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Vanguardia mujerista haciendo escuela: An oral history of Cuban feminism

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Approved and recommended for acceptance as a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Vanguardia Mujerista Haciendo Escuela: An Oral History of Cuban Feminism

Marie Elizabeth Eszenyi

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to the Cuban feminist revolutionaries—past, present, and future—
who commit their lives to envisioning a better, more equal Cuba for all.

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I would like to thank several people for their guidance, assistance, and support for this project. This thesis would be incomplete and insufficient without the help and contribution of many people. Hence, I view this project as a collaborative work that represents countless hours of collaborative dialogue, sharing of experiences, and knowledge production.

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Abstract

The high rate of female political participation in Cuba has led many journalists, political scientists, and activists to claim that the country is quite possibly the most feminist in Latin America (Torregrosa, 2012). As the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality (2012) indicates, Cuba ranks third in the world for female participation in legislative bodies. Indeed, Cuba has a long history of female political and revolutionary involvement that positions Cuban feminism both on the forefront and the margins of the economy, governmental institutions, culture, society, military systems, and the workplace during various historical points. Moreover, Cuba's location just 90 miles from the United States as well as its lengthy history with colonialism, slavery, & African diaspora situate the island as a convergence of cultural melding, international influence, & Afrikan tradition. Regardless of the truth value of the journalists' claim that Cuba is the 'most feminist' country in the region, the apparent tension that exists between the increased political participation of women, the presence of women on both the forefront and margins of multiple facets of Cuban life, and the numerous international forces empowering and oppressing Cuban women all demonstrate the highly complex relationship between Cuban feminists and the socialist state and, therefore, highlight the vastly insightful potential of research on Cuban feminism.

In this project, I employ Black feminist and Latin@ critical race theories to construct an oral history of contemporary Cuban feminism; more specifically, I synthesize historical materials from special collections on Cuban history, extant scholarship, and interviews from members of the state-based women's federation to provide an account of contemporary Cuban feminism holistically, including the core

tenets and key influences that permeate many individual forms of Cuban feminism. I also discuss the current status of transnational feminist collaboration between the United States and Cuba as well as the future of Cuban feminism with respect to this collaboration. The goal of this work is not only to facilitate a better understanding of the ways in which contemporary Cuban feminisms align with and diverge from previous incarnations of Cuban feminism, but also to support Cuban feminist voices within American academic discourse so that the burgeoning field of Cuban feminism can be recognized and appreciated.

Chapter 1: Introduction & Justification

My tape recorder and protocol rested on my knees as I sat in an old, wobbly, plastic lawn chair, gazing down el calle toward Havana Bay and Malecon, where thousands gathered to celebrate Carnaval the night before. In the distance, I could see Faro Castillo del Morro, one of the island's most famous landmarks. I was in Cuba, but my journey hadn't really started.

The high rate of female political participation in Cuba has led many journalists, political scientists, and activists to claim that the country is quite possibly the most feminist in Latin America (Torregrosa, 2012). As the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality (2012) indicates, Cuba ranks third in the world for female participation in legislative bodies. Indeed, Cuba has a long history of female political and revolutionary involvement that positions Cuban feminism both on the forefront and the margins of the economy, governmental institutions, culture, society, military systems, and the workplace during various historical points. Moreover, Cuba's location just 90 miles from the United States as well as its lengthy history with colonialism, slavery, & African diaspora situate the island as a convergence of cultural melding, international influence, & Afrikan tradition (Lavrin, 1978; Gross & Bingham, 1985; Bingham & Gross, 1985; Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1993). Regardless of the truth value of the journalists' claim that Cuba is the 'most feminist' country in the region, the apparent tension that exists between the increased political participation of women, the presence of women on both the forefront and margins of multiple facets of Cuban life, and the numerous international forces empowering and oppressing Cuban women all demonstrate the highly complex

relationship between Cuban feminists and the socialist state and, therefore, highlight the vastly insightful potential of research on Cuban feminism.

Further, the potential insights rendered from research on Cuban feminists can also help explore the ways in which domestic and international influence—such as the history of Cuban women in combat and the transnational solidarity with other Caribbean nations—has impacted Cuban feminism. In this project, I will explore these multifaceted influences and investigate how the subsequent Cuban feminist rhetoric, specifically feminist rhetoric on socialism, is impacted by the historically symbiotic relationship that exists between Cuban feminism and Cuban socialism. I will do this by constructing a feminist oral history of contemporary Cuban feminism. Using interviews I conducted in Havana, I examine the current state of Cuban feminism, including its present-day and historical interactions with domestic socialism. I will then identify and discuss several of the more prominent domestic and international influences impacting contemporary Cuban feminist trends holistically. I will conclude my paper with an investigation of the future of Cuban feminism with respect to domestic and transnational feminist activism.

It is important to note that this project is in no way attempting to define a strict interpretation of Cuban feminism and its influences objectively. Rather, this collection of interviews and my own reading of them is meant to provide a glimpse into the key trends that I have found to exist in many women's articulations of their form of Cuban feminism. As I hope this paper communicates, Cuban feminism is a highly subjective and very personal expression of individual identity, collective memory, and activism that result in as many forms of Cuban feminism as Cuban feminists.

In Support of Cuban Feminist Research

As this section will elucidate, Cuban feminism is an essential field for rhetorical advocacy work and communication research. The socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical traditions of Cuba led to a unique collection of feminist ideologies worthy of inclusion in the feminist canon. As many critical Latin@ scholars and Latin@s will likely note, each country in Latin America and the Caribbean retain unique traditions and influences that—when combined with the multiplicity and variety of feminist voices—results in a collective albeit not objective form of feminism inextricably bound to history, place, culture, etc. The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which Cuban feminism has and continues to interact with, support, and diverge from the socialist state in order to develop a clearer perspective of the binding elements of Cuban feminism. Therefore, this project attempts to help supplement our current knowledge of Cuban feminism with contemporary accounts that consider the newer Raúl Castro regime and the future of transnational feminist relationships.

As this chapter has and the literature review will further demonstrate, the appearance of Cuban feminism's simultaneous pro-government and anti-government activism—the socialist call for equality or critiques the government's lack of protection for sex workers, for example—complicates the one-sided perspectives (extant in both media and academic outlets) that Cuban feminists are merely for or against the socialist state. This is not to say that academic or news coverage of Cuban feminist's relationship to the government is purposefully constructed as one-sided or that these sources are misunderstanding the relationship between Cuban feminism and the government. Rather, I argue that the frequent sharp focus of many journal and news articles on a single or a few linked issues—when taken as

a collective—seem to invariably construct an overarching contradictory and inherently oppositional binary between published voices who claim Cuban feminism is pro-government or anti-government. This paper is attempting to fill the gap between this false binary and to deconstruct it by creating a paper that accounts for and focuses on the multifaceted relationship between Cuban feminists and the government. Although each of the extant works on Cuban feminist pro/anti-government projects are often solely describing this relationship with respect to one instance, I argue that a project that highlights the many points of similarity and difference between the government and Cuban feminism is needed to reinforce the very real, highly complex, and dynamic relationship between Cuban feminists and the government.

There are many key issues within Cuban feminism that demonstrate the often holistic appearance of disagreement over whether Cuban feminists are pro or anti-government. First, the colonial lineage of Cuba has led many Cubans to embrace Marxist-Leninist-Engelian politics (Dumoulin, 2011). Along these lines, colonialism has left Cuba with an interesting class system that is supported mainly through tourism (Herman, 2012; Murphy *et al*, 1991). In this sense, Cuban feminism is inextricably tied to intersectional political advocacy and action. In some ways, such as the sex tourism issue, Cuban feminists appear to function in stark contrast to the government's lack of support. As mentioned, a major source of tourism income in Cuba stems from Cuban sex tourism, specifically gay sex tourism (Stout, 2008). However, many of the Cuban sex workers are left unprotected by law and controlled by the whims of capitalism (Stout, 2008; Dumoulin, 2011; Froines, 1993). This class and sex-based oppression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersexed, questioning (hereafter, LGBTQIQ) community has led many Cuban feminists to absorb LGBTQIQ rights as a part of their own advocacy for sexual freedom, which often results in tense relations with the

government as demonstrated through Las Krudas' frequent song lyrics about freedom from sexual oppression (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008).

In contrast, another prominent advocacy topic for Cuban feminism relates to motherhood. Like Black feminism, which views the Black mother as an invaluable component of the family structure, Cuban feminism equally stresses the importance of mothers (Khan, 2008; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984; hooks, 1989). As Chaney asserts, the Cuban mother, or 'supermadre,' has a unique role in the power structure of the home and politics (1979). Smith extends this analysis to girls living in socialist systems (1995). A large part of Cuban feminist activism is encouraging women to enact their legal rights to work outside the home (as opposed to operating within the confines of traditional household roles) (Chaney, 1979; Khan, 2008). However, on this point, Cuban feminists ally strongly with governmental resources such as the FMC (which will be outlined further through participants' accounts) and Castro's own speeches supporting Cuban feminism (Castro, 1981).

Finally, another source of Cuban feminist advocacy is Africanism, or Afro-Cubanism. As mentioned above, much Cuban culture draws from African/Afrikaan tradition given the African diaspora to Cuba. Armstead (2007; 2008) argues that Cuban feminists are attempting to not just grow the visibility of the Cuban woman, but rather to grow the visibility of the Black Cuban woman. Core tenants of the Afrikaan tradition that Cuban feminism isolates include sisterhood, community, the role of the Black woman, and gender and intersectionality (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008; Morgan, 1970; Woodridge, 2008; Shakur, 1987). Cuban feminist activism that addresses these parallels to the Afrikaan tradition can be seen through activist art, music, poetry, and

writing (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008). In this sense, again, Cuban feminists align and work with the Cuban government on various cultural initiatives. However, some scholars have noted some tension on this point with respect to Cuban feminists' fear that the Cuban government isn't doing enough to stop institutionalized racism against Black Cubans or practitioners of Santeria (who often belong to a specific ethnic group) (Segre & Coyula, 1997).

From a brief glimpse of some existing scholarship, it becomes clear that the relationship between Cuban feminists and the socialist state is complex on multiple issues. Therefore, it could be argued that a deeper understanding of this relationship provides the lynchpin for *understanding* and *enacting* Cuban feminist advocacy on an effective, coherent (publically and internally), and pragmatic level. From the anti-state Afro-Cuban protest art (in response to postcolonial, state, and race-based domination), to the domestic policies shaping our understanding of gender dynamics and motherhood, to the rift between the government and gay sex tourism, all of these nuanced understandings require a foundational analysis of how the relationship between the state's socialist framework and Cuban feminism evolved historically and how this relationship functions today. This is particularly relevant given that, as history suggests repeatedly with various feminist advocacy projects in Cuba, the way in which the state reacts and responds to issues of oppression has been the main catalyst for feminist rhetoric surrounding socialism (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008; Wooldridge, 2008).

Of course, this claim is also substantiated since Cuba's policies, such as the illegality of gay sex tourism or the law establishing equal parental responsibility of parenting, set the rhetorical Kairos¹ for the available activist opportunities and constraints of Cuban feminist discourse (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Lastly, given that socialism and feminism in Cuba endured a lengthy co-evolution that resulted in a co-dependent relationship (Disney, 2008), most Cuban feminists view socialism as the preferred political system for eradicating both domestic and internationally-based oppression (Murphy *et al*, 1991). Thus, it is important to ascertain how these points of tension affect the overall success of the relationship between the state and Cuban feminists. The only way to fully capture a thorough understanding of any of these advocacy works is to conduct a project that examines this starting point.

Finally, this project is also significant as a communication work since it will further support Cuban voices out of the periphery of feminist studies.² A paper on contemporary Cuban feminism will assist in documenting Cuban activist rhetoric and potentially help encourage social change. Such consciousness-raising can produce a cohesive transnational feminist community that may result in increased connection, collaboration, and global progress (Thayer, 2010; Gottfried, 1996). Although such a project will most certainly not reach all of these ends, it will, however, serve as an excellent starting point to evaluate the discourse and meta-discourse surrounding the

¹ Here, I am using the definition of Kairos that is consistent with that in Sipiora & Baumlin (2002). *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

² I use the word "support" here to suggest that I am not speaking for Cuban feminists or that Cuban feminists are incapable of moving themselves out of the margin. Indeed, I think the best role for us as American feminist activists is to take on a supporting and allied role in solidarity with Cuban feminists.

highly influential relationship between socialism and Cuban feminism. Moreover, it can provide footing for the community to align with Cuban feminists' transition through the next political era.

The following chapter will provide a comprehensive literature review of works on Cuban feminism from multiple disciplines, Latin@ critical race theory, and Black feminist theory. In addition, this literature review will further justify my arguments above regarding the existing gaps in research on Cuban feminism. Chapter 3 presents and explains my use of feminist oral history with autoethnography and archival research. Chapter 4 outlines the core tenets of contemporary Cuban feminism and the ways in which it manifests through the women's organization. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the array of domestic and international influences that have historically and currently informed Cuban feminist advocacy. Finally, Chapter 6 and the conclusion will, I hope, illuminate where the future of Cuban feminism appears to be heading both in terms of governmental collaboration and transnational feminist alliances.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Wedged into the tiny space afforded by the chipped baby blue plaster balcony of Mirurgia's home, the smell of the ocean on the breeze provided a momentary reprieve to the oppressive heat. The house itself, a makeshift movie theater for the neighborhood, was complete with detached theater seats and old, torn couches, a giant flatscreen television, cracked walls and scattered pictures of Jesus and Mary.

In addition to providing an account of extant literature on issues surrounding Cuban feminism, this chapter also highlights the importance of communication studies works on Cuban feminism. As suggested above, there is an abundance of communication and interdisciplinary scholarship on Latin American and Caribbean feminism as well as Cuban feminism. This section outlines central contributions to this field that have shaped the direction of this project and further specifies the gaps in extant literature that this project attempts to fill.

Cuba

There exists a vast array of scholarly literature on topics pertaining to Cuba. Historical analyses focus on a wide array of issues and time periods such as the U.S. embargo (Smith, 1998; Borer & Bowen, 2007), Cuban human rights abuses (Coll, 2007; Ludlam, 2012), and the Castro regime (Dunne, 2011; Ludlam, 2012). In contrast, Africana studies scholars have explored the ways in which diaspora impact Afro-Cuban cultural and political life (Armstead, 2007). Thus, historical and Africana literature is crucial to any discussion of Cuban feminism since it provides background knowledge on transnational influences that have shaped and continue to shape the vehicles of oppression in Cuba. Such scholarship represents a slight departure from oppression

studies of the U.S. since American oppression studies tends to examine our role as the colonial oppressor through our global hegemonic influence, the institution's responsibility to eradicate the continued oppression of colonized populations, and the ways in which personal relationships function within this space of oppression (hooks, 1984; Collins, 1990). In slight contrast, Cuban feminists tend to focus on the position of Cuba as a colonized state and the impact this history has on individuals (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008). Indeed, much postcolonial literature surrounds the United States' role as the transnational oppressor particularly with respect to its catalyzing of the diasporic movement of marginalized populations (Spivak, 1988). Cuban feminism also appears to examine power relationships, and colonialism broadly (Wooldridge, 2008); however, as is understandable, Cubans and Americans appear to often focus on oppression studies through their countries' perceived role within the sphere of oppression. As the participants' comments will later suggest, the role of collective memory within Cuban feminism may also contribute to this preferred focus on the position as "colonized."

Given Cuba's rich Afro-Caribbean culture and unique history, there has been a myriad of literature on Cuba in many academic disciplines. Several works argue that Cuba's socialist framework, combined with international influence, have a significant impact on social issues (Dunne, 2011; Ludlam, 2012). For example, Gross and Bingham (1985) indicate that Cuba's socialist policies have substantially increased women's political participation. Indeed, a study in Torregrosa (2012) indicates that Cuba is ranked fourth globally and first in the Caribbean with respect to gender equity in government jobs. This evidence is supported by a UN Gender Equality Study (2012). Moreover,

Disney (2008) extends this analysis to maintain that since Cuba's 1959 revolution, socialism and feminism have co-developed within a mutually and positively influencing relationship.

One example of this process includes Cuba's reliance on tourism as the primary source of income. Due to the lasting impact of colonialism, women and gay men must often resort to sex tourism to support themselves (Herman, 2012; Murphy *et al*, 1991). However, sex workers remain unprotected by law (Stout, 2008). This lack of governmental support enables sex workers to be continuously subjugated by the whims of capitalist demand (Stout, 2008; Froines, 1993; Dumoulin, 2011).

As evidenced by these few examples of Cuba's policies, Cuba has done considerable with respect to gender equity in the workplace and in domestic settings. However, there is still considerable work to be done with respect to institutionalized sexism and classism. This study offers a unique opportunity to help empower Cuban feminist voices to bring these issues of inequality to the forefront of academic discussion. Such discussion will not only greatly improve the existing dialogue surrounding Cuban policies, but it also has the potential to further heal the disparate relationship between the U.S. and Cuba by enabling American women³ to act in solidarity with Cuban feminists.

³ Similar to my remarks regarding the multiplicity of Cuban feminisms, I contend there is no singular form of American feminism. Rather, there exists as many forms of American feminisms as American feminists. In this paragraph, I mean to suggest that an excellent first step toward maintaining transnational feminist relationships is to facilitate a better collective understanding of the holistic tenets and influences on Cuban feminism.

Communication Studies

With respect to communication studies, there is much literature surrounding Cuban feminism and surrounding topics. First, Delgado's (1998) piece on Latin@ identities as silenced is particularly important because it contextualizes Latin@ persons as subaltern subjects uniquely impacted by the complicated intersections of personhood, ethnicity, subjectivity, etc. This piece is important for this paper because it further emphasizes the importance of addressing my positionality as a researcher and how it impacts my co-participants and the final project, which is a crucial first step of this project. Additionally, Blaufuss (2007) discusses many ethical challenges she faced while doing fieldwork in Cuba, specifically the challenges of ensuring inclusion for participants, particularly the fact that there is no way to address 100% of power imbalances that exist while doing research of this nature.

Also important is the focus of marginalized populations within the Latin@ community. For example, Cisneros (2011) rhetorically analyzes citizenship with respect to symbolic acts of exclusion toward immigrants while Gonzalez (1990) describes the otherizing nature of rhetoric toward Mexican Americans. Corrigan (2005) uses texts from women in exile to facilitate discussion of Cuban women in contemporary life. In particular, she analyzes the ways in which the historical context influences current perspectives. Moreover, Mayer (2004) discusses the new wave of diasporas in the U.S. Latin@ community principally with respect to power relations and understandings of diaspora as panlatinidad or Pan-Latin@. Mayer (2004) concludes that these conceptions can lead to the essentializing of marginalized Latin@s under the guise of pluralism. Other works on Latin@ diaspora include Cisneros (2013), Finally, Flores (1998)

discusses the stages of how marginalized or oppressed Chicana feminists create empowering spaces for themselves through rhetoric and discourse. These spaces result in relationship building with other Chicana feminists as well as a safe space with boundaries to establish what Flores calls the “Chicana feminist homeland.” Flores (2003) extends this analysis to account for the ways in which Mexican immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s established homeland.

The Hall (2007) article operates in conversation with the Blaufuss article as it analyzes the use of tropes such as hybridity and liminality through postcolonial critique. This article is helpful since it employs postcolonial criticism to further establish the way in which privilege manifests through rhetoric, in this case through metaphor. Similarly, Holling (2008) offers a chronology of the role of performance in Chicana and Latin@ culture, specifically during times of assimilation and reconnection to origin. While Hall (2007) offers performance as an alternative to such tropes, this conclusion rests on the foundation that culture is an ongoing, embodied, and active performance. Flores (2014), too, argues that performance is a crucially important text for critical race studies. Interestingly, it could be argued that the participants’ embodied activism through their narratives and expression of collective identity could be a part of Hall’s understanding of performance, and, therefore, accessible to a unique form of embodied agency. I will be discussing the impact of the co-participants’ use of collective memory, agency, and embodied activism later in the conclusion of this project.

Additionally, much work inspects the ways in which popular culture has rhetorically shaped and reinforced gender communication and roles in Cuban society and politics. For example, Baron (2010) conducted a thematic analysis of Cuban films from three decades in order to outline the ways certain gender norms have shifted or remained stagnant through rhetoric in film. Baron (2010) specifically isolates the concept of Cuban 'machismo' to demonstrate how masculine stereotypes in popular films continue to reinforce patriarchy while women attempt to dismantle it (through equal distribution in the workplace, etc.).

While many studies examine the ways that Cubans use rhetoric to marginalize women, there are several studies that focus on ways that women are positively represented in cultural and activist publications. For instance, Bushnell (2011) rhetorically studies how Cuba has appreciated women's legal, revolutionary, and political roles through their inclusion on postage stamps. Other studies have discussed Cuba's collective positive perceptions of female activism, such as anti-Batista groups (Chase, 2010) and protest art (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008; Woodridge, 2008). This literature provides a foundation for understanding how Cuban feminism has been understood in the communication studies discipline thus far. Additionally, these resources will provide a chronology of the representation of women throughout Cuban history.

The Great Cuban Feminist Debate

Since Cuban feminism emerged in academic discourse, there has been an ongoing struggle over the inclusion of Cuban feminism in Academia and frequent preference for protest art and music outside the academy (Ferguson, 1993; Armstead,

2006; Armstead, 2008) Many “established” academic writers in the feminist community initially excluded Cuban feminism from mainstream feminist dialogue (Armstead, 2007). Much like Black feminists in the United States who turned to outside publications to construct their intersectional perspectives and identities (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984; hooks, 1989; Shakur, 1987), many Cuban feminists reject traditional academic writing in favor of art, poetry, and music (Gross & Bingham, 1985; Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008; Wooldridge, 2008). Feminist and LGBTQIQ artists like Las Krudas consider rap music a unique vehicle for their liberation from many forms of oppression (race, class, gender, sexual) (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008; Wooldridge, 2008).

Since the early 1990s, however, there has been a considerable push in Academia for the inclusion of Cuban feminist voices in mainstream publications (Ferguson, 1993). In 1993, the University of Havana held Cuba’s first women and gender studies conference. Participants included local Cuban feminists and members from the American feminist movement (Ferguson, 1993). This conference demonstrates the increased community building that was taking place between different feminist groups during the 1990s (Ferguson, 1993). In contrast, Froines (1993) suggests that during the early 1990s, there was no such opposition between the U.S. women’s movements and the Cuban women’s movement. These differing accounts likely allude to a complex relationship between Cuban and American feminists. While there may be tension between Cuban and American feminists, one can suggest that this relationship is strengthening as more Cuban voices are included in feminist theory. However, since the 1990s, there have been few events created to create such space for Cuban and American

feminist collaboration. This claim that the relationship may be strengthened with inclusion in feminist theory will be further analyzed in the conclusion of this paper.

Cuban Socialism

Now that I have provided a synopsis of several influences on and major themes within Cuban feminism, I will now discuss the current literature on the interaction between Cuban socialism and feminism. Disney (2008) maintains that since Cuba's 1959 revolution, socialism and feminism have co-developed within a mutually and positively influencing relationship. Indeed, several works argue that Cuba's socialist government combined with international influence have a significantly positive impact on social issues (Dunne, 2011; Ludlam, 2012). More specifically, Gross and Bingham (1985) indicate that Cuba's socialist policies have substantially increased women's political participation. Torregrosa (2012) strongly argues that Cuba is the prominent leader in the Caribbean with respect to gender equity in the workplace. These findings are historically confirmed by several other pieces (Lavrín, 1978; Lavrín, 1993; Lavrín 1995).

Although the literature above generally supports that Cuba's socialism is better for women, there exists a plethora of data detailing Cuba's human rights abuses that complicates this argument. For example, Coll (2007) and Ludlam (2012) both suggest that the Castro regime's proclivity toward political executions, strong censorship, and restrictions on assembly are indicative of deeper social concerns. Moreover, Human Rights Watch (2002) parallels these abuses to Guatemala, whose death squads and mass displacement have left Guatemala in a state of continuous armed conflict.

However, evidence does indicate that the recent transition of power to Raul Castro, Fidel Castro's brother, will have a positive impact on women and human rights (Dunne, 2011; Ludlam, 2012). Dunne (2011) and Ludlam (2012) suggest that Raul Castro is more open to reformation, particularly with respect to social, economic, and transnational policy. Additionally, one of Raul Castro's current platforms includes work on the "unfinished feminist revolution" (de la Torre, 2011). Although specific policies have not been altered, such remarks can be interpreted as a positive shift toward top-down social change, for which Cuba is particularly known (Gross & Bingham, 1986).

International Policy

With respect to international policies, Cuba has endured a lengthy history of tension with non-socialist states. Since the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs refugee attack sponsored by the United States in 1961, relations between Cuba and the United States have been generally hostile (Gross & Bingham, 1986). Although recent literature suggests that relations have bettered over time (Smith, 1998; Borer & Bowen, 2007), there is much literature suggesting that U.S. international economic policies have left Cuba's economy exploited by capitalism (Etiennet & Leacock, 1980; Bolles, 1993; Shakur, 2005). There are several implications of this exploitation. First, this capitalist mindset results in an embedded patriarchal ideology of fiscal domination that counters gender equality in Cuba (Etiennet & Leacock, 1980; Schild, 2000). Secondly, the economic shift toward matching the United States' capitalist modernization results in a shift toward individual autonomy (Schild, 2000). This shift, in turn, implicates individuals as personally responsible for their low socio-economic state within the capitalist system (Schild, 2000).

Cuban Women

Since the early 1990s, there has been a sharp influx in literature on Caribbean women (Belen & Bose, 1993). Within this literature is a substantial amount of work on Cuban women. In this section, I will discuss Cuban women historically with respect to their participation in the Cuban revolution as well as Cuban women post-revolution. In some of my analyses, I will incorporate comparisons to other Caribbean or Latin American nations. For example, there are many projects that analyze the historical development of women's political participation in Belize (McLaurin, 1996), Chile (Franceschet, 2005; Richards, 2004; Dandavati, 1996; Cosgrove, 2010; Lavrin, 1995), Nicaragua (Disney, 2008; Kampwirth, 2004), Guatemala (Berger, 2006, Menjivar, 2011), Mexico (Hershfield, 2008; Kampwirth, 2004; Olcott, 2005, Lavrin, 1978; Couturier, 1978; Gallagher, 1978; Macias, 1978), Argentina (Cosgrove, 2010; Lavrin, 1996; Little, 1978), El Salvador (Cosgrove, 2010; Kampwirth, 2004), Venezuela (Diaz, 2004), Peru (Burkett, 1978), Brazil (Russell-Wood, 1978; Soeiro, 1978; Hechner, 1978), Colombia (Cherpak, 1978), and Uruguay (Lavrin, 1995). These works provide valuable insight into why the particular nuances of Cuban history result in a unique form of feminism. Again, this is not to say that these countries are directly parallel to Cuba in all, or many, political and domestic aspects. However, given some of the similarities across the region with respect to women's participation in revolutionary activities, these comparisons can add to the depth of our understanding of Cuban women. This use of comparison is not meant to reduce all Latin American and Caribbean feminist development to a singular process or ideological guidebook. Rather, these comparisons are meant to highlight and clarify some of the ways in which Cuban feminism and its influences interact in similarity and difference to other nations.

Women played a critical role in Cuba's revolution. As Disney (2008, p. 1) suggests, "The process of women's mobilization, participation, and organization in political activism represents a transformation in both the public and private sphere." Whereas before the revolution, women were confined to domestic roles and unable to enter the workforce, the Cuban revolution was not conducive to the maintenance of traditional gender roles. Indeed, unlike the American Revolution and American Civil War, Cuban women fought alongside men (Bushnell, 2010; Chase, 2010). Women's participation in guerilla warfare directly parallels the revolutions of El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Guatemala, Bolivia, and other countries across the region (Kampwirth, 2004; Chinchilla, 1993).

Several of the prominent female guerilla fighters include Haydee Santania, Celia Sanchez, and Vilma Espín, the late wife of Raul Castro (Gross & Bingham, 1986). These female guerilla fighters and others were involved in anti-Batista groups, functioned as quartermasters, and served as soldiers and colonels (Gross & Bingham, 1985; Gross & Bingham, 1986). Kampwirth (2004) goes as far to argue that this transition between the *soldadera* (soldier) tradition of female soldiers to women as full fledged members of militant groups led to the rise of Cuban feminism. Olcott (2005) argues that a similar process occurred with respect to Mexican feminism. This argument is further supported given the revolution's coining of the term "supermadre" (super mother) to recognize women who played a key role in the revolution (Gross & Bingham, 1986).

Following the revolution, many women returned to their domestic roles in Cuban households (Bushnell, 2011; Chase, 2010). However, as Lavrin (1993) suggests, many women who participated in the revolution became acutely aware of gender roles and male 'machismo' (Baron, 2010). This awareness led to the development of consciousness networks among women who sought legal reform and gender equity (Lavrin, 1993). The post-revolution period in Chile illuminates the complexity of women's entrance into the political sphere (Fraceschet, 2005). Fraceschet (2005) further articulates that a prominent argument to empower women politically was that women were needed to humanize politics. Yet, this argument, while it was effective in the cases of Chile and Cuba, reinforces the gender dichotomy and stereotyping of women as more emotional and sensitive to the needs of humanity (Fraceschet, 2005). This study will contribute to existing literature by expanding upon the friction between engaging Cuban women in the contemporary political sphere while attempting to avoid normative gender and sexuality discourse.

It is also important to note that during the post-revolutionary time up until the present, there has been an ongoing rift between radical Cuban feminist activists and women who simply wished to reenter the domestic sphere (Chaney, 1979; Khan, 2008). In particular, Haydee Santania has outlined the tension between Cuban women's ties to tradition and their desire to achieve gender equity (Gross & Bingham, 1986). This tension will be crucially important for this project given that it still very much permeates Cuban life. This debate will be a driving factor for the subsequent research questions.

Influences on Cuban Feminism

There exists literature as early as the 1970s, which attempts to categorize the various influences on Cuban feminism. Several pieces discuss the impact of the African diaspora and subsequent migrations (Cisneros, 2003; Armstead, 2007; Chaney, 1993). These works are critical given Cuban feminists' sharp ties to Afrikaan culture (Armstead, 2008). Moreover, these works construct the foundation for this paper's discussion on how contemporary Cuban feminism is engaged in a mutually influencing relationship with Afrikaan tradition today.

As previously alluded, there is much work on the transnational influence on Cuban feminism. Since the 1970s, social movements and policies from around the world actively shape and are shaped by each other (Berger, 2006; Thayer, 2010; Gottfried, 1996; Rodriguez, 2003). Additionally, Olmos (1993) and Bolles (1993) even suggest that there may be a difficult and tense relationship between international interventions, via NGOs, etc., and Caribbean nations that leaves Caribbean nations like Cuba to resent international assistance. This result may be due to a gap between international organization's expected goals and actual achievements with respect to issues like poverty and discrimination (Cosgrove, 2010). However, as many of the co-participants indicate in later chapters, reluctance to engage with international relief efforts can also be due to a resistance of materialism, modernity, and a belief that organizations are misguided or mal-intended.

As the following chapters will argue, Cuban feminism is a highly complex and theory-laden ideological foundation that is not only difficult to generalize but is also subjective to each Cuban feminist. The subsequent work in this thesis represents an

attempt to describe a collection of themes that comprise current discussions in Cuban feminism with particular attention to the ways in which these phenomena are *communicated*. Therefore, the next chapter will provide the rationale for employing feminist oral history to better understand and showcase the many ways that Cuban feminism is being discussed between women, in the women's organizations, between organizations, in Cuba, and in the larger international public sphere.

Chapter 3: Method of Inquiry

Before I knew it, I was mid-interview. Maria Julia was telling me how she and her family struggled to survive during the Revolución as her father gave their money away illegally to support the anti-Batista regime. I asked why her father would give their money away while they were starving. Maria Julia looked at me blankly and said, 'That's just what you do for freedom.' I felt like a sham. Freedom to me was the word that caused my oppression studies brain to reel with images of American patriotism and kitschy Fourth of July t-shirts. But, it felt so different when Maria Julia said it.

The goal of this project is to provide an account of contemporary Cuban feminist voices through the use and synthesis of interviews with Cuban feminists, archival documents, and extant literature. Though a better understanding⁴ of contemporary Cuban feminism theoretically and as applied through the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC or Federación), it becomes possible to elucidate the ways in which Cuban feminism's past and present inform the future domestic and transnational advocacy work. Moreover, this understanding may help further solidify the relationships that were previously built during transnational feminist collaboration during the 1990s. The primary texts for this research are Cuban feminist voices. Thus, for this project, I have chosen to employ a feminist oral history methodology. In this section, I begin with a discussion of my positionality as the researcher and co-participant as well as other ethical considerations

⁴ When I suggest that we should acquire of a better understanding of Cuban feminism, I am primarily referring to academics and the feminist community in the United States. However, this "we" could also refer to other academics or feminists in other parts of the world who do not have a first-hand perspective of Cuban feminism. In no way am I suggesting that Cuban feminists are unaware of or need my assistance in documenting their own epistemological and pragmatic work.

and potential limitations. My hope is that this centering of my identity as a co-participant will help partially inform the resultant chapters of this project as I have constructed and shaped them. I then designate my research approach, including key epistemological assumptions and goal outcomes of feminist oral history. Finally, I describe the research collaborators (co-participants) as well as the method for data collection, research procedures, and data analysis techniques.

My Positionality as Researcher

A primary ethical and research based concern for this project is centering my positionality as researcher from the outset of this project in the hopes that it will help frame this paper as my voice and my interpretation of the co-participants' words. While I am attempting to keep as much of the interview data intact without editing or modification, I am the ultimate arbitrator of this work. As such, it is necessary and important to identify and discuss my identity and privilege as it impacts this analysis. I am a white, non-native Spanish speaker from the United States. I come from a middle-class background, and I am in a graduate program. Hence, there is a substantial difference in privilege between myself and my co-participants for many reasons.

To prepare for this project, I needed to not only brush up on my Spanish and get all of my documentation in order, but I also needed to identify the ways in which my privilege inevitably challenges and interacts with my construction of this feminist oral history project. First and foremost, as an American, it is important that I was aware of my assumptions regarding U.S./Cuban relations, Cuban culture, Spanish speakers, etc. To help challenge these assumptions and deconstruct them, I took regular field notes on my trip and maintained a regular journal. Entries from this journal are now included as

autoethnographic compositions at the beginning of each chapter. These sections are meant to help frame each chapter from my headspace and the process that I encountered at each point during my trip. They align thematically with each chapter, and I hope that they provide insight into the ways that I challenged and struggled with my position of privilege during my trip. I have also included certain autoethnographic reflections when relevant throughout the chapters in order to provide similar perspective. Blaufuss (2007) specifically recommends treating fieldwork as a process that unfolds. This supports my inclusion of autoethnographic notes and process-specific details.

Clearly there is no way to deconstruct 100% of my privilege and access this project from the perspective of a native Cuban in a similar position as my co-participants. However, in addition to recognizing the limitations of my identity as a researcher, it is also important to recognize that there is a benefit to my identity. That is, since I am approaching this project from the goal of understanding the future of transnational feminist relationships particularly from an American perspective, it is helpful to be able to understand the challenges that Americans face and will continue to face when approaching any sort of transnational relationship with Cuban feminists. Moreover, I can also use my identity to recognize some of the ways that it was helpful for me to approach this project in order to provide recommendations in my concluding chapter for other American feminists.

A second ethical consideration is refraining from speaking for others. As Alcoff (1992) notes, “the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for” (no page). Indeed, given that the goal of this project

is to showcase and encourage Cuban feminists and their voices out of the periphery of U.S. academic discussions, the participants' identities and their words must be at the crux of this project. To attempt to avoid falling into the trap of speaking for or through Cuban feminists, I have included both the original Spanish narratives along with my English translations. Moreover, since the Spanish data is the closest representation of the participants' original voices, I have placed these block quotations before the English translation. Moreover, I have kept the narratives as true to the audio recordings as possible. The coded data has only been modified to account for English phrasing during the translation phase. Finally, I have included many larger block sections of collaborators' voices within my analyses. I have chosen to structure this project in this way to account for and appreciate Cuban women's stories while simultaneously recognizing my role in creating this work. Additionally, the use of longer block quotes helps provide a better sense of the ways in which the co-participants are creating and structuring their rhetoric through collective memory and the co-construction of knowledge (for example, in some quotations, participants will clarify with others regarding certain facts or memories).

Approach to Research

In this section, I provide a brief overview of my ontology with the goal of situating myself and my research goals from the outset. My approach to this research project best aligns with the nature of qualitative scholarship (Creswell, 2011). First, with respect to the data collected in interviews and other channels, I assume that reality is socially constructed and subjective. In contrast to many quantitative works, the goal of this project is not to establish causation or patterned relationships between variables.

Rather, I recognize that all of the influences impacting Cuban feminism are highly complex, mutually influencing, and citation inherent to Cuban women. Therefore, this project attempts to provide insight into the lived experiences and socialist alignment of Cuban women.

While this project issues a series of research questions through a specific theoretical lens and methodology, this thesis remains inductive in nature. This grounded theory project represents an open-ended exploration (Creswell, 2011) intended to construct a cogent account of Cuban feminist theory and praxis. My role as an invested researcher, then, is to engage in Cuban feminist texts in a holistic and pluralistic manner. As will become evident in the next section, the ideological alignment between the qualitative research practices that I outlined above and the feminist oral history practices (which are also acknowledging of subjectivity and the socially constructed nature of reality as well as encouraging of grounded theory practices) will provide a helpful framework for completing this project. Now that I have provided the basic assumptions surrounding this thesis project, I will now proceed to discuss my specific choice of methodology.

Oral History: Theory & Method

Feminist oral history represents an excellent methodology for documenting and showcasing the voices of Cuban women. Again, while this methodology inevitably involves my interpretation of Cuban women's perspectives, it is also an excellent method for conducting interviews that allow the co-participants the ability to co-construct knowledge with other participants, rely on collective memory, and engage in storytelling (Gluck, 2011). In this section, I chronicle the origins of oral history as a theoretical

approach and methodology, which is particularly important given that feminist oral history was developed as a means for self-empowerment and activism. I then illustrate the key components and ideological underpinnings of oral history methods and elucidate their appropriateness for this project. Following this section, I delineate essential facets of feminist oral history as they emanated out of the oral history tradition.

As many scholars note, the basic practices of oral history existed long before the method was used formally. As Sharpless (2008) indicates, the process of collecting information, stories, and folklore orally dates back to ancient Greece and earlier. This tradition of passing down knowledge orally transcended traditional historical documentation practices and permeated many cultures including African tribes (Sharpless, 2008). Given that writing and literacy were not widely attainable until relatively recently in humyn⁵ history, orally conferring myth, stories, and genealogy was the only method of preserving collective memory (Ong, 1967). Thus, unlike other scholarly methods—which posit their roots in academic settings, oral history methodologies predated, or at least concurrently emerged alongside the birth of academia itself. More importantly, the roots of this methodology as an empowering and equality oriented practice suggests that this methodology might enhance the ability to analyze the co-participants use of collective memory and storytelling as both a method and a way to connect historically to feminist predecessors.

⁵ I am using the spelling of humyn and womyn consistent with Tandon's (2008) rejection of the subcategorization of humyn/womyn under the masculine category.

The academic inception of oral history further demonstrates the inclusiveness and process-centered nature of oral history and, therefore, the method's inherent alignment with Cuban feminist's use of storytelling and collective memory as inclusive practices. At the outset, oral history practitioners fought an uphill battle to insert the method into academic conversations, including communication studies. The implication of the pragmatic instantiation of oral history is that the academic employment of the method encountered early resistance in contrast to the established scientific research practices, and the development of an academic 'camp' for oral historians did not surface until the 1930s (Sharpless, 2008). At the turn of the 20th century, several academics became interested in the potential for oral history to record the lives of everyday individuals (Dunaway, 1996).

In the 1930s, Allan Nevins of Columbia (Dunaway, 1996) and W.T. Couch of University of North Carolina Press (Sharpless, 2008) began to construct and implement a series of process-centered, interdisciplinary oral history conventions geared toward understanding non-traditional sources of historical knowledge (Dunaway, 1996). Simultaneously, the New Deal offered partial funding for oral history programs, such as the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), with the intent to document often ignored voices (Sharpless, 2008). The early partnerships between oral history practitioners and academic institutions or external organizations indicate that oral history quickly began to bridge the gap between theory and practice—a key theme of this research project given feminist oral history's ability to create safe, inclusive, and equal spaces for all persons to share regardless of privilege.

The second wave of oral history applications suggest that oral history is rooted within a discourse of empowerment and advocacy, which further denote the appropriateness of this method. In the 1960s, a second wave of oral historians began applying the method to empower disenfranchised populations (Dunaway, 1996; Sharpless, 2008). In particular, oral history offered a way for illiterate or overlooked populations to express their voices. For example, Alex Haley employed oral history to engage African American voices and the Doris Duke project interviewed Native Americans to buttress social change of the time period (Sharpless, 2008). Also during this time, other universities and organizations began to advance oral history methods in academic and pragmatic arenas (Sharpless, 2008). Following this resurgence, oral historians continued to blend oral history theory with postmodern philosophy and other critical scholarship. Since the 1970s, oral history has become a prominent, accessible method for documenting all voices and marginalized populations, in particular. As this section should evince, oral history offers a plentiful and ideologically-fitting opportunity to expound contemporary Cuban feminism.

Feminist Oral History

For this thesis project, I employ a feminist oral history methodology following the work of Gluck (2011). As Gluck (2011) notes, feminist oral history's triangulated approach enable me to combine the rich body of historical texts on Cuban feminism—the archives, interviews, protest art, music, etc., with a new set of interviews—one that would complement the existing collection. Feminist oral history offers just that—a method for piecing together the spoken accounts of womyn with supporting texts to augment androcentric histories. This section attempts to make clearer the origin of

feminist oral history and the ways in which it functions apart from traditional⁶ oral history methodologies.

Feminist oral history materialized during the push for more critical applications of oral history methods. In the 1970s, Sherna Berger Gluck and others crafted feminist oral history to challenge the patriarchal nature of dominant discourse through an intersectional lens (Gluck, 2011). While traditional American oral history was conceived solely to document biographies, historical events, and the like, feminist oral history was devised both to archive feminist activist efforts and to propound highly personal activism through interaction, sharing of experiences, and co-construction of reality and epistemology (Dunaway & Baum, 1996). Therefore, feminist oral history engages womyn and other marginalized feminist groups through a combination of interviews, uncovering rare or archival documents, conducting rhetorical analyses of texts in the public sphere, etc. Moreover, feminist oral history instantiated not just an extension of traditional oral history but also an accrediting of African custom. Gluck professes,

Women all over the country have been using oral history to explore this rhythm of women's lives. In doing so, we are harking back to an oral tradition much older than the developed by white male historians in the United States in the 1940s. We are part of the tradition in which the life and experiences of 'everywoman/man' was considered worthy of remembering and passing on to others because it was history. It was this tradition, brought from Africa, which

⁶ Here and elsewhere in this thesis, I use the term 'traditional' in reference to oral history to mean the field of American oral history that developed during the 1930s and 1940s out of the history discipline. As this thesis will note, oral history as a practice has existed for thousands of years in many different cultures (Lanman & Wendling, 2006).

black historians tapped in the 1920s when they started to record the stories of former slaves. It was this same tradition which both inspired Alex Haley to trace his roots and helped him to reconstruct the kidnap of his ancestors from West Africa. (Gluck, 1977, p. 3)

From the outset, feminist oral history aligns itself with a heritage proceeding from collective memory, empowerment, and restoration (Dunaway & Baum, 1996, p. 23). This lineage coupled with the assumption that oral history represents a form of activism—in the sense that it empowers the speaker and carries rhetorical weight (Dunaway & Baum, 1996; Sharpless, 2008)—signify key distinctions between traditional oral history and a feminist oral history lens. Consequently, feminist oral history focuses on the ways in which womyn communicate about particular events or people through personal and collective memories.

The divergence between feminist oral history and traditional oral history practices are not to suggest that feminist oral history and its habitués operate in stark contrast to each other; as referenced above, the academic oral history conventions from the 1930s were compounded to validate non-traditional knowledge sources. Consequently, there exist numerous similarities between traditional oral history and feminist oral history in theory and practice, which will be discussed further in the next section of this chapter. Yet, as Abrams (2010) expounds, a rift between historians and feminist historians during the 1970s did result in feminist oral historians' adoption of clear and distinct analytical, social justice-oriented practices geared toward recovering lost or marginalized voices.

Several examples of feminist oral history work from the 1970s to the present substantiate the inception, evolution, and contemporary status of feminist oral history. First, Gluck's seminal work (1977) on feminist oral history, which asks, "What's so special about women?", describes the then-current state of oral history as it largely ignored womyn and establishes the fundamental questions that feminist oral history seeks to address. Gluck in 1979 and in 1983 with Scharf and Jensen begins to apply this lens to womyn's groups, such as womyn in labor and the socialist feminists, respectively. Gluck also publishes *Women's Words* (1991), a monograph that elaborates on feminist oral history theory and academic methods. During the second large wave of feminist oral history scholarship, Sangster (1994) reflects on feminist oral history in a special edition of *Women's History Review*. The article examines the sub-discipline's progress as well as sundry ethical debates pertaining to the role of the researcher, the intersectional nature of feminist oral history methods, and the use of womyn's lives as research (Sangster, 1994).

Lastly, contemporary scholarship, such as Abrams' (2010) book proffers a series of interpretative feminist history models for academics and laypersons, while simultaneously extending feminist oral history theory to account for oral history as performance vis-à-vis the work of Della Pollock. Other contemporary work further tests the boundaries between academia and the public sphere, specifically with respect to Cuban feminism. For example, Florida International University in conjunction with the Cuban Research Institute maintains a special collection containing interviews and first-edition texts of prominent Cuban womyn ("FIU Special Collections," 2015). From this brief chronology, it becomes clear that feminist oral history has maintained a

consistently self-reflexive understanding of the nature of feminist ideology and the way that feminists communicate about said ideology.

Feminist Oral History Explained

Whereas the history of feminist oral history is central in framing the reader's understanding of the applicability of the method to a project on Cuban feminism, this section confers an established set of feminist oral history practices and defines the methodology for the scope of this project. The objective of this section is not to parley for an overarching methodological standard; rather, these demarcated criteria typify the general ontology of this project. Hence, I have purposefully chosen tenets of feminist oral history that best align with the goals of this research project. This active process of selecting particular facets employs the overall adaptability of feminist oral history (Abrams, 2010; Gluck, 2011).

Gluck (2011) provides a model for feminist oral history interviews of radical social movements—one that remains an activist enterprise that has the power to “advance knowledge, empower people, and attribute to social change” (Armitage & Gluck, 1998). Oral history interviews do not just provide womyn the space to share experiences and chronicle important events; the interviewer is also participating in womyn's identity construction through their co-creation of knowledge through questions, follow up responses, etc. (McClaurin, 1996). Oral historians, therefore, should be critical of the stories presented and aware of the complex relationship between the narrator and the listener that is “bound by insiderness and commonalities” (Armitage & Gluck, 1998). Thus, for Gluck and others, feminist oral history offers a collaborative, dynamic, empowering, and applied method (McMahan, 1989; Gluck, 1996; Dunaway,

1996) for documenting and accounting for subjective ‘non-truths,’ shared experiences, and embodiment/performance (Abrams, 2010; Janesick, 2010; Davis, Back, & MacLean, 1977). Feminist oral history accomplishes this in a way that is social-justice oriented with the goal of recovering the past and preserving collective memory (McMahan, 1989; Thompson, 2000; Gluck, 1996; Dunaway & Baum, 1996, Davis, Back, & MacLean, 1977; Ritchie, 2003; Janesick, 2010).

Given Gluck’s model, this project is a combination of interviews with Cuban womyn, archival research, and autoethnographic accounts. As the Appendix illustrates, these interviews inquire into the lives of the Cuban womyn as individuals—including their experiences with education and society and their collective memories of the Cuban Revolution and the FMC’s role in liberating womyn. The archival research provides an interesting comparison point by cross-checking the way in which the collaborators communicate about the collective memory of Cuban womyn. Finally, the autoethnographic accounts offer a way for the reader and myself to understand how I perceive and interpret the womyn’s communication.

This approach is ideal for understanding and analyzing the role of tradition and history as it pertains to Cuban feminism. First, as is evident throughout this paper, feminist oral history is in line with the intersectional and resistant nature of Cuban feminism. Moreover, given the complexity and tension—as illustrated by the conflicting accounts above—between U.S. feminists and Cuban feminists, such a project must attempt to avoid the pitfall of merely *speaking for* (Alcoff, 1992) Cuban womyn or dictating the direction of Cuban feminism under the guise of empowerment. Feminist oral history allows the researcher to avoid this critique in some ways since it removes

the focus from the interviewer and places it directly on the respondent (Armitage & Gluck, 2011). However, in the sense that the interviewer is processing and interpreting the participants' voices, there is no way to eliminate all forms of interviewer intervention 100%. This feature is critical given that every woman is a potential authority on culture and the unique problems womyn face McLaurin (1996). Although it could be argued that the act of the researcher placing focus on the respondent is still a hegemonic conveyance of power, this is a challenge that any oral history interview faces (Armitage & Gluck, 1998) that may be solved given the back and forth transfer of power that naturally occurs throughout dialogue. Moreover, while the final word and interpretation goes to the interviewer, I have agreed to send all copies to the participants for feedback before publication.

Additionally, feminist oral history is appropriate for this communication project since it enables the interviewee to challenge historical implications and reconstruct her past through rhetoric (Gluck, 1977). Gluck (1977) argues that this is crucially important given that many of the traditions brought from Africa during the diaspora have been interpreted and re-interpreted throughout time. Allowing the interviewee to redefine her relationship to this history validates the experiences of the "everywoman" (Gluck, 1999; Gluck, 1983). This validation may be a primary benefit of this project given the lack of validation sometimes experienced by marginalized womyn of color (hooks, 1981).

Participants

As feminist oral history underscores the value of interviewees as co-participants or collaborators, the acquisition of partners in the research process is indispensable. To assess the status of contemporary Cuban feminism holistically, it is necessary to interact with individuals from a range of demographics and experiences. Hence, this project requires interviews of Cubans engaged in a wide array of activism in various regions of Cuba. To gain participants from a wide variety of experiences, I interviewed women of multiple age groups, multiple sexual orientations, various work and educational training, several ethnic backgrounds, etc. Further, these women hailed from many different parts of Cuba. I selected these women for participation in this research after I established contact in my casa particular. In order to gain trust of the community, I needed to approach potential participants through others. Once I formed relationships with Marisela and Mirurgia, I was able to quickly form relationships with other members of the FMC. In total, I interviewed seven women affiliated with the FMC. I have included brief descriptions of each woman, including her work, educational background, family life, etc. to introduce them to you as the reader:

Claudia: 20 years old. Born in Havana. Finished college recently. Works at a blood bank. Has not left the country. Current secretary of the FMC (joined at 15). One of the younger active members of the federation. Co-interviewed with Mirurgia.

Libertad: 72 years old. Daughter of a baker and a housewife. Wanted to attend university; however, it was closed due to the takeover of the Batista regime. Following the revolución, graduated from college with a degree in economics.

From a young age, joined the work of the revolution. Worked 39 years in the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Traveled to Europe and many countries. In the last years of work, helped with a Cuban-Swiss joint venture—Nestle. Retired in 2010. Active member and former leader of the local FMC.

Lydia: 68 years old. Retired primary school teacher. Her family was involved in many revolutionary activities. Many of them fought during the July 26 battle. Co-interviewed with Josefina.

Josefina: 70 years old. Retired. Worked for the Ministry of International Relations. Her family also fought during the Revolución. Co-interviewed with Lydia.

Maria Julia: 65 years old. Born to a laborer and a housewife. Mechanical engineer. Works at the Center of Medical Sciences and also runs an extension project with the university dedicated to caring for the elderly. Recalls many experiences of the Batista regime. Feels obligated to talk about the social issues before and after the revolución because of her experiences. Member of the FMC.

Marisela: 53 years old. Born in Havana. Lives with her sister and mother. Studied history at the University of Havana. Worked for 10 years as a professor of history. Possesses a very thorough knowledge of womyn during the revolución. Now owns her own business in rental housing with several employees. Member of the FMC.

Mirurgia: 53 years old. Lives with her husband, son, and mother. Works for Marisela in a casa particular. Knows a lot about womyn's rights over time.

Member of the FMC. Became a close friend during my time in Cuba. Co-interviewed with Claudia.

It is very important to note that each of these womyn consented, and in some cases requested, to have their names published with their remarks. The inclusion of womyn's names is both consistent with my Institutional Review Board (IRB) documentation and other interviews of Cuban feminists (Armstead, 2007, 2008). While special permission was required from the university's IRB the inclusion of the collaborators' names is an integral step in the advocacy and self-empowerment process since identity exploration and collective memory recovery are two of the benefits of oral history and Cuban feminist rhetoric. However, these benefits are further outlined in the chapter on contemporary Cuban feminism.

Due to the above-referenced fears of international mistrust, I felt an omnipresent cautious undertone throughout my stay in Cuba. To offset the potential for disingenuous data and, more importantly, to foster stronger relationships with the womyn I met, I found collaborators through snowball sampling techniques. By chance and friendly conversation, my two main gatekeepers were Marisela, the proprietor of the casa particular in which I was staying, and Mirurgia, one of Marisela's employees. After I established relationships and trust that I was not an American spy or agitator—which, was easy to do given my terrible vocabulary and pronunciation, I was quickly able to meet other members of the Federación and the neighborhood. I visited their houses, toured their neighborhoods and schools, and ate their food, which was difficult being that I was a vegetarian at the time. I also visited the local Federación building that housed technical, fitness, and work-related classes for the locality.

What struck me as most different between the womyn in Cuba and womyn in the United States is how they use their free time. While television is still widely enjoyed in Havana, I found that many womyn, especially jubiladas (retired womyn), regularly take visitors or simply sit on their balconies and enjoy the ocean breeze. The old adage “Life is much slower” used to describe the American south reminds me of life in Cuba. In Havana, visiting one’s neighbors does not appear to require the same preparation that it does for American hosts or guests; rather, neighbors frequently stop by to chat, share news, or pass the day in quiet company. Although it was likely normal for them, I felt honored to become a part of their daily communal gatherings. Not only did I learn by watching their interactions, but I also came to learn much more about myself in the process.

A further distinction between American and Cuban womyn⁷ is their relationship with material goods. As I explain further in subsequent chapters, Cuban womyn do not tend to lean heavily on commercialization and products. While the womyn I met still wear makeup and do their hair, they are not possessed by the same attachment to clothing or fashion trends. A likely explanation for these detached feelings toward material goods is the overarching Cuban ideological distancing from capitalism. However, this connection will be further discussed in subsequent chapters. As a result (in tandem with the economic challenges faced by many Cubans), earned income is directly allocated to

⁷ As will become evident throughout this paper, these observations were from my experience in Cuba. Therefore, they are not meant to be completely generalizable to all of Cuba. Rather, they are included to paint a picture of how this experience impacted the interviews and subsequent analyses.

basic needs and spending on aesthetic interested is generally shirked (unless the product is necessary).

This mentality challenged my deep-seated orientation toward self-care—the notion that you should splurge and *buy* that special shampoo, manicure, or dress to make yourself *feel* empowered and feminine. Therefore, I was completely taken aback when I went to a shopping mall (or, a grouping of stores conveniently attached to a tourist hotel) with Mirurgia and she did not want to buy a new pair of embellished pink sandals despite that she was previously mentioning how much her feet and back hurt. She told me that the shoes were priced in Cuban convertible pesos (CUC) instead of Cuban pesos⁸, subsequently costing over one month of her pay. I purchased the shoes for her, and as she fawned over my generosity, I couldn't help but simultaneously feel that this was the best money I had ever spent and that I seriously needed to review my approach to consumption. As I conclude in the final chapter of this thesis, the Cuban womyn I met on my journey possess such unique outlooks on life that inspire others with different cultural assumptions to rethink their own ideologies.

⁸ In Cuba, there are two kinds of currency: the CUC and the Cuban peso. The exchange rate during my trip was \$1 U.S. dollar for every CUC and 24 Cuban pesos. Most Cubans, who live in what Americans would refer to as “impoverished” conditions, earn and spend Cuban pesos or “street money”. Therefore, they shop at specific grocery and shopping outlets that sell in Cuban pesos to make it easier to live. In contrast, tourists and wealthier Cubans shop in CUC. Oftentimes, prices are not fixed and if someone appears to be a tourist, the price in pesos transforms into the price in CUC. However, even food and luxury items at CUC rates are far cheaper than one would generally find in the United States. For example, I purchased a hop-on/hop-off bus tour that lasted an entire day for only \$5 CUC. Meals were also regularly \$5 CUC and under in non-tourist locations.

Data Collection Tools

The role of personal interviews in feminist oral history is invaluable for the research, the researcher, and—one hopes—the collaborator. For this project, I interviewed womyn in their houses, on their balconies, at the casa particular, outside of the Federación building, etc. For some of the activists with scheduling conflicts (some were out of the country at the time of my visit), I corresponded with them extensively and interviewed them online. This section will outline my two semi-structured protocols as well as other data collection information.

Obviously, there are no previously utilized protocols available that match the research goals for this project. Indeed, since much of the work is autoethnographic in nature, I created a series of questions that would allow me to not only define a stable understanding of Cuban feminism today, but that would also enable me to understand how Cuban feminism functions now and how it might function in the future. As mentioned above, the use of triangulation and autoethnography is not meant to completely wash away my privilege, etc. Rather, it is meant to supplement the interview data and to provide a more comprehensive perspective of Cuban womyn's understanding of Cuban feminism as well as my own. However, the works of others, such as Perkins (2000) and Armstead (2007; 2008), were helpful in assessing the types of questions that had already been asked for other research goals and how these queries have contributed to an academic understanding of Cuban feminism. This project required questions that sought to forge new relationships with Cuban womyn by valuing their personal histories and the way in which they express them.

For the members of the FMC, I catered my protocol to focus on their day-to-day lives, how they interpret gender at home and in the workplace, whether they have experienced sexism at home or at work, what work they do with the Federación, etc. The protocol for FMC members also inquires into their personal experience with and knowledge of the Revolución. Essentially, this protocol investigates how Cuban feminism is enacted on domestic and workplace levels outside of the radical activist arena. The application of this protocol is integral in considering how Cuban feminism permeates and influences the lives of typical Cuban womyn. Moreover, this protocol is designed to explore how the intersectional nature of the Revolución has shaped normative assumptions regarding the role of Cuban womyn in society. A full copy of this protocol can be found in Appendix 1.

Since the protocol is designed for semi-structured interviews, follow-up questions and clarifications were essential to capturing the full meaning and story behind a co-participants' words. During the interviews, follow up questions were highly personalized and employed to create a sense of mutual engagement among participants and also to accent the nuances of each participant's unique lens and history. Further, as the Cuban womyn I met were so generous and affable, many of the interviews transmuted into conversations—about me, about how I liked Cuba, about their desire to travel to the States, etc. So, while the questions in the protocol took roughly 30-45 minutes to complete, many interviews with these conversations extended past the protocol and included key pieces of data. Most importantly, I think the structure of the protocol abetted the formation of relationships with the womyn in productive ways. Since I was not bound to a fixed protocol, I was able to interact with them and respond to their particular needs

as interviewees. I was also able to venture off topic in areas that resulted in additional data.

Because feminist oral history aims to encompass a holistic reading of a given text, then inclusion of other sources of knowledge beyond interview participants is widely endorsed (Gluck, 1996; Gluck, 1998; Abrams, 2010; Dunaway & Baum, 1996). This project also includes autoethnographic analysis and archival data to supplement activist and/or⁹FMC member interviews. In order to conduct autoethnography, I collected comprehensive field notes and completed journal entries from the time I left Harrisonburg, Virginia to the time I arrived home. These notes included a detailed ledger of my schedule, my reception to the environment, challenges I faced, my personal emotions, relationships I had formed, information about the area and the people, and any other relevant information. As evident from the chapter beginnings, I am framing this thesis firmly from my perspective. The autoethnographic lens allows me to situate myself as the mediator of all data—with my perspective and biases noted—while concurrently centering the participants' voices as the primary texts worth studying. Further, autoethnography also permits myself and readers to challenge our normative epistemologies and behaviors, including ethnocentric perspectives. It is my hope that the inclusion of my process will encourage others to value the numerous benefits offered by transnational relationships with Cuban feminists.

⁹ Here, I use the phrase and/or to suggest that not all of the co-participants identified as activists per se. Several of the participants held the view that activists participated in more radical forms of activism outside of their participation in the FMC.

Concerning the archival data, I received a research grant from the Organization for Research on Women and Communication (ORWAC) to visit the special collections at Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, Florida. These archives contain rare texts on Cuban history, government, womyn, etc, many of which are referenced throughout this thesis. The special collection also holds a series of oral history videos of Cubans who experienced the Revolución. In the course of my visit to the archives, I spent several days collecting rich descriptions and novel perspectives that are not widely available in other university collections and databases. In addition to the resources I gathered, I was also able to explore the vast Cuban community in Miami; this visit also provided a new outlook on the lives of Cubans who immigrated to America following the Revolución.

Procedures

Before this project could advance past a mere idea, I needed to secure both funding and governmental permission to travel to Cuba. Fortunately, through our Office of International Programs, Provost for Research & Development, Dean for the College of Arts & Letters, and Department of Communication Studies, I was awarded full funding for travel, lodging, food, and miscellaneous expenses. While I am very grateful to have garnered the resources to complete my project, this process has raised questions in my mind regarding the challenges that American scholars of Cuban feminism face in their quests to engage in transnational feminist collaboration. Certainly, my funding process highlights the need for external grant opportunities for research on Cuba if American scholars are to continue academic research, such as a follow up to the 1996 conference between U.S. and Cuban feminists. This challenge as it compares to other transnational feminist collaboration challenges will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

In terms of governmental permission, the U.S. Department of Treasury (USDT) indicated to me that a person may travel to Cuba for the completion of a university sanctioned course. The USDT further regulates that a student need not apply for an individual visa for Cuba travel. However, once I attempted to book my flight through a Cuban travel agency—which, is easiest when finding and booking flights to Havana, I was unable to book passage without official documentation from the government. So, I formally applied through the USDT to travel to Cuba. Four months later, I was told that I did not need formal approval; this documented response was sufficient for the travel agency and my plans were finalized.

I arrived in Cuba in early August, 2014. I chose to stay in a more authentic casa particular, Casa Marisela de Colores, which is similar to an American bed & breakfast. Throughout my nine days in Havana, many tourists and backpackers from Latin America and Europe were hosted at this casa. The place itself was a third floor walkup apartment-style residence with five distinct bedrooms (rojo, azul, verde, amarillo, y naranja), a full kitchen and dining area, and a large living room. In the afternoons and at night to avoid the oppressive heat, we would congregate in the living room around two small fans and a television to watch telenovelas, music videos, and American shows dubbed in Spanish. For the first few days until I mustered the confidence to speak Spanish, I carried with me a notepad or my non-functioning phone to scribe out messages to Marisela, Mirurgia, and Jorge (one of Marisela's other employees).

In the mornings and some afternoons, I would venture out with Mirurgia to conduct interviews. Sometimes, I would have no idea who we were going to meet until we showed up on their door. At many points, I felt like a little duckling being ferried around by my Cuban mama duck¹⁰. In addition to making sure I was eating right, getting the best Cuban experience, etc., Mirurgia also greatly assisted with locating potential collaborators. Once a co-participant agreed to be interviewed, I translated my IRB documents into Spanish. All participants were willing to be audio recorded, and many requested that the final project be sent to them.

With respect to the progression of interviews, I allocated the first third of each interview to learning about the participants—their background, their education, their work experience, their family, and their connection to the revolution. This section of each interview was meant not only to establish trust between myself and the co-participants, but also to document and weave together the personal histories with collective memory and archival texts. I next proceeded to ask the discussants about Cuban womyn more generally in terms of the history of Cuban womyn, the role of womyn from the Batista regime to the present, and the relationship between the government and the FMC. Here, the womyn provided overall descriptions as well as local examples to substantiate claims. However, I noticed a general reluctance to engage questions regarding challenges Cuban

¹⁰ In many ways, this experience was liberating because it required me to ‘go with the flow.’ As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that I cannot and do not want to control for confounding variables and the like. However, in a country where the language is not native to me, there were many occasions when, due to a more limited vocabulary, I found myself acquiescing to any opportunity to go out or try a new activity. While the language barrier (in terms of my not knowing certain lesser used or regional vocabulary words) was somewhat anxiety producing, the ability to put unyielding faith in my friend, Mirurgia, felt different, yet safe. I genuinely felt like a member of her family.

womyn face when working with the government. As discussed previously, the incumbent fear of American usurpers and spies could have precluded full disclosure; however, the responses—which were overwhelmingly in favor of Fidel and Raul—could represent a genuine embrace of the liberatory aspects of the regime and a forgiveness of its limitations. Finally, I inquired into the future for Cuban womyn. This section included a discussion of transnationalism and, specifically, how lifting the Bloqueo¹¹ could impact Cuban womyn.

One particular area of focus for these interviews is the practice of communal interviewing. When I arrived to conduct my first few interviews, I went into the setting assuming that I would conduct interviews individually. Contradictorily in the immediacy of the moment, I began the interviews only to notice both participants contributing together, bouncing ideas off one another, clarifying dates, and so on. Given that my IRB accounted for conducting collaborative interviews, I left it to the participants to decide whether the interviews would be collaborative. Out of every setting in which I had more than one person to interview, all decided to interview together. Given my analysis in Chapter 4, I found that communal interviews corroborated Cuban feminists' trust in the co-creation of knowledge and collective memory.

A second important facet of these collected interviews is the acquisition of oral history records through the audio tapes. One of the integral components of this project from the outset was to garner IRB approval to both audio and video record each interview. The purpose of this inclusion is twofold. First, the audio tapes provide a basis

¹¹ The Embargo

for current and future analysis of Cuban feminism of this time period. Second, the tapes provide a permanent oral history record that could be publically available at a later date. The latter use is of primary importance to feminist oral history methodologies since one of the primary goals is public dissemination and consciousness-raising.

Data Analysis

Upon my collection of interview and archival data, I first listened to all of the tapes in their original, unfiltered format several times. I took notes on areas of heightened emotional response, repetition, points of confusion, and any other points of interest uniquely offered by the audio tapes. I then proceeded to the transcription and translation phase of the data. Throughout this process, I formatted the transcribed documents as true to the speakers' style as possible. I did clean up the transcriptions for vocal fillers that were unrelated to the overall message. During the translation step, I translated the transcripts in order to ensure that I could fully comprehend the data¹² during coding and provide non-Spanish speaking readers with a way to understand the Cuban womyn's voices.

Following this process, I began coding the interviews. I coded each interview separately. I first coded the content using a line-by-line method of coding that yielded around 1,500 unique messages. From these messages, I examined each interview independently for emergent themes. These themes were then condensed to around 30 repeated or stressed themes within each interview. Finally, each list of themes was further abbreviated to a set of unique core themes. From this work, I was able to compare and

¹² Again, I refer to my desire to make sure that I understood and contextualized lesser used and regional vocabulary.

contrast each interview on the unique core theme level and the repeated/stressed themes. This comparative analysis suggested that collaborators highlighted the nature of contemporary Cuban feminism, the influences affecting contemporary Cuban feminism, and the prospects for Cuban feminism in the future. Therefore, I organized this work into these three main chapters so to highlight the main content areas of the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Since participants' names are published in this study, potential ethical questions arise concerning confidentiality and the ability to link participants with potentially negative data. While I do not think that any interview data is particularly damning in any way, it is still important to consider the implications of participant-linked data for this and other studies. For this project, participants requested to or approved of publishing their names. As Armstead (2006; 2007) notes, a valuable feature of Cuban feminist activism is identity presentation and, oftentimes, public acknowledgement of perspectives. For example, *Las Krudas* publish their names with all of their narratives (Armstead, 2006, 2007). Therefore, since personal acknowledgement appears to be a key element in activism, one could consider the publication of co-participants' names as an ethical obligation. Further, since my ideological approach toward research assumes the collaborative and co-constructive nature of research, there also seems to be an ethical obligation to acknowledge research partners.

Credibility

As mentioned throughout this section, participant credibility and honesty are two concerns when applying any oral history methods. However, as Abrams (2010) and Dunaway & Baum (1996) suggest, the subjective nature of feminist oral history methods

account for the multiple types of ‘truths’ and knowledge. With respect to the question of whether participants would be intentionally misleading, I approach this research with the assumption that the Cuban womyn—who I now call my friends—are providing honest and true accounts of their lived experiences. As aforementioned, the fear of repercussions for expressing divergent opinions is an initial concern. However, the complexity and often differing perspectives offered by the Cuban womyn suggest that the participants’ accounts are demonstrative of their actual opinions. Further, in certain places of this analysis, I have noted where collaborators’ perspectives diverge with commonly held American or Cuban assumptions regarding Cuba and/or Cuban feminism. Moreover, the archival research conducted at FIU combined with my experiences in Cuba offers a triangulation strategy to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these accounts from the Cuban womyn are not meant to represent a concrete and fixed understanding of Cuban feminism that applies to all Cubans. Rather, this data is meant to provide subjective accounts that offer a new lens to American feminists in the hopes of promoting increased transnational collaboration.

Limitations & Research Bias

As with any research project, there exist inherent limitations to applying a specific methodological approach. Given the importance of relationships in the interview process—and, subsequently, the importance of interviews on oral history projects—getting to know the area, meeting gatekeepers, and conducting interviews in nine days is quite a lofty goal. While the relationships I was able to form were fulfilling both personally and for this project, the original timeline of one month in Cuba would have been much better suited to gaining a broader scope of contemporary Cuban feminism.

Even still, the amount of interviews I was able to acquire offers a comprehensive and appropriate survey for a master's thesis.

A second potential limitation for this work pertains to the inability to ensure honesty from all participants. When attempting to employ feminist oral history to describe the status of contemporary Cuban feminism holistically, it is essential to capture a genuine and complete account. However, as mentioned above, this method assumes the subjectivity and complexity of truth claims. Moreover, this analysis recognizes and attempts to better understand the positionality of all collaborators. Therefore, my analysis attempts to highlight points of divergence and contrast in order to further note the complexities of contemporary Cuban feminism.

Chapter 4: A Glimpse into Contemporary Cuban Feminism

Tears gathered in the eyes of the womyn as they offered their wealth of experience, extolling Castro's liberation and dedication to all people of Cuba. These womyn of Cuba were not the scary "communist-socialist" other that American media outlets had constructed—they were genuine and complex, and they welcomed me into their family as one of their own.

According to Marisela, the feminist presence in Cuba, "is not exactly feminist." Indeed, Marisela suggests that the Federation of Cuban Women is a type of feminism, yet it is not exactly feminist. When I pressed Marisela on what she meant by this statement, she suggested that feminism in Cuba does not have the same negative rhetorical weight that the term 'feminism' in the United States connotes. In contrast, the womyn's organization appears to have a much more prominent, visible, and widely supported feminist orientation. Marisela suggests that the womyn's participation in the Revolución combined with the previous womyn's liberation movement in Cuba's history are responsible for the current cultural perceptions of Cuban feminism. This chapter will examine the ways in which Cuban feminism exists in the status quo and how womyn talk about their current forms of feminism. These analyses in tandem will, I hope, facilitate a well-rounded perspective on how Cuban feminist rhetoric, Cuban feminism, and the socialist state exist in a constantly changing symbiotic and sometimes tense relationship.

This chapter attempts to provide insight into the collaborators' accounts of contemporary Cuban feminism as it is enacted through the Federación (FMC). To provide the clearest perspective, I will focus on several prominent themes that emerged in my discussions with the FMC members. I will begin by describing the current work of the Federación. I will then examine the transformation of the role of womyn in Cuban society and the necessary adaptations of the Federación. Finally, I will articulate the ways in which the Federación is supported by and interacts with the Cuban government. I am hoping that this section will help explicate how the changing political landscape—particularly the transition of power from Fidel to Raul Castro—is or is not affecting the work of the FMC.

The Federación: What is it good for? Absolutely everything

The services provided by the Federación are invaluable to the Cuban communities. Marisela notes, however, that it is important to recognize that the FMC is the only organization for womyn in Cuba. There is little to no NGO presence in the country and, hence, the FMC is sponsored, managed, and encouraged by the Cuban government. Given that the FMC is the sole resource for womyn exclusively, the Federación offers a wide range of services, activities, and opportunities for engagement. Lydia and Josefina both described a wide range of athletic and health-related activities meant to help jubiladas stay active during their retirement. Marisela spoke about the daycare program to help young mothers go back to school or work. Libertad and Claudia both discuss the regular meeting process, which offers womyn the opportunity to voice concerns and problems, give and receive guidance, and demonstrate solidarity with other womyn. Claudia, Maria Julia, and Libertad all noted the educational programs to help all

womyn—young and older—enhance their skill sets for the workplace. These programs offer courses that teach trade work and technological skills in order to encourage womyn into all facets of the workplace. Finally, Claudia mentioned the philanthropy events that allow womyn the opportunity to help other womyn—by harvesting crops, cleaning the neighborhoods, etc.

This vast array of FMC operations not only allude to the work required to facilitate such a diverse range of activities, but it also hints at the dedication of Cuban womyn to each other and community. As one would expect in any collectivist-leaning culture, this sense of community extended throughout my interviews with each of the womyn. For example, Libertad describes her connection and dedication to the Cuban feminist community¹³:

Yo soy fundadora de la Federación. Lo que pasa es que la Federación tuvo distintas etapas. Primero estaba en los centros de trabajo nada más. Y yo estaba en el centro de trabajo... Ahí mi trabajo en la Federación disminuyó porque yo trabajaba mucho. Pero cuando yo me jubilé, yo siempre decía que cuando yo me

¹³ I have chosen to include all block quotations from the co-participants in English and Spanish. I think this is the best way to transparently represent the collaboration that took place both during the interviews and through the translation process. All translations included in this thesis project are my own, and I have done my best to represent each collaborator's individual voice and speaking style. Therefore, I made only minor revisions and removed non-essential repetitions. However, sentence structure including the use of run-on sentences for effect remain intact. It is also important to note that I have purposefully included larger block quotations in these chapters in order to best showcase and preserve the collaborator's own voices. The focus on Cuban women's voices is of primary concern given that the purpose of this project is to document and preserve first-hand Cuban women's accounts of Cuban feminism. This use of larger quotes is consistent with the feminist oral history methods outlined in Chapter 3.

retirara, me jubilara, yo me iba a incorporar de nuevo al trabajo de la Federación. Siempre me gustó mucho el trabajo de la Federación.

I am a founder of the Federation. What happens is that the Federation had different stages. It was first about workplaces and nothing more.. And I was in the workplace...My work in the Federation declined because I worked hard. But when I retired, I always said that when I retired, I retired, I was going to add back to the work of the Federation. I always liked the work of the Federation.

Libertad gave back to the Federación by becoming an FMC organizer (one step below the president role). As she handed me a vintage looking photograph of Vilma Espín, one of the Cuban feminist revolutionaries, Libertad reminisced over her gratitude toward the womyn of the Revolución. Although Libertad herself was active during the Revolución, her eyes sparkled with appreciation as she talked about Vilma's vital role in founding the FMC. Libertad's words about Vilma combined with her articulation of her need to give back to the Federación suggests a deep privileging and genuine gratefulness of the hard work of Cuban womyn in the past. Libertad's expression and emotional response, which was very similar to Josefina and Lydia's words on Fidel's liberation of Cuba, demonstrates a connection to history that informs the contemporary community in a unique way. When I think of the way that second and third-wave feminists in the United States often reject and distance themselves from first-wave feminists, I am reminded of the fragmentation that occurs within American feminist groups. In contrast, Cuban womyn's collective indebtedness to the revolutionaries continues to bind Cuban womyn in a constructive and seemingly indestructible way.

While describing the work of the FMC, all of the womyn interviewed expressed their ability to voice concerns with other womyn, which suggests that the FMC is purposefully situated within and continuously self-regulating a locus of solidarity. This commitment to community is no surprise given the willingness and, indeed, organic development of the Cuban womyn's collaborative interviewing. When I arrived in Cuba, I intended to let interviews develop naturally; however, I did not expect that the womyn I interviewed would assume a process of communal interviewing. As noted in the Literature Review, the core themes of group knowledge production and collective memory are often appreciated in many Black feminist writings as central to an intersectional feminist identity (hooks, 1985; Collins, 1990). Most interestingly, I found myself welcomed into this community when all of the participants invited me to the 55th Anniversary celebration of the FMC. While I was unable to attend because of my previously scheduled return flight, I felt so honored to be welcome at such an event. Their invitations inspired a sense of belonging in me that made me feel as if I understood a small part of the community as an insider.

This feeling of insiderness contrasted with my very much outsider positionality complicated my understanding of the Cuban feminist community because it rendered my privilege both a priority and irrelevant, my experiences both valuable and unimportant, and my identity both so similar and so divergent. Essentially, the way that the womyn described and invited me into their community not only elucidated a new understanding of the current work of the Federación, but it also espoused within me a self-reflexivity that accessed a form of knowledge production that I have never experienced before. This

internal process, I argue, resembles a small facet of the way in which communal knowledge production and collective memory function within Cuban feminism today.

Another implicit feature of the Cuban womyn's descriptions of the current FMC work complicates the way that collective memory influences Cuban feminism. The socio-political landscape in Cuba is continuously evolving; while there is no discrete set of turning points for the FMC, all of the participants noted the increased presence of a new generation of Cuban womyn with no first-hand experience of the Cuban revolution and reconstruction period. Mirurgia and Claudia note that before the *Revolución*, resources and opportunities for womyn were very limited—womyn were not allowed to hold public office, maintain independence, or work outside the home. Maria Julia recalls many Cuban families, including her own, resorting to clandestine jobs in order to survive and protest the Batista regime. However, as Claudia notes, the newer generations are not as personally connected to the revolution. She goes as far as claiming that many young people simply don't care anymore. In contrast, Marisela's experience as a university professor complicates this claim; Marisela suggests that the work of the *Federación* is appreciated by very young girls and older womyn alike. This tension suggests that the FMC has to adapt to a changing audience.

Claudia's role as the local FMC secretary provides her with a first-hand perspective of the current needs of Cuban womyn. She explicates, "People are in pretty rough shape in terms of their experience, aptitude, and ability to care for and serve the *Federación*." Claudia laughs and proclaims that as soon as she had learned material from the FMC, she found herself teaching others. This experience is worth consideration given that Claudia was only fifteen when she joined the *Federación* and began attending

classes. Mirurgia also articulates the reason for the changing goals of the organization; she argues that as womyn's status as equal changes, it changes the nature of the FMC's goals. Therefore, the Castro regime's progress allows the FMC to expand upon its initial goal of ensuring the success of womyn's short and long-term futures. Claudia emphatically states, "We will not be housewives, do nothing at the end of our studies. It's that kind of orientation." Maria Julia similarly pronounces, "The primary task is talking to youth, education at a young age, eradicating machismo, carrying forward the momentum of womyn's liberation." She concludes, "It's a call to work, study, join, and make a fuller society." Again, the air of a collectivist orientation permeates their words. Additionally, though, the collaborators' remarks suggest a transition and/or expansion of Cuban feminism to account for implicit as well as explicit forms of inequality. Thus, in addition to challenging domestic incarnations of patriarchy and machismo—both of which were concerns during the Batista regime—the feminists are alluding to a more holistic and empowering form of activism that encourages Cuban feminists to push back against the ingrained cultural and gender norms rooted in Cuban (and Afro-Caribbean/Latin American) culture. This is not to say that Cuban feminism did not advocate for self-empowerment historically. Rather, as Maria Julia notes, "Before, it was about getting womyn out of the house and into jobs."

Given the dynamic nature of the FMC, it is important to understand how Cuban feminists make sense of the government's role in the Federación. As Marisela expressed above, the government's sponsorship of the FMC denotes that the Federación is a public organization; as such, all womyn over the age of 15 are eligible and automatically considered members. The cost of membership to the FMC is only 3 pesos per year

(which roughly accounts to 1/8 of a CUC or U.S. dollar). Moreover, retired womyn do not pay for membership. Although membership in the FMC is not mandatory, the organization does work on a national level to protect the rights of womyn (Marisela). Yet, the FMC activities mentioned by the participants highlight the more local and horizontal structure of the FMC as opposed to a primarily vertical or top-down organization. For example, Libertad's role as organizer was limited to ten different delegations in which each delegation represented one or two blocks of Havana.

Likewise, the work of the FMC is restricted primarily for the interests of Cuban womyn. Marisela, Lydia, and Josefina note that the Federación is only meant for womyn. While other organizations for children or animals may partner with the FMC, these relationships are temporally limited and are reserved for certain projects. Interestingly, all of the collaborators describe equality in Cuba as applicable to *all* beings—womyn, men, children, animals, the environment, the poor, people with disabilities, etc. However, each of the womyn stressed that men and children should not be a part of the FMC. This friction between the 'equality for all' mentality and the cause-specific organizational structure is interesting for a few reasons. First, the womyn's repeated and fervent statements of total equality highlight the intersectional nature of Cuban feminism. As the literature review suggests, Cuban feminists do not engage in explicit denigration or marginalization of sub cultures, perhaps with the exception of those who practice the minority religion, Santería. Secondly, this tension between this intersectional ontology and the isolated organizations perhaps alludes to a Gestalt-like assumption that Cuba (holistically) represents more than the work of any one organization. Lastly, this compartmentalization complicates Cuban feminism and

possibly explains the recent creation of fringe/radical activist groups, like Las Krudas. While the data collected for this project cannot verify these claims, these arguments, however, do point to a deeper understanding of Cuban feminism than what is available at first glance. These points of complexity will be further discussed in the influences chapter of this thesis.

The historic relationship of the FMC with the government as it is articulated by Cuban womyn also informs contemporary Cuban feminist practices. As mentioned above, Cuban feminists have a strong connection to the collective memory of revolutionaries. Josefina and Lydia both became very emotional when speaking of Fidel, their liberator. Libertad explained, “Fidel has been, is and will be a man who has been wonderful for womyn...not just womyn in Cuba, but in Latin America and other countries.” However, the participants’ words do not suggest that Cuban feminists are accepting of Fidel as a result of groupthink or uncritical acceptance. Libertad notes, “Look, 100% don’t agree with Fidel. There is a sector of the population that does not agree with Fidel. But, most do agree with him.” Claudia expresses further discontented opinions, “I like nothing about this government...I’m young, I research, I see other things. I would ask them for many changes...But, they are changes that cannot be made so radical—They are slowly happening, but I do not quite agree with government.” Again, the age difference between Claudia and Libertad likely represents the generational shift occurring in Havana today. However, both womyn’s rhetoric is interesting for another reason—the participants all speak very highly of Fidel and Raul. Indeed, criticism is addressed to the nebulous ‘government’ as opposed to one particular leader or official. Perhaps, this is because of supposed lack of free speech (which, has

always been speculated by U.S. media). However, this distinction could also represent a treatment of Fidel (and Raul, Che, and other revolutionaries) as cultural lore that comprise a collective icon. Marisela's words that "Fidel is a beloved figure in Cuba" did not go unnoticed by me as I toured the city on my first few days in Havana. You cannot pass more than 50 feet before you see another billboard, graffiti, or sign praising Fidel, the revolutionaries, or the liberation of Cuba. The main government buildings in Havana have two art pieces of Fidel and Che's iconic images—they cover at least one hundred feet of the building façade, facing toward the revolution square where the uprisings occurred.

Maria Julia paused during our interview to reflect on Fidel. "Fidel was in the mountains as the guerilla leader. Fidel was in an amphibious area aiding in the eastern provinces...Fidel was in the tanks and on the forefront of the struggle...that was a special period...there was no food, so he ate croquettes like us...He has always been fair, feeling with the people." Again, her words signify a prototype of Fidel as a leader of the people, foraging in the mountains, on the front lines of revolution. This common portrayal of Fidel in the mountains greatly resonates with Cuban feminists. Their articulations highlight the unbelievable reality so many Cubans faced; yet, they do not appear to distance contemporary feminists from the past. This relationship between collective memory and cultural icons is also relevant given the consistency of socialist nations embracing of cultural figures; this connection will be further highlighted in the influences chapter.

As cited above, Raul Castro's transition to power appears to be construed in the mainstream media as an opportunity for further progressive social change (Dunne, 2011; Ludlam, 2012). However, Cuban feminists' articulation of Raul Castro's work suggests that this narrative might oversimplify and deny credit to the work already accomplished in Cuba for womyn's rights. In fact, all of the collaborators suggested that Raul is simply an extension of the Castro regime and that not much has changed in terms of policy or work toward equality. For example, Mirurgia and Claudia both emphatically claimed that there has been no change since Raul took power. Yet, this is not to say that Cuban womyn do not like Raul as a leader. Maria Julia clarifies,¹⁴

Bueno, Raúl... Fue mi jefe en las FAR, no directamente, pero fue el ministro de las FAR... Hay gente que son tan inteligentes, que le queda pequeño el espacio donde se desenvuelven. Y en mi concepto personal, un hombre que hizo, que previó un desarrollo político, que en su tiempo nadie lo imaginaba, y siempre tuvo fe en el hombre como la sigue teniendo hoy, y es un soñador de sueños posibles, porque a veces decimos: "Es un soñador..." No, de sueños posibles. Porque él cree que el mundo es mejor y hoy casi todo el mundo está convencido de que se puede hacer un mundo mejor, porque hace cincuenta años atrás no había estas guerras, o sea que teníamos un poquito un mundo mejor, no el que queríamos, no el que necesitábamos, pero era un mundo mejor al de hoy, porque hoy estamos acabando

¹⁴ As noted in the methods section of this paper, I have chosen to keep longer block quotations for several reasons. First, I am attempting to preserve as much of the co-participants voices while also recognizing my role as an intervening agent and the creator of this analysis. Second, I am maintaining the length of quotes because I feel that they best enable the reader to acquire a true sense of the co-participants' use of collective memory, their co-construction of knowledge with other participants, and the most well-rounded perspective of their voices.

con los glaciares, estamos acabando con la naturaleza, con los árboles, con todo. O sea, que un mundo mejor, que puede mejorarse cuando paremos esta gran destrucción que estamos haciendo. Yo creo que si eres un grande de pensamiento humano, fuera de contexto de este siglo y del que viene, y del que no, y que cuando él se paró en la ONU a hablar de las preocupaciones con el mundo y del clima, nadie hablaba de eso. O sea, que es un hombre fuera de contexto, pero que cada cual tiene sus peculiaridades y que cada cual le ha hecho falta, y le hace falta a Cuba.

Well, Raul ... was my boss in the FAR, not directly, but he was the minister of the FAR...Some people are so smart, that space where they operate is small. And in my personal concept, a man who did, who foresaw a political development, which at the time no one imagined, and always had faith in man as still today, and is a dreamer of dreams. Sometimes, we say "He's a dreamer ..." No, they are possible dreams. Because he believes that the world is better, and today almost everyone is convinced that he can make a better world, because fifty years ago there were these wars, so he had a bit of a better world, not what we wanted, not what we needed, but a better world today, because today we are destroying glaciers, we are destroying nature, trees. That is, a better world can be improved when we stop this great destruction we are doing. I think if you're a big human thought, out of context of this century and the next, and no, and when he stood at the UN to discuss concerns with the world and climate, no one spoke that. I mean, he's a

man out of context, but each has his peculiarities and each has been necessary, and what is missing in Cuba.

For Maria Julia, and many others, Raul is a prototypical leader. Moreover, Maria Julia's remarks seem to suggest that Raul could represent Cuba's collective consciousness. In other words, Cuba has been at the forefront of making the world a better place before any other nation. This inference is bolstered by this quotations appreciation of idealism on a global scale. Yet, even if Raul is not representative of an innovative and idealistic contemporary Cuba, Maria Julia's narrative most certainly showcases Cuban womyn's focus on the future.

A final theme that appears in all of the womyn's interviews is the current state of womyn's rights in Cuba. Despite the ongoing U.S. narrative that Cuba is a backwards and oppressive nation—a view verified by my own misguided stereotypes—the collaborators could not speak any higher about the opportunities and rights afforded to womyn. As Marisela rightly pointed out, I could (and did) walk around the streets of Havana and feel safe. Each sector of Havana is like a small village, complete with a primary school, church, and close-knit neighborhood. The womyn and men watch out for each other and the local children. One night, Mirurgia invited me back to her home. While we were there, not only did I meet her entire family, but we also walked down the hall and met her future daughter-in-law's entire family. Instead of walking head down into my apartment while strategically avoiding my neighbors, I was immersed in a community where everyone cherished and sought out communal time with each other. We would regularly sit outside on the balconies or walk along the streets and shout up at people's open windows just to chat. These interactions not only debunked many myths I

held about Cuba, but they also suggested that the structural inequalities that pushed many women into domestic roles were changing. During my time in Cuba, I met women who were engineers, teachers, professors, government officials, healthcare workers, etc. These experiences left me wondering about the future goals of the FMC. However, as I will suggest later, the very fact that I was assuming the FMC would change its goals was a folly of my own privilege.

Marisela was particularly helpful regarding questions on the future of the FMC. She proffers, “There is clear thinking regarding rights in general. Cuba has a very high political education.” From my limited view, she was right. Every night, Mirurgia, Jorge (another one of Marisela’s employees), and I would watch Spanish soap operas, Latino music videos, and the news. Even though my Spanish was far from perfect, we had many conversations about politics. At the time, the Ebola scare was just beginning, and the situation over Ukrainian borders was heightened, and ISIS was becoming a growing concern. Jorge and I had many conversations regarding international politics, and it was clear that he was well-versed on all of our discussion points. Claudia, as is similar with many Cubans, is particularly aware of international relations with other socialist nations. She promotes solidarity with Venezuela, Vietnam, and all of the Latin American and Caribbean nations. If Cubans have a high level of knowledge pertaining to socio-political issues, then the future of the FMC may be to expand upon this foundation of knowledge both domestically and with respect to transnational relationships. The future of Cuban feminism will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5: Influences on Contemporary Cuban Feminism

In these moments, I came to understand a different patriotic exigency—one that not only elucidated the womyn's willingness to work through the country's economic troubles, but also explained why I felt so at home since my arrival in Havana. In the streets below, I could hear the droning engines of pristine 1950s Chevys and Fords—their anachronistic presence a simultaneous rejection of crass capitalist materialism and an indefatigable symbol of the Cuban way of life.

Cuban feminism's storied past combined with numerous international political, social, and cultural insights provide the milieu with which Cuban feminism was formed. This chapter endeavors to uncover some of the more prominent sources of insight for and sites of collaboration with Cuban feminists. I will divide these influences into two sections: domestic and international. This organization will, I hope, facilitate an understanding that the multifaceted nature of Cuban feminism—and its subsequent articulation—was not arrived at by external force, coercion, or even benevolent missionizing. Rather, various historical opportunities for accessibility to other forms of knowledge and partnership has imparted lasting perspicacity for Cuban feminist thinkers.

To preface this chapter, it is imperative to note that this analysis of influences is not meant to denote a universal, static, or complete representation of factors affecting Cuban feminist thought. Such a task would be impossible for several reasons. First, given the inherently subjective nature of political ideologies generally, it would be unreasonable to expect each Cuban feminist to make sense of Cuban feminism in the same way or to adhere to identical politics in practice. Second, as later chapters will note, Cuban feminism is a constantly evolving ideology, even more so in the currently

changing landscape. Finally, as I hope this chapter suggest, Cuban feminism is a highly complex worldview that cannot be reduced to a finite set of variables. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation for defining contemporary Cuban feminism in the context of the past and present.

The Role of History in Cuban Feminism

As one might imagine, womyn have been integral throughout Cuba's entire existence—given the size and scope of this project, however, I will limit my focus to three particular points in Cuban history in which womyn had a considerable impact upon the state and the state had an immeasurable impact on Cuban womyn. These three historical moments include early 1900s suffrage, the Batista Regime and Revolución, and the post-revolution transition. As opposed to viewing these as kinetic events impacting womyn's rights amidst periods of stasis, I argue that these eras represent key examples necessary for understanding the collective memory shared by Cuban womyn.

It is also worth noting that although I have only chosen to incorporate three particular examples within Cuba's history in comparison to the numerous international examples provided, I am attempting to suggest that this time allocation is somehow representative of the weight of influence on Cuban feminism. This time allocation is also not meant to indicate that Cuban womyn were not central in or to the formation of their own feminisms. Rather, many works have been published regarding the role of womyn throughout Cuban history. Additionally, my inclusion of a wide range of international influences is also meant to help deconstruct extant stereotypes regarding the isolated and insular nature of Cuba—which, as I found through my short visit to Havana, is easily

overturned. Yet, the barrage of slanted American media accounts prevented me, and I assume many others, from acquiring a complete perspective on Cuba and its feminists.

As articulated above, this chapter is meant to provide background into the intricate development and progression of Cuban feminism as an ideological practice. Although it is difficult to trace the precise commencement of Cuban feminism chronologically, it is possible to investigate how early collective attempts to progress toward gender equality contributed to the overall Cuban feminist movement. The womyn's suffrage movement in Cuba roughly coincided with suffrage in the United States.

Womyn's Suffrage in Cuba

Marisela's background as a history professor affords her a unique opportunity to engage with students on the role of womyn throughout Cuba's history. Her perspective provides insight into the historical awareness that younger generations are exposed to and the older generations lived through.

Las mujeres están presentes en muchos momentos importantes de la historia. Y los programas de estudio en Cuba, en todos los niveles de enseñanza, reflejan a las mujeres que han tenido contribuciones importantes en la historia de este país. Por ejemplo, en la Guerra de Independencia, una de las heroínas de la historia de Cuba es Mariana Grajales, la madre de Antonio Maceo. Y es una figura femenina que se trata con mucho peso en los programas de Historia. En la época revolucionaria se habla de mujeres que tuvieron una presencia importante en la lucha durante la tiranía de Batista; el movimiento femenino, la participación que

tuvo, las mujeres que más se destacaron, desde la historia de Moncada hasta la llegada de Fidel al poder. En todo ese movimiento que hay revolucionario entre el 53 y el 59, hay muchas figuras femeninas que se mencionan en los programas de Historia por su participación en la lucha revolucionaria. Hay de Santa María, la hermana de Abel; Celia, que fue la mano derecha de Fidel en el organización del apoyo femenino a la lucha de la sierra. Eso todo está incluido en los programas de Historia. Después del triunfo de la Revolución, también cuando se explican las historias de los diferentes momentos de la Revolución, hay personajes femeninos que son muy importantes y que los programas los abordan. Porque tú abordan un período histórico y abordan los hechos y las figuras más significativas dentro de ese período, y dentro de ellas siempre aparecen figuras femeninas que han tenido un peso grande en la historia de este país. Como es el caso de Celia Sánchez, como es el caso de Vilma Espín. O sea, figuras femeninas que han tenido una participación importante en la historia de Cuba.

Womyn are present in many important moments in history. And curricula in Cuba, at all levels of education reflect womyn who have had significant contributions in the history of this country. For example, in the War of Independence, one of the heroines in the history of Cuba is Mariana Grajales, mother of Antonio Maceo. And female figures come with a lot of weight in the history programs...In revolutionary times, we talk about womyn who had a significant presence in the fight during the Batista dictatorship; the womyn's movement, which had participation, womyn who stood out from the history of

Moncada until the arrival of Fidel to power. In all that revolutionary movement between 53 and 59, there are many female figures mentioned in history programs for their participation in the revolutionary struggle. There is de Santa Maria, the sister of Abel; Celia, who was Fidel's right hand in the organization of womyn's support for the struggle. That is all included in the programs history. After the triumph of the Revolution...there are female characters that are very important and the programs are addressed. Because you approach a historical period, and you approach the facts and the most significant figures within that period, and within them always appear female figures who have had a big weight in the history of this country. Such as Celia Sánchez, such as Vilma Espín. That is, female figures who played an important role in the history of Cuba.

Marisela's comments showcase the central role of womyn throughout Cuban history. As the Bushnell (2011) article indicated with its analysis of female figures on postage stamps, female leaders in Cuba also take on prevalent cultural roles. Therefore, it would appear that historical figures like Celia Sánchez and Vilma Espín may also take on the role of cultural icons in a comparable way to the Castros.

The Batista Regime and the Cuban Revolution

During the Batista regime, many Cubans experienced a reduction of humyn rights and an increase in violence and repression. Marisela, who was very young during the Revolución recalls the stories that her family passed down to her,

Te contaban muchas historias cotidianas de cómo era la represión en la época de Batista. Eso es una historia de hace mucho que cuentan mucho las personas que vivieron este proceso. Aparecían jóvenes muertos en las calles, se cerró la

Universidad... O sea, durante los años de la dictadura había una especie de terror ciudadano que marcó mucho a esta generación la lucha de la juventud contra Batista, la lucha del movimiento de Fidel. Fue una lucha muy sangrienta porque cuando eran aprestados, no se les mataba, se les torturaba. Entonces fue una cosa que marcó mucho esta generación en la década de los 50, y que transmitían siempre los padres a los hijos lo que fue la Revolución. Para explicar un poco las razones por las cuales la gente luchó y esta generación se levantó en arma, no sólo la miseria y la injusticia social, sino fundamentalmente lo que más llega a la gente es la crueldad de aquel sistema de masacrar la juventud y la violación de todas las libertades personales. A todo el que tu veas en Cuba que tenga más de 65 años, que haya vivido la dictadura de Batista, te hace el signo de la victoria, porque fue una etapa de terror que se vivió hasta que se acabó con el triunfo de la Revolución que derrocó al gobierno anterior y que marcó mucho aquella generación.

We had many everyday stories of how repression was under Batista. That is a story of long ago that people have long lived process. Young appeared dead in the streets, they closed the University ... I mean, during the years of the dictatorship, there was a kind of citizen terror that marked much to this generation of youth struggling against the Batista, fighting the movement of Fidel. It was a very bloody fight because when they were arrested, they did not kill them, they were tortured. That was one thing that marked much this generation in the 50s, and always transmitted from parents to children...to explain a little why people fought and this generation rose in arms, not only poverty and social injustice, but

basically what most people are seeing the cruelty of that system massacre youth and violate of all personal freedoms. For all who have seen more than 65 years in Cuba, who have lived the dictatorship of Batista, it makes you the sign of victory—because it was a time of terror that lived until he was finished with the triumph of the Revolution that overthrew the previous government and that marked much that generation.

Marisela's description alludes to the importance of storytelling in Cuban culture. Yet, this quotation and others also demonstrate the cultural commitment to preserving memories—both personal and collective—surrounding the Revolución and violence. Therefore, it would appear that part of the connection between Cuban feminism and collective memory is the preservation of memories about darker times in Cuba so to avoid repeating this history in the future.

Maria Julia was one of the luckier children in Cuba during the Batista regime. Her father worked for an American consortium of gas, electric, and phone companies. Since it was a safe and well-paid position, Maria Julia was able to attend private school and live with other family members. Now, she reflects on the good and bad conditions she was exposed to at that time,

Éramos reyes!—no como la mayoría de los niños aquí, sobre todo de los niños del campo, que era el sector más descuidado de la nación. No había mucho empleo en Cuba. No había una inserción de la mujer en la sociedad. Había analfabetismo, no había una atención médica integral de toda la-- habían clínicas privadas, existía mucho la propiedad privada. Yo, siendo una niña, no me daba cuenta de muchas

cosas sociales porque a esa edad uno va a la escuela y la familia que tenga posibilidades trata de mantener a los muchachos en el estudio, una serie de cosas.

We were kings!—not like most children here, especially the children of the field, which was the most neglected sector of the nation. There was not much employment in Cuba. There was no involvement of womyn in society. We had illiteracy. There was no comprehensive medical care. We only had private clinics. There was much private property. I, being a girl, was not aware of many social things because at that age, you go to school and have opportunities. Families try to keep the kids in school and in a number of things.

In her interview, Maria Julia recognizes and attempts to deconstruct the privilege she experienced during her childhood in the Batista era. Not only does Maria Julia self-reflexively note her own lack of awareness of forces of oppression during that time period, but she also analyzes how those forces impacted her and others in different ways. Maria Julia and many other participants ascertain that although they were lucky enough to live a middle to upper class lifestyle, many other fellow Cubans were subjected to poor educational and career opportunities, violence, torture, and death. Essentially, the way in which Maria Julia expresses and exposes the structural inequality at play during the Batista Regime parallels many Cubans appreciation for the equality proffered by the newer socialist incarnation of the Cuban government and, therefore, demonstrates the way in which the Batista Regime and subsequent Revolución inform Cuban feminism today. Finally, it is worth noting that Maria Julia also purposefully inserts her gender into the conversation of her youth during Batista control (“I, being a *girl*”). This inclusion

suggests that although she may not be directly speaking to the way in which her gender impacted her understanding of life during Batista reign, it does have some bearing on the conception of her identity at that time.

As the oldest participant, Libertad, who was born in 1939, distinctly recalls the oppressive conditions in Havana before the revolution. Libertad had finished her secondary and pre-university studies, but was unable to enroll in collegiate coursework because the regime closed Cuba's universities. Because she was precluded from finishing her studies, Libertad joined the militia and assisted with the revolution. She recollects,

Yo me incorporé a las milicias en el año 61, ya era miliciana, y hacíamos guardia en el centro de trabajo y hacíamos trabajo voluntario y se trabajaba mucho... Yo no peleé. Hubo mujeres que sí, que incluso se incorporaron antes del triunfo de la revolución en las sierras con Fidel... Pero por ejemplo en Girón, que fue un momento en que hubo que combatir directamente con las armas. Yo estuve en la crisis de octubre. En la crisis de octubre yo estuve acuartelada. Decíamos que era allá dispuestos, ¿no?, por cualquier cosa que pudiera pasar, después no pasó nada, después de la crisis todo se arregló pero sí estuvimos preparados por si había que combatir.

I joined the militia in '61 and did my duty at the workplace, did volunteer work, and worked much... I did not fight. There were womyn that, yes, even joined before the triumph of the revolution in the mountains with Fidel... But for example in Girón, that was a time when we had to fight directly with weapons, I did not partake of Girón... In the crisis of October, I was quartered. We said that

we were beyond ready, right, for anything that might happen. Then nothing happened. After the crisis all was well, but we were ready if needed to combat.

Libertad's words not only signify the lived experience of many womyn who partook in the revolutionary struggle, but they also illustrate the way in which the United States is invariably intertwined with Cuban womyn both directly and indirectly. In some cases, womyn were on the forefront of revolutionary activities. Libertad states, "I was the first in my family who joined the process of revolution, but since then my daughters are also incorporated, and grandchildren, and since then the whole family was incorporated, of course, my husband, too." Indeed, many womyn led and assisted in a range of revolutionary activities, including protests, activist organizing, domestic tasks, and, of course, guerilla warfare (Armstead, 2007; 2008). As Libertad alludes throughout our interview, she and her family worked tirelessly throughout the *Revolución* and during the post-war rebuilding efforts. Lastly, it is important to note that Libertad's thoughts also allude to the generational commitment to the *Revolución* and its memory. However, the relationship between Cuban feminism and collective memory will be discussed in the next chapter.

Similar to many Cuban families during the 1950s and 1960s, several participants' families were involved in various aspects of the *Revolución*. For example, Claudia's grandfather was a convoy member. Maria Julia, who was a pre-teen when Cuba won the *Revolución*, remembers her father's role as a sympathizer who illegally bought bonds to finance the failed July 26 attacks on the Moncada barracks that kick started the *Revolución*. As these examples denote, the struggle for liberation in Cuba required many small clandestine efforts of the people in order to successfully overthrow the Batista

regime. In reference to these collective efforts, Maria Julia reflects on Fidel's famous "History Will Absolve Me" speech—a four hour long defense of the Moncada barracks attacks that came to symbolize and justify the illicit overthrow of Batista reign.

A principle reason for Cuban's justification of illegal or guerilla tactics during the revolution was the United States' involvement in Cuban affairs. Per Maria Julia's elucidation, many Cubans feel that the United States' role during the Revolución was not only oppositional, but antagonistic.

La invasión de Girón fue parte de los Estados Unidos, y había que preparar al pueblo que no se sabía nada de eso, para una posible invasión. Se hace la invasión en el 62, y este peligro de invasión siempre ha estado en Cuba, como lo estuvo en otros países durante años: Panamá fue invadido, Nicaragua, la revolución también se frustró, y así lo que está pasando hoy en Venezuela -es un comentario aparte grande- pero bueno, siempre nosotros como pueblo nos tuvimos que preparar ante una posible invasión que no dejó de hacerse algunas situaciones de sabotaje, situaciones económicas que nos llevaron a la introducción aquí, por parte de Estados Unidos del dengue, de la fiebre porcina. En definitiva, hay documentos que profetizaron que se ha visto que el fin era terminar con la revolución, y dar menos posibilidades económicas y sociales al pueblo para que este se volviera en contra de la revolución.

The Bay of Pigs invasion was part of the United States, and we had to prepare the people who do not know anything about that for a possible invasion. The invasion was in '52, and the danger of invasion has always been in Cuba, as it was in other

countries for years: Panama was invaded, Nicaragua, the revolution also frustrated them, and so what is happening now is a separate, large Venezuela, but hey, if we as a people, we had to prepare for a possible invasion, some situations of sabotage, economic situations that led us to the introduction here, by the United States, of dengue, swine fever. In short, there are documents that has been prophesied that the purpose was to end the revolution, and to lessen the economic and social opportunities for people. This would turn them against the revolution.

Similar to Marisela's remarks above, the commitment to resistance of oppression and violence appears to be a crucial factor in Cuban feminist memory. Moreover, the way in which Maria Julia describes the struggles of other nations as well as the international forces impacting Cuban progress seems to suggest there exists an extant tension between formerly oppressed Latin nations and their rocky history with the United States. This history is further aggravated, in the case of Cuba, with the Bloqueo and its interference with international trade.

Post-Revolution Transition

Following the conclusion of the Revolución, a rebuilding period commenced. Marisela describes the overarching goal of this period as "perfecting the socialist model." During this time, womyn were still very active in ministry duties and military forces. As with Libertad, whose name aptly describes her efforts during the Revolución, many Cuban womyn worked tirelessly toward building the new Cuba as a socialist state. However, as was the case with myself, many outsiders looking at Cuba through an ethnocentric or democratically-minded lens may question the progress that Cuba has

made since the Batista regime and subsequent revolution. Maria Julia swiftly answers these claims,

A veces dicen: "Sigue siendo una dictadura". ¿Cómo es posible que una dictadura se mantenga 54 años? Y vengan y vean en el país está tranquilidad. A lo mejor en tu estancia aquí has podido ver algunos policías. Nadie lleva un arma en la mano ni hay esa represión que sí las tienen en las dictaduras. Mi padre era simpatizador. Quizás en mi caso se puedan haber comprado algunos bonos del 26 de julio que financiaban algunas tareas de los que estaban clandestinos pero directamente en la lucha clandestina no se participaba.

Sometimes they say, "It remains a dictatorship." How is it possible that a dictatorship remains 54 years? And come and see this tranquility in the country. Maybe on your stay here, you have seen some policemen. No one carries a gun in his hand, and those that do have such repression are in dictatorships.

For Marisela and many others, while the fighting of the Revolución may be over, the Revolución is still very much ongoing. The rhetorical move to conceptualize social progress as a continuation of the Revolución has several implications on current and future Cuban feminism. First, the continuation of the Revolución narrative imposes a sort of urgency or Kairos. This urgency may be a reason why so many Cuban womyn remain committed to feminist causes. Second, the Revolución narrative helps to further connect the many generations of Cuban womyn by bridging the lived experience gap. For, if Cuban womyn are still in the Revolución, then it follows that all Cuban womyn have some shared experience even if many of them weren't alive during the actual war.

Finally, the Revolución narrative helps to unify Cuban womyn by implying that there still exists an opposition. However, while the opponent appears to be long gone in Cuban feminist rhetoric, this elusive oppressor continues to unify Cuban womyn against the potential threat of inequality.

International Influences on Cuban Feminism

One of the most interesting facets of Cuban feminism is its use and interaction with international theories and ideologies. Clearly, the socialist ideology of the Cuban state permeates Cuban feminism. Indubitably, European political thinkers like Marx and Engels have and will continue to have a lasting effect on Cuban feminism. Moreover, the solidarity between other similarly minded movements, such as the United States Civil Rights Movement and other socialist nations, also continue to inform Cuban womyn's sense making and identification with their own feminism. As the data will suggest, Cuban womyn are hyper aware of their own ideologies and influences and, conversely, how their feminisms inform other movements.

Marxist/Leninist Political Thought

A primary factor influencing Cuban political thought and, subsequently, Cuban feminism is Marxist philosophy, specifically the Marxist/Engelian socialist model and Lenin's later attempted enactment of it in the Soviet Union also imparts knowledge on the ways that socialism can function in practice. Finally, socialist feminist theory have contributed to international relationships and coalitions throughout Cuba's history.

On a general level, as Bauer (2011) suggests, socialist political thought, such as Lenin's worker state, allows for a distribution of capital that does not privilege certain demographics over others. However, socialist thought also captures some of the nuances of the relationship between socialism and Cuban feminism. For example, Engels strongly argued that the individualist, patriarchal family structure needed to be replaced (Bauer 2011; Engels, 1938). Engels states,

Modern socialism is, in its essence, the direct product of the recognition on the one hand, of the class antagonisms, existing in the society of today between proprietors and non-proprietors, between capitalists and wage workers; on the other hand, of the anarchy existing in production....(1938, p. 31)

Two examples of this form of society are Venezuela and Vietnam (Bauer, 2011). With both of these examples, a head of state calls for opposition to imperialism and capitalism. In both cases, Bauer (2011) argues, the leaders have engaged in negative behavior; however, these behaviors are not a true application of Marxist/Engelian theory. In contrast, Engels (1938) argued that ideal reason would prevail over oppression and injustice, privilege and superstition. As one would expect, all of the Cuban womyn I spoke to supported these ideological practices and their enactment in Cuba.

Socialist Feminism

With respect to socialist feminist theory, there are several key points of agreement that render socialist feminism useful in understanding Cuban feminism. As Marisela, Mirurgia, Josefina, and Lydia note, socialism is the only mechanism with which all Cubans can be treated equally. Socialist feminist theory similarly understands liberation

through socialism. Additionally, as the literature review suggests, Cuban feminism conceptualizes capitalism as a central source of inequality. Likewise, Williams (1973) and Bauer (2011) argue that socialist feminism rejects capitalism in order to favor more equalizing socio-economic systems. However, one key distinction between socialist feminist theory and Cuban feminism is the former's engagement in multi-issue campaigns or, in other words, multiple advocacy issues concurrently as opposed to one particular politic like lesbian feminist socialism (Williams, 1973; Fraser, 1973; Bauer, 2011).

The Relationship between Cuban & Black feminisms

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Black feminism and its inception during the Civil Rights Movement strongly influences Cuban feminists today. Likewise, Cuban feminist activists also provide insight for Black feminists. This section attempts to illuminate some of the ways that Black feminism and Cuban feminism conceptualize feminism similarly and how they likely co-construct each other. However, this section also distinguishes Black feminism from Cuban feminism. Rather than attempting to employ Black feminism to understand Cuban feminism, I argue that this relationship is one of mutual influence and understanding. Therefore, I am attempting to use this section to describe how this theory may influence the ways in which Cuban feminists make sense of their own feminisms.

A first assumption of Black feminism pertains to both the nature of oppression and liberation for the Black woman. According to hooks, since the time of slavery, the Black woman has held a distinct status as an oppressed individual since she can be oppressed by the White man, the Black man, and also the White woman (hooks, 1984). She indicates,

In a retrospective examination of the black female slave experience, sexism looms as large as racism as an oppressive force in the lives of black women. Institutionalized sexism-that is, patriarchy-formed the base of the American social structure along with racial imperialism. (hooks 1981)

Thus, the Black woman has been and still is oppressed by the interacting forces of patriarchy and racism. Hooks concludes that these intersecting oppressions results in a unique form of oppression that shapes the Black woman's liberation struggle differently than other struggles, such as that of the White woman (hooks, 1989). It is worth noting that this analysis on the Black woman also applies to Cuban womyn. As hooks, Collins, and Lorde articulate, the concept of the Black woman can be applied to womyn of color generally (Lorde, 1980; hooks, 1985; Collins, 1990). In particular, this analysis can be applied to Cuban womyn given the impact of diaspora and slavery on Cuban womyn, which was the main context of hooks, Collins', & Lorde's analyses.

Due to these distinctions in oppression and liberation tactics, Black feminists have situated their work as a staunch criticism of traditional (White) feminism. This near universal critique of first-wave feminism is a second underlying assumption of Black feminism. Hooks, Collins, and Lorde all suggest that traditional feminism is inadequate

to address the primary concerns of the Black woman (Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1980; hooks, 1989). They contend that traditional feminism is inherently Eurocentric and racially biased (Lorde, 1980; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1989). Thus, a further assumption of Black feminism is that Black women should (or must) theorize themselves “outside the boundaries of the academic context” (Davies, 1994).

A final assumption of Black feminism (to be discussed in this paper) pertains to the process of dismantling oppression. As suggested above, Hooks argues that Black feminism examines the intersections of race, sex, and class (hooks, 1984; hooks, 1981; hooks, 1989). This intersection forms the basis of Black feminist solidarity because it enables one to investigate how interacting and fluid characteristics, such as gender, race, & class collectively shape and marginalize identity (hooks, 1989; Matthews, 1998).

Now that core components and assumptions of Black feminism have been outlined, I will now focus on how Black feminist illuminates and overlaps with the Cuban feminism and the socialist state. Given that Black feminism highlights and combats institutionalized racism and sexism, Black feminist theory approaches feminism through similar themes. These themes include commitment to community, communal knowledge production, intersections of oppressions, and willingness to engage in any form of protest if necessary. However, Black feminist theory is not entirely encompassing of Cuban feminism. An obvious limitation to this theory is that it is not meant to isolate and dismantle specific forms of oppression one by one. Therefore, Black feminist theory is different in that Cuban feminism clearly isolates womyn as a priority for activism, at least per my experience with my co-participants. As outlined above, the Cuban woman is not simply oppressed by distinct forces of sexism, classism,

and racism; but rather, these forms of oppression collectively and collaboratively work to marginalize the Cuban woman. So, although this lack of focus on forms of oppression may be considered a hindrance, this omission can also be considered a understanding of the reality of the Cuban woman.

A second difference between the theoretical applications is that while Black feminist theory applies to people of color, including Afro-Caribbean populations, the theory does not fully encapsulate the unique history and culture of Cuban womyn. As mentioned above, like the Black woman, the Cuban woman is still in a unique position as an oppressed being (Collins, 1990). However, this relationship does not directly mirror the relationship between Black womyn and Black men, White men, and White womyn. Instead, Cuban womyn face oppression from White men and womyn, as well as the race and class groups unique to Cuba, including the tension between Cubans and practitioners of Santeria (Armstead, 2007; Armstead, 2008).

Moreover, while Black feminism has strong ties to Afrikaan culture and tradition (Shakur, 1987), Cuban womyn's Afro-Caribbean tradition and culture is vastly different given the impact of the slave trade, the presence of sex tourism, the Cuban revolution, etc. (Lavrin, 1978; Stout, 2008; Bushnell, 2011; Chase, 2010). Therefore, on a general level, this theory may overlap with Cuban feminism. However, Black feminism is not a comprehensive theory that should be used to understand Cuban feminism in its entirety.

Latin@ Critical Race Theory

Latin@ critical race theory has much overlap with Cuban feminism. Indeed, many Cuban feminists, such as Las Krudas, reference Latin@ Critical Race Theory as it informs their feminisms. In this section, I will describe Latin@ Critical Race Theory and argue how it interacts with Cuban feminists and Cuban feminist theory. I will also use this section to demarcate how Latin@ Critical Race scholarship diverges from Black feminism and uniquely informs and interacts with Cuban feminism, particularly with respect to nativism and Afro-Cubanism.

As Anguiano *et al* (2012) indicate, Latin@ Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), provides an excellent opportunity to encourage Latin@ voices into the academic community. Like Black feminism, LatCrit examines intersecting oppressions (Anguiano *et al*, 2012). However, unlike Black feminism, the intersecting oppressions that LatCrit investigates are generally limited to culture, ethnicity, language, and nationality as experienced by Latin@ populations (Anguiano, *et al*, 2012). Additionally, LatCrit as a theory is more willing to ascribe to a set of basic functions:

1. the production of critical and interdisciplinary knowledge
2. the promotion of substantive social transformation
3. the expansion and interconnection of anticolonial struggles
4. the cultivation of community and coalition among outsider scholars

(Bender & Valdes, 2011; Valdes, 1999)

This set of criteria functions in slight contrast to my findings in Cuba where the co-participants identified gender equality as the main goal of Cuban feminism. However, as

the data suggested in Chapter 4, all of these criteria are largely in line with Cuban feminist advocacy as described by the co-participants.

While I have contended that Black feminism can account for the positionality of Cuban womyn given the connection to diaspora, there is a slight limitation in the ability to examine the unique role of the Cuban woman as the *Cuban* woman, only as a woman of color. Huber (2010) further articulates this second assumption, “LatCrit enables researchers to better articulate the experiences of Latinas/os specifically, through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters” (p. 79). This quote suggests that LatCrit offers the researcher the ability to examine the role of the Cuban woman in relation to many different oppressors. Again, these differences and similarities suggest that Cuban feminism is merely under the umbrella of LatCrit or Black feminism. Rather, these connections suggest that Black feminism and LatCrit are influences on Cuban feminism to some degree and, based on readings of Black feminism (Shakur, 1987; 2011) and LatCrit (Blaufuss, 2007), Cuban feminism also influences Black feminism and LatCrit.

More specifically, LatCrit helps to inform Cuban feminism in several ways. First, as illustrated above, LatCrit helps us to understand how institutionalized oppression functions with respect to the various fluid ethnicities in Cuba as opposed to simply the Black/White binary (Donoso, 2013). As Anguiano *et al* (2012) suggests, “By highlighting complex racial identity, LatCrit provides an ideal lens to focus on [sic] sociopolitical and historical forces” (p. 73). Thus, the complex Afro-Cuban identities existing in Cuba today serve as the keystone to our understanding of the government and protestors discourse on Cuban womyn’s equality.

Moreover, LatCrit enables the researcher to expose the ways that engrained cultural proclivities toward socialism impact the way that Cuban feminist protest groups choose to engage the state through their protest rhetoric. As aforementioned, due to the nature of the Cuban revolution and anti-Batista movement, Cubans have complex and vacillating with socialism (Baron, 2010; de la Torre, 2011; Herman, 2012). LatCrit can help uncover these tensions for example through the rhetorical exchange between the government and the FMC.

Although this theory has much overlap with Cuban feminist theory, there are several parameters that should be noted to further differentiate Cuban feminism from LatCrit. This differentiation is integral given that it is important to distinguish Cuban feminism as its own distinct form of feminism. First, it could be argued that LatCrit *overemphasizes* the relationship between race and institutionalized oppression. Indeed, much of the literature on LatCrit (Valdes, 1999; Bender & Valdes, 2011; Huber, 2010) do not highlight gender at all and, if they do, they draw from other theory bases such as Black feminism. This staunchly diverges from Cuban feminism's commitment to gender equality as the primary goal¹⁵.

A further limitation of LatCrit is that it generalizes whereas Cuban feminism is specific to Cuban womyn. As literature indicates, Cuban culture is unique just as any other Caribbean or Latin American country has its own particularities with respect to culture, politics, and, in particular, feminism. As the literature review noted, there are many projects that describe a very different role of womyn from revolution to

¹⁵ Here, I reference gender equality as the primary goal. This is in reference to my co-participants' labeling of gender equality as the primary goal of their work with the FMC.

contemporary times in many Latin@ countries. However, LatCrit literature can sometimes suggest that it is an appropriate theoretical basis to describe any of these complex cultural, social, and political situations. Yet, there is a lack of literature describing why this theory is able to capture the nuances of Cuba's unique socio-cultural history. Therefore, LatCrit should be understood as existing within a mutually influencing relationship and not as a mode of understanding Cuban feminism.

Chapter 6: The Future of Cuban Feminism—Federated Goals, Coalitions, Transnationalism

I didn't know what the future held for those womyn and transnational feminism—or if I would ever see them again. But, I knew that the relationships we had formed would continue to impact me for the rest of my life. When they opened themselves up to me and poured their souls into every word they spoke, I felt a sense of gratitude that was unparalleled—because I was invited into their collective memory.

The future of Cuban feminism has been referred to throughout this project as it is an ongoing theme in Cuban womyn's narratives on feminist advocacy. This section will provide a description of where Cuban feminists project the FMC to be heading in terms of the development and implementation of goals. Further, this chapter attempts to explore the possibility of re-establishing transnational feminist relationships between U.S. feminists and Cuban feminists. It is hoped that after understanding how the past and current incarnations of Cuban feminism function, we—as feminists collectively—can conceptualize a way to foster better relationships given the current limitations of the Bloqueo.

With respect to the FMC, most of the Cuban womyn I spoke to in interviews or in passing are very pleased with the Federación. However, given the focus on progress and reaching an ideal socialist model, it is possible to improve the quality of life for all womyn. I asked each of the womyn about whether forced domesticity or violence against womyn are still issues in Cuba today. Marisela indicated that in country villages and some regions, these problems exist. However, Marisela stressed that these are isolated cases and not the trend. Mirurgia and Claudia echoed this sentiment by expressing that the status of womyn's rights is protected through the constitution;

therefore, womyn have the right to an education, to work, and to express themselves freely. Maria Julia added complexity to this question. She notes, “Violence against women is a larger cultural problem—machismo.” Further, given the lack of training and education afforded to many middle aged and older womyn, womyn are still likely to suffer the most negative economic impacts whether they are malicious or not. Libertad supposed, “Women do the same as the men...have the same rights. Nowadays, most women—90 some percent of women—work. Then, the woman becomes independent. It’s not a problem. It’s not easy—we have double work when we come home.” Libertad’s comments showcase the dual responsibility that implicitly affects all womyn. Marisela contributed that in many cases, men and womyn share household responsibilities. However, as Libertad indicates, this is not always the case given entrenched cultural norms left over from the Batista regime. These comments taken together all suggest that Cuban feminism may be reaching a turning point whereby the implicit instances of patriarchy will become primary goals of the FMC. However, given that these are not considered the cultural trends, it may be the case that these problems go unresolved.

As the literature review suggests, there is a lack of overlap between radical feminist groups, like Las Krudas, and the FMC. While Marisela’s educational experience affords her a unique perspective on fringe groups, many Cuban womyn do not view the status of womyn and other traditionally marginalized populations in the same light. For example, Las Krudas discusses the continued oppression of queer feminists through their protest rap and art (Armstead, 2007; 2008). Perhaps the future of Cuban feminism includes coalition building with these fringe groups? The solidarity that

exists due to the collective memory and use of cultural icons may help foster collaboration between the groups.

Concerning the FMC's relationship to the government, Marisela helps to contextualize the way forward. She stresses,

Sí, ahí todos los gobiernos tienen problemas. Sí, hay problemas...En Cuba existe una disidencia...La disidencia son grupos que se han organizado en una acción contestataria al gobierno. Eso es una realidad...¿Tú ves agresión? ¿Tú ves violencia? No. Tú ves una sociedad tranquila, una infancia feliz, la gente saliendo a trabajar, tú no ves un régimen represivo. Todas las sociedades tienen problemas, esto no es el paraíso, si no todo el mundo vendría a vivir a Cuba. Tenemos problemas económicos, somos un país pobre, pero en sentido general, la juventud y las mujeres y la vida allí, es buena.

Yes, all governments have problems. Yes, there are problems. In Cuba, there is dissent...The dissidents are groups that are organized in a rebellious government action. That is a reality...Do you see aggression? Do you see violence? No, you see a peaceful society, happy children, people going to work, you do not see a repressive regime...All societies have problems, this is not paradise, otherwise everyone would come to live in Cuba. We have economic problems, we are a poor country, but in general, youth and women's lives—there is good.

While Marisela doesn't make any sort of recommendations to improve the working relationship with the government on a national scale or in terms of coalitions with other governmental organizations, her words resonate with me. Not only do they hint at the

resistance to materialism and embrace of vivacity and culture, but they also demonstrate a relationship with temporality that is vastly different from the United States. When I think of political dissent in the United States—and even with my own pet political projects—there is a demand for immediate solutions. If there is not an immediate turnaround following the election of a new official, then the system is rejected. In contrast, Cuban women appear to be much more willing to accept incremental changes over time. Perhaps this is because life is generally slower in Cuba or perhaps it is due to the credibility the Castro regime established since the Revolución. However, the way that Cuban women talk about changing the political system is framed within a patient and understanding lens.

Finally, it appears that the recent discussions in the public sphere regarding the embargo represent a potential turning point in U.S.-Cuban relations. However, in order to reinvigorate transnational feminist relationships, it is important to obtain a better understanding of Cuban women's perspectives of how the political tension impacts our relationships. According to Marisela, Cubans do not like the United States government. Yet, she emphasizes that there is a distinction between the U.S. government and the American people. When I asked Libertad about the future of our relationship, she poses another question, "What about America? We like the people of the United States... The U.S. government does not tolerate us and does not forgive that we are not dependent upon it. So, we are blocked." In a situation where the governmental clash appears to preclude meaningful engagement, is there a way to move forward without a lift in the embargo?

According to Marisela, “the United States is the one who does not let American citizens establish relations with Cuba. Not the reverse... There are relations of solidarity, but not the government.” Claudia elaborates, “We can’t remove it. It’s not something we have control over.” Josefina and Lydia too echo these sentiments, “People don’t dislike the U.S. It’s about the bloqueo—completely in the hands of the U.S.” These collective feelings provoked a mutual feeling of helplessness between myself and the Cuban womyn. A noticeable shift in tone overtook us, and we became sad at the possibility that our relationships would not be able to grow because of this longstanding political strife. I asked Libertad if she thought the embargo would go away. She said simply, “We cannot say, I do not know. We would like to end, because if the people ended the blockade, we would live better....” After hearing this account, my heart dropped. I felt as if these womyn—who had embraced me as one of their own—were being let down by me. But, what could I do to change the situation?

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I reflect on my experiences in Cuba almost every day. From my time spent super invested in Spanish soap operas with the night caretaker, Jorge; to my time spent at Mirurgia's family house as her hija Americana; to the time when I was snuck into a Cuban-only historical battle reenactment so that I could experience the real Cuba, I can't help but wish everyone in the States would visit Cuba. But, I knew that it would never be the same if they did.

This paper has analyzed contemporary Cuban feminism through several channels. While the participants provided wonderful accounts of the current work of the Federación and its relationship with the socialist government, I attempted to discover the connection between contemporary Cuban feminism and the multifaceted influences that continue to impact it. Finally, this paper attempts to move forward and explore ways that Cuban feminism may progress in the future with respect to its goals, its relationship with the government, and the potential for future transnational relationships.

Contemporary Cuban Feminism

With respect to contemporary Cuban feminism, this project has analyzed the rhetoric of FMC members to uncover the current goals and challenges within Cuban feminism. These include the recruitment of new, young feminist voices, womyn's education and training (specifically the sciences), as well as the creation of a well-rounded program for womyn that includes wellness, domestic skills training, and a safe community, etc. One additional, although implicit, facet of contemporary Cuban feminism is the appreciation and reliance on collective memory. All of the participants, including the youngest—Claudia—referenced historical events like the Revolución from

a collective and almost folkloric perspective. The use of collective memory combined with the sense of community visible through the group interviews as well as Mirurgia's maternal care represents one of the most important components of Cuban feminism because it creates a unique and fascinating duality between the Cuban womyn's subjective feminisms and their understanding and appreciation of Cuban feminism holistically.

This commonality among co-participants is quite interesting when compared to data from the archival and rare texts from the special collections at Florida International University. Many of the texts I examined described similar focal points for feminist activism in Cuba in the 1800s, 1900s, and post-Revolución times (Aldama, 2010; Guillois & Tamayo, 2012; MacGaffey & Barnett, 1965; MacGaffey & Barnett, 1962; Maloof, 1999; Mata, 2001), specifically with respect to education (Castro, 1990; Castro & Guillois, 1987; Guillois, 1990; Mata, 2001, 2005, 2008; Montero, 1999; Reed, 1989, 1991; Ruebens, 1970), training (in particular, military training) (Macías, 1978; Martinez, 2008; Medrano, 1995; Randall, 1972; Ruiz, 1968; Yerovi & Farrill, 1991) and (also implicitly) collective memory (Guillois & Shnookal, 1991; Herrera, 2008; Molina, 2004; Montero, 1989; Ruebens, 1970; Shepherd, 1995; Suarez, 1967).

This commonality of goals and focal points is interesting since it seems to raise an initial question regarding the effectiveness of Cuban feminism over time. If the goals between contemporary Cuban feminists and feminists during the 1800s, 1900s, and post-Revolución, then is Cuban feminism achieving success? Well, it is clear from the many achievements noted in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 that womyn in Cuba have garnered much success in both work and household settings since the post-Revolución time.

Therefore, the next question is if Cuban feminists have been very successful, why do they still have the same goals and focal points? One might assume that since goals of workplace equality and equal rights (among others) have been achieved, then the goals of the FMC and Cuban feminists would have shifted to other specific points of interest. When Marisela answered my question about how she thought the government was performing with respect to womyn's rights, she remarked that not all governments are perfect. For her, the constant drive toward betterment is the primary standard for evaluation. Maria Julia, Claudia, and Libertad also remarked similarly regarding their standards for testing governmental success. Their words may suggest that a reason why the goals have not changed is because Cuban feminists have maintained the same priorities and want to continue improving in those areas. This thought is particularly interesting given the contradictory Western ideal of solving a problem and moving on to the next problem. This potential difference in underlying cultural values would be very useful knowledge as U.S. and Cuban feminists work toward future transnational feminist collaboration since it would very likely impact both groups' goal planning.

The co-participants acknowledgement of similarities and differences among other Cuban feminists is also telling. While each of the womyn may not have expressed identical feminist identities, each possessed an acute awareness of key areas of similarity and variance that was identical regardless of age, background, experience, etc. The areas each co-participant addressed regarding acknowledged potential difference among other feminists included the extent of international intervention, the use/support of illicit radical activism such as protest/performance art, and the degree to which domestic support and rights organizations should collaborate. Similar to the shared

commonalities, the acknowledged potential differences between contemporary Cuban feminists also paralleled acknowledged differences of earlier feminists, specifically with respect to international intervention (Aldama, 2010; Nash, 1985; Nettles, 2009; Pastor, 2003; Randall, 2009, Randall & Janda, 1981; Randall, 1972) and inter-organizational collaboration (Nash, 1985; Nettles, 2008; Perez, 1988; Randall & Janda, 1981). This parallel between contemporary Cuban feminists and earlier feminists raises questions regarding potential areas of stagnation. Given the participants' discussions of the regular meetings of the FMC, it would seem that these two issues are not regularly on the docket of conversation. However, given the co-participants' enthusiasm at the potential for further transnational collaboration, it appears to be prudent to explore why the potential for international aid and inter-organizational collaboration continues to cause reluctance among some Cuban feminists. Undoubtedly and as acknowledged above, fear of American usurpers and spies is likely the main reason why Cuban feminists are reluctant to engage in transnational feminist efforts, particularly those relating to any form of international aid or assistance. However, based on the participants' concerns pertaining to former U.S./Cuban relations and my own presence in Cuba, fears of cooptation by Americans and key ideological differences (such as those pertaining to capitalism, for instance) may be additional reasons for reticence to push our relationship forward. Therefore, it seems important for the communities to discuss ways in which American and Cuban feminists can build trust, establish expectations, and view topics of interests from both perspectives.

Influences on Cuban Feminism

From Chapter 5, it becomes quickly clear that there are numerous and multi-faceted influences that have impacted and will continue to impact Cuban feminism. Not only does Cuba's rich history with various periods of womyn's empowerment and oppression impact contemporary Cuban feminism, but international relationships, the Civil Rights Movement and Black feminism, Marxist/Engelian political thought, socialist feminist theory, etc. have gradually become integrated within or mutually influenced alongside many Cuban feminists' ideological development. In addition to providing an analysis of the more prevalent influences that appear to impact many individuals' Cuban feminisms and, therefore, Cuban feminism generally speaking, I also argue that it is crucially important to recognize that Cuban feminists have created their feminist ideologies autonomously. Obviously, Cuban feminism did not develop in a vacuum. However, that is not to say that the influences described in Chapter 5 are independent variables that have manipulated Cuban feminist ideologies over time. In contrast, many of the influences—international and domestic—developed concurrently with Cuban feminism and were mutually beneficial.

For example, Lydia, Josefina, Claudia, and Marisela all discussed the ways in which Vietnam and Venezuela have continued to develop and explore socialist theory collaboratively. As I applied literature on transnational engagement (Spivak, 1988) to this project, it would be an incorrect and an oppressive Western assumption to contend that international influences have molded Cuban feminism. After my experiences with the womyn of Cuba, it is obvious that they are extremely intelligent and autonomous in the development of their individual identities and ideologies. This conclusion is critical

for those who wish to pursue future transnational feminist collaboration because it helps to reframe or check the Western assumed role of “How can I help?” to “What can we do?”

Final Thoughts

In addition to providing insights for future transnational feminist collaboration based on this exploration of the connection between the socialist state and Cuban feminists, this project has also yielded insights for communication theory and oral history methodologies. First, this project demonstrates the importance of including Cuban feminist rhetoric in the communication studies canon. First, this collection of oral histories provides a moving and enlightening account of the ways that the Revolución and reconstruction period have impacted Cuban womyn. Moreover, these oral histories collectively account for many core themes within Cuban feminism today. Therefore, this form of Cuban feminist rhetoric not only describes an important chronology of Cuban feminist history worth preserving, but it also represents a form of activism that has been very successful and is worth further examination. The use of collective memory through storytelling harkens back to an early form of humyn knowledge production that remains a binding element within the Cuban community that cannot be fully explained. Future research should seek to further explore the role of collective memory in transcending verbal communication as it appears to connect communities beyond the act of storytelling alone.

This project also yields additional thought worthy of note for feminist oral historians. First, the application of feminist oral history to this thesis project demonstrates the applicability of feminist oral history methodologies to communities that rely upon storytelling and collective memory as well as individuals with complex

ideologies that have layers not easily discernable by other methodologies. Moreover, the use of feminist oral history was particularly appropriate given the method's ability to include and analyze large sections of co-participants' remarks. This feature of feminist oral history was extremely helpful to ensure that co-participants' voices are analyzed in a way that showcases and honors their voices and language choices. Finally, the triangulation between the interview data, the archival data, and extant literature as suggested by Gluck (2011) provided multiple points of comparison that rendered analysis that would have likely been missed otherwise.

Overall, the experience I had with the womyn in Cuba was amazing. The time we shared, although it was short, was life changing for me. Although I was happy to return to the U.S., I was sad to be missing the FMC anniversary party. Libertad had mentioned that each woman would bring something—food, sweets, etc.—and then do a little party, and put it to music. As I boarded the plane, I reflected on Libertad's words, and I realized that what she said could not be truer: each woman was bringing something to the celebration. I thought, if only we could use our knowledge and resources to do the same, then the future of transnational feminism between the United States and Cuba would be very bright, indeed.

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol for Members of the Womyn's Organization

Interview Questions (Translated)

General question areas	Possible probes
Personal information	<p>Tell me about yourself</p> <p>Tell me about your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School/Work experience - Family - Heritage
Cuban Feminism Generally	<p>Tell me about the history of Cuban feminism/womyn in Cuba</p> <p>Do you have any personal connection to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Former activists - Cuban Revolutions - Etc.
Form of Feminism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you consider yourself a Cuban feminist? - How do you define your form of feminism? <p>How do you think about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intersectionality - Animal Rights - Environment - Government in Cuba
Experience in Advocacy	<p>How do you define advocacy?</p> <p>How do you define activism?</p> <p>How do you enact your form of advocacy?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University/Educational level - State-based organizations - Protest art/music - Other forms of activism <p>What are your short, medium, and long term goals for your work?</p> <p>How do you go about enacting these goals? Examples.</p> <p>What kind, if any, tension have you experienced with the government?</p> <p>How has the community responded to your work?</p>
Other	<p>Any other information you feel would add to my project.</p> <p>Thank you so much for speaking with me!</p>

Glossary

Batista Regime – The dictatorship that was controlling Cuba before the Revolución. Named after the leader and president, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar.

Bloqueo – The Cuban term for the United States Embargo.

Fidel Castro – Former president of Cuba. Fidel Castro took power following the Cuban Revolution and subsequent overthrow of the Batista Regime. Transferred power to his brother, Raúl Castro in 2008.

Raúl Castro – Current president of Cuba. Took power in 2008 after his brother, Fidel, transferred power to him. Raúl Castro was very active in the Cuban Revolution in terms of military strategy and reconstruction.

Vilma Espín – Late wife of Raúl Castro and former Cuban revolutionary. Co-founder of the FMC where she facilitated the literacy program and education campaigns.

Cuban Revolution – The gradual overthrow of the Batista Regime beginning in 1953 and ending in 1959 (with a period of reconstruction afterward). This revolution is known for the guerilla tactics as well as the female inclusion in military activities. Prominent leaders include Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Raúl Castro.

Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) – This is the government sponsored womyn's organization in Cuba. The FMC is the only organization for Cuban womyn only. The goals of the FMC are to aid in the domestic and professional advancement of womyn. This goal is promoted through regular member meetings, skills trainings, and educational opportunities.

Che Guevara – See Cuban Revolution.

(la) Revolución – See Cuban Revolution.

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