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Aquí no hay protestas: Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Cuba

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Aquí no hay protestas

Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Cuba

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Acknowledgments

At the beginning of 2018, I decided to forgo writing a thesis. I loved the subject of my project, but it was precisely from this love that fear and anxiety grew; fear of disappointing those who helped realize my work, anxiety towards not writing the strong text I knew the communities involved deserved, and fear of ultimately breaking the relationships in Cuba that made this work possible. These sentiments interwove into a blanket under which, at the beginning of 2018, I suffocated. To relieve myself from this state, I emailed my advisors and notified them that I could not continue my thesis. As I got ready to remove my blanket, I felt a force beyond my control shift it away from my head: finally, I could breathe.

Roseann, your response to my email was precisely this force. Your honesty and encouraging words empowered me to breathe, despite the anxiety and fear. Beyond your constant emotional support, I thank you for your meticulous and thoughtful guidance throughout the writing process. Ben, your insights and challenging questions were also incredibly important in shaping my work- and despite your busy schedule, I always felt your support and for this I thank you.

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Also in Cuba, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation towards all the participants in my project who welcomed me, trusted me with their stories, allowed me into their homes, and offered advice to support my project. This thesis would not have been possible without all of your important work, and I hope my project reflects the deep admiration I feel towards your commitment and strength in pursing your passions.

Finally, I offer love and thanks to my family. I thank you for your steadfast trust in me, even when you did not understand or agree with my decisions. I am grateful and in constant awe of your unhesitant love.

Abstract

This thesis examines why, despite Cuba's global preeminence in gender equality advocacy, inequality remains a deeply entrenched issue. My work focuses on one specific component of inequality, gender-based violence, and explores what is currently being done to address this injustice.

Through qualitative interviews with a variety of stakeholders, participant-observation, as well as a content analysis of literature on women's rights in Cuba, I came to realize that there is an important yet under-documented discrepancy between state-led and grassroots work regarding gender-based violence. Although state-led work, mainly through the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), receives widespread praise in foreign and domestic literature as the entity responsible for securing women's rights nationally, my participants in particular noted that this narrative is misleading and outdated. In the last decade, non-state actors have begun to augment the role of the FMC. Interviewees consistently noted that the issue in question is more effectively being addressed through grassroots activism. Accordingly, I bring the non-state actors to the forefront of change, thus shedding new light on the quest to ameliorate gender-based violence in Cuba.

This case fits into international dialogues regarding gender-based violence activism work. Particularly, my study contributes to transnational activism studies exploring different causes and strategies to alleviate the issue. The Cuban experience serves as a unique and important case to compare with other countries in Latin America and the broader context. The study also contributes in expanding preexisting work on women's rights in Cuba carried out by NGOs such as the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA), that seek to build more informed understandings of Cuba, and break away from historic prejudices of the island.

Keywords: gender equality, gender-based violence, FMC, transnational activism.

Abbreviations

FMC	Federation of Cuban Women
OAR	Oscar Arnulfo Romero Center
UH	University of Havana
CDA	Center for Democracy in the Americas
WLDM	Women and Local Development of Marianao
CENESEX	Cuban National Center for Sex Education
NGPTVF	National Group for Prevention and Treatment of Violence in the Family
PCC	Communist Party of Cuba

The Participants

Dr. Isabel Moya Journalist; Academic; Editor-in-Chief of *Mujeres*

Dr. Clotilde Proveyer Academic

Sara Más Journalist for *Mujeres* magazine; Activist

Mirta Rodríguez Calderon Independent Journalist; Academic

Dr. Marta Nuñez Sarmiento Academic

Laritza González Project Coordinator at OAR

Betsi Catalayud Project Coordinator at WLDM

Yamila González Ferrer Academic/Legal Practitioner for National Union of Jurists

Alberto Roque Blogger; LGBTQ activist in Cuba

Deymi D'Atri Independent Filmmaker

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Preface

When I first began my research project, I envisioned it as an "ode to the grassroots work in Cuba." The project was to focus on the gender-based violence activism work of grassroots initiatives, and bring forth potential transnational lessons from their work. In the project's introductory overview for participants, I noted that my motivation stemmed from the deep admiration and curiosity I developed during my study abroad semester in Cuba, towards grassroots work against gender-based violence. I underscored the latter to establish that my intention with the project was not to perpetuate literature with a *perspectiva imperialista* 'an imperialist perspective': one that intrinsically seeks to belittle Cuba, given its nonalignment with Western hegemonic values.

Dr. Moya, my Cuban advisor during my summer research fellowship, noted that she and various other Cubans grew weary over the years to help foreign researchers; oftentimes the researchers did not separate from a *perspectiva imperialista* and, as a result, collected data only to confirm prejudices of the island. I realized early on that emphasizing my admiration and open-mind were important relational factors to establish my trustworthiness as a researcher.

Months later when I sat down to begin writing my thesis, sentiments of admiration continued

to hold an unyielding presence in my mind. Yet, I was entirely lost for words. I wanted to describe the work I witnessed, and document the narratives of the people who helped guide my fieldwork— but the fear of writing in a manner too critical, thus potentially breaking the relationships I worked arduously to build, impeded me from even beginning to think critically of the fieldwork. Critical thought and admiration calcified as two mutually exclusive concepts.

Overtime, I endeavored to look past my fears; I realized that simply recounting the stories and narratives of the projects I admired deeply could not adequately convey *why these groups deserve praise.* Social critique was necessary. Context was necessary. Inevitably, praise necessitated I bring forth the contextual factors that made the non-state actors so effective.

It is my greatest hope that the critique and praise embedded in these pages ultimately strengthens *la lucha* 'the fight.' In Cuba, there is a common expression *hay que seguir luchando,* 'we must continue the fight'— this text seeks to contribute to the Cuban *lucha* through a deeper analysis of activism work in Cuba against gender-based violence. Although *Aqui no hay protestas,* 'here there are no protests,' there exists a widespread network of grassroots work seeking justice and more holistic equality for women. My work endeavors to document these groups to show that although a very popular form of activism, protests, are illegal in Cuba, a lot of valuable social justice currently exists in the country: *aquí no hay protestas,* but there exist many under-documented initiatives that are spearheading change for women in Cuba.

Introduction

Es Complicado, It's Complicated

Cuba is a tenacious leader on the stage of international gender equality indexes. According to The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, which measures the literacy rates, health, political participation, and economic status of women, Cuba has consistently ranked within the top 25 countries for almost a decade (2010-2017).[1] Yet despite its progression towards equality, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue. In accordance with the United Nations' understanding of gender-based violence, I define the latter as any act of violence based on gender, including: physical, psychological, economic, structural and sexual violence, and femicide.[2]

The Cuban government is a key entity aggravating gender-based violence. Data from my

[1] Of notable significance is that between 2010 and 2013, Cuba increased its position from 20th to 13th, climbing the scale by seven places in only two years. In comparison, during this timeframe the United States dropped from 19th to 49th.

[2] Essentially, the United Nations defines gender-based violence as follows: "Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family [...] occurring within the general community[...] perpetrated or condoned by the state." A/RES/48/104. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women." *United Nations*, 20 Dec. 1993.

research indicates that the government's national discourse sustains a collective imagination favorable to gender-based violence. Although the state took measures to alleviate these conditions, namely through the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the efforts proved limited.

In the last decade, non-state actors have begun to replace the role of the FMC. My study documents how these actors address gender-based violence and, thus, how they are promoting gender equality in Cuba. The qualitative data I collected expands the informational lens on gender-based violence to include narratives of organizers of non-state actors, and, more generally, individuals associated with alternative mechanisms to ameliorate gender-based violence. Through their experiences, I understood the influential role non-state actors hold in local communities. Accordingly, I argue that non-state actors are, to a certain degree, replacing the role of the FMC. Two case studies underscore the latter: the Oscar Arnulfo Romero Center (OAR) a Christian NGO, and the community project Women and Local Development in Marianao (WLDM). OAR and WLDM exemplify the influence non-state actors hold in community-level activism.

Aquí no hay protestas has two central aims. First, to underscore *why* gender-based violence remains an issue in Cuba. Literature on this subject pervasively lacks in-depth explorations as to the origins of continued violence: often the only sources identified are flawed laws. (Truyol, 1998) My study expands the analysis to social, political, and economic forces; I believe that only through a greater consideration of the Cuban context can we begin to uncover the true obstacles to the sustainable evolution of gender equality in Cuba and, in turn, possible solutions to address the issue.

As one of Latin America and the world's leaders in indexes on gender equality, Cuba is a country whose evolution towards equality is of international relevance. Especially of significance

to the narrative are its complex and paradoxical nuances; in expanding the focus of the origins of gender-based violence, I seek to capture these nuances. It is my hope that shedding light on the complexity of this social issue contributes to transnational reflections on why this historic injustice persists, and what roots may be targeted to address the issue.

The second aim of my work is to forefront non-state actors such as OAR and WLDM as the principle foci of support and education on gender-based violence. Extensive documentation of the work of these actors is missing in foreign and domestic literature, and in light of their increasingly important role in local communities, I believe it is valuable to adequately recognize their work. The latter is particularly necessary given the current dominance the FMC holds in state discourse on women's rights in Cuba: non-state actors have yet to be included in this narrative. My study endeavors to place these actors at the forefront of change in Cuba, especially with regards to gender-based violence, to construct a counter-narrative to state discourse and, thus, paint a more holistic image of current activism.

Ultimately, I hope that the extensive consideration of non-state actors contributes, to some degree, in their empowerment; *Aquí no hay protestas* serves as a form of visibility and praise to under-recognized groups propelling gender equality. In this manner, I believe the visibility of alternative forms of treatment discussed in *Aquí no hay protestas* may also indirectly contribute in the empowerment of survivors in Cuba. If more literature on Cuba also included non-state actors in discussions on gender-based violence, especially domestic literature, individuals seeking help may recognize the availability of alternative options to state mechanisms for treatment. Knowing that options other than state shelters and FMC support groups exist, could be a potential source of empowerment for individuals seeking help.

Literature Overview of Gender-Based Violence in Cuba

The first text written on gender-based violence in Cuba was a result of the collaborative efforts between Cuban academics and academics from the United States. (Proveyer, 1993) Proveyer's article explored what may today be considered a groundbreaking documentation of the conditions of women under the revolutionary government; the text was the first to recognize the paradoxical state of equality in Cuba. Notwithstanding the unique data collected through project, the article was published outside of Cuba, in the journal of the National Women's Studies Association.

In the decade following Proveyer's article, few texts emerged on the subject, and those that were developed remained concentrated in a very narrow sphere: academia. (Veitía, 1995; Alberdi, 1996) The two studies were the undergraduate theses of students from the Sociology Department at the University of Havana. Both examined case studies of violence in intimate partnerships. During this timeframe, the first and only domestically produced comparative study on gender-based violence between Cuba and another country was produced. (Proveyer, 1999) Proveyer compared narratives of eleven survivors in Havana, and six survivors in the Valencia Community in Spain.

A significantly greater number of texts have been published on the subject between 2000-2018; the majority of these focus on documenting stories of survivors and narrating what kinds of violence persist in Cuba. Anthologies of survivors' narratives in particular have been popular and widely distributed in Cuba. (Rubiera, 2010; Fernández, 2017) These include a dozen or more accounts of survivors from different socioeconomic backgrounds. More investigative works have

also emerged, bringing forth case studies from across the country with a focus on interfamily violence. (Tenorio, 2011; Reina and Magela, 2012) Renown academics in Women's Studies offer a more expansive lens, focusing on the general ways gender-based violence persists in Cuba, and how these studies emerged. (Vasallo, 2012; Moya, 2014)

Studies shedding light on what is or is not being done to address the issue have emerged only recently. (CDA, 2013; Proveyer, 2014; García and Torres, 2016) Although all these examine the shortcomings of state institutions in addressing gender-based violence, only Proveyer and the CDA's text begin to discuss what is being done to compensate for the institutional failures. In addition, these two texts are the sole ones to substantively employ and embed accounts other than those of survivors in their analyses.

Structure

Chapter I introduces the methodology, including the research design, data collection, and data analysis procedures of my research project. Chapters II and III, "Gender-Based Violence Activism in Latin America" and "Gender-Based Violence Activism in Cuba," contextualize the subject of my research in the Latin American region and, more specifically, in Cuba. Illustrating the evolution of gender-based violence activism work in Latin America in Chapter II emphasizes the peculiarity of its evolution in Cuba; despite the revolutionary government's advocacy for women's rights, government-led work on gender-based violence evolved differently, and much later, than in other countries in Latin America. Chapter III begins to discuss why the subject embedded in national discourse later relative to other Latin American countries and describes

how the Cuban government came to address the issue. The historical overview culminates in the current state narratives surrounding gender-based violence. Key features of contemporary state discourse introduce a recurring theme throughout the work: the framework of *oficialista* discourse, constructed with narratives of equality, helps preserve inequality and, as a result, gender-based violence.

Chapter IV outlines *how* narratives of equality preserve conditions of inequality and aggravate gender-based violence. The unbalanced attention *oficialista* discourse gives to the statistical significance of women's representation in the public sector rather than to the continued position of subordination women hold in the private sphere, aggravates these domestic conditions. In Chapter V, I propose that it was in the government's interest to preserve misleading narratives on the current conditions of equality in Cuba, notwithstanding the continued inequality and violence. Both in the foreign and domestic contexts, the unbalanced image contributed in fortifying the nation-building process. A crucial component of this image is the retention of the FMC as a steadfast positive influence in ameliorating gender-based violence and promoting women's rights. *Oficialista* narratives on current conditions of equality are based on very specific moments in Cuban history when the FMC played a leading role in advocacy for women; this imbalanced narrative of history greatly benefits the state. To frame and support my analysis, I refer to Friedrich Nietzsche's essay *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life.* Nietzsche's essay represents one of the most influential theory texts I read throughout my time at Swarthmore, through which I deepened my understanding of the different relationships humankind formed to history, and the potential detrimental effects to life that an improper relationship with the past engenders. The theorist's work specifically helps illustrate why the Cuban government benefits domestically from an imbalanced usage of history in

national narratives.

Chapter V specifically challenges this glorified narrative of the Federation, discussing its shortcomings and interweaving them with a *counter-narrative:* how non-state actors are compensating for these shortcomings and replacing the role of the FMC. Two case studies of non-state actors, OAR and WLDM, demonstrate how these actors ameliorate gender-based violence and, ultimately, engender change for women. Contrary to state discourse, this chapter signals that the FMC is no longer the principle entity propelling change for women, especially on the subject of gender-based violence: change is occurring outside of *oficialista* institutions, at the grassroots level.

Chapter I
Methodology

Study Design

"Why do we do research? Who benefits from it?"[3]

Juliet Merrifield

I did not know it at the time, but my introduction to Merrifield's text my sophomore year at Swarthmore was going to play an incredibly important role in my formation as a researcher and scholar. Merrifield begins her article on Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the questions illustrated above, enticing readers to consider the motivation, audience, and utility of researchers' work in a simple, yet critical manner. For the last decade, I had been taught that every paper must have a 'so what' but never before had I ever been pushed to think of the 'and then what?' of my work. 'So what' in a research project answers why the work matters and why

[3] Merrifield , Juliet. "Knowing, Learning, Doing: Participatory Action Research." *NCSALL: Knowing, Learning, Doing: Participatory Action Research*, Feb. 1997.

readers should care about the subject matter, but PAR widens the question to why we produce the materials in the first place, and do we see it having any practical element to it. Thus, for the first time, I was compelled to think: why do we, in academia, create knowledge? And for whom?

In addition to PAR, the project's epistemological basis was also informed by decolonized research methodology, often a basis for the work of feminist, indigenous and critical race theorists. (Hesse-Biber, 2014; Lykes and Mallona, 2008; Smith, 1999) A significant idiosyncrasy of these approaches to research is their emphasis in breaking from conventional power dynamics between a researcher and the communities involved in a study. The rupture is possible through certain shared traits including: focusing on incorporating marginalized voices and considering conversational modes of interviewing such as story-telling. Similarly to PAR, time constraints limited my ability to wholly assimilate practices from decolonized research methodology; however, throughout my research project I took into consideration the critiques to traditional research and power dynamics that decolonized research methodology brings forth.

These questions that PAR and decolonized research methodology pose proved especially valuable when I decided to develop a project on gender-based violence in Cuba. I knew I wanted to design a project on this subject, but I did not want this research to simply satisfy a curiosity: I wanted to produce something that might be *useful* to the communities I was interested in understanding. Merrifield's text was influential in forming the epistemological basis of my work. With her questions in mind, I explicitly asked Dr. Moya what research gaps existed that could be useful to fill. Dr. Moya noted that literature on the issue generally draws data from the personal narratives of survivors and primarily features reports on the violence and how this persists on the

island. Reports had yet to expand their data from survivors, to include those individuals leading initiatives to address the issue, and had yet to document in depth what kinds of initiatives were developed in the last decade beyond the state initiatives. Thus, the greatest void existed on the subject of the organizers of community projects and initiatives to help survivors. Though there was extensive activist work around gender-based violence, academic literature did not focus on work of this nature.

Originally, I sought to apply PAR and decolonized research methodology to the data collection of my project but the time constraints I faced rendered it too challenging to fulfill one of the biggest traits of these methods: considering participants as co-researchers rather than simply subjects in a study. Although I did consult participants during our meetings, and employ their knowledge to shape the course of my work, the consultation only took place once with each participant. Consistently meeting and consulting every participant to build their role as co-researchers would have been very difficult given the limited time I resided in the country, together with my desire to meet with a wide range of individuals. Thus, although these methods contributed to the epistemological basis of my project, it ultimately was not a PAR or decolonized research project.

The design of the project ultimately drew from engaged scholarship practices; specifically, the informed model of engaged scholarship. (Van de Ven, 2007; Merry, 2011; Low and Merry, 2010) In essence, this form of scholarship controls and conducts the activities of a study through the advice of the various stakeholders. Descriptive and explanatory questions posed to stakeholders from different backgrounds allow the researcher to study a research problem from different viewpoints. (Van de Ven, 2007)

Data Collection

In accordance with the informed model of engaged scholarship, at almost every step of my research, including the formation of the problem, theory building, and research design, I consulted the opinions of my stakeholders. I believe that the strength to my project especially stems from the relationships I formed and the guidance I received during my fieldwork. Van de Ven states: "Simply talking with a few knowledgeable people […] goes a long way […] By stepping outside of themselves, researchers can gain a more informed perspective of their studies."[4] To truly 'step outside of myself' and 'gain a more informed perspective' I chose specific data collection methods that could best help me form relationships with stakeholders and spend time in the contexts of interest. The chosen methods include: snowball sampling, participant-observation, and semi-structured interviews.

Snowball Sampling: The Participants

According to this technique, participants consult their existing acquaintances to help recruit new individuals for the study. I found this approach particularly valuable given my initial distance from the communities I wished to engage with; although I had studied abroad in Cuba for five months when I began conducting the research, the only point of contact I had related to my topic of interest was my advisor, Dr. Moya. Given this detachment, I recognized that designing a tightly prescribed plan veered away from the design of my project. On one hand,

[4] H., Van de Ven Andrew. Engaged Scholarship: A Guide for Organizational and Social Research (Oxford University Press, 2013) 271

it would have rejected my epistemological considerations in that it would elevate my knowledge and intuition above that of the communities involved. On another, forming a preconceived plan would stray from the spontaneity that characterizes qualitative research methodology.

John W. Creswell refers to this improvisation idiosyncrasy of qualitative research as 'emergent design':

> "[…] The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent […] some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field […] The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information."[5]

Creswell notes that many facets of the qualitative research project are subject to shift, including the focus of the questions, the people involved, and the spaces where the collection takes place. My own research experienced two significant shifts after the first week of fieldwork, principally thanks to the snowball sampling technique.

During the first weeks of fieldwork, Dr. Moya recommended most of the people I met and interviewed. In accordance with my initial guiding research question, I wanted to understand the role of non-*oficialista* initiatives in ameliorating gender-based violence, and how these groups addressed the issue. The individuals Dr. Moya directed me to fell into three professions/fields: legal, academic, and community project organizers. The sole interviewee that did not fall into these categories and who Dr. Moya had not recommended was Deymi D'Atri, a documentarian who was currently unemployed. One of the professors from my study abroad semester introduced me to Deymi when I had described my interest in learning more of activist work on

[5] Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches. (SAGE Publications: 2018), 186

gender-based violence.

My encounter with Deymi marked perhaps the most important shift in my research. Through our conversation, I was made aware of the limited perspective of my snowball technique. Towards the end of our interview, Deymi asked me directly for the names of the people I had interviewed thus far: though I did not understand the nods of disapproval I received, eventually she explained that many of the people I interviewed were part of an *oficialista* circle. Deymi explained that the people I met with, including Dr. Moya, followed similar and more censored narratives. In other words, these were people who, whether consciously or subconsciously, were providing a limited picture of the realities around the activist work; namely, they could not offer more critical analyses of the state and state-affiliated institutions.

The guidance Deymi provided catalyzed a shift in the focus of my interviews, and in my strategy to recruit participants. With regards to the focus of my interviews, previously I was principally concerned in how my interviewees perceived the local community projects, how they viewed and evaluated their role in advocacy work. After meeting with Deymi, the focus shifted towards a comparative one, and I asked interviewees to compare the 'state and non-state approaches to ameliorating gender-based violence:

How would you describe the work related to gender based violence of local community projects in Cuba? Are you satisfied with their work?

How would you compare the approach of state and non-state actors in addressing gender based violence? Are you satisfied with their work?

In addition to the shift in the focus of my interviews, Deymi's observations also alerted me of the

need to expand my network of contacts to include people unaffiliated with Dr. Moya and, more genially, unaffiliated with the more established institutions. The recruitment process of individuals with this back ground took place principally during my atterdance at events related to gender-based violence; the participant observation workI engaged in was a valuable time to meet new individuals that were more purely local, non-state actors. The graphic below contains an illustration of the interviewees I documented in the final research project; circles represent non-*oficialista* individuals while squares are individuals from more *oficialista* backgrounds.

Figure A. Participants

Of the twenty individuals (not all represented in Figure A) I interviewed, two of these were survivors I specifically requested to speak with. The low number of survivors I interviewed in comparison to organizers and other figures involved in work on gender-based violence may be

understood through two explanations. Firstly, there was already a great deal of documentation in local studies on the experiences of survivors in Cuba. My focus on the organizers was, in part, born from the lack of information accessible on the other side of the treatment process: those organizing the treatment process. The second explanation is that I only wanted to specifically reach out to survivors if they had been or were participants in one of the non-*oficialista* initiatives I studied; the two survivors were both participants in one of the non-*oficialista* project I ultimately chose to focus on, WLDM. Triangulating the opinions of organizers, survivors and my own observations from the same project strengthened my perceptions and interpretations of the group.

Participant Observation: Spaces of Research

Participating in activities for survivors complemented the information interviewees shared with me regarding non-*oficialista* initiatives. While I was determined to also observe *oficialista* led groups for survivors- namely, state shelters-I was not given the access to these spaces. When I asked Dr. Moya whether I could observe activities in a shelter, she noted that it would be a difficult process, especially for foreigners. Ultimately I realized that the term 'difficult' was a politer form of expressing 'impossible.' Notwithstanding these restrictions in the *oficialista* realm, I was invited to many non-*oficialista* activities for survivors; my interview with Laritza was the most significant in opening various opportunities to partake in these events.

Directly and indirectly, Laritza made it possible for me to partake in activities of two different initiatives working specifically with survivors: Oscar Arnulfo Romero Center (OAR) and Women and Local Development in Marianao (WLDM).

I. *OAR*

OAR is a Christian NGO founded in 1985. Though the group focuses on many social issues, in the last decade the most prominent among them has become gender-based violence. The group began to centralize its focus on the latter when, beginning in 2010, in accordance to their mission to ameliorate gender based violence, they developed the national campaign, 'You are More,' ERES MÁS. Two principal components characterize the campaign: the production of public information materials and the organization of community activities. In accordance with the first component, the campaign helped create a popular television show called 'Breaking the Silence,' Rompiendo el Silencio. Each episode exposed a different form of gender-based violence from psychological violence to violence against transsexuals. The group gained significant national recognition after the show aired in 2016. As per the second component, I personally had the chance to partake in an activity designed to help promote and encourage entrepreneurship among survivors.

The entrepreneurship conference was an ideal event to conduct my participant observation, as it brought together five local community projects and each used entrepreneurship as a way of helping survivors heal. Thus, in accordance with my desire to expand the network of interviewees to include participants unaffiliated with Dr. Moya and other individuals with a closer relationship to the state, the event also proved an ideal recruiting space; it was at this conference that I met organizers

from the second initiative where I conducted my participant observation, WLDM.

II. WLDM

The community project WLDM is composed of three smaller projects of shoemakers, bakers, and hairdressers. WLDM's mission is to break from patriarchal norms infused in Cuban society through the economic empowerment of women from vulnerable populations, such as non-heterosexual cisgender individuals and people of color. The emphasis on the economic empowerment of women stems from the WLDM's belief that the most common reason why women in Cuba are unable to leave violent relationships is because of an economic dependency on their aggressor. To secure this objective, the group focuses on developing initiatives to promote the acquisition of skills to help them access the labor market, and better paying jobs. One of the organizers I met noted that WLDM has helped around 200 women reach financial autonomy since the group was created.

As part of WLDM's objective to empower women, the group hosts self-esteem workshops. I had the opportunity to partake in the final day of a weeklong workshop held in Marianao, the municipality where WLDM is based. In addition to observing as a participant, I conducted three interviews, one participant and two organizers, at the conclusion of the workshop.

Both organizers at OAR and WLDM were open to my audiotaping the activities. This concession aided my participation greatly as I was not consistently focused on note taking; the diminished necessity to document my observations in real-time allowed me to visibly

demonstrate greater compassion and awareness of my surroundings. For example, when the subject at the conference or in the workshop veered towards more sensitive matters, most often, this consisted in survivors sharing the violence they overcame, I was able to put pen and paper down, and wholly focus my attention on the individual speaking. I noticed that this was an especially appreciated gesture during one-on-one conversations or interviews; any initial discomfort or tension eased when I ceased taking notes, a shift I observed through physical cues such as eye-contact and occasional touches on my arms of reassurance.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The 'semi-structured' component of the interviews was a valuable trait of this data collection procedure. Before interviews began, I emphasized to my interviewees that the process did not have a set order or specific objectives—my focus as an interviewer was to have a conversation with the individual, learn of their opinions on the topics of interest, and listen to their personal narratives. I only had five questions prepared for participants, but I did not always insist on asking them; if our dialogue flowed naturally in the direction of a related topic, I would disregard the questions and allow the participant to direct the conversation. The questions in themselves were also intentionally generic and non-aggressive in that they did not ask interviewees for their *opinion* on a specific institution, or person. Below is a list of the questions: while the first two were inquiries on gender-based violence generally and in the Cuban context, the last three prompted more personalized answers.

1. How do you define gender-based violence?
2. How would you describe gender-based violence in Cuba?

3 How would you compare the approach at the state and non-state actors in addressing gender-based violence? Are you satisfied with their work?

4. For this research project, I am very interested in hearing the life stories of the individuals that have dedicated themselves in some capacity to gender-based violence. Could you describe to me your experience with this, perhaps beginning with where your motivation and interest in the subject stem from?

5. What difficulties, if there have been, have you encountered in your job? How did you overcome them?

The majority of my preconceived questions raised the importance of recognizing my participants as a whole, and not simply their knowledge of a subject. In this manner, I believe the epistemological basis of my project emerges in the interview process, as it counters traditional Western methodology's disregard of the value of storytelling and subjectivity. Though the research is not perfectly in alignment with indigenous research methodology, I would consider my value of conversation and storytelling a trait inspired by this particular methodology. Scholars writing on this approach to research such as Chilisea and Tsheko write: "In indigenous research, conversational methods [...] reflect the ideal of equality among participants and emphasize building relationships and connectedness among people and with the environment."[6] The connectedness and equality components mentioned in this statement resonate greatly with my awareness of traditional power dynamics between researchers and participants. In addition to the 'semi-structured' component of my interviews, the flexible nature of my note-taking was also inspired by the same epistemology; if the discussion veered towards more sensitive subjects, I interrupted note taking and dedicated my full attention to the participant. Reflection sessions at the end of each day helped me remember important points from the interview if I ultimately

[6] Chilisa, Bagele, and Gaelebale N. Tsheko. "Mixed Methods in Indigenous Research." *Journal of Mixed Methods Research (*vol. 8, no. 3, 2014), 223.

decided not to take notes. During these sessions, I also documented more generally my impressions of the fieldwork that day, and typed up notes taken in interviews. As all of my interviewees were comfortable with my note-taking, I was able to record in the moment the first impressions I felt from the conversations.

Data Analysis

Getting Here: On Overcoming Self-Censorship

Establishing myself as a researcher driven by compassion, admiration, and a genuine desire to understand Cuban realities was a principle concern throughout my fieldwork. This objective was especially significant given the occasional absence of these sentiments among researchers in Cuba; several times in the initial stages of my research, Dr. Moya alerted me that at times foreign researchers had upset locals, including herself, in their inconsiderate ways of engaging with the community. Dr. Moya deemed it a product of the 'red-tinted glasses' foreigners often wear coming into Cuba, yet never remove; she explains that the preconceived understandings of Cuba and, more generally, of communism often induce foreigners to perceive realities through a hypercritical lens. Further, she notes that the lens also affected the behavior of the students in that it can render them unnecessarily critical and aggressive. Dr. Moya conceded upon arrival that the existence of these red glasses was understandable yet it was really the lack of self-awareness of their existence and a weak effort to diminish the influence of these as a way of perceiving reality that upset her and many other Cubans willing to help foreign students. Later on in my research, I witnessed Dr. Moya's observations firsthand: three individuals who I hoped to

interview refused to meet with me due to previous negative experiences with foreign students and a fear of being misquoted.[7]

With this understanding of common perceptions of foreign researchers, I was determined to distinguish myself and clearly emphasize the great compassion and admiration I felt towards the communities involved in my project. As I mentioned previously in the Data Collection section above, I sought collection strategies reflective of my empathy-driven approach and willingness to break from traditional power dynamics between researcher and participants. These guiding principles did ultimately allow me to build a strong network of individuals related to my subject of interest.

But while the compassion I felt towards these individuals was a constructive force for the project when I was in Cuba, once I left the country this sentiment proved destructive of the continuation of my work. The strong emotional connection I formed to the individuals involved in my fieldwork unknowingly compelled me to self-censor for fear that my analyses might break these relations: I was so concerned to fight the influence of red-tinted glasses that I did not realize the 'rose-tinted' glasses forming in their place.

Overcoming self-censorship was the first, and most difficult phase of my data analysis. Creswell notes in his text on research design that in qualitative research, it is essential that researchers be aware of how their background influences their interpretations of data: "qualitative research is interpretative research; the inquirer is typically involved in a sustained

[7] Various examples exist of foreign researchers tarnishing relations with Cubans because their work was perceived inaccurate or misleading of Cuba. The accumulation of similar experiences developed a "collective memory" of foreign researchers as a potential threat to the unity of the revolution and thus of the country: "the relationship between researchers and foreign anthropologists has been a fraught one." (Andaya, 2014), 5.

and intensive experience with participants. This introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into qualitative research [...] the experiences may cause researchers to lean toward certain themes [...]."[8] Creswell underscores that because individuals conducting qualitative research generally interact extensively with the participants, the inquiries they make and themes they focus on are guided by the researchers' personal background. In my own research, this was true to the extent that the relations I had formed to most of my interviewees subconsciously *limited* the themes I considered. For example, the personal connection I developed with Dr. Moya initially discouraged me from even considering writing critiques of the FMC. Dr. Moya benefits greatly from the FMC not simply given her role as the editor and chief of the Federation's magazine but because the group often supports her in a plurality of ways, such as providing the special disability-friendly transportation she needs to get around the city. In light of Dr. Moya's relation to the FMC, and my strong connection to Dr. Moya, I felt that writing sections dedicated to critiquing the group might upset her, and thus disregarded the value of considering the group in my analyses.

When I became aware of the source of my self-censorship, and conceded myself greater intellectual liberty, I was able to analyze my data through a more critical lens.

Coding Interviews

The interview analysis took place through three principal stages: extrapolating categories, choosing codes, and comparing responses. During the first phase, I read through the transcribed

[8] Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches. (SAGE Publications: 2018), 187.

interviews and selected the principal categories prevalent in the interviews. Six categories emerged: institutions, current conditions, history, societal transformation in Cuba, campaigns, and personal narrative. Each category represented a facet of Cuba I wanted to further explore; these were intentionally broad as the extensive amount of data-every interview was between 15-20 pages long-rendered it difficult to decipher immediately which specific codes to use for the comparative analysis.

Once the interviews were categorized in the six topics listed above, I could more easily determine common themes and patterns. In the second phase of the analysis, I selected five codes reflective of specific themes I wished to analyze, based on the patterns that emerged from my categorization of the interviews. The five codes that emerged included: *oficialista*, community projects, legal, FMC, and change. Through manual color-coding I marked how interviewees discussed the themes and, in the final stage of the process, I compared interpretations of each code.

Content Analysis

To complement my analysis of the interviews, I conducted a content analysis of foreign and local documents related to gender-based violence in Cuba. The local documents consisted in an array of materials including: newspapers, magazines, theses, and books. These primary materials enabled me to make inferences as to how popular media outlets are reporting the issue, who is leading the discussion, and whether there is any dominant narrative surrounding the

issue. Similarly, the foreign materials I collected enabled me to infer what the dominant outsider focus has been on gender-based violence in Cuba and, more generally, of activist work on the subject.

And Then What?

When the final research product is completed, I intend to translate the document in Spanish and send it in PDF form to all the participants. With regards to the general Cuban context, it is my hope that the final research product engenders discussions on the current state of advocacy work on gender-based violence and how this is being reported in national media. In relation specifically to the communities involved in my study, I hope that the work may be to some degree a source of empowerment to their work and grassroots activism as it places their work on the forefront of promoting women's rights.

Notwithstanding these more positive outlooks on the potential influence of the work in Cuba, there is also a significant potential for the project to equally disrupt or, in the worst of cases, break the relationships I labored to build. The project *is* a social critique, and as such attempts to uncover power relations and structures of inequality. (Low and Merry, 2010) Yet an array of the individuals that helped guide my research, namely Dr. Moya, were deeply associated with the institutions that perpetuated unequal power relations. As Dr. Moya was going to be the first person to review my completed work, and oversee its distribution, I developed a degree of concern that the possibility of even distributing the work might be damaged given its critiques. I feared that the offense Dr. Moya might form would be so strong that she would even refuse to distribute the project.

As I concluded writing this very chapter on March 4th 2018, Dr. Moya passed away. Her death marks a significant shift in the 'and then what' of my work in Cuba, as I lost one of the strongest professional contacts I developed in Cuba. However, I hope to strengthen my existing points of contact in the country to garner a wider network of individuals that could potentially oversee its distribution and contribute honest critiques for its improvement.

Chapter II

Gender-Based Violence Activism in Latin America

You foolish men who lay
the guilt on women,
not seeing you're the cause
of the very thing you blame;
[…]
No woman wins esteem of you:
the most modest is ungrateful
if she refuses to admit you;
yet if she does, she's loose.

-From *Foolish Men Who Accuse,*
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz,
1689

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz was born on November 12, 1651 in San Miguel Naplantla, Mexico, during the country's colonial period. At the time, women were excluded from most educational, political, and social spheres—yet Sor Juana broke from this norm. In her early childhood, Sor Juana not only taught herself to read and write but also learned multiple languages; by adolescence, she was teaching Latin to young children and had learned

Nahuatl, an Aztec language spoken in Central Mexico. During this time Sor Juana built a reputation throughout Mexico for her intelligence and scholarship. Despite her family's refusal to allow her to attend University, Sor Juana was able to continue her studies through her decision to become a nun; in 1669, she entered the monastery of Hieronymite nuns where, until her death, she was given the freedom and resources to continue her studies. Sor Juana wrote a vast array of literary works at the monastery, including poetry and plays, yet perhaps her most famous literary writing was her letter *Response to Sister Filotea de la Cruz.* The letter was a response to a Portuguese Jesuit preacher's published critiques of her writing, in which he advised she focus on religious rather than secular studies. Sor Juana's reply to the letter is hailed today as the first documented feminist manifesto in the world that defends, among other things, a woman's right to education. Though the letter is one of the central texts of her international legacy, I found the poem mentioned in this chapter's epigraph to offer a more striking understanding of the significance of her legacy, especially for gender-based violence studies in Latin America.

In the stanzas illustrated above, Sor Juana describes in succinct yet powerful ways behavioral traits of men at the time that helped perpetuate violence against women. Although she never explicitly uses the term violence, the dynamics described touch on the traits that compose violent behavior. Particularly exemplary of the latter is the verse 'The most modest is ungrateful if she refuses to admit you; yet if she does, she's loose'; in the poem, Sor Juana notes the contradictory and powerless position women are subjected to but in these verses, this appears to portray some degree of physical violence. In the verses, she notes that if women refuse to sexually engage, 'to admit' a man, she is considered 'ungrateful,' yet if she accepts him, she is considered promiscuous, she is 'loose.' The blame and disgrace Sor Juana claims women are inevitably subjected to convey well the idea that regardless of their decisions, women are in a

position of subordination simply for the fact of being woman. The latter is a moral reiterated throughout the poem, and one that is the foundation of the definition of gender-based violence: succumbing to unequal power relations and violence for one's gender.'

Sor Juana was one of the most widely published poets of her time and continues to gain recognition from contemporary influential figures such as Virginia Woolf and Octavio Paz. Beyond her legacy as a writer and feminist, Sor Juana exemplifies the significance Latin American women have held in influencing international feminist discourse, particularly in shaping discourse on gender-based violence; almost three hundred years after Sor Juana wrote the poem *Foolish Men Who Accuse,* Latin American women continue to hold a central role in leading the international mobilization against gender-based violence.

Latin America at the Forefront

Various scholars underscore the global significance of activism in Latin America against gender-based violence. (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Gherardi, 2016; Roggeband, 2016) In this region, the issue rose to prominence on feminist agendas years before it engendered international action. While the issue was only brought to light in 1985 at the UN Women's conference in Nairobi, where substantial recommendations on the subject were made, in Latin America these talks began in 1981, at the first feminist Encounter for Latin America and the Caribbean in Bogotá. (Keck and Sikkink)

The Encounter conference brought together more than 140 feminist organizations from across the region. Of notable importance was the proposal to call November 25 the "Day against Violence against Women," in honor of three sisters from the Dominican Republic murdered on

that same day by security forces under Trujillo's dictatorship. An array of Latin American organizations held annual commemorations on November 25 and, as a result, in 1991 this contributed in developing one of the most important campaigns for raising global awareness on the issue, the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence."

The 1981 Encounter conference marked the beginning of an established transnational mobilization around the issue in Latin America. In subsequent Encounters, the group escalated its efforts against gender-based violence. Of notable significance was the fifth conference in 1990, during which the group formed the Latin American and Caribbean Network against Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence. Through this network, the group specifically endeavored in developing a broad framing of the problem of violence and succeeded in establishing a widespread communicative network. In accordance, Roggeband states:

"The creation of new transnational spaces through Encounters and networking allowed feminists in Latin America to develop a new understanding of violence against women. These new spaces helped to integrate domestic knowledge and experiences of institutionalized violence under military regimes, processes of democratization, and state building and connect these to existing and emerging international frameworks on human rights and gender equality."[9]

Roggeband underscores that conversations on gender-based violence existed in Latin America *before* they emerged in international feminist platforms. Shared domestic experiences with, for example, 'institutionalized violence under military regimes' and 'processes of democratization' kindled conversations on this form of violence. Roggeband's perspective is an especially valuable perspective given the tendency of certain scholars to ground their analyses of gender-based violence activism work in Latin America in international conventions, such as the Belém

[9] Conny Roggeband, "Ending Violence against Women in Latin America: Feminist Norm Setting in a Multilevel Context," *Politics & Gender* (vol. 12, no. 01: 2016), 165.

do Para (1995); their analyses suggest that gender-based violence rose to prominence on the agenda of Latin American feminists as a *consequence* of international conventions, rather than vice versa. While the conventions were critical to strengthening activist work in the region, it is important to note, as Roggeband and my analysis above indicate, that the international norms were developed as part of the *ongoing work* of Latin American feminists.

The Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI) regional report on Latin America and the Caribbean (2017) underscores that international conventions were a critical complement to preexisting mobilization in Latin America. Conventions provided an impetus to reinforce legislative frameworks covering domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape (including marital rape), and other forms of violence such as femicide. Additionally, they catalyzed the development of more comprehensive and gender-responsive welfare and legal services for survivors. Exemplary of the latter is the influence international conventions such as the Belém do Para (1995) have exerted on the subject of femicide. Figure B. supports the latter, clearly showing that after the convention, twenty countries in the region passed laws to address domestic violence against women. Only two countries, Argentina and Chile, passed these laws before the convention.

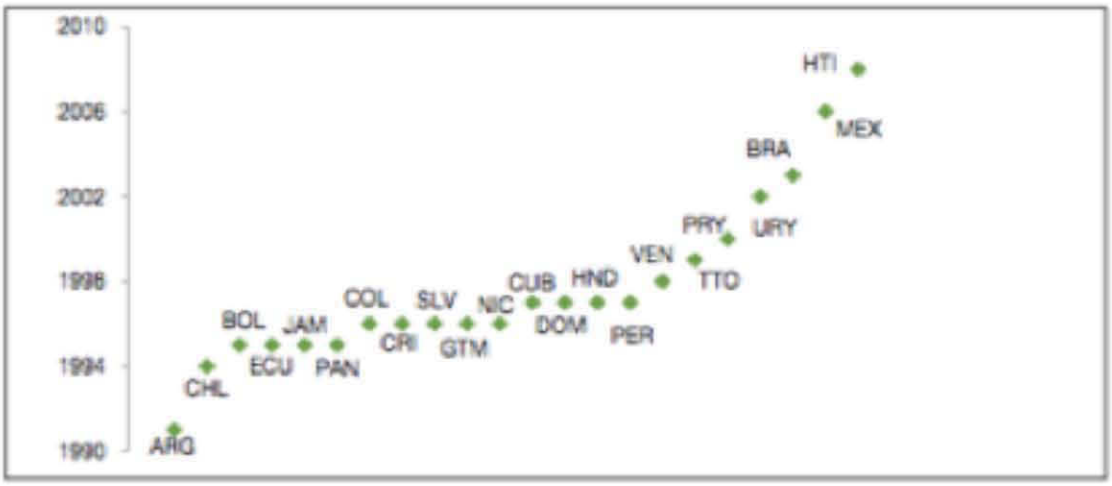

Figure B. Laws addressing domestic violence against women by date of enactment.[10]

The adoption of these laws took place over the course of two decades. In addition to passing laws following the recommendations of the Belém do Para convention, countries also improved laws and added new ones to specifically include the definition of femicide in their legislation. Sixteen Latin American countries enacted laws between 2008 and 2015 to confront femicides. In Guatemala and Argentina, for example, these have increased penalties and in El Salvador, a national protocol was adopted to improve the conduct of investigations for femicide cases.

These gender-positive legal frameworks are some of the most progressive globally. In accordance, legal scholars such as the Argentinian lawyer and activist Natalia Gherardi note that the Latin American and Caribbean region is perhaps the most advanced globally with respect to national regulatory frameworks to address gender-based violence. (Gherardi, 2016) In the last two decades every country in the region has passed a law covering domestic violence, and thirteen offer comprehensive legal protection and services to survivors. Despite the legislative progression, factors such as ineffective implementation and regional states of conflict have

[10] "Latin America and the Caribbean: SIGI Regional Report ." *Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development* , 2017. 74.

allowed for the persistence of gender-based violence.

The Violence Continues...

Today, Latin America is one of the regions in the world with the highest rates of gender-based violence; among the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, half are in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Although statistics are lacking specifically for rates of violence in Cuba, studies, and observations from interviewees do not place Cuba among those countries in Latin America with the highest rates of violence. Nonetheless, there was mass consensus among my interviewees that since the revolutionary state came to power, Cuban women have continued to experience gender-based violence in all its manifestations.

How countries have responded to these escalating rates of violence follow similar patterns. The activism surrounding the issue targets common principal areas of concern: law, law enforcement, media, and education. Exemplary of the latter is the development of NGOs over the last decade across the region working specifically to provide alternative legal services and support for survivors. Two such groups are Women's Justice Initiative (WJI), a Guatemalan NGO working since 2011, and the Latin American Team of Justice and Gender (ELA), an Argentinian NGO founded in 2003. Both WJI and ELA bring together interdisciplinary teams of specialists to help disadvantaged female populations secure their full legal rights and access legal resources. While the WJI is focused on working with survivors from indigenous communities, primarily Mayan ones, the ELA more generically focuses on women's advocacy work in more socio-economically disadvantaged positions.

Bottom-up activism of this nature is widespread throughout Latin America and the

Caribbean, with notable increase over the last decade. Poor implementation of laws and governments reluctant for various reasons to take systematic action against the issue have engendered the birth of alternative initiatives to provide aid and help raise social consciousness on gender-based violence.

The Cuban case is an especially interesting one in relation to the latter; here too there has been a grassroots mobilization against the issue. And yet, unlike many other Latin American countries, the progression by which the country arrived at such a strong contemporary bottom-up activism differs significantly to other countries.

Gender-based violence was an issue brought forth publicly in Cuba much later than in other countries in the region, and when it officially began to emerge in national revolutionary discourse, it was largely a product of international conventions and conferences. The global recognition the issue began to receive on feminist agendas pressured the Cuban state to follow global trends, especially given the government's dependence on its concern for gender equality to sustain its legitimacy. Thus, unlike the experience of an array of Latin American countries, Cuba's initiative to address violence stemmed from its participation in international women's conferences rather than conversations with and inspiration from other Latin American countries. The following chapter outlines in greater detail how gender-based violence came to be discussed in Cuba.

Chapter III

Gender-Based Violence Activism in Cuba

There were many difficulties when I began to study gender based violence around thirty years ago. The first was when I actually started working on the subject: it was still not recognized as a social issue.

-Clotilde Proveyer, 2017

Proveyer is considered one of Cuba's pioneers in gender-based violence studies; various contemporary Cuban scholars who have written on the issue recognize Dr. Proveyer's historic role. (Vasallo, 2012; Tenorio, 2011; Moya, 2014) Particularly influential in her career was the founding of the Women's Department at the University of Havana in 1991. The department hosted several conferences on research on women as part of its mission to promote collaboration with foreign scholars. Proveyer personally benefitted from these events early on; during a 1993 conference with scholars from the United States, she and some of the invited scholars collaborated on the first published work on gender-based violence in Cuba. The article noted that Cuban women were still subordinate to men, notwithstanding the progress they made in the

public sector.[11] Despite these significant and noteworthy findings, the article was not published in Cuba: in autumn of 1993, the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) published the work in their journal. Proveyeur's quote in the epigraph to this chapter sheds light, albeit indirectly, as to why the publication occurred outside of Cuba.

When I asked Proveyeur to recount some of the challenges she has faced in bringing to light gender-based violence in Cuba, she noted that many of these difficulties lay at the start of her career 'when I first began to study gender-based violence around thirty years ago.' She attributes the source of this difficulty to the fact that 'it was still not recognized as a social issue'; the credibility that the issue lacked greatly complicated Proveyeur's work. Even among colleagues at the University, Proveyer claimed that she encountered great resistance to the subject (in subsequent data analysis chapters, I include sections as to *why* the issue persisted and was not reported). Exemplary of the widespread resistance to the subject of gender-based violence is the publication of her work in a non-Cuban context; the article might have motivated other academics and women's organizations in Cuba to integrate the findings in their work and, in turn, help ameliorate existing realities. Its publication outside of Cuba signifies that it was only available to those Cubans who were acquainted with Proveyer, or were part of elite circles with foreign contacts who could procure the work. In essence, its distribution and, as a result, its potential influence, was curtailed.

Proveyer's experience is a manifestation of a much greater phenomenon. The lack of a

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[11] "[…] Although the Cuban woman has won extremely important positions in all spheres of social life, which have permitted her to place herself on a par with man in the construction of the new society, in the home (where positive changes have also taken place) she has not yet managed to break with the subordination that rules and devalues her[…]The contradictory and multifaceted character of the emancipation of women in Cuba is the focus of this report of our case study […]." Clotilde Proveyer et al. "The Cuban Woman as a Social Subject: Reflections on a Case Study."*National Women's Studies Association* , (vol. 5, no. 3, 1993), 357.

desire to effectively embed gender-based violence as a prominent issue in Cuba was not only a characteristic of the academic sphere but also of the larger sociopolitical context. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the issue integrated in the Latin American feminist agenda during the first Encounter conference in 1981; Cuba remained distant from these conversations, and did not participate in the first three feminist Encounters.

Scholars note that Cuba's reluctance to collaborate with feminists on the subject stemmed from a more general rejection of the notion of 'feminism.' (Smith and Padula, 1996) Leaders of the FMC on occasion denounced feminism as an ideology that prevented women from seeing that the true source of their woes lay not in men but in capitalism. In accordance, Vilma Espín, president and founder of the FMC claimed in 1974 that the Federation was feminine, but not feminist. (Farber, 2011) Given this antifeminist sentiment and gender-based violence's association with the Latin American feminist agenda, the issue was not ascribed legitimacy among the leaders of the Federation. It was only until the issue rose to prominence in the mid 1990s on the international feminist agenda, particularly within the United Nations, that the issue integrated in national discourse and action.

How the Cuban State Officially Recognized and Addressed Gender-Based Violence

Cuba was an active member of the UN since the establishment of the revolutionary government. Especially with regards to women's rights, the country was consistently involved in the organization's conferences. Accordingly, Cuba was the first member-state to sign what is described as the international bill of rights for women, the Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Thus, when gender-based violence rose to prominence on the UN agenda at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), Cuban delegates also began to consider the significance of the issue. The Cuban government took action that same year to address gender-based violence in Cuba; the Beijing Conference was the most influential event in inspiring and shaping Cuban policy to ameliorate violence against women.

In 1997, Fidel signed and approved of the implementation of a National Plan of Action for Follow-up on the Beijing conference. The preamble of the document states: "This Plan of Action, which summarizes the feelings and the political will of the State of the Republic of Cuba, is to constitute the cornerstone of the development of policies for women and to provide continuity in the advancement and development of gender equality in our country."[12] Here the political will of the government is directly associated with alleviating gender-based violence. Many of the clauses of the Plan of Action explicitly state the intent of the government and various state institutions to take action against this issue. Clause 67 is one such example: "Create a data base on both the victims and the perpetrators of all kinds of violence against women, and of violence against the normal development of children and young people, broken down by sex, age, and relationship to victims."[13] Although the database was never actually created, a desire carry out this action existed, at least on paper; clause 67 and more generally the National Plan of Action is a testament to the increasing desire to raise awareness on the issue. In the following months, the government and the FMC endeavored in an array of actions that were specifically

[12] "Plan de Acción Nacional de Seguimiento a la Conferencia de Beijing," República de Cuba, Editorial de la mujer, (1999), 2.
[13] Ibid

designed to ameliorate gender-based violence. Significant among these actions was the creation of the National Group for Prevention and Treatment of Violence in the Family (NGPTVF).

The FMC spearheaded the creation of the NGPTVF primarily to address violence against women. Diverse membership allows the group to focus on the problem through multidisciplinary and multi-sectorial measures. Prominent institutions represented include the Institute of Forensic Medicine, the Ministries of Education, Health, Interior and Justice, the National Sex Education Center, the People's Supreme Court, and the Radio and Television Institute. Together, members collaborate on three principle areas: training, treatment, and research.

Before the creation of the National Group, no spaces such as shelters existed to support individuals undergoing violence. To this extent, the group's creation of family counseling centers was significant in that it was the first space of healing established in Cuba. Contrastingly to the creation of the shelters, the discussion on gender-based violence was not a novelty; As illustrated previously in the chapter, her research on gender-based violence in Cuba began many years before the NGPTVF more systematically promoted this line of investigative work.

In addition to the Cuban government's mobilization efforts following the Beijing Conference, the state also took action symbolic in the international community, indicative of its desire to join the global conversations on gender-based violence: inviting a UN official to investigate the conditions of violence against women in Cuba. This was the first invitation the government extended to any United Nations human rights mechanism.

On August 17 1998, the Government of Cuba sent a letter to the United Nations, inviting the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to Cuba, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy. The

Special Rapporteur visited the island from 7 to 12 June 1999, and the following year, a report 'Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective' was released on the situation of violence against women and its causes and consequences. In her general findings section, Ms. Coomaraswamy shares her thoughts on the FMC: "[…] very impressed by the work of the FMC […] is very attuned to the problems of violence at the grass-roots level. It has begun programs of research and community intervention."[14] Coomaraswamy's analysis of activist work in Cuba against gender-based violence places the FMC at the head of this work. The breadth of the group nationally and the awareness of its members on the issue, equally impressed the Special Rapporteur.

Certainly, the FMC's lead in the establishment of the National Group did represent a milestone in the prevention and treatment of gender-based violence. The Federation recognized the necessity to address this issue in Cuba and, accordingly, advocated for institutional action to ameliorate the violence. But almost all my interviewees claimed that the significance of the Federation in this activism work changed overtime; the 'attuned' nature of the FMC that Coomaraswamy described has increasingly diminished. While the group continues to recognize the importance of the issue, it has not worked as much to improve the quality of support (Chapters IV-VI will elaborate in greater detail the shortcomings of the FMC).

Contemporary National Discourse on Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

A content analysis the nation's principal newspaper, *Granma*, reveals that over the last

[14] Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Report on the Mission to Cuba ." *UN Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights* (8 Feb. 2000), 5.

three years, articles covering the issue consistently mention the Federation as the principle entity propelling activist work against the issue. In an article commemorating the FMC's fifty-seventh anniversary, for example, the Federation is placed at the helm of advocacy for women, especially with regards to gender-based violence: "The state shelters are the heart of our organization […] they guarantee individualized attention to contribute to the solution of conflicts, like cases of gender-based violence […] As long as the FMC exists, the dignity of Cuban women will not be violated."[15] Similarly to other articles discussing this subject, the Federation's work is never tainted through a more critical lens. The article depicts the Federation's work related to gender-based violence in a glorified light, focusing on the activism as a certain 'guarantee to contribute to the solution of conflicts.' The existence of the Federation alone, is thus a sign that 'women's dignity will not be violated.' What emerges from these statements is an absolute-tone that leaves no room for debate on the Federation's role in society, no room to question the institution's shortcomings. The same absolute-tone emerges in international settings, when Cuban officials attempt to explain why gender-based violence has not yet fully been eradicated in Cuba: officials trace the roots externally to the US embargo, without any concession to domestic factors. Especially revelatory of the latter are the statements several Cuban delegates at the UN have made over the last decade when describing gender-based violence in Cuba.

In my content analysis of speeches Cuban officials pronounced at various UN conferences between the years 2008-2018, a pattern emerged surrounding this oficialista narrative. In four separate speeches during this decade, Cuban delegates explain that the root of the continued

[15] García, Alejandra. "Más De Medio Siglo De Orientación a Las Mujeres y Familias Cubanas." *Granma.cu*, 22 Aug. 2017, www.granma.cu/cuba/2017-08-22/mas-de-medio-siglo-de-orientacion-a-las-mujeres-y-familias-cubanas-22-08-2017-23-08-45.

violence might be traced to the US embargo.

Exemplary of the 'embargo frame' to gender-based violence are the following two statements of Ambassador Ana Silvia Rodríguez Abascal and Anayansi Rodriguez Camejo spoken in, respectively, 2016 and 2017, at UN conferences. The Cuban officials state:

"[…] Eliminating violence against women and girls requires the lifting of all unilateral coercive measures. Thus, she underscored that the economic, commercial and financial blockade that continues to be imposed against Cuba is an obstacle for the country's full development and the advancement of women. It is a form of direct and indirect violence affecting and hampering Cuban women's enjoyment of fundamental rights, including their right to development."[16]

"Camejo told the committee that in order to reach full elimination of 'violence against women and girls' it is necessary that 'the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba' be removed."[17]

In essence, the statements might lead one to believe that the embargo and its consequences are the forces perpetuating gender-based violence in Cuba. Both delegates explicitly claim that the embargo is the factor preventing women from progressing and reaching full emancipation. Once this embargo is lifted, Camejo states that Cuba will attain 'the full elimination of violence against women and girls.'

It should be noted that there is substantial foreign and local research demonstrating that the embargo does dramatically complicate the daily lives of Cubans. For example, certain studies show that the housing crisis has aggravated domestic violence; the financial and logistical difficulty of moving to a new home can discourage many from endeavoring to move or build a

[16] "Expone Cuba Logros En Materia De Derecho De La Mujer." *MinRex Cuba* (10 Oct. 2016)

[17] "Remarks by H.E. Mrs. Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo, Ambassador Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, Opening the Reception Hosted by the Cuban Mission to the UN to Commemorate the Africa Day. New York, May 23rd 2017." *MinRex Cuba* , (24 May 2017).

new one.[18] (Farber, 2011) Thus indirectly there exist physical and social constraints that can increase the permanence and probability of situations of violence. Given that the embargo has played a direct role in worsening the housing crisis, it may be considered then that the embargo indirectly contributed in aggravating domestic violence. However, the authority men feel they have to engage in this form of violence does not originate in the embargo. Implying otherwise, as the Cuban delegates claim, that the economic and social constraints imposed by the US are the principle cause of continued gender-based violence, has problematic connotations, especially along class lines.

Claiming that the embargo perpetuates violence indirectly implies that conditions of hardship and poverty are preserving violence against women. While the effects of the embargo can aggravate *existing* violence, as demonstrated by the housing crisis, the phrasing of the Cuban delegates suggests that the embargo is the *origin* of these. Thus, one might reasonably conclude from the statements that they believe gender-based violence in Cuba originates from forced conditions of poverty and hardship. The latter is an argument I am certain many Cuban scholars would join me in discouraging; gender-based violence is not a class issue, as socioeconomic status does not intrinsically dictate violent behavior. But based on the recurrent official Cuban narrative that explains the violence as a product of the embargo, one might wrongly associate poverty with gender-based violence.

[18] "One of the little-noticed effects of poor and congested housing conditions is their contribution to the high rates of divorced and to domestic violence." Farber, 205.

A Counter-Narrative

The following chapters will demonstrate that national discourses' outsourcing of gender-based violence to forces outside of Cuba, and its placement of the Federation at the center of this activist work, is not without consequences. A major injustice arises because of this misleading image: violence is indirectly perpetuated.

Discourse that is uncritical of the Federation and omits its shortcomings diminishes the incentive and potential mobilization towards improving the group, indirectly helping perpetuate violence. The only consistent and major entity identified as the source for continued violence is external to the country: the embargo. As described above, the official narrative attributes the continued violence against women to the United States' economic embargo— a point Cuban delegates made at various UN conferences. Shifting attention away from the domestic by not recognizing the institutional shortcomings in addressing gender-based violence and concomitantly drawing the attention to external influencers, namely, the embargo, manipulates the source of violence in a way favorable to the Cuban state, in that absolves it from taking responsibility for the continued violence. In turn, an obscured source signifies that actually targeting what the domestic factors influencing violence is rendered more difficult, thus contributing to more violence.

Framing the Federation as the principle activist, without equally recognizing the importance of alternative actors in supporting the prevention and healing process also indirectly helps perpetuate violence. Survivors looking for aid at the moment in Cuba who do not have access to internet and who are distant from big cities in Cuba-where many of these alternative actors are based- might not know of alternative forms of accessing help. The only source of

support available to them is the programs of the Federation, and if these-as will be shown in successive chapters-are not helpful, their condition could worsen as they may, for example, remain in a violent partnership. Disclosing to the population that there are alternative forms of aid in addition to the Nation Group's shelters across the country could alleviate violence by empowering individuals with more options and processes to receive support.

In the following chapters, data from my research will challenge the contemporary national discourse and elaborate on the consequences of this framing of gender-based violence activism work. On one hand, it will frame the issue as domestically sustained: how the FMC and *oficialista* discourse contribute in perpetuating this violence. On another, it will bring to the forefront those alternative mechanisms of prevention and healing. Through this counter-narrative, I hope to highlight the detrimental implications of the current national discourse, and how an alternative discourse that takes into consideration the effective work already in existence in the country might indirectly contribute in ameliorating violence.

Chapter IV

Inequality, In Equality

'Entre marido y mujer nadie se debe meter.'

Between a husband and wife, no one should interfere. This phrase was frequently mentioned like a tired nursery rhyme when the subject of gender-based violence came up in conversations with friends and colleagues. The mass consensus across a broad spectrum of ages and backgrounds was that gender-based violence was still a grave social issue in Cuba, and that this saying epitomized how the violence persists. To animate the expression, my participants would often describe a hypothetical case study of a police officer called to assess a case of domestic violence. When the officer arrives at the scene, the woman explains her situation; perhaps the husband hit her during a fight, and was now threatening to take away their children. Despite the clear tension and potential for the situation to escalate, the officer treats the case as de minimis. It is not the police's role to intervene in private affairs: *entre marido y mujer nadie se debe meter*.

In this scenario, the perception of occurrences in the domestic space as private affairs, absolves the officer from taking action to resolve the conflict, minimizing the potential for the woman to receive the support needed to escape violence. Thus, the "untouchable" nature of the domestic space overpowers law and justice. Why? What are the roots of this dynamic?

One of the principal roots might be traced to the FMC and postrevolutionary state's achievement of certain *conquistas* (conquests). The *conquistas* refers primarily to those social and legal victories that helped mobilize women into the public sector, obtained within the first twenty years of the Revolution.

Scholar Samuel Farber notes that since the summer of 1958, when Castro successfully helped establish the Mariana Grajales platoon, the first women's platoon in the revolutionary struggle, women's participation in the revolutionary project was increasingly viewed as essential in the fortification of the Revolution. When the revolutionary government was established, both the government and the Federation pushed for policy and legislation changes to ensure greater mobilization of women in the public sector. The subsequent increase in women's representation in the public sector was so significant that the changes became known as *las conquistas,* 'the victories.' On one hand, greater participation was equated with women's emancipation and on another, participation was considered an essential component in the government's strategy for modernization. Ensuring women's greater inclusion in the public sector thus signified benefits at the individual and national level. (Farber, 2011; Azicri, 2000) The *conquistas* that encouraged women in the public sphere undoubtedly had important implications for their empowerment. However, in recent decades, the *conquistas* have paradoxically contributed in preserving and aggravating gender inequality. Various interviewees attribute the fortification of

certain social norms, such as *'entre marido y mujer nadie se debe meter'* outlined in the aforementioned anecdote, to the preservation of the *conquistas* in national discourse. The recurrent use of *conquistas* to explain contemporary conditions of equality has neglected and aggravated continued conditions of inequality in the domestic sphere, preserving a climate ripe for gender-based violence. Three subsections will help illustrate the latter: Behind the Numbers: "Las Conquistas," "Behind the Statistics: How Inequality Persists Despite Las Conquistas," and "Las Conquistas in Oficialista Discourse." Ultimately, I hope this chapter will shed light on how discussions of equality have indirectly contributed in perpetuating conditions of inequality and gender-based violence.

Las Conquistas

"I've tried not to let myself be seduced by statistics."[19]

-Moya, *Alas Destacadas*

With this statement, Moya subtly alludes to the widespread social phenomenon pertaining to any local or foreign discussion on 'women in Cuba': it often begins with statistics. The statistics Moya specifically refers to are, namely, the pre-and post-revolutionary presence of women in the public sector. Perhaps with a jocular tone, Moya notes that there is a great temptation to begin descriptions of the progress women have made in Cuba with these numbers. The temptation is, indeed, high: even without significant knowledge of the Cuban context, the representational strides women have made in Cuba are, one might argue, universally impressive.

[19] Moya Richard Isabel , "Alas Desatadas". http//www.jiribilla. cu//2009//n400_01// 400_05.htlm (2009).

The table below illustrates some of the most commonly cited numbers.

	Prerevolutionary (% of women)	Postrevolutionary (% of women)
Work outside the home	12	46
University Graduates	3	60.6
Literacy rate at 10 years or older	23	99.8
Finished High School	2	61.3

Table A. Pre (circa 1953) and Postrevolutionary (circa 2008) Percentage of Female Representation in Public Sector.[20]

From the table, one may clearly infer that there is a drastic increase in female representation across a wide range of public sectors. Notable change occurred, for example, in education: while women constituted only 3% of university graduates in 1953, in 2008 they comprised 60.6% of graduates. In themselves, these proportions are cited as *conquistas*. The significant difference in representation was a clear result of the political will of the revolutionary government who, together with the Federation's advocacy work, enacted historic legal and policy changes.

In the first twenty years since its establishment, the Cuban government consistently passed some of the most progressive laws affecting women in the Western Hemisphere. On paper, Cuban women advanced far more rapidly than women in countries considered more developed such as the United States. The legalization of abortion, for example, occurred nationwide in

[20] "Literacy Rate, Adult Total (% of People Ages 15 and above)." *Data World Bank* , data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.ADT.LITR.ZS?locations=CU&year_high_desc=false. ; Barrueta, Norma Vasallo. Ecos Distantes, Voces Cercanas, Miradas Feministas, 115.

Cuba in 1965, while in the United States this changed in 1973 with *Roe v. Wade*- yet is still a difficult right to uphold in many states. With time, these rights increased; thanks to the advocacy of the Federation, various laws were passed that greater ensured women's capacity to participate in the public sector. The most influential laws include: Children's Circles, Maternity Law, and the Family Code.

- Children's Circles (1961):

  The first major reform to have facilitated women's empowerment and participation in the workforce was the establishment of children's circles, '*circulos infantiles*.' The Federation advocated for their creation and raised enough funds to establish three centers in poorer neighborhoods of Havana. Parents could take their children to the centers from as early as 45 days until 6 years of age, when they were ready to begin school. Children could remain for an average workday, from 6:30am to 6:30pm. The centers provided meals, baths, naps, and learning and playtime. Until 1967 when the centers became free, parents were required to pay a small fee based on their income.

  Today, there are 1,130 centers across the country however due to the recent economic crises, they have become severely underfunded and overpopulated. Additionally, thanks to the rise of private industries in Cuba, private daycares and nanny-services have become increasingly more popular, drawing caretakers towards these more profitable businesses.

  Although the original *circulos infantiles* have increasingly become obsolete given the economic crisis and the possibility of better-resourced alternatives in the private

sector, when they were first introduced to Cuban society these did play a role in contributing to women's greater access to the workforce.

- Maternity Law (1974):

  Among the most important features of this law is the conception of 'paid maternity leave.' With the law, women were given the right to an 18-week paid maternity leave, and paid days off for doctor's visits. The law also guarantees medical care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. An additional option exists whereby a mother can take unpaid leave but for a nine-month period instead.

  In the last few years, greater discussions have been held on the need to modify the maternity law, especially in regards to paternity leave: the law provides for no paternity leave.[21] However, it should be recognized that despite its flaws, other countries in the Western Hemisphere, such as the United States have yet to even pass a law for paid maternity leave.[22]

- The Family Code (1975):

  Despite the enactment of the latter two laws, and of consistent encouragement from high levels of government for women to participate in the workforce, participation rates remained low, especially in areas such as politics. Accordingly, the government

[21] Alejandra García, "Nuevas Normas Jurídicas Aumentan Protección a La Maternidad En Cuba." *Granma.cu*, www.granma.cu/cuba/2017-02-10/nuevas-normas-juridicas-aumentan-proteccion-a-la-maternidad-en-cuba-10-02-2017-23-02-27. (10 Feb. 2017)

[22] Alejandra García, "Nuevas Normas Jurídicas Aumentan Protección a La Maternidad En Cuba." *Granma.cu*, www.granma.cu/cuba/2017-02-10/nuevas-normas-juridicas-aumentan-proteccion-a-la-maternidad-en-cuba-10-02-2017-23-02-27. (10 Feb. 2017)

spearheaded a survey to understand what the continued limiting factors to female participation in politics. In her description of the latter, Margaret Randall states:

> "The Cuban revolutionary leadership was interested in understanding why female representation in the new People's Power had been so low. A multidisciplinary group of experts was dispatched to Matanzas. Large numbers of men and women were interviewed and the answer seemed unanimous [...] If women were expected to take full responsibility for housework and child care as well as hold jobs outside the home and lead active political lives, many were not eager to run for office as well[...] eventually a new family code was drafted. "[23]

Randall notes that the family code was a law drafted as a direct response to the results from the survey. The results of the survey identified the 'second shift' as the principal restraint on women's involvement in politics; women received pulls in opposite poles, whereby on one hand social norms continued to pressure women to hold a dominant role in the house hold, and on another, pressured them to increase their participation in the workforce. Given these polarizing forces, women were unable to, additionally, take on an active role in politics. The family code drafted in the months after the survey attempted to alleviate the pressures women faced. Article 27, for example, states that both spouses must contribute to the needs of the family by sharing childcare and household duties. In essence, the articles sought to promote spouses' equal responsibility in the domestic sphere.

The Federation played an active role lobbying for each of these *conquistas,* further helping the group establish itself as the principal entity fighting for women's rights in Cuba. To a certain extent, these *conquistas* did help ensure women's greater participation in the public sector, as

[23] Margaret Randall, Gathering Rage: the Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda. (Monthly Review Press: 1992) 146

demonstrated in Table A previously shown: the statistical shift in the proportion of women in the public sector is a result of these conquistas. However, the increased representation of women across a wide range of social sectors did not signify that conditions of inequality were weakened or that patriarchal norms held less influence. Representation occurred alongside widespread conditions of inequality; many of my non-*oficialista* interviewees note that the *conquistas* were flawed and actually contributed in aggravating existing gender-based violence. In part, the latter may be attributed to the state's recurrent use of the *conquistas* in national discourse to frame discussions on the progress of Cuban women. Conditions for women in Cuba were often explained through these victories, and neglected to equally acknowledge the inequality women continued to face.

The following sections will outline this gap between non-*oficialista* observations and *oficialista* discourse: while the second section will elaborate how inequality continued despite the *conquistas,* the third section will demonstrate how *oficialista* discourse focuses on the *conquistas* to explain conditions for women, omitting the recurring conditions of inequality and gender-based violence.

Behind the Statistics: How Inequality Persists Despite Las Conquistas

Dr. Moya's previously mentioned quote on trying not to let herself succumb to the seduction of statistics was not only spoken with a jocular and ironic tone; it was spoken with an underlying note of caution. The academic recognizes that behind the statistics, there exist nuances that reveal an urgent need for continued progress towards equality. A prominent nuance that emerged in my data is the discrepancy between the public and private life of Cuban women:

the increased importance of women in the public sphere has aggravated their conditions in the private. When I asked my interviewees to describe the current state of inequality in Cuba, one of the recurring forms of contextualizing the issue was the discrepancy between the public and private Cuban woman. Interviewees from distinct backgrounds underscore that an increased participation in social, economic, and political affairs did not ultimately correlate with liberation or an alleviation of the violence. Quite the contrary, interviewees note that the increased pressure for women to join the public sector aggravated conditions of inequality in the private domain. Thus, despite *las conquistas,* conditions of inequality continue to manifest in the private domain.

Demonstrative of the latter is Laritza's description of contemporary women's relation to the public and private sphere:

> What exactly *do* women direct? Education and public health, where there are no resources, no money, no problems […] And these are roles traditionally assigned to women […] women only earn 85% of what their male counterparts do in the same jobs. Why? Because I am the caretaker of seniors, because I need to take the kids to school, because I missed a day of work because a friend got sick […] Time is a resource we are missing. Even those of us that have access and control over economic resources, we don't have access and control over our time.

Laritza recognizes the strides women have made in the workforce, yet she nuances the breadth of female representation, highlighting that the roles where women have managerial positions consists of 'education and public health, where there are no resources, no money, no problems' and 'roles traditionally assigned to women.' Data from various Cuban sources confirms Laritza's observations; representation has increased across different professions, yet those with a female-majority consist of professions historically considered female. (Vasallo, 2014; IGECSA, 2014) In 2011, for example, the lowest level of women in the workforce was registered in the agricultural, forestry and fishing industry (16.7%), while the highest representation of women was in social services (51.6%). (IGECSA, 2014)

Laritza further notes that even if women have an active presence in the workforce, the

continued influence of traditional gender roles negatively affects their position in the public and private domain. While it is true that certain *conquistas* such as the maternity law were attempts to eradicate discriminatory tendencies in salaries, Laritza underscores that in practice, women are not entitled to their full salary given their continued social construct as primary caretakers of the household. The preservation of the traditional role of the Cuban woman as the caretaker creates certain expectations of her, namely, that she will take care of multiple generations in the household, and these expectations have set implications for her usage of time and finances: 'Because I am the caretaker of seniors, because I need to take the kids to school, because I missed a day of work because a friend got sick.' Regarding finance-gestation, Laritza states that 'women only earn 85% of their salary,' as a certain percentage of the original is allocated to the various individuals under their care. In addition to the financial commitment, women are expected to dedicate a certain percentage of time to domestic work far exceeding that of men. Laritza briefly mentions this at the conclusion of her analysis; women do not have the liberty to choose whether to dedicate time to domestic affairs, as the 'caretaker expectation' dominates their willpower.

Other interviewees such as Dr. Proveyer elaborate on time usage more thoroughly:

> Women are in a position of subordination in a relation not only in terms of roles distributed but in relations of power […] In the possibilities that women can enjoy their time. Women don't have privacy, they have domestic time.

Proveyer raises an interesting discrepancy between private and domestic time. In her description of the unequal power relations that persist in the private sphere, Proveyer draws forth her point by noting that women do not 'have privacy, they have domestic time.' As with Laritza, Proveyer highlights that the roles women are expected to fulfill are so drastic that they limit women's freedom and willpower. According to Proveyer's comments, women are not entitled to time to

themselves, privacy, but rather constantly expected to dedicate themselves to "selfless time," taking charge of all family affairs in the private. Statistics collected in a 2002 survey of the National Office of Statistics in Cuba, support Laritza and Dr. Proveyeur's claims on time distribution in the domestic domain.

The survey underscores the drastic contrast in time management between men and women in unpaid labor. Table B. illustrates some of the results.

Territory	Women (%)	Men (%)
Urban	69	28
Rural	80	40
Total	71	33

Table B. Results from survey on time usage of men and women on unpaid labor. ONEI. 2002.

Both the rural and urban populations demonstrate a consistent imbalance in time usage, whereby women dedicate more than half of the percentage of their time in unpaid labor. Though there is a slight increase in domestic work time among rural male populations, it still represents only half of the time women dedicate to the home. The UN office of development in Cuba-UNDP-recounts these statistics specifically to highlight that one of the biggest obstacles to female empowerment in Cuba is the drastically unequal domestic conditions for men and women, and the implications these expectations have on important life variables such as time.

Despite *las conquistas*, these statistics and observations from my interviewees underscore that the rise of women's presence in the public sector did not intrinsically correlate with holistic

equality; rather, the greater pressures to participate in the public domain added and aggravated existing inequalities, notably in the private domain. The latter may be attributed to the shortcomings in the laws considered *conquistas*. On one hand, the laws did not adequately target private affairs and, on another, when these laws did focus on the private domain, such as the Family Code's emphasis on shared domestic work, the regulations were not properly enforced. (Truyol, 1998) Together, these shortcomings of the *conquistas* helped preserve and aggravate inequality and, as a result, gender-based violence.

Las Conquistas in Oficialista Discourse

"Today we live in a society where more than 60% of the technical labor force are women; we live in a society where the woman has work. We do not conceive of the woman as a slave of man; we conceive her as a human being with all the rights [...] who can deny this? [...] Thanks to the Revolution we can say that men have improved greatly, because I know of many young men that share domestic work."[24]

-Fidel Castro, 1998

Castro's speech follows the statistical narrative trend Dr. Moya alluded to; his discussion of the changed conditions for women thanks to the Revolution begins with quantitative information. In his view, the increased participation of women in the public sector broke traditional gender roles, leading him to conclude that the Revolution liberated women. To frame his belief, Castro uses statistics of the percentage of women in the technical force. While the statistics are significant in themselves, the issue at play is that Castro uses the statistic as evidence for the positive progression towards a holistically liberated populous-'we do not conceive of the woman as the slave of man, we conceive of her as a human being with all the rights.' From the previous section of this chapter, it is clear that greater representation did not

[24] Fidel Castro, Speech at the National Assembly of Popular Power, Havana, 24 Feb 1998-In honor of the 40th anniversary of decisive battles of liberation.

intrinsically guarantee emancipation.

Castro's decision to focus on the notion of 'representation in the public sector' is not without consequences; by focusing on this *conquista,* and neglecting to *equally* describe the continued struggle women face, especially in the domestic sphere, he indirectly helps perpetuate gender-based violence. One of my interviewees, Lartiza, explicitly outlined the latter:

> In Cuba there is a low perception of the risk with respect to violence against women. Because of the conquistas […] There are legal fractures. You tell me, 66% of the work force is made of women, and I will tell you that behind that number only 10% is in a decision-making position because we have a glass ceiling. The Federation says, another statistic they love, that 48% of the parliament is made of women. But the female delegates do not have equal access and control of resources.

Here Laritza directly associates *las conquistas* with gender-based violence. Laritza claims that 'because of the conquistas,' or rather, the use of statistics to frame narratives of women's progress, there is a 'low perception of the risk with respect to violence against women.' In accordance with data from the previous section, Laritza notes that there are nuances behind the statistics that indicate a drastic need for continued pressure towards equality. To illustrate her point, Laritza brings forth statistics often used in *oficialista* discourse. The first corresponds generically to the Cuban workforce, that '66% of the workforce is made of women'; Laritza highlights that behind this ostensibly impressive number, only 10% are in decision-making positions. The second statistic corresponds more specifically to women in positions of power. Laritza notes that *oficialista* discourse mentions that '48% of the parliament is made of women'- the statistic is also one often use internationally when speaking of gender equality in Cuba, as this degree of female representation is one of the highest in the world. (World Bank, 2016) But Laritza highlights that this statistic too is misleading, as 'the female delegates do not have equal access and control of resources': to paraphrase, she notes that just because women are in

positions of power, does not signify that they have equal ability or access to exercise power.

In her quote, Laritza identifies a specific entity that perpetuates this harmful statistics-based narrative: the Federation of Cuban Women. The organization that fought for the *conquistas* and for greater gender equality is, according to Laritza, one of the entities responsible for perpetuating narratives that preserve conditions favorable to gender-based violence. When Laritza first states 'You tell me,' she does not explicitly name the Federation but later, when she states 'The Federation says, another statistic they love' it becomes clear that the interviewee holds the organization accountable for disseminating misleading narratives of the conditions of women in Cuba.

Although she does not explicitly state this, one might infer from Laritza's observations that, given the Federation's past role advocating for the legal *conquistas* that helped women achieve greater representation in the public sector, it is in the organization's interest to employ these statistics, as they fortify the group's position as the entity effectively leading women's advocacy work in Cuba. Exemplary of the latter, and of the group's general tendency to perpetuate unbalanced narratives, is the experience of one of my interviewees, Deymi, with censorship in the Federation's magazine, *Mujeres.* Deymi's experience not only offered a unique and direct example of the FMC's contradictory nature, but also catalyzed the major shift in my research process as she helped me recognize that my pool of participants was biased towards the FMC.

Deymi is a graduate of the Facultad de las Artes y de los Medios de Comunicación Audiovisual (FAMCA), the faculty of cinema and television within the island's principal arts school, Istituto Superior de Arte (ISA). At ISA, Deymi directed films centered on the subject of gender-based violence. Her works have received widespread acclaim in Cuba-notably, her

documentary on female cinematographers. The documentary illustrates how women succumb to and suffer from discrimination in the cinema industry. In her interview, Deymi notes that the FMC's principal media outlet, the magazine *Mujeres*, recognized the importance of her work. Yet when her commentaries veered towards critiquing the work of the FMC, she was censored. Deymi states:

> They portray themselves as the group that works but it does not. The same goes for the magazine *Mujeres*, and Moya is someone who I appreciate, but she responds to the interests of the state. […] They interviewed me for *Mujeres* and I mentioned that the Federation did not really occupy itself with women and with female directors. We don't have rights. And it was censored. They do not deal with women's issues because they do not have the power to do so-I'm not saying they don't have good intentions they really do want to but they cant because they do not have the power to do so.

Unlike other interviewees, the sense of disillusionment towards the FMC was explicit and personal in my conversation with Deymi. From her own experience working with female directors, and working specifically on the subject of gender-based violence in Cuba, Deymi notes that there is a stark contrast between the FMC's projected image, and reality: 'they portray themselves as the group that works but it does not.' Skimming through *Mujeres,* one may immediately become aware of the projected image Deymi describes. In a 2012 edition of the magazine, an article describes the Federation as follows: "[…] the advancement of women in this country is possible thanks to the political will and the action of the women organized in the FMC."[25] Here *federadas* are placed at the epicenter of women's progress, a viewpoint found commonly throughout state media outlets.

To elaborate on her accusation of the gap between the Federation's projected image and reality, Deymi brings forth her own experience, claiming that the group 'does not really occupy

[25] Gutiérrez, Miguel. "Elegida Nueva Secretaria General De La FMC ." *Mujeres*, 2012.

itself with women and with female directors.' As a result of the Federation's lack of adequate attention towards the gender gap in the cinema industry, Demi argues that women here 'don't have rights.' It is important to note that when explaining *why* she believes the Federation has not taken effective action to help female directors, she notes that there is a discrepancy between the group's intention and power.

Deymi notes that she believes the Federation 'has good intentions'; however, despite these good intentions they are unable to take adequate action, to 'deal with women's issues' because of power restraints, 'they do not have the power to do so.' She repeats the latter phrase twice. Earlier in her quote, Deymi alludes to the rationale behind the Federation's lack of power: 'responds to the interests of the state.' Although Deymi was specifically referring to the Editor-in-Chief of the Federation's magazine, Dr. Moya, it may be inferred that the statement applies more generally to the organization as a whole. Thus, to paraphrase Deymi, because the Federation ultimately responds to the interests of the state, it does not have the power to effectively address women's issues.

In the following chapter, I argue that it is not in the interest of *oficialista* circles to 'address women's issues,' as Deymi noted; doing so would likely bring to light the causes for this continued discrimination, and the state and state affiliated institutions' failure in adequately ameliorating these conditions. To minimize the potential for state inefficiency to emerge, a misleading yet favorable image is constructed with the 'past glories,' namely *las conquistas* and the Federation's role in lobbying for these. Ultimately, this narrative aids the revolutionary state's preservation of power in domestic and foreign contexts.

Chapter V

Who Wins?

"[…] women are not an afterthought of nature, they are not secondary players in human destiny, and every society has always known that. Without women capable of giving birth, human populations would die out. That is why the mass rape and murder of women, girls and children has long been a feature of genocidal wars, and of other campaigns meant to subdue and exploit a population."[26]

-Margaret Atwood, *New York Times,* 2017

"If they were to ask us what is the most revolutionary thing that the Revolution is doing, we would say it is precisely this, the revolution that is occurring within the women of our country."[27]

-Fidel Castro, 1966

Women have been crucial to the nation-building process of countries around the world. In her article on feminist literature, Atwood notes that the inspiration for the centrality of women in her books derived from the historic influence this group has yielded in shaping 'human destiny.' Atwood points to women's capability of giving birth as an example of a gender-specific trait that

[26] Margaret Atwood, "Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means in the Age of Trump." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html. (10 Mar. 2017)

[27] Andaya, Elise. *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era.* Rutgers University Press, (2014) 13.

gives women the potential to influence the course of history. However, the writer notes that this power has also been a source of great exploitation in 'mass rapes', 'genocidal wars,' and 'campaigns meant to subdue and exploit a population.'

Atwood's commentaries on the significance of women in nation-building parallel well to women under the revolutionary government in Cuba. As Castro's speech from 1966 indicates, women have held an explicit and central role in the development of Cuban socialism: 'the most revolutionary thing that the Revolution is doing […] is occurring within the women of our country.' But the representation of Cuban women in national discourse has endured great manipulation, namely through the incomplete depiction of the conditions of equality in Cuba. As illustrated in the previous chapter, national discourse has increasingly focused on representing women through their notable presence in the public sector, neglecting to equally recognize the continued inequality in the domestic domain. I argue in this chapter that the manipulated image is central to, to quote Atwood, 'a campaign to subdue and exploit a population': constructing an incomplete image of Cuban women in state discourse helped preserve a strong sense of nationalism and nationhood.

Preserving a misleading image proved advantageous for the government's retention of power in domestic and foreign contexts. While I mainly rely on Nietzsche's essay *On Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* to outline the domestic benefits of preserving the incomplete narrative of women in Cuba, I focus more on data from interviews to highlight the foreign benefits of this narrative.

The government's success came at the cost of increased suffering of women in the domestic sphere. Preserving the incomplete image of Cuban women required obfuscating and neglecting ongoing conditions of gender-based violence. As a result of this, and of the

shortcomings of state institutions designed to help survivors, the conditions in the private sphere worsened.

The Domestic Benefit of Conquistas: A Nietzschean Analysis

Nietzsche's theoretical framework in *On Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* helps illustrate why preserving the image of the *conquistas* in national discourse is domestically beneficial to the Cuban government. The theorist's essay explores humankind's various relationships with history to underscore the importance of the relation for progressing towards modernity. Accordingly, Nietzsche identifies how unhealthy relations to history have developed to illustrate how a more constructive one may be formed. History is essential in the construction of nations, but the abuse of it can destroy the future progression of populations. Namely, the effects of the abuse of history can manipulate a populations' relationship to the present in a form detrimental to their future improvement.

In the Cuban case, there exists an abuse of history in that *oficialista* discourse exploits certain moments in Cuban history to construct an image of current conditions of equality; rather than addressing the sustained inequality, *oficialista* discourse draws attention predominantly to past victories. The imbalanced narrative is beneficial to the revolutionary government's retention of power namely, to employ Nietzsche's term, through the loss of the 'contructive drive.' The destruction of this drive creates a collective pair of nationalism-building "rose-colored lenses" through which Cubans perceive the current state of women in Cuba.

Nietzsche's essay describes the constructive drive as a force that enables humans to destroy

and rebuild "artifacts" of the past to build stronger ones for the future. In illustrating the concept, Nietzsche states:

"The historical sense, if it rules without restraint, uproots the future because it destroys illusions and robs existing things of their atmosphere in which alone they can live […] always undermines the living and brings it to ruin […] If no constructive drive is active behind the historical drive, if one does not destroy and clear away so that a future, already alive in our hope, may build its house on cleared ground […] then the creative instinct is enfeebled and discouraged."[28]

Here we may infer that the theorist believes it essential to pair a 'historical sense' together with a constructive drive. Alone, the historical sense creates a skewed perception of the present, 'robs things of their atmosphere in which alone they can live.' Driven solely by the historical sense, humans' distort their vision of the present thus losing their ability to perceive and interact wholly with this time. As a result, the neglected and misjudged conditions of the present suffer and, as Nietzsche states, 'always undermines the living and brings it to ruin.' To counteract the potential for this ruin, the theorist claims it is essential humans pair the historical sense together with a constructive drive; this relation helps humans achieve a more balanced and healthy relation to time, whereby the past is not forgotten and the present is not neglected. From the narrative, one may infer that the theorist holds the constructive drive valuable in that it entails the possibility of destroying present conditions to build a better future: 'destroying and clearing away so that a future, already alive in our hope, may build its house on cleared grounds.' Inside this potential for construction, is the 'creative instinct,' or rather, the ability to imagine ways of constructing the stronger 'house on cleared grounds.' As an imbalanced perception of history inhibits the constructive drive, then so too does it 'enfeeble and discourage' the creative instinct.

In the case of Cuba, the recurrent use of a narrative based in *las conquistas* and the Federation's role in obtaining these, enfeebles the constructive drive. I believe that the loss of

[28] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. 38

this drive creates a collective imagination beneficial to the state through two causes: complacency with present, and, to a certain degree, veneration of the present.

When *oficialista* discourse frames discussions on the current state of equality with statistics of women in the public sector, without equally recognizing the various ways conditions of gender equality in Cuba necessitate improvement, discourse has the power to, as Nietzsche writes, 'rob things of their atmosphere.' In robbing the present of its atmosphere, and the recurring state of inequality and violence, there develops idleness and an unquestioning attitude among the masses beneficial to the state. Individuals are less likely to question the current conditions if they are perceived through *las conquistas* as these act as "rose-colored lenses" that diminish the need to address gender equality. As a result, the impetus and sense of urgency necessary to, as Nietzsche coins it, 'destroy and clear away so that a future may build its house on cleared ground,' is also hindered; framing discussion on equality through past victories entrenches the historical sense so deeply that it leaves no room for cleared ground. In addition to a sense of complacency, the image *oficialista* discourse constructs of current conditions also engenders a sense of veneration towards the state and the Federation, as they are the entities portrayed responsible for the state of equality. Together the inaction and veneration among the masses helps preserve the legitimacy of the government and, in turn, sustain nationalism.

Inside this *oficialista* framework to discourse, gender-based violence finds a favorable culture in which to grow. When the quest to preserve these past victories takes precedence over the desire to improve present conditions, these are exacerbated. Deymi's case with censorship mentioned in the previous chapter exemplifies the latter. By censoring her critiques of the Federation, the group suggests that preserving a particular image takes precedence over recognizing potential shortcomings of the institution. If the group genuinely prioritized

ameliorating inequality and gender-based violence over the interests of the state, they would likely have incorporated her critiques; these could have served as impetus to "destroy" what was failing and build anew to better help women. In censoring Deymi's comments, they reject the potential for self-improvement. Those who ultimately suffer from this are the very group the Federation claims to fight for: women. By diminishing the possibility for self-improvement, they diminish the potential to better support women. Without this support, inequality, discrimination, and gender-based violence thrive.

Although *oficialista* discourse is unfavorable to ameliorating conditions for women, the government benefits greatly from depicting an unbalanced image of history. The greater focus on past victories than existing inequality helps maintain complacency and satisfaction of masses towards present conditions and, as a result, preserve the state's legitimacy. Beyond the domestic benefits of an imbalanced image of conditions of equality, the Cuban government also benefits in the foreign context: painting an imbalanced picture of equality helps preserve, to a certain degree, the state's legitimacy on the world stage.

The Foreign Benefit of the Conquistas: Women as Weapons in Cuban Foreign Policy

"*For the Cuban government, as the* Granma article makes clear, reproductive health statistics provide a valuable arsenal of discursive weaponry in the fraught ideological exchange that characterizes US-Cuban relations […] Cuba's health indicators thus function as powerful 'ambassadors for socialism' on a broader international stage."[29]

-Elise Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State*

In her book on reproductive health in Cuba, scholar Elise Andaya argues that the Cuban government has benefitted greatly from incorporating statistics regarding women's health in Cuba, particularly in the international context. Cuba's 'fraught ideological exchange' particularly with the US engenders pressure for the socialist state to distinguish itself from the capitalist US. Accordingly, the author defines these statistics as 'ambassadors for socialism on a broader international stage.' Andaya also paints these statistics as more defensive state tools, coining them 'valuable arsenal of discursive weaponry.' The author thus identifies the duplicity of the statistics; on one hand, they serve as diplomatic tools that can function as *bridges*, establishing Cuba's legitimacy as the only socialist country in the Western Hemisphere, and on another, they function as *weapons*, defense mechanisms to repel attacks from countries that have historically been eager not only to delegitimize but also to overthrow the revolutionary government.

Andaya's observation of the power of Cuba's reproductive health statistics in the world alludes to the more general importance women have held in *oficialista* discourse to establish the legitimacy of the revolution. Castro's speech from 1966 at the epigraph of this chapter illustrates that the female presence in *oficialista* discourse has existed since the beginnings of the revolution, and has been framed as the distinctive factor of the revolution. Women are not an

[29] Elise Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era.* 13.

afterthought of Cuban socialism-they are at its very core. Tainting the image of Cuban women, and recognizing the continued state of subordination Cuban women face at large, might be perceived as a sign of the weakness of the Revolution, thus hurting the very core of Cuban socialism.

Beyond the reproductive health statistics Andaya brings forth, I believe that the government maintains a strong image of Cuban women by preserving the concept of *las conquistas* and the past victories of the Federation. Given this component, the Cuban government has been reluctant to adequately address the causes of gender-based violence; effectively targeting the causes would inevitably compromise Cuban socialism's idiosyncrasy as the ultimate emancipatory force for women. In turn, the government may consider this weakened facade a vulnerability to attacks from the United States. My interviews with journalists Sara Más and Mirta Rodriguez Calderon, were particularly valuable in understanding gender-based violence as foreign policy issue. Both interviewees traced the reluctance to address the deeper causes of gender-based violence to the *oficialista* circle's fear of compromising national identity in internal and external contexts.

Mirta's experience writing about gender-based violence at the turn of the century is indicative of the pressure individuals involved in the construction of the national image, such as journalists, faced to compromise truth, 'for the sake of the revolution.' The following extract from her interview particularly exposes 'fear' as the main sentiment felt among *oficialista* circles towards the potential tainting of the empowered image of Cuban women:

> There is fear. It is a very complicated story. For a long time, journalists prioritized what was called and what they made us believe was the unity of the country, and the unity of the Revolution and that nothing could be done that conspired against the unity of the Revolution, because the most essential thing was to preserve the revolution and in order to do this we had to maintain unity. That brought us to what you call 'fear', to not risk what was essential to sustain the Revolution. And that brought us to self-censor, to

'auto-limit' ourselves. I told my children that I never lied but not always did I tell the full truth.

Mirta referred to herself during our interview as a controversial journalist, a journalist *mal mirada* 'badly viewed' by *oficialistas*. Over the course of her career, she often wrote pieces that posed deeper questions and sought for more answers. And yet, despite her desire to report "the truth," in the quote above she notes that there was an external pressure to 'self-censor' and 'never lie but not always tell the full truth.'

Mirta describes the external pressure to contain her writing as linked to the notion of 'unity in the Revolution' and a 'fear of conspiring against the Revolution.' The preservation of unity was prioritized above all else because it was through 'the maintenance of unity' that the Revolution maintained its strength. The term 'unity' Mirta utilized may be paralleled to 'homogeneity'; to maintain unity, it was necessary to perpetuate homogeneous narratives that did not contradict each other. 'Truth' according to Mirta's narrative, appears to do precisely the latter; it questions and complicates in ways unfavorable to this 'unity.' As a result, 'truth' and 'unity' could not co-exist. Keeping the homogenous facade of equality took precedence over 'truth' and questioning whether and how inequality persisted.

What Mirta left unstated in her interview, whether intentionally or not, was what the deeper roots of the fear were, and how this fear was related to bringing to light social issues such as gender-based violence. Sara Más' interview elaborates on the latter, specifically identifying Cuba's 'enemy', the United States, as the force indirectly pressuring *oficialista* circles to preserve homogenous narratives on equality for 'arsenal' against the US' attacks.

Sara Más argued in her interview that there is a governmental fear to address the causes of

gender-based violence. Más states:

> The issue of lack of certain information has been around for a long time, it is a taboo and there is fear to give arms to the enemy. Until when are we going to believe this if the enemy is always going to have arms against you?

Mirta noted earlier that there was a deeply rooted fear of compromising revolutionary unity. In Más' aforementioned statement, she too brings up the question of fear, although she goes a step further to illustrate *who* politicians fear would ultimately benefit from a breakage in revolutionary unity: the enemy. Más does not directly state a specific enemy here, but given Cuba's history, it may be deduced that Más was referring to the United States. My interviewee describes that the exposure of 'certain information,' such as the current gravity of gender-based violence in Cuba, has become a taboo, and that this stems from a fear of giving the enemy 'arms.' When Más uses the term arms, she refers to the exposure of an image of Cuba that does not resonate with that constructed in national discourse; of a nation characterized by the absence of injustice towards marginalized and historically oppressed groups such as Afro-Cubans and women.

Admitting to the existence of gender-based violence would be to admit the failure on part of the government, official institutions and, more generally the revolutionary project, to eliminate conditions that perpetuate violence. Hence, the weakening of Cuba's projected image by publicly addressing gender-based violence might give the enemy more justification for critiques and, in turn, render the country vulnerable to attacks from the United States. Mas' question in the quote, 'until when are we going to believe this if the enemy is always going to have arms against you?' alludes to her critiques of the 'arms logic.' The question is addressed to an undeclared 'you' that I believe is directed towards the Cuban government and *oficialistas*

within this sphere that prioritize the preservation of national unity above all else, for fear of appearing weak in the enemy's eyes.

Though I consider the fear of attacks from the US legitimate and seek not to invalidate Cuba's constant struggle that is defending itself as the only communist nation in the Western Hemisphere, I do not deem it a strong enough rationale to neglect adequately addressing continued inequality. While the state and state-affiliated institutions benefit from the narratives they perpetuate, the women they claim to support suffer. As illustrated in the previous chapter, women's rise in the public sector has correlated with a worsening of her conditions in the domestic sphere. Inside this gap between *oficialista* narrative and reality, gender-based violence has found the "blind spot" in which to grow.

In light of Sara and Mirta's interviews, it might be extrapolated that given its direct association with the state, the Federation has been unable to adequately address the conditions of gender-based violence. There exists an intrinsic political element in the Federation that entails prioritizing, as Mirta and Sara described, the image of unity and justice above genuinely seeking social change. Over the last decade, however, small community initiatives and NGOs have emerged that are ameliorating conditions of inequality and gender-based violence. Given their distance from the state, these projects do not have the same pressure to preserve homogenous narratives or facades. As one organizer, Lizette, remarked: 'we have no intention other than helping survivors.'

The following chapter illustrates the specific shortcomings of state affiliated institutions, namely the Federation, in responding to gender-based violence and supporting survivors. Inside this void, smaller projects have begun to take the lead in replacing state institutions' work.

Through interviews with organizers, and my own participant-observation, I was made aware of the significance of these projects in prevention and healing. Thus, contrary to national state discourse, my research shows that the Federation is no longer the 'principle entity propelling change for women,' especially on the subject of gender-based violence: change is occurring outside of *oficialista* institutions, at the grassroots level.

Chapter VI

Los Granitos de Arena, The Grains of Sand

In thirty years we have advanced greatly, I have observed this change. From nothing to now even television shows on gender based violence […] Yes, now there is more balance top-down, than bottom-up. Because there is not yet an awareness as to what gender violence is.

-Marta Núñez Sarmiento

Of all the interviews I conducted, that of Marta Núñez Sarmiento was perhaps the most spatially memorable. The interview took place in her home; second to that of the US' ambassador, her home was perhaps the most luxurious one I visited in Cuba. Marta was born into a relatively wealthy family before the revolution, and even after the communist regime came to power, their home was not nationalized. Though the exact reasons for this were not disclosed to me, her parent's strong support and involvement in the revolutionary movement likely has much to do with the concessions they were granted to live a comparatively more luxurious lifestyle than most families in Havana. Marta's mother had been one of the founding members of the FMC and in 1962, at only 15 years old, Marta too began working for the group. When Marta left

the FMC four years later, she embarked on a professional route in academia in the fields of philosophy, sociology and gender studies.

Marta has, in essence, lived a life "at the top." Reflective of this back ground, was her position on how change is being achieved with regards to gender-based violence: 'now there is more balance top-down, than bottom-up.' In describing why she believed this was the case, she explained that it was because 'there was not yet an awareness as to what gender-based violence is.' Marta acknowledges that there has been a slow but significant progression towards greater awareness on the issue, yet when she describes who has been responsible for this progress, she attributes it to 'the top.'

Studies carried out by foreigners in Cuba assist in perpetuating Marta's *oficialista*-favoring narrative. One of the most prominent examples is the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA)'s report, 'Women's Work: Gender Equality in Cuba and the Role of Women Building Cuba's Future,' published in 2013. Important media outlets such as the *New York Times* use the study as a reference point in understanding the current conditions of gender equality in Cuba.[30] The CDA report provides an in-depth analysis outlining the quest for gender equality in Cuba despite persistent deeply rooted inequalities. Accordingly, the study includes an 'institutional advocacy' section that describes various institutions promoting gender equality. Though the authors dedicate four pages to large institutions such as the FMC and CENESEX, smaller local initiatives only occupy a paragraph each. The lesser attention non-*oficialista* are given on paper, suggests that these are relatively less important in comparison to *oficialista* groups.

A similar conclusion may be drawn from reports that are perhaps even more influential in

[30] Torregrosa, Luisita Lopez. "In Cuba, Equality Is Two-Sided." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 5 Mar. 2013, www.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/world/americas/06iht-letter06.html.

the international community than the CDA's report: the UN's periodic reports on Cuba. As with the CDA report, these offer greater insights on the current conditions on gender equality in Cuba. However, they too follow narratives generally in alignment with the *oficialista* narratives.

From my research, I came to learn that the narrative *oficialista* discourse and foreign outlets such as those of the UN and the CDA fail to adequately recognize the dynamics of the activist community, especially with regards to gender-based violence. The predominant view among my interviewees highly involved in work on this issue was that it has increasingly received attention in the last few years specifically because of the work 'from the bottom.' Two recurring themes on the non-*oficialista* received great praise from participants in my research: their capacity for community mobilization, and their provision of alternative spaces for critical debate and dialogue. The following sections examine these qualities, and underscore how they hold particular importance given their lacking in *oficialista* groups, namely in the Federation. Extracts from UN documents will help juxtapose the misleading reports of this organization with the current realities on activist work, as described by participants in my research.

In essence, the chapter seeks to build a counter-narrative on activist work in Cuba related to gender-based violence, shifting attention away from *oficialista* institutions, towards the non-*oficialista* groups. Individually, these smaller local initiatives may not engender drastic nationwide shifts, however, as one interviewee remarked, the strength lies in the 'grains of sand,' *los granitos de arena*. Together, the grains of sand are ameliorating conditions of gender-based violence and, ultimately, catalyzing change towards greater gender equality in Cuba.

Mobilization and Community-Building

"The Federation, designed as the national machinery for the advancement of women, has the status of a non-governmental organization and does not receive funding from the state party, which limits its effective functioning in promoting women's enjoyment of their rights as well as gender equality."[31]

-Periodic Report on Cuba, CEDAW, 2013

In March 1980, Cuba officially signed the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. (CEDAW) As part of the convention, the Cuban state is obliged to submit to the Secretary-General a report on measures that have been adopted to implement the Convention. Every four years, or when the CEDAW Committee requests it, the state is expected to release a report with updates. Following a review period of the report, the CEDAW Committee then formulates concluding comments and suggestions as to how the state may more effectively continue to ameliorate violence against women in the country. The quote above is an extract from 2013 of one of these follow-up commentaries of the CEDAW Committee.

The statement was incorporated into a section entitled 'National Machinery for the Advancement of Women' which was dedicated solely to the FMC, and illustrating the continued obstacles the organization faces in its attempts to ameliorate gender-based violence. In describing their concerns about this topic, the Committee states that 'the absence of funding from the state party limits its effective functioning in promoting women's enjoyment of their rights as well as gender equality'; a limited access to funds is thus portrayed as the principal obstacle

[31] "Concluding Observations on the Combined Seventh and Eighth Periodic Reports of Cuba ." *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (30 July 2013), 4.

behind the FMC's inability to carry out its role as the national advocate for gender equality. While there is some truth to this statement in that a lack of funding *is* a limiting factor, my own research shows that the lack of funding is not necessarily an obstacle in activist work in Cuba.

Smaller projects and NGOs less affiliated with the state have far less access to funds and volunteers than the Federation; nonetheless, they are described as entities helping ameliorate gender-based violence through prevention and healing mechanisms. Dr. Moya underscored the latter in her description of the importance of community projects and local actors:

> The presence of the projects in marginalized communities mobilizes the best of the community because money is not always what is missing in effective activist work but rather the ability to mobilize the community to address its problems in another manner.

The observations Dr. Moya provides on non-state entities challenge the UN's statement. Dr. Moya explicitly states that 'money is not always what is missing in more effective activist work but rather the ability to mobilize the community.' An important correlation that the UN suggests is thus broken through Moya's statement: that money intrinsically signifies a capacity for impact and mobilization.

Exemplary of Moya's claims was an entrepreneurship conference I attended that OAR organized for survivors. Though the conference was an influential act in itself to mobilize individuals interested in and/or affected by gender-based violence, the projects invited to this conference, particularly WLDM, were striking examples of Dr. Moya's commentaries. WLDM mobilizes a more specific yet crucial population the Federation has neglected: the LGBTQ community. Beyond mobilizing individuals in its community, WLDM specifically focuses on helping survivors from marginalized groups of women given the Federation's observed tendency

to mobilize women who conform to the traditional constructs of woman as cisgender and heterosexual.

OAR Entrepreneurship Conference

The conference was held in one of the rooms of OAR's headquarters. OAR had invited representatives from five projects in different municipalities of Havana, including: Marianao, el Cerro, and Los Angeles. Each group sought to help survivors healing process by encouraging them to engage in different professions, such as baking, hairdressing, photography, and cobblery. The objective of the conference was to provide a space for these groups-and others interested in their work- to interact with one another and create a *economía social solidaria* 'social solidarity economy'. Though it was never defined to me what this specific term meant, I believe it refers to the creation of a community actively engaged in healing and rehabilitating through their creation of an empowering and inclusive labor market.

Laritza, the interviewee who had extended an invitation for me to participate in this activity and a main OAR organizer, gave an introductory speech at the event to layout its general logistics. A small space was given along the walls of the room for each of the six projects to display the materials they brought related to their projects; some just had samples of their work, and others had more elaborate presentations with photographs, posters, and logos. The audience, composed of around twenty individuals, was given half an hour to move around the room and ask representatives at each stand questions on the project. Once this first phase was over, representatives would give more formal presentations on their work.

During my free time to interact with representatives, I was only able to converse in detail with a few select groups; swarms of people made it difficult to have one-on-one conversations with representatives. Of the groups I had the opportunity to speak with more extensively, WLDM particularly struck me as a non-state actor undertaking important work to fill the Federation's mobilization void.

WLDM is composed of three smaller projects of shoemakers, bakers, and hairdressers. A mural of photos of each project adorned the group's stand, which also included a large poster with their logo. Unlike other groups at the conference, WLDM had brochures and stickers of their project to give out to the audience. The group was the largest and seemingly more well-resourced at the conference. A brief skim of their brochure revealed immediately that the group greatly emphasizes the need to specifically help survivors that fall into the category of marginalized women, such as women of differing sexualities and that are gender non-conforming. Organizers noted that these groups of women are especially in need of attention. Though it is not stated on the brochure, organizers at the conference explained to me that the group's emphasis on marginalized women stems from the institutional discrimination these women face when seeking help from the Federation.

A content analysis I executed from 2012-2014 editions of the FMC's magazine *Mujeres* evinces observations organizers from WLDM shared with me regarding the FMCs tendency to only aid and mobilize those individuals that follow traditional conceptions of women. Considering the magazine a public projection of the group's values, it becomes clear that one of the principle concerns of the Federation is the concept of 'family.' However, the notion as understood through the images of the magazine is very narrow: when a family is depicted, it

often follows the traditional 'male-female' schema. Figure C. Below epitomizes the latter.

Figure C. Covers of 2012 and 2013 editions of Mujeres magazine.

Represented in the images are the covers of editions from 2012 and 2013; both covers depict the 'Cuban family' composed of a man, woman, and child. Although the 2013 edition, like many others, does include distinct articles inclusive of differing sexualities and genders-one article for example covers how parents can support their children should they express that they are gay-the overall recurring image is not inclusive of differing constructs of romantic and familial relations. When images of couples are shown in the 'relationship advice' articles, these solely depict people of ostensibly opposite genders. The visual centrality of cisgender heteronormative relations suggests that while the magazine may concede elements of inclusivity, the group's overarching priority lies with women who follow conventional gender norms. It may be inferred then that the visual marginalization of non-conforming women in the magazine may

permeate into the ways in which survivors are helped. Manifestations of patriarchal tendencies emerged not only in my aforementioned content analysis but also in my readings of foreign scholarly work, where descriptions of *Mujeres* were interweaved with observations of its traditional and discriminatory nature.[32]

From my conversation with one particular WLDM organizer, Betsi, it became clear that this project attempts to counteract the Federation's exclusion of certain groups of women. Betsi noted that there exists institutional discrimination, including transphobia and homophobia, towards certain groups of survivors, that renders their own work all the more necessary.

Betsi noted that WLDM's participation at the entrepreneurship conference greatly facilitated and strengthened its mission to mobilize marginalized groups of women. Events such as the OAR conference offered the possibility of "seeing the other," getting to know and form potentially collaborative links with other less established projects that were engaging in similar work in different municipalities. Bringing together different projects gave them the possibility of broadening a community and support system that could better help their social justice work. While for the organizers, it was a time to share ideas and build potential relations of collaboration, for participants it was more a time of empowerment and validation. Betsi thus considered this space for more public story telling an important time for the women to share the significant progress they made thanks to the project.

Listening to Betsi's thoughts on the conference brought me to ask her whether I could partake in WLDM's activities during my stay: she extended an invitation to a week-long self-

[32] "It's magazine Mujeres, which focused on women's contributions to the economy, education, and culture, has been infused with a traditional, paternalistic portrayal of women [...] much of its content has involved how to make toys, knit [...] and other domestic matters." 194 (Farber, 2011).

esteem workshop the group was hosting. The next section illustrates how participating in this workshop for a day revealed to me the significance of what many of my interviewees mentioned was another key feature of the localized projects that rendered them important catalysts for ameliorating gender-based violence in Cuba: their provision of a space for debate and dialogue. This quality of the non-state actors helping survivors is particularly important given its drastic absence in state affiliated spaces such as those of the Federation; the Federation's direct association with the state signifies that it is very difficult to have critical social debate on the gender-based violence.

Debate & Dialogue

There are no spaces of ample discussion-not that they do not exist. They exist. There are very interesting projects, many projects-I've heard-of local development where women are those ones leading the discussion, planting the seed, and how it will be planted. These are good initiatives.

-Alberto Roque

As the previous Chapter V alluded to, gender-based violence is difficult to discuss in depth within *oficialista* spaces; there are an array of domestic and foreign benefits in obfuscating the issue. In light of the intrinsic difficulty to address the issue and its causes, there is, Alberto notes, a drastic absence of spaces for 'ample discussion.' Despite this nationwide phenomenon, Alberto recognizes that there are smaller pockets of debate and dialogue: local community projects. The interviewee described these as 'very interesting projects' and 'good initiatives' where 'ample discussion does occur.' In specifying why he holds such high perceptions of the projects, he makes reference to the agency women have within this spaces to shape dialogue with

more freedom, 'where women are those ones leading the discussion, planting the seed, and how it will be planted.' Although he does not explicitly explain the latter, it may be inferred that Alberto's statement alludes to the limited nature of discussion in the Federation, given the male-dominate state's ultimate regulatory power over activity within the group. As smaller projects and NGOs do not have the same affiliation with the state, they experience greater freedom to decide the topics of interest and the way to approach these.

My own data participating in projects similar to the ones Alberto described, and interviewing organizers of initiatives, confirm his observations. The non-*oficialista* initiatives were important spaces for healing and prevention against gender-based violence. Of notable significance to their success, is the multi-faceted nature of their debate and dialogue. WLDM exemplifies the latter, particularly though their focus on education. In addition to seeking women's empowerment through promoting their economic independence, WLDM also empowers women through education. During my participation in their self-esteem workshop, I observed that the group serves as an alternative educational space on gender-based violence in the Marianao municipality. Education is a tool WLDM employ to engender discussions that extend not only to survivors but also to social actors in the community that may influence cases of violence, such as the National Revolutionary Police.

WLDM & Survivors

It is not that we give them the fish, but that we teach them *how* to fish.

-Graciela

Graciela was one of the directors of a week-long self-esteem workshop run by WLDM. I had the opportunity to visit the workshop one of these days and when it was over, conduct a group interview which included two directors, Graciela and Betsi, and a survivor who participated in the workshop, Carina. When I asked the group how they felt the work of WLDM differed from that of state shelters, NGPTVF, Graciela provided the fishing metaphor above; the group does not seek to simply direct a survivor to the solution or the expected help, but rather teaches them how to obtain the solution themselves and understand more independently how to achieve a desired outcome. Elaborating on this metaphor, Graciela states:

> Yes, the official houses of attention have a different process than we do with these workshops. Those homes are for a specialized consultation and what we do is host a reflection group. It is a totally different focus. From here, I can develop tools […] then if I-and the other directors-see it necessary, I will send a particular participant to have a specialized consultation, where she can receive certain medications and other health support if necessary. Here we do not immediately seek the medical route, we simply attempt to give them tools so that they can learn to identify the violence themselves.

The official route, according to Graciela, is one that gives survivors a fish and does not teach them how to fish. In her analysis, she claims that official shelters have a set, depersonalized approach in that these by default choose the medical route. Multiple times over our interview, she brought forth her reservations about immediately seeking the solution to cases of violence in medicine. Suggestive of why she sees automatically resorting to this route as a limited solution is her explanation of when the medical route is sought out at WLDM: 'if necessary.' Not all cases of violence, Graciela notes, intrinsically benefit from the medical route. Further, by

automatically following this form of treatment, the official route does not encourage a survivor to independently think through and contextualize her experience. In this manner, Graciela considers the healing process in the state shelters a more individualistic one as it intrinsically constrains the explanations of a survivors' conditions to their individual stories, rather than in the larger collective history of the country. Contrastingly, the workshops at WLDM do emphasize the importance of more collective and context-based healing mechanisms.

WLDM workshops offer 'reflection groups' centered on critical debate, dialogue, and self-esteem building. In encouraging reflection and critical thinking, survivors do not simply receive ephemeral 'treatment' but rather are more sustainably treated in that they achieve a personal growth and empowerment; as Graciela states, survivors can 'develop the tools' to 'learn to identify the violence themselves.' By 'identifying the violence' Graciela indicated that these workshops enable women to more critically reflect on why they lived in violence, what social factors help perpetuate violence, and how to combat patriarchal norms. I had the chance to witness the latter during my visit to the self-esteem workshop; the activities centered around demonstrating how schooling helps perpetuate gender-based violence in Cuba, and how better educational approaches can fight this status quo.

The workshop was held in a room owned by the FMC. Fourteen people were sitting in a circle when I arrived: seven participants, two state social workers, and five directors affiliated with WLDM. While there was little variance of gender in the room-the only man present was one of the social workers-I was surprised at the range of ages. Three generations were represented in the room: the youngest person in the room was fourteen years old, a daughter of one of the participants, and the oldest woman was in her late seventies. Although the invitation

for participating in the activities was extended to all members of families, often the partners of the survivors did not attend; it was described to me as a difficult process to incentivize male partners to attend these sessions.

The group had been recounting information from previous days, and discussing the subject of the day. Generally, the week was dedicated to understanding the value of popular education and the ways in which this educational approach can help combat gender-based violence. The day I arrived was specifically dedicated to Paulo Freire. To start the group's reflections, one of the directors asked the participants how they believed children were socialized to become oppressors and oppressed. This engendered a discussion on the ways in which gender roles are constructed in Cuba. One survivor remarked:

> No one is born knowing that pink corresponds to female, and blue to boys. But when you go to the store to get toys or gifts for children, it is always organized that way. You are either pink or blue. Even my husband-he bought a toy for our son, a truck. And that's not right. What if he wants to play with dolls?

The comment catalyzed a tangent on the common effort the participants have had to put into deconstructing gender roles their children have learned. Multiple participants accused Cuban schools as the principal spaces where their children acquired gender norms. To further relate the subject to education, the directors moved on to the next activity, a showing of a twenty-minute documentary entitled *Paolo Freire: Constructor of Dreams*.

Though the first few minutes of film captivated the entire room's attention, participants progressively lost interest in the showing; some stepped outside, and others chatted amongst themselves. In an attempt to resurrect the lost group enthusiasm during the film screening, a brief dance session was held. Participants were encouraged to move around the room and dance to a

popular song. During this activity, Betsi remarked to me that they often included more movement-based activities that included singing and dancing, and that beyond rekindling group energy, these served as important moments of self-esteem building.

Despite the ostensible lack of interest in the documentary, all participants shared their reactions to the film in the ensuing discussion. To begin the reflections, Betsi asked the group what relation they saw between popular education and Cuban socialism. It was observed by the participants that, ideally, the teacher understands the ethical, professional, and political values of the students. In accordance, one survivor noted: "educators need to understand and listen to the criteria of those they educate, they need to hear the voice of their students, to listen to them because speaking to a classroom is not the same as knowing how to listen to it." The importance of the educator's awareness of those being educated was related back to gender norms; understanding students would allow a teacher to be more sensitive to discriminatory dynamics among students.

The dialogue I witnessed aligned greatly with the 'group reflection' that Graciela mentioned characterized these workshops. Giving women a space to dialogue and debate how gender norms are perpetuated in the classroom, and how popular education pedagogy can help combat patriarchal norms, was an alternative form of helping survivors that veered away from that of official state spaces. Focusing on expanding and deepening women's education was thus a form of self-esteem building.

Exemplary of the empowering quality the group reflections, and their effectiveness in helping survivors was an account I heard of Mariana, a survivor who participated in these workshops. Mariana gave a public account of her experience with WLDM and how the workshops helped her, at the entrepreneurship conference held at the OAR mentioned in the

previous section. With confidence, clarity, and a smile, Mariana stated:

> I am one of those women, survivors of violence. I would like to thank this project, with a gender-conscious lens […] I was a woman with a very low self-esteem, I was a woman that was afraid […] And today I am here thanks to those workshops […] I was not alone, it was thanks to all these other women […] Because alone you cannot survive.

I believe the experience Mariana shared is a testament to Alberto's earlier claims on the importance of localized spaces. Alberto noted that despite a predominant absence of spaces of debate in Cuba, non-state actors have preserved this more revolutionary dialogue and, accordingly, carry out more effective social justice work. Mariana's growth through WLDM and workshops such as the one I participated in, demonstrate that there are survivors benefitting greatly from the existence of the non-state actors. Thanks to WLDM, Mariana shares that she was able to transition from being 'a woman with a very low self-esteem' to the woman in a room full of thirty people that spoke naturally, gracefully, and confidently on her difficult past. This growth is also a testament to Graciela's illustration of the mission of WLDM: to teach survivors how to fish, and not provide them with the fish. Mariana's depiction of her transition does not involve the project simply giving her the aid she needed when she was in a difficult situation, but rather offered her a space in which to grow and think critically of Cuban social realities.

WLDM & Social Actors

Beyond survivors, WLDM also focuses on providing a space of critical reflection and dialogue for key social actors. The group specifically works with those actors believed to

potentially influence cases of gender-based violence. Prominent among these groups are the national police and managers/directors in the workforce. Before WLDM began training the social actors, Betsi underscored that they were "totally unaware of gender-based violence," but increasingly became aware of the issue through workshops and training sessions. The latter is particularly significant in light of the role the Federation reportedly played in training those same social actors. Although the Federation is described in *oficialista* documents as an entity spearheading the training efforts, Betsi's observations, and those of local studies, suggest otherwise: less oficialista narratives propose a different narrative, one that illustrates the failed efforts of the Federation to ameliorate gender-based violence because of the lack of proper training from *within* the Federation. Betsi noted that WLDM's work with social actors contributes in filling this institutional gap to secure a safer and better educated community of individuals in positions to influence cases of violence.

In Cuba's 1999 CEDAW report, under the 'Violence Against Women' section, the Federation is portrayed as the primary entity executing training programs for social actors with the power to ameliorate conditions of gender-based violence. The report states:

"The results of the Group's work include: provision of training for the boards of management of the National Revolutionary Police [...] concerning the problems of family violence viewed from a gender perspective [...] formulation of a training program for officials working on social policies at the highest decision-making level; this program has been introduced in the bodies mentioned above, and other program for community workers and specialists is being prepared."[33]

From the description of the Federation's work, one might conclude that the programs the group

[33] "Fourth Periodic Report on Cuba." Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women , (27 Sept. 1999) 20.

runs for social actors appear successful. The authors of the report mention that the Federation 'provides training' on themes 'concerning the problems of family violence viewed from a gender perspective.' Among those actors the Federation aids, are officials 'at the highest decision-making levels' and members of lower professional ranks, 'community workers and specialists.' Though the work is not explicitly evaluated, the effects of the programs are not discussed-a point that may also be attributed to their emerging status. From research carried out at the local *Universidad del Oriente* ' University of Orient' and my conversations at WLDMN with Betsi, it became clear that the Federation could not unfalteringly yield a positive influence through its training programs, namely, as a result of the lack of education and proper training from within the Federation itself, among those *federadas* executing the training programs.

At the University of Orient, a qualitative study was conducted to analyze the role of local governments in addressing gender-based violence in the eastern region of Moa, a municipality in the Holguín province. Researchers worked closely with *federadas* in Moa, and encouraged their interviewees to share their experiences receiving aid from the Federation. The study is significant and unique to the current academic landscape in that it is the only one that accumulated high quantities of qualitative data to underscore the institutional shortcomings of the Federation: forty-seven survivors of gender-based violence were interviewed over the course of ten years. Other studies do mention that institutional shortcomings exist, and describe where institutions fail-however, none support their claims with accounts from survivors, and even less elaborate so extensively on the lack of preparation specifically within the Federation.

The results clearly indicate that the Federation in Moa is drastically inefficient in helping survivors:

"our investigation helped identify that in the work of the local government and in the FMC of Moa-the institution supposedly closest to women's issues-there is not an adequate understanding of gender-based violence [...] all of the women we have spoken to express their belief in the inefficiency of the FMC in Moa to help them with their problem."[34]

It is important to note that before identifying the shortcomings of the Federation, the authors frame their findings as diverging from the common narrative of the group. Perhaps with a degree of irony, the researchers underscore that the Federation is 'the institution supposedly closest to women's issues.' The use of the word 'supposedly' here suggests that there is a non-alignment between the widespread image of the Federation, and the realities exposed through their study.

Significant among their findings was the mass consensus among survivors of the inefficiency of the Federation. The statement above illustrates that *all* of these survivors believed that the Federation did not adequately support them-'all of the women we have spoken to express their belief in the inefficiency of the FMC in Moa to help them with their problem.' Throughout the study, researchers suggest that it is a lack of preparedness among those volunteers at the lower levels that affects the treatment process. In explaining the sources of the lack of preparation, the authors note that 'there is not an adequate understanding of gender-based violence.' Affirming of these findings is the experience WLDM organizers shared with me on the effects of the *federadas'* presence collaborating in the project.

In her conversations with me about the presence of *federadas* in WLDMN workshops, Betsi offered insights that affirm the results from the Oriente Study. Betsi notes:

when the delegates from the lower ranks of FMC come help they are not well-trained in the subject of gender-based violence[…] We in the project realized that the FMC does not play a decisive, leading role

[34] García , Yuliuva Hernández, and Alisa Natividad Delgado Tornés . "Políticas Públicas Locales Para Atender La Violencia De Género En Cuba: Entre Desafíos y La Realidad Social De Las Mujeres Víctimas ." *Universidad Autónoma Del Caribe* (vol. 14, no. 02, 2016), 114.

in the issue of gender-based violence. Perhaps it is for the lack of training in this subject.

Here Betsi challenges the *oficialista* conception that the Federation is spearheading advocacy work in Cuba on gender-based violence, 'we in the project realized that the FMC does not play a decisive, leading role in the issue of gender-based violence.' Influential in shaping her perceptions of the FMC were her negative experiences collaborating with *federadas*. Betsi correlated the presence of *federadas* in WLDM workshops with weakened support for survivors. As a result of limited knowledge among *federadas* on gender-based violence, organizers at the WLDM had to split their attention between helping survivors and training federadas. Indicative of her frustration and concern with respect to the latter, is the fact that Betsi reiterated twice in her statement that the *federadas* exhibited limited knowledge on gender-based violence: 'they are not well trained in the subject of gender-based violence' and 'perhaps it is for the lack of training in this subject.' To counter the *federadas'* shortcomings, Betsi mentioned that WLDM organizers oftentimes re-train and re-educate FMC officials working with the project. Betsi believes this time-consuming process is crucial as it equips directors of workshops with the knowledge necessary to facilitate important dialogue to better helps survivors.

Betsi and the University of Orient study suggest that there exist widespread detrimental deficiencies within the base of *federadas* working with survivors. In light of this finding, and of the previously mentioned UN report illustrating the Federation's role in training social actors on gender-based violence, one might ask the following question: how it is possible for the group to adequately train social actors, such as the revolutionary police, if the members of the group themselves reportedly do not understand the issue well? My interview with another WLDM organizer, Tania, proved useful in understanding this puzzle.

Tania noted that before WLDM began training social actors in Marianao, they were 'totally unaware of gender-based violence.' Though she did not explicitly state it in her interview, Tania's observation may be attributed to the failure of the Federation to train actors in this area of Havana. WLDM might thus be considered an entity replacing the Federation; not only does the project spearhead the training of collaborating *federadas,* but also leads the training of key social actors. The project accomplishes the training of social actors through the creation of spaces for debate and dialogue on gender-based violence. When I asked Tania to clarify what these training sessions looked like, she provided her most memorable example that involved a training workshop for chiefs of certain industries in Marianao. Tania explains:

> Last year, we met with a group of heads of an industry. We presented them a table with myths and stereotypes. They had to mark with a cross-which they believed were actual myths and stereotypes today, with respect to gender-based violence [...] We wanted these workshops to be didactic, and to take advantage of what they already knew. After that questionnaire we presented, we had a great debate and we had the opportunity to tell them 'look at what you do, at how you perpetuate violence.' We reminded them that social networks are there to support, and that they too can partake in perpetuating or breaking violence. Many of them realized this, but many continued to reproduce their previous behaviors. Through these workshops, I believe we contribute to denaturalizing the violence.

Similarly to the approach with survivors, the strategy employed to help sensitize this group followed WLDM's 'fishing over fish' approach. According to Tania's depiction of the workshop, the chiefs were not simply told what violence was, 'given the fish'; rather, WLDM sought to 'teach them to fish,' in underscoring the underlying patriarchal norms in their preexisting knowledge, 'from what they already knew.' During the workshop, the heads were encouraged to reflect on what myths and stereotypes of gender-based violence. Tania describes this activity as having led to a 'great debate.' The possibility of engaging in a debate here exemplifies Alberto's previously mentioned statements regarding the importance of local community projects in preserving spaces of more revolutionary discussions. Gathering together heads of industries, key

figures of the business community that, as Tania stated 'can also partake in perpetuating or breaking violence,' was an important act, regardless of the outcome. Although some 'continue to reproduce their previous behaviors,' the ultimate objective of these activities is not necessarily that they are immediately transformative, but that they begin a process of collective reflection on a form of violence persistent in Cuba.

The Significance of a Counter-Narrative

A knowledge gap exists on the activist work undertaken in Cuba to address gender-based violence. Studies on this subject are characterized by what I coin a 'top-heavy' narrative, whereby the central focus of the subject is the Federation. Whether it be in praise of this institution, such as the periodic reports of the UN or in condemnation of the shortcomings of the institution, such as the study of the University of Orient in Cuba, the ultimate focus of the works is the Federation. It should be acknowledged that my own study too dedicates a great portion of text to the Federation. However, as this chapter exemplifies, my objective with bringing forth the Federation differs from that of other studies in that I used information on the shortcomings of the group as a complement to show *how they are being addressed*. The latter is precisely where the importance of the chapter lies; even if the shortcomings of the Federation are acknowledged by the UN or the University of Orient study, the *"and then what?" i*s never explored. Once a study recognizes the failures of the *oficialista* group, there is never an exploration as to what is done to address these failures.

This chapter begins to address the missing 'and then what' by discussing some of the manners in which non-*oficialista* entities are compensating for the shortcomings of the

Federation, thus ameliorating gender-based violence in local communities. Bringing the smaller non-state actors to the forefront of change helps build a counter-narrative that could potentially have benefits in the local and international community.

Locally, greater reporting on the work carried out by non-state actors can have valuable implications for survivors and for individuals interested in the issue. For survivors, accessing this knowledge could signify greater awareness of alternative mechanisms for healing; it provides options for overcoming their situation, rather than simply resorting to the state-run shelters. For individuals simply interested in deepening their knowledge of the issue, the non-state actors provide spaces in which to understand gender-based violence from a greater array of perspectives, rather than the conventional health-perspective the Federation relies on.

Building an alternative, deeper narrative on activism work against gender-based violence might also be considered a valuable process. Cuba is a beacon in Latin America and in the world on the subject of gender equality; and yet, there exist many nuances in the current context as to how this equality is being preserved and strengthened. Complicating the current foreign narratives that tend to oversimplify the work by focusing solely on the *oficialista* institutions may ultimately help develop a greater sense of the process whereby change is occurring in Cuba. A more complete narrative of the movement to address gender-based violence at the grassroots level may, in turn, serve as an inspiration to other countries.

Concluding Thoughts

At its Nation Conference in 2012, the PCC officially embedded in its objectives the need to eradicate gender-based violence. Sara Más describes in a *Mujeres* article that the party's actions at the conference represented a great feat for greater national attention and treatment of violence.[35] Similarly, Dalia Acosta, UN employee and activist underscores the importance of the party's actions: "It is the first time that a political document of such reach in the country recognized the problem and establishes the necessity to confront it."[36] The PCC's recognition of the sustained violence is indeed significant. But recognition is only a first step towards the true eradication of gender-based violence; simply acknowledging the existence of violence is not sufficient to appropriately develop solutions to its alleviation-the root causes must be addressed.

[35] Más , Sara. "Claves Frente a La Violencia Machista ." *Mujeres* , (2016), 4.
[36] Acosta, Dalia. Rutas Visualización. Taller de Periodistas, Morón, 2013.

In other words, recognition should be followed with an in-depth exploration as to the sources of these conditions. The latter has not yet occurred in national discourse. Six years since the PCC conference in question, the state continues to acknowledge inequality and gender-based violence, but it has not addressed the sources and how to effectively overcome this condition. My study represents a potential contribution to the PCC and larger activist community's possible future endeavors. Based on data from my interviews and participant-observation, this study has explored potential sources of continued gender-based violence in Cuba and illustrated some of the current mechanisms for its amelioration.

I argue that the principal cause is the framework of *oficialista* discourse: the misleading depiction of gender equality in Cuba aggravated conditions of inequality. Advocating for women's rights and gender equality has been a crucial feature of Cuban socialism. *Oficialista* discourse often brings forth the improved conditions of women under the revolutionary state, particularly in light of the statistical evidence of women's increased presence in the public sector. The government benefits in domestic and foreign contexts from a statistics-heavy framework. In the Cuban context, narratives of equality help solidify the revolutionary state's legitimacy and engender a sense of nationalism. The state also benefits from a fortified national image in the foreign context; Cuban socialism's success with women, especially supplemented by their greater presence in the public sector, to a certain extent legitimizes the government's endeavors. In turn, a strong image projected to the international community is especially valuable to the government given the US' historical efforts to dismantle the revolutionary state. Although the state may arguably have had legitimate reasons to fortify its nation-building process as a defense mechanism against the US, the image projected increasingly became a misleading representation of the state of women in Cuba. Overtime, the neglect of continued

inequalities aggravated these; gender-based violence found an appropriate climate in which to grow given the state's failure to effectively address this issue in national discourse. While women's presence in the public sector grew, the conditions for women in the domestic sphere have not yet improved.

Officially, the Federation is proclaimed to be the main entity alleviating inequality and specifically targeting gender-based violence. Yet my research confirms that the organization has been unable to fulfill this role. The FMC's close association with the state signifies that the preservation of the "equality-facade" takes precedence even inside those institutions in existence to support women. Thus, recognizing inefficiencies and adequately addressing them to better itself is difficult given its greater loyalty to preserving the revolutionary state, than improving conditions for women.

In the last decade, non-state actors have emerged as those entities superseding the Federation's role. Two main themes emerged from my data in relation to their effectiveness: the capacity for community-building, and the provision of spaces for debate and dialogue. A prominent rationale for their success is disconnect from the state. Non-state actors do not play a central role in the PCC's image preservation, thus have more freedom to pursue alternative support mechanisms. My participant-observation, particularly with two non-state actors, OAR and WLDM, solidified my understanding of the latter.

During my fieldwork, OAR held an entrepreneurship conference related to gender-based violence; the group brought together projects from different municipalities of Havana that promoted entrepreneurship as a form of alleviating gender-based violence. Each project perceived an individual's economic independence as the main form of empowerment critical to break from violent relationships. The NGO recognized the importance of this approach, and

arranged the conference to celebrate the work while building a community of individuals with similar interests. Organizers and survivor-participants alike at the conference explicitly noted in our conversations that events such as the OAR's entrepreneurship conference were influential in building solidarity as no state entity, namely the Federation, was pursing similar endeavors.

WLDM was one of the projects I came to learn of through the OAR conference. In addition to supporting women's economic independence through certain professions, namely cobblery, baking, and hairdressing, WLDM also empowers women through education. The group employs educational practices to encourage debate and dialogue not only for survivors, but for social actors that could potentially be involved in cases of gender-based violence. On one hand, in relation to survivors specifically, WLDM uses popular education training as a tool to push them to consider their own narrative as part of the larger Cuban social, political and economic context. On another, the group offers educational workshops for social actors such as the police to help them better understand the issue. This work is particularly significant in light of the FMC's more narrow approach to understanding gender-based violence; interviewees noted that the Federation generally considers the issue as purely health-related, and that this perspective is limited in supporting survivors.

If the PCC is truly interested in eradicating gender-based violence as proclaimed in the 2012 Congress, then the party would benefit greatly from further exploring the influential work of non-state actors discussed in my study. These initiatives demonstrate great success in local communities, and learning from already effective work represents a relatively accessible approach to pursuing the party's objectives.

The PCC's objective could also greatly benefit from my study in that it illustrates some of the sources of sustained violence; to deepen my analysis on the effectiveness of non-state actors

and better illustrate why these groups target the roots of violence, I discussed these specific roots. As mentioned previously in this section, it was in the government's domestic and foreign benefit to neglect to appropriately recognize gender-based violence. Although the state's rationale may have held some relevance in terms of protecting Cuba and establishing the state's legitimacy, today, the costs far outweigh the benefits; especially in light of Cuban socialism's central objective to ensure the improved conditions for women, continuing to obfuscate the issue has increasingly aggravated this. Whether intentionally or not, the state is responsible in part for the current state of inequality and these conditions will only worsen with time. *Not adequately addressing gender-based violence will thus likely compromise the essence of Cuban socialism.* Accordingly, I argue that it is in the state's current benefit to hold itself accountable to the role it played in perpetuating violence; recognizing its shortcomings, and those of its affiliated institutions, such as the FMC, will only help the government understand where its needs improvement. Those who will ultimately benefit from these improvements are women: survivors and individuals generally looking for support will find, in fortified institutions, greater security and support. In turn, Cuban socialism will be closer to attaining its core value of achieving holistic gender equality.

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