda, llevar a su familia o asegurarse condiciones de privilegio (Scherer 1998). Sin embargo, lo que en este caso distingue a hombres y mujeres es que estas últimas son con mayor frecuencia abandonadas por su familia, lo que las coloca en una posición de desventaja respecto a los internos, que tanto en el aspecto económico como en otros cuentan con el apoyo de familiares (Cuevas 1991, Lagarde 1993, Makowsky 1995, Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

<sup>4</sup> El estudio de Allen (1987) muestra que las resoluciones judiciales no se hallan exentas de los prejuicios y los estereotipos de género.

Otro punto en el que su situación difiere es en la manera cómo la privación de su libertad afecta a su familia, en particular a los hijos. Por lo regular, cuando el hombre va a prisión, los hijos quedan al cuidado de la madre, frecuentemente compartiendo el mismo techo con los hermanos. Cuando la madre va a prisión, en cambio, los niños no suelen quedar al cuidado del padre, por lo que pierden tanto al padre como a la madre; y a menudo también a los hermanos, pues es habitual que los niños se repartan entre los familiares o sean enviados a alguna institución (Puglia 1987, Azaola y Yacamán 1996, Bisgaard 1999, Payá 2001).

En ocasiones se permite que los niños pequeños permanezcan con la madre mientras ésta se encuentra en prisión. Se trata, sin embargo, de un asunto polémico y que no se encuentra regulado en el nivel nacional, por lo que la situación varía de una prisión a otra dependiendo, en el fondo, del criterio que resuelvan emplear los funcionarios en turno. Así, por ejemplo, encontramos prisiones en donde se permite que los niños permanezcan con la madre hasta los 12 años, otras hasta los seis y otras más en las que deben salir a los dos años o a los dos meses. Los reglamentos tampoco establecen qué derechos tienen los niños que permanecen con sus madres. Lo más frecuente es que duerman en la misma cama y que la madre comparta con los hijos sus alimentos, mientras que a ellos se les priva del derecho a la educación y a la salud. Respecto a esto último, y al igual que sus madres, es posible que se consiga que un médico atienda a los niños cuando lo requieran, pero dado que los medicamentos no se proporcionan y los internos/as deben adquirirlos por su cuenta, por lo general las mujeres los obtienen solicitando la cooperación de sus compañeras (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

El que se permita que los niños permanezcan con sus madres en prisión no implica que se considere a éstas como la mejor solución sino, en algunos casos, como la única disponible. En la mayoría de los casos, sin embargo, los niños se quedan al cuidado de las abuelas o de otros familiares y sólo cuando ello no es posible la interna prefiere tenerlos con ella antes que enviarlos a una institución donde no

siempre reciben un buen trato. Tampoco existen normas que regulen los procedimientos a seguir en todos los casos, sino que ello depende, como hemos dicho, de las pautas que establezcan los directivos en turno, entre las cuales la opinión de la interna casi siempre juega un papel secundario. En este caso, la institución carcelaria suplanta a los padres en su derecho a decidir sobre el destino de sus hijos.

En una estimación aproximada, el total de menores de edad cuyas madres se encuentran en prisión sería, en el nivel nacional para el mes de mayo de 2001, de cerca de 15 mil niños, de los cuales alrededor de mil 500 estarían viviendo con sus madres en distintas prisiones del país.

El perfil de las mujeres que se encuentran en prisión en México es el siguiente: 70% tiene entre 18 y 35 años. Una tercera parte son solteras, otra casadas y otra más vivía en unión libre, siendo muy pocas las viudas o divorciadas. Cerca de 80 % son madres y tiene, en promedio, tres hijos. En cuanto a la escolaridad, 70% tiene como nivel máximo la primaria y, dentro de ellas, 20% es analfabeta. El 30% restante se distribuye entre las que tienen algún grado de la secundaria y unas cuantas han cursado la preparatoria o alguna carrera corta. Respecto a la ocupación que desempeñaban antes de ingresar a la prisión, la mitad de las mujeres se encontraba en el hogar y la otra mitad trabajaba como comerciante, mesera, empleada doméstica, secretaria, cajera o prostituta y, en menor proporción, en actividades agrícolas o industriales. En cuanto al delito, la mayoría, 36%, se encuentra interna por delitos relacionados con el traslado de drogas; 33% por delitos relacionados con la propiedad; 14% por homicidio; 4% por lesiones; 3% por robo de infante; 2% por secuestro; 2% por delitos sexuales; y 6% por el conjunto de otros delitos, entre los que se encuentran el despojo, el daño en propiedad ajena, el allanamiento, etc. (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

A lo anterior debe agregarse que, como regla general, las internas pertenecen al sector socialmente más marginado, como ocurre en todas partes. Se trata del reclutamiento preferencial de los pobres por parte de los sistemas de

procuración de justicia, que ha sido tantas veces denunciado por los críticos del derecho penal. En el caso de las mujeres mexicanas, si bien los tipos delictivos varían respecto a los que predominaban hace algunas décadas, los motivos siguen siendo los mismos. El transporte de pequeñas cantidades de droga, por el que se les denomina "burras" o "burreras", ha venido a ocupar el lugar del robo.

Como es bien sabido, el negocio de las drogas es un fenómeno globalizado que arrastra consigo poderosas redes del crimen organizado. Dentro de éste, las mujeres constituyen sólo el último eslabón de la cadena a la que, por cierto, son enganchadas contando con su pobreza. En tanto que dentro de dichas redes ellas no ocupan una posición jerárquicamente relevante, se las considera prescindibles, por lo que muchas veces son denunciadas por quienes las contratan, cubriendo de esta forma su cuota con las autoridades y contando con que no les será muy difícil encontrar otras mujeres que las reemplacen.

Otro punto en el que la situación de las mujeres internas difiere respecto a la de los varones, tiene que ver con el ciclo de vida y las consecuencias que para cada uno tiene el estar privado de su libertad dentro de un determinado periodo. Es decir, si bien tanto la mayoría de los hombres como de las mujeres que cometen delitos se encuentra entre los 20 y los 35 años, no tiene para ambos las mismas consecuencias el estar privados de su libertad durante, digamos, 10 años. Mientras que para la mujer puede representar la pérdida de su oportunidad para procrear, para el varón, en cambio, habiendo estado recluido durante el mismo tiempo, no tendría las mismas consecuencias.

Por otro lado, el sistema penitenciario mexicano se caracteriza por adoptar una política que favorece el contacto de los internos con su familia, así como con su pareja, sólo que emplea distintos criterios para los internos hombres que para las mujeres. De este modo, mientras que a los varones se les permite definir con un amplio margen de libertad cuál es la mujer que acudirá los días y horas señalados para la visita conyugal, a las internas se les impone una serie de

requisitos y obstáculos que en los hechos limitan su derecho a la visita conyugal.

Las internas deben demostrar que quien pretende acudir a la visita conyugal es su esposo, había procreado hijos con ella o vivían en una relación de concubinato; y no es raro que aun después de haber demostrado lo anterior, el personal determine que con quien la mujer ha resuelto relacionarse no es conveniente para ella, por lo que se le impide que la visite. El resultado es que la institución, una vez más, infantiliza y adopta decisiones que corresponde tomar a las mujeres internas. Queda claro, además, que en este caso las medidas que adopta la institución se rigen por una doble moral que no se aplica de la misma manera a los hombres que a las mujeres internas. Los estereotipos de género y la distinta manera en que a partir de éstos se aborda la sexualidad del hombre y de la mujer, provocan que el sistema penitenciario coloque a la mujer en una posición de desventaja respecto al varón.

También encontramos desviaciones significativas en lo que se refiere a las oportunidades de trabajo y educación que hombres y mujeres encuentran en la prisión. Las normas que rigen al sistema penitenciario mexicano establecen que la prisión tiene como finalidad la readaptación social de los internos/as y que los medios para lograrla son el trabajo, la educación y la capacitación.<sup>5</sup> Es frecuente, sin embargo, que las pocas oportunidades de emplearse que existen en la prisión se brinden a los varones, dado que se opera bajo los estereotipos de género que suponen a éstos como proveedores de la familia, siendo que la gran mayoría de las mujeres presas son madres solteras que se hacen cargo de la manutención de los hijos debido al abandono de esta responsabilidad por parte de los padres.

<sup>5</sup> El artículo 2º de la Ley que Establece las Normas Mínimas sobre Readaptación Social de Sentenciados estipula: "El sistema penal se organizará sobre la base del trabajo, la capacitación para el mismo y la educación como medios para la readaptación social del delincuente" (Ley publicada en el *Diario Oficial*, 19 mayo de 1971).

Como parte de este equívoco y de los estereotipos de género, a las mujeres suele constreñírselas a la costura, el bordado, el tejido y a otras labores manuales que, se dice, las mantendrán ocupadas y harán que el tiempo les parezca más corto. "Terapia ocupacional", la llaman, de una manera que nos parece denigrante, puesto que es tanto como no reconocer que pueden tener otras aptitudes y no tomar en cuenta que, además, lo que se les ofrece no les permitirá capacitarse ni ingresar al mercado laboral o hacer frente a sus responsabilidades. Como si no se pensara en ellas como seres capaces de aportar algo útil a la sociedad, o como si sólo hubiera que entretenerlas o mantenerlas ocupadas, sin importar que lo que hacen son productos que tienen un escaso valor.

Algo semejante ocurre con los programas educativos que se ofrecen a las mujeres en la prisión. A menudo éstos olvidan que los sujetos a que se dirigen son personas adultas con una amplia experiencia de vida, la que debería ser el punto de partida de programas que la capitalizaran en beneficio de la mujer. Por el contrario, los programas educativos suelen, una vez más, dirigirse a estas mujeres como si fueran niñas a las que pretenden enseñar con los mismos métodos que ya antes fracasaron y las impulsaron a abandonar el sistema escolar. Sobre esto, es frecuente escuchar que los funcionarios de los centros de readaptación se lamentan de la escasa participación de las mujeres en los programas educativos, sin que logren visualizar que, tal como éstos están diseñados, tienen muy poco que aportar y carecen de sentido para las internas.

Otro punto en el que abundan los prejuicios es el de la imagen que los funcionarios tienen respecto de las mujeres internas. A menudo las etiquetan como apáticas, deprimidas o poco participativas, como si el encierro y la separación de su familia no constituyeran motivos suficientes para que cualquiera se deprimiera. No obstante, si la mujer se expresa o manifiesta los motivos de su tristeza, muchas veces se le silencia, se le adormece, se le recetan medicamentos para que se tranquilice y deje de confrontarse a sí misma y a los otros con su dolor. Esta forma de responder y acallar las

demandas de las mujeres no sólo es propia de los espacios penitenciarios (Burin *et al.* 1991). Sin embargo, en éstos es tan frecuente que la mayor parte de los directivos reconoce que prefiere lidiar con la población y las formas de resistencia masculinas, que con las mujeres, así sean unas cuantas (Makowsky 1995).

En esta actitud de recetar la tranquilidad a la mujer, como lo enuncia el título del libro de Burin, no debe pasarse por alto la doble moral que, otra vez, emplea el sistema penitenciario. Mientras que, por un lado, mantiene bajo encierro a la mujer por delitos relacionados con las drogas; por el otro, no tiene empacho en prescribirlas cuando considera que ello le ayudará a preservar cierto orden o equilibrio que le conviene mantener. Ello, por no mencionar que por la misma razón tolera, si no es que participa y obtiene beneficios, del consumo y la venta de drogas entre los internos/as.

Un último factor que, nos parece, tampoco se debe pasar por alto, son las etiquetas que se colocan a las internas dentro del sistema penitenciario. Es el caso, por ejemplo, de que se les llame "mulas" o "burras" a las que transportan droga, o "lacras" a las reincidentes, pero también de otras clasificaciones que se les imponen en el interior de los penales. En el de la Ciudad de México, por ejemplo, las internas duermen en uno de los cinco dormitorios a los que se denomina de la siguiente manera: 1) madres y tercera edad; 2) pasivo-agresivas; 3) farmaco-dependientes y lesbianas; 4) antisociales; y 5) psiquiátricas. Las más de las veces, estas etiquetas resultan en nuevos estigmas que se añaden a la ya deteriorada autoimagen de las mujeres internas y que no resulta fácil abandonar aun cuando terminen de cumplir su sentencia.

## Conclusiones

Como brevemente hemos intentado mostrar, el sistema penitenciario refuerza la construcción de géneros y, por consiguiente, mantiene las diferencias sociales que resultan en desventajas para las mujeres, cuyas necesidades son relegadas en las prisiones, como ocurre en otros espacios sociales. Es en este sentido que nuestro estudio, como otros, ha propuesto que las mujeres son sujetos ausentes o no visibles para el sistema penal.

El sistema penitenciario se encuentra estructurado tomando como modelo al varón. Las mujeres son, en todo caso, una especie de apéndice que se agrega a dicho modelo. Basta mirar el diseño arquitectónico de las prisiones, la distribución de sus espacios; o bien sus normas, reglamentos, discursos y manuales, para corroborar que en ellos no se toman en cuenta las necesidades específicas de las mujeres.

Por otra parte, no debe dejarse de lado que el confinamiento de las mujeres a las que nos hemos referido, viene a ser un proceso de marginación secundaria que tiene como antecedente un proceso de marginación primaria. Ciertamente, los sectores marginales son los más susceptibles a ingresar en los circuitos de la justicia y son los que aparecen sobrerrepresentados en sus registros. Lo que, en buena parte, conduce a estas poblaciones al proceso de marginación secundaria, al confinamiento, es el haber vivido en un contexto de marginación primaria. Para la mayor parte de las mujeres internas, salir de la experiencia de marginación secundaria implica, desafortunadamente, volver a la marginación primaria (Azaola y Yacamán 1996).

En suma, cabe insistir en que, dadas las condiciones de desigualdad tanto social como de género para la mujer, si los sistemas de procuración y administración de justicia no actúan para corregirlas, lo que termina por imponerse es una justicia parcial. Si las diferencias a las que nos hemos referido son ignoradas, lo que se reproduce es una situación de desigualdad real, profunda e intrincada. Acortar la distancia que separa y que establece diferencias entre las

condiciones de vida que sobrellevan los hombres y las mujeres que se encuentran en prisión, quizá sea uno de los pasos que haya que dar antes de poder arribar al diseño de alternativas más justas y más racionales, que sustituyan a los sistemas penales que hoy en día conocemos.



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## CAPÍTULO IV

### Between Local Constituencies and Transnational Funding: Situating Salvadoran Feminism

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The women's organizations that emerged during the Salvadoran civil war were part of the political movement that aimed to build grassroots support for the FMLN, El Frente Farabundo Martí para Liberación Nacional (the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front or FMLN). In almost ten years since the war has ended, the women's movement has grown dramatically in size and influence and has assumed a critical role in Salvadoran civil society. In the process the nature of the organizations has changed dramatically. In this paper I will explore some the factors that have encouraged and shaped the growth of this movement.

Using a case study of *Mujeres por La Dignidad y la Vida* (Women for Dignity and Life or the Dignas), this paper focuses on two of their projects to explore how the necessities and opportunities faced by the Salvadoran women's groups have changed as El Salvador has moved from civil war to a democratic transitional government.<sup>1</sup> The first project is a midwives house in the municipality of Nombre de Jesús, Chalatenango. The second is a local development effort in Suchitoto through which a representative of a coalition of women's groups was elected to the city county in 1997. These two projects illustrate what might be the most important contribution of Central American feminism through

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the author's involvement with the Salvadoran women's movement since 1986 and, in particular, fieldwork in El Salvador carried out between September 1996 and August 1997. Support for this paper came from the Institute of International Education Fulbright Scholarship and a dissertation grant from Institute for the Study of World Politics.

their ability to empower poor and rural women by incorporating a feminist perspective into a class analysis of their context. This paper also suggests that if international organizations that provide funding, on which groups like the Dignas have come to rely, are to avoid undermining this process in El Salvador they must take into account impact of their funds on the character of the movement. In addition, the Salvadoran case shows that if international funders want to encourage the development of autonomous women's movements in the contexts of other democratic transitions, they may need to make funding available to women's groups even before democratization begins.

While women played an active role in the Salvadoran opposition throughout the civil war, a qualitative change in the FMLN's policy toward women's projects occurred after the 1989 offensive failed to spark an insurrection. The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the disintegration of the Soviet Union profoundly affected important sources of support upon which the party had depended. One response to this situation was the promotion of women's projects. The different groups associated with the FMLN created comités femeninos while existing women's organizations began to occupy higher profiles. The primary goal of these efforts was to both increase the recruitment of women to the party and to take advantage of the increasing opportunities for financing of women's projects through international funders and agencies (*Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida* 1993: 116).

The Dignas emerged through this process. The women who started the group in 1990 were all associated with the National Resistance (*Resistencia Nacional* or RN), one of the five clandestine military-political parties that made up the FMLN. While the efforts of the founding Dignas to organize women in the party were initially supported by the RN leadership, it soon became apparent that the relationship between the women's group and the party would be problematic. The conflicts crystallized when the women organized their first national assembly. They refused to follow the sug-

gestions of their superiors in the RN about how the event should be shaped and, as a result, the party withdrew its financial support for the event (*ibid.*: 116-117).

The women continued to resist direction from the top and found their work increasingly sabotaged by party leaders. In the communities where the RN had historically operated, local women were pressured not to work with the women in the Dignas. Ironically, the RN leaders accused the Dignas of using these women to raise funds to be spent for their own purposes, a practice the party had consistently employed. Accusations of sexual promiscuity and lesbianism were also used against them, according to Morena Herrera, one of the founding members of the Dignas.

The Dignas turned to other Latin American feminists such as Marta Harnecker, Julieta Kirkwood, and Virginia Vargas in an effort to analyze their situation. The Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros or conferences, held roughly every three years since 1981, provided a forum in which they began to explore issues of gender and power. Women from the Dignas and other Salvadoran women's organizations participated in the Fourth Encuentro in Taxco, Mexico in 1987, but were more inspired by the 1990 conference in Argentina. This conference was a watershed for the Dignas, according to Morena Herrera, one of the few Salvadoran participants. Not only did it give the Dignas the confidence to declare their independence from the RN a few months later, but Central America was selected as the site of the Sixth Encuentro in 1993.

The international feminists who worked with the Dignas over the years were also important influences. Among them were Clara Murguialday, from the Basque country of Spain, and Norma Vázquez of Mexico. Murguialday had worked with the women's movement in Nicaragua and also with international women's organizations in Uruguay. Vázquez had worked with the largest feminist organization in Mexico, CIDHAL, coordinating their programs with women in Central America. They began giving the Dignas workshops on to-

pics such as methods for working with women in 1991 and eventually came to work with the organization full-time. They brought two vital sets of skills which dramatically contributed to the Dignas' growth and development as a feminist organization. They articulated a feminist analysis of the processes that the Dignas had gone through in a way that deeply resonated with the Salvadoran's experiences and demonstrated how a feminist perspective could empower women to confront their situation. In addition, their knowledge about and contact with international development agencies helped shape the Dignas' efforts to obtain seminal funding for several of their projects.

By 1996, when the research on which this paper is based was carried out, the Dignas were no longer a small women's group struggling to assert their autonomy from the political party from which they emerged. They had become an institution with funding from thirty-three different international agencies and a projected budget for 1997 of more than \$1.5 million. More than sixty women worked with the Dignas in eleven different programs. Along with other women's organizations, the Dignas represented a civil society in the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development (Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer or ISDEMU), a body created by the Legislative Assembly to develop a national policy on women. Their programs included seven that provided services, and organized women to press for their demands: Sexual and Reproductive Health, Education, Local Development, Anti-Violence, Child Support, Mental Health, and Non-traditional Work.

At this time, the Dignas worked in seven different municipalities, primarily in areas where the Dignas' founders operated in their previous incarnation as guerrillas fighting with the RN. Their main office was in the capital, San Salvador and they had satellite houses (casas) in the smaller cities of Suchitoto, Sensuntepeque, and Berlin; and in the small towns of Nombre de Jesús and Tierra Blanca.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Several of these casas have been closed in the interim.

The two projects I am going to focus on illuminate processes which affect gender and class relations in NGOs and, consequently, civil society. The first project was part of the Sexual and Reproductive Health program. In Nombre de Jesús, the Dignas attempted to establish a Casa de las Parteras, or a midwife's house. The goal of this project was to validate the work of women who provided this vital service while providing a model of alternative health care. By examining the declining role of one of the midwives in the project, I demonstrate the process of stratification within the organization that is currently leaving some of the original grassroots supporters behind.

The second project grew out of the Dignas Local Development program in Suchitoto which included two distinct elements. The first was a process in which Suchitoto women were selected representatives who were presented to the FMLN as candidates for city council. The other part of the project organized local women to develop a political platform which addressed women's issues. The women then lobbied the mayoral candidates to support and implement the demands outlined in the platform.

These processes, and the political gains of women in general in El Salvador, suggest that the Salvadoran women's movement may be an exception to what Elisabeth Friedman has characterized as the troubling paradox of Latin American women are active in resistance to authoritarian rule but demobilize in the transition to democracy (1998: 87). I suggest that the success of the Salvadorans may be related to the fact that the Salvadoran women's movement emerged and consolidated before the FMLN was able to constitute itself as a legal party.

### Mama Tina<sup>3</sup>: A Conduit to the Community

A wirey morenita who was a bundle of energy, Mama Tina was one of the founders of the Dignas. She was ru-

<sup>3</sup> Based on an extended interview done by the author with Ernestine Hernández Otero, known as Mama Tina, on June 4-6, 1997.

mored to be somewhere between 62 and 72 years old though she confessed to me that based on her memory of historic events she actually could be no more than fifty-nine. But a false I.D. she had gotten during the war had provided her with some additional years. She decided to keep it because the older you were during the war, the less the soldiers hassled you.

Finding ways to avoid harassment while passing through checkpoints was a serious concern for Mama Tina because during the war she was a "delegate of the word", a lay religious worker who accompanied a priest on his visits to communities. She also traveled by herself back and forth across the lines that divided the territories held by the FMLN and those controlled by the Salvadoran Armed Forces in the 1980s. While providing spiritual counsel, she also drummed up support for the FMLN.

Mama Tina had been, as she put it, left an orphan by the early 1980s. Her three sons were killed in the war in Santa Marta, Cabañas, where she was from originally. Military operations carried out by the Salvadoran security forces had forced her community to flee over the border into Honduras where they were settled into the Mesa Grande refugee camp. Mama Tina developed leadership skills there and was recruited by the FMLN. When she eventually went back to El Salvador in 1986 with the first group to repatriate from Mesa Grande she assumed her activities as pastoral worker. Soon afterwards, she took up an additional role out of necessity. She began to practice midwifery, delivering the babies of women in the areas controlled by the FMLN.

Because of the lack of the type of mountains in El Salvador that would support a Guevarist style guerrilla strategy, during the war the FMLN was forced to rely on the country's densely packed civilian population to survive. Civilian supporters, particularly women, replaced the mountains as the primary supporters of guerrilla fighters by providing refuge and basic needs (see Vázquez, et al. 1996). For those guerrilleras and FMLN supporters who became

pregnant in Chalatenango, this meant relying upon Mama Tina. As her reputation grew, she also began to attend births for the wider community as well.

Mama Tina was also one of a small group of women from the RN who founded the Dignas in 1990. The first meeting took place in FENASTRAS<sup>4</sup>, the National Union Federation of Salvadoran Workers (Federación Nacional Sindical de Trabajadores Salvadoreños) in downtown San Salvador. The participants were RN combatants and urban commandos, collaborators from various communities that supported the RN, from the unions in FENASTRAS, members of the CoMadres (Committee of Mothers of Political Prisoners, the Disappeared and Assassinated), and a North American supporter.

As the organization developed, Mama Tina became one of the primary conduits through whom new ideas about women's roles were introduced to women in Nombre de Jesús. Women in San Salvador with more education, skills, and access to this discourse adapted feminist theory from South America, Europe, and North America to the Salvadoran reality. On the other hand, women like Mama Tina were vital to finding and implementing the mechanisms that made it possible to disseminate this new perspective on gender in the rural areas from which the Dignas originally drew their support. The introduction of unconventional topics for discussion, particularly the workshops on sexuality, shattered taboos in these communities while challenging gender relations. Feminist discourse provided women with justifications for demanding more egalitarian behaviors from their partners, and encouraged them to assume active roles within their communities.

But such changes were not welcomed by all. Mama Tina recalled some of the reactions they got:

4 The FENASTRAS building was bombed by a death squad in 1989 killing several people, including the country's most important female labor leader, Febe Velásquez. A Norwegian labor federation gave them the funds to reconstruct the building so that was virtually bomb-proof and it became a common meeting place for many organizations.



*We had problems when we formed the women's directive because they said that we wanted to get the women to leave their men, their husbands. That was the problem we had and so we told them that it wasn't true. But the men didn't want to let the women come [to the meetings or workshops of the Dignas] because, you know, they said these Dignas women are tearing couples apart. This was the problem we faced.*

As mentioned above, the Dignas also faced disinformation campaigns from FMLN cadre who resented their decision to become an autonomous organization outside the discipline of the party. An often repeated story told of a woman who after attending a Dignas' workshop, went home and refused her husband something like dinner, sex, or cleaning up. The tale always concluded with the woman showing up the next day with signs of having suffered a beating and asking what she did wrong.

The participation of a trusted community-based woman, like Mama Tina, in the Dignas was critical to the ability of these new-found feminists to address these fears. The relationships, goodwill, and skills that she had developed during the war provided Mama Tina with the resources to confront the problems that the Dignas faced in introducing feminist ideas and practices to Nombre de Jesús. As a result, she played a critical role in establishing Nombre de Jesús as one of the half dozen communities from which the Dignas drew their support from their founding. Over the years, the context in which the organization functioned changed, and the value, and power, of women like Mama Tina diminished.

### Changing Priorities of the Dignas

The Dignas began organizing in the early 1990s in the rural communities where the RN, the branch of the FMLN out of which the founders of the Dignas came, was based. Initially they developed productive projects such as cooperative grain mills, agricultural enterprises, bakeries, and craft workshops. Using a practical and strategic framework (see

Molyneux 1985; Moser 1989), they sought to recruit women into the organization by addressing their basic needs. Once the women were involved, the Dignas would provide them with opportunities to participate in workshops on issues such as gender, sexuality, and domestic violence.

By 1993, some women in the Dignas had become frustrated with the results of projects. An evaluation of the projects' productivity pointed to traditions of dependency (asistencialismo) as a major obstacle to their success (Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida 1993a: 8). These were practices that had grown out of these communities' experiences during the war. Many of the women, like Mama Tina, had spent time in refugee camps or territory controlled by the FMLN. In the process, the report claimed, they had become accustomed to receiving aid as refugees. As a result, the rural women were failing to take responsibility for the projects funded on their behalf. With one exception, the projects were not becoming self-sustaining.

The funding for these projects had been secured from international funders by the Dignas' organizers who were based in San Salvador. These women were not only more educated, but they had political experiences that put them in contact with new ideas and ways of organizing. They were learning how to successfully obtain support from international and feminist funding agencies that was increasingly available in the postwar reconstruction period. However, the prospect of endless fund seeking to subsidize the productive projects began to lose its appeal. Their initial expectation that providing women with economic alternatives would revolutionize women's roles was replaced by a realization that the sources of gender oppression were far more entrenched than they had anticipated. The fact that the regions they were working in were so economically marginal limited what they could accomplish. Their efforts to improve women's status through such projects were not only failing to substantially increase women's income but were actually extending women's workday by adding productive work on top of the extensive duties they were expected to perform as part of the sexual division of labor in their households

and communities. The Dignas concluded that productive projects were no substitution for organizing activity [and] the struggle for particular demands and policies from the State and its institutions (ibid.: 15). The organization disengaged from the projects they had initiated and reoriented its efforts, generating considerable resentment in several communities.

La Casa de las Parteras was one of the projects that grew out of this new vision. In the Dignas 1993 Global Plan, their primary objective was defined as constructing an organized force of women with the capacity to intervene in the national reality to better the living conditions of Salvadoran women and to elaborate proposals that integrate the construction of peace, reconciliation and national democratization so that they do not forget or postpone the needs and interests of women (*Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida* 1993b: 12). By 1997, in the Dignas Global Plan for the next three years, the goal of organizing women was replaced by a mission statement with a slightly different emphasis. It called for the Dignas to contribute to the eradication of gender subordination, the democratization and sustainable development of the society, and the empowerment of women (*Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida* 1997: 17). Empowering women had replaced the goal of organizing them and organizing had become one of the methods through which empowerment would be achieved. As a result, women like Mama Tina were no longer as valuable an asset to the organization as they were in earlier stages of its life.

Although the Dignas had<sup>5</sup> the house that eventually became La Casa de las Parteras during this period, the earliest reference to the organizing of midwives in *Nombre de Jesús*

<sup>5</sup> The ownership of this house was contested. Mama Tina claimed that the RN had originally bought it and her name was on the deed with the name of another woman who had been a party member. Morena Herrera, another founder of the Dignas and the woman who is probably most closely associated with the organization, claimed that the down payment was made by the Dignas with money from a North American group. When the Dignas separated from the RN, the house was one of the primary sources of contention as both organizations claimed it as their own. But, according to Herrera, because the women whose name was on the deed supported the Dignas, they were able to keep it.

was in the Dignas March-April 1993 newsletter. However, I have a personal recollection of talking to Mama Tina as early as 1992 during the Dignas second anniversary celebration about her dreams of converting the building into a Midwives House. Those dreams would come as a major sacrifice to Mama Tina as the conversion of the house into the Midwives House turned into a struggle over the building where Mama Tina was living at the time. Eventually she was not only evicted but laid off by the organization as well<sup>6</sup>.

As the work with the midwives shifted from one where the ability to mobilize local women was essential to one which required the skills to develop of funding proposals and oversee major building renovations, Mama Tina's strengths became less and less valuable. For instance, when she talked about her work in the early days, she emphasized her willingness to traverse the rugged mountains that separated the hamlets where the various midwives lived. Such work was necessary as there were no phones or regular mail service. Once the decision was made to seek funding to renovate the building to open a center, other kinds of skill became more essential. Funding for the renovations was obtained from Spanish and Australian contributors through a proposal written by Norma Vázquez. By the time the renovations were being finished in 1996, the director of the project was the coordinator of the Dignas Reproductive and Sexual Health Program, a young urban, ex-medical student who was computer literate.

Mama Tina was still involved as one of the midwives. But her dream for the Midwives Houses has been usurped by the Dignas, along with her power and respect within the organization. Their goals did not clash. The Dignas goals were to create a situation where the midwives get paid for their work, to improve women's health in and around *Nombre de Jesús*, and to provide a model of health care so compelling that the state would be forced to assume the social and financial costs of maintaining it. But their model of how to do so is an example of what Alvarez has characterized as

<sup>6</sup> Based on an interview with Gloria Guzmán, the coordinator of the Dignas rural projects at the time.

"NGOization" (1997: 4) of women's movements in Latin America. She claims this professionalization and specialization of women in the Latin American women's movement may be undermining its democratic character. As this case shows, it may be a process that is difficult to avoid.

The increasing administrative requirements of international funders may contribute to the stratification of women in the movement. As the case of Mama Tina showed, the talents, skills, and characteristics needed by the organizations changed over time. Mama Tina's willingness and ability to mobilize women from the villages and towns in the hills surrounding Nombre de Jesús were critical attributes during the stage of the organization when it was initially being formed. But once the Dignas became more institutionalized, the organization required different skills from its employees. During December 1996 and February 1997, the coordinators of the various programs and their staff spent almost two months evaluating their achievements and developing plans for the next year. To a large degree this was in order to satisfy the requirements of the funding they had received. These tasks required not only the ability to read and write but the capacity to use a computer.

At the same time, many of their sources of funding would not provide any money for transportation or meals for the participants in the Dignas meetings and workshops. Resistance to subsidizing the costs of participation may come from the concern that women would come to events primarily to collect the stipends. But for many of the participants in the programs, their income is so low that without the stipends, they cannot afford the time or the labor to attend. Providing funds for these basic necessities could help to offset the other factors that are widening the gaps between the women who work full-time for the Dignas and those whose participation is unpaid<sup>7</sup>.

7 When I presented my conclusions to the Dignas in June of 1999, they emphasized that the policies of international agencies were not the only factor contributing to stratification within the organization. They pointed to "vanguardism", arrogance, and the desire for power on the part of some women as the internal causes.

With the proliferation of NGOs in El Salvador (and elsewhere), a lack of transparency has become a problem. NGOs may not be accountable for their use of funds to either their usuarias or the funding agencies. Often those in whose name the funds are raised neither know about nor have the skills to monitor the use of the funds. Larger funding agencies often do oversee the projects they fund or require documentation about the use of monies upon the risk of losing access to future funding. But in the case of smaller agencies, when NGOs raise money for a project there are few mechanisms to ensure that the money is spent as designated. While in some cases, proposing a project which they have no intention of implementing may be a way for organizations with few resources to obtain the money they need to function, doing so can also be a source of corruption. Accusations of such activities are rampant with the Salvadoran NGO community.

This may be due in part to the fact that during the war, funds sent to popular organizations were often siphoned off to support the guerrillas. This history creates a particular need for transparency in El Salvador. I do not want to suggest that funders should contribute to further professionalization of the field by imposing more onerous reporting requirements upon NGOs. Nor do I want to suggest government regulation; this seems like a case of asking the wolf to guard the lambs. Contributors need to consider how the use of monies sent to support a NGO will be monitored. Mechanisms need to be developed that will allow for the identification, especially by those in whose name the funds are being raised, of the improper use of funds. In addition, the funding process needs to become more of a dialogue where those who are seeking support can influence the nature of the funding process, particularly what kinds of activities get funded, so that the need for unauthorized diversions of funds is minimized. As NGOs proliferate as an international response to the neoliberal attack on government services, we need to find ways to make those who are seeking funds, as well as those who are distributing them, accountable to those who are the supposed recipients of the funds.

## Developing Women's Political Participation

Suchitoto is a picturesque, colonial town located within an hour of San Salvador, and in the shadow of Guazapa, the mountain stronghold of the FMLN during the war. As such, it was a highly contested territory where political activity was concentrated. As a result, even before the Peace Accords were officially signed, various groups associated with the FMLN began efforts to organize women's projects, including the Dignas (Murguialday 1997: 10). In 1991 at the initiation of several foreign nuns who had been working in Suchitoto, these separate groups came together to form the Coalition of Cuscatlán Women (Concertación de Mujeres de Cuscatlán or CMC)<sup>8</sup>.

The relationship between women's groups and the FMLN was double-sided. On one hand, the groups existed largely because of the party's organizing efforts, and its ability to secure funding from international sources to support projects. At the same time, the nature of the FMLN created obstacles for women who wanted to organize as women. The FMLN was a coalition of five separate political-military organizations. During this period each of the women's groups were vertically tied to the one of these organizations through a local group which was linked to a national headquarters in San Salvador. Efforts to unite women from these distinct organizations were undermined by the sectarianism and the culture of political authoritarianism (ibid.: 11) that characterized Salvadoran politics. In the period following the war with the lessening of the pressure which encouraged unity, divisions were heightened by the competition for the funds available for reconstruction. The desire to maintain control of affiliated women's organizations on the part of male leaders was a major obstacle to the unification of the women's groups.

In addition, many of the party leaders and heads of popular organizations were deeply suspicious of other women's organizations, particularly the Dignas who increasingly proclaimed their autonomy and feminist perspective. The mixed

<sup>8</sup> Cuscatlán is the state where Suchitoto is located.

groups discouraged women in their organizations from adopting a feminist perspective as it was seen as counter to their primary task of grassroots work with the bases (*trabajo integral con las bases*) (ibid.).

Despite these obstacles and the general malaise that followed the signing of the Peace Accords, the CMC formed three women's committees to take up the issues of land reform, violence against women, and literacy. Over the next few years the CMC held periodic assemblies to discuss their progress.

In 1994, the elections of the century captured the attention of the women in Suchitoto as it did with women in other parts of the country. This was the first time the FMLN was legally allowed to participate in elections in El Salvador. Additionally, local, state, and national elections were being held simultaneously, an event that occurs only once every fifteen years as the posts in each level of government have different terms. The Dignas joined with other women's groups to develop a political platform, *Mujeres 94*, to pressure candidates for national office to respond to women's needs.

During eight months of public debates, forums, and working committees more than thirty-two women's organizations collaborated in developing the *Mujeres 94*. The platform included demands that challenged the Salvadoran gender system. The elimination of sexism in the legal code generally was called for as well as specific reforms to address the problems of domestic violence and discrimination in labor laws and agrarian reform. The establishment of quotas for the number of women in political office and political parties, women's inclusion in development, drastic improvement in working conditions in both the formal and informal sectors as well as for campesinas, educational reform, programs to prevent violence against women, improvements in the health system, reproductive rights, and gay rights were part of the platform.

*Mujeres 94* defined a national agenda for women. Unfortunately, the process of pressuring the political parties

to accept the platform occurred simultaneously with the final organizing for the Seventh Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Conference (Encuentro). El Salvador had been selected as the site of the Encuentro in 1992. The hosting of a large international feminist event diverted much needed energy from the negotiations with the political parties (see Ready 1999: 317-320). While several of the key demands<sup>9</sup> were excluded, Mujeres 94 established a methodological precedent for elaborating women's political demands: the practice of using political platforms as tools to articulate women's demands into the political arena and as vehicles to encourage their participation in the political process. The Dignas translated these methods for motivating women's political action into an effort to develop a municipal political platform in Suchitoto in early 1994.

Pati Otero, the coordinator of the DL equipo in 1996, described the process of developing women's municipal platform to me<sup>10</sup>. The Dignas began by having their promoters visit the communities where they had already been working and interview three different types of women: a woman who had a husband and children, a single mother, and a younger unmarried woman. They then developed a set of proposals based on the results of these interviews. A public meeting of women was convened to discuss the findings of the study and to organize the women around the demands.

While the conclusions were compiled into *Cambios Para Todas: Demandas de las Mujeres del Municipio de Suchitoto* (Changes for All, the Demands of the Women from the Municipality of Suchitoto), the process did not unfold fast enough to enable the women to present their demands to the parties before the elections. Nor were they able to maintain sufficient interest of women in the communities to carry out effective follow up with the FMLN, who won the election in Suchitoto in March of 1994, but they did continue to meet sporadically. Over 150 women came together to dis-

<sup>9</sup> The demands for reproductive rights, sex education, gay rights, and 50 percent representation by women (Murguialday and Herrera 1994)

<sup>10</sup> Interview held October 28, 1996, San Salvador.

cuss their formal participation in a Follow up Commission (Comisión de Seguimiento) formed by the city council in October to elaborate a general diagnóstico and a development plan for the municipality through the year 2010 (Murguialday 1997:14). Of the two women who were elected to the committee, however, one participated only until the middle of 1995 and the other never showed up.

Despite these setbacks women in Suchitoto, with much encouragement and support from the Dignas and other women's groups from San Salvador, continued to define and assert their gendered demands. During July of 1996, one day before the FMLN held a conference in Suchitoto to designate their candidates in the upcoming election, the women held their own convention. The Dignas had met with the FMLN earlier that year to discuss their desire to see more women on the local slate but the mayor and the local party leaders, while supportive, had argued that their hands were tied by the procedures handed down by the national party. These mechanisms, they claimed, were to ensure the legitimate representations of various social sectors and they could not let the women circumvent them. But the Dignas' history with the party made them skeptical of the party's process and they suspected it would be used to prevent the selection of women candidates who were likely to challenge the party hierarchy. As a result, the women decided to hold their own conference to select the women they wanted to represent them.

At the FMLN convention, each social sector was supposed to present candidates to be voted upon. However, the party leaders circumvented this process by presenting a list of preselected candidates for ratification. But the women were prepared with their own candidates and were sufficiently organized to press the party to accept at least one of them, Ofelia López (ibid.: 38-39)<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Based on an interview with Ofelia López on May 27, 1997. While her history and international experience made Ofelia an outstanding candidate, the Dignas were also able to secure the candidacy of two of their promoters in other regions where they worked, Nombre de Jesús and Villa Victoria.

Ofelia was the coordinator of the Dignas local development program in Suchitoto. She was originally from a peasant family from the municipality with a history of involvement with the RN that predated the war. Ofelia, herself, had eventually been captured and imprisoned for three years. While incarcerated in Ilopango prison she became a leader of the political prisoners' organization, COPPES, and was seriously injured when the armed forces attacked the prison in an effort to wrest control from COPPES. In order to get treatment for her injuries, Ofelia accepted an offer of political asylum in Australia. She returned to El Salvador in the early nineties and joined the Dignas.

In the months before the 1997 elections, Ofelia's job was to promote women's participation by organizing local women to develop a new political platform to address the particular needs of women in the municipality. She recruited women from groups representing literacy teachers, women working against domestic violence, midwives, community organizations, and a women's radio program, and they began meetings in October of 1996 with additional organizers from the Dignas and IMU, the Institute for the Study of Women. Over the next five months, a committee of women revised the platform developed in 1994, presented it to an assembly of local women for their approval, and prepared themselves to publicly present their demands to the mayoral candidates.

A week before the elections, eighty women gathered in the Monseñor Romero Center in Suchitoto to support the women who were presenting the candidates with their platform. But only two of the candidates showed up; the one from the FMLN arrived an hour and a half late. Nonetheless, the women enthusiastically outlined the justifications for their demands, and while both candidates expressed their support, the incumbent FMLN mayor qualified his comments. As it was fairly evident that he would be returned to office, he cautioned the women that many of their demands would be beyond his power as mayor and could only be changed by the National Assembly. As a result, he encouraged them

to continue their participation and he pledged his support of a local women's commission.

His remarks point to what may be the most important result of the process of preparing the platforms; the most visible impact was not on shaping party politics, but on developing the protagonismo of the poor rural women in Suchitoto. As Gamson (1994) has suggested, when the goal is to establish a sense of identity, the most important audience may be the group itself. For these women, the process of working together to articulate gender-based demands into a coherent political platform, and learning the techniques for using that platform to apply political pressure enabled them to see themselves as a political force. The ability of the Dignas to promote the expansion of rural women's political participation suggests that the Salvadoran women's movement may have accomplished something exceptional in Latin American democratic transitions.

### A Timely Autonomy

While it may still be too early to conclude with certainty, the activism of the women in Suchitoto suggests the Salvadoran women's movement may be an exception to a pattern of women's mobilization in Latin America. Friedman describes this troubling paradox as one where women mobilize politically under even the most repressive forms of authoritarian rule, but in the transition to democracy, they demobilize (1998: 87). The reason for this, she argues, is that the institutionalization of politics during the transition impedes the forms of organization that women developed under the previous regimes and their subsequent political incorporation into democracy (ibid.: 88). Looking at the case of Venezuelan women in the 1950s, she claims that under repressive conditions many activities become too dangerous for men to carry out. But women, who are assumed not to be political, are able to take on political activities precisely because of that assumption. When democracy is restored, the sociopolitical climate that made women's participation necessary dissipates. Ironically, she points out that



the political parties, the most widely accepted channels for democratic representation, often present gendered barriers to women's full incorporation (ibid.: 89).

Friedman's description of the experiences of Venezuelan women mirrors that of the Dignas in critical ways, with the exception of one element. The Dignas and other women's organizations in El Salvador began to consolidate their own organizations before the war had terminated. The Dignas were founded in 1990 and began to struggle with the party almost immediately. By the time the Peace Accords were signed and the FMLN could begin its legal struggle toward consolidation in 1992, the Dignas had already gone through a process of establishing their autonomy from the RN.

Using a gendered version of the political opportunity perspective Friedman analyzes the profoundly gendered ways in which social movements interact with their political environments and how that process changes depending upon the stage of democratization. She explores the role played by political parties in both the mobilization and subsequent demobilizations of women during the transition to democracy through the experience of Venezuelan women.

The relative success of the Salvadoran women's movement in surviving the transition to democracy can also be explained through a gendered political opportunity perspective. This approach focuses on how the presence or absence of particular opportunities can influence the shape of social movements. For instance, the end of the Cold War created pressure on the Salvadoran resistance to look for new sources of support. The growing availability in the late 1980s of funding from international development agencies for women's projects provided an alternative source of funds. As a result, women's committees were created in the various branches of the FMLN. However, in order to obtain financial support it was necessary for women in the party to take an active role in conceptualizing and presenting these projects to potential funders. By placing women, who had already been deeply politicized by their participation in the

civil war, in positions to develop and promote projects that specifically addressed women's needs, the party provided the initiative for women to begin to investigate and identify the material basis for their subordination. This process also enabled women to move from working clandestinely to assuming an open and legal role as individuals responsible for legal, nonmilitary development projects.

As Amy Conger Lind has pointed out in an article on popular women's organizations in Ecuador, basic needs are not solely tied to survival, but rather to constructions of identity and relations of power (1992:137). The process of developing programs which would capture the funds designated for women's projects facilitated the emergence of awareness that women's needs were distinct from those of their compañeros. As the Dignas have documented (1993a), when they attempted to use the funds they got in order to address those needs, they discovered the resistance of their superiors to take those needs seriously. Their own gendered subordination within the party structures became more visible.

Two factors contributed to the ability of the women who founded the Dignas to increasingly challenge the gender discrimination within the RN. The first was the existence of funding that not only permitted but encouraged them to recognize the need for autonomous women's movement. The financial and ideological support they received from feminist movements in other regions of Latin America, Europe, and the United States reinforced their analysis of women's oppression. They were encouraged to focus not only on the structural conditions which oppressed women but to examine the relations of daily life, the conditions within the family, and the dynamics within the party.

During this period, the RN attempted to marginalize the women who acted independently of the party apparatus. But the fact that the women could rely on alternative sources of support enabled them to assert their autonomy when the party attempt to control their actions. The party lead-

ers continued to block their access to women in the zones controlled by the party. Such actions fueled the Dignas receptivity to the feminist critiques of political parties that they were beginning to encounter and discuss in groups similar to the women's conscious-raising groups of the United States women's movements. These theories challenged the vertical authoritarian structures of the political parties to which the Dignas belonged and provided them with additional justification to assert their autonomy and develop their own form of organization.

In addition, during the first two years of the Dignas existence and during a period of intense organizing for them and other women's groups, the party was still operating outside the legal framework. This limited how effective the FMLN could be in disciplining the rebels and put serious restraints on what they could offer in order to entice women's loyalty. The Dignas, on the other hand, were able to operate openly even before the signing of the Peace Accords. Women in Suchitoto came together to discuss their collective interests in 1991, crossing party lines, and developing new institutions and new strategies. The success of *Mujeres 94*, the national women's political platform campaign, led the Dignas to initiate the process elaborating women's platforms on the local level. While these campaigns proceeded with fits and starts, by 1996 in Suchitoto they had succeeded in acquiring sufficient power to pressure the FMLN to accept Ofelia as their candidate for the municipal council.

Unlike the Venezuelan case, as well as others women's movements in Latin America, the Salvadoran women's movement has grown during the democratic transition. This suggests is the timing of support of an independent, autonomous women's movement may be crucial to its success. I strongly agree with Friedman's analysis of the gendered nature of political transitions. This case shows evidence that in situations where women have taken a political role in opposition movements, the existence of an autonomous women's movement may be a critical factor in assuring that

women continue to occupy those roles following a democratic transition. Even so, as the campaign to get women elected to the party slate in Suchitoto illustrates, the ability of the Dignas to remain completely outside of those structures has been challenged as the FMLN has consolidated. This aspect demonstrates that supporting women's groups, as well as other social actors, in establishing their autonomy during the period prior to democratic transitions may be critical to ensuring the future of women's activism and a vital civil society.<sup>12</sup>

12 In our discussions of my conclusions, the Dignas felt that this analysis put too much emphasis on timing.

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## CAPÍTULO V

### Unconscious Feminist Consciousness: The Politics of Gender in Post-insurrection Cuba (1959-1999)

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*Here you cannot talk about feminism. Women do not accept that term, even I talk to brilliant women, cultured, and when I tell them that I am a feminist they say that they are not. For whatever reason they don't want to use that term: 'I have not studied it', they don't want to. They think it's an over-used and an exclusive term (personal interview with Lizette Villa, President of the Association of Artists of Film, Radio, and Television within the Union of Writers and Artists, 1999).*

While in Cuba in the summer of 1999 nineteen revolutionary feminists shared with me everything from their conflicting to consensual opinions towards the above sentiment. I met women in their eighties that were thrilled with the role of women in the armed struggle against Batista<sup>1</sup> and the subsequent position of women in Cuban political-economic society. The same women however often remarked at the extra hurdles they were forced to overcome in order to receive revolutionary acknowledgement. I met younger women in their forties and fifties who were loyal Communist Party members and feminists attempting to reconcile what to many felt to be a very contentious existence. While in Cuba for the last month of my year long research in Latin America and the Caribbean, I was exposed to a plethora of attitudes

<sup>1</sup> For two excellent histories of the Cuban revolution see García-Pérez, Gladys Marel, 1998, *Insurrection and Revolution: Armed Struggle in Cuba, 1952-1959*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers and Pérez-Stable, Marifeli, 1999, *The Cuban Revolution, Origins, Course, and Legacy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

and ideologies regarding the status of gender, women, and feminism in post-1959 Cuba. In this article I will argue that an unconscious feminist consciousness permeates Cuban political thought. Though the socio-economic indicators suggest that the status of women has greatly improved since the revolution, this is not indicative of a feminist<sup>2</sup> movement, but rather the contrary. I suggest however that this is not the result of a lack of feminist consciousness but rather a hegemonic political culture which places women in a position where female identity is completely trumped by revolutionary distinctiveness. In short, women have lost their gender in revolutionary Cuban society and with it has vanished the perceived need and opportunity for a women's or feminist social movement. Therefore Cuban society operates under what I call revolutionary androgyny.<sup>3</sup>

The Cuban revolution was definitively triumphant by agreed upon sociological definitions.<sup>4</sup> As we know, the sociology of revolutions is concerned with what factors contribute to a successful insurrection or seizure of power.<sup>5</sup> However, when one speaks to revolutionaries in Latin America, the revolution is understood to begin from the moment power is seized.<sup>6</sup> If this is the case, then we may deepen our sociological inquiry by adopting a feminist lens and moving

2 I work from Sonia Alvarez's definition of feminism which states that an act and by extension a movement is feminist if "it seeks to transform the roles society assigns to women, challenges existing power arrangements, and claims women's rights to personal autonomy and equality" (1990).

3 Through out this paper I use "androgyny" in the sense that femininity is absorbed into masculinity rather than the 'ideal' which suggests femininity and masculinity are equally merged, erasing gender constructs in the process. In other words, androgyny leads to the disappearance of 'woman' as a category.

4 See Skocpol, 1979

5 See Boswell, Terry and William J. Dixon. 1990. "Dependency and Rebellion: A Cross-National Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 55:540-559; Boswell, Terry and William J. Dixon. 1993. "Marx's Theory of Rebellion: A Cross-National Analysis of Class Exploitation, Economic Development, and Violent Revolt." *American Sociological Review* 58:681-702; Foran, John. 1992. "A Theory of Third World Social Revolutions: Iran, Nicaragua, and El Salvador Compared." *Critical Sociology* 19:3-27; Foran, John (Ed.). 1997. *Theorizing Revolutions*. New York and London: Routledge; Goldstone, JA (Ed.). 1994. *Revolutions: Theo-*

beyond the question of what causes the seizure of power to ask, "did the Cuban revolution (post-1959) succeed with respect to women?" There are a number of ways to measure success, for example, access to health care and education. After offering a brief theoretical context I will offer an overview of the status of women in post-insurrection Cuba. Within this discussion I will look at the various altercations to gender ideology in a preliminary move in explicating the trumping of women's identity. I will then move on to a discussion of feminist and/or women's mobilization and the obstacles faced and overcome by Cuban revolutionary feminists.

## Theoretical background

The literature on the emergence of feminism in Latin America is illustrative of innovation, agency, and creativity on the part of the activists. Most discussions of Latin American feminism use Molyneux's (1985) "practical" gendered versus "strategic" feminist interests as a point of departure. Molyneux argues that women's organizing tends to happen either out of the need for survival for "practical" gendered reasons, or is motivated by "strategic" feminist demands through a conscious desire to challenge patriarchal structures. This polemic has initiated a lively debate. Many reject the formula as it tends to imply that poor women's organizing is not politically motivated but rather something akin to feminine social service.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the

*retical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace; Goldstone, Jack A. 1991. *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Goodwin, Jeff. 2001. *States and Revolutionary Movements 1945-1991*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Goodwin, Jeff and Theda Skocpol. 1989. "Explaining Revolutions in the Contemporary Third World." *Politics and Society* 17:489-509; Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Revolution*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, and Wickham-Crowley, Timothy P. 1992. *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America. A Comparative Study of Insurgents and Regimes since 1956*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

6 I credit Karen Kampwirth for sharing this observation with me (personal communication, 1998).

7 See (Lind, 1992)

model implies that the strategic and practical demands are mutually exclusive, which undermines the possibility of coalition and alliance building.

There has also been a significant amount of literature regarding social movements, namely the protests of the mothers of the disappeared, which disrupt the albeit eroding yet historically relevant distinction between the private and public spheres (Schirmer 1993a; 1993b; Stephen 1994, 1997, and Fisher, 1993). That is, despite the fact that the mothers groups did and do not organize as "feminists", their combative presence against the state and radical agenda for respect for human rights has proven effective as a catalyst for oppositional thinking. These alterations in attitude were primarily internal to the women organizers with inevitable if subtle reverberations in civil society as well. As women met collectively to find their disappeared loved ones they shared new experiences as leaders of a social movement and often sole supporters of their families. This combination facilitated a development of previously untapped self confidence along with a budding and unnamed feminist consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

The literature attentive to the relationship between revolutions and feminism is also useful in understanding the case of feminism in post-insurrection Cuba. It has been quite helpful in providing examples of women's revolutionary skills eventually being transferred to feminist movements (Randall 1992; Chinchilla, 1990; 1995; Stephen, 1997; Kampwirth, 1997, forthcoming, and XXX, 1995, 1997). Though I mark myself as one who argues that sexism within discursively egalitarian or socialist struggles leads to a feminist consciousness, I also see other factors, many of which suggest more agency and pro-action on the part of women.<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that the mothers of the disappeared were feminist organizations as they explicitly reject the label. However, their organizing has led to a process of reflection on the positions of women and thus re-conceptualizations, in some cases, of gender dynamics. See (Chinchilla, 1992) for a related discussion.

<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine this assertion in more detail as it relies heavily on a comparative analysis of Cuba, Chile, and El Salvador. See (XXX, 2000).

theoretical synthesis here is illustrative of the patterns detectable in post-insurrection Cuba. As we will see a tense ideological struggle exists between practical and strategic interests for women in contemporary Cuba. In a sense this distinction is state imposed and arguably more influential than conflicts among women's groups over strategy. Additionally the mother's rejection of feminism while experiencing empowerment within a female centered environment further elaborates what I call the unconscious feminist consciousness with respect to the case of Cuba. And finally the tensions between revolutionary and feminist movements (or the age old "woman question") are highly visible in post-insurrection Cuba. With this theoretical backdrop I will use the remainder of this paper to elaborate the unconscious feminist consciousness in Cuba and explore the reasons for a lack of feminist movement amidst a highly politicized and thus seemingly fertile climate.

### Women in Post-insurrection Cuba

Indicators comparable to those of the Human Development Index suggest that women in Cuba have seen their situations progress significantly since the revolution. For example, the life expectancy of women in Cuba for the period 1990-1995 was (is) 77.3 as opposed to 61.3 in 1950-1955, prior to the revolution. Additionally, Cuba is considered a nation in the advanced stages of demographic transition which has had measurable effects on women. In 1950-1955, on the average, Cuban women had 4.1 children. Forty years and a revolution later, from 1990-1995 the number decreased to 1.9 indicating a significant amount of control over fertility and thus reproductive decisions. Related to this is the fact that women are getting older (and thus healthier with a higher life expectancy). In 1950 for example only 12.8 percent of the total population were women fifty years old and above, however, by 1990 that number jumped to 20.6. Also related to women's health are the numbers of physicians per 10,000 inhabitants. Though I do not have the numbers for before the revolution, there is a striking difference if we look at the numbers in Cuba in comparison



to the overall simple Latin American and Caribbean average. In 1990 there were 43.3 physicians per 10,000 inhabitants in contrast to 14.9 as the average in Latin America combined (Valdés and Gomariz 1995: 46; 41; 115; 117). In this section I will look at what accounts for social gains for women and offer a brief discussion of the obstacles that Cuban women currently face.

*The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (Federation of Cuban Women - FMC)*

In some circles, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) is heralded as one of the many successes in the gender realm for which the Castro regime can take credit. The FMC's history, origins, governmental or non-governmental status, and even goals and ideology can be quite convoluted depending upon who is speaking.<sup>10</sup> In 1971, FMC president Vilma Espín and leader during the revolutionary struggle, described the basic function of the FMC:

*to incorporate women into the construction of socialism, elevating the general political, cultural, and technical level of the nation. All of the FMC's activities are designed precisely to mobilize women, to organize them, and improve their condition (quoted in Smith and Padula 1996: 33).*

Some women proudly credit Castro with starting the FMC, suggesting that it was his commitment to women and gender issues which led to such a body. From Espín's quote

<sup>10</sup> It is during discussions about the FMC that issues of ideology and methodology become inextricably bound. Very few women were willing to criticize the FMC on tape, save one woman (the only woman) who opted to remain anonymous throughout all of my research. Similarly, as a researcher one becomes sensitive to different truths and what contexts produce competing truths for the (seemingly) same reality. An issue of great importance when doing field work in Cuba, around a topic as contested as gender and feminism, is the legal ramifications of "disrupting the nation's unity." Thus, because my informants were risking their political records by speaking with me in regards to a topic not terribly popular with the government the varying answers, definitions, and explanations I received regarding the FMC become more explicable.

above we can deduce that the purpose of the FMC was not to address sexual discrimination but rather, it was designed to mobilize women, an important sector of society, in support of socialism. This was arguably the first step of the regime fostering women's commitment to the revolutionary project at the expense of a feminist agenda. Ironically, a woman's institution was used to encourage androgynous revolutionary behavior. Clotilde Proveyer, Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Havana describes the history of the FMC, noting advances for women as a result of these larger socialist goals:

*In 1960 there was a meeting of all of the [women's] organizations and each one... disintegrated in the sense that they incorporate[d] into what was the Federation of Cuban Women.... [T]he fundamental objective [was] fighting for women's incorporation and ... participation as equals in the construction of a new society (personal interview, Proveyer 1999).*

Rita Perrera, staff member with the FMC in the area of Foreign Affairs with a thirty-five year history in the FMC offers a complementary perspective, describing the organization as follows:

*I think that the Federation of Cuban Women has gained, in its own right, due to everything that it has done, due to this practice, and due to its discourse, it has be[come]... a very important point of reference for the government on women's issues. Anytime that there is going to be a program that is going to be implemented that will have an impact or relates to women, the Federation of Cuban Women is always consulted. I think that it is an important role that we have to play.... I feel that it is the national mechanism in Cuba [for women].... We don't have a ministry, we don't have a women's department, we don't have a government organization, or a government body that handles women's affairs;*

*we only have the standing commission on following the channels of these and we use it a lot to get our points of view fluid [emphasis added] (personal interview, Perrera 1999).*

Indeed, our research group discussed our plans with Perrera upon our arrival. She expressed extreme dismay that we had not contacted the FMC for approval of our plans prior to the trip. In other words, as she presented it to us, the FMC is to know of all interactions about gender and feminism within Cuba.

Nikki Craske, a non-Cuban scholar, suggests that the centrality of women to the revolutionary government was manifested in part by the creation of the FMC. In contrast to what Perrera indicated to me, Craske describes the FMC as a very top-down organization headed by Vilma Espín: "any notion of feminism was, for the Cuban hierarchy, an anathema, since it was inextricably bound to 'imperialist' U.S. and Western bourgeois values: Espín herself insisted that the FMC was feminine rather than a feminist organization" (Craske 1999: 147). Albeit for different reasons, this ideological debate is similar to that which the mothers groups in Latin America are still grappling. A retired political analyst whom I interviewed but wished to remain anonymous had this assessment of the FMC:

*The Federation of Cuban Women was allegedly for addressing the problems of women in revolutionary Cuba. They stopped short [of] their main and only task... to take women to the workforce which is good in the sense that it gives women economic independence.... It never addressed the problems of women living in a macho society, it has never addressed the problems of the impoverishment of women in a... society where dollars are not the national currency [yet they dominate].... It has not addressed the issue of drop-out by female students because of early pregnancies or simply lack of interest in pursuing their studies; it has not addressed the question of*

*women who drop out of work because daycare centers are not functioning properly, and in general it does not address an issue which I think should become one of the central issues... which is domestic violence.... It is acknowledged that there are gender problems, but they are not [addressed] (personal interview, Anonymous 1999).*

Many women requested that I turn off the tape recorder so they too could share these types of frustrations. For example, they complained about the FMC's top-heavy structure, its disconnection with the grass-roots, and the lack of attention to issues of pressing concern to women, namely domestic violence.

Whether the FMC is governmental or non-governmental, feminist or feminine, hierarchical or grass-roots, autonomous or centralized, are all in a sense questions of semantics resulting from the highly complex and restricted political climate under which Cubans live. Similarly, these interpretations, contested or not, do not (necessarily) undermine the successes of the FMC as a revolutionary body for women in Cuba. By 1990 the FMC had three million members, or, over eighty percent of all Cuban women between the ages of fourteen and sixty-five (Smith and Padula 1996: 36). Despite the conflicting opinions, the membership indicates that the FMC plays a significant role in both the personal and public lives of women in Cuban society. Their prominence, however, has been positive for some women and negative for others.

Because there were few women in positions with national power, the FMC became the center of women's power within the revolution (post-1959) with its multi-layered structure parallel to the Cuban Communist Party. More than 130,000 women hold official positions in the organization. The experience was intended to train women for leadership in other sectors but it actually did the reverse by absorbing the energies of women who might have otherwise found positions in the state or the Communist Party. Despite many Cuban

women's contentious relationship with the FMC, it has been very instrumental in the incorporation of women into Cuban society. This process has been more of an absorption of Cuban women's potential feminist energies rather than an empowerment or deployment of such an agenda. Through the FMC, women's social needs were met, removing the urgency for a feminist agenda. Additionally, women's organized energy was redirected to support the revolutionary regime rather than their own latent autonomous movement which served to close likely political opportunity structures.<sup>11</sup>

*Education and empowerment.* No discussion of the Cuban revolution and gender is complete without mention of advances in literacy and education. Educational achievements were both significant and rapid. Thousands of new teachers were hired, and abandoned or reclaimed mansions along with former army barracks were converted into educational centers. Thousands of volunteers became "people's teachers" and in 1960 the great literacy campaign was launched. 1961 was the year of education.<sup>12</sup> Over 100,000 people volunteered for this campaign, more than half of whom were young women. The campaign had a dual function: first to offer literacy to the poor, and second, to raise consciousness among the well-off regarding the status of the poor. On a triumphant twenty-second of December in 1961 Fidel Castro declared Cuba a literate nation. 700,000 Cubans, more than half of whom were women, had learned to read and write. Scholarships were then offered to the volunteers so they could become professional teachers (Smith and Padula 1996: 83-84). While the revolution served to challenge some gendered expectations, for example, women traveling and thus existing independent of men, other gendered divisions of labor were reinforced. For example, the volunteer work performed by women literacy workers is perfectly parallels

the unpaid domestic labor of housewives. In both cases the institution, be it the state or the family, is dependent upon women's labor but is also unwilling to value these contributions vis-à-vis the assignment of a real wage. Indeed, wages are adjusted and impacted by capitalist ideologies of supply and demand, but socialist societies function with paid labor as well.

Yolanda González, currently an historian researching Fidel Castro's promotion of women in the M-26-7 guerrilla movement and formerly an active brigadista (literacy worker),<sup>13</sup> explained the literacy campaign and her participation in it:

*It was then that the struggle with my uncles started, they would say "how can you leave, you are crazy to go there to put up with that work." I told them that I was going to where I had to work the most... I was eighteen years old then.... That was the first experience for young women of that time because we had been educated to not go out alone.... I was always stubborn, so when my mom did not let me go, I insisted, then she told me that if I left [with] the brigades she would not support me in any manner (personal interview, González Plascencia 1999).*

Yolanda's recollection further illuminates how the literacy campaign affected women. From Yolanda we can see that her and other young women's commitment to the revolutionary project was a major catalyst in motivating women to challenge gendered norms within the family and by extension society at large. Women leaving the house for the first time served as a confrontation with rigid gender ideologies; both men and women were forced to eventually

11 See Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: University Press.

12 April 16, 1961 was also the date that Fidel Castro declared the Cuban revolution to be socialist in nature only to be met the next day with the infamous Bay of Pigs invasion of U.S. supported Cuban-exiles. This attempt at power was thwarted within seventy-two hours (Pérez-Stable 1999: 3).

13 Yolanda was also an evangelical Christian at the time of the revolutionary triumph. She told me in an interview that after 1959 she started listening more closely to Castro's speeches and realized that he was calling for the same basic rights that the Bible was. She eventually shifted her religious energies, commitment, and passion to Fidel Castro. From the way she spoke and what she had to say it appeared as if her loyalty continued to grow as the years passed.

grow accustomed to seeing women alone, a distinct signal of independence to both sexes. And though, as Yolanda explains, family members were often frightened and unsupportive of these transformations, they have over time served to lay the groundwork for an unconscious feminist consciousness.

Women in the paid labor force. As a result of the educational advancements and the revolutionary government in Cuba, women have entered the paid labor force en masse. The retired political analyst we met above had mixed feelings about the incorporation of women into the paid labor force:

*[women] are a very large part of the workforce. Perhaps it's 50/50 or 45/55; it's a very equal number in the workforce. They... are professional women. Also in the sciences, in medicine, in research, they are very... present there. But... if they have to get a director it is almost always a man. You hear the same thing, "she will get married, she will get pregnant, she will have children, and then she won't come to work." It's the same old story (personal interview, Anonymous 1999).*

The existence of a glass-ceiling and the fact that women managers rarely go beyond midlevel positions has been confirmed by research conducted inside of Cuba.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that women are under-represented in managerial positions, they do make up significant portions of the labor force that were previously open almost exclusively to men. Sixty-five percent of technicians, eighty-five percent of the administrative employees, seventy percent of the technical workforce in education, and forty-three

<sup>14</sup> Federation of Cuban Women, *FMC IV Congreso: Informe Central*, p. 4 (cited in Smith and Padula 1996: 114, footnote number 44, page 212).

<sup>15</sup> An article from the *Granma Internacional* states that "66.1% of professional and intermediate-level technicians are women ... and that 45% of the scientific and technical sector" are represented by women (March 2000).

percent of the scientists are women.<sup>15</sup> Women scientists can be found in all fields, including, engineering, mining, geology, economics, and biotechnology (Vallina and Pagés 1998 - 1999: 21; López Vigil 1998: 32).<sup>16</sup>

Related to the status of women in the work force is another phenomenon which is common in Latin America but has arisen for different reasons in Cuba. According to López Vigil, between thirty-three and forty percent of Cuban households are headed by women. This, she argues, is not a result of irresponsible paternity and poverty like the rest of Latin America but rather the economic independence, educational levels, and increased likelihood of divorce (López Vigil 1998: 31). However, some Cuban women pointed out that economic freedom as conceptualized in the socialist model of their nation is not necessarily the path to women's emancipation:

*Socialism liberated women by putting them to work. Done deal. If you were salaried, you were liberated; if you worked productively, you had already broken your chains. In the socialism that we learned, everything was so easy, everything went in a straight line: society emancipated itself from capitalism and was now happy; everything was now functioning. Women emancipated themselves economically and were now free. The family subordinated you: work liberated you. What sheer foolishness, gentlemen (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 39).*

In other words, androgynous revolutionary incorporation into the process of production, while necessary, did not guarantee progress in undoing the gendered division of labor still present in the domestic realm. Indeed, women have jobs in non-traditional fields, but this anonymous is suggesting that these advances are the result of twentieth century socialism, not feminism.

<sup>16</sup> These two articles that this and many other quotes in this paper come from were given to me by two of the Cuban feminists I interviewed who wanted me to be sure to use them sources.

Women and health. Another celebrated advance for women in Cuba is seen in the area of health, despite the fact that the reconstruction of the Cuban health care system was a national— not women— specific priority. Cuban women are protected by a safe and accessible health system which takes their needs into account - something which is in stark contrast to the rest of Latin American and the Caribbean.<sup>17</sup> This has not always been the case in Cuba, however, even in the Castro era.

Under the 1938 criminal code, which remained on the books until 1979, abortion was allowed in only three circumstances: to save the life of the mother, rape, or to avoid birth defects from hereditary diseases. What is not often mentioned is that the Castro government actively opposed abortion for several years. Another obstacle to women obtaining abortions presented itself after 1959, as many doctors left Cuba when their lucrative careers became nationalized. Thus, there was a period when the maternal death rate increased dramatically from self induced abortions. By 1980 the Ministry of Health was alarmed by figures of deaths from illegal abortions and attempted a program to both discourage abortions while making them safer and more accessible. It was in the 1980s that abortion became available without charge through the tenth week of pregnancy (Smith and Padula 1996: 73-76).

The roles of women in the Cuban health revolution are similar to what we saw with respect to the education campaigns; that is, much voluntary labor. It is important to highlight, however, that by 1990 sixty-four percent of all family doctors were women. By the mid-1970s the number of women health volunteers, who, like the literacy workers, were organized by the FMC, was about 60,000 women na-

17 It is important to note however, that many women complained to me that despite the institutional availability and protection of health care most hospitals are severely under stocked with everything from band-aids, to antibiotics (personal interviews, 1999). This situation has been exacerbated by the combination of the "Special Period" as well as the U.S. Embargo against Cuba (Smith and Padula 1996: 59).

tionwide. Women from all sectors of society joined this campaign (Smith and Padula 1996: 61-62). Related to this advance in health care, Rita Pererra of the FMC explained the dialogue that happens between the government and the FMC, and thus the influence of the FMC upon the lives of women:

*There used to be a resolution from the Ministry of Health, an internal resolution... that the father, the men, could not stay with their children in pediatric hospitals; it had to be the women. In [an FMC] congress this issue came up.... A woman [gave] examples of how she was in [the] hospital and how her husband wanted to take care of the child and they wouldn't let him. There the Ministry of Health could not [argue]... it tried to give an explanation, but ... it was [apparent] that it was not justifi[able] and this is how the resolution was abolished.... I remember Fidel was there and Fidel said [to the Ministry of Health] "what [do you] have to say about this?" The Ministry of Health said something about tradition, so there was nothing logical about it so it had to be deleted (personal interview, Pererra 1999).*

The presence of Fidel Castro at an FMC congressional meeting suggests a type of ministerial status enjoyed by the organization. Their positive influence is noted here, again suggesting that a feminist movement, as we shall see, would be what the state considers "redundant."

#### *Gender Bending: It's the Law.*

*So many changes in public life, in society, didn't guarantee equal changes in private life. Those two worlds were divorced from each other.... The men were revolutionaries in their workplace... in the union, but they walked into their house and were no longer revolutionaries. A load of reactionaries, conservatives! I call them machista-leninistas (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 39).*



Post-1959 laws regarding equality, labor, maternity leave, and the like are quite progressive in Cuba. Indeed, the Cuban constitution of 1976<sup>18</sup> mandates that "women enjoy the same rights as men" (Valdés and Gomariz 1995: 138). However, as the opening quote of this sub-section suggests, it takes more than laws on the books or revolutionary discourse to erase the markings sexism has burned deeply into the Cuban individual and collective psyches.

Like most things related to gender in Cuba there is (at least) a double meaning embedded in each of the changes instituted by the revolutionary regime. Castro was, and is, quite cognizant of the fact that women are a strategic political sector of the population and their support of the revolution is key to the maintenance, defense, and dissemination of the revolutionary project. In an attempt to inspire confidence in the revolution Castro passed a series of laws which strove to regulate gender equality in both the public and private spheres. These laws have proved problematic however, in that they are difficult if not impossible to regulate; they were often ideological gestures that have not gone farther than the original judicial process needed to pass them; and finally, laws alone cannot alter cultural and social practices. As the anonymous political analyst.

*The constitution says that we are all equal in the eyes of the law; we are all equal and that we all have*

18 1) The Constitution modified in 1992 sanctioned the following: "Every man or woman who is able to work is entitled to the opportunity to find useful employment; 2) the state protects the family, as well as motherhood, and marriage; 3) discrimination [of any kind] is forbidden and punishable by law; 4) all citizens... have access to (a) all state and public administration positions as well as employment...; (b) all ranks of the Revolutionary Armed Forces...; (c) equal pay for equal work; (d) men and women enjoy equal rights...; (e) ... free education; (f) ... free health care; (g) ... both men and women... can be elected... The maternity law establishes the right to eighteen weeks of paid maternity leave, twelve of them to be enjoyed after the delivery, and an additional two more weeks in the case of multiple pregnancies or error concerning the delivery date... [There are also] the revolutionary laws designed to protect single mothers... The Family Code proclaims the absolute equality of both spouses, a principle which entails the judicial elimination of all vestiges of subordination of the wife with respect to the husband" (Vallina and Pagés 1998 - 1999: 18-20).

*the same opportunities for jobs and opportunities for studies and all people should have the same rights. But apart from that, if you don't address gender problems as such, separately, it is very difficult to make an impact at a social level. I am always very confused when they talk to me about gender because it is something so alien in this society; it is something that you don't talk about (personal interview, Anonymous 1999).*

The revolutionary government had the awareness, will, and political foresight to assure equal rights for women. This was to be accomplished through a legal restructuring of society. While in Cuba I discussed these laws, specifically the Family Code with the women I interviewed. In 1975 the Family Code was approved, stipulating that family relations should be based on love, respect, and shared responsibilities. The code only presents one version of the family as the norm - the heterosexual nuclear family.<sup>19</sup> In other words, despite the fact that Fidel Castro sought to revolutionize the society, including at the micro level of the family the end result was the exclusive promotion of the nuclear family and its attendant prescription for gender roles. When discussing the Family Code a Cuban feminist told López Vigil that "the code could be a thousand times better, but I think it helped create a good deal of awareness, in men and women too, of everyday machismo" (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 30-31)! I heard this sentiment repeatedly while in Cuba; that is, the Family Code initiated discussions about gender but for the most part, this is where the challenge to gender constructs ended. Some of the more revolutionary stalwarts offered uncritical praise while the majority of the women found the code to be both the beginning and premature end of a necessary debate. There was high consensus however, that despite the actual existence of the Fam-

19 Castro's hostility towards homosexuals has been well documented by Randall, 1992; Argüelles, 1993; Argüelles and Rich, 1984; 1985; Leiner, 1993. See also the Cuban film *Strawberry and Chocolate* (Alea and Tabio 1994) which addresses this issue. This has eased over the years but Cuba is still anything but a hospitable climate to gays and lesbians.



ily Code, women still perform the majority (if not all) of the domestic duties, especially since the onset of the "Special Period."<sup>20</sup> In a sense, there was even a backlash as Cuban society perceived itself to be more evolved with respect to gender relations than other nations thus claiming victory in a battle which as of yet is not close to complete. The Family Code is then the discursive manifestation of the unconscious feminist consciousness. That is, women knew they were entitled to full equality but did not mobilize to attain it.

*Women in/and politics.* The one issue that women across the political spectrum<sup>21</sup> agreed upon in Cuba was the lack of women in positions of power. Sociologist and member of the Communist Party Mayra Espina explained power this way:

*I believe that feminine organizing and the ways in which women have gotten involved in political activities and in the public life have been maintained within a framework of power that is masculine. This seems like a contradiction because the political changes that have taken place in the last four de-*

20 The "Special Period," the name suggesting a temporary yet grave crisis, began in September 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then the island has been on a strict rationing program which includes everything from gasoline to soap. Most women I interviewed made it clear that this crisis was being managed by women. Despite the fact that the Family Code stipulates sharing the chores, it was women who knew how to make the minimal resources stretch beyond their seeming limits. Domestic work has become more time consuming due to the rationing thus women have much less time for politics and/or paid labor. The frustration one hears repeatedly is directed towards the U.S. government and the embargo for making a difficult situation unbearable.

21 The "political spectrum" in Cuba is difficult to quantify. However, one can think of it in terms of degree of criticism leveled against the government combined with membership or not in the Communist Party. (This became so relevant that after a few interviews I realized I needed to ask about one's membership status as if it were a demographic question.) It is important however to note that not all members of the Communist Party were uncritical of the government – most of the women I interviewed were members and some had quite severe criticisms. My sample included no women who wanted to leave Cuba; even the one woman who remained anonymous and was clearly frustrated with many aspects of government policy had no desire to leave Cuba.

*cedes in Cuba are precisely what have allowed for Cuba to show so many achievements when it comes to women's social integration.... [The] masculine [framework of power] is where the limitation is.... In addition, you notice that this is complicated because a part of that machista or masculine framework of power and the views of the male-female relationship is even flattering to women. That is to say the positive side of the masculine model is a Cuban [male] that is the protector of the woman, delicate towards the woman, that feels responsible for the life of the woman, that does not allow her do anything that may supposedly hurt her.... I believe that the Cuban political climate has been at this level for a number of years, it is a view of women that excites her, that protects her, that cherishes her, but it continues to be maintained in this masculine vision (personal interview, Espina 1999).*

In other words, Espina suggests that a prototypical gendered hegemonic culture functions in Cuba which both leads women to participate in the unequal power sharing while enjoying it on perhaps a subconscious level. The results however are more than psychological: Between 1993 and 1994 Cuba had one woman minister,<sup>22</sup> or 2.6 percent of the total. In 1994, there were no women governors in provinces or departments. The presence of women in local government for the years 1993 and 1994 was not much more impressive: there were nine women, or 5.3 percent of the total. For the years 1993-1994 there were 134 women in the legislature and between 1992 and 1994 there were 1,809 women on the municipal councils (Valdés and Gomariz 1995: 162-66). Overall, these numbers are anything but inspiring. In short, we see no women with executive powers in Cuba, and of these numbers the closest to that level of the hierarchy are the women Ministers of which Cuba has little to boast. The

22 According to the *Granma Internacional*, "three women are at the head of important ministries: domestic trade, foreign investment, and technology, science and the environment" (March 2000).

highest level of female participation can be found in the legislative body and even there only 22.8 percent of the positions are held by women.<sup>23</sup> Thus, equality may be stipulated by law but power sharing (both along gendered and party lines) is something that has yet to come to fruition in Cuba. In my estimation this is indicative of three things: first, the presence of the androgynous revolutionary ideology which favors the male norm; second, the persistence of stubborn gender roles which prescribe men to the "political sphere," and finally, the double or triple burden, exacerbated by the "special period," accounts for much of Cuban women's time, thus preventing them from pursuing representative political positions.

### The women's/feminist movement in Cuba

With the above gendered backdrop in place we can now proceed in explicitly discussing feminism in this complex revolutionary androgynous climate. In all of my interviews I asked the women if they considered themselves feminists, how they defined feminism, and if they thought there was a feminist consciousness in Cuba. The answers to these questions were what I would call 'divergently similar' in their subtext as we will see below.

#### *Colectivo Magín*

*Colectivo Magín*, despite its short lived history, is an organization of utmost importance in the contemporary social-history of gendered consciousness in Cuba. The word "Magín," meaning "imagination" in Spanish, was chosen because the founders were primarily concerned with altering the image of women in the media. The five original founders<sup>24</sup> came together at a journalism conference in Latin America in 1993. One early and anonymous member described the initial phase of Magín as follows:

<sup>23</sup> More recent numbers reported in the *Granma Internacional* (March 2000) indicate that these numbers have increased with women comprising 27.6% of the deputies in the National Assembly.

<sup>24</sup> I tried to meet with Mirta Rodríguez Calderón as she is one of the founders of Magín and leaders in feminist journalism; unfortunately she was out

*In creating Magín we decided to begin through the media, but starting from a very broad concept of "media" We didn't want only journalists, radio broadcasters, publicists.... We also began to bring in teachers. Who's a better multiplier of messages than them? And family doctors, who also multiply messages. And popular power representatives and academics and researchers.... The task we gave ourselves was to discover the concept of gender and apply it to the work that each one of us was already doing (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 41).*

Sonia Moro, an historian and original founder of Magín explained that the collective, though directly focused on gender and images of women did not call itself feminist:

*We were a group of journalists, of communicators; we did not have a denomination. We were simply women who wanted to change the image of women. Even in Magín there were women who did not like the term feminism very much, there was a bit of everything (personal interview, Moro 1999).*

In other words, Magín understood themselves to be a collective of professional women, not feminists, and it was for this reason that they initially received the support of the FMC. In Cuba it is illegal to duplicate efforts of existing organizations. As professional women, Magín had an agenda distinct from the FMC and didn't see themselves in conflict with the government's policies. Magín's members were well respected professional women, including some who were quite well-known; cinematographers, radio personalities, artists, designers, soap-opera scriptwriters, television directors, journalists, and academics. These women did not join Magín with the intention of making something of themselves, as they were already established. Rather, they joined Magín to create a space where they could share their experiences (López Vigil 1998: 42).

The members of Magín were almost all members of the Communist Party as well and thus respected the wishes of the government. Related to that, Sonia Moro explains

### Magín's relationship with the FMC:

*For a while a person from the Federation was a member of the managing committee, up to a certain point because that person stopped going to the meetings without giving [an] explanation.... We would send someone to inquire, all the documents that we were producing were also sent; we kept the Federation abreast of what we were doing, but they stopped attending. And in addition they felt attacked, threatened. We were left [confused] because it seems to me that the work with the masses has nothing to do with professional work. In addition the objective of Magín was... to chang[e] the image of woman in the media [by working with] those... women who were in the media or women who were transmitting a message, by way of the family, when they meet with their community, with their patients (personal interview, Moro 1999).*

In other words, Moro saw the goals and the target communities as distinct. Magín also kept the Communist Party informed of their every procedural move. Further emphasizing their desired relationship with the FMC a member who remained anonymous in López Vigil's article explained:

*We informed the Party of everything Magín did. In the beginning, the Cuban Women's Federation was on our side. We were well respected, we were part of them, and there were no problems. We invited them to everything and shared our materials with them. Also, we always said: "If we have been able to get to the point of creating Magín, it's because of all we learned in the Women's Federation. If we've grown exceptionally fast, it's due to everything we previously did with the Revolution" (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 42).*

Yet some women (and men) remained uncomfortable with the tactics and even existence of Magín. I spoke with Lizette

Villa, the President of the Association of Artists of Film, Radio, and Television within the Union of Writers and Artists, about Magín. Villa has a respected position within the government in the realm of cultural production. She spoke to me at length about women's images in the media and shared some TV documentaries which she had produced whose purpose was to offer positive images of women. Additionally, she considers herself a feminist. She told me that she was aware of Magín and some of her friends were former leaders of the group. Still, a feminist of the arts deeply concerned with the promotion of a positive image of women shies away from Magín; why is that?

*Look, the Magín group was important in a conceptual way for communicators... but it seems to me that (because I met some of the leaders because they are my friends) in addition I am telling you this because I told them, that they were not transparent enough in terms of the... majority.*

*I am telling you in a general way [what] I spoke to them about. From the beginning I told them "I am not going to be in Magín because those are not my principles or my ideas on how to coordinate women. I believe that we women need to work with those that we disagree with, with our different ideas, but with similar goals." In this case, the communicators. I don't like the selfish and opportunist attitudes; I can't stand it and I am not ready to be around those attitudes. I tolerated them, if you want to be selfish it's your problem and I respect your selfishness and I respect your opportunism even though I don't like it personally, I respect it. My respect for another person is the most important thing, please understand that, but I don't like sharing time with them when I see that things have an ideal that is... starting from those inequalities and diversity, not thinking that everyone is the same.... I want diversity of thought, but with similar ideas, with similar purposes, with similar projects in favor of women not with individual projects.... I let them in the National Awards*

*of Film, Radio and Television that I organize; I let them give out their award as Magín, but I am not interested. It is clear that many of them talk... about many interesting things... in feminist terms. They discussed some interesting things that we had no other space to discuss (personal interview, Villa 1999) [emphasis added].*

Villa's feelings towards Magín are anything but straightforward. She appears conflicted about their methods (what she considered a lack of transparency) and even their goals, despite the fact that her work seems to strive for the same exact end. Additionally, she does consider herself a feminist. On the other hand, Villa seems most disturbed by what she perceived to be Magín's individualistic (anti-socialist) approach to a collective (socialist) problem. Thus, for Villa, Magín strayed too far from the androgynous revolutionary project.

The feeling that Magín was not completely transparent in its methods was not held only by onlookers in the community but the Communist Party as well:

*In March of 1996, the Party's Politburo came out with a very tough, very restrictive and disturbing ideological document. All of a sudden, women from the Federation who had come to our workshops and participated in all our activities drew away from us. It was a sign of things to come. They had gotten the message to cut themselves off. In September, the Party's Central Committee called a meeting of its executive committee and Magín's steering committee. The purpose was to disband Magín. While it was a friendly and respectful meeting, as opposed to a trial, it was nevertheless clear from the beginning that if we resisted we would be subject to party disciplinary measures (quoted in López Vigil 1998: 42).*

Belkys Vega, Cuban cinematographer and founding member of Colectivo Magín explains that they weren't so much both-

ered as confused by the decision. Magín had no desire to conflict with the Communist Party as they supported the revolution and were members of the Party. Sonia Moro had this response: "It was understood that Magín was duplicating [efforts]. All of us compañeras accepted, but we accepted that because of discipline; because we are revolutionaries and we do not want to be outside of the revolution. But we thought that it was not as it was presented to us" (personal interview, Moro 1999). That is, they respected the government's wishes but didn't agree with its interpretation of the situation. Vega also did not agree with the logic that Magín was duplicating the efforts of the FMC.

She explains,

*We are not guilty, we had to stop existing because it was not legal. We are not going to have an illegal organization, that was not our intention.... In addition to that, we or at least most of us, envision Magín as integral to the Communist party. That is, it is not a different proposal for the social issue; we are working for the same social project. What we wanted was to include a different view of the same social project and for that reason we were not interested in being a clandestine organization, but an organization within this social project (personal interview, Vega 1999) [emphasis added].*

In short, the collective was told that their objectives were justifiable, but that justifiable did not always mean appropriate. It was "suggested" that the members could continue their work within the already existing channels, or in this case, the FMC (López Vigil 1998: 43). Magín has since stopped organizing.

*Feminism + feminist consciousness = women's movement?*

As we have seen from some of the above testimonies feminism is often perceived to be either in direct contrast to Cuban socialism, a divisive ideology imported from the bourgeois North, or an unnecessary distraction, as a class-

less society creates equality for all.<sup>25</sup> The great majority of the women I interviewed, however, took the strong if not contentious stance of defining themselves as feminists. Most of the women ironically felt that the feminist consciousness which exists in Cuba is what they called an "unconscious" one; that is, women were aware of their rights to equality but didn't necessarily identify that vision as feminism. In this section I will share some of the women's diverse definitions of feminism and understandings of feminist consciousness in Cuba.

Belkys Vega considers herself a feminist now but noted that if one was to ask her in a couple of years she may change her mind. It was through her work with Magín that she started calling herself a feminist:

*In Cuba the term feminism has... been seen as somewhat negative. It has been seen as negative and this of course has not allowed some people that have... defended the feminist principle to call themselves feminist. There are a lot of women in Cuba who have fought for women's equality, for equal opportunities, for the right to [access] to all job positions, for being recognized as professionals in equal terms as men, [but] you can notice a lot of feminist problems.... [V]ery few of us know about the development of the movement. Yes, I believe that in Cuba there has been a feminist movement with other names. I think that organizations like Magín have been permeated with a feminist focus. It has raised more consciousness and it is more openly recognized as feminism. But I think that the way in which the term has been used has damaged the acceptance of feminist positions (personal interview, Vega 1999).*

Mayra Espina has considered herself a feminist since the mid-1980s but tends not to use the term. She explained that the reason for this was due to the fact that Cuban

25 See Randall 1992 for a related discussion.

society for the most part doesn't understand feminism and assumes women who embrace the term to be man-haters etc. She describes feminism as a revolutionary project which understands and celebrates difference and sheds light on relations of power:

*I believe that feminism is an everyday attitude about life that attempts to review the differences and the right to have those gender differences to a situation of equality.... What I have found in feminism is tolerance, in the enjoyment of the differences that I had not found in other social and life ideologies. That contact with feminism allowed me to understand what difference means.... I think that entering feminism is opening other doors... of understanding the cultural, historical, and all kinds of differences. I believe that feminism has understood them better than other forms of social thought. I believe that is a way of understanding life within the differences that rejoice from it and of course a fundamental aspect of feminist theory, as political life, revolutionary, and as an everyday practice, is a radical position against any kind of power or domination beyond the one that has to do with gender differences (personal interview, Espina 1999).*

With such variety in both issues of priority and ideas about feminism, one begins to wonder if there is indeed a feminist consciousness in such a political climate. If so, where is it, and if not, why can we not find one? Marta Nuñez, Communist Party member who considers herself a feminist and has since 1994, explains,

*I wouldn't say there is a feminist consciousness [here]. And if it does exist it exists very unconsciously; an unconscious consciousness. If you ask anyone in Cuba are you a feminist? They would say "no, feminist movements promote only women and women against men." But when you've personalized*



*feminism in the Church, for example, I do. I think that many Christian women are quite feminist unconsciously (personal interview, Nuñez 1999).*

This is quite striking as we think of communism, Christianity, and feminism to be a collection of antitheses. However, Nuñez is defining the church as a nexus where feminist ideals (and not discourse) would likely be uncovered. On a similar note, Sonnia Moro said, "I believe that there is a sense of equality, but I don't know to what extent that [it is] equipped with a feminist consciousness" (personal interview, Moro 1999). Similarly, when I asked if she thought there was a feminist consciousness in Cuba, Rita Perrera of the FMC answered, "I think there is, but people are not aware of it" (personal interview, Perrera 1999). What is particularly striking here is that all three women, with different relationships to feminism, and of course interviewed separately, use almost the same words to describe feminism; or an "unconscious consciousness." Additionally, I suggest that the anti-feminist androgynous revolutionary dogma led women supporters of the state to de-prioritize and even suppress their feminist instincts. In other words, all three are suggesting that women in general have certain expectations as to their equal treatment in society but this is more the result of living in a socialist and politicized atmosphere rather than one with high consciousness around gendered issues. This mentality, I will argue below, is in part responsible for both a backlash against feminism as well as a stagnant women's movement.

The different Cuban women I spoke with all had somewhat distinct interpretations of not only what feminism is and whether a feminist consciousness exists, but also if a women's movement existed in Cuba, and if so, how might it be characterized. Graciela González Olmedo, another professor of Women's Studies at the University of Havana described the women's movement as follows:

*[The women's movement] is a strong movement. It is not [as] sufficiently strong and integrated as we*

*would want it to be, but it has gained strength because we have [worked so] at least there is a consciousness and that consciousness has been transferred to each of the elements that can improvise or implement this change at [a] societal level.... There are more strengths than weaknesses (personal interview, González Olmedo 1999).*

Clearly Olmedo sees the women's movement as deeply connected to the FMC. Elvira Vallina, historian and former member of M-26-7 sees evidence of a Cuban women's movement through the proliferation of research on women:<sup>26</sup>

*I am trying to define in Cuba at this point in time, under the conditions, what is a movement.... I believe that the... women's movement that exists has to be defined as research movements. There are research groups on women in the social sciences, through sociologists at the University of Havana, and in other universities. [There are] lectures about women, by way of the faculty in sociology.... Right now, we have the Women's International Encounter which was promoted by the women faculty at the University of Havana, dozens of women from around the world attended the third Women's Encounter where Cuban women participated with their own research (personal interview, Vallina 1999).*

Sonnica Moro, who says she has always been a feminist because she has always known that women have been at a disadvantage, describes the women's movement as formal and restrictive and suggests that women need to find their voice:

*[The women's movement is] formal, that is, it exists but it does not move. It is potentially very strong,*

26 When Elvira and I met she was in the midst of conducting an intriguing survey about the roles of women in the M-26-7. Thus, many of the researchers that are focussing their work on gender, especially in an historical context, are fully cognizant of the fact that they are writing women into history, a large task to be sure and one with long term ramifications in the ability of altering what future generations understand regarding gender.



*but it's not moving, and I believe it has to move.... It has to move, even in other mass organizations, there have been renovations... in the sense of opening up.... I believe that women need to once again recover their voice. Also she can reach to have a protagonist's role that no one has handed down, that she has won. Because sometimes they tell us that the revolution gives [to] us... I believe that there is no substance to what has been given; I believe she has won it, no one has given it to her as a gift [emphasis added] (personal interview, Moro 1999).*

This is a rather powerful observation that further illuminates the internal ideological struggles with which Cuban revolutionary feminists are faced. Moro's observation concurs with the other women's assessments of an unconscious feminist consciousness. The existence of a women's agenda without movement towards that end suggests that unconsciously women recognize the need for a feminist consciousness but are politically, organizationally, and ideologically prevented from pursuing such endeavors. The frustration expressed by Moro is exacerbated by her contradictory role as a loyal member of the communist party, or, as an androgynous revolutionary desiring to exist as an autonomous feminist agent.

In summary, I would characterize the women's movement in Cuba as institutional, limited in effectiveness, and severely restricted in its autonomy. There are several noteworthy observations here: First, the women I spoke with in Cuba had a great range in opinions about the women's movement, from strong, to weak, or even stagnant. Second, there is limited room for feminist expression outside the confines of the FMC (which many don't define as "feminist" but rather "feminine").<sup>27</sup> The case of Magín was a clear example of these limits on autonomous expression. Third, though "femi-

nism" is not necessary for a women's movement to be effective, the residual fear of the word has led to an equally quiescent women's movement. And fourth, because the state has met many of the basic needs of women through laws and social services, many women believe that feminism (or at least gender equality) is, in a sense, state sanctioned, and thus the need for feminist social movements has been eliminated.

The fact that the different women and/or feminists I interviewed had varying ideas about the women's movement in Cuba is not in and of itself problematic. Indeed, a homogenous set of answers is arguably more suspect and difficult to interpret than one characterized by diversity. What it does suggest, however, is that a women's or feminist movement, if it does indeed exist, is only effective in some circles. For example, to the women who believe there is a strong women's movement (Vallina, for example) the Cuban model works adequately. That is, as noted above, Vallina felt that there was indeed a strong women's movement and this was manifest in the proliferation of women-centered research. As a feminist social scientist, needless to say, I concur that women-focused research is fundamental to the development of new ideas and world views about gender. However, it is curious that some women felt there to be no women's movement in Cuba. For example, my anonymous informant suggested:

*At a societal level I don't think it [feminism] is even a movement. I don't think there is even a feminist consciousness at a societal level. You may find it in small groups of women who are friends and who have spoken about these issues; you could find it in groups of men who are aware of women's issues and acknowledge them; you will find them in the young people who are not very clear about what feminism is, but who know that their problems and concerns pertain more to women than to any other group in society, but at a very disconnected and scattered level. It is not a movement, it is not a cohesive thing*

27 For an excellent discussion of this distinction see Kaplan, Temma. 1982. "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918." *Signs* 7:545-560.

*yet; it is not something that can bring together a major section of the population, not the majority, but certain sectors of the populations.... It is very slowly beginning to gain some ground, very slowly because it is very difficult in a country where everything is designed to come from men and to advance men twenty [steps] (personal interview, Anonymous 1999).*

This suggests that the needs that she (and the circle of friends she refers to) felt should be prioritized were being left out of the current agenda (if we can call it that). For these women, research is not enough. In other words, the ebbs and flows of effectiveness of the women's movement within Cuban society are quite pronounced, reiterating that the women's movement is only effective in some circles.

Second, the restrictions on feminist expression also account for a muffled women's movement. The case of Colectivo Magín is the most dramatic example. As we saw, Magín was a group of professional women attempting to challenge the image of women in the media. But because the government/Communist Party felt they were duplicating efforts of the FMC they were forced to stop organizing. This shows that the women's movement must function within the parameters set by the government; not just the existing institutions but also their definitions of what work remains to be done. To imply that the work of Magín was duplicating the efforts of the FMC is to suggest that the FMC is indeed effectively challenging the images of women in the media. However, if Magín felt this was so they clearly would have never initiated such a struggle. The point, however, is that the women's movement (like everything in Cuba) is thoroughly bound to the Communist Party and government; thus true autonomy for feminism cannot exist. And we may recall that Alvarez's definition of feminism from which I am working suggests that autonomy is a non-negotiable characteristic.

From my interviews it also became clear that feminism is not a popular term in Cuba. It has a host of political bag-

gage, stigmas, and taboos associated with it. And though I would argue that a women's movement need not wholly embrace the term to challenge gendered inequities, the negative connotations have had long term effects upon the larger community in Cuba and their desire and ability to mobilize collectively for a movement with such deeply problematic images. Finally, because the state and revolutionary government were so quick and thorough in addressing women's basic needs, many women feel no need to mobilize. As we saw above, women's health, educational, and labor status dramatically increased after the revolution. Women have a sense of empowerment through their access to paid labor, regardless of what many women perceive as glass ceilings combined with other obstacles resulting from the special period. Women exercise far more control over their bodies in the sexual realm than in every other Latin American country and many parts of the First World because of their access to safe and free abortions. They are legally entitled to demand assistance with the domestic chores, file for divorce, and claim paid maternity leave. We have seen that these gains are all somewhat precarious due the special period and U.S. embargo and in a sense represent only words on a page. As suggested above, these advances play the dual role of empowering women around quasi-traditional gendered patterns and thus pushing women into positions of non-confrontation with respect to their feminist rights. In other words, the revolution provided a forum to challenge gendered norms during the insurrection but was quick to retract that space, often subtly, in the post-1959 period.

Clotilde Proveyer, Professor of Women's Studies describes the revolution as "essentially feminist":

*Feminism is to try to achieve the qualitative growth of women. If feminism is that... then I believe that the revolution, the social project, is essentially feminist. That is to say it is in favor of women, and the Federation is essentially feminist, and all of our lec-*

tures, and our research, and our own personal affiliation, are feminist.... I believe that in that sense I feel I am a feminist and I don't feel that this is a separate "ghettoized" group because I feel identified and I feel represented in different areas, [in] the Federation [which is] the essence of the revolutionary project (personal interview, Proveyer 1999).

Does this imply then that women's needs were met by the revolution and "the woman question" answered? Or, does it suggest that the revolutionary regime had the political foresight to keep women's needs at the forefront in order to render complacent a politically experienced group of women with deep collective grievances? Above we have seen examples of Castro's desire to keep women endeared to the revolutionary project. Thus, unfortunately I would suggest that Proveyer's observations simply further reinforce the notion that the revolutionary regime sought to keep women as a revolution-friendly constituency. To a large extent Castro has been successful, and as is the traditional pattern in socialist realities this has been at the expense of feminism.

*What has never been accepted here is feminism. Feminism in Cuba has always been something dangerous, suspect, unnatural. Feminist? That's a woman who rejects men, who wants to do away with them altogether, who speaks of no longer wanting to 'sleep with the enemy'... And it's not just against men who don't understand, there are a bunch of women who are accustomed to thinking: how am I going to be a feminist if I believe that we can't live without men? Feminism? Many people also see it as the exact [same]... as lesbianism; they don't differentiate. There's also a lot of ignorance (anonymous quote in López Vigil 1998: 38).*

## Conclusions: A Critical Reading of Gender In Castro's Cuba

If anything becomes clear in this article it is the multi-tiered complexity of Cuban society. Spending even one short month in Cuba one gets a taste of the constant contradictions with which Cuban reality is inundated. For example, health care is free yet medical supplies don't exist. Everything is not state controlled, but what the government does not condone is shut down (Magín). Women see themselves as equals but avoid the word feminism because it is woman-focused. People advocate a diversity of thought as long as it is unified.<sup>28</sup> In other words, a sociologist's view of Cuba is anything but a singular vision.

Much of what we have seen with respect to women in Cuba further demonstrates this point. In post-1959 Cuba women's basic indicators for the standard of living dramatically increased. That is, they have access (when available) to free health care, including abortions, and thus a control over their bodies which is unprecedented in the region. Women are not only a literate part of the population but highly educated as well. Women are entitled to work in the paid labor force as do men, though they are, for the most part not as equally represented in managerial positions as they are in the labor force at large. With respect to government and positions of power women are grossly under-represented. There are numerous laws which theoretically protect women's rights to share domestic tasks, maternity leave, and no discrimination, but the combination of deeply held cultural beliefs by both men and women, the special period, and an inability to enforce such laws has made many of these advances largely symbolic. We also saw that women have the FMC to serve their needs but that if they move beyond its program and goals then their work is likely to be considered duplicate and thus illegal. There is a positive wave

<sup>28</sup> These are truly superficial observations – when one delves deeper into issues of race and racism in Cuba the contradictions and hypocrisy become even more pronounced.

of women-centered research, including a Women's Studies program at the University of Havana. Women feel entitled to equality in their nation and in a sense take feminism for granted, both because many of their gendered needs have been met and because of a fear of the word. In short, Castro established a very strong infrastructure to address gendered needs in order to keep women on the side of the revolution and preemptively thwart any feminist agitation. As this article demonstrates, his goals were met. In the meantime, women have benefited in the short run with social services that meet their needs and as I have argued, been hurt in the long run, as their traditional roles as women have not been undermined by the revolution but rather re-enforced with new demands of worker and activist superimposed onto the older (and remaining) expectations of homemaker and wife.

### Methodological Post-Script

At this point it is important to briefly examine methodology within the socio-political reality in Cuba. As many scholars have noted Cuba is an exceptionally challenging place for field work, especially as a U.S. citizen.<sup>29</sup> I traveled to Cuba with a list of contacts, however, the scholars program of which I was a part was denied "institutional support" for our various research projects. In other words, the Cuban Ministry of Culture did not endorse our projects. When attempting to set up interviews in Cuba, potential interviewees for the most part ask one who is sponsoring the project and some, upon hearing that I had no sponsorship, opted not to be interviewed. In the Cuban context the lack of institutional support implies that speaking to a researcher can be construed as a breach in national unity, a legal violation. Thus in the process of supporting the state and respecting the law, it was often the more stalwart supporters and participants of the revolution who declined interviews. Ironically, this commitment to the revolution subsequently led to a sample slightly weighted towards a vantage point more critical of the revolution. This is not to say, however, that all interviews presented obstacles. Many women were very

29 See (Bengelsdorf, 1988) for example.

passionate about recalling their histories and committing and entrusting them to a project such as this.<sup>30</sup>

The data for the theoretical and empirical discussions presented here are the result of a year of field work in Latin America and the Caribbean divided between El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba. During that time I interviewed sixty eight women in total. Due to budgetary and travel restrictions I was only able to spend one month in Cuba where I interviewed nineteen women.<sup>31</sup> The women ranged from forty-four to eighty years in age, were a highly educated group with eight having Ph.D.s and the rest a minimum of a high school, if not university level education. Social class, like everything in Cuba, is exceptionally complex and neat categories become slippery the moment one attempts to apply them. However, the majority of women in my sample ranged from working to middle in class positioning, which is determined in part by their upbringing before the revolution (or their parent's status) as well as their position in contemporary Cuban society. I did not talk to any of the women about their own sexuality and thus cannot say with certainty that all of the women I met were heterosexual. Personal racial identities were also not discussed. However, based on phenotype fifteen of the nineteen women are white, three Afro-Cuban, and one mulatta, a term still widely used in Cuba and discourse about race in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Through my questions I attempted to understand the roles of women in the revolution, their understandings of feminist consciousness, how gender and gendered roles have changed through the revolution, and how they feel about

30 See *Local Voices, Global Visions: Women Revolutionaries in Cuba, Chile, and El Salvador Share Their Histories* (forthcoming, XXX) for a detailed discussion of the benefits of comparative-historical field work to Women's Studies and a selection of interviews with revolutionary feminists printed in their entirety.

31 The demographic information of the Cuban women is as follows: (Note that the category "social class" is self-described by the informant either directly or through the career and educational level of their parents in pre-revolutionary Cuba. The category of "race" is strictly based on phenotypic appearance.)

Demographic data on Cuban women on page 46

the position of women in revolutionary Cuba. Interviews tended to be close to two hours and were conducted in Spanish (save a few women who were at minimum bilingual) in either homes or offices all in Havana, Cuba. The interviews were framed by either the extreme thick Havana heat or, on the other extreme, over air-conditioned offices. The homes, nice by Cuban standards, were exceptionally humble, often lined with books and revolutionary and/or family photos. Save the department of sociology at the University of Havana where I interviewed a group of professors affiliated with the Gender Studies program there in their bungalow like surroundings, offices tended to be a bit more luxurious as some were former mansions of sugar plantation owners since converted into offices for NGOs and governmental ministries.

None of the above description is to suggest that interviews with Cuban women are any more or less subjective than any other groups of political informants. My intention here is to share some of the methodological challenges and experiences as they offer more insight towards the final analysis.

### Demographic data on Cuban women:

Name Member	Age	Social Class	Race/ Ethnicity	Comm. Party
Anonymous	59	Upper middle class	White	No
Victoria Benavides	ND	Working class	Afro-Cuban	Yes
Elvira Diaz Vallina	66	Campesino	White	Yes
María Ducás Megret	48	"Humble backgnd"	Afro-Cuban	Yes
Elvira Eduardo Vásquez	ND	Poor-working class	Afro-Cuban	Yes
Mayra Espina	43	Typical lower middle class	White	Yes
María Antonia Figueroa	80	Middle class	White	Yes
Marel García Pérez	62	Poor	White	No
Yolanda González	ND	Campesino	Mulatta	Yes
Graciela Glez Olmedo	43	ND	White	ND
Nimia Menocal	68	Lower middle class	White	Yes
Sonia Moro	59	Modest Professional	White	No
Marta Nuñez	ND	Middle class	White	Yes
Ester Pérez	ND	Middle class	White	Yes
Rita Perrera	49	"Humble backgnd"	White	Yes
Clotilde Proveyer	ND	ND	White	ND
Reina María Rodríguez	ND	ND	White	No
Belkys Vega	47	Professional class	White	Yes
Lizette Villa	50	Poor working class	White	Yes

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## CAPÍTULO VI

### Out in Nicaragua: Local and Transnational Desires after the Revolution

Florence Babb  
(Iowa University)

In June 2000, I returned to spend several weeks in Nicaragua after two years away and found the capital city of Managua transformed by the rebuilding of an urban center, with new government buildings, immense traffic circles and plazas, and an abundance of hotels and commercial establishments. My first day back, I ventured into one of two major shopping malls and discovered the movie *Boys Don't Cry* (Los Muchachos no lloran, with subtitles) playing at a multiplex cinema. I was excited to see that quality films were now being shown in a city where a couple of years before the only movie theatres were extremely seedy and offered pornography. I immediately attended a showing of the movie. I was curious to see what reception it would have in the Nicaraguan setting, soon after its release to wide acclaim in the United States. The audience at the matinee was small and fairly mainstream middle class—not surprising in a nation where the two-dollar admission fee was beyond the means of the majority. Class distinction aside, they seemed to appreciate the movie's powerful story of sexual-identity transgression and its consequences in the North American Midwest.<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to sex and sexuality there are stories that are considered acceptable enough to be told and stories that remain taboo. Histories of sexuality on any terrain are subject to revision and debate when local, national, or

<sup>1</sup> Transgenderism and transvestism are not unknown in Nicaragua, where *travesti* performances at gay bars are common and where a well-known market seller appears publicly in drag. See Lancaster 1997 for a discussion of transvestism in everyday life in Nicaragua.

transnational conditions prompt caution on the one hand or allow more open discussion of sexual difference and transgression on the other.<sup>2</sup> Periods of social transformation may present opportunities for personal or national reflection on the politics of gender and sexuality, or they may push such reflection to the margins in the name of settling larger historical accounts. What happens then, when personal or local desires are supported by transnational political currents but also clash dramatically with perceived national interests?

The Nicaraguan revolution which culminated in the coup of 1979 and determined state power until 1990 offered an opportunity for women and men who were disenfranchised to become significant players in a social drama that would transform much of the national landscape during that decade.<sup>3</sup> Frequent invocations of "30 percent women's participation" in the reports of the insurrectionary struggle that triumphed suggested that gender barriers, like class barriers, were overturned in the Sandinista period. The governing power that emerged from the struggle placed women and gender issues on the agenda as national priorities, along with agrarian, health, education, and legal reform. Indeed, laws were quickly passed that prohibited sexism in advertising, penalized commercial sex, ended the category of illegitimacy, and established fathers' responsibility for the well-being of their children. A new Constitution in 1987 was the first to include women's rights, under the rubric of protecting the family as the basic unit in society.

By extending rights to women and protection to families in which marriage was *de facto* as well as legal, the

<sup>2</sup> See Quiroga 2000 for an excellent discussion of the way that silences may figure differently and strategically across gay cultures. In his work on gay sexualities in Latin America, the author is "less interested in the subject who proclaims his or her own sexuality than the melancholic subject who refuses the confession, the subject who chooses to mask it, while at the same time showing us the mask" (p. 19).

<sup>3</sup> A number of writers have examined the Nicaraguan revolution in depth, including Spalding 1987, Walker 1991, and others. Several have considered the participation of and impact on women, including Collinson 1990 and Brenez 1991, among others.

Sandinistas revealed a more inclusive vision—particularly in a society in which nearly half of households are headed by women and those with adult men are often not sanctified by legal marriage. The governing Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) was not willing, however, to go further by establishing reproductive choice or protection from domestic violence and sexual harassment as constitutional rights. Nor was the FSLN willing or able to move beyond a heteronormative conception of the Nicaraguan family and society. An emergent feminist movement and a nascent lesbian and gay movement would later question the underlying assumptions that went unchallenged by the Nicaraguan revolution.<sup>4</sup>

My desire to play a part in the telling of this story is no doubt motivated by several associations it has with my own personal narrative. I made my first trip to Nicaragua in 1989, when the revolutionary government was facing grave problems that it was unable to resolve before the national elections the following year. At that time, I had filed for divorce and was anxiously awaiting the outcome of a custody decision. I began an extended research project that took me back to Nicaragua more than a dozen times in a decade, including two more extended periods with my young son. I traced the effects of the sharp political-economic transition introduced by neoliberal governments on low-income women and men in the capital city of Managua. While my main focus was on gender and the local economy, I became increasingly interested in the emerging feminist and gay movements that were beginning to have an increasingly independent and public presence in the country, especially in Managua. These movements were significant and striking in their own right, but I was particularly drawn to them as a long-time feminist then reexamining my own sexual identity. As it happened, Nicaragua's public coming-out and my own coincided closely and played out on the same terrain.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion and critique of the Sandinista program and the growth of the feminist movement, see Randall 1992, Chinchilla 1994, and Kampwirth 1996. My forthcoming book discusses the Sandinista decade briefly, then focuses on the 1990s, when the women's and gay movements grew stronger (Babb 2001).

My location as an international researcher who was aware of the involvement of lesbian and gay activists from abroad while working on a range of social issues in Nicaragua—and also aware of broad cultural differences between gay communities in the United States and Latin America—made me question the degree to which transnational political currents had inspired the gay movement there.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I first examine the ways that homosexuality was both expressed and suppressed during the years of the revolution, and then consider the growth of the gay movement as I have observed it in the post-Sandinista period.<sup>6</sup> I suggest that greater attention to women and gender differences will enable us to move beyond the earlier focus on “traditional” masculine same-sex identities to a broader analysis of sexual identities that include both gay men and lesbians. Then, I turn to the vexing question of how to understand local sexualities in a globalizing era. I argue that while same-sex sexual practices have been widespread for some time among Nicaraguans who do not identify as homosexual, the 1990s have made visible a growing number of women and men who identify closely with the transnational lesbian and gay movement. How they simultaneously negotiate the local and the global in their cultural politics, and the multiplicity of sexual identities that currently coexist, should illuminate these processes as they occur on a wider playing field beyond this small Central American nation.<sup>7</sup>

### Coming Out in the Revolution

A few writers who spent time in Nicaragua in the 1980s commented on the prevalence of same-sex practices among

5 I only have anecdotal evidence of the disproportionate involvement of lesbians and gay men among internationalists active in Nicaragua during and after the Sandinista revolution, but it appears to have been considerable. See Rebecca Gordon's (1986) *Letters from Nicaragua* for the reflections of a lesbian feminist participant in Witness for Peace in Nicaragua in 1984.

6 My research in Managua spanned 1989–2000 with over twelve months spent in the country. The material presented here is part of a broader project (see Babb 2001).

7 Parker (1999) makes a similar point in discussing the coexistence of “indigenous,” hybrid, and global homosexualities in contemporary urban Brazil. See also Parker and Sánchez-Eppler (2000) for discussion of transnational currents influencing queer identities in a variety of contexts.

men even in the absence of a gay community (Adam 1989, Lancaster 1988). Adam noted the lack of structural support for gay identities and communities which emerged in a period of political unrest, economic hardship, and in a culture constrained by the conservative views of the family promulgated by the Catholic Church. Lancaster noted that homosexuality was associated with the decadence of earlier years during the Somoza dictatorship and therefore clashed with notions of morally correct revolutionaries.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a man could enjoy sex with other men as well as with women and still be considered “manly” so long as he was the active, penetrating, partner and not the stigmatized, passive partner, the *cochón*. Lancaster's (1992) influential work cautioned against using Western concepts of gay identity and culture in settings like the Managua barrio where he carried out research. Before 1990, little was said of the identities and practices of women having same-sex relationships in Nicaragua.

In a society in which most families share close quarters and there is little privacy, it is not surprising that same-sex desires have found few opportunities for expression. The work of John D'Emilio (1983) on the historical formation of gay identity with the growth of capitalism in the United States links changes in work and family, and lessening reliance on the household, to the emergence of gay identities and communities. Without the same historical trajectory of individuals leaving home to establish new work lives and new sexual identities, how might gay identity be experienced? Interestingly, it appears that young Nicaraguans leaving home to participate in the revolutionary movement in the late 1970s and, again, leaving behind families in the early 1980s in order to participate in health and literacy brigades found needed opportunities for independence and privacy. Interviews, conducted by scholars and activists after the FSLN left power, have provided accounts (often still

8 See *El País* 1992 for a discussion of gay culture in the years before the Sandinista revolution and during the 1980s. The article is notable for signaling a degree of acceptance of the gay community by the early 1990's.

unpublished) by gay and lesbian Sandinistas who played important roles in the revolution. Some individuals have related that while they were not entirely open about their sexual orientation, acquaintances were aware of it and in general did not consider it to be a problem. Just as military and college life have offered opportunities for sexual exploration in the United States and other societies, in revolutionary Nicaragua an unintended outcome of service in the military and the brigades was the discovery of same-sex desire among a number of young women and men.<sup>9</sup>

Collectivized production and the emphasis on drawing women as well as men into the workforce also provided new opportunities for members of the same sex to come together away from homes and families. Solidarity with the revolution and greater proximity in work relations doubtless allowed some men and women workers to question gender and sexual relations. For example, feminist (and lesbian) participation in such mass labor-based organizations as the Sandinista Association of Rural Workers (ATC) served as a precursor to more independent political movements in the 1990s. A number of individuals were able to explore more intimate aspects of their sexual lives as a result of their collective participation in work and political activism.<sup>10</sup>

Once the FSLN rose to power and undertook its nation-building project, however, some social needs took precedence over others. By the time the Sandinista government was preparing its new Constitution, it was also contending with the Contra war and a deepening economic crisis and, as noted, set aside some expectations advanced by women. Not coincidentally, the first stirrings of a feminist move-

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere and in other periods in Latin America, the military has provided opportunities for the expression of same-sex desire. See for example Beattie (1997).

<sup>10</sup> Cuba makes an interesting comparative case with Nicaragua, as both Latin American nations have experienced revolutions in the twentieth century. In Cuba, as in Nicaragua, homosexuality was associated with prerevolutionary decadent bourgeois society. In both countries, a number of individuals left for the United States where they developed a stronger gay sensibility and politics.

ment that departed from the Sandinista mass organization AMNLAE (Nicaraguan Women's Association, Luisa Amanda Espinosa)—at once more radical and more democratic—can be traced to 1987, the year the new Constitution was approved (Kampwirth 1998).

That same year, State Security clamped down on a group of lesbians and gay men who had quietly begun meeting together at the end of 1985 in Managua (Bolt González 1996:295). Many of those who were called in and detained in March 1987 were active Sandinistas, but their organizing based on gay rights was viewed as a deviation and not approved by the FSLN. Activists like Rita Arauz, who later became a well-known AIDS activist and NGO founder, were arrested but later released. She and others who were detained did not want to damage the revolutionary government by going public with their experience, and therefore remained silent. Thus, the public and the emerging movement were both unaware of the incident, thus avoiding an international response that surely would have followed this breach of human rights (Randall 1994).

In November 1987, gay men and lesbians who had been organizing clandestinely in Managua formed CEP-SIDA, an AIDS-education NGO. Perhaps because of the FSLN's embarrassment over State Security's intervention, the Ministry of Health offered support to this grassroots program organized by members of the gay community. Significantly, the Ministry's efforts were motivated by the 1988 arrival in Managua of a San Francisco-based health colloquium that

Those who returned, at least in the case of Nicaragua, formed part of the leadership in gay political organizing on the one hand, and part of the neoliberal impulse to embrace new economic opportunities on the other. A difference between the two countries is that gay politics in Nicaragua was formed largely within the revolutionary Sandinista political culture while in Cuba it appears to be those disillusioned with the revolution who have been particularly outspoken. This difference is conveyed in the documentaries *Sex and the Sandinistas* (Broadbent 1991) and *Improper Conduct* (Almendros and Jiménez-Leal 1984). For discussion of gay culture in Cuba, see Lumsden 1996 and Quiroga 2000. The twenty years that separated the two revolutions may help to account for the greater acceptance and lesser suppression of gay identity and politics in Nicaragua.



addressed the issue of AIDS. Under the sympathetic direction of Minister Dora María Téllez, activists distributed condoms to men in cruising areas and to students and sex workers, beginning at a time when AIDS had barely made an appearance in Nicaragua and gay activism was almost unheard of (Schreiber and Stephen 1989).

Then, in 1989, a contingent of some fifty gay Nicaraguans wearing black T-shirts with pink triangles prominently participated in the tenth annual march to Managua's Plaza de la Revolución in honor of the revolution's victory (Randall 1993). This public coming-out of gay-identified Sandinistas was empowering and paved the way for further activism. When I made my first trip to Nicaragua just a few weeks later, I found signs, however subtle, of a gay social and political presence in Managua. Although the FSLN may have slowed the public appearance of a gay movement in the country, it cannot be denied that the revolution and the changes it brought about also provided the social and political space needed for the movement to coalesce.

### Post-Sandinista Spaces for Lesbian and Gay Organizing

After the electoral defeat of the FSLN, lesbians and gay men had to adjust to the new terms of their participation in oppositional movements confronting the neoliberal Chamorro and Alemán governments, whose social agendas were considerably more conservative than that of the Sandinistas. Nonetheless, lesbians and gay men have been empowered by the growth of their political movement and by the expanding social and cultural space they occupy. Similar to the women's movement in Nicaragua, the gay and lesbian movement gained new openings and greater autonomy after 1990, as activists were no longer wedded to priorities established by the revolutionary government. That year, Shomos (We Homosexuals) formed as a collective of men and women, and Nosotras (We Women) formed as a lesbian feminist collective, first in Managua and then in other parts of the country (Bolt González 1996: 296).

In contrast to the recognition of Nicaraguan male homosexual practices prior to 1990—even when it was non-politicized and less evident to the dominant heteronormative society—in the years since then, lesbians have become more visible as sexual subjects and political activists. In 1991, the wider feminist community in Nicaragua broke away publicly from the mass Sandinista women's organization AMNLAE for a weekend of activities known as the Festival of the 52 Percent, a reference to the proportion of women in the country. At the festival, held in March to celebrate International Women's Day, one of a number of booths offering information was occupied by lesbians who were beginning to organize openly in Managua. They were well received and at the close of the festivities I observed that their booth had a thriving business selling slices of lemon meringue pie to an eager line of customers. That evening, some same-sex couples were among the women and men dancing to the music of a local band.

In June of that year, Nicaraguans held their first public celebration of Gay Pride which I attended. Several hundred people came to a well-known cultural center, Coro de Angeles, for a showing of the North American movie, *Torch Song Trilogy*, followed by a panel discussion of homosexuality and human rights. The audience responded with passionate testimonies of experiences suffered in families and in the society, speaking out about injustice and personal pain. The diverse crowd that evening included well-known Nicaraguans who were both straight and gay, and who were clearly hopeful and enthusiastic about the historic event taking place. In the years since then, Gay Pride has received more attention, with weeks of activities to commemorate it.

In 1992, a repressive sodomy law, known as "Article 204" was reactivated, galvanizing the lesbian and gay movement. This part of the Penal Code criminalizes sexual activity "between persons of the same sex" in a "scandalous way." In response to the law, regarded as the most repressive in the Americas, more than twenty-five groups came together to launch a Campaign for a Sexuality Free of Prejudice. For



several weeks, panels, protests, and celebrations of Gay Pride took place in Managua. The Xochiquetzal Foundation, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was constituted in 1990 and co-directed by lesbian feminists Hazel Fonseca and Mary Bolt González, played a leading role in generating support for the campaign. Despite the strong opposition to the law, it has remained on the books.<sup>11</sup>

By the early 1990s, several NGOs had been established to meet the needs of gay men and lesbians. Nimehuatzin, an active AIDS-education foundation headed by Rita Arauz, also functions informally as a gay community center. Xochiquetzal, mentioned above, offers health and psychological services as well as sex education, directed largely, though not exclusively, to a gay and lesbian clientele; beginning in 1993, they began publishing the magazine *Fuera del Closet* (Out of the Closet), which presents a mix of informative articles, poetry, and art. The feminist center *Puntos de Encuentro* (Encounter Points) and women's health centers like *S.I. Mujer* and *IXCHEN* began to conduct workshops on women's sexuality and to support gay rights. More lesbian organizations joined *Nosotras*, including *Entre Amigas* (Among Women Friends), and *Grupo por la visibilidad lesbica* (Group for Lesbian Visibility), which began publishing the magazine *Humanas* (Female Humans). The significant involvement of lesbians, outnumbering gay men, in organizations and projects has turned the tide in establishing women's central and public place in the gay movement.

At the private level, to be sure, lesbians have continued to suffer the effects of social discrimination, often having low self-esteem and self-confidence. This subject is explored in the first Nicaraguan book on lesbian lives, *Sencillamente Diferentes...* (Simply Different...), written by psychologist (then co-director of Xochiquetzal) Bolt González and pub-

11 At the international level, opposition was strong as well. A letter from the International Commission for Gay and Lesbian Human Rights (based in San Francisco) protesting Article 204 appeared in the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* 6/21/92. Amnesty International also protested Article 204.

lished in 1996. The prologue by high-ranking Sandinista Dora María Téllez invokes Nicaraguans' revolutionary past, calling on them to tolerate and respect cultural diversity, including sexual differences.<sup>12</sup> The book's release was the focus of a Gay Pride celebration that year, when once again a large and enthusiastic audience turned out in Managua for a panel discussion of the study along with food, socializing, and music by the popular singer Norma Elena Gadea.

Despite the growing visibility of lesbians in public culture and in the gay rights movement, they have not successfully claimed social space to the same degree as gay men. Since 1990, the neoliberal turn in the country has presented new opportunities for men, including "Miami boys" who have returned from their self-imposed exile during the revolutionary period.<sup>13</sup> Gay bars and clubs have opened that cater to the minority of gay men who have the economic means to enjoy reasonably safe public spaces, and women are a small minority of the clientele. Even when a new bar opened that declared itself a welcome space for "all who are different," there were few women among the gay men who were present the night that I went there with a few friends in 1993. The bar's music, tables for talking, and a dance floor made the place an attractive venue, but like other "gay bars," this one is principally a place in which men cruise or socialize. Around midnight there was a fairly raucous transvestite performance, with smashing bottles and glasses as a grand finale. The situation had changed little by 2000, when I ventured into a new and popular gay disco—the only difference was the huge crowd of well-dressed men dancing and drink-

12 See Bolt González (1996) for more discussion of the findings from this research. Interestingly, she discovered that while some of the lesbians she interviewed adopted roles similar to those found among gay men—in a group of 30, one identified as *pasiva* and five identified as *activa*—the majority claimed to have equal or complementary roles in their relationships (p. 203).

13 Fernández-Alemán (2000) presents an excellent discussion of the neoliberalization of gay identities and politics in Honduras. His emphasis on the commodification of gay men, however, may lead him to overlook lesbians' substantial political participation in a rather different development that he also notes: the globalization of human rights discourses in the gay movement.

ing at the bar. I estimated that there were over a hundred men and about a half dozen women. Lesbians may stay away because they lack the financial resources or have family responsibilities, or because of the perception that the bars are a male space; even in gay and lesbian culture, Nicaraguans associate men with *la calle* (the street) and women with *la casa* (the house).<sup>14</sup>

### From the Local to the Transnational

Analysts of same-sex sexuality in the era of globalization have ranged from those who celebrate an opening up of opportunities for those who have endured social marginalization, to those who lament an incursion of western culture and imperialist politics in the lives of those from less developed regions. Tilting toward the former perspective, Altman (2001:95) writes that "new sexual identities mean a loss of certain traditional cultural comforts while offering new possibilities to those who adopt them, and activists in non-western countries will consciously draw on both traditions." Offering a passionate call for the latter, critical view, Manalansan (1997:486) writes that "globalization obfuscates hierarchical relations between metropolitan centers and sub-urban peripheries. By privileging Western definitions of same-sex sexual practices, non-Western practices are marginalized and cast as 'pre-modern' or un-liberated." Here I consider to what degree and to what effect there has been a shift in Nicaragua between 1990 and the turn of the millennium from local and private same-sex practices to a more

14 See Parker (1999) for a useful discussion of Brazilian gay men's eroticizing of public space. I say more about Nicaraguan men's and women's separation between public and private space (*calle* and *casa*) in Babb 2001. González (2000) offers an interesting discussion of Nicaraguan women's sexuality as a site of social anxiety since the nineteenth century, though she restricts her analysis to heterosexuality. She argues that in the prerevolutionary years under the Somoza dictatorship women had new opportunities for public participation, but concerns over prostitution and immorality circulated widely. Her work shows that the Sandinistas were particularly intent upon enforcing codes of moral rectitude. Certainly, anxieties over men's and women's homosexual inclinations were also pronounced during the Sandinista decade.

open engagement with transnational gay practices and politics.<sup>15</sup> Once again, I argue that most of those who have participated in the debate have focused on men's experiences and that more attention must go to examining women's experiences and gender differences at local, national, and global levels. We cannot assume that men and women, specifically gay men and lesbians, experience the same "comforts" or the same injustices, or that they will respond alike to the transnationalization of sexual identities. There is no doubt that shared experiences of discrimination based on race, class, nationality, or sexual orientation may draw gay men and lesbians together, but male privilege generally offers economic advantage to men, who may claim new rights as consumers under conditions of globalization. On the other hand, women who have chafed under traditional cultural expectations may see greater opportunities for gaining social and political space through participation in international gay activism.

It is impossible to treat separately the transitions in the political culture of sexuality and broader social transitions, in Nicaragua as elsewhere. The post-Sandinista period is notable for its rapid reversals as a revolutionary, socialist-oriented government gave way to a neoliberal one. Under the terms of the market-driven governments of Violeta Chamorro (1990-1996) and Arnoldo Alemán (1996-2001), individuals have been encouraged to compete for scarce goods and opportunities, and rewards go to those who survive as the "fittest." The freedom to compete for jobs and other resources extends to certain openings for commercial ventures that were less common under the Sandinistas. The rising poverty of many Nicaraguans has led more of them, including travestis (transvestite or transgender) to prostitution, while a wealthier class of Nicaraguans returning from their chosen exile in Miami opens gay bars in Managua's more fashionable neighborhoods. At the same time, the conservative social climate prohibits open non-normative sexual-

15 See Green and Babb (in press) for discussion of the significant changes in sexual identity-based movements during the last two decades in Latin America.

ity without risk of undesired consequences. To some extent, the current climate may not be so different from the pre-Sandinista days when gay culture was tolerated to a limited degree, but only so long as it remained submerged in the dominant culture.

Nevertheless, lesbian and gay activism emerged in this altered social space from the clandestine gatherings in the latter half of the 1980s to open organizing just a few years later. Not surprisingly, some of the Nicaraguans who formed the leadership of new groups and NGOs had experience in the United States or other nations with longer histories of gay organizing. Rita Arauz is one who returned to Nicaragua in the mid-1980s after ten years in San Francisco, where her sexual identity and politics were formed; on her return she founded the NGO Nimehuatzin as an "out" lesbian. Arauz, along with the activist Lupita Sequeira, appeared in the British TV documentary, *Sex and the Sandinistas* (1991), which considered the situation of lesbians and gay men during the revolution and its aftermath. Notably, in the video the two women are speaking in English. During this period, from the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, a number of internacionalistas (international activists) were also among the most active in gay mobilization, even if it was behind the scenes. In a conversation among seven lesbians recorded in 1991 by Margaret Randall (1993) only two were Nicaraguan while the others had come from Costa Rica, France, Spain, and the United States.<sup>16</sup>

The transnational aspects of the lesbian and gay movement become significantly more apparent once women are brought into the picture. As we have seen, earlier accounts of same-sex sexuality and gay life focused on men, some of whom traditionally identified as straight but enjoying sex (as *activos*) with men as well as women or as quietly deviant (the *pasivos* or *cochones*). Some men participated as

16 The published conversation also reveals that individuals' memories of gay organizing just a few years before varies significantly, depending in part on the roles they played in it.

gay activists in the transition period, particularly when the AIDS pandemic galvanized them, but women have been more prominent among activists in the 1990s. Whether as founders of NGOs like Nimehuatzin and Xochiquetzal or as feminists (including, prominently, internacionalistas Ana Criquillon and Amy Bank) heading up Puntos de Encuentro, which devotes attention to gay and lesbian human rights, women play a decisive role.

One indication of the transnational influence in gay rights politics in Nicaragua is the adoption of the Gay Pride celebration on or around June 28 each year, following the practice in the United States (in honor of the Stonewall rebellion in New York City in 1969) and other countries. Nicaraguans debated whether to recognize that date or another one more closely related to their own national experience (perhaps the intervention of State Security), but settled on adopting the date which had come to have the clearest symbolic meaning at the international level.<sup>17</sup> This parallels other international holidays celebrated by activists in Nicaragua, including International Women's Day March 8 and the socialist workers' holiday May 1.<sup>18</sup>

Other material, ideological, and linguistic markers express pride in affiliating with an international gay movement. While at first understood by the select few, these signifiers are beginning to enter the mainstream through newspapers and other media. International symbols used in Nicaragua today include pink triangles, rainbows, red ribbons, interlocking male or female symbols, the labrys, the color purple, and the acronym LGBT—often LGBTT, to recognize and include not only transgender, but also transvestites. The inclusion of transgender and bisexual among sexual minority categories also signals a growing engagement with global gay politics, as noted by a gay male activist I spoke to and whom I rec-

17 See Randall 1994 for Rita Arauz's discussion of the question.

18 See Manalansan (1997) for an insightful and critical discussion of the discourse of Stonewall and how it has come to function as an originary, revolutionary moment for gays and lesbians everywhere.

ognized as having appeared in the video *Sex and the Sandinistas*.<sup>19</sup> The trope of the "closet," "coming out," and "gaining visibility" are widespread now—as evident, for example, in the publication *Fuera del closet* and in the group known as "Grupo por la visibilidad lesbica."<sup>20</sup>

The central place of "coming out" and "gaining visibility" among lesbians and gay men in the United States and other Northern nations is well-known. It is important to note that the same centrality is given to visibility as a political strategy in Nicaragua. In Quiroga's (2000) essays on queer Latino America, he emphasizes that identity politics and the insistence on gaining visibility that is paramount in the United States may be tied to an imperial history and may not be liberatory south of the border. He describes the way that cultural politics may collide with identity politics in gay Latin America, where queer bodies are sometimes "masked" as a deliberate strategy. Even in an age of global capitalism, the AIDS pandemic, and the transnationalization of the body, some may opt successfully for a queering of culture that does not rely on unmasking and declaring one's sexual identity.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, some Nicaraguans may resist the closet in their personal lives and still not emulate the "coming out"

19 The video is not shown in Nicaragua, I was told, because some individuals in it are not openly out to their families and co-workers. This man rushed to assure me that it was alright that I show the video in the United States and that it circulate outside Nicaragua.

20 In Bolt González 1996, the first book published on Nicaraguan lesbians, an appendix explicates these international symbols, presumably to further acquaint Nicaraguans with their meanings. It is also notable that in her interviews, the author generally began by asking to whom the lesbians she studied were «out,» and how their families responded to knowledge of their sexual orientation. She thus made use of the familiar tropes of «coming out,» visibility, and identity politics that have become hegemonic on a global scale.

21 Similarly, Manalansan (1997:501) expresses the concern that as a result of globalization, terminology such as "the closet," "coming out," and "gaining visibility," has frequently been adopted without questioning the Western assumptions behind the terms. By presenting narratives of diasporic Filipino gay men, he shows that "the closet is not a monolithic space, and that 'coming out' or becoming publicly visible is not a uniform process that can be generalized across different national cultures."

political strategy of the North, but others regard it as a highly useful tool for organizing a nascent movement.

Language itself can be a significant marker of sexual identity and of the changes that are presently under way. Earlier studies discovered that men having same-sex relations were divided into active (unmarked) and passive (marked, *cochón*) categories, and in some sectors of Nicaragua the word *cochóna* (signifying a masculine woman who has sex with other women) is better known than *lesbiana* (Bolt González 1996:295). However, there are now multiple terminologies used by and about men and women to signal their sexual preferences and identities. Far more frequently, we hear references in Spanish to "lesbiana" and "gay" as well as to "homosexual" in Nicaragua. A gay bar may still attract more men, but gay politics finds more women than men in the leadership. The public presence of Gay Pride (*Orgullo Gay*) activities has contributed to a more widespread usage of global LGBT terminology in the country. In general, today we find a multiplicity of coexisting identities, from those who unselfconsciously participate in same-sex activity without embracing a gay identity to others who adopt many attributes and preferences of gay men and lesbians world-wide.

Further evidence of the appropriation of global gay political strategies may be found in the emphasis given to discourses and activism relating to AIDS and to human rights. It is undeniable that these issues resonate deeply in the Nicaraguan context, where social movements are calling for democratization and citizenship rights in civil society. But AIDS work and appeals for extending equal human rights to gay men and lesbians also have the strategic advantage of appealing to broad humanitarian and liberal interests. Attention is thus turned from perceived deviant behavior to medical necessity and social justice. Added to the slogan advanced a few years earlier, "For a sexuality free of prejudice," there is a call now for a closer monitoring of sexual behavior and for safer sex practices. At a time when most organizations are seeking international support as NGOs,



focusing on AIDS prevention and on human rights offers greater assurance of being heard, becoming part of a global dialogue, and receiving financial support.

While the connections to transnational gay culture and politics appear to be clear, we must still ask whether it is accurate to say that there is a Nicaraguan gay and lesbian movement. In contrast to what I found in the early to mid-nineties when a fledgling movement was celebrated, my revisit to Managua in June 2000 produced contradictory responses to the question. While some were still confident that a young movement was in the making, others, including some of the pioneers in political groups and NGOs, were reluctant to say that any unified social movement could be identified. Instead, they asserted, there were activities undertaken by a number of smaller groups that addressed issues of concern to lesbians and gay men. Although my trip was scheduled to coincide with Gay Pride, I had trouble learning, despite much questioning, what major activities were planned that would draw people together as in past years. I finally heard of and attended several events, including a presentation of USAID-funded research on gay sex practices and safer sex held at a bookstore-café, but they did not bring out the large crowds that were typical a few years earlier. Hazel Fonseca of Xochiquetzal suggested to me that under conditions of neoliberalism, a more cautious approach was being taken, with groups quietly conducting their work and seeking cultural openings in which to make gradual changes (interview 6/20/00).

We might conclude that the movement has not taken off as hoped a few years ago, but it would be more accurate to say that organizing has taken a somewhat different course. Pluralist politics appears to be the order of the day, with a number of groups incorporating gay rights issues into their more comprehensive agendas. Whether this is evidence of a more fully developed gay political strategy that has exceeded the limits of a unitary movement or of a neoliberal competitive environment in which NGOs and other groups compete for scarce resources is open to debate. The de-

cline in broader-based, focused organized activity among lesbians and gay men may also parallel the diminishing presence of other mass political organizations in the post-Sandinista period. In any event, I was impressed during my last visit with the wide range of activities, from the local, Puntos de Encuentro educating urban youth about sexual and other cultural differences, to the global, Nimehuatzin preparing to participate in an international AIDS conference in South Africa. My sense was that Nicaraguan activists were well aware of the differences that separated them from one another as well as from internacionalistas, and they were working to develop politically at a time of national-level uncertainty and social fragmentation.

While the nation prepares for another election in which the reigning Liberals, now headed by President Alemán, are expected to face off with the Sandinistas, with Daniel Ortega as candidate once again, the two party leaders have formed a pact to protect their personal interests (Envío 1999). Alemán attempts to hide his record of corruption while Ortega has, since 1998, sought to retain parliamentary immunity from charges of sexual abuse made by his adoptive step-daughter, Zoilamérica Narvaez. The latter's charges brought sexual politics to the forefront of national discussion as she made public allegations of twenty years of abuse. Ortega's wife, Rosario Murillo, suggested in an interview for a major daily newspaper that her daughter's allegations against her stepfather were influenced by individuals of "uncertain sexual identity" who rejected marriage and family and "in general the values and culture of heterosexual relations" (*La Prensa*, June 5, 1998:1). This was only the most recent lesbian-baiting to occur among prominent Sandinistas,<sup>22</sup> and such homophobia is still more common among political conservatives.

In summer 2000, when I returned to Nicaragua, the pact still shielded the two leading figures in the nation's politics.

22 The daughter of former FSLN vice president Sergio Ramírez and a high-ranking woman in the party directorate were also targets of politically-motivated gossip.

The sodomy law remained in place and, although it was not widely enforced, a young working class lesbian recently had been arrested under the law and, after her release, murdered in what many regarded as a hate crime. At the same time that there were obstacles to progressive change, there were more hopeful openings as well. A new and popular academic course on sexuality was offered by a gay Sandinista instructor at the Central American University. Cable television was bringing to Managua viewers Brazilian novelas with sensitive depictions of gay characters. And the first Nicaraguan novela to include strong women and gay characters was in production with the collaboration of the feminist NGO Puntos de Encuentro.

The film *Boys Don't Cry* was met with favorable responses from some members of the cultural elite, and when I visited with Rita Arauz, she told me that she wished that all the legislators in the nation could see the movie. She felt that it would open up discussion and have a positive impact on creating a more tolerant society. She herself welcomed the "queer" cultural flows from outside Nicaragua, acknowledging that gay imperialist interventions had sometimes been a problem in the past,<sup>23</sup> but suggesting that the local population is now able to negotiate what elements of international culture to incorporate and which ones to reject (interview 6/23/00).

Arauz's position is close to one expressed by Povinelli and Chauncey (1999:445), who point to a need for studies of sexuality and globalization that move beyond abstract discussion of "flows, circuits, circulations of people, capital, and culture—without any model of subjective mediation." Indeed, anthropologists and others seeking to discover "authentic" and local same-sex desire in pristine form in out of the way places like Nicaragua—who argue zealously against the use of "Western" concepts and terminologies—might

<sup>23</sup> She referred to the substantial number of lesbian and gay *internacionalistas* in the country in the 1970s and their disproportionate influence in helping to form a movement. On the other hand, she and other Nicaraguans sought out opportunities to identify themselves to visiting delegations as gay, so that international solidarity would be strengthened (Randall 1994:277).

take heed. The evidence of the transnationalization of sexuality is strong, yet what is introduced and retained is a matter of cultural and political negotiation. This is not to deny that unequal relations of power play a part in both personal and organizational politics, with adverse consequences for those in non-Western nations.

At times it has been strategic for Nicaraguan gay activists to reference the distant and indigenous past rather than the recent influence of gay movements in the United States or Europe in tracing their political genealogies. For example, Xochiquetzal's center featured a mural on the exterior wall with indigenous designs, suggesting the deep roots of gay culture in the region and engaging in a familiar sort of myth-making as gay sexuality was depicted as transhistorical. Activist Lupita Sequeira invoked the timelessness and "authenticity" of Nicaragua's gay past even as she discovered connections between its contemporary gay culture and an international gay movement (Broadbent 1991). Indeed, the cultural borrowings from gay politics to the North are unmistakable. It is this mix of local and transnational elements that is so evident today, though few would claim that there exists a unified national gay identity or community.

In the current Nicaraguan context, more may be gained by lesbian and gay groups and NGOs creating and claiming ties with international counterparts and movements than by remaining focused at the local or national level. At a time when organizational growth has brought to light increasing political differences and when homophobia is still pronounced in the society, identification and solidarity with international groups may be desired. Moreover, most organizations in the country depend on international financial support, often from Europe, and funding agencies expect to find programs and services that mirror their own countries' gay rights movement activities.<sup>24</sup> Sadly, the neoliberal competition over scarce funding is fierce even in feminist and gay organizations. Some Nicaraguans are privately questioning how far

<sup>24</sup> See Ewig (1999) for a discussion of the way that NGO's dependence on international support has influenced the orientation of the women's movement in Nicaragua.



their own social and political agendas are being established by international interests and priorities, but in order to be viable many consent to be guided by parameters set far from their shores. Arguably, the current demands for staying afloat substantially impede the formation of stronger ties of solidarity at the national level.

## Conclusion

A number of writers examining gay identities have called favorable attention to the "transnational turn" in gender and sexuality studies (Povinelli and Chauncey 1999:439; Altman 2001). Yet others have cautioned against rushing to embrace globalization and its effects without due consideration of ways that global identities and practices are offset by national desires for "cultural belonging, or cultural citizenship" (Rofel 1999:453). I have been guided by those who are at once mindful of continued local practices and of the enormous changes that are under way in many parts of the world, particularly in urbanized areas (Parker 1999). My research in Nicaragua has shown that while global exchanges have presented needed opportunities to expand sexual expression and sexual rights, neoliberalism has also benefited some far more than others as sexual subjects and citizens, particularly men and cultural elites. Women and members of the popular classes in general have experienced diminished possibilities and greater hardship in the years since 1990, even if they have also found new ways of organizing collectively.

Through its mass mobilization, the Nicaraguan revolution provided an unexpected opportunity for young women and men to explore and redefine their sexuality. During their years in power, the Sandinistas began to clear a space for more open discussion of gender and sexual relations as well as personal life and politics. Now, in the neoliberal era, the FSLN leadership faces its own crisis in just these areas, signaling that there is much that is unresolved in Nicaragua's machista political culture. For its part, the Liberal government has put in place a conservative social agenda that

serves to underwrite the traditional nuclear family and heteronormative gender relations. Even so, at this stage, feminist and gay organizing and a discourse of human rights lend greater support to those who have been silenced in the past. In a period of globalization, the transnational flow of ideas, information, people, and technologies is increasing rapidly and is meeting a more welcome response, even in what has been viewed historically as a cultural backwater in Latin America.

Organizations and NGOs are emerging in Nicaragua that do not give uncritical support to parties and their leaders and are insisting on social justice in a democratic civil society. For the first time, the call for justice and equality includes the private sphere as well as the public sphere, the integrity of the body and the person as well as the society in a new political culture. Gender and sexuality are increasingly understood to be social vectors that matter at the local, national, and transnational levels. Here I have suggested that sexual difference is deeply gendered at every level and that a consideration of women's experience may fundamentally alter our understanding of gay identity and politics. My intervention in the dominant masculine conception of local Nicaraguan same-sex desire is an attempt to open up discussion of transnational gay culture and politics in this post-revolutionary society. Time will tell whether lesbians and gay men in the country will defend and build upon the cultural space that opened in the last decade and whether they will successfully gain political rights in this period of national uncertainty. The work they are doing in small and diverse groups augurs well for the future.

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