

2017

## **The Culture of Gender/The Gender of Culture: Cuban Women, Culture, and Change—The Island and the Diaspora**

Berta E. Hernández-Truyol

*University of Florida Levin College of Law*, [hernandez@law.ufl.edu](mailto:hernandez@law.ufl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/facultypub>



Part of the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), and the [Latin American Studies Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

29 Fla. J. Int'l L. 179 (2017)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at UF Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in UF Law Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UF Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [rachel@law.ufl.edu](mailto:rachel@law.ufl.edu).

# THE CULTURE OF GENDER/THE GENDER OF CULTURE: CUBAN WOMEN, CULTURE, AND CHANGE—THE ISLAND AND THE DIASPORA\*

*Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol\*\**

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	179
II.	THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY .....	180
III.	A BRIEF HISTORY OF CUBA .....	184
	A. <i>General</i> .....	184
	B. <i>Cuban Women</i> .....	186
IV.	CUBAN WOMEN AFTER 1959.....	188
	A. <i>On the Island</i> .....	188
	B. <i>In the Diaspora</i> .....	190
V.	CONCLUSION.....	193

## I. INTRODUCTION

This Essay analyzes the role of the Cuban woman in society—both on the island as well as in the diaspora. The purpose of this Essay is to assess whether culture has changed among either (or both) Cuban women on the island after the revolution and those who have emigrated since then. The Essay develops this topic in three parts. The first part presents the role of women in society in general and specifically in Latina/o societies. Following, the work addresses the history of Cuba, in order to weave in the record of women’s movements and women’s organizations on the

---

\* A version of this article was presented at the University of Havana in May 2016 as a part of the University of Florida’s Law and Policy in the Americas’ Conference.

\*\* Levin, Mabic and Levin Professor of Law at the University of Florida Levin College of Law. I owe much gratitude to the invaluable assistance of Florencia Alejandra Otegui and Taryn Marks for extraordinary editorial work and to Reina Saco (’17) and Sheyla Marimon (’19) for their research assistance. My mother, Dr. Eduvigis Tuyol Hernández, graduated from the University of Havana Law School in 1948. Being part of this historic event is particularly significant in that context. Additionally, I would like to thank Dean Laura A. Rosenbury for her support of this conference and my participation. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dean Martha Milagro Moreno Cruz and Dr. Teresa Delgado Vergara, of the University of Havana Law School, for their warm welcome, their support of the conference and of future exchanges with our university.

island until 1959. As all Cuban women share this history, whether they live on the island or are part of the diaspora, this historical perspective will serve to inform readers of the changes based on gender roles. The third part of the Essay focuses on the contemporary status of Cuban women in order to evaluate if there have been any changes with respect to the gender of culture or the culture of gender. This Essay concludes that the cultural, gendered role of Cuban women has remained unchanged both on the island and in the diaspora.

## II. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Throughout history and across the globe, the role of women has traditionally been a reproductive one.<sup>1</sup> The woman is the private actor; the man is the public personality. In her private role, the woman is responsible for the family and their home. On the other hand, the man is in charge of the public sector, including the market, society, and the government. Interestingly, although the woman is given the task of preserving, maintaining, and transmitting cultural attitudes, values, and traditions, it is the man who defines the elements of which that culture is composed. However, this dichotomy does not reflect the reality of all women. For example, marginable women—vulnerable women who exist at the margins of society and the economy—have never found themselves solely in the private realm. Within the colonial system, the women assigned to the lowest levels of social stratification—slaves—always worked, and their labor, including reproductive labor, was part of the mercantilization of the person in slavery.<sup>2</sup>

One of the consequences of the reproductive role to which women were relegated is that they have been systematically excluded from economic and social fields—from the sphere of “production.”<sup>3</sup> Historically, and still today in many developing countries, women cannot inherit wealth, obtain credit, possess property, enter into contracts, or even have their own bank accounts.<sup>4</sup>

These prohibitions stem from the patriarchal norm that, from its insertion, determined that the traditional domain of the woman is reproduction. This reproductive role includes unremunerated labor like

---

1. See generally NANCY FOLBRE, GREED, LUST & GENDER: A HISTORY OF ECONOMIC IDEAS 125–39 (2009).

2. *Id.* at 73–75. See also Nilüfer Cagatay, *Gender and Poverty* 8 (United Nations Dev. Program, Soc. Dev. & Poverty Elimination Div. Working Paper No. 5, 1998), <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/poverty-reduction/poverty-websites/gender-and-poverty/GenderandPoverty.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/WH8Q-XZ3U>] (noting that “women tend to specialize in unpaid reproductive or caring labour”).

3. FOLBRE, *supra* note 1, at 127, 136–38.

4. Cagatay, *supra* note 2, at 2 nn.2, 3. See also FOLBRE, *supra* note 1, at 24.

cooking, cleaning, and childcare.<sup>5</sup> The social and economic hierarchy resulting from patriarchy places women in a role subordinate to men. In short, throughout history—and perpetuated today through usage of the masculine as representative of humanity in the Spanish language—masculinity is the mold of citizenship. Masculinity is what is valued. Sociologists, philosophers, and lawyers have all identified the masculine as the standard of humanity.

Latina/o culture embraces this paradigm.<sup>6</sup> But before developing this point, it is important to note that Latina/o culture is neither monolithic nor homogeneous, but rather is comprised of a pan-ethnic group within which exists a hugely diverse population in terms of race, religion, education, and economic standing.<sup>7</sup> The differences are noticeable—from linguistic patterns to stories of migration, from levels of education to economic achievement.<sup>8</sup> Latinas, despite sharing a significant history and culture, do not have a uniform perspective about gender/sex roles or sexuality.<sup>9</sup> However, they do have common cultural factors, many of which converge around the importance of the family and the rigid notions and delineations of the appropriate sexual and gender roles and behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding individual differences, certain generalities are pertinent to the development of the culture of gender among Latinas, including Cuban women. As Octavio Paz said in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, “[i]n a world made in man’s image, women are only a reflection of masculine will and desire.”<sup>11</sup> Paz continues,

[W]oman is considered an instrument to satisfy man’s desires and to achieve the ends assigned by law, society, or morality[,] [g]oals . . . about which she has never been asked to consent and in whose enacting she participates only passively, as a “depository” of

5. FOLBRE, *supra* note 1, at 127–38.

6. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *The Gender Bend: Culture, Sex, and Sexuality—A LatCritical Human Rights Map of Latina/o Border Crossings*, 83 INDIANA L.J. 1283, 1291 (2008) [hereinafter Hernández-Truyol, *Gender Bend*].

7. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Building Bridges—Latinas and Latinos at the Crossroads: Realities, Rhetoric and Replacement*, 25 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 369, 386–87 (1994) (examining the heterogeneity and pan-ethnicity of the *Latina/o* community).

8. *Id.* at 387–93.

9. E.g., Oliva M. Espín, *Cultural and Historical Influences on Sexuality in Hispanic/Latin Women: Implications for Psychotherapy*, in PLEASURE AND DANGER: EXPLORING FEMALE SEXUALITY 149, 149 (Carole S. Vance ed., 1984) [hereinafter Espín, *Sexuality*] (“Despite shared features of history and culture, attitudes toward sex-roles are extremely diverse among Hispanic women. . . . Consequently, it is very difficult to discuss the sexuality or sexual behavior of Latin women without the danger of making some sweeping generalizations. . . . [However, h]istorical influences have left their mark in cultural processes.”).

10. *Id.* at 152–55.

11. OCTAVIO PAZ, *EL LABERINTO DE LA SOLEDAD* 37–38 (1981) (translation by author).

certain values. . . . [W]omen transmit or conserve, but they do not create, the values and energies . . . . Femininity is never an end in itself as masculinity is."<sup>12</sup>

Rather, the Latino defines the Latina from his position of superiority in society, the family, and the market, and the state.

Latina/o culture has certain expectations of women.<sup>13</sup> The socialization of Latinas requires not only certain behavior but also that they embrace the appropriate gender role, which is to be feminine, to be good mothers, and to be good wives. The goal of their lives is to marry, to have children, and to serve their families.<sup>14</sup> Even young girls' toys prepare them for adult life: dolls, baby carriages, dollhouses, and kitchen playsets.<sup>15</sup> The identity of Latinas develops in the context of *marianismo*, the image of the ideal woman—the Blessed Virgin Mary.<sup>16</sup> This paradigm features the glorification of Latinas as women who, although strong, sacrifice for their family and abnegate their own desires and necessities. The Latina, in order to be considered a good woman, needs to be tidy and passive; sensitive and sentimental; respectful and deferential to her mother and father as well as to her husband and children.<sup>17</sup>

As Paz observed, the woman is the depository of cultural values. But it is the man who creates them. As a depository, the woman is responsible for not only maintaining but also transmitting the culture through generations. And the woman, obedient as she is, transmits and makes sure to maintain the same culture which serves to subordinate her.

The counterpart of *marianismo* is *machismo*.<sup>18</sup> This part of the

12. *Id.* Translation by author.

13. Hernández-Truyol, *Gender Bend*, *supra* note 6, at 1291.

14. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, Essay, *Borders (En)Gendered: Normativities, Latinas, and a LatCrit Paradigm*, 72 N.Y.U. L. REV. 882, 917–18 (1997).

15. *Id.*

16. See Elizabeth M. Iglesias & Francisco Valdes, Afterword, *Religion, Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in Coalitional Theory: A Critical and Self-Critical Analysis of LatCrit Social Justice Agendas*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 503, 513 n.17, 519 (1998) (citing myriad sources in support of Latina/o religiosity).

17. Significantly, eighty-five percent of Latinas consider themselves Catholic, and many hold political and social views that are influenced by religious doctrine. See GLORIA BONILLA-SANTIAGO, *BREAKING GROUND AND BARRIERS: HISPANIC WOMEN DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP* 11 (1992). The imagery of the Virgin Mary as the female ideal is firmly rooted in and praised by Latina/o culture. As one author stated, “[s]ome Chicanas are similarly praised as they emulate the sanctified example set by [the Virgin] Mary. The woman par excellence is mother and wife. She is to love and support her husband and to nurture and teach her children. Thus, may she gain fulfillment as a woman.” Consuelo Nieto, *The Chicana and the Civil Rights Movement*, CIV. RTS. DIGEST, Spring 1974, at 39.

18. BONILLA-SANTIAGO, *supra* note 17, at 11–12; see also PIERRETTE HONDAGNEU-SOTELO, *GENDERED TRANSITIONS: MEXICAN EXPERIENCES OF IMMIGRATION* 9 (1994) (“The

formula dictates that the man be intellectual, rational, strong, authoritarian, independent; man must have a domineering personality.<sup>19</sup> He belongs out in the world just as the woman belongs in the home. The Cuban culture of gender reflects these realities of the gender of culture.

Regarding this Essay, there are two additional points of utmost importance. First, Latina/o culture is not exceptional with regard to the rules concerning the transmission of culture. In societies around the world, women are responsible for maintaining and transmitting culture—they are the “carrier[s] of culture.”<sup>20</sup> Cultures are maintained through the preservation of their traditions. These traditions not only preserve gender roles, but also persist almost exclusively because of gender roles. “Women’s roles become the ‘bastion’ of tradition” albeit in a very informal way.<sup>21</sup> For example, women in the older generations transfer cultural information to younger generations not only through their own behavior, but also through the expression of their opinions about the appropriate roles of men and women. Through these methods, they delineate what is permitted and not permitted, what constitutes proper conduct or prohibited conduct.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, women themselves transmit the cultural information that conserves their subordinated position, which limits their opportunities and robs them of their liberty.

This is the model through which mothers convey knowledge about traditional, cultural, and sexual values to their daughters as well as to their sons.<sup>23</sup> Mothers do not, however, have a structural format that is explicitly organized for the transmission of traditional knowledge.<sup>24</sup> On the contrary, in the majority of cultures, messages concerning the condition of women and sexuality are diffused

through half-muttered comments, behaviors, examples,  
and—powerfully—through silence. Women of older generations

---

ideological corollary [to *machismo*] for women, . . . *marianismo* . . . is modeled on the Catholic Virgin Madonna, and prescribes dependence, subordination, responsibility for all domestic chores, and selfless devotion to family and children.”).

19. BONILLA-SANTIAGO, *supra* note 17, at 11. Bonilla-Santiago also observes that “many Latin males are expected to show their manhood by behaving in a strong fashion, by demonstrating sexual powers, and by asserting their authority over women.” See also *id.* at 11–12 (noting that both gender role descriptives are socio-cultural phenomena).

20. OLIVA M. ESPÍN, WOMEN CROSSING BOUNDARIES: A PSYCHOLOGY OF IMMIGRATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF SEXUALITY 125 (1999) [hereinafter ESPÍN, WOMEN CROSSING] (stating that women are “cultural carriers” (quoting Nira Yuval-Davis, *Fundamentalism, Multiculturalism and Women in Britain*, in “RACE,” CULTURE AND DIFFERENCE 278, 285 (James Donald & Ali Rattansi eds., 1992))).

21. *Id.* at 7.

22. *Id.* at 146.

23. *Id.* at 145–46 (noting that this phenomenon becomes especially marked with migration experiences).

24. *Id.* at 146.

pass along values and beliefs about appropriate gender and sexual behavior by what they say about men and other women, and by teaching by example what is allowed or forbidden in the culture. These include ideas about what “good” women should and should not do.<sup>25</sup>

As a result, women are essential in the application of patriarchal cultural values, even when those values stress or prejudice women, their identity, or their dignity.<sup>26</sup> Women themselves apply, transmit, and perpetuate the traditions that limit and restrict their opportunities as well as bound their liberty and self-determination.

Second, when people migrate, the same principle of cultural transmission occurs.<sup>27</sup> In a migration, though, one is separated from one’s culture of origin, thus preserving and transmitting a culture that is “frozen” at the moment of migration.<sup>28</sup> Any cultural changes at the place of origin do not form part of the transmission in the diaspora.<sup>29</sup>

### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF CUBA

#### A. General

This Essay has focused on Latina/o culture in general and established that Cuba is part of the patriarchal paradigm of Latina/o culture and its perpetuation through women. But this ignores the reality that in the beginning of the history of the island that we now know as Cuba, there was no Latina/o culture. Prior to colonization, the inhabitants of the island were Indians, the indigenous population of the West Indies.<sup>30</sup> The Indo-Cuban population was peaceful and civilized.<sup>31</sup> Their ancestors came from South America and the Indo-Cubans followed their traditional agricultural lifestyle and nutritional practices,<sup>32</sup> had a refined culture, and

25. *Id.*

26. Hernández-Truyol, *Gender Bend*, *supra* note 6, at 1295.

27. *Id.* at 1296.

28. ESPÍN, *WOMEN CROSSING*, *supra* note 20, at 7; *see also id.* at 23 (noting “immigrants may become entrenched in traditional social and sex-role norms to defend against strong pressures to acculturate”). Men, because both majority and minority cultures are patriarchal, in effect “fit” in the new country. This could render their transition easier and may result in strengthening their embracing of patriarchal norms.

29. *Id.* at 23 (stating that with migration “home culture . . . becomes idealized”).

30. I LA ENCICLOPEDIA DE CUBA 34 (Gastón Baquero & Vicente Báez eds., 2d ed. 1975) [hereinafter *ENCICLOPEDIA*].

31. *Id.* at 19 (noting that Christopher Columbus perceived Indocubanas/os as gentle, timid peoples, who wear no clothes and had no weapons or law).

32. *See* S. JAMES ANAYA, *INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW* 14–16 (1996) (describing the history of the Ciboney Indians).

made tools for fishing and cultivation.<sup>33</sup> Significantly in the context of this conference, the indigenous people did not operate under the system of patriarchy.<sup>34</sup> On the contrary, they operated without the differentiations of gender that came with colonization.

This life of tranquility—as well as almost the entire population—was destroyed by colonization.<sup>35</sup> Mere decades after the “discovery” of the island, the Indo-Cuban population had either been annihilated or assimilated.<sup>36</sup> The Spanish distributed the men amongst themselves to work on farms and took possession of the women as servants or concubines.<sup>37</sup> This shocked the Indo-Cuban culture that did not have the same hierarchies or distinctions of gender that the Spanish had.

Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (c. 1484–1566), came to Cuba to address the problems of the indigenous population and was awarded a large number of Indian laborers for his good work.<sup>38</sup> One day he realized the magnitude of the injustices the system inflicted and recognized that no one should exploit the work of indigenous persons.<sup>39</sup> From that moment on, he fought to establish a system of social justice for the Indo-Cuban population.<sup>40</sup> Ironically, to protect the Indo-Cubans, he recommended the introduction of African slaves in 1517.<sup>41</sup>

Three centuries of Spanish invasion and colonization resulted in the establishment of a Cuban society in which the Spanish culture, institutions, language, and religion prevailed. One of these institutions was the system of *castas*, or social classes, that categorized people according to social, economic, and educational status or position.<sup>42</sup> It also

33. IRVING ROUSE, *THE TAINOS: RISE & DECLINE OF THE PEOPLE WHO GREETED COLUMBUS* 35 (1993).

34. ENCICLOPEDIA, *supra* note 30, at 30 (noting that women played important role in society).

35. *Id.* at 34 (stating that ill-treatment and enslavement of the indigenous population at the hands of Spaniards resulted in their extinction).

36. 2 LEVÍ MARRERO, *CUBA: ECONOMÍA Y SOCIEDAD* 352–53 (1972) (noting the total disappearance of Indocubanas/os after the first decades of Spanish occupation and some documentation of a small number in the latter half of the sixteenth century); LOUIS A. PÉREZ, JR., *CUBA: BETWEEN REFORM AND REVOLUTION* 30 (1988) (“The number of Indians dwindled from an estimated 112,000 on the eve of the conquest to 19,000 in 1519 to 7,000 in 1531. By the mid-1550s, the Indian population had shrunk to fewer than 3,000.”).

37. ENCICLOPEDIA, *supra* note 30, at 42 (describing the capture and sale of Indians); *id.* at 44 (describing the punishment of Indians who refused to work as slaves and how the Spanish would simply claim women as their own); *id.* at 50 (explaining that serfdom was for gentle Indians and slavery for rebellious ones in early Spanish colonies in Americas); *id.* at 51 (stating that the Spanish justified enslavement of the Indians by pointing to Indian attacks of Spaniards).

38. *Id.* at 55.

39. *Id.*

40. *Id.*

41. *Id.* at 57; *see also id.* at 52 (noting that the slavery of Indians predated the slavery of Africans).

42. Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *The LatIndia and Mestizajes: Of Cultures,*



categorized them according to race with white persons occupying a higher level in the hierarchy and Indians and black persons occupying a lower level.<sup>43</sup> Along with colonization, the Spaniards also established patriarchy.

Despite this system of social classes, the *criollos*—Spaniards born in Cuba—developed as a mercantile class.<sup>44</sup> They created an economy based on sugar that converted Cuba into a great center of sugar production.<sup>45</sup> The *criollos* competed with the Spanish to govern the island, which pushed the development of a growing sense of Cuban nationalism.<sup>46</sup> Although the Ten Years' War (1868–1878) did not achieve Cuban independence, a second war did obtain it, but only with the intervention of the United States, which then imposed military control.<sup>47</sup> The colonization by the United States changed from a military invasion to an economic and political control that continued in one form or another until the Cuban Revolution of 1933 (led by students of the Federación Estudiantil Universitaria—FEU).<sup>48</sup> Thus Cuba liberated itself from its restrictive situation and continued on until 1959.

### B. Cuban Women

In this brief history, it is imperative to highlight the role of Cuban women. First, before the establishment of patriarchy by the Spanish colonizers, the women of the island were the indigenous women who coexisted with men in an egalitarian society.<sup>49</sup> After colonization and the establishment of patriarchy, women had a Marianist role. But women in Cuba always manage to break the mold.

The first Cuban women to throw off the role established by Spanish society for women were the *mambisas*.<sup>50</sup> They—wives and mothers—left their homes to join the struggle for independence from Spain.<sup>51</sup> Their presence challenged the aforementioned feminine space that required

---

*Conquests, and LatCritical Feminism*, 3 J. GENDER RACE & JUST. 63, 77–78 (1999).

43. *Id.* at 78–79; see also PÉREZ, *supra* note 36, at 92–93.

44. PÉREZ, *supra* note 36, at 92, 94–95. Note that *criollos* is sometimes spelled *creoles*.

45. *Id.* at 76, 85–89.

46. *E.g., id.* at 94–95.

47. *Id.* at 121–25, 177–88 (describing the history of the second war).

48. *Id.* at 236, 256–64.

49. PÉREZ, *supra* note 36, at 25–32.

50. K. LYNN STONER, FROM THE HOUSE TO THE STREETS: THE CUBAN WOMAN'S MOVEMENT FOR LEGAL REFORM, 1898–1940, at 13–19 (1991).

51. *Id.* For example, Mariana Grajeles, a *mambisa* and the mother of ten Cuban patriots, fought in the Ten Years War and two subsequent wars for independence. It is legend that upon learning of the battlefield death of her oldest son, she told her youngest son, her only son not at the front, "And you son, stand tall, for the time has come for you to fight for your country." *Id.* at 20 (translation by author).

submission and weakness.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, the *mambisas* represented strength and leadership.<sup>53</sup>

But the *mambisas* also embodied the natural role of the mother. Mariana Grajales, mother of ten soldiers (including Antonio Maceo, a well-known Cuban hero), fought beside her sons in the war and became the archetypal model of the Cuban mother.<sup>54</sup> The image of Grajales as the mother-patriot is emblematic of the sacrifice and strength of Cuban women.<sup>55</sup>

In the twentieth century, Cuban feminists fought to obtain rights, though they did so without focusing on or even desiring the full equality of women.<sup>56</sup> Their cause, called the feminine movement, had many significant victories. For example, they succeeded in adopting laws benefitting women such as the right to property, divorce, and maternity benefits.<sup>57</sup> Many had careers as teachers or professors—professions considered appropriate for women.<sup>58</sup> Even with these successes, the prevailing culture dictated that when they married, their role would be that of wife and mother above and before all else.<sup>59</sup>

It is interesting and instructive to study who were the Cuban women who launched the feminist movement. The Cuban feminists were an interesting group. They belonged to a high social class; the *feministas* were white, educated, and came from wealthy or professional families.<sup>60</sup> Additionally:

- 42% had married;
- 42% had children;
- 60% had worked at some point in their lives;
- 75% had a college degree; and
- 33% had postgraduate degrees.<sup>61</sup>

Strikingly, 100% had at least one female servant, the same female servants explicitly excluded from receiving the benefits of the maternity

52. *Id.* at 13.

53. *Id.* at 13, 17.

54. *Id.* at 20.

55. *Id.* at 19, 26–27.

56. *Id.* at 59–67.

57. *Id.* at 41, 45–53.

58. *Id.* at 35.

59. *Id.* at 69–70 (noting that at the second Women’s Congress in 1925, “[a] reverence for traditional motherhood girded every debate” and that “the feminists established themselves as the matriarchs of a new state who sought to preserve and protect traditional institutions of the family”).

60. *Id.* at 78, 79.

61. *Id.*

law that the feminists had obtained.<sup>62</sup> In short, the laws and legal protections that the feminists fought for frequently did not help the women who needed them most: black women, *mulatas*, and poor white women, who worked not because they wanted to but because they needed to. Thus, marginable women remained marginalized in law and in society. They enjoyed neither the rights nor the benefits arising from these legal advances.

Even after the changes brought about by the laws granting the rights for which the feminists fought, marginable women continued to work outside the home without receiving any such benefit. These marginable women were among the first to encounter the problem of the double workday:<sup>63</sup> the responsibilities in their own home did not cease just because they also worked outside the house. Ironically, many of them worked as maids for the same feminists who fought so hard for women's rights.<sup>64</sup>

#### IV. CUBAN WOMEN AFTER 1959

##### A. *On the Island*

After the revolution, the goal of obtaining women's equality became "a revolution within the revolution."<sup>65</sup> Cuba committed itself to gender equality and the Cuban constitution as well as Cuban laws reflected this goal.<sup>66</sup>

Immediately after the revolution, a large movement formed to include women in the labor force.<sup>67</sup> Vilma Espín, the deceased wife of Raúl Castro, helped to realize this goal.<sup>68</sup> One of her best-known successes globally is the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), an organization that implements policies and programs to achieve the equality and emancipation of Cuban women in all fields and levels of society.<sup>69</sup>

62. *Id.* at 178.

63. Ctr. for Democracy in the Americas, *Women's Work: Gender Equality in Cuba and the Role of Women Building Cuba's Future* 3 (2013), [https://thecubaneconomy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CDA\\_Womens\\_Work1.pdf](https://thecubaneconomy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CDA_Womens_Work1.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/Z8TX-T98R>] [hereinafter CDA, *Women's Work*].

64. *Id.* at 78.

65. Fidel Castro, Prime Minister of Cuba, Closing Address at the Fifth FMC National Plenum (Dec. 12, 1966) (transcript available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1966/19661210.html> [<https://perma.cc/6KFE-HZLP>]).

66. CDA, *Women's Work*, *supra* note 63, at 19–20, 32.

67. *Id.* at 22.

68. *Id.* at 21, 22.

69. *Id.* at 22–23. "The FMC, founded on August 23, 1960, was the first mass organization created by [Fidel Castro's] new government. With Vilma Espín at its helm, in the first few months 17,000 women members, called *federadas*, joined. Named 'the governing body' for policy on

Women who previously could not have dreamed of a college education were trained as nurses and doctors, as professors, as factory and pharmaceutical workers, as librarians, as lawyers, and as soldiers of the Republic.<sup>70</sup> After the revolution, no limits exist with respect to the professions or jobs available for women.

What impact has the implementation of this new egalitarian philosophy had in Cuban society? One drastic change occurred in the employment rates. Pre-revolution, in 1953, only 13.7% of women worked outside the house, 70,000 (approximately one quarter) of whom worked as maids.<sup>71</sup> The role of women in the labor force changed after the revolution. The revolution not only had women's equality among its various objectives, but it created, through socialist philosophy, the obligation to participate in the productive sector. As a result, women, much like men, had the patriotic duty to work outside the house.<sup>72</sup> Today, women make up almost 40% of the workforce.<sup>73</sup> They have jobs in education, health, finance, insurance, joint ventures, etc.—in short, in every field of work.<sup>74</sup>

While there was enormous change in the labor sector, there was also much that had not changed in society at large, including within the labor sector. The prevailing *marianismo/machismo* culture explains the areas that resist change. For example, few women work in the agricultural sector, in cooperatives, or in executive positions.<sup>75</sup> One expert explains that “[t]here is a lot of *machismo*, more so in agriculture.”<sup>76</sup> Additionally, although almost 40% of Cuban women work, they “earn on average less than half of what men make—not because there is pay discrimination, but rather that men have access to higher paying jobs.”<sup>77</sup>

Despite Cuban women's increasing participation in the productive sector, their obligations attendant to their reproductive role continued: taking care of the home, children, husband, and other family, including one's mother and father or mother-in-law and father-in-law.<sup>78</sup> In this

---

women in Cuba, the FMC was entrusted to do nothing less than spearhead the realization of women's emancipation.” *Id.* at 22 (citations omitted).

70. PÉREZ, *supra* note 36, at 370–72.

71. *Id.* at 16. See also OXFAM, 50 YEARS LATER: WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN CUBA 21 (2010), <https://www.oxfam.ca/sites/default/files/imce/women-social-change-cuba.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/L7DG-7K7K>] (stating that the Cuban women's population in 1953 consisted of 2,132,000 women over the age of ten).

72. CDA, *Women's Work*, *supra* note 63, at 21.

73. *Id.* at 41.

74. *Id.*

75. *Id.* at 42.

76. *Id.* (quoting Armando Nova) (original emphasis omitted) (translation by author).

77. *Id.* at 45 (citation omitted).

78. *Id.* “As Cuba urbanized in the twentieth century, and a stable working class developed in some areas, women were absorbed into the labor force in offices, factories and the booming

sense, like all working women of the twentieth century, the Cuban working woman has a double workday, despite laws establishing equality in the home as well as at work.<sup>79</sup> By one estimate, “Cuban women still spend in excess of thirty-four hours every week doing chores and child-rearing, while men contribute just twelve hours” to domestic activities.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly, some black Cuban women speak of having more than one job at once—the double workday—as a tradition, because that has always been their reality.<sup>81</sup>

Even changes to the legal system did little to affect the gendered cultural system. For example, the 2003 amendments to Cuba’s Family Code allow a family to decide whether the mother or the father stays home or works. Yet, according to one report only eighteen men opted to remain at home.<sup>82</sup> Those men who opted to stay at home recount narratives of friends mocking them for their decision.<sup>83</sup>

How can one explain these differences within a system that legally has promulgated equality? Culture. Ethnographic studies note that Cuban culture continues to be *machista*.<sup>84</sup> Women may be represented in relatively powerful positions, but women are not empowered.<sup>85</sup> Despite the opening of the labor sector for women and their rise in that sector, women continue—based on culture—to be programmed from infancy to be mothers.

### B. *In the Diaspora*

This Essay has shown that despite the radical political and social changes within which women’s equality and the inclusion of women in the productive sector occurred in Cuba, there has been no change in the

tourist sector. But, while Cuban men had a more privileged position in the labor force, more free time, and fewer social strictures; for women, the burdens of the double-shift continued.” *Id.* at 3.

79. *Id.* at 4.

80. *Id.*

81. *Id.* at 52.

82. *Id.* at 33.

83. *Id.* “My good friend did that—he took care of his children and stayed home while the wife went to work. We were cruel to him, he is our friend but we were teasing him a lot, saying ‘I will bring my underwear for you to wash.’ Only when the income is much higher than the man, would the man accept. I teased my friend, but I also helped him do the laundry.” *Id.* (quoting Interview by Cynthia Curtis with Carlos from Santiago, in Santiago, Cuba (Sept. 9, 2012)).

84. *Id.* at 51 (“We have to distinguish that access to university studies does not necessarily give us power. What’s more, to be in positions that are supposedly positions of power does not necessarily permit the exercise of power.” (quoting María Ileana Faguaga)).

85. *Id.* at 40–42 (“Today, women hold 72% of the education and 70% of the health care jobs created by the state. Likewise, they are in the majority in finance and the insurance sector. . . . Although women make up 52.8% of the workforce with a graduate-level education, they hold only 34.4% of executive positions. Women do not show strongly in the non-state sector either, accounting for only 17.2% of cooperative workers.” (citation omitted)).

gender role of Cuban women on the island. With these findings in mind, it is interesting to conduct a comparative analysis of the role of women in the diaspora. The result of such comparative analysis can be conveyed succinctly: *plus ça change*—the more things change . . .

But it is instructive to first elaborate on the result in the comparison of status between Cuban women on the island and those in the diaspora. As the second part of this Essay has discussed, women transmit culture, and transmit it faithfully, even though it causes them hardship, as seen on the island in the case of the double workday.

This Essay also addressed how migration further problematizes the situation because it freezes the concept of culture at the moment of departure. Putting these two realities together, women of the Cuban diaspora are charged with transmitting culture and they do so based on the culture that prevailed when they left Cuba. On the island, culture has remained *machista* despite laws implementing the equality of women. Similarly, in the diaspora, the culture exported through migration remained unaffected by the legal changes concerning equality; Cubans retained the same culture of *machismo*.

The literature distinguishes among three generations of the Cuban diaspora. The first generation are the Exiles, the people who left Cuba between 1960 and 1970.<sup>86</sup> This group, in general, opposed the revolution. They are predominantly white and drawn from the professional class.<sup>87</sup>

The second generation are the Children of the Revolution, whose migration occurred in the mid-to late-1970s and early 1980s.<sup>88</sup> Its members generally agree with the principles of the revolution and the ideal of social equality. Yet they migrated because of a desire for more democracy.<sup>89</sup> Many were party members and, in general, the parents of this generation remain in Cuba and sympathize with the party.<sup>90</sup> The majority of the members of this group are whites whose families benefited from the changes the revolution brought to society and the economy.<sup>91</sup>

86. Susan Eckstein & Mette Louise Berg, *Cubans in the United States and Spain: The Diaspora Generational Divide*, DIASPORA: J. TRANSNAT'L STUD., Mar. 1, 2009, at 162–63. See generally METTE LOUISE BERG, DIASPORIC GENERATIONS: MEMORY, POLITICS AND NATION AMONG CUBANS IN SPAIN (2011); Mette Louise Berg, *Memory, Politics, and Diaspora: Cubans in Spain*, in CUBA: IDEA OF A NATION DISPLACED 15, 15–35 (Andrea O'Reilly Herrera ed., 2007).

87. Eckstein & Berg, *supra* note 866, at 165; see also Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, *Cuba's Exiles: Portrait of a Refugee Migration*, 19 INT'L MIGRATION REV. 4, 9–10, 23 (1985).

88. IRAIDA H. LÓPEZ, IMPOSSIBLE RETURNS: NARRATIVES OF THE CUBAN DIASPORA 42 (2015).

89. *Id.*

90. BERG, *supra* note 86, at 98.

91. *Id.* at 98–103.

The third generation are the Migrants.<sup>92</sup> These persons emigrated during the Special Period of the late 1980s and early 1990s and identify themselves as economic migrants.<sup>93</sup> Many of these migrants are single men with little advanced education, and as a group they are more diverse than the first two in the sense of race and class.<sup>94</sup>

The Cuban diaspora, represented by these three generations, has spread throughout the world. However, the largest concentrations are in the continental United States—in Florida (Miami) and in New Jersey, then in Spain, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico.<sup>95</sup>

Having reviewed the Cuban diaspora, it is appropriate to interrogate what is the status of Cuban women in the diaspora. Articulating the question in proper terms for this Essay's theme, one asks: What happened with the culture of gender and the gender of culture? The answer is straightforward and, given the analysis of the diaspora, it is not surprising: the culture of gender and the gender of culture remain unchanged.

Firstly, three of the largest concentrations of the Cuban diaspora live either in the colonizing power—Spain, the country that exported patriarchy to Cuba—or in places that Spain colonized and to which patriarchy was exported—Puerto Rico and Venezuela. Consequently, as one might expect, the culture of *machismo* that existed in Cuba before the revolution not only persists but also has been reinforced.

On the other hand, it is interesting to examine what has occurred in the United States, a place that is not a predominantly Latina/o country and in which *latinidad* is not the predominant culture. In spite of the differences in cultural foundations, the United States, as well as the majority of countries around the world, is a patriarchy, even though it is not in the form of *machismo*. However, the foundation of male privilege does exist in the United States. Two things happen to Cuban women in this context. First, and most constant, they live in the *machista* culture in which they have a double workday, just like Cuban women on the island, as many in the diaspora want to work or have to work. Second, in the United States they are considered a minority group, so they are doubly marginalized because they are both women and an ethnic minority. Last, they find themselves in a system that legally protects against sexism or racism, but that does not recognize the double burden of multidimensionality.

---

92. Eckstein & Berg, *supra* note 86, at 165.

93. *Id.*

94. *Id.*

95. LÓPEZ, *supra* note 88, at 39–40.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the diaspora, as on the island, *plus ça change*. . . . Culture, notwithstanding the law, dominates in all environments. Law and culture are one image in a mirror—each reflects the other. *Machismo* still dominates the reflection of the Cuban woman and although it does not negate her legal rights, it does greatly affect her life. Although Cuban women work in the productive sector wherever they reside, they continue to have the responsibility for maintaining the home and all that represents. Cuban women on the island as well as in the diaspora are still burdened with the double workday. The culture of gender survives and charges the Cuban woman to not only work in the productive sector but also in the reproductive sector. In the latter role, the Cuban woman, both on the island and in the diaspora, is responsible for maintaining the home and the family and transmitting culture—and transmitting it faithfully—regardless of the hardship that it causes her.



# **Left Blank Intentionally**