“To Not Die Alone”

KINSHIP, LOVE AND LIFE CYCLE IN CONTEMPORARY HAVANA, CUBA

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To my family – in Havana and Helsinki

Contents

List of Illustrations viii

Acknowledgments ix

1. Introduction: Bodies, Love, and Life in Urban Havana
Introduction 1
Socialist Efforts to Modernise Sexuality 3
Post-Soviet Havana 8
Negotiating Intimacy, Money, and Reciprocity 12
Space and Housing 15
Body, Beauty, and Race 18
Love, Passion, and Emotions 22
Gendered Forms of Agency 25
Conclusion 29

2. Kinship as an Idiom for Social Relations
Introduction 34
Kinship and the Life Cycle 35
Reciprocity and the Dialectics of Care 39
Love, Reproductive Cycle, and Personhood 42
Fieldwork in Havana 45
Conclusion 54

3. Having a Child is Worth the Trouble: Fertility and Reproduction
Introduction 56
Deciding over Pregnancy: When to Have a Child? 58
"Not Planning It" *61*
Love *62*
"Having the Conditions": Money and Housing *64*
State Involvement in Decisions over Pregnancy *66*
Infertility 68
Waiting for a New-Born: Expectations Regarding a Baby 71
Body and Looks *71*
Baby's Gender *73*
Notions of Kinship: Blood, Nurture, and Biogenetic Ties 74
Nurture as Female Care *76*
Material Contributions as Male Care: "A Child Makes the Father" *78*

State Care: Nurture and Material 83
After Birth: Catholic Baptism 88
Godparents 91
Naming 96
Conclusion 99

4. Becoming a Woman: Quince as a Moment of Female Sexuality
Introduction 102
La Fiesta de los Quince 102
Mother-Daughter Relation 110
Father-Daughter Relation 111
Marginal Relations in Quince: Patrilateral and Affinal Bonds 114
Quince as Reproduction and Producing Fertility 115
Quince's History and Relationship with the Socialist State 117
Conclusion 118

5. Nobody Likes Sleeping Alone: Love, Sexuality, and Adult Gender Relations
Introduction 120
Gendered Attractiveness 122
Moral Economies of Gendered Care: Negotiating Love through Food, Gifts, and Labour 129
Respect, Control, and Jealousy 133
The Break-Up of Love: Failing Reciprocal Care 137
Sexual Desire and Infidelity 141
Gendered Violence 145
State Discourse on Love and Sexuality 148
Breaking Up: Harming Sociability 150
"I Have No Luck in Love": A Woman Alone 152
Heterosexuality and Homosexuality 153
Conclusion 158

6. Reciprocating Care: Old Age, Funerals, and Death
Introduction 162
Old Age and the State 163
Old Age as the Peak of Woman's Authority 165
Reintegrating a Father to the Kinship Structure at Old Age 167

Historical Context of Funerals 172
Wake: Keeping Company to the Deceased 173
Burial: Catholic Last Rites 177
Burial Site: Origins and Unity 180
Second Burial: Creating Family Continuity 184
Death as Connection 187
Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day *187*
Misa de los Difuntos and Spirits *188*
Inheritance 192
Ancestors: Rebirth and Reincarnation 196
Church and State: Catholic Life Cycle Rituals 198
Conclusion 200

7. The State as Family
Introduction 203
The State and the Dialectics of Care 204
Neighbours as Family: "El vecino es la familia más cercana" 212
Family Metaphors and the Revolution's Culture of Life 215
State Rituals as Family Rituals 223
Fidel as Father of the Nation and Present Absence 226
Conclusion 230

Conclusion: Kinship, Love, and Time 232

Bibliography 240

List of Illustrations

1. Managing everyday life in *Centro Habana*.
2. The author interviewing a *quinceañera* at her party.
3. Preparing for the arrival of a newborn: a closet full of dresses waiting for a baby girl.
4. A mother and baby at a Catholic baptism.
5. A quince cake.
6. A *quinceañera* posing in a photo shoot.
7. Two *quinceañeras* in a photo shoot in *Habana Vieja*.
8. Young men enjoying a night out.
9. A recent burial site at the Colon cemetery.
10. A man's gravesite: "*Papi*, we remember you with love. Your spouse and daughter."
11. Ta' José, a miraculous *muerto*: "Ta' José, I thank you for granting me what I asked for and fulfilling my dream."
12. A poster on the street in Vedado: "...The Plan Bush will deprive you of the kiss in the morning, of the hug after school, and of the constantly cheeky eyes."
13. Waiting for the parade's arrival at the children's carnival.
14. The First of May parade turned into a fiesta.
15. A cartel on a porch around Fidel Castro's birthday: "Congratulations, dad!"

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1. Introduction: Bodies, Love, and Life in Urban Havana

Introduction

Everyday life in Cuba is strongly gendered. Gender creates a significant difference both in intimate experiences such as love, desire, sexuality, and the body and in the ways in which the state discourse seeks to reorganise social relations in a socialist society. Gender mediates Cubans' experiences of larger structures and changes as well as their personal social relations and experiences.

Gender as a difference organising social action is both created and reproduced throughout the life cycle. Babies become importantly gendered well before they are born. The life cycle can be understood as a constant perfection of the gendering of persons, until this is transformed at old age and in death. This process of gendering relies heavily on parenthood, sexuality, and the body. Gender, kinship, and sexuality become thereby intimately intertwined.

According to Marilyn Strathern (1988: x), gender can be understood only as a difference: men and women need to be examined in relation to each other. Since we cannot automatically assume gender – or any other type of categorisation – to occupy an organising position in the ways in which social relations are lived, enacted and experienced, attention must be paid to the ways in which people present sociality: the ways in which relationships are construed through categories such as gender and the principles on which these categorisations are based.

But categorisations are not only culturally contingent, their meanings and emphasis shift over time as people's social relations change both over their life course as well as historically. Different connections and distinctions emerge as important at distinct points of the life cycle and in this process people's relationship to larger collectives such as the state changes. Thus, while people move across specific social bonds and situations over their life course, state policies and historical changes shape domestic life, kinship, and sexuality at the same time.

This study is an investigation into gender and kinship in contemporary Havana – namely on the categorisations, meanings, and relationships through the reproduction of which Cubans centrally organise sociability. Using the transformations that take place in family relations over the

individual life cycle as the analytical lens, this study seeks to understand everyday life in a transforming socialist society by concentrating on social relationships experienced through the unfolding dramas of love and death. The ethnographic focus is on ordinary, low-income, and racially mixed Havana residents and the ways in which their life projects revolve around family bonds, sexual unions, and other social connections. Importantly, this research examines how gender and kinship are transformed over the life cycle, how these shifts interact with state policies, and how Cubans create, reproduce, and negotiate social relations by the love expressed in the practice of reciprocal care. The aim is to bring insights into understanding the relationship between day-to-day relationships, large-scale state politics and time, as well as to show how over the life course, Cubans' relationships are organised through accentuating gender as the main axis of social difference.

This chapter explores the pervasively gendered nature of Cuban society by concentrating on sexuality. Sexuality provides a good point of view on kinship, state and gender; on the issues that will be central throughout this study. As sexuality intertwines with meanings and practices related to the body, space, materiality, emotion/affect, personhood, and agency – and has also played a significant role in state politics since the 1959 revolution (see Hamilton 2012), this allows an insight into everyday life in urban Havana.

Sexuality interweaves with love, desire, and passion. Jennifer Cole and Lynn M. Thomas (2009) emphasise that it is important to pay attention to the emotional aspect of social relations, to love and desire as inner – yet thoroughly cultural and historically constructed – qualities that both inform and constrain a person's social interactions, imagination, and conceptualisations of agency. Cole and Thomas define love as "the sentiments of attachment and affiliation that bind people to one another" (2009: 2). This conceptualisation is useful for the purposes of this study because it includes both love towards one's kin and distinct forms of sexual passion. As the emotional and the material tend to be entangled (Cole and Thomas 2009: 20), love becomes materialised in actual practices from the circulation of objects to distinct types of labour and bodily states. Anchored in the material and nurturing exchanges of reciprocal care, love is made real, expressed, contested, and negotiated. Forms of emotion also connect to larger historical structures. While love and sexuality are embraced by individuals as highly personal forms of emotion and action, they are also socially, culturally, and historically constructed and contingent.

Cuba is often approached foremost as a political entity, with a strong research focus on the state. However, state actions and large-scale structural powers

take shape and are experienced through the lived everyday realities of local people and their social worlds. The relationship between individuals and large-scale collectives such as culture and history – or in a more defined scale, the state and the nation – is mediated by institutions, values, and diverse types of relationships such as family and gender relations (Sahlins 2004: 224). At the same time, the state forms an intricate part of Cuban everyday life and shares in the circulation of some meanings that are central to local social relations, such as the position of family bonds in sociability. On the other hand, the notions of gender, sexuality, family, and love which the state has endorsed over the years differ significantly from the views and practices embraced by individual Cubans. This shifting dynamics between state ideologies and individuals' actual practices highlights the social and political importance of gender, kinship, and sexuality in contemporary Cuba.

Socialist Efforts to Modernise Sexuality

The 1959 Cuban revolution represented a modernisation project aimed at creating a new industrial, scientific, and egalitarian society without religion, any type of discrimination, or unemployment. Simultaneously, efforts to create a socialist New Man focused on the abandon of egoistic selfishness, vanity, and materialism, seen as bourgeois vices (Guevara 2005 [1965]). The New Man, as conceptualised by Che Guevara, was supposed to be hard-working, morally pure, responsible, truthful, self-sacrificing, oriented toward physical labour, guided by a humanistic spirit and proletarian internationalism, and indifferent to amusements, material incentives, or external beauty (2005). As in other socialist states (see Cohen 2005: 86-149; Friedman 2005 on China; Verdery 1996: 24-25; Gal and Kligman 2000a: 5, 2000b: 5 on Eastern Europe), a further aim was to undermine distinct mediating structures (such as religious institutions) in order to generate a direct relationship between the state and the individual (see also Hamilton 2012: 31). The purpose was to create a revolution "outside of which there is no life" (Guevara 2005: 30).

A part of this endeavour was to move diverse types of nurturing work from non-state actors to the state. A particular aim was to allow women's participation in wage labour in order to create a direct engagement with the socialist state (see e.g. Castro Ruz 2006: 79-86; Safa 2005: 323-325; see also Verdery 1996). Elise Andaya (2007: 53) even argues that Cuba's New Man was actually a New Woman, considering that women's productive and reproductive lives became such an inherent part of revolutionary views of the new society. In the 1960s', kindergartens were opened, hospitals and policlinics offered free health care, schools kept children busy during the day, and various state

institutions were founded to provide care for the elderly (see e.g. Bell et al. 2007; Castro Ruz 2006; Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2011). With the help of the Cuban Women's Federation (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas – FMC*), women's full participation in wage labour was supposed to eradicate *machismo* and create full gender equality – in an 'Engelsian' (2004 [1884]) spirit (see also Rosendahl 1997: 51-77; Safa 2005: 324-328).

However, several researchers have pointed out the strongly gendered character and consequences of socialist state policies (Verdery 1996: 64-65; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Rosendahl 1997; Andaya 2007). Due to the high degree of women's participation in the labour force, relatively easy access to abortion (except in Romania), liberal divorce laws, generous maternity leaves, and state-provided child care, socialist state policies have been considered to empower women in society to a relatively large extent (Verdery 1996: 64-69; Safa 2005). At the same time, a number of authors have shown that not only have socialist state policies been unable to eradicate *machismo* (Rosendahl 1997) but have disfavoured women in various ways through other policies and practices. This has taken place most notably by interfering deeply in women's reproductive lives (e.g. Kligman 1998; Andaya 2007; Kath 2010; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b) while leaving intact their nurturing and domestic responsibilities, thus creating a "triple burden" (Verdery 1996: 65) of wage work, mothering combined with heavy housework, and political activism (Andaya 2007; Verdery 1996: 44-50; 61-69; Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b). At the same time, state policies on family, sexuality, and gender relations contain several ambiguities and have varied over the years of the revolution.

Jafari Allen (2011: 58) argues that sexuality in particular "stands at the nexus of ideas of culture, nationhood, and race in Cuba." During its first years, the revolution sought to reform gender, sexuality, and family relations in numerous ways. In the early sixties, Cubans who were labelled as prostitutes or homosexuals were placed in the notorious UMAP (*Unidades Militares para la Ayuda de Producción* – Military Units for the Aid of Production) labour camps in order to turn them into 'proper' socialist citizens (Lumsden 1996: 65-70; Allen 2011: 67-73). Physical labour was conceived as a way to avoid bourgeois-style intellectualism and regarded as rehabilitating and educative (Pettavino and Brenner 1999; Allen 2011: 69). The efforts to promote gender egalitarianism in distinct fields of life were accompanied by a preoccupation with a proper type of a gender difference. For instance, a man's appearance judged to be too 'effeminate' (i.e. a man who was wearing 'too tight' trousers or flaring long hair) could be a reason for a police arrest and detention into the UMAP camps (Allen 2011: 70; see also Lumsden 1996: 6, 71-72). Such practices emphasise connections between gender, sexuality, bodily appearance, and the state. In

particular, they highlight the importance of gendering – a gendering that is clearly inscribed in a person's body – to Cuban society.

As a part of its efforts to reform local gender, kinship, and sexuality, the state also sought to promote stability and equality in marital relations – endeavours that Cuba shared with Eastern European and Soviet state socialisms (see Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Verdery 1996: 61-82). Such undertakings included pursuits to promote intermarriage across divisions of race, age, wealth, and geographical origin as a part of a policy aimed to erase all types of social differences (Díaz Tenorio 1993; Fernandez 2010: 4-5). Via a campaign of collective weddings in the 1960s ("*Operación matrimonio*", see Blanco 1960; Cabrera 1960; Martinez-Alier 1974: vii, 140-141; Nelson 1970: 399; see also Smith 1974: iv, xxxv), and subsequent other state policies that allowed all Cubans to marry with the luxury of a bourgeois wedding ceremony for a very low fee, as well as state incentives to newly-wed couples, the government sought to promote greater stability especially in the largely informal marital relations of the poorer section of the population. This can be linked to the revolution's efforts to modernise Cuban society (see Andaya 2007); as for modernisation theory, the existence of nuclear families based on legal marriage grounded on the couple's mutual attraction was an important indication that modernisation was taking place (Cole and Thomas 2009: 10). As in the early revolutionary stand on sexuality, such practices highlight the regulatory, disciplinary characteristics of Cuban state power, with family and sexuality policies aimed at increasing state rule over its citizens (see Cole and Thomas 2009: 5-9).

However, in the Caribbean, gender relations have for a long time been described as fragile and unstable, with persons entering into legal marriages in much lower numbers than in many other parts of the world (e.g. Clarke 1974 [1957]; Smith 1988, 1996a, 1996b [1957], 1996c [1982], 1996d [1988]). Since the colonial era, state efforts to curtail Caribbean sexuality have been frequent across the region (see Barrow 1996; Smith 1996a: 81-100, Smith 1996c), so that in this regard socialist Cuba is no exception.[1] However, in 1975, the Cuban state officially eased up its policy to promote legal marriage by granting long-term consensual unions the same legal status as to marriage. This also gave full legal rights in terms of inheritance to the offspring of non-legalised unions. Helen Safa (2005) argues that the revolution has emphasised the role of matrifocality because it has increased women's independence and the amount of female-headed families. My ethnographic data conforms to this

1 Although there has been a considerable turning away from socialist politics in Cuba for some time now, I use the term socialist here as this stand has guided official state politics since 1961 and continues to be the official government position (see Constitución de la República de Cuba 2001: 2-3; Anonymous 2013). See Verdery 1996 for a discussion on the central structural features of socialism.

view in the sense that the gender and kinship relations of the *habaneros* with whom I worked display several similarities with some of the classical features that have been connected with Caribbean matrifocality.[2] The strong emphasis given to the mother-child bond (Smith 1996a, 1996b: 44), the central position occupied by women in the family structure (Smith 1974: xi; Smith 1996a: 15, 42, 1996b: 44; Barrow 1996: 73), and the relative marginality of men in the family in the position of a husband-father (Clarke 1974: 161; Smith 1974: xi; Barrow 1996: 73; Smith 1996a: 14, 90, 83-84) are some of the features that correspond with the tendencies that have been associated with Caribbean matrifocality.

However, in other aspects there are significant differences between classical descriptions of Caribbean matrifocality and contemporary Cuban gender and kinship relations.[3] My data suggests that there is practically no difference between legal marriage and non-legal unions (see also Rosendahl 1997: 56) and no differentiation between 'illegitimate' and 'legitimate' children. In addition, the wedding is not regarded as a particularly important life cycle ritual (cf. Clarke 1974; Smith 1974; Barrow 1996; Smith 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d). Legal marriage was indeed very rare and many research participants preferred informal arrangements of dating and living together. It was not unusual for both men and women to be involved in more than one relationship at a time and break-ups could be frequent and sometimes very sudden.

It is hard to say to what extent these differences can be seen as reflecting changes brought about by Cuba's state policies – as an (unintended) consequence of the socialist marital, gender, labour, and family policies – or whether these features were characteristic of the gender and kinship relations of the poorer, mostly non-white section of the population before the revolution already, as suggested for instance by Jean Stubbs (1997). While the aim of the state has been to increase stability, legal marriages, and gender egalitarianism in the domestic realm, matrifocal kinship arrangements tend to embrace gender differences and are more prone to unstable gender relations. Taking into notice the revolution's early attempts to promote legal marriage among the poorer section of the population (see Blanco 1960; Cabrera 1960), it seems likely that legal marriage has not played a particularly significant role amongst this group in the past either. However, discussing sexuality and gender relations in colonial Cuba, Verena Martinez-Alier (1974) states that in the nineteenth century, marital and sexual relations were to a high degree controlled by a class and colour endogamy and the great value given to legal

2 The specificities of the fieldwork will be described in Chapter 2.

3 My use of the word "Cuba" in this account is firmly anchored in the perspective offered by my ethnography – the arguments presented here should therefore not be understood as generalisations applicable to the country as a whole. Ethnographic evidence is always particularly situated and explores the world through particular viewpoints.

marriage amongst all classes (even though legal marriage was more common in the white upper classes than in other groups of the population). Marriage was significantly a status symbol, while both "concubinage" and matrifocality were common, in particular amongst the non-white population (Martinez-Alier 1974: 104, 117). Therefore, it seems that while the revolution has brought changes to the value of legal marriage (i.e. diminished its importance), its unpopularity within the poorer section of the population in particular represents significant continuity of pre-revolutionary practices.[4] Thus, while the socialist state policies seem to have brought certain transformations to marital relations, this has not taken place exactly as the revolution intended. While legal marriage seems to have lost its signification as a class-based ideal, this has not led to its wide popular adoption – as envisioned by the revolution – but rather to the erosion of its importance.

At the time of my fieldwork, the state ran campaigns trying to curtail men's violence against women and children ('domestic violence') as well as educative campaigns urging men to do more housework and take more responsibility for childcare. Such campaigns are effectuated primarily via educative TV spots. The Cuban Women's Federation has usually been the instigator of such campaigns and it also runs local help points for all types of family troubles called "Orientation Houses for Women and the Family" (*Casas de orientación a la mujer y a la familia*). These centres offer women the possibility to consult psychologists, lawyers, and physicians as well as to attend various types of courses, often organised according to women's wishes. (However, in practice these services are often deficient and people complained of long waiting times and about the difficulty of getting the chance to speak with the expert they desired to see.)

The state also practices sexual education. Like several other state campaigns, these take place mostly via television. Promotional spots emphasising the importance of the use of condom are very frequent and there are specific campaigns particularly for the youth. For instance, a program called *Juvenil* explained terms like "promiscuity" and recommended "stability" as well as the use of condom while simultaneously telling youngsters to try to avoid stigmatising remarks in relation to sexuality (7 July, 2007). In schools, selected teenagers are trained to become "health ambassadors" in their communities via their participation in sexual education classes where they are informed about HIV/AIDS, other STDs, distinct sexual practices, and the use of condom. Carrie Hamilton (2012: 36) states that sexual education campaigns appeared in the Cuban public discourse as early as in the mid-seventies, whereas more

4 I did not observe a similar dual-marriage system as described by R.T. Smith (1996a: 87, 1996b: 44) in the English-speaking Caribbean and by Martinez-Alier (1974) in nineteenth-century Cuba, where class equals contract legal marriages whereas class and colour status differences between partners lead to consensual unions.

recent state campaigning has included promoting greater tolerance for diverse sexual practices (see also Lumsden 1996: 101-106; Allen 2011: 191-192; Hamilton 2012: 7, 49-50, 148). The most recent turn in state sexual politics took place in late 2012, when the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (*Instituto Cubano de Radio y Televisión*, ICRT) decided to prohibit the public performance of the hugely popular – and highly sexual – reggaeton music in state venues due to its "vulgar" lyrics that "distort the sensuality" of Cuban women (de la Hoz 2012; see also Tremlett 2012; Hernandez-Reguant 2006 on similar discussions on *timba*). Sexuality and gendered meanings thereby continue to occupy a politically central position in contemporary Cuba.

Post-Soviet Havana

The severe economic crisis that Cuba encountered since the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s forced the state to make several concessions to the socialist ideology, such as allowing the formation of small private enterprises and opening the country to international tourism (e.g. Eckstein 1994: 88-127; Azicri 2000: 100-176; Cabezas 2009: 61-67).

The 1990s also witnessed the growing monetisation of Cuban society.[5] As the state was forced to make significant cuts to its services and material contributions to the population, there was an increase in the number of commodities available only in the informal economic sector, where the US dollar had taken a significant position as the running currency. Until 1993, Cubans had not been allowed to possess dollars even though the currency had been in use in special state shops meant only for Cuba's few foreigners so that they could buy items that were inaccessible to the rest of the population (Eckstein 1994: 200). In 1993, the double-currency system was officialised and the possession of US dollars was de-criminalised. In addition, the special stores (now called "*shopin*") were opened also to Cubans, although the expectation was still that Cubans would not be able to shop in them due to their low income levels (see Roland 2011: 45-54, 90-91). This created a situation where the majority of the population (with the exception of those working in the tourist industry) are paid in Cuban pesos (MN, *moneda nacional*) while most commodities are sold in *pesos convertibles* (CUC) – a currency that replaced US dollar in 2004. At the time of my fieldwork (in 2007-2008), the value of CUC was about the same as that of US dollar and one US dollar or CUC was worth about 23 or 24 Cuban pesos.

Since this 1990s "dollarization" (Eckstein 1994: 125) more material items have become available to Cubans only via money – whether in the official state

5 I am grateful to Rayna Rapp for drawing my attention to this issue.

shops or in the informal economy – as opposed to the previous possibility to receive them as state subsidies either via the rationing system of *la libreta* ("little booklet") or as rewards for exemplary work performances to those labelled as national *vanguardia*. While some money obviously circulated also in the Soviet era, it seems that money (i.e. cash as an object) has become more relevant to day-to-day life during the post-Soviet period. This is what I refer to with the notion of the heightened monetisation of Cuban society. For many of my informants, the time before the 1990s *Special Period* represented an era when the state provided Cubans with nearly everything they needed and money did not circulate as much as nowadays: "in that era there was no money." Now, however, people increasingly need money in order to access day-to-day staples, creating a situation where only those with cash have access to commodities, which intensifies wealth inequalities.



FIG. 1: MANAGING EVERYDAY LIFE IN *CENTRO HABANA*

Due to declining state contributions, Cubans' small state salaries are insufficient for living because the (unsubsidised) prices of many day-to-day commodities are very high (whether in the official state shops or in the informal economy). In addition, many services that the state is supposed to offer free of charge or for a very small fee currently form part of the sphere of monetary exchanges, as Cubans try to make up for their increased need for cash.[6] For example, while by regulation, a lawyer should offer his services for

6 At the same time, other types of material items circulate in the context of distinct services, which would indicate that such services are not exclusively monetised. The health care sector is possibly the best documented of these (see Andaya 2009a; Brotherton 2005; Kath 2010: 131-164), . In the absence of documentation on service-related exchange practices during the Soviet era it is difficult to say to what extent this actually is a new a phenomenon that has emerged during the post-Soviet era. Accounts from other socialist states (e.g. Verdery 1996: 21-22, 27, 51) suggest that

a minimal fee of twenty pesos (about 0.90 USD), I was told that if one really needs help, then one should give the lawyer about 100 CUC (100 USD) in order "to stimulate" him/her to do the job well.

There is little ethnographic evidence on social relations in Soviet-era Cuba (see, however Randall 1974, 1981; Lewis et al. 1977a, 1977b; Rosendahl 1997), which makes it difficult to make precise arguments about the changes during the post-Soviet era. Nevertheless, it seems that the 1990s did bring certain transformations to Cuban social relations, although at the same time it is obvious that the Special Period of extreme scarcity did not take place in a cultural, social, or historical vacuum. Many scholars argue the larger changes of the post-Soviet period to be connected to increased wealth differences (Azicri 2000: 71-99; Holbraad 2004; Roland 2006, 2011; Rosenberg Weinreb 2008; Cabezas 2009), a greater significance of markers of wealth and privilege (Holbraad 2004; Lundgren 2011), an increased significance of racialised differences (de la Fuente 2001a, 2001b; Roland 2006, 2011; Rosenberg Weinreb 2008; Cabezas 2009; Fernandez 2010: 7, 47-48; Allen 2011; Skurski personal communication 2011) as well as the new importance of the body as the site where such privileges are marked and expressed (Lundgren 2011).

The material deficiencies and dissatisfactions of the post-Soviet period have intensified Cubans' desire to migrate. At the same time, the state has invested heavily in the tourism industry in an attempt to save the country's ailing economy, which has brought significant numbers of foreigners to the island – attractive in their ability to provide answers to diverse longings. In the early 2000s, this led to state regulations concerning Cubans' interaction with foreigners, including prohibitions to enter tourist establishments as well as police harassment on locals seeking to interact with foreigners.[7] The aim was to curtail the highly increased sexual encounters and other types of exchanges involving money, material, and distinct types of services between tourists and locals. (However, these efforts to restrict contacts are continuously circumvented by Cubans.[8]

Changes in the post-Soviet era are also connected with a heightened desire for consumption, as state shops now occasionally feature items such as DVD players and Nike trainers and tourists and visiting Cuban migrants flare fancy

material exchanges have been an important way to obtain services in socialist societies in general (I am grateful to Nadine Fernandez for pointing this out to me). At the same time, this is not incompatible with the sense that my Cuban informants have on money having become *more* important to day-to-day life in the post-Soviet era.

7 Such state measures are highly racialised, black Cubans being much more likely targeted by increased police surveillance (see also Roland 2006, 2011; Fernandez 2010: 130-144; Allen 2011: 22-23).

8 Kaifa L. Roland (2011) argues that the aim of the post-Soviet era restrictions on Cubans' interaction with tourists was also to stop Cubans from seeing the discrepant luxury in which tourists live compared to them. In my view such state efforts are also partly motivated by the desire to stop tourists from seeing the most blatant forms of local poverty in order to promote the right kind of image of Cuba abroad and avert critiques of socialism.

mobile phones and other commodities during their visits to the country (see also Porter 2008). Since his official Presidency in February 2008, Raúl Castro has started to dismantle Cuba's previous egalitarian consumption policies by allowing people to possess several previously forbidden commodities such as computers and mobile phones. Driven by a strong feeling of all being equally entitled to possess such commodities, many younger Cubans in particular want to have all the latest fashionable gear.

The post-Soviet era changes include a transformation in the position of religions and diverse ritual practices – including several life cycle rituals – in Cuban society. Since the early sixties, the revolution had embraced atheism as its official state policy, rejecting both institutionalised (Catholicism, Protestantism, Jewishness) as well as non-institutionalised (Santería, Palo, Spiritism, Abakúa etc.) religions. During the 1990s, the wording in the constitution was changed from atheist to secular, persons practicing a religion were allowed to become members of the Cuban Communist Party and it was officially allowed to practice all religions more freely (Azicri 2000: 252-253; Eckstein 1994: 25).[9] This same period coincides with a shift in the revolution's attitude towards non-state rituals such as the girls' coming-of-age ritual *quince* which was initially seen as a bourgeois elite practice (and was indeed practiced predominantly by the white upper classes) but became later increasingly tolerated, and a the Afro-Cuban folklore which is currently embraced by the state as a form of national cultural distinctiveness (see e.g. Daniel 1991; Moore 1995: 166).

Since the 1990s, the influence of Christian churches has grown, but it is very likely that the most popular religion in the country is Afro-Cuban Santería. Cuba's Catholic Church has a long presence on the island as its roots are in Cuba's colonisation by Spain. It has traditionally been an institution favoured by the white elite population – a reason for its rejection by the revolution (Azicri 2000: 251-253; see also Cardenal 2003: 505) – and the practitioners of the 'official' form of Catholicism still tend to be white. The official line of the Catholic Church strictly condemns other Cuban religions (most notably Santería), but in practice people often embrace a great variety of religions in their ritual practices.

The Catholic Church tries to promote its own form of family policy by stressing the importance of legal marriage and the rejection of abortions. However, church efforts to curtail family and sexual relations seem to have been largely futile; for instance, a Catholic Church in *Centro Habana* displayed posters urging Cubans to wait until legal marriage before they have sex and to remain

9 However, during my fieldwork, many religious Cubans (practitioners of both Catholicism and of Afro-Cuban religions) reported having experienced discrimination or forms of harassment by state authorities.

faithful to their spouse after marriage, but I do not know anyone who has taken any notice of them (see also Lumsden 1996: 45). On the other hand, many Cubans stated that people's sense of morality in terms of sexuality, money, and social relations largely eroded in the 1990s.

Negotiating Intimacy, Money, and Reciprocity

The issue of money, sexuality, and morality relates to the capacity of large-scale political and economic structural changes to transform local social relations. Discussing love in Africa, Cole and Thomas (2009: 24) argue that economic changes shape and reshape the negotiation of intimate relations, affect, and exchanges. They propose that money in particular seems to carry important transformative effects in itself. They suggest that even though older ideas of mutual constitution of affect and exchange may remain important, heightened monetisation challenges them. Expanding consumerism and increased social inequalities bring about a sharpened opposition between money and love, fuelling dilemmas between moral action and material gain. (Cole and Thomas 2009: 23). Thus, heightened monetisation, greater inequalities, and an increased desire to consume have introduced moral dilemmas between material interests and more reciprocal emotional attachments.

Recent anthropological literature on Cuban sexuality has paid specific attention to the complex relationship between material exchanges and intimacy, highlighting the issue of the commodification of social relations (e.g. Hodge 2001, 2005; Cabezas 2004, 2009; Simoni 2008a, 2008b; Placencia 2009; Fernandez 2010: 130-144; Roland 2011). Silje Lundgren (2011: 64), for instance, differentiates between relationships for "economic interest" and "an ideal of 'true love'," although she recognises that women expect desirable partners to have some degree of economic stability.

Others have concentrated on the racialised aspects of notions of love, money, and sexuality. Nadine Fernandez (2010: 130-144), points out that views about the commodification of gender relations are often racialised: black Cubans are perceived as more likely to be driven by material interests whereas white Cubans' relationships are seen as based on affective commitments (see also Andaya 2007: 289-291; Roland 2011: 55-57). This relates specifically to the long-term historical position of racially mixed women and the image of the *mulata* as erotised and commodified in Cuba (Kutzinski 1993). Marked by her 'distorted' sexuality, the *mulata* becomes conceptualised as a cunning social climber who only tries to profit from men (Kutzinski 1993: 171, 191-194). Allen (2011: 14, 45-47, 188, 193), on the other hand, perceives such images as examples

of Cuba's "heteropatriarchal" culture and power structures and argues that even though they continue to define contemporary society, black Cubans reinterpret, transgress, and may potentially transform such notions via creative acts of "erotic self-making."

In her discussion of female sex work, Kaifa L. Roland also sees sexuality as granting women a type of agency (2011: 72-75) whilst at the same time highlighting the ways in which sex work itself is based on globalised forms of inequalities related to wealth, race, ethnicity, and gender. Roland labels her notion of female sex work as forming a continuum ranging from "prostitutes" via "*jineteras*" to "*chicas*," along with the role of money exchange diminishing along the continuum (2011: 72). Amalia Cabezas, on the other hand, does not engage in such categorisations in her discussion on female sex work. Cabezas rejects the dichotomisation between love and money and distinguishes a wide range of distinct types of relationships involving "some commodified aspects blended with intimacy" (2009: 168). Andaya, on the other hand, argues that instead of discussing sex work, we should "consider how such practices articulate with broader strategies of love, kinship, and economic mobility" (2007: 293). This way, what becomes highlighted are the ways in which both sexuality and kinship should be seen as social strategies that enable both economic and geographic mobility (Andaya 2007: 292-295).

As this discussion suggests, the negotiation of exchanges is a tricky business. It is problematic to take a dichotomisation between 'love' on the one hand and 'money' on the other as the starting point, as such concepts are based on a modernist, Western, and idealised notion of 'true love' as something 'purely spiritual' and detached from the material (Cole and Thomas 2009: 20-21). Even though Cubans differentiate between "material interest" (*interés*) and relationships driven by other types of motivations, I will show throughout this study that in practice the negotiation of social relations intertwines closely with material exchanges. In my experience, the question of commodification of social relations most commonly arises when there are blatant inequalities of wealth between the partners (as in relations between Cubans and foreigners).[10] In most day-to-day situations, however, the notion of love is deeply entangled with materiality and it is often impossible to differentiate between the two.

Both family and gender relations are to an important degree practiced via reciprocal exchanges that connote love and care. Moreover, the expectation that some types of material goods are exchanged is involved in a wide range of other everyday contexts. In some cases, such exchanges are conceptualised

10 Many Cubans consider most foreigners to be "millionaires" ("otherwise how could they travel so far and stay in a hotel?"). In a country where the average monthly salary is currently 19 USD, it does not take much money to appear very wealthy.

as "bribing" (*soborno*). Most often, however, the issue is more complex and material exchanges are negotiated in the moral framework of reciprocity, implying the existence of a bond of love, friendship, respect, or even socialist companionship when such exchanges take place in the neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, the ways in which money enters such exchanges can be highly complex. During my early fieldwork I initially thought that in close relations – amongst family, lovers, or good friends – cash as such does not directly change hands. After a while I noticed that it does, but in such relations reciprocity may be delayed significantly, is not counted, and takes distinct forms between different persons. In such contexts, money is usually not regarded as a payment but rather as "help" – that is, money should circulate in the sphere of the gift economy rather than commodity economy. At the same time, people often fail to meet each other's expectations and notions of love, money, nurture, and materiality are frequently contested between persons.

My data suggests that for Cubans, the entanglement of social relations with the material becomes problematic and a contrast between love and care and money and material interests arises when a relationship pointedly lacks reciprocity and the contributions become clearly one-sided. Reciprocity works through assumptions of an imaginary ideal balance of contributions: it depends on the types of meanings both parties give to each other's actions. Two persons' conceptualisations may differ from each other and Cubans do not expect a fully symmetrical reciprocity. Rather, what counts is that there is some type of reciprocity between the partners; relationships that completely lack reciprocity are seen as abusive. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, while the material complexities highlighted by the post-Soviet period definitely play their part in contemporary love and sexuality, what is at stake is primarily the negotiation of the appropriate reciprocity rather than a simple commodification of certain social relations.

Many of the changes that have taken place in Cuban society since the 1990s are similar to the transformations that have occurred in Eastern Europe during the post-socialist period, for they exemplify such large-scale social, political, and economic shifts as increasing class differentiation, decline in state subsidies, and changes in the possibilities for social mobility. Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a, 2000b) emphasise the gendered nature of such large-scale transformations. Therefore, the transformative processes that have taken place in Cuba in the post-Soviet period and the types of changes that they have brought to social relations should be examined as intrinsically gendered. Such processes as the increased monetisation of exchanges or the new significance of the body take shape as gendered and are experienced

through local conceptualisations of gender difference, but simultaneously, they may also transform social relations.

Space and Housing

Housing is intimately intertwined with many of the complexities of everyday life in urban Havana. While Cuba's housing situation has changed significantly during the post-Soviet period, it is tightly rooted in more long-term continuities. Housing forms a particular focus in many locals' material efforts and exemplifies the ways in which social relations are entangled with material issues.

The lack of adequate housing has been a constant problem in Havana throughout the revolution (and even before; see Butterworth 1980; Trefftz 2011; Hamilton 2012: 218-229). In 1960, the Urban Reform Law (*Reforma Urbana*) gave renters the right to ownership or life-time usufruct right of their residences for a very small fee (Trefftz 2011; see also Eckstein 1994: 155). However, Cuba constructs very few new housing units and in the absence of construction material, the old ones are falling apart. Until the law reform in 2011 (Cave 2011), individuals were not legally allowed to buy, sell, or rent housing units.[11] There were only two legal ways to a new place to stay: gain access to a work brigade that co-builds houses for its members or exchange a residence that one already owns with someone else in a *permuta* swap. However, despite these strict state regulations, I was told a certain form of housing 'speculation' was possible also before the most recent law change if one was smart and lucky enough to make advantageous swaps. In this practice, what mattered was social relations rather than money.

At the time of my fieldwork, Cubans were not officially allowed to buy land and access to construction materials was highly restricted. The only way to construct one's own house officially was to receive land from the state for instance as a reward for services rendered abroad (e.g. soldiers, physicians, athletes) or as a compensation (e.g. to the widow of a soldier who had died in battle) and then achieve the authorisation to purchase construction materials in state shops for a subsidised price. However, housing units, land, and construction materials were also sold and bought through black market deals. The problem with such contracts was that since they were illegal, there was a real danger of being cheated: there was no way to make sure that the person who claims to sell something really is the legal owner of it. Moreover, such deals required constant monetary contributions to state officials so that there would be no problems with the inspectors. Besides, it was actually more

11 The housing market was liberalised in November 2011, allowing Cubans to buy and sell their flats and own a second home outside of the cities (Cave 2011; Burnett 2012).

expensive to purchase construction materials through unlicensed channels. Throughout my fieldwork, some of my closest informants have been engaged in very complicated procedures in order to gain legal ownership of their residence. In some case, these cases have been going on for several years, which demonstrates that housing forms a specific focus of people's efforts and aspirations.

Before the law reform in 2011, marriage deals represented a way to circumvent state regulations because legal marriage granted a way to include the spouse into the legal ownership of the housing unit.[12] Contracting a legal marriage was a way to close a deal on a house without complications, even though in practice the two partners would usually live in different addresses. My ethnographic data suggests that housing, love, and sexuality interweave in other ways as well. A man or a woman with access to adequate housing easily attracts plenty of suitors and admirers, as many people are eager to find a way to move out from their crowded family flats. A person living alone and in possession of a decent home may quickly receive marriage proposals in a relationship and many of my flat-owning research participants explicitly rejected legal marriage in order to prevent their partner from gaining legal rights of ownership to their residence. However, even in the absence of legal marriage, love and sexual relations have for a long time been a way to circumvent state regulations and to negotiate Havana's housing crisis as well as Cubans' desires of migration (see also Hamilton 2012: 224).

Although such processes are importantly gendered, my ethnographic data suggests that there is little overall gender difference regarding legal house ownership (although this often transforms over the life cycle). Amongst the 55 legal home owners, 28 were women, 27 men.[13]

Relatively often, people circulate between different households. A person may consider distinct residences home and divide his/her time and possessions between them. Moreover, some people live circulating constantly between their kin's and partners' households without any stable home (but they are not homeless).[14] Men, women, and children may all circulate between households,

12 Since the reform of the Family Law (*Código de Familia*) in 1975, "singular and stable" consensual unions occupy the same legal status as legal marriages (*capítulo I, sección tercera*, artículo 18). (The law does not specify how long a union needs to be in order to be considered stable.) The law states that spouses share property but cites so many exceptions to the rule that in practice marriage does not automatically give right to the spouse's possessions (*capítulo II, sección segunda, artículos* 31-33). However, my informants were under the impression that legal marriage gives both partners the right of ownership to a flat previously owned by one of the partners and this guided their views about commitments.

13However, in *el barriecito*, one of the two neighbourhoods where I worked, there was a minor gender difference: in my street there were more male land and house owners than women. This is explained by the fact that this is a military area and men are more likely to pursue military careers (for a long time, women were not even allowed to do so) and to gain housing through this means, whereas women are more likely to receive housing as inheritance.

14 This is typical also for other parts of the Caribbean; see Clarke 1974: 107-108, Smith 1974: iv; Barrow 1996: 249; Gonzalez 1996 [1984]: 149-159.

although men tend to change households more often than women. Starting and ending a sexual relationship explained most of this mobility among my research participants.

When a relationship starts, depending on which of the partners has access to housing, either a woman may move in with a man or a man may move in with a woman. (If both partners have access to housing, it is more likely for a woman to move in with the man than vice versa.) If the couple separates, depending on who owns the flat, either the man or the woman may move out, to reside either with a new partner or with kin. In many cases, if the couple has children, the man moves out to reside with a new partner even if he owns the flat, since children usually follow their mother. However, at all ages, boys tend to live with their father more often than girls. Women are usually very reluctant to leave girl children to reside with anyone else, but they may sometimes leave a boy child to be raised by his father or patrilateral kin (an aunt or a grandmother). The reason for this may be a move to another province (or country) because of a new partner or the fact that a woman's new partner does not want to have her children from a previous union living in his house; especially the relationship between a woman's son and her partner easily becomes conflicting.

However, not all couples live together. While it was not seen as good for anyone to live alone, some women with a residence of their own did not want their partner to live with them and preferred to maintain a dating relationship. In a couple, there are expectations of gendered reciprocity in the performance of everyday tasks, which are divided into men's and women's work. Women typically perform the most of the work that takes place inside the house while men take care of several outside chores (such as going to the market to buy food, cleaning the yard, or fixing a broken antenna). Some women rejected the additional domestic chores that having a man in the house would entail. However, while men perform many tasks for their partner as well, they usually do this even if they don't live with the woman. On the other hand, men often need to live with a woman in order to get their housework done.

These practices connect with a wider Caribbean notion of the gendering of space between the house and the street, pointed out by Peter Wilson (1976) in his classical ethnography on Providence. While this does not mean that women would not leave the house or that men would not spend time inside the house, there is a pervasive gendered orientation to space that makes *la casa* a symbolically female area and *la calle* a symbolically male area (see also Rosendahl 1997: 58-61; Pertierra 2008 on the house; Lundgren 2011: 96-118 on the street). Similarly, both of these spaces contain a degree of moral danger

to the other gender. While in practice many *habanera* women tend to be free to roam the streets as much as they like already at an early age, the description "a woman of the street" (*una mujer de la calle* or *callejera*) easily contains moral frowning. For a man, the accusation of spending too much time at home is more serious because it questions his masculinity. Therefore, boys are pushed out to the street from an early age (Rosendahl 1997: 62-63).

This gendered orientation of space also connects with notions of control and assertiveness in a relationship. Even though both men and women supervise their partner's movements to a certain degree, men are expected to do their best to avoid female control (Lundgren 2011: 51-61) while at the same time maintaining control over their female partners, both supervising and protecting them. Living with his partner gives a man more control over a woman's movements and amongst my research participants, many men wanted to be on the current of their partner's whereabouts at all times. Women, on the other hand, often preferred maintaining a degree of independence in their relationships (for instance, by hanging on to their own home even when moving in with a man to his home). Men easily find such displays of a woman's independence threatening and want their partner to depend on them in some way (see also Lundgren 2011: 51-61, 65-66). Moreover, a man needs to live with a partner in order to avoid doubts about his masculinity and suspicions of being homosexual, whereas for a woman living alone does not pose a similar threat to her femininity (although she may at times receive frowning comments from kin and neighbours).

Such practices show that space and housing carry importantly gendered and sexualised meanings. Similar meanings relate to the human body.

Body, Beauty, and Race

The body is a major site for reproducing gender difference in Cuban society and it plays a central role in social relations. The distinct practices and meanings that create, reproduce, and break relationships are experienced in a very corporeal form. Emotions, reciprocal care, and experiencing a sexual orientation, all take place through the body and bodily practices. The body is also a significant site of social morality (Sobo 1993: 1-3). The close focus on the body in Cuban social life highlights differently valued, gendered distinctions on the basis of beauty, race, weight, 'grooming', clothing, and sexual skills.

Throughout the life cycle, close attention is paid to the beauty of female bodies. From an early age, women's bodies accentuate and reproduce the gender difference in a markedly visible way. Baby girls are dressed in

decorated, frilly dresses, their ears are pierced as a way to mark them off from baby boys and from the age two they walk around in (moderately) high-heeled shoes. The adult female appearance favoured by both men and women consists of strong make-up, carefully manicured nails, and showy, skin-tight clothes that reveal the woman's body shape (see also Rosendahl 1997: 66; Lundgren 2011: 119-134). Bodily features also connect with a woman's moral worth. While a 'sloppy' appearance from both men and women is considered impolite to others, especially a woman who does not tend to her looks risks both her own respectability as well as that of her close female kin, who share in the responsibility of taking care of her body. Different bodily features (such as hair texture and length as well as facial features) are also used by Cubans to make gendered, sexualised, and racialised distinctions and hierarchies by which sexual desirability and attractiveness are defined.

Racialised conceptualisations of attractiveness become materialised in actual relationships, which, as Fernandez (2010) points out, carry significant political significance to both support and undermine official policies of racial egalitarianism. While Martinez-Alier (1974) describes nineteenth century marital relations as governed by a strict race-class endogamy which can be superseded only by exceptional individuals, Fernandez (2010) argues that despite decades of official revolutionary egalitarianism and multiple forms of social mixing, in contemporary Cuba, the notion of class-race endogamy still continues to define romantic relations, although the frequency of interracial relationships varies by class. She states that interracial relationships are most frequent amongst the lower classes, while upper-class whites continue to practice the strictest forms of endogamy (Fernandez 2010; see also Martinez-Alier 1974: 23-26; Safa 2009: 48-49). My ethnographic evidence gives a somewhat different image of race relations, as amongst the *habaneros* with whom I worked, love, relationships, families, and households were all marked by a considerable level of racial mixing. This may, however, be a reflection of their lower-income class position, as Fernandez's account suggests.

Fernandez (2010) highlights the concept of "level of culture" (*nivel de cultura*) in her approach on Cuban notions of romance and attractiveness. She sees the level of culture as closely connected to race and wealth, and devaluing poverty and Afro-Cuban cultural features in particular. Similarly, Lundgren (2011) connects the level of culture closely to both race and class and describes it as a concept that her white, mostly middle-class research participants used to differentiate themselves from other Cubans in order to convey class and racial superiority.

While I noticed a connection between racialised meanings and a person's level of culture, this was not a straightforward one-to-one correlation. For instance,

sometimes a white man could be designated as having a very low level of culture if he, for example, had not studied anything after secondary school, was violently hot-tempered, or had been in prison. Moreover, differing from both Fernandez's (2010) and Lundgren's (2011) accounts, while my research participants welcomed a partner with a high level of culture, I did not witness this as being an issue of major importance in people's love relationships. While the level of culture connects especially with a man's wealth and his skin colour, I see both of these as individually more significant to my female research participants' views of a desirable partner than the concept of the level of culture as such.

Dancing is considered to be an important skill of attraction for both men and women (see also Rosendahl 1997: 62; Allen 2011: 30-31, 140-141; Simoni 2012). Being a good dancer, to be able to move one's hips and body in a way that is "delicious" (*sabroso*) is important for both men and women. Both girls and boys are urged to dance, move, and gyrate their hips since they are babies and girls are expected to prove their dancing abilities at their quince party at the age of 15 (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). My research participants also saw such skills as gendered and racialised: "white men can't dance" (see Allen 2011: 45 for a critique). The ability to dance also connects with the idea of sexual performance for both men and women; being able to move uninhibitedly is a promise of a rich sexual performance. Such associations are used in a skilled way for attracting foreign tourists and the possibilities of social mobility that this may carry along (see also Simoni 2012), but they also hold great seduction value amongst locals.[15] My research participants valued sexual skills in both men and women (see also Miller 1994: 120-121, 172-182). However, the expectation to be a capable lover tended to concern men more heavily than women, due to gendered conceptualisations that highlight men as 'by nature' possessing stronger sexual drives than women (see also Rosendahl: 1997: 61-73; Allen 2011: 45-51, 166, 168; Lundgren 2011: 54-56).

My ethnographic evidence shows that throughout the life cycle, men and women pay very close attention to each other's bodies. The male body ideal is tall, athletic, and agreeably muscled. My male research participants liked to dress well and were usually well groomed with short hair (see also Rosendahl 1997: 62). The female body ideal is represented by "*la criolla*"; the curvy "Creole" body shape with a narrow waist, big breasts, and a big bottom (see also Rosendahl 1997: 66; Lundgren 2011: 132-134). Plastic surgery was seen by my research participants as a normal way for women to enhance their looks. Plastic surgery is offered free of charge as part of the state-provided free health care.

15 Connecting with the tendency to sexualise black Cubans (see also Kutzinski 1993; Lumsden 1996: 42, 51, 147; Schmidt 2008: 162; Cabezas 2010: 98-101; Fernandez 2010: 121-127, 131-132; Allen 2011: 39, 45, 49, 157-166; Roland 2011: 37-42, 54-58), such notions show the complexity of racialised notions of desirability.

Lundgren (2011: 119-138) argues that the great degree of acceptability of plastic surgery amongst *habaneros* implies an image of beauty that is made and produced from the outside rather than possessed 'naturally' and internally. She relates this to the signalling off of class privilege, since according to her women usually need connections and money to have access to plastic surgery. While I agree with Lundgren's view of beauty as "made", my data does not suggest a connection between plastic surgery and class privilege. Rather, in this context, the state significantly participates in the reproduction and highlighting of gender as a difference.

The embodied gender difference is also emphasised in everyday public spaces. In the street, men pay close attention to women's bodies, shouting comments such as "what a pretty *mulata*!" (*qué mulata más bonita*) or "how tasty you are, *mami*!" (*qué rica tu esta', mami*). While women usually display indifference in front of such comments, my female research participants did take pride in instigating comments from men and enjoyed the attention as a sign of their femininity and beauty (see also Allen 2011: 35). A woman's beauty gives her the ability to attract men, which grants her a certain form of power over men. Beauty works to a woman's advantage in very concrete ways when men give her gifts or offer her a ride in a car instead of letting her stand waiting in the bus queue. This way, beauty is seen as an important asset that gives a woman the power of seduction and manipulation over men. It gives a woman "erotic agency," which Holly Wardlow (2006a: 232) defines as "the power and delight of being desired."

Bodies matter also in another way. Cubans constantly comment on each other's' weight, on whether a person is fat (*gordo*) or skinny (*flaco*). Food is significant in social relations as an expression of love and care. Although the food situation has improved significantly since the 1990s when Cubans suffered serious malnutrition, the acquisition of food is still laborious and a rather limited array of items tends to be available at any one time (Garth 2009). Making sure that one's loved ones get enough to eat forms part of the reciprocal praxis of care. At the sight of a very skinny person, my research participants assumed that the person might be ill or that the kin or partners around are not taking proper care of him/her, since they are letting him/her go hungry. Being too thin signals a lack of care due to either neglect or loneliness and is considered highly unattractive. Since it is women's job to prepare food, if a man was very slim, my research participants thought that his female partner does not care for him or love him. If a woman was very thin, my research participants thought that her man is not bringing her proper food to the table; signalling a lack of interest, extreme poverty, or possibly infidelity, suggesting that he is directing his resources towards another woman.

A fat man was sometimes said to have the "body of a butcher" (*el cuerpo de un carnicero*), meaning that he has wealth and access to resources, which makes him attractive to women. At the same time, being *too* fat was considered unattractive for both men and women. My research participants saw fatness as a sign of greediness, selfish unwillingness to share food with others, and of being "out of control" (*fuera de control*). The state has strongly promoted athleticism as a quality of the socialist New Man already since the early 1960s for reasons relating both to health as well as to the greater productivity of fit workers (Arbena 1990; Pettavino and Brenner 1999). Currently Cubans often refer to the fatness of Miami Cubans as a sign of their moral decay. In addition, the new hierarchy imposed by the arriving of foreign tourists to Havana in the post-Soviet era was often signalled out by commenting on the fatness of the tourists – how all the best food goes to them while locals have to manage on very limited diets. Moreover, the lines for defining who is "fat" and who is "skinny" may often feel rather strange to a westerner as even slim persons may be designated as "fat" or somewhat normal persons as "skinny." This shows that the discourse on weight is often more about the state of an individual's social relations than about weight as such. Thus, food and the body become an idiom for signalling proper care or neglect, whether this relates to Cubans' personal social relations or to the state. Complaining about food becomes an idiom for critiquing both one's personal social bonds as well as the state for insufficient care.

Rather than being signs of individual control and privilege like Lundgren (2001: 119-138) argues, I suggest that amongst my research participants, bodies are better understood as embedded in social relations. Bodies – women's bodies in particular – are considered something that is constantly out in the open, visible and exposed to comments.

Love, Passion, and Emotions

My research participants experienced love as a passionate, violent emotion that has the power to render a person insane. For young people this experience sometimes represented such a total dependence on the loved one that they found it frightening and never wanted to experience it again. Men in particular had experienced such extreme states of loving where the emotion felt more like torture and every minute away from the loved one was experienced as deep agony. Thus, love has the potential to seriously undermine a person's autonomy in a harmful way (see Gregg 2006; Wardlow 2006b; for similar conceptualisations from Brazil and Papua New Guinea).

The gendering of emotion connects with more general conceptualisations

of femininity and masculinity. Cole and Thomas (2009: 1-30) discuss notions of love as on the one hand, passionate sexual desire and reciprocal 'complementarity,' on the other. While notions of passion highlight individual desire, the reciprocal aspect of love has been connected to the reproduction of the kinship system. In Cuba, these two aspects of love carry gendered meanings, which contribute to the reproduction of local notions of kinship and sexuality. Amongst my research participants, men were more disposed to experience love as a passionate individual desire while women tended to emphasise a view of love as reciprocal complementarity. At the same time, neither of these conceptualisations related solely to one gender; that is, they should not be seen as rigid dichotomies but rather as gendered tendencies. Furthermore, women may occasionally emphasise passion and desire in their views of love, and reciprocal complementarity and the reproductive aspect of sexuality are also highly significant to men in their relationships. Nevertheless, amongst my research participants, women tended to emphasise more 'complementarity' and a kin-related orientation in their relationships, whilst men were more prone to stressing their 'personal' amorous desires. Both these gendered conceptualisations also relate to more general cultural discourses conceptualising women as mature caretakers and men as irresponsible and impulsive.

My female research participants often displayed rather pragmatic considerations in their sexual relations, coming sometimes across as almost 'calculative' in their relations from the male point of view. Sometimes women appeared as nearly indifferent towards their male partners and showed them few signs of affection. Lundgren (2011: 51-62) describes the Cuban conceptualisation of heterosexual relationships as a battle where the one who displays being more in love and needy of the partner also comes across as weaker. In this respect, the 'coldness' of some of my female informants may partly relate to the endeavour to maintain the upper hand in a relationship. But my research participants also saw women in general as being capable of a more mature and responsible behaviour than men and thereby they were perceived as less disposed to experience such violent forms of passion than men. This connects with the tendency among many of my female participants to highlight a man's economic condition over his physical attractiveness in their choice of a partner.

In comparison, men came across as more emotionally driven, uncontrolled, and impulsive in their relationships. They could suddenly burst into a rage or become overly loving and tender in the treatment of their partners. While in his interactions with other men, a man is expected to be a tough *machote*, I often witnessed men displaying strong emotional dependencies in their

relationships with women. While by rule, a man should control his dependent partner in a relationship, in their emotional passion, my male research participants often appeared as more dependent on women than women on men. In the context of love and sexuality, it therefore seems that women possess the agency to enchant men with their beauty and powers of seduction.

This dynamics connects with actual practices and experiences in relationships, as it pushes men to be possessive and women to seek out men that can provide them with wealth and opportunities.[16] In this gendered conceptualisation, women come across as making pragmatic decisions of seeking social advancement by engaging in sexual arrangements with men. Men, on the other hand, appear to be consumed by emotions beyond their control and desperate efforts to control the object of their affection. These qualities resemble classic ethnographic descriptions of Caribbean gender relations. In the context of the classic literature on Caribbean matrifocality (e.g. Clarke 1974; Smith 1988, 1996a), women are described as nurturing mothers and responsible caretakers striving to get ahead, while men as fathers are seen as marginalised in their ability to display mature adult behaviour, following their amorous desires in whatever direction they may take them. Women thereby appear as 'naturally' nurturing, committed 'adults,' seeking out opportunities to take care of themselves and their children, whereas men seem to be at the mercy of their sexuality. There are considerable similarities between such long-term historical and ethnographic conceptualisations of Caribbean masculinity and femininity and the ways in which my research participants negotiated sexual and love relations in post-Soviet Havana: women's rather pragmatic considerations could sometimes make them come across as plotting and 'calculating' in relation to men, whereas being overwhelmed by emotional and sexual desires could make men seem as possessive and controlling in relation to women.

Such conceptualisations also draw on more long-term historical models of social mobility. In Cuba (Martinez-Alier 1974), as elsewhere in the Caribbean (e.g. Newman 2010), since the colonial era, sexual relations have offered non-white women in particular a way to seek socioeconomic ascendance through maintaining relationships with wealthier or 'racially' higher-status partners. Allen (2011: 46) criticises this type of a picture as an erroneous portrayal of Cuban gender and race relations. However, such critique draws from a dichotomist understanding of love and money as two distinct things instead of their complexly intertwined character in practice. It also relies on Western bourgeois notions of morality instead of seeing beauty, sexuality, and social

16 While such practices resemble common stereotypes of the cunning *mulata*, this shows that such conceptualisations continue to have relevance in contemporary Cuba and that people can selectively employ various forms of cultural meanings and imagery in their efforts. We have to have ways of discussing diverse forms of organising sexuality and social relations without designating them automatically as mere stereotypes (see Spronk 2014).

relations as culturally and historically based ways of seeking social mobility. That relationships may connect with social mobility does not make them automatically devoid of affect, passion, or reciprocity. Rather, this highlights sexuality as enabling gendered forms of agency.

Gendered Forms of Agency

Wardlow (2006a: 9), in her study on Papua New Guinea Huli women, suggests that understanding sexuality requires attention to agency as gendered: that "there are specific modes of exerting power or producing effects that are particular to women as women or men as men." Wardlow defines gendered agency as "gendered modes of action that stem from (1) culturally specific constructions of personhood (...); (2) women's social position (...); and institutionalized practices that effectively exclude women from modes of agency to which men have access" (2006a: 12). Gendered agency thereby connects closely with forms of personhood, or, for Wardlow, "sexual subjectivity" (2006a: 18) as an inner – yet thoroughly cultural and historically constructed – quality that both informs and constrains an individual's actions, imagination, and conceptualisations of agency –thereby shaping also social relations.

Above I have discussed some of the ways in which the notions of sexuality and attraction provide women and men gendered forms of agency in situations that display positive aspects of love. However, gendered notions of agency become particularly highlighted when love relations face trouble and fears of infidelity in particular. Love magic, plotting, surveillance, and physical violence are particularly gendered ways to try to cope with such issues.

My research participants saw only women as using love magic ("*brujería*"; a general term for all types of 'witchcraft'). While it is likely that in practice, men may sometimes resort to love magic as well – some men are highly knowledgeable of such practices – I was only told of cases where women had been using it to attain their goals. A woman may use love magic to take revenge on her unfaithful partner or to make a man fall in love with her. Mothers warned their sons from eating or drinking anything in a woman's house if they suspected that the woman might be trying to seduce the son (and they did not personally welcome such intentions), for fear that she might do *brujería* for instance to the coffee that he consumes. The fact that *brujería* was seen only as a women's practice connects with the cultural conceptualisation of women as plotting and deceitful. *Brujería* relates to ideas of women's power to make men 'go crazy' and love as something that is feared by men. The fear that women may use love magic makes love all the more dangerous for men for the use of magic carries even greater potential to undermine male

assertiveness. This exemplifies love as an "involuntary state of being" (Cole and Thomas 2009: 7) from the men's perspective.

The fact that my informants conceptualised only women as sometimes resorting to love magic suggests that women are considered to be in a weaker position than men because they need morally suspicious means in order to lure men into love. On the one hand, this contradicts the tendency to see women as maintaining the upper hand in issues of love with their powers of beauty and seduction but on the other hand, it conforms to the notion of men as the active, desiring agents in relationships. While accusations of *brujería* may have serious consequences and disrupt relations, I never witnessed suspicions of the use of love magic inciting very strong reactions. Rather, it was seen as a quite normal – but a rather immoral – way for a woman to take action in getting what she wants. However, a more moral way to exercise such agency would be through beauty, which is supposed to be the 'proper' way for a woman to attract a man. The fact that all the accusations of *brujeria* that I observed concerned (middle-aged or older) black women shows that suspicions of *brujería* maintain a close relationship with racialised conceptions of beauty. As – from the point of other informants, not of themselves – these women were seen as having little chance of attracting men with their beauty, they were seen as forced to use *brujería* in order to attract the partner they desired: in both cases, men who were younger and lighter skinned than the women in question. These gendered, racialised (and ageist) conceptualisations on the use of love magic fit well to Victor Turner's (2007 [1969]: 123-126) views on the ritual and mystical power that persons in a weak or marginal position may possess. Thus, *brujería* is conceptualised as granting a form of agency for marginalised persons in particular. It can be understood as a form of female agency.

While women are seen as having significant agency through their beauty and sexuality, the conceptualisation of men as unable to govern their sexual desires (by their 'nature'), grants them the upper hand in love and sexuality. Men are permitted more sexual digressions such as infidelity. Nevertheless, even in the case of women, infidelity amongst my informants was not considered entirely a person's individual responsibility. Since sexual desire was seen as a natural and possibly unpredictable force in both men and women, in a relationship, a person's kin was expected to "take care" (*cuidar*) that infidelity does not take place. In the case of men, such supervising was considered as less important because men's sexual desires were seen to be somewhat 'beyond control.' Women, however, were expected to be more considerate in their actions; as a result, female sexuality was seen as more disposed to being curtailed through supervision. If female infidelity nevertheless takes place, the responsibility over the occurrence is shared by the woman herself, her partner who did not supervise her properly, her kin

who did not supervise her well enough (on behalf of her partner), and, in some cases, even by his kin (who failed to supervise a kin member's partner on his behalf).[17] Since persons are not perceived as fully 'autonomous individuals' in their actions, they cannot be expected to take full responsibility over their deeds. The oldest adults of the family in particular are responsible for taking care of their younger kin.[18] Moreover, this care is very corporeal; people are responsible for each other's bodies, making sure that the persons around them are fed, clean, properly clothed, decently groomed, well behaving, and in the 'right place' in their social relations.

But sometimes intimate relationships contain also the threat of physical violence. While women may sometimes resort to violence, male violence against women is by far more common (Rosendahl 1997: 73; Lundgren 2011: 91-94). Somehow the fact that social relations and emotions are lived through the body to such a degree grants violence a degree of 'normality' in relationships. With this I do not mean that violence is somehow uncritically accepted but rather that it should be understood in a wider cultural and social framework of ideas about the body. I see violence as forming part of the same intimate intertwining of the body, emotions/affect, and social relations as the meanings attached to the importance of food, beauty, body shape (fatness or thinness), clothing, sexual skills, and dancing. As social relations and the emotions intertwined in them are experienced through visible bodily states, the body becomes the manifestation of others' love and care or neglect towards a person. This is not a notion conforming to the Western dualistic conceptualisation of the (outer) body and the 'inner self' of emotions as two separate entities, but rather a view where emotions 'live' in the body and take shape through it. A woman's beauty incites a man's love towards her and a man's skilful dancing may attract a woman's desire toward him. In a similar vein, efforts to control one's partner may sometimes take place through direct physical control in particular by men.

My ethnographic data suggests that men are more likely to engage in direct action to manage their sexuality: trying to gain a firm control over their partners and courting the woman that they desire in a strong, asserted way. For women, however, such behaviour appears to be less appropriate; they are not supposed to chase after men or impose their will on their partners. To a

17 Nevertheless, when this control fails, the only person that is seen as having some kind of a right to punish a woman for her infidelity is her partner; her kin does not interfere at this point anymore. However, the man with whom the infidelity takes place is not considered so strongly guilty of the situation (unless if he was especially close to the woman's partner) since men are seen as 'by nature' prone to seize the opportunities for sex when they represent themselves. Yet, following this same logic, in the case of male infidelity, the other woman usually *is* accused for the occurrence since men are, again, seen as 'by nature' seizing the opportunities that present themselves. Such notions make men 'slaves' to their sexual desires.

18 When a person travels, the responsibility of taking care of him/her moves temporarily to another person; to kin or the people around where s/he goes.

certain degree, this cultural ideology thereby passivizes women and grants men the agency to act in matters of love and sexuality. However, in practice women are far from passive in love and sexuality. In their efforts to undermine the effects of male infidelity, excessive jealousy, and violence, my female informants sometimes engaged in *brujería*, plotting, and lying. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women would always be successful in such actions. Men are in a more powerful position when it comes to physical dominance and to cultural tolerance for engaging in many disruptive practices in sexual and love relations.

Such findings show the gendered nature of forms of agency. While male agency is usually more direct, female agency takes place in a more indirect way. On the one hand, I see this as relating to the *machista* notion that leaves women with fewer other options to pursue their desires in love and sexuality. On the other hand, some of my female informants clearly enjoyed being able to fool men through their elaborate plotting and were pleased with their own cleverness when they managed to manoeuvre things to go their way.

Women's tendency to use indirect agency is repeated in several distinct practices and gendered cultural conceptualisations: women are often thought to be deceitful in their relationships (by both men and themselves); they are not supposed to make too straightforward approaches to men, but rather to drop hints and try to seduce men through their beauty. Women are also suspected of being secretly practicing love magic; they may plot to get space in a relationship, to inflict a break-up, or to gain a lost partner back.

These examples of female uses of indirect agency relate to the interplay between not being *too* imposing or dominant – a quality that may incite a man to reject a woman – and of not being labelled as someone who lets other people take advantage of herself, either. On the other hand, men's direct, assertive, and confronting agency connects with machismo and their expected ability to be in control.[19] Women's agency similarly relates to machismo and to the double standard of romantic love (described by Mutongi 2009: 26).

While I refer to women's agency as indirect, it could also be conceptualised as connected with the "negative agency" that Wardlow (2006a) describes in her ethnography on Papua New Guinea Huli women. Wardlow defines negative agency as "the refusal to cooperate with others' plans and expectations as well as a kind of excision of a woman's energies and skills from the social body" (2006a: 24). In a way, women's plotting and their supposed use of love magic could be seen as negative agency, for such actions are perceived

19 I am aware of the critique (e.g. Gutmann 2005 [1996]) of the concept of machismo, but Cubans themselves (men, women and the state discourse) use this concept (for example; "Here the men are very *machistas*").

as rather immoral ways of pursuing one's desires. On the other hand, such women's practices are nevertheless *productive*; they create relationships instead of disrupting them, which does not fit to the definition of negative agency. Moreover, men's agency – while mostly direct – is often more negative and problematic because it may entail physical violence or the threat thereof and it often results more disruptive of social relations (whether this happens due to infidelity, violence, or excessive jealousy).

Conclusion

Love, sexuality, and gender are in many ways connected both with the managing of everyday life and wider notions of society, history, and politics in contemporary Havana. Through the lens of love and sexuality, this chapter has examined the ways in which such highly personal aspects of life as the body, emotions, personhood, and forms of agency are significantly gendered in Cuba.

While I have paid attention to negative and 'restrictive' aspects of sexuality as well, I have tried to highlight sexuality as an enabling factor. Cubans' heterosexual relations are importantly characterised by a dynamics that draws on gendered conceptualisations of sexuality, desire, the body, agency, space, and emotions/ affect. Such notions intertwine with ideas about personhood, exchange practices, and ways of showing love and care in social relations. Thus, while gender is the most significant categorisation organising everyday life, intimacy, and an individual's experiences of larger structures and transformations, such conceptualisations also draw upon notions of race, age, and class/wealth.

Love and sexuality form central organising principles in social relations. While Cuban understandings of love draw heavily on notions of romantic love, they also differ from it to a certain extent, as love blurs together aspects of passion, reciprocity, desire, and material pragmatics. Moreover, love is characterised by its ambiguous nature; while on the one hand, it allows moments of pleasure and social support, on the other hand, it signals danger, dependency, and conflict. And since the notions of attraction are marked by various forms of inequalities, love also risks marginalising some people, in a way that may influence their entire life course.

Outline of the Chapters

The title of this study "to not die alone" refers to the profound importance that social relations play in Cubans' lives and the ways in which both

love and kinship are ways of both creating and reproducing such bonds. However, as time changes social relations, death unavoidably forms part of the transformation of relationships over the life cycle. As a whole, this study explores the ways in which kinship stands at the centre of Cubans' life projects: the ways in which gender and kinship change over time and how this transforms people's relationship to the state. I explore how distinct differences are emphasised at distinct life stages in such a way that some meanings become particularly highlighted in certain specific contexts. This research argues that social relations examined over the life cycle form a more productive way to understand Cuba than a focus on the state or on individuals alone and that this sheds light both to how ordinary Cubans relate to the state as well as to the ways in which the state builds an image of a national community by circulating certain characteristics that are central in individuals' conceptualisations and negotiations of their personal social relations over the life cycle.

On a more abstract theoretical level, this study explores the ways in which time transforms social relations and how this interacts with the ways in which people relate to larger collectives. The study therefore sheds light to the interaction between large-scale cultural and historical structures – here approached through the state – and individuals, allowing in an exploration into issues such as sociability, kinship, exchange, reciprocity, gender, personhood, and time – as well as agency, the body, emotions, power, and cultural and historical continuity and change. Thus, this study contributes to the anthropological tradition started by Marcel Mauss (1999 [1923]) that examines the central guidelines of sociability – for Mauss taking the form of reciprocity – and their materialisation through particular practices such as (gift) exchange. In the field of kinship studies, while this research draws on the research tradition on Caribbean matrifocality, the aim is to bring an original point of view to this discussion with inspiration from Terence Turner's (1979a, 1979b) dialectical view on the changes that kinship systems undergo over the life cycle. My understanding of kinship and time also draws on Maurice Godelier's (1999) critique to Mauss, on Arnold van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) classical view on life cycle rituals as representing the divisions and structures of any society particularly clearly, as well as on French post-structuralist insights on the importance of examining exchange over the time span of the whole life cycle (Barraud et al. 1994). Finally, this study examines the question of how people's intimate experiences of love and sexuality are both interior – as personal emotions and ways of acting – and culturally and historically contingent. Consequently, this research also contributes to the anthropological tradition started by David Schneider (1968) and continued by others, such as Cole and Thomas (2009), Hirsch and Wardlow (2006) – and

in the Caribbean context, Mark Padilla (2007), Nadine Fernandez (2010), and Amalia Cabezas (2009) – that poses the question: what can love tell us about large-scale historical and cultural structures, at the same time as it informs us about individuals' intimate life projects?

As we have seen, this research begins with an exploration into the thoroughly gendered nature of Cuban society and the way in which social relations – the focus of everyday life – are governed by love as their organising principle.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the theoretical conceptualisations that underpin my analysis. These include the concept of time that informs the organisation of this study around the life cycle, and the ways in which this relates to the larger structures of the state. Other key theoretical considerations include a discussion of exchange through the notion of reciprocity and the concept of dialectics of care as a way to understand how social relations transform over the life cycle. The chapter further examines the ways in which kinship relations have been approached in the Caribbean in the past (since there is very little information specifically on Cuba) and examines the way in which this study contributes to the understanding of Cuban and Caribbean gender and kinship relations on a more general level.

Chapter 3 discusses male and female contributions towards a new-born baby during pregnancy, childbirth, and the immediate baby stage. It argues that while care emerges as a central orientation in social relations during this period, there is a gendered difference in male and female forms of care. Male forms of care tend to take on a more material form and be symbolised most importantly by money, whereas female care takes the form of loving nurture. The chapter also discusses how the birth of a new human being creates 'moments of affinity' in the kinship system, thus emphasising bonds, which are normally seen as extremely fragile or even inexistent in the literature on Caribbean kinship. The chapter further analyses the Catholic baptism ritual and the ways in which it may both bring people together and separate them, paying special attention to how the ritual allows people to make statements about their social worlds. Finally, the chapter explores how the state relates to the time period of pregnancy, childbirth, and the early baby stage, as well as to the specific gendered practices during this life stage.

Chapter 4 explores girls' coming-of-age ritual *la fiesta de los quince años* by concentrating on the social relations that become mobilised in the ritual and the types of contributions made by the various relatives around the *quinceañera*. It argues that the ritual relates closely to the matrifocal kinship form, emphasising mostly the relationship between a mother and a daughter,

whereas patrilateral relations in particular appear as marginal. At the same time, certain contributions are expected also from the marginal patrilateral kin at this life stage and these may play a significant role in determining the *quinceañera*'s relationship with her father later in life. The chapter also examines the ritual's symbolism that centres on the girl's beauty and sexuality and the centrality of the ritual in reproducing and emphasising gender difference in Cuban society. Moreover, the chapter relates the quince ritual to the socialist state context through a discussion on the ritual's history and its colonial symbolism. The chapter ends by an examination of the meanings that distinct actors give to the ritual and argues that shortcomings at this stage will be remembered during the years to come.

Chapter 5 examines sexuality and adult gender relations and the ways in which these reflect wider understandings of gender in Cuban society. The chapter argues that the gendered conceptualisation of reciprocal care examined in Chapter 3 – with men contributing money and material wealth and women reciprocating with nurture – is replicated in the context of sexuality and love relations. The chapter discusses the types of contributions both parties are expected to bring to a relationship and their emotional implications and considers how a relationship between two persons relates to their wider web of kinship relations. It argues that often expectations are not met and gendered forms of care become distorted, playing a central role in the breaking of the relationship. In this context, the deeply socially embedded nature of love and sexuality is approached through a consideration on the complexities of affinal relations and on the conflicting demands that this places on a person, especially on men. The chapter further examines the emotionally charged nature of negotiations of love in this context and shows that both sexual desire and problems in the relationship are experienced as deeply gendered. The chapter also discusses why understandings of sexual desire and gendered contributions easily lead to break-ups. Finally, individuals' relationships are examined in relation to state conceptualisations of socialist gender relations.

Chapter 6 explores the transformations taking place in social relations at old age and death. It argues that this life stage shifts more emphasis on the previously marginal patrilateral relationships, in particular to the father-child relation. Even though the mother-child bond remains the central focus of the kinship system, the father-child relation has the potential to emerge on a more significant position than in any of the previous life stages. This life stage is special also because the gender difference that centrally characterises all the other stages of the life cycle becomes less emphasised at this point, as more weight shifts to the kinship bond as such. The chapter discusses the way

in which reciprocal care emerges as a central orientation of social relations also at this life stage and examines how this is expressed in the funeral ritual. In addition to examining separation and mourning brought by death, the chapter analyses the ways in which the caring relationship between kin continues after death. The chapter further explores how both the state and the Catholic Church participate as social actors in providing individuals with care at this life stage. Finally, the chapter argues that Cubans perceive the type of reciprocity installed by inheritance as mutual care.

Chapter 7 discusses the wider institutions that frame the lives of Cubans and argues that the way in which the state constitutes a discourse of Cuba as a national community relies on a conceptualisation of the state as a family. Thus, state protection to those in the most vulnerable position in the society – children in particular – becomes particularly important to the state's moral legitimacy, representing state commitment to a culture of life. In addition, the chapter examines the concept of kinship that informs the state discourse and how both children and a view of Cuba's past as formed by a metaphorical state patriliny of socialist heroes relate to two distinct conceptualisations of time that are central to the state discourse: time as progress and time as standing still. The chapter ends with a consideration of how these two notions of time relate to ideas of the reproduction of Cuban society as a whole.

Finally, the study concludes by returning to the meaning of gender, kinship, reciprocity, love, care, and sociability introduced especially in the first two chapters of this study, as well as by considering how time relates to social relations both as historical changes and through the life cycle. It argues that dialectics of care allows for a nuanced approach to kinship and gender and their relationship with both time and large-scale political and economic structures. Kinship is at the centre of Cuban conceptualisations of their society and of life in general.

2. Kinship as an Idiom for Social Relations

"People are looking for happiness but they don't understand that happiness comes with others, that it doesn't come alone, you find it with others."

"La gente está buscando la felicidad pero no entiende que la felicidad viene con los otros, que no viene solo, lo encuentras con los otros."

Yoanki, a mulato man, 24 years.

Introduction

Reciprocity pervades every aspect of life in Havana. Reciprocity structures social relationships within the intimate bonds of kinship and sexuality, in the neighbourhood and when dealing with state officials. Material exchanges intertwine with social relations and exchanges of reciprocal care – either material or nurturing – are a way to create, reproduce, and negotiate social relations. In gender relations especially, reciprocal care expresses love and emotional engagement. In an ailing socialist society, such exchanges also play a significant pragmatic role. At the same time, people's definitions of appropriate reciprocity often vary, and there are frequently failures to meet others' expectations. With its rather uniquely structured – and rapidly changing – exchange system, Cuba is a good place to study reciprocity as well as the changes that larger historical, political, and economic transformations bring to the social relations defined by it.

Reciprocity and the love and care woven into it take distinct forms at different moments; time is an essential factor in reciprocity (Mauss 1999 [1923]). Thus, reciprocity is marked by a delay: a gift is not immediately returned and some exchanges may become reciprocated only after a very long time, over the entire life cycle or in a future generation. Reciprocal exchanges thereby engage persons into potentially lasting social relations and dependencies: reciprocity plays on the trust that in the future, one's contributions will be remembered and reciprocated in one way or another. More than on material rewards as such, the emphasis is on the social bond enabled by exchange. In Cuba, reciprocity becomes particularly highlighted at such crucial moments as birth, death, and transition into full adulthood; all events that are closely connected to life cycle rituals.

Life cycle rituals tend to represent social relations and divisions in a crystallised form. However, they may also represent a moment of change

where relationships are redefined and negotiated, thus forming a particularly productive way to approach such relations that may only materialise in certain specific contexts. As social relations transform over time, kinship relations take on a different form depending on the moment of the life cycle under examination. As the life cycle involves the reproduction of the kinship and gender system as a whole through the processes of birth and death, the life cycle is an appropriate lens for an analysis of transformations in social relations.

The reciprocity practiced over the life cycle – as an aspect of love, kinship, and personhood – is culturally specific and historically contextualised. As social relations change over time, this process also transforms people's relationship with such larger collectives as the state. The meanings and practices that are central to how Cubans create, reproduce, and negotiate social relations throughout the life cycle relate in distinct ways to the state discourse of the socialist nation.

Time is part of the reproduction of both individuals and the state. Both these reproductive processes focus on exchanges of care. The transformations that take place over the life cycle characterise a specific *dialectics of care.* Since care is also emphasised in the conceptualisation of the relationship between individuals and the state, the transformations of care over the life cycle maintain a close relationship with the ways in which state discourses are created. Larger historical transformations may thus have a significant influence on people's intimate experiences of love, reciprocity, sexuality, parenting, and old age.

Kinship and the Life Cycle

At different points of the life cycle, distinct social relations emerge as important. At such moments, social divisions and transformations often become especially visible (van Gennep 1960 [1909]). Life cycle rituals are often a moment of change, an event that carries the potential to transform and redefine social relations.

The life cycle perspective allows examining social life as a whole. This approach is a way to avoid the problems of having to prioritise a certain pre-defined set of relationships (such as nuclear family, biogenetic kin connections, or the institution of marriage) as the object of study, for the life cycle perspective allows to explore which relationships become more central and which more marginal at distinct moments in time. Thus, for instance, the idea of the sexual couple and/or romantic love is not automatically seen

as separate and primary in relation to other types of attachments. Instead, it is necessary to explore the significance of all distinct types of relationships ethnographically.

In Cuba, social relations focus on the notion of kinship bonds (*"familia"*). My use of this term does not prioritise biogenetic views of kinship although it includes them. My understanding of kinship stems from local notions of family relations that include kinship both as 'nature' – through ideas of shared biogenetic substances – and 'nurture' – as intimate bonds that are created, reproduced, maintained, and negotiated. Thus, kinship is understood as a system of symbols and meanings that is locally, culturally, and historically specific (Schneider 1968: vii-viii, 1-3), at the same time as it is created, reproduced, and negotiated through particular practices.

Since Cuba was very restricted to outside researchers for a long time, there is still little ethnographic research on local kinship relations (see, however, Safa 2005; Andaya 2007). On the other hand, in a wider context, Caribbean kinship relations have attracted extensive research in the past, primarily focusing on matrifocality in the English-speaking Caribbean (e.g. Solien de González 1965; Clarke 1974; Smith 1988, 1996a, 1996b; Barrow 1996).

Matrifocality has been characterised as a particularly Afro-Caribbean kinship formation that prevails especially amongst poor people, as – like R. T. Smith (1988: 11-15, 93, 1996a: 4, 13-14, 33) and others (e.g. Clarke 1974: 75, 131) have argued – poverty and dark skin colour tend to go together in the region.[20] However, this view presupposes family relations to be divided by race, which is not the case amongst the *habaneros* (residents of Havana) that I worked. The connection between matrifocality and poverty/low class is more complicated, for not only has the revolution in many ways transformed Cuba's earlier class division – the aim was, after all, to create a classless society – but also because in contemporary Cuba, people's wealth may fluctuate considerably and does not necessarily connect with such factors traditionally associated with class as education or even race (e.g. Rosenberg Weinreb 2008). At the same time, it is clear that some type of class distinctions exist, as shown by concepts such as the level of culture (see Fernandez 2010; Lundgren 2011). However, in the absence of more extensive studies on family relations amongst wealthy Cubans, it is difficult to say to what extent the fact that my informants were mostly people with relatively low incomes is connected to the forms of their kinship relations. Andaya (2007: 219-220), Stubbs (1997), Safa (2005), and Anna Pertierra (2008), all see Cuban kinship relations in general as characterised by

20 See also de la Fuente 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; Cabezas 2009: 79-81; Fernandez 2010: 80-95, 129-130; Allen 2011: 63 on the relationship between class and income/wealth in post-Soviet Cuba. For an overview on class and race in the English-speaking Caribbean, see Austin 1983.

bonds very similar to Caribbean matrifocality.

Research on Caribbean matrifocality has emphasised the particular strength of the mother-child bond, the central position of women in the kinship system and in the household, the marginality of men in the position of husband/father, the weakness of marital relations, and, consequently, the relative marginality of patrilateral and affinal relations (Solien de González 1965; Clarke 1974; Smith 1974; Smith 1988, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d; Safa 2005; Andaya 2007). On the other hand, some researchers have rejected the concept of matrifocality in favour of an emphasis on wider kinship networks (Stack 1974; Olwig 1981; Blackwood 2005). However, in both cases, research has concentrated on relationships between women, matrilateral female kin in particular, and paid little attention to men's family relations. In such accounts, kinship appears as a set of relations that concern only women, reflecting a tendency to neglect the examination of patrilateral and affine bonds (for exceptions, see Smith 1988: 39-41, 58-79; Birth 1998). Moreover, the way in which kinship relations transform over time raises another problem in the research tradition. R. T. Smith (1996a: 15-17, 40) states that over the life cycle Caribbean kinship units – which often set off as nuclear families – become more matrifocal, but he does not examine how time transforms kinship relations in more complicated ways, allowing in particular the reworking of marginal kinship links.

Terence Turner's (1979a, 1979b) discussion of Kayapó societies as "dialectical systems" offers a more nuanced understanding of the shifting nature of kinship relations. Turner views kinship as characterised by transformations of the entire family system over the reproductive cycle. As Turner's approach crucially engages the idea that social relations change over time and that individual shifts may become reflected in wider networks of relationships, I find it helpful in order to capture the frequently changing character of Cuban social relations. Turner suggests that kinship relations transform over the life cycle so that those kinship relations that are marginal at certain points of the life cycle may become more significant at other points in time. Through an examination of Kayapó Gê and Bororo kinship, Turner notes that over time, affinal relations are transformed into consanguinity as the birth of children creates a consanguine link to the household for a man residing with his wife's parents. Over the life cycle, a man/father gradually becomes more integrated to the family unit and eventually transforms into a full consanguine member. At the same time, kin relations that are marginal at a particular point of the reproductive cycle are given significance through exchanges as well as ritual and naming practices. A number of central events over the life cycle transform kin relationships, rearranging the position of various persons involved.

Individuals transit cyclically between states of integration, separation, and re-integration to their specific families within the kinship system, but the cycles and their timing are gender-differentiated. (Turner 1979a, 1979b). Due to these transformations, Turner characterises Kayapó societies as "dialectical systems." (1979a).

This approach addresses both sides of the classical kinship debate between 'consanguine' and 'affine' relations. Turner points out that the internal structure of an individual household (i.e. relations between generations) and the structure of interhousehold relations (i.e. exchange, alliance, marriage) are closely related; they are "two sides of the same coin" (1979a: 166). The pattern of interhousehold spouse exchange reproduces the core of the relations that form the centre of the internal structure of each individual household (1979a: 166). Heterosexual relations have the potential to lead to the birth of new kin members and reproduce the family structure. This creates a close connection between the birth of children (filiation) and marital relations (alliance and exchange).

Turner's model is useful because it examines the life cycle as a series of transitions where kin relations are transformed, marginal kin relations becoming more central over time and individual transitions also transforming the status(es) of their kin. Specific transitions in the kinship system may therefore create shifts in a wide range of relationships. Moreover, Turner's model approaches distinct bonds (consanguine, conjugal, affine) and transitions as differentiated by gender, which resonates with the central position of gender in Cuban social relations.

Drawing on these ideas, I examine Cuban social relations as formed by moments where specific points of the life cycle carry the potentiality to transform and redefine social relations. This is transformation only *in potential*: social relations are not *always* transformed and all persons do not seize the possibilities allowed by such specific moments. While in day-to-day contexts, Cuban kinship relations are largely focused on mother-child connections and matrilateral relations (much like described in the literature on Caribbean matrifocality), certain points of the life cycle represent moments in which more emphasis may shift on the more marginal patrilateral and affine kinship relations. This also exemplifies the way in which Cubans live their lives embedded in wide networks of social relations. Over the life cycle, some of these connections become visible in distinct ways through exchanges. Other potential connections may never grow into actual bonds of reciprocal care. A person may prefer not to seize the possibilities of transformation allowed by such special moments or an individual may lack the practical means to do

so. Thus, while a specific moment of the life cycle may allow for individuals to re-negotiate their position in relation to their partners, children, parents, siblings, or wider kin, this does not necessarily happen; sometimes everything may continue as before. Yet the potential for transformation is there, allowing for the reworking of bonds that are usually marginal in day-to-day life.

These shifts in social relations are connected with a degree of variation concerning the ways in which diverse social distinctions are highlighted as significant in relationships. Thus, the importance given to such categorisations as race, heterosexuality, matri- or patrilaterality, affinity, and even gender, may shift over the life cycle to a certain degree. While a certain division may emerge as particularly significant in certain moments, it may become undermined in other contexts. Time therefore creates fluctuation in the types of categorisations and divisions that are often taken for granted in definitions of Cuban social relations.

Distinct aspects of relationships becoming relevant in different contexts is also reflected in the ways in which Cubans relate to the state, which over the life cycle takes on a more and less central role in individual existence. This issue is closely connected with the shifts that take place in Cubans' caring practices and in the expectations of reciprocity that define them over the life cycle.

Reciprocity and the Dialectics of Care

For Mauss, reciprocity is epitomised in the gift and the obligation to return it. Giving and receiving objects installs a lasting, mutual relationship between two parties, creating a total social fact that intertwines the material with the moral and the social. (1999: 28). Drawing on this tradition, more recent French research has shown how the circulation of objects is intimately connected with the shape of social relations in a certain society (e.g. Barraud et al. 1994), allowing people to materialise, create, reproduce, negotiate, and (re)define their relationships. This perspective highlights the significance of holistic accounts: the importance of examining exchanges over time frames that cover the entire exchange cycle (de Barraud et al. 1994: 2-4, 7-9). In this study the time span of the whole life cycle creates such a framework. These insights from the French tradition – the centrality of reciprocity for social relations, the ways in which materiality intertwines with sociability, and the importance of examining exchanges in a holistic framework – are central to my understanding of the role of care in Cuban social relations, although I expand exchange to include not only material objects but also nurturing practices.

For Mauss, reciprocity entails both the economic and the political and focuses on social solidarity as opposed to commoditised relations governed by self-interest and individualism (1999:125-130). In other words, in Maussian reciprocity the emphasis is on the social aspects of exchange.

Annette Weiner, however, argues that instead of reciprocity, we should focus our attention on reproduction. Weiner highlights the gendered nature of exchange and the interplay between human life cycles and material and immaterial exchanges. She argues that the idea of reciprocity simplifies transactions, which in fact constitute far-reaching obligations that shift back and forth between persons as an aspect of memory and form part of the social reproduction over time.[21] (Weiner 1980, 1992).

Drawing on Weiner, but not rejecting reciprocity altogether, Maurice Godelier (1999) points out that in all societies there are things that are outside of reciprocity: things that kept rather than exchanged. These form the necessary anchoring point for fixing continuity in time for both societies and individuals and are vital for the reproduction of the social order. There are always things that are passed down from one generation to another. They give value to those things that are exchanged; without such things, exchange is not possible. Such things "enable the society to represent itself (...) and to reproduce itself as a whole." (1999: 40). Thus, both exchange and inheritance must be given recognition.

Godelier argues that in social relations, exchange is always accompanied by transmission. In kinship, this takes place through filiation. Godelier places the body at the core of understanding kinship – marked by the double axis of memory (filiation) and choice (marriage alliances) – as well as by social relations more generally. (1998: 408-410). He describes kinship as "a set of representations and issues that mark bodies, that embed themselves in these bodies: they do this by representing a transfer, between the sexes and the generations, of material and spiritual substances and forces, that are joined by the ranks and powers transmitted in some societies through kinship." (1998: 388). The socialised human body becomes thus a way to examine both transmission and reciprocity (1998: 409).

However, the body as the image of both kinship and alliance/sexuality also relates to love and emotions. Soumhaya Venkatesen (2011), faults reciprocity for leaving no room for romantic love and passion. The problem with this argument is that it relies on a dichotomisation between romantic love and other types of relationships, practices, and emotions instead of understanding love, reciprocity, pragmatic concerns, and desire as complexly intertwined in

21 In her understanding of time, Weiner draws on Bourdieu's (1977: 4-5) critique of Lévi-Strauss's notion of reciprocity. In his subsequent critique of reciprocity Bourdieu (2000: 191-202), in my view, does not pay proper notice to the emphasis on social relations in Maussian reciprocity, which after all does not differ significantly from Bourdieu's understanding of social capital.

character (Povinelli 2011).

Reciprocity in Cuban social relations is highly praxis-oriented and characterises most importantly relationships between kin members and lovers. On the other hand, this praxis-oriented character of reciprocity brings up the problem of analytical categories more widely. The notion of reciprocity has been criticised for imposing Western rationality in societies where it does not exist (Weiner 1980; 1992). However, while reciprocity is not a concept that most Cubans would themselves use to describe their relationships, the types of expectations that they place on each other and the central role played by pragmatic contributions as expressing and creating social bonds in a wide range of everyday situations (see also Rosendahl 1997; Andaya 2009a), suggest that reciprocity is a central value in relationships and not something analytically imposed on sets of data rejecting such conceptualisations. Rather than verbalised, reciprocity becomes expected and enacted in the course of everyday practices of care.

Care may refer to both nurturing practices and material contributions, ranging from providing someone with money or other forms of material support to performing physical labour or feeding. Care may also be emotional: comforting, tenderness, or giving someone a good piece of advice. Reciprocity defines Cubans' conceptualisations of all of these types of care: while giving and receiving objects creates mutual bonds between persons, so does the giving and receiving of nurture in the form of bodily practices and emotional engagements.

Reciprocal care forms a way to reproduce and negotiate the existing bonds between persons as well as to create new ones. Care connects with the love that people feel towards their kin or partners: throughout the life cycle, Cubans express and negotiate emotional attachments by practicing distinct forms of care towards each other. Thus, the material becomes intimately tied with the emotional and the moral. Moreover, such caring practices are not only a way to express love in pre-existing social bonds; they also allow the creation of new relations, therefore playing a central role in the reproduction and negotiation of social relations over time. The circulation of objects is thus closely connected to ideas about material care as an expression of love (for similar ideas in Africa, see Cole 2009; Hunter 2009).

Based on French insights on the intertwined nature of materiality and social solidarity – here approached in the more intimate framework of loving care – I draw on Turner's (1979a, 1979b) characterisation of Kayapó societies as "dialectical systems" and use the notion of *dialectics of care* to examine

how Cubans conceptualise their social relations as comprised of reciprocal exchanges of nurturing, material, and emotional care over the life cycle. I use the term dialectics to convey the idea that reciprocal caring practices shift over time, that care may materialise at a certain specific moment yet disappear at another, or that it may flow towards a certain direction in a specific context and alter its direction in another context.

The way in which care flows between persons relies on the expectation of (asymmetrical) reciprocity between individuals. Such expectations may also become neglected. Nevertheless, reciprocal care forms the central orientation in terms of which social relations are negotiated (see Stasch 2009: 4). While those who should most of all practice reciprocal care towards each other are kin members, the dialectics of care also characterises gendered expectations in sexual relations. It also plays a role in Cubans' relationship with the state.

The state participates in the dialectics of care by providing services and contributions over the life cycle: the promise to nurture its citizens from cradle to crave has formed the central ideological claim of socialism. However, as the state is weak in the type of reciprocity that characterises individuals' personal bonds, an ideological conceptualisation of the state as a family becomes central instead, enabling the state to claim continuity in time. At the same time, this notion builds on the way in which the state participates in the dialectics of care and entails some type of state contributions to materialise its ideological claims of a family-like bond. Like care in individuals' relations, state care also varies considerably from one moment to another. Consequently, the dialectics of care defines social relations as a whole, characterising both love and neglect in the context of intimate kinship and sexual bonds, as well as forming the criterion by which Cubans assess the successes and failures of the state.

Love, Reproductive Cycle, and Personhood

Mauss warned that larger-scale political and economic transformations might threaten and transform reciprocity with monetisation in particular functioning as the advocate of individualism and commoditised social relations (1999: 112-129). As reciprocity plays a central role in creating, reproducing, and expressing the loving care that forms the focus of social relations in Cuba, such transformations may resonate significantly with the overall life cycle.

Several researchers have shown that large-scale structural changes may transform the reproductive cycle and the ways in which individuals experience

love and sexuality (e.g. Ginsburg and Rapp 1995; Wardlow 2006a; Padilla et al. 2007; Padilla 2007; Cole and Thomas 2009; Hunter 2009). As Wardlow (2006a: 6) puts it; "that men are absent for wage labor changes what it means to be a sister; that bridewealth is increasingly monetized and used as means to gain cash changes what it means to be a wife." Historical changes such as monetisation – or other transformations in political ideology – may change reciprocity, care, and the ways in which love and kinship are negotiated, thereby transforming the life cycle.

As the notions of love and kinship are closely connected to ideas about personhood, transformations in the reproductive cycle and in affective relations may have complex consequences to the notion of the person. Several scholars have shown that transformations in intimate relations and the reproductive cycle can bring about changes in forms of personhood (Collier 1997; Rebhun 1999; Ahearn 2001; Hirsch 2003; Wardlow 2006a; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Padilla 2007; Padilla et al. 2007; Masqulier 2009; Mutongi 2009; Spronk 2009; see also Cole and Thomas 2009: 6-13). Romantic love in particular has been connected with a shift to more individualistic forms of personhood, as it prioritises individual desire as opposed to family obligations as the basis of affective attachments. Such transformations have been widely connected with a shift in social relations from an emphasis on larger kinship groups to conjugal love and more companionate forms of marriage (e.g. Ahearn 2001; Hirsch 2003; Yan 2003; Wardlow 2006a; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Padilla et al. 2007). The increased prevalence of romantic love is often connected to larger social, economic, and political transformations such as modernisation (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Wardlow 2006a), increased (neo)liberal globalisation (Padilla et al. 2007), and heightened monetisation (Wardlow 2006a; Cole and Thomas 2009).

However, although similar large-scale factors have relevance in Cuba, there are some differences between the Cuban context and the above-mentioned descriptions. While romantic love has shaped Cuban understandings of gender relations at least since the 19th century (see e.g. Villaverde 2005 [1839]), there is no significant emphasis on conjugality, which is historically weak in the Caribbean. Moreover, while Cubans definitely recognise the importance of individual desire in their views of sexuality, this relates closely with larger kinship considerations, which are highlighted as a person's primary source of emotional attachments. This suggests that the Cuban notion of personhood both recognises considerable degrees of individualist agency and, simultaneously, highlights relationality as a fundamental aspect of existence (see also Wardlow 2006a; Cole 2009).

Relationality is a term anchored in Marilyn Strathern's (1988) work, whose insights are helpful to illustrate the profound significance of social relations. My effort to examine social life as a whole draws on Strathern's view that "one relationship cannot be considered independently from others" (1988: 34). Such a holistic approach to social life connects with a more relational notion of personhood over perspectives that prioritise a focus on individuals. For Strathern, social relations are at the very core of human beings, defining both personhood and the body. Strathern's view on human relationality draws centrally on the idea that every child is born as a nexus of distinct social relations, carrying in itself different types of connections. Therefore, the body is also composed of the specific historical actions of social others, making the person "a microcosm" of social relations (1988: 131). Thus, children embody social relations already at the moment of their birth: they are the register of past social relations, of encounters that have taken place. Consequently, children are not born as 'empty' but as the embodiment of a set of social relations. In their persona, people carry the potential for various kinds of social bonds. My understanding of Cuban notions of personhood draws on Strathern's insights. Persons have the potential for various types of social relations, distinct aspects of which may become activated at distinct times.

Cecilia Busby provides a model of personhood that differs both from the Melanesian partible person and a Western individualistic person. Busby approaches South Indian personhood as permeable and having fluid body borders, yet as internally whole (1997: 275-276). Unlike in the Melanesian model, in Busby's view gender as well becomes tightly anchored to the body. However, the "boundary of the body is considered permeable, so that substance can flow between persons, and connections can be made" (Busby 1997: 275). Thus, personhood becomes conceptualised as both bounded and permeable. While there are significant differences between Cuban notions of personhood and the South Indian ones discussed by Busby, they are similar as to the ways in which persons are in many ways conceived as permeated by the actions and presence of others. My understanding of the notion of relationality thus draws selectively on both Strathern's and Busby's views.

At the same time, this understanding of the person – and the profound importance of kinship bonds for Cubans – relates closely to the "mutuality of being" that Marshall Sahlins (2011) places at the core of kinship belonging. Sahlins describes this concept as referring to "people who are intrinsic to one another's existence – thus 'mutual person(s)'" (2011: 2). For him, this notion covers the ethnographically varied forms of constituting kinship (whether involving procreation or other modes of forming relatedness), all forms of interpersonal relations (i.e. both filiation and alliance), as well as the effects

of kinship bonds; "whereby what one person does or suffers also happens to others. (...) Where being is mutual, the experience is more than individual." (2011: 3). The way in which Cubans live their lives embedded in social networks makes the notion of such intrinsically shared existence relevant for the understanding of personhood and the role that kinship bonds play in it.

However, this emphasis on relationality does not cancel out the fact that more individualist conceptualisations may become prioritised in certain contexts and that conceptualisations of personhood are subject to historical changes (Wardlow 2006a). If social relations change – reflecting some of the larger structural transformations – this may resonate with notions of personhood and transform them in unexpected ways. Some studies argue that the post-Soviet period has marked Cuban society with increased individualism (Crahan 1999: 565; Azicri 2000: 58; Muñoz and Ortega Breña 2009: 79).[22] I am cautious about applying such (teleological) trajectories to Cuban (or any other) society and propose instead that such issues have to be examined empirically by paying detailed attention to the meanings and practices that characterise Cubans' day-to-day social relations and the types of notions that are highlighted as central to individual existence throughout the life course. Emphasising the importance of ethnographic fieldwork as a way to try to understand such differences, allows us to grasp better the culturally and historically contingent nature of personhood as opposed to assuming universal relevance to Western understandings of an individualist 'self' (see Sahlins 1996, 2004).

Fieldwork in Havana

For a long time, Cuba was relatively closed to outside investigators (see, however, Randall 1974, 1981; Lewis et al. 1977a, 1977b; Rosendahl 1997; Lomnitz 2012 on Fernando Coronil – most of whom encountered considerable trouble in their efforts to do research on the island). However, when Cuba started to welcome tourists during the post-Soviet period, outside researchers gradually gained easier access to the island, even though obtaining a research visa remains complicated.

To describe my own fieldwork process, I could borrow a phrase often used by Cubans to describe their day-to-day life: "*no es fácil*." Indeed, it is not easy to do fieldwork in Cuba. People are welcoming, warm, and open to interaction with strangers, but – as noted by many others (Andaya 2007; Fernandez 2010; Kath 2010) – dealing with the state bureaucracy is difficult. At the same time, such problems provide a good introduction to some of the complexities of day-to-day

22 This view has also been expressed by the Cuban government (see Eckstein 1994: 320; Lumsden 1996: 199; Ritter 1998: 81; Leogrande and Thomas 2002: 352; Baker 2005: 368, 378).

life in Cuba, as they are in some ways similar to those experienced by locals in their various pursuits.

This study is based on ethnographic data collected in Havana predominantly in 2007-2008, totalling 14 months of research.[23] The reason for the periodical nature of my fieldwork is related to the complex visa situation and to problems in trying to find a Cuban research institute to the scope of which my study would suit. As family and life cycle rituals as a topic were conceptualised as something that did not exactly fit to the research agenda of neither anthropology nor sociology or psychology, it was hard for me to find a local affiliation, and when I finally managed to establish this, there was considerable confusion on how to run the details of the application process, resulting in problems with my visa status. Gaining this institutional affiliation and via it, a proper visa, was highly difficult.

While dealing with the state bureaucracy constituted a major problem, I did not, for instance, have difficulties with the language as my engagement with Spanish dates years back. I also collected all the material myself and did not, for instance, need to use a research assistant for interviews (e.g. Andaya 2007: 13). During my first fieldwork in Havana in 2003, I had established extensive social networks and was able to rely on these once I went back for my doctoral dissertation research in 2007-2008, for I had maintained contact with my closest informants throughout the years. These social connections also shaped the geographic location where my fieldwork mainly took place.

Havana has been the stronghold of recent anthropological studies on Cuba (e.g. Andaya 2007; Fernandez 2010; Allen 2011; Lundgren 2011; Holbraad 2012), partly reflecting the fact that gaining a visa to conduct research elsewhere in the country is even more difficult. I chose to stay in Havana because my earlier contacts reside there and also because Havana is the capital and therefore reflects large-scale structural changes in Cuban society faster than other parts of the country. Moreover, Havana is the seat of the national government, thus providing a good view on state politics.

Unlike some studies (e.g. Fernandez 2010; Lundgren 2011), my research did not specifically concentrate on a particular neighbourhood. On the other hand, I spent most of my daily time – along with my contacts – between *Centro Habana* and a neighbourhood in Havana's eastern suburbs, which I call *el barriecito*. This neighbourhood differs considerably from the more central parts of Havana. Situated further away from the city centre, it attracts fewer tourists. Since

23 I travelled to Cuba for the first time in 2001 but engaged in actual fieldwork for the first time in 2003 over three months for my Master's thesis. I went back to Havana in 2006 for a month (in order to organise my research visa); for five months in 2007; for four months in 2008 and for a month in 2010. In spite of my desire to stay in Havana for a longer period of time, I repeatedly faced considerable trouble in my efforts to gain a more long-term visa for my stay.

there is more space, *el barriecito* lacks *Centro Habana*'s typical feeling of intense crowdedness and hectic pulsation. Houses are new and the neighbourhood is composed mostly of migrant residents that have arrived from Eastern Cuba to Havana in the 1970s (and many of them much later, as new people keep coming to the capital). There are large areas covered by *lleipons*; shacks constructed illegally on state land by dark-skinned, recently arrived, poor migrants from Eastern Cuba. Other areas consist of very new concrete block houses built mostly by military personnel that have been given state land because their job, whereas some other residences have been built on land purchased illegally at the 'black' market. *El barriecito* is a relatively neglected area in particular when compared to the more central and touristy parts of Havana (*Habana Vieja*, *Vedado* and *Centro Habana*). The water supply is continuously very poor – during my stay, the taps gave water at the best every other night from about midnight until four or five a.m., but usually less frequently. When Havana was battered by hurricanes in the autumn of 2008, electricity was cut for weeks and water supply was off for three consecutive months (while in the whiter, more touristic, and 'middle-class' *Vedado*, the damages were repaired within a week).

These specific features of *el barriecito* also resonate with the gendered day-to-day practices in the neighbourhood. As Katherine Verdery (1996: 44-47, 66) notes for socialist Romania, such problems – combined with the lack of many domestic appliances – make domestic work particularly burdensome (for women) and many women in particular dream of a housing unit with running water and air conditioning during the hot and humid summer months. Men, on the other hand, are usually busy with house construction projects whether for their own benefit or as (unlicensed) paid labour (or in the case of some young men as part of a state-imposed punishment for having engaged in illegalities in the context of the informal economy). In important ways, people's day-to-day projects thereby intertwine with the issue of housing.

Despite residing in Havana, many of my informants are originally from Eastern Cuba and maintain steady relationships with their kin in *Oriente*. They frequently send their kin food, clothes, and money to be carried by cousins, nephews, and nieces who travel back and forth between Havana and the more rural Eastern Cuba.[24] They send gifts and post-cards on special dates (such as birthdays and on Mothers' Day) and try to visit during the summer holidays

24 Migration laws restrict individuals' entry to Havana and while many East Cubans would desire to migrate to the capital more permanently, they struggle to make it happen in the midst of state regulations and the constant housing deficiency. The state requires all Cubans to have adequate housing before they can officially move to Havana. Thereby, migrants desiring to gain residency in the capital need to be officially inscribed to live with kin who have enough room in their flat so that it is judged by state officials as suitable for extra persons. Many Cubans – both migrants and *habaneros* – resolve this by finding a kin member in whose *libreta* (food rationing book) they can be officially inscribed while in practice residing in another address. However, many come illegally. East Cuban migrants who come to Havana without the appropriate state permit to be there are called *palestinos* – an indication of their stateless status and highlighting the importance of what Sarah Green (2012) calls the "relative location" of places and the bodies in them.

in July if financially possible. Calls take place regularly and sometimes kin members come to Havana with bags of coffee or sugar from *Oriente*; (used both as gifts to kin and commodities sold to neighbours to finance their stay in the capital). There is thus a steady flow of goods and communication circulating between Havana and the more rural parts of Cuba, and *habaneros*, who are (relatively) wealthier in comparison with their rural kin, feel both a strong desire and an important moral commitment to maintain contact with their families in Eastern Cuba and help them.

While I knew very few people who had kin living outside of Cuba, similar bonds characterised their relationships with absent family members. The kin outside of the island maintained connections via phone calls, remittances of money, and by sending little gifts to Havana on special occasions.

Such connections show that my informants are deeply connected with people outside of Havana and involved in networks of kin relations that include other parts of Cuba as well as – more rarely – Cubans migrated abroad. These links also demonstrate the importance of material contributions as a way of maintaining social relationships and showing love and care to absent kin. This highlights the interconnectedness of materiality, love, and care and shows that while such material exchanges are importantly reciprocal, this reciprocity does not need to be symmetrical.

Most of my informants could be described as ordinary, low-income Cubans: men, women, and children of all ages residing mostly in a specific neighbourhood in *Centro Habana* and a certain sector in *el barriecito*. These people became my primary social contacts due to random initial encounters during my first fieldwork period in Havana in 2003. My research primarily concentrated on one extended family with members in both of these neighbourhoods – the reason why I ended up spending my time between these two places – as well as their more distant kin, partners, friends, and neighbours. I also worked closely with another extended family from *Centro Habana* and the wide range of kin, partners, friends, and neighbours linked to them.

I met the first family via an accidental encounter with their 22-year-old *jabao* (a racial categorisation between *mulato* and white) son Yuniel in an unlicensed hairdresser saloon in *Centro Habana*. It turned out that I was doing research on girls' quince parties and he was working in diverse cultural events and we became good friends. He introduced me to an extensive range of his family, kin, friends, and neighbours who welcomed me warmly and eventually shaped me into a family member. Yuniel, his (60+ years old) mother Caridad, two matrilateral sisters (Rosa and Yadira, respectively 32 years and 37 years old)

and his mother's spouse José (who was in his late sixties) became my closest family and informants, but I was also in frequent interaction with their uncles, aunts, cousins, changing partners, and friends.

The members of the second family became my close contacts as I met Danel, who was a good friend of the lady from whom I was initially renting a room in *Habana vieja*. Danel, a black, 38-year-old artist who resided in *Centro Habana*, introduced me to his six sisters and two brothers, their children and partners and children's partners, his father, his father's new spouse, a wide range of cousins as well as ritual kin, friends, and neighbours. Indeed, making friends with one Cuban tends to bring several persons into one's frequent range of social interactions because people maintain very extensive social networks.



FIG. 2: THE AUTHOR INTERVIEWING A *QUINCEAÑERA* AT HER PARTY

As this description shows, I did not exactly *choose* these people as my research subjects; rather, it was the other way around. At the same time, the ways in which my closest informants' social networks were built around bonds of kinship, sexuality, neighbourhood, and other similar ties, allowed me to closely observe the types of notions that govern Cuban sociability as well as helped me to expand my social contacts.

By characterising my informants with the overall label of ordinary people, I mean that they are not particularly privileged in any sense nor any type of dissidents; not even sexually marginal (as has become the trend in ethnographies on Cuba recently, e.g. Hodge 2001; 2005; Simoni: 2008b,

2012; Stout 2008, forthcoming; Cabezas 2009; Placencia 2009; Allen 2011; Roland 2011; Daigle 2013). Compared to the research subjects of many recent ethnographies on Cuba, my informants are probably somewhat lower-income and less cosmopolitan than many of the people we meet in other accounts (e.g. Andaya 2007; Allen 2011; Lundgren 2011). Only one (an elderly white man) of my informants identified himself as a fervent revolutionary. Others did not oppose to the revolution either (with four exceptions, all of these men). Most of my informants embraced the basic ideals of the revolution, even though they did not agree with everything and often complained about the complexities of life in contemporary Cuba. Due to the great focus on *jineterismo* ('tourist hustling and/or prostitution') or similar practices in recent studies on Cuba (e.g. Hodge 2001, 2005; Simoni 2008b, 2009, 2012; Stout 2008, forthcoming; Cabezas 2009; Placencia 2009; Roland 2011; Daigle 2013), my informants do seem to represent nearly an anomaly in comparison to many other ethnographies in the sense that they saw themselves as accepting the revolution rather than opposing it – despite the fact that their day-to-day life entailed circumventing, stretching, and breaking certain rules, laws, and revolutionary principles as a way to get by.[25] They did not make a living out of *jineterismo*: many were state employees (such as a secretary, a primary school teacher, a factory worker, a lawyer, a chauffeur, a DJ), some were small-scale private entrepreneurs (selling coffee and bread in the street), some worked in construction (both in the official as well as the unofficial field), and others were engaged in micro-brigade housing projects, on a leave from their normal jobs.[26] Two of my female informants had travelled to Europe during a relationship with a foreign man, but both relationships had ended badly and they had returned to Cuba. One female informant had a son in Europe whom she had visited there and her spouse had kin in Miami, whom he also had visited. The rest had never travelled outside of Cuba, yet kept on dreaming about such a possibility.

In terms of racial categorisations, my informants ranged from black to white and everything in between (being mostly *mulatos* and *jabaos*).[27] For instance, Yuniel's family was composed of a white man, his *mulata* spouse and children who were (depending on the context) labelled as *mulatos* or *jabaos*. Danel, another of my closest informants, was black and his extended family consisted mostly of blacks and *mulatos,* although with some Chinese family background.

25 However, all in all, my informants' overall vision of the revolution would probably come close to the way in which Allen describes his informants' views on wanting a more open, modified socialist welfare state (2012: 334) – even though in other ways my informants differ greatly from Allen's research subjects.

26 Safa (2009: 49) notes that the self-employed enjoy the highest income levels in Cuba but this view does not take into account that there are considerable differences inside the category of 'self-employed'; one ends up in very different levels of monthly income by selling *cafecitos* (little coffees) by the roadside to Cubans for one peso (less than 0.05 USD), and by renting rooms to tourists for 25-30 CUC per night.

27 See Fernandez 2010: 17-24; Roland 2011: 33-37 for good descriptions of Cuban racial categorisations.

In general, everyday life in Havana is very mixed racially.

Racial categorisations connect with a certain amount of differences in religious practices (e.g. Eckstein 1994: 4; Tweed 1997: 67-68; de la Fuente 2001c: 18; Holbraad 2004; Fernandez 2010: 147; Allen 2011: 59,123-124, 149). While some of my informants were active practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions as well as Spiritism, others had very little to do with any types of religious practices. The majority were involved in occasional practices of Santería and Spiritism, some of Palo, whilst also identifying themselves as Catholics. Many other informants had very little to do with any types of religious practices, but could still engage in Santería, Catholicism or Spiritism occasionally if the situation required it. Thus, while there is a connection between religious practices and race, my ethnography highlights the ways in which the importance of such practices is slightly transformed over distinct contexts. Therefore, focusing on the life cycle provides a good way to grasp their meanings in kinship relations.

As most of my fieldwork concentrated on conducting participant observation in the everyday lives of individual Cubans, I complemented my data by collecting information on life cycle rituals and family policies as widely as I could. While there were some quince parties, a baptism, and a wedding within the social networks of my informants, which I could attend, such events were not highly frequent and, for instance, no one I knew died during my fieldwork, greatly limiting my access to funerals. Therefore, I complemented my day-to-day participant observation by spending time in the specific sites where life cycle rituals take place: observing Catholic baptisms in churches, attending quince photo shoots in various locations, and participating in weddings in state wedding halls. While all these were relatively open and easy-to-access events, attending funerals was more complicated. Nevertheless, I managed to observe closely several performances of Catholic last rites, as well as two burials in the Colón cemetery, and to attend a wake in a state funeral home. In addition to life cycle rituals, I attended all types of state-organised public events such as the Children's Day, as well as socialist rituals such as the celebration of the first of May and Fidel Castro's birthday, as a way to gain an understanding on the state discourse. As I embrace a holistic understanding of fieldwork, I also participated in distinct Catholic rituals (masses, processions, a confirmation, and a first communion) in churches around Havana and observed some Afro-Cuban and Spiritist religious rituals (such as *fiestas de santo* and a *toque de muerto*) as a way to gain a better understanding on Cubans' views on transcendence.

Due to the general orientation of my research on life cycle rituals as a lens on kinship and gender relations, I interviewed several ritual experts, such as

Catholic priests, funeral home employees, wedding hall employees, divorce lawyers, employees of maternity homes and old people's homes, and persons working in important state organisations that are involved in issues of gender, family, and sexuality (such as the Cuban Women's Federation and the Orientation Houses for Women and the Family, *Casas de Orientación a la Mujer y la Familia*). I also conducted interviews amongst ordinary Cubans over various distinct topics related to family life, gender issues, and life cycle rituals and collected media material (newspapers, magazines, and taped TV news) in order to gain information on the state discourse. However, rather than focusing on interviews, I concentrated on noting down 'naturally occurring speech.' Interviews always represent a form of 'outward-oriented speech' detached from its normal context and governed by norms that differ from those governing speech in everyday situations (e.g. Briggs 1986; Wolcott 1995). Thus, when interviewed, people tend to give an account that is normatively correct (Wolcott 1995: 104). While this does not make interviewing useless as a research technique, one has to bear in mind that the information gained by interviews is of a specific kind. This is why I noted down as much naturally occurring speech as possible.

Furthermore, my fieldwork concentrated on practices rather than verbal data. As Pierre Bourdieu (1990) in particular has pointed out, many things in day-to-day life take place via bodily practices as opposed to speech. A whole range of day-to-day habits, actions, events, exchanges, interaction, and other issues cannot or are not verbalised, often because they are taken for granted. For example, people are often unable to verbalise their cosmology or other very deep-seating, fundamental conceptualisations about the world and society. (Bourdieu 1990). Therefore, it is important to pay attention also to the non-verbalised aspects of culture and engage in participant observation rather than relying on such methods as surveys or interviews alone. Besides, exchanges represent another domain of life that is often not specifically verbalised. As materiality intertwines deeply with social relations, I paid close attention to the types of exchanges that take place amongst persons in the context of everyday life as well as in more special situations.

As I became more acquainted with the people in the neighbourhood of *el barriecito* where I stayed, they ascribed me to the category of "*la rusa*" (the Russian woman). Russians are perceived as localised foreigners who have been in Cuba for a long time, know the country, and are not tourists. This social categorisation made my interactions in the neighbourhood easier than in the case of being conceptualised as a *yuma*, because this label often carries the slightly disdainful connotations associated with tourists as somewhat naïve people who are loaded with money and easily fooled and who lack many basic

skills and knowledge (such as speaking Cuban Spanish and knowing how to dance). *Yuma* is for Cubans 'the other' (see e.g. Roland 2011: 3, 13, 65), whereas being labelled as a *rusa*; a student or – eventually – family, is different and something closer to the Cuban everyday experience.

I think that the fact that my relationship with my closest informants was built on a family connection emerging from an initial friendship makes my fieldwork somewhat different from those organised, for instance, around sexual intimacy, as stated by a few anthropologists working on Cuban gender and family relations (e.g. Roland 2006: 18-19; Pertierra 2007; Fernandez 2010: 8-12; Lundgren 2011: 50). My position possibly exposed me more to (affine) conflicts, problems, and 'plotting' in relationships – things that are not so likely to be revealed to a spouse or to a girlfriend. At the same time, I gained close information on my informants' sexual and love relations by participating in their day-to-day lives and often heard the same story from two different angles because in a way I was often considered more 'neutral ground.' This is why I frequently discussed the same things with both female and male informants. At the same time, my close connection with one family in particular obviously defines the type of information that I was able to gather.[28]

My informants were aware that I was a Ph.D. student in anthropology writing a book on Cuban family relations and the life cycle. Occasionally, they brought up topics they wanted me to include in my book (*"ponlo en tu libro!"*) and after I left Cuba, they have kept on asking about the advancing of my research in our continuous email exchanges. On the other hand, the level of information in this study is occasionally very intimate and I am aware that some researchers with close ties to Cuba prefer to leave their most personal interactions outside of the scope of their research publications (e.g. Lundgren 2011). However, while I do not write out *everything* I know about the lives of my informants in this study, my day-to-day life was so strongly characterised by my interaction with my family (as well as their kin, neighbours, partners, and friends) that it would be hard to write this study without that information. Nevertheless, due to the intimacy of the topic, I have taken great care to blur any information referring to the identities of my informants. I also avoid telling full life stories of certain individuals and prefer to draw the relevant information from various distinct sources. While many of the descriptions of the events in the pages of this study are represented via the voices of Yuniel's family in particular, I do have similar, extensive data also from other sources, although most of the time I do not represent it. However, when I represent the life events of someone else, these people are always connected via bonds of kinship, sexuality, friendship, or neighbourhood with one of the two families, the people of which make the core of my fieldwork. Yuniel's family is foregrounded because their life events often tend to take on the most colourful expressions

28 Moreover, due to my visa troubles, I occasionally had problems in getting access to certain state institutions.

of similar tendencies characterising the lives of other people. I was thus never bored sharing my time in Cuba with these wonderful persons (whose lives often reminded me of more of a *telenovela* than of my normal everyday back home).

The way in which my own relationship with my Cuban informants was forged via the idiom of family connection – an issue repeated by other anthropologists working in Cuba (e.g. Andaya 2007: 11-17) – as well as alternative way of becoming incorporated into kinship networks via sexual intimacy (discussed above), show the position that such idioms hold as ways to create social relations in Cuba. Moreover, over time many of those bonds which start off as sexual intimacy become conceptualised via family idioms as well, showing the importance that the notion of kinship in particular holds to Cuban conceptualisations of sociability.

I think the reason why my Cuban family welcomed me so warmly into their lives tells a lot about the central value that sociability holds for Cubans. In addition to the fact that it is always handy to have transnational connections in the family (see Andaya 2007: 5-6, 249-297), I was often just 'keeping company.' Towards the end of my fieldwork, when I had already moved out from Yadira's, her boyfriend moved in to live with her instead. She told me that she did not like him anymore but decided to live with him anyway because, "you will leave and then I will be alone again." It is better to live with company.

Conclusion

Kinship provides Cubans with a general idiom for conceptualising social relations. This is exemplified particularly well by my fieldwork experience. Over time, my relationship with my closest informants became conceptualised as a family bond characterised by reciprocal care – highlighting the fact that time indeed transforms social relations.

A focus on the dialectics of care provides a way to understand the shifts in kinship relations, reciprocity, and exchange practices over the life cycle. This approach thereby allows exploring those relationships that are most salient in local day-to-day life, as well as the ways in which such bonds are created, reproduced, and negotiated over time. This is a more nuanced and holistic way to approach the shifting nature of Caribbean kinship systems than the traditional accounts on Caribbean matrifocality because it takes central notice of the way in which time transforms kinship, sexuality, love, and social relations in general.

As people's hopes, desires, plans, and visions transform over time, the reproductive cycle provides a good way to approach the meanings, practices, and categorisations that remain central throughout the life cycle, as well as those that become more and less significant in distinct life stages. Moreover, as kinship and sexuality are historically contingent, large-scale political and economic transformations may change individuals' experiences of love, care, and reciprocity, resonating in complex ways with ideas of personhood. The next chapter explores these questions—the shifts in social relations and care in the context of fertility and childbirth, a crucial moment of the life cycle.

3. Having a Child is Worth the Trouble: Fertility and Reproduction

"Being a mother is marvellous; I want to grow as a woman, as a mother... Having a child is really worth all the trouble because being a mother is the best thing there is [in the world]."

"Ser madre es maravilloso, quiero crecer como mujer, como madre... Tener un hijo sí vale toda la pena porque es lo mejor que hay, ser madre."
A woman on TV

"Children are the best thing the world can have!"
"Los hijos son lo más lindo que puede tener el mundo!"
A woman on TV

"Although I have [many] lovers in life who fill me with happiness, I will never find anything like your love, my mother."
"Aunque amores yo tengo en la vida que me llenan de felicidad, como el tuyo madre mía, yo nunca voy a encontrar."
A song on TV, performed by a male singer

"The mother's heart is forever."
"El corazón de madre es para siempre."
A song on TV, performed by a male singer

Introduction

When Roidel's ex-girlfriend – who no one else in the family liked – became pregnant with his child, his sister Yolanda exclaimed: "Now we have to drag this woman with us for the rest of our lives!" The birth of a child transforms social relations. A child makes relationships salient by embodying past relationships and materialising the potential for future relationships. A child creates new relations and changes kinship.

In the literature on Caribbean kinship, affine relations are frequently noted to be relatively marginal and weak due to the fragility of sexual relationships and the rarity of legal marriages (e.g. Solien de González 1965; Clarke 1974). R. T. Smith (1996a: 52), however, notes that when children create "blood ties" between families, the distinction between affines and consanguines may become reduced and "non-legal unions generate extensive and enduring kinship ties" (1988: 79). Yolanda's above-mentioned statement suggests that the birth of a child has the potential to create a lasting relationship between the mother's and the father's family, even if the actual sexual relationship between them ends.

This chapter argues that the birth of a child offers the opportunity to forge new alliances: to make emerge new connections and social relations. The birth of a child engages kin across a pregnant woman's social universe, transforming previous social relations on a more extensive scale than just the individual and making diverse connections salient. Due to its potential to create new relationships as well as to reproduce existing relations, the birth of a child represents a decisive moment in the life cycle and the flow of social relations.

Marilyn Strathern (1988) describes how the social relations of which a new-born is composed are made visible via material exchanges in the Papua New Guinea highlands. In Cuba, material exchanges at the time of pregnancy concentrate on the maternity collection that the mother-to-be gathers for her baby as a central aspect of preparing for the birth. A woman typically obtains objects for this collection from various distinct sources. She receives some objects from the state, some items from her partner, her mother, sisters, brothers, grandmother, her partner's mother and sisters, her (matrilateral) uncles' partners, friends, colleagues, and possibly also neighbours. She thus receives gifts from various distinct directions of her social universe. Via such material exchanges, a child makes social relations visible.

Since giving and receiving objects creates and reproduces reciprocal social relations (Mauss 1999: 39-42, 113, 123-125), the objects in the woman's maternity collection can be examined as representations of her – and in the future, the new-born's – social universe through the types of social bonds that they embody. In this respect, it is significant that my informants rejected state contributions towards their pregnancy to a certain degree by criticising the state-provided maternity package while at the same time stressing the importance of the maternity collection acquired outside of the state sphere.

Despite the ideological significance of pregnancy and childbirth to the socialist state, pregnant women tend to emphasise the importance of their personal social relations. However, rather than interpreting this as a complete rejection of the state, I suggest seeing it as an indication of the profound emotional/affective and pragmatic importance that social relations hold in Cubans' lives.

A man usually respects the pregnancy as a women's business. However – along with the pregnant woman, her female kin, and the state – his female relatives participate in pregnancy-related decision making. A man's female kin have an interest in his partner's pregnancy due to the child's potential to create new social relations. Not only does a child represent the hope of a new kin member, but also has the potential to install lasting relations between the man's and the woman's family.

However, the type of affinity that emerges via such encounters is very different from the type of solid affinity described in much of the classical kinship theory. While the birth of a child has *the potential* to create a lasting affine relationship between the mother's and the father's family, this does not always take place in practice. Nevertheless, the birth of a child represents a moment when the usually marginal kinship relations take on more importance, creating a moment of affinity and patrilaterality in the life cycle. While the relationship between affine kin becomes more important during the pregnancy and the first year of the child's life, it may later fade away for years, sometimes even disappear completely.

Whereas a strong relationship between a mother and a child is a constant in the kinship system – creating a continuous emphasis on the matrilateral kin – the usually marginal patrilateral and affine relations take on specific significance at this life stage via various practices such as naming. Catholic baptism represents an important life cycle ritual at this life stage and may both bring people together and separate them. Catholic baptism is a ritual practice that allows persons to make statements about their social worlds as well as to create or reinforce specific types of bonds in the context of ritual kinship.

The birth of a child offers various distinct parties the opportunity to expand their social relations through participation in the care of the pregnant mother-to-be and the new-born, both before and after the birth. Thus, the birth of a child allows a wide range of persons to create potentially lasting relations with the hope that their efforts and contributions will not be forgotten in the years to come. The care that they may provide at this life stage carries the potential of being reciprocated in the future. The mother-to-be, on the other hand, holds a specific interest to create social relations that would best help her in taking care of the child also in the future. Via Catholic baptism and other practices, she tries to expand the child's social universe as much as possible.

Deciding over Pregnancy: When to Have a Child?

"There [in Europe] it is normal not to give birth, but here everybody gives birth," said Sunami when we were discussing her recent miscarriage and the fact that at 33, she was the only childless woman in her workplace even though all her colleagues were younger than her.

As has been repeatedly noted in ethnographies on the Caribbean (e.g. Clarke 1974: 95-96, 107, 142-180; Simey 1996 [1946]: 39; Evans 1996 [1989]: 423), in Cuba as well everyone wants to have children. The very high number of abortions

(Andaya 2007: 156-158) might suggest otherwise, but these reflect a reaction to inadequate timing and conditions of the pregnancy rather than unwillingness to have children. In the Caribbean, becoming a parent is significantly tied to becoming an adult: a mature, full person. This adulthood is crucially gendered: only as a parent is a person considered to be a real man or a real woman (e.g. Wilson 1973: 149-151; Clarke 1974: 95-96; Smith 1974: xxii; Smith 1988: 147; Sobo 1993; Barrow 1996: 397-398; Gussler 1996 [1980]: 129; Manyoni 1996: 22). Parenthood is thus an essential institution that creates gender difference both in Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean.

Nevertheless, Cuba has had very low fertility levels and high abortion rates for quite a long time (Eckstein 1994: 144-145; Alfonso Fraga 2006; Andaya 2007). Andaya points out that the policy of free and easily accessible abortions to all women was created only in 1979 (2007: 176, 180). According to Andaya, after the state initially embraced high rates of fertility in the 1960s, low fertility became a marker of socialist modernity, whereas high fertility (more than two children) and teenage pregnancies became attached to tradition, irresponsibility, and irrationality. (Andaya 2007: 59, 74-75, 107, 114-116).

However, at the time of my fieldwork, the Cuban government was preoccupied with the country's aging and declining population (Alfonso Fraga 2006) and the very liberal abortion regulations were tightened as a state measure to tackle these problems. A reportage in the daily TV news complained that women no longer want to have children until they have reached a satisfactory educational and income level (6 April, 2008; see also Andaya 2007: 158, 168-171, 249). There were rumours that the government had restricted its previously very liberal abortion policy in order to incite more women to give birth to more children at a younger age in an attempt to both increase the population and decrease its average age. Consequently, some young girls had children at an earlier age than they actually would have wanted because they were only allowed to have a certain amount of abortions conducted within a certain time frame. (I was unable to verify the official regulations on this, but the gossip in the neighbourhood stated that the number was two within a year.) Two teenaged girls in my neighbourhood were refused abortion on the basis that they had undergone too many during too short a time, and had no other remedy but to keep their babies.

Andaya (2007: 155-200) argues that Cubans' great reliance on abortion as a form of contraception was produced by the state's neglecting women's needs and failing to provide other forms of contraception in its endeavour to achieve socialist modernisation. Abortion is considered a normal means of contraception and there is absolutely no stigma whatsoever attached to it.

Nearly all the women I knew had undergone at least one abortion, some even ten or more. Many women do not want to eat contraceptive pills because they feel that they harm them.

For older women who have already had their children, sterilisation is a common means of contraception. Like abortion, it is conducted free of charge in public healthcare facilities. Both of these methods place responsibility for contraception on women.[29] Furthermore, state campaigns against STDs and promoting the use of condoms centre on women. Cuban men are often unwilling to use a condom, let alone undergo sterilisation.

A person who is unable to have children – a woman in particular – is pitied and considered to never reach full adulthood (see also Clarke 1974: 95-96; Sobo 1993 for Jamaica). Having nieces and nephews is considered an alleviation to such a tragic situation, helping a person to avoid the saddest faith anyone could have, which is "to die alone." Children are seen as the ones a person can truly count on, the ones who will care for them when they are old and sick. Thus, for a childless person, the issue is usually not whether to have a child, it is *when* and with *whom*.

Most of my informants considered it best for a woman to have children at the age of 25 and in any case, before turning 30. However, at the time of my fieldwork, while I was told that it was fashionable for women to have their children very young (before turning 20), this does not reflect the experience of most of my informants. For men, it was considered good to have children at the latest by the time they reach their mid-thirties. Persons who were still childless beyond this age were either pitied or, in the case of foreigners, considered as the peculiar cultural features of capitalist countries.

These same concerns of when and with whom enter into consideration when a person who already has a child considers having another child, although in somewhat distinct ways. The tendency for women to have only one child seems to be on the rise (see ONE 2009: 48-50, table 5), even though most of my female informants had more than one child. However, men who had children

29 However, there is a way in which the Cuban state tries to involve also men in the abortion process. A female informant told me that before the abortion, a woman receives a card from her local policlinic to donate blood. She has to give the card to the man with whom she has had sex. He has to go to donate blood because in the operation women tend to lose a lot of blood. If the man is under 18 years old, someone else may go to donate blood in his place, for instance his brother. With the receipt that the man receives after the donation, the woman is allowed an abortion. If the man refuses to donate blood, the woman has to find someone else to do it in his place in order to gain access to the abortion. Ideally, this process installs a certain type of reciprocity between the woman, the man, and the state: the man gives his blood to the state so that the woman may receive blood during the abortion. This procedure – unlike the general contraception policy in Cuba – connects with state egalitarianism in the sense that both the woman and the man are seen as responsible for 'the consequences' of their sexual encounter, although the man in a far lesser degree. Another interesting aspect of such state practices is that they embrace a socially embedded view of the body in this process: what happens inside the woman's body becomes the concern of the woman, her partner, and possibly a wider range of kin if her partner is underage.

frequently had more than one child. On the other hand, some men did not have any children at all. A similar tendency is visible in Cuban national fertility statistics (ONE 2009: 48). In the Caribbean, the birth of children has traditionally been an important indication of a couple's compatibility that is crucial for the continuity of the union (Clarke 1974: 95-96, 107). This suggests that children have been seen as an important proof of the couple's love. It has thus been typical to have a child with various different partners (Clarke 1974: 92, 95-108; see also Goode 1960: 30). However, the significantly declined fertility in the area (Hill 1992: 80; Guzmán et al. 2006: 526-527, 530, 536; Bryant 2007: 109) suggests that such patterns may have been changing for quite some time already. These tendencies suggest that the potential shifts in Cuban fertility are in many ways gendered, bringing changes to the lives of both men and women.

"Not Planning It"

It was typical for many of my informants to have multiple rather short-term relationships. Girls often start having sexual relations around the age of fifteen and boys a bit later, at the age of 17 or 18. Most pregnancies 'just happened' in the sense that at least one, often both of the partners, had not planned it. Thus, rather than deciding whether trying to get pregnant, the decision is often made over whether to go through with a pregnancy or whether to abort.

However, if a woman is getting close to her thirties or even past it and does not have children, it is considered natural for her to go through with the pregnancy. Nevertheless, even though there is a close relationship between a woman's age and her decision on whether to have a child, this should not be understood as a straightforward correlation. A woman's young age does not necessarily mean that she is more likely to decide against the pregnancy.

The decision on whether to continue or terminate a pregnancy is normally considered to belong to the pregnant woman and the would-be-father has little say in either case. Even when a woman decides to continue with a pregnancy against the man's will, he is unlikely to protest her decision because fatherhood increases his masculinity. Moreover, as mothers maintain by far greater responsibility over children than fathers, this usually leaves the man a relatively large degree of liberty in deciding how he wants to handle the situation.

Nevertheless, a woman's female relatives are very likely to have their say regarding her decision. When Sunami got pregnant with her first child after

only three weeks in a relationship with her new partner, she wanted to have an abortion for she thought that the relationship had not lasted long enough to handle a child. However, since at 33, Sunami had undergone several abortions as well as a miscarriage, her mother and sister managed to convince her to keep the child.

Even though a man rarely has a say in his partner's pregnancy, his female relatives – his mother in particular – are likely to want to influence his partner's decision, in particular if they are opposed to the pregnancy. When Roidel was 22 years old and his 38-years old partner Nadia – who already had two teenage children – became pregnant, his mother interfered and told Nadia to consider aborting because he was still too young and did not meet the "conditions" (i.e. house and money) to care for a child. As a result, Nadia was offended by his mother and did not want to have anything to do with her ever since. In addition, there was a fierce argument between Roidel and his mother. Finally, the pregnancy was terminated. A similar situation took place two years later, but this time Roidel's ex-girlfriend Ixis was already three months pregnant with his child and had decided to keep the baby. At the same time, Roidel's new partner Surina became pregnant with his child. Roidel's mother was not pleased with either of the pregnancies, but she said nothing to his ex-girlfriend Ixis, who was a childless 38-year-old woman. Roidel's new partner Surina was of the same axe as Ixis but she already had two children from a previous relationship. Therefore, Roidel's mother suggested her to abort since her son would not be able to handle two children at such a young age. Again, this deteriorated the ties between Roidel's mother and his partner Surina and led to a fierce argument between Roidel and his mother. As a result, the pregnancy was terminated.

Love

A child may function as a proof of love or as a manipulation of it because he or she offers an opportunity to 'force' a partner into a relationship. Female informants in particular represented pregnancy as a woman's way to manipulate a man and to trap a man they loved into a relationship.[30] This understanding conforms to the more general view of women as 'deceitful' and more inclined to engage in indirect agency in their actions. In affine relations, such representations often take the form of representing men as the largely innocent victims of plotting women who try to snare them via pregnancy. Mothers in particular tend to be afraid of unwanted partners "hooking up"

30 Moreover, one particularly inventive informant told me how even abortion can be used as a way to "hook up" a man, as she had engaged in elaborate plotting in order to get back together with her former partner by telling him that she was pregnant and needed to have an abortion, although this was not really the case. More often, however, abortion represents a way to negate relationships, a woman's unwillingness to create a potentially lasting relationship with a man.

(*enganchar*) their sons with a pregnancy. On the other hand, not all women see such practices as successful, as exemplified by this comment from a 15-year-old female informant: "Some girls have kids in order to tie a man [to themselves] but here it does the contrary."

Men cultivate such views less. My male informants did not believe that women's "tying down" efforts could be very successful; rather, they stressed their own freedom to act as they wanted in these types of situations. Men often consider a pregnancy to be the woman's personal issue not concerning the man (a view that is often proved somewhat erroneous as the pregnancy advances).

But women are not the only ones who try to manipulate love via pregnancy. It is thought that a woman decides to go through with a pregnancy when she is in love with a man; a child thus functions as a proof of the woman's love towards her man. Since pregnancy is considered very strongly to be women's business, men have little power to decide whether they want a child with a partner or not. Therefore, if a man wants children, he has to find a woman who agrees to "give birth for him" (*parirle*). When a woman "agrees to give birth" for a man, this also functions as a proof that the man has "managed to make her fall in love" with him (*enamorarla*) or that he has succeeded in "hooking her" (*engancharla*). While a woman's pregnancies function as a proof of a man's sexual potency and virility (Wilson 1973: 149-151; Clarke 1974: 96; Smith 1988: 147; Barrow 1996: 404; Gussler 1996: 129; Lazarus-Black 1996: 233), a child is an evidence of a man's success as a lover, as a desired ladies' man. Most importantly, a child functions as a proof of this particular woman's love towards this particular man. This is why a child also gives the man an opportunity to attach the woman more closely to him: a pregnant woman is less likely to break a relationship with her partner even if she desires to do so. For example, when Rosa was pregnant and living with her very bad-tempered partner, her sister sighed: "Now she can't even leave him because of the pregnancy." (*Ahora no lo puede dejar porque está preñada*). As it is very hard for a woman with a small child to survive on her own materially, she is unlikely to leave her partner when pregnant.

Material items are important when a man is trying to woo a woman to "give birth for him." This takes the form of pampering the woman via material contributions, as exemplified by this comment from a female informant: "Freddy has started to treat me very well, he is so loving with me now (...), he gives me everything I ask for; (...) he bought me chicken, he bought me an ice-cream (...), he bought me beer (...). It seems that he thinks that I will give birth for him; he is so loving with me." Thus, indulging a woman via material

items, especially food, is a way for a man to show his love for her and to try to convince her to "give birth for him." Material contributions are also a way for the man to demonstrate the woman that he has money, something that women consider carefully when reflecting on a pregnancy.

"Having the Conditions": Money and Housing

Material conditions play an important role in both men's and women's decisions about pregnancy. Women often assess a man's material conditions, wealth, and likelihood to provide for his child when reflecting a particular man's suitability for fatherhood. While all my female informants did not pay such close attention to a man's material conditions, most women in fact considered whether a man would be able to supply them and the child with money and whether he owned a flat or even something as luxurious as a car. Wealthier men were also seen as more likely to continue providing for their child even if the relationship with the mother ends.

A view from Yolanda when her sister Sunami finally decided to go through with a pregnancy provides a good example of such considerations: "She continues to be pregnant since she is now comfortable; she has a husband, the husband has a car, she doesn't have to be walking around there [in the street]." HH: She doesn't want to take it away [have an abortion]? Yolanda: "No, she can't be taking it away like that so many times, she will have to leave this one; she is already comfortable!" HH: Did Teresa [her mother] tell her that? Yolanda: "Yes, and me as well."

Even though women pay attention to a man's character in the sense that they do not want to have children with a "bad" man who "doesn't care about" his children or who "hits you," considerations over a man's wealth often weigh more than other types of reflections. For instance, when I remarked to Yolanda that her sister's ex-partner – with whom she had a miscarriage and whom she had left to be with for her current partner – would have probably taken better care of the child than her current partner, Yolanda's response was: "Yes, but Misael did not have money, this one has money!" (*Si pero Misael no tenía dinero, eso sí tiene dinero*). In fact, my comment did not follow my informants' logic. Women often said that they wanted the father of their child to be "responsible," but a man's responsibility is largely connected to his material contributions to his partner and child.

Male informants also emphasised their position as material providers and the importance of "having conditions" (*tener condiciones*) when contemplating whether they would want to have a child or not. Twenty-four-year-old Roidel

said of his 38-year-old girlfriend: "Ixis wants to get pregnant but I don't because I don't have the conditions." HH: Yes, she is older than you... Roidel: "No, it's not that, but it's that I don't have the conditions, there are people who have them [children] without the conditions, but not me." In practice, men often have to give up these noble ideals and they end up having their first child when they are still without the "conditions" for it. In this case, a man either tries to create the "conditions" for example by quitting his studies and finding a job or he may refuse to take on his role as a responsible father and continue his life more or less like before parenthood. A woman has the means to force some material responsibility from a man if he refuses to do his share because the law guarantees her the right to receive alimony after the child is born. However, in practice few women bother to go to court for such issues, which reflects a willingness to avoid official quarrels, a degree of distrust towards the court system, as well as the tediousness of the process and expenses related to it.

The importance that my female research participants granted to a man's position as a provider contradicts the socialist ideal of female independence gained via participation in the labour force, despite of the fact that virtually all of my female informants worked and none of them could be comfortably described as a 'housewife.' Since most salaries earned from official work are insufficient for living in contemporary Cuba, socialist ideals are undermined by the constant economic shortage.

However, if a woman has some money and access to a place to stay, she may decide to have a child without the father's consent and place little or no expectations on his material contributions. Or she may decide to have a child by herself even without the "conditions," as often happens to young girls. My informants sometimes referred to this as "independent production" (*producción independiente*). In such a case the woman usually lives in her mother's household with the child, sometimes in a classically matrifocal household (e.g. Smith 1996a: 40, 1996b: 43-44).

Even though Cubans consider material conditions when deciding over a pregnancy, these are not the only or overbearing factor. In Cuba, "everybody has children even though they don't have the conditions," but at the same time, these are issues upon which both men and women reflect when faced with a pregnancy. Moreover, all of my informants, including those not having "the conditions," were interested in creating "the conditions" and improving the material circumstances for their child after the birth.

The importance that women in particular give to a man's wealth in their views

about a desirable partner/father – combined with the state preoccupation over the trend of low fertility and late child birth (Alfonso Fraga 2006; Rodríguez Gómez 2008; see also ONE 2009) – suggests that Cubans have started to pay significant attention to material conditions when making decisions over pregnancy.[31] Andaya argues that economic difficulties are lowering Cubans' fertility, as state failure to provide women with adequate nurture and men's indifference towards children push women to exert responsible motherhood through aborting because it is difficult to provide even for one child (2007: 170).[32] However, as I have shown, economic reasons are not the only factor that may push women to an abortion, for abortion represents also a negation to engage in a potentially lasting relationship with the man and his family, the reasons for which may be multiple. Moreover, responsible motherhood may also be practiced by trying to secure a child as much material wealth as possible by choosing a wealthy father. As women often struggle with material difficulties especially when their children are very young (Andaya 2007: 249-296; Hamilton 2012: 96-116), material considerations play a particularly significant role in women's conceptualisations of the qualities of a desirable father.

State Involvement in Decisions over Pregnancy

The state participates in women's decision making on whether to continue with a pregnancy or not. This state involvement takes place not only directly through abortion policy but also through general conditions such as income, housing, and work. However, my research shows that a woman's personal social relations play a primary role in her decision over whether to continue with a pregnancy or not. At the same time, the state participates in the process intimately and may influence it greatly – sometimes the state may even decide the outcome, as when my young female informants were denied abortions.

Due to their extensive health care and child care facilities, family subsidies, as well as maternity leaves, socialist states have been supportive of motherhood in many ways (Verdery 1996: 65). However, this state engagement with motherhood also has a repressive side. The most extreme case has been socialist Romania where women were virtually forced into motherhood via the state's pro-natalist policies (Kligman 1998). Discussing Cuba during the first decades of the revolution, Andaya (2007: 175-183) points out that the strict

31 Rodríguez Gómez (2008) states that while Cuba has had very low fertility levels historically, since 1978, fertility started to decline in a permanent way. From the 1970s until 1990, fertility was marked by a significant tendency towards adolescent pregnancy, which the state saw as problematic. From 1990 until 1995, fertility rates decreased markedly and were remarkably low until 1996. After that, fertility rates stabilised but became marked by a higher prevalence of pregnancies in older age groups (over 30 years) and a lower incidence of adolescent fertility, even though the level of teenage pregnancies continues to be high. (Rodríguez Gómez 2008).

32 Pertierra (2008: 748 ff. 8) also connects Cuba's low fertility with the fact that before having a child, women wait for the proper situation with appropriate economic means to take care of a child.

abortion regulations, the lack of contraception, and the absence of physicians after their mass flight to Miami obliged women to continue with pregnancies that they did not desire. My informants' views about the tightened abortion regulations in 2008 suggest a similar weakening of women's reproductive rights – indicating a particularly post-socialist tendency according to Gal and Kligman (2000a: 1).

At the same time, the health care personnel may also put pressure on women to make them decide against pregnancy. Political scientist Elizabeth Kath (2010: 90 ff. 4, 95) states that women with foetal abnormalities are pushed or even obliged to abort by the state authorities since this might otherwise raise the national infant mortality rate. The state may also push some women to sterilisations (Kath 2010: 92-95; see also Andaya 2007: 113-115). Kath (2010: 93, 121) even argues that sometimes sterilisations are conducted without the woman's consent, as this may be seen as desirable by the health care personnel in the case of women who suffer from mental illnesses (such as schizophrenia) or from health conditions that would make the pregnancy dangerous for either the woman or the child (for instance, a heart condition). Andaya (2007: 100-116) sees sterilisations as a way for the state to control women who are perceived as undisciplined in their reproductive practices, for instance due to the high amount of abortions that they have undergone or who are conceived as unsuitable for parenthood due to their lack of socialist morality. She further argues that the state discourse sees women as irresponsible and disorderly in their reproductive practices, although due to material deficiencies and political indifference the state in fact deprives Cuban women of access to all types of family planning, which makes it impossible for women to control their time and their bodies. (Andaya 2007: 86-118, 155-200).

As several of my female informants had been sterilised, it is possible that they form part of the population that state actors see as particularly undisciplined. However, they themselves did not see sterilisation as abnormal or conceive it as a state intrusion into their reproductive lives (their sterilisations had been voluntary). One woman, however, complained that she fell pregnant *despite* the fact that she had been sterilised. However, rather than seeing the inadequacy of doctors as the reason for this, she perceived it as an indication of her position as a daughter of Yemayá, the most maternal of Santería *orishas* (gods) who lives surrounded by her numerous children. This shows that people may have varied responses to state policies. While the state maintains an intimate involvement in Cubans' reproductive decisions, it does not control their entire lives.

While I agree with Andaya on the unpredictability of Cuban state practices, it

is problematic to assume that reproduction is always something that people would 'plan rationally' if something – in this case the state – does not inhibit them from doing so. Cuban conceptualisations of reproduction, sexuality, and the body differ from the Western modernist idea of the rationally acting individual who tries to 'control' all facets of life. This highlights the discrepancies between the state discourse of rational modernisation and people's practical everyday lives, deeply intertwined with social relations.

Infertility

Naturally, pregnancy is not always an issue that a woman can decide at will. Since parenthood is crucial for both genders, infertility is considered a great tragedy that diverts a person from the normal course of life.[33] The case of Desiree exemplifies the way in which experiencing infertility involves multiple layers of a woman's social worlds. In their attempt to have a child, persons try to engage and manipulate various types of social relations as well as the possibilities provided by the socialist state.

At the start of my fieldwork in 2007, Desiree was 38 years old and had been treated for infertility earlier when she was still living with her previous partner. At the time of my fieldwork, she was separated and did not have a steady partner. However, being a beautiful *mulata*, she had quite a few admirers (*enamorados*). One of them was Osbel, a 32-year-old man from the neighbourhood where her mother lived. Even though Desiree did not find Osbel attractive, she cultivated a friendship with him and his mother. Desiree's great desire to have a child was well known, and still childless Osbel and his mother were both hopeful that Desiree would be willing to have children with Osbel who had little luck with women (mostly due to his not very attractive looks). Osbel's mother had important connections to the Cuban Communist Party, and with her relations she organised Desiree to have a meeting with a fertility doctor in order to see whether Desiree's problem could be solved. Occasionally, she even accompanied Desiree to the doctor's appointments, while Osbel kept on providing Desiree with the necessary gifts to the health care personnel (such as cans of soft drink and ham sandwiches), as well as taking her out to have beer and ice-cream after the painful tests. Desiree had no intention to have Osbel as the father of her child but she needed Osbel's – and in particular his mother's – help in getting fertility treatment, so it was in her interests to let them believe that Osbel would be the father if she could manage to get pregnant. She was manipulating both Osbel and his mother – and via her, the state fertility treatment opportunities – in order to obtain what she most desired in the world: a child.

33 See also Wilson 1973: 149-151; Clarke 1974: 95-96; Smith 1988: 147; Barrow 1996: 397; Gussler 1996 [1980]: 129 for other parts of the Caribbean. Andaya (2007: 185, 198) argues that in Cuba, the bad quality of the few contraceptive methods available as well as the need to resort to abortions as birth control cause infertility.

However, the process dragged on for months, the tests were painful, the doctors rather rude, and Desiree's motivation started to drop and she started to miss some of the booked appointments. Moreover, she had an argument with Osbel and the two stopped seeing each other for a few weeks. But Desiree was not the only one with her own interests in this situation. Although Osbel wanted to have a child, his mother's desire was even stronger for Desiree to become the mother of her grandchild. After the breakup, Osbel's mother hurried to get the relationship working again, as shown by Desiree's statement:

> *I saw Osbel's mother and she said that she is interested in me; that she had said to Osbel that: 'It's your fault that Desiree doesn't come here [to her house where Osbel also lived] anymore because you spoke to her loudly and now she doesn't come to see me anymore.' And I'm sure that she said it so that I would say: 'No, I will come'; that I will call him; to push me towards him again. But I will not call him. She is crazy for me to give birth to a [child] (...) for him. And do you know what else she told me, for she's really gossipy (chismosa), maybe it's even a lie, that the spouse of el Flaquito [the 'Skinnie'] – el Flaquito who was with me – that el Flaquito's wife is pregnant. (...) She said that she heard it at the market, that one woman had said it to another who said that they are going to make a soup for her [Flaquito's wife] because she is pregnant. And for sure she [Osbel's mother] said it to me so that I would start to put myself in this, as if to not be left behind if she [Flaquito's wife] got pregnant, so that I would also strive to say that: 'Me too, I will get pregnant.' Because she is crazy for me to give birth to (...) [a child] for Osbel, it was her who started to run around because of this; she arranged for me a doctor's appointment and she has done all the running around for this, for I was already tired of this.*

Thus, Osbel's mother had her own ways of manipulating Desiree in order to try to get what she desired: parenthood for her son and a grandchild for herself.

On the other hand, Desiree's female kin also had their opinion about the issue. Both Desiree's mother and sister – even though desiring for her to get pregnant – rejected Osbel and his mother as possible in-laws and wanted Desiree to stop the whole affair with them. Knowing that she did not like Osbel or had no intentions to have a child with him, they were – justifiably – afraid that Osbel and his mother would get very angry if they found out that Desiree had no intentions to choose Osbel as the father of her child. In the middle of my fieldwork in 2008, Desiree's strategy for trying to have a child had shifted from getting help from Osbel and his mother to being assisted by her kin, most importantly by her matrilateral parallel (female) cousin Yipsi, who was a qualified pregnancy potion maker back home in *Oriente*. This time Desiree's mother and her mother's partner (Desiree's step father) were the ones to help her acquire the ingredients, while Yipsi prepared the potion. However,

at the time of my visit in April 2010, Desiree still remained childless and had more or less given up all hope to ever have children (apart from occasionally drinking Yipsi's *miel de guïra*).

This case illustrates how various aspects of a woman's social world are involved in her fertility. All the different actors – Desiree, her mother and sister, her mother's new spouse, her matrilateral cousin Yipsi, Osbel, and Osbel's mother – pursued the same goal of Desiree having a child, but they differed in their opinions of how this should take place and had ways of manipulating each other in their attempts to get their way. Even though some men participated in the process, it was most importantly a women's issue, the most significant social relation being between Desiree and her self-appointed mother-in-law Mayda, who was a central agent in the whole process. Moreover, in the process Desiree also became the bone of contention between her own mother and her mother-in-law and even though she herself wanted to have a child, her fertility became less personal than she had initially planned or perhaps would have liked to imagine and ended up mobilising quite a section of her social world. Even her stepfather, with whom she normally had a very difficult relationship, helped her in the process. Most importantly, the central part played by Desiree's mother-in-law differs from the often-noted weakness of affine bonds in the Caribbean (e.g. Solien de González 1965; Clarke 1974).[34] This shows how having a child is such an important endeavour that it involves persons from many different directions of a woman's social world. Moreover, this case exemplifies the creativity and pragmatism with which Cubans resort to distinct social relations in their pursuits; since the 'affine' relation did not provide the help she needed, Desiree turned back to her matrilateral kin for assistance. Finally, the shift from the employment of state medicine to the kin-provided *miel de guïra* potion further exemplifies Cubans' creative and pragmatic employment of the distinct medicinal means available to them in order to achieve their goals.

The thought that someone could not want to have children was inconceivable to my informants. Since I did not have a child at the age of 29 years, I was constantly asked what is wrong with me and when will I have a child. Once when my Cuban matrilateral uncle was questioning me on the issue, I made the mistake of replying that I am not even sure if I want to have children. He was outright *appalled* by my response and strongly frowned upon me: "How come a civilised person would *not* want to have children...!" Female informants reacted in similar ways. Only someone beyond *all barometers of social normality* could not want to have children. Thus, from the point of view

34 While recognising that some affines may be included into kin networks (1988: 40) and that "non-legal unions generate extensive and enduring kinship ties" (1988: 79), even R. T. Smith at the same time emphasises the low level of solidarity created by links of conjugality (1996a: 55-56).

of my informants, the desire to have children appears as a feature defining all human beings. This shows the fundamental role that children play in creating, expanding, and reproducing an individual's social relations.

Since parenthood is central to the individual life course and an individual's social position, infertility is very painful, and can, for instance, be used as a very hurtful insult in arguments between men and women. Desiree stated of her ex-partner: "He said that I will never have children; that I will die alone and that really hurts." Since fertility is also important for gendered forms of agency for women, infertility places a woman in a particularly vulnerable position. While infertility means never gaining a fully adult position for both men and women, a man may try to make up for his lack of biogenetic fatherhood by entering into relationships with women who already have children and starting to father their children via material caring practices. For women infertility is worse, for they are the ones who are seen as continuing the kin line by passing on the family blood (as I will show below). Most importantly, dying alone without children is seen as the worst possible faith a person can have: infertility prevents a person from having a range of centrally important social relations and has long-lasting effects in the future.

Waiting for a New-Born: Expectations Regarding a Baby

Body and Looks

A child is both a new person formed by the merging of the mother's and the father's biogenetic substances as well as an embodiment of past relationships. Since children are understood to inherit bodily features from both their mother and their father, their physique is quite literally seen as a representation of past sexual encounters. In the Caribbean, this issue has usually been approached from the point of view of race and the notion of 'whitening' (e.g. Martinez-Alier 1974; Smith 1996a: 69, 153; Yelvington 2001: 242-247; Fernandez 2010; Roland 2011: 22-25), a concept sometimes employed also by my informants. In this section, I will, however, consider wider interest in a child's looks and the ways in which the baby's body functions as an evidence of past social relations.

Before the birth, my pregnant informants were very interested in pondering their baby's appearance. Instead of reflections on the child's character or on the most beneficial upbringing techniques, the conversations centred on the baby's looks. Mothers-to-be worried especially about their future child's body structure and contemplated on physical activities most suitable for

him or her in order to obtain the ideal body. It surprised me to never witness conversations on upbringing; there were no worries or insecurity regarding one's position as a parent and an educator.

While some of the features that my informants discussed related to racialised characteristics such as the baby's skin colour and hair texture, they also had other, very detailed conversations about the baby's body parts; on whether the child will have the mother's feet or the father's neck, and whether to put the baby in ballet or in karate in order to fix the "problematic" traits. Especially baby girls' future looks were under careful scrutiny. While women want their sons to be good-looking as well, for a girl child, looking pretty is considered crucial. This creates a gender distinction already before the baby is born and highlights the central importance of gender difference in society.

Women carefully consider a man's looks when they contemplate a suitable father candidate. There was a tendency among black or *mulata* women to prefer to have a child with a man whose skin colour was lighter than their own (see also Smith 1996a: 79, 153; Yelvington 2001: 242-247; Roland 2011: 22-25). When '*mulata-jaba*' Rosa was pregnant, everybody confirmed that: "the baby will be beautiful because the father is white" (*el papa es blanco*). This highlights racial meanings in the context of reproduction, as women also consider the father candidate's hair texture, hoping to have a baby with "good hair" (*pelo bueno* – straight, smooth hair).[35] At the same time, this is by no means the only or the overwhelming criterion and often preconceived plans and practice may not coincide.

Women also ponder on a man's health (such as having asthma or allergies), his athleticism, strength, and height. This shows that the child's appearance is believed to be a combination of the mother's and the father's features (despite a degree of ambiguity in biogenetic notions on fatherhood). One of my informants even momentarily rejected her baby son because she said that he looks exactly like the father – with whom she was on bad terms – and did not resemble herself.

Moreover, a baby's looks are also seen to reveal sexual encounters that the partners may wish to keep secret. When *mulata-india* Belgis had separated from her *mulato* partner and noticed after the breakup that she is pregnant, Yadira told me that "she quickly hooked up with the [white] green-eyed guy." The

35 Racialised, gendered, and sexualised hierarchies of beauty become particularly accentuated in relation to such bodily features as hair. Women should have long, preferably European-style, smooth, "good hair" (i.e. not Afro-texture, called *pasa*) that is considered attractive for both women and men (see also Fernandez 2010: 21; cf. Schmidt 2008: 162). Short hair in women is considered unfeminine and unattractive and may be taken as a sign of lesbianism (see also Allen 2011: 11). Such racialised distinctions on hair texture follow relatively well Kaifa L. Roland's (2006) view of Cuba's racial / colour hierarchy as a continuum where white European features are preferred over black African features (see Drummond 1980 for a discussion on the Caribbean more generally).

new partner was socially recognised as the father of the baby, but neighbours kept on waiting for the baby to be born in order to see "whose the baby is." The baby thus brings past relations out to the open, with a person's body keeping track of past sexual encounters. Therefore, children may also bear testimony of infidelity: when black Maikel's son with a white woman was born white, he first suspected his partner of infidelity. However, the child's body testified otherwise; Maikel explained to me how he had found "a green stain" (*una mancha verde*) on the child's back, which according to him shows that the father is black and thereby confirmed his parenthood. Thus, a child's body also carries in itself the potential for future relationships.

Sometimes the child him/herself negotiates his/her parental connections at a later age. Fourteen-year-old Miralis and her two older sisters were of the opinion that they all had the same father. However, while Miralis' two sisters were slim, oval-faced and very beautiful *mulatas*, Miralis was plump, lighter, and a very round-faced *jaba*. While the gossip of the neighbourhood affirmed that "they say that [her father] is a *jabao* who lives down there," Miralis herself was adamant that her mother's long-time partner Juan, who had raised her, was her father. To cut the tongue of the rumours, Miralis had Juan's initials tattooed on her ankle. Thus, since her body was not seen to 'naturally' display the signs of Juan's fatherhood, she herself added them to it at her adolescence.

Like many other aspects of pregnancy, worrying over a child's looks concerns only women. I never witnessed men discussing similar issues regarding their yet unborn children or particularly planning whom to choose as the mother for their child. However, the discussions on an unborn baby's features engaged women from across a woman's social world, both her (matrilateral) kin as well as affines. The father is thus represented by his female kin in such conversations. The baby is a lasting embodiment of the mother's and father's (past) union and since the child is "half the father," the child is of interest also to the father's relatives. The baby thus creates an affine relation between the mother's and the father's family and displays this connection via his/her body.

Baby's Gender

Cubans are very eager to find out the gender of the baby as soon as possible. Usually this takes place during the seventh month of the pregnancy when a woman goes to an ultrasound check-up in a health care centre. Most of my female informants wished for a girl child; one to such a degree that she burst into tears when the doctor told her that she was expecting a boy. She had already bought several dresses for the baby (and after recovering from her initial shock, she declared that the baby would have to wear them, no matter what).

The main reason why most of my female informants wanted to have a girl was that girls were seen to "continue the lineage" and stay close to their mother throughout their lives.[36] Thus, women preferred girl children since they were considered to be more likely to commit to a lifelong, reciprocal caring relationship with the mother. Moreover, many women were very eager to dress a girl child up in frills and hair decorations as well as to organise the girl's quince party in the years to come (even though they also dreaded the expenses that this would bring). The possibility to dress up their girl child beautifully was very important to my female informants, and it was represented clearly by the numerous fancy dresses that some female informants acquired for their babies before the birth (some amounting up to 70 pieces in spite of their generally meagre income levels).

In addition, many male informants wanted to have a girl child for the same reasons (although they were not interested in dressing up the child). They wanted to have a little girl that would be their "princess" and that they could "pamper." Nevertheless, throughout their lives, men tend to have a closer relationship with their sons than with their daughters.

Boy children are considered "cheaper" than girls since they do not need a similar array of outfits and decorations as girls. Sometimes when asked, my informants said that women usually want to have boy children and men want to have girl children because "the mother makes whatever she wants of a boy child" (*la madre hace del varón lo que le da las ganas*). However, in practice girls were preferred by nearly all informants (cf. Andaya 2007: 280). Women viewed boys as more prone to falling in love and leaving their mother alone (drifting away and chasing different women); there was thus more risk of being neglected in terms of the care and love they expected their children to reciprocate to them in the years to come.

Notions of Kinship: Blood, Nurture, and Biogenetic Ties

Even though the kinship system is bilateral and children are considered to inherit bodily features from both of their parents, children are seen to have a stronger connection with their mother than with their father by virtue of the physical process of pregnancy. There is a somewhat matrilineal tendency regarding the ways in which "blood" (*sangre*) is considered to pass in descent, for siblings of the same mother are seen to share the same blood, while in terms of siblings having the same father there is some degree of ambiguity.

36 Martinez-Alier (1974: 117) states that the view of women as the perpetuators of the lineage characterised already nineteenth-century Cuba. See also Sargent and Harris (1992) for similar views on the preference for girl children in Jamaica.

A statement from Norberto, a black 33-year-old male informant, exemplifies this: "They are my brothers, of blood (*de sangre*), of mother, they are not of the father, they were born with me." (See also Clarke 1974: 44-48, 62; Smith 1988: 37-39, 1996a: 15, 44). While the mother is seen as having a natural, unending connection with the child, there is a degree of ambiguity in the father-child bond.

'Consanguinity' alone cannot be seen as the basis of kinship in Cuba and relationships created via care, nurture, and shared experiences are equally considered as 'true' kinship, sometimes even more so than the relations that are labelled as based on an innate, shared biogenetic substance (see also Simey 1996: 39; Miller 2007: 537). As Caridad commented on the eldest son of her daughter's partner: "The son is not his [Carlos'], but Carlos raised him, [so] the son is his." When it comes to fathering in particular, 'nurture' seems to take priority over notions of consanguinity (i.e. 'shared biogenetic substance' or 'nature') as the basis of a kin relation.

However, some of my informants stressed the importance of an innate consanguine bond regarding the father-child relation, especially when the relationship between the child's mother and father had ended. Yadira's statement on her new partner Livian manifests this clearly: "He doesn't have children, he has children that he has raised (...), but when you break up, the children stay with the mother and you lose them; if you're the father, then it's another thing." Thus some informants emphasised the strength and permanence of the father-child bond, as also exemplified by this statement from a male informant: "Women come and go, but your children will always be your children."

A female informant expressed a different view when asked if her current partner had children. She replied in the negative, but since I had previously heard otherwise (from the partner himself), I questioned her on the subject, and she replied: "He had a daughter but it was a long time ago, [the daughter] is now 11 years old, but it is not his daughter since he never saw her, never raised her, so he doesn't have kids."[37] In this view, a person can stop being somebody's father if he does not perform any acts of fathering towards the child. Hence (some) consanguine relations can also be terminated (cf. Schneider 1968: 25).

The above-mentioned examples suggest that there is significant ambiguity in

37 However, although his girlfriend denied his fatherhood, Pavel himself cherished the memory of his daughter. He always carried a photo of his daughter in his wallet even though he had not seen her for over six years, and he asked me if I could make him a large colour print of the daughter's photo so that he could put it on his wall. In this case, the photo is the only materialisation of Pavel's fatherhood. This way, a material object may mediate a man's relationship to his children even when nothing else does.

the meanings of consanguinity as well as of nurture and care when it comes to defining the existence of a kinship relation in Cuba. While the mother-child bond is beyond contest, the father-child bond can, in my informants' views, rest either on something innate ('consanguinity,' 'blood,' or a 'shared biogenetic substance'), or on presence and care, depending on the prevailing situation. While these may go together, they do not automatically need to do so. Thus, at least in some situations, the kinship structure appears to allow two alternative ways to define kinship: consanguinity and nurture (compare Schneider 1968). At the same time, both of these rely heavily on the notions and practices of care, for a woman's carrying of a child is conceptualised not only as creating a biogenetic connection between the mother and the child, but also as being a form of care, as the mother nurtures the baby inside of her body. The ambiguity regarding the notions of consanguinity and nurture concerns the father-child bond in particular. This is also conceptualised as creating the man's greater freedom to act regarding the baby, as stated by a female informant: "the one who has to carry the belly is you." While the woman is seen as automatically having an exceptionally strong bond with the child – given 'in nature' – the father, to a significant degree, has to create this connection via his material contributions.

There is thus a considerable degree of ambiguity in the significance of notions of consanguinity in relation to the kinship category of the father. A close bond to a non-consanguine father sometimes counteracts the often troubled consanguine father-child relation. In relation to the mother, notions based on a shared biogenetic substance as well as the physical process of the pregnancy are both unambiguously of great significance in the definition of kinship. However, when it comes to the father, either the notion of consanguinity or that of nurture and care can be seen as more significant in the creation of a kinship relation.

Nurture as Female Care

As a whole, pregnancy and childbirth are very strongly a women's issue in Cuba as well as elsewhere in the Caribbean (e.g. Clarke 1974: 96, 107, 142-180; Smith 1988: 147-148). Both individual Cubans and the state system conceptualise pregnancy and childbirth in this gender-differentiated way. Furthermore, childcare is markedly a women's issue and men spend on the whole comparatively less time with children (see also Clarke 1974: 96, 107, 142-180; Smith 1996b: 44). Women usually take care of all the daily childcare activities and have the main responsibility over children, being valued as loving nurturers (see also Andaya 2007).

Before the birth, the mother-to-be, along with her female relatives, focuses on preparing everything for the arrival of the baby. She spends her days discussing the baby-to-be with her female kin and friends and preparing the material conditions for the child's arrival and concentrates on taking care of herself for the sake of her child. Food plays a central role in embodying nurturing care. The mother concentrates on following a diet that is seen as the best for the baby's alimentation. This way, food forms a central bond between the mother-to-be and her yet unborn child, as the woman's way to nurture, care, and love the baby.

Similarly, the mother-to-be's female relatives take care that she receives the adequate alimentation, rest, and exercise during the pregnancy, helping her with housework, rushing to her place at the slightest sign of a problem or illness, cooking nutritive foods for her, and informing her on the different aspects of the pregnancy. A pregnant woman's mother in particular maintains a very close contact with her daughter throughout the pregnancy and goes to stay with her for some time before the birth and after it in order to take care of her daughter and to help her take care of the baby, regardless of whether the daughter lives with a partner or not. If the pregnant woman's mother cannot come, another matrilateral female relative takes over the responsibility of caring for her instead. Thus, nurturing care emerges as central both to the pregnant woman's bond with her unborn child and to other women's relationship with her.

Although the female kin who provide a woman with this type of care are normally her matrilateral relatives, she may also receive help from other women, both during the pregnancy and after the birth. Often the future father's mother in particular is closely involved in the pregnancy, although much less than the woman's mother (see also Barrow 1996: 171-172, 398, 406). Teresa helped her son's ex-partner Ixis in embroidering lace decorations for the baby's sheets, bought the baby little gifts both before the birth and after it, and went to see Ixis regularly during her pregnancy. After the baby's birth, both Teresa and her daughter Yolanda provided Ixis with reliable help in childcare whenever she needed it (despite their initial resentment of her pregnancy) and Ixis continues to visit them during special events, such as Mothers' Day. The birth of Ixis' son thus provoked the emergence of an affine relation between Ixis and her ex-partner's female kin. This relation took the form of nurturing care centred on the pregnant woman and the baby. Such practices are also a way for the man's female kin to try to make sure that they will have a relationship with the child after the birth, for they depend on the mother's willingness to let such bonds develop.

While nurturing care emerges as an essentially female contribution to pregnancy and childbirth, it takes place across a pregnant woman's social world, including the woman's matrilateral kin, patrilateral kin, and affines. In particular, a new child brings to the forth the otherwise usually marginal affine bond. However, while the female relatives of a father-to-be may provide a pregnant woman and a new-born with nurturing care, there are also ways in which men as fathers are expected to contribute towards their partner and the child.

Sometimes men participate in providing their partners nurturing care during pregnancy. Typically, these are young men who are unable to give their partner money. A man may go shopping with his partner in order to carry all the heavy items she buys, massage her feet, or contribute via sexual services. A young male informant told me how a doctor had told him to have sex with his nine months pregnant ex-partner as a way to incite the birth, an order which he did his best to follow, even though he did not find his ex-partner attractive anymore. Women normally expect their partners to be fully at their disposal when they are pregnant and men often treat their partners like queens during pregnancy.

Especially if something goes wrong, all those around a pregnant woman are quick to react. When during her seventh month of pregnancy, Ixis was internalised to a hospital due to strong abdominal pains, her mother, sister, godfather, as well as the child's father, his mother, and his sister took turns in spending time at the hospital in order to keep her company. Even though Ixis and the child's father were no longer together, he sat at the hospital throughout the night with her because – as stated by his mother – "she could not stay alone during the night." Thus, various distinct social relations become activated during the pregnancy, all concerned in taking care of the pregnant woman.

Material Contributions as Male Care: "A Child Makes the Father"

Material issues are important when preparing for a new arrival. While setting up the material conditions for a baby is normally done by the pregnant woman together with her female kin, the baby's father usually makes important contributions in this regard as well.

When Rosa was seven months pregnant with her first child and found out the gender of the baby, she spent her days shopping for the baby. This material stocking up was a central feature of getting ready for the arrival of a new-born

and it occupied her most of the day. With great trouble and with the help of her mother and sisters, she managed to amass a considerable collection of items, which included, among other things; 54 lavishly decorated dresses, 7 pairs of baby underwear, 9 pairs of socks, 11 pairs of shoes, a beanie, a pair of gloves, a hat, 4 packets of hair clips and ribbons, a special baby bag, a 'baby thermos,' 3 pacifiers, a pacifier chain, 12 rattles, 15 bibs, 9 feeding bottles, a bathtub, a cradle, a side padding for the cradle, 3 pairs of sheets, 6 pillowcases, a blanket, 5 towels, a walker, a buggy, 6 toys, nappies, a packet of 10 specially protected safety pins, 2 bottles of baby perfume, a bottle of baby oil, 3 bottles of baby lotion, and 12 soaps. During my fieldwork I witnessed other pregnant women engaging in similar pursuits. Thus, gathering material things obviously occupied a position of primary importance in preparing for the birth.

The state grants pregnant women the possibility to buy a collection of baby items in a low, subsidised price. While all my female informants seized this opportunity, the state-provided maternity package was always seen to be of a bad quality and insufficient alone. However, while they criticised the state maternity package, none of my informants rejected the package altogether.

Objects are material presentations of the woman's social networks. Therefore, my informants emphasised the importance of the maternity collection acquired outside of the state sphere with the help of their personal social relations. A pregnant woman usually receives objects for her maternity collection from various distinct people: her matrilateral kin, in a lesser degree from her patrilateral kin, as well as from persons who are in an affine relation with her.

The gifts from a woman's matrilateral (female) kin in particular may be substantial and make up an important part of her maternity collection.[38] However, such gifts, given primarily by women, are often fairly small items and they are rarely intended to compose the whole collection. Rather, they function as material statements that make a woman's social universe visible. While they may be of essential importance for a woman's ability to provide for her child, they are most of all symbolic demonstrations of care. These gifts show that the persons around a pregnant woman care for her and for her baby's wellbeing, in particular in the midst of the material scarcity that has bothered Cuba since the fall of the Soviet Union.

As exemplified by Rosa's case, most of the items in a woman's maternity

38 As in the case of 15-year-old Miralis, who received nearly 70 clothes items from her older sister for her baby daughter, for the sister had given birth to a baby girl only a year before her. Miralis got pregnant after a casual sexual encounter with a young boy from another province and had little contact with the baby's father after the initial encounter. Moreover, at the time, Miralis's sister lived in Spain and had much more money at her disposal than an average Cuban.

collection are purchased by herself. Nevertheless, the money for this is supposed to be provided by the baby's father. Although the baby's father often plays a rather invisible part in getting ready for the new-born, he is expected to provide his partner with a steady flow of cash throughout the pregnancy.



FIG 3. PREPARING FOR THE ARRIVAL OF A NEWBORN: A CLOSET FULL OF DRESSES WAITING FOR A BABY GIRL

While this stream of money that flows from men to their pregnant partners is largely dismissed in the literature on Caribbean kinship (e.g. Clarke 1974; Smith 1996a, 1996b; Safa 2005; Andaya 2007: 201-248), I suggest that it deserves greater attention as a male contribution towards a successful pregnancy and to the new-born.[39] The sum of money expected from a father during the

39 R. T. Smith (1988: 137, 147, 1996a: 16-17) notes that economic factors connect with notions of male responsibility but he does not pay extensive attention to this or examine it in terms of gendered reciprocity that is emotionally

pregnancy may rise to considerable amounts. For instance, Rosa spent around 500 USD in the acquisition of her maternity collection, a massive sum when taking into consideration that the average monthly wage in Cuba is about 19 USD.

When a woman has a child 'alone' without a male partner (as happens frequently), raising the child without the father or coping with the pregnancy alone is not considered to be a problem. Rather, the difficulty lies in compiling the maternity collection without the money supplied by the father (or another male partner). A statement from a female informant exemplifies this:

> *My niece gave birth and she was studying and finished, and [now] she is doing an internship and gets paid 80 pesos [MN, about four USD] and she got pregnant and she thought that already with this – with 80 pesos! – she can buy her maternity collection and have her children because she is working. And with 80 pesos! (...) And she has no house, she has no husband, she has no money, she has nothing! Because her husband has a wife and children, so it is her alone. She lives in my sister's house with her mother and my sister takes care of the child. My sister ran around, found money, they collected a big maternity collection for her, [my sister] did her a mosquito net – a very pretty one, for my sister is very good at that, she knows [these things] – and my niece said: "look, my baby, people said that it will have nothing, but look how my baby has everything!" The baby has everything because the grandmother did all the errands...*

In this case, having a child without the father's contributions requires special efforts from the part of the pregnant woman and her mother in particular. A woman's female relatives frequently patch up where fathers fail to provide for their partners and children.

If a man is too poor to provide money for his partner throughout the pregnancy and after the birth, he is expected to offer her at least some other material contributions: usually food and small items for the baby. While in practice not *all* men provide money to the mothers of their children, they are strongly *expected* to do so and frowned upon if they do not fulfil this responsibility. A good man has to be generous and have money to share. Both male and female informants were of the opinion that responsible fatherhood essentially entails giving money and/or other material items to female partners and children according to a man's possibilities.

There is a connection between responsibility and the notion of care. A statement from a male informant talking about his ex-partner exemplifies this: "[Her] mother wanted her to get pregnant [to me]. The mother wanted

significant or notice the ways in which economic factors may influence a man's whole life cycle. Moreover, Andaya notices that there has been an increase in ideologies that value men as economic providers (2007: 231-235) but she does not examine how men's material contributions intertwine with notions of love, care, and gendered reciprocity in the family system either.

me to be with her because she said that I'm very good, that I'm responsible, that I take care of her." Since material contributions connect with responsible, caring fatherhood, contributing money and other material items can be seen as a particularly male form of care in Cuba.

I want to stress that this should not be seen as an external expectation that is imposed on men by women or by the compelling socialist state, even though partners in particular often request for men's contributions. Many fathers are committed to providing for their children and have a strong desire to contribute as much as possible for the wellbeing of their child. While the material contributions of young men in particular may appear as marginal (an ice-cream here, a balloon stolen from the work place there), they can still convey a strong desire from the man's part to be a proper, caring parent for his child. In this sense, becoming a parent may deeply transform a man's life via the emotional commitment that he feels to take care of his child – as opposed to what is often stated in the literature on Caribbean fatherhood (e.g. Smith 1960 [1957]: 147, 1988: 137, 147, 1996a: 13-14, 1996b: 205; Wilson 1973: 149-151; Clarke 1974; Smith 1974: x-xi; Lazarus-Black 2001; Andaya 2007). Thus, a child "makes the father" of a man who may have had no intention to engage in such a commitment before the baby's birth.

Both the commitment that a man may feel as a father and the negotiation of his (biogenetic) fatherhood intertwine importantly with materiality. One of my female informants told me how in 1993 – in the middle of the huge material deficiencies of Cuba's Special Period – her work colleagues had managed to acquire a packet of nappies for her new-born as a gift. At home, her partner became jealous and destroyed the packet in rage because – despite her assurance to the contrary – he thought that she had received the nappies from an admirer. The fact that the suspicion of his partner having received material contributions from another man very soon after giving birth provoked such a violent reaction in Wendy's partner shows the important role of material contributions in affirming the alliance between a man and a child as well as confirming a man's fatherhood. Another man giving gifts to a woman's new-born hints to the possibility that he might in fact be the biogenetic father and points to a woman's past infidelity. Since material exchanges may both reflect and produce emotionally charged relationships (Cole and Thomas 2009: 20-21), men's material contributions are an important way to create, affirm, and maintain fatherhood.

Men's material contributions to women and children should be seen as important in their quality of installing a social relation between the baby's mother and the father, as well as between the father and the child. This of

course requires the man's willingness to create such social bonds. Providing his partner and child with money and material contributions connects to a notion of responsible masculinity, making access to material wealth significant to a man's ability to create and maintain social relations. Since this makes wealthier men more desirable as fathers, the shift that seems to be occurring in Cuban fertility as women have fewer children than before may also have the gendered consequence of leaving some men childless. While some men – like Rosa's wealthy partner who is able to offer his spouse laptops and DVD players – have several children with various different women, others – such as my very poor artist friend Danel – risk remaining childless, as they struggle to find a woman who would be willing to maintain a relationship with a man who never has money, let alone to have a child with such a partner.

This situation relates to larger changes that have taken place in Cuba in the post-Soviet period.

State Care: Nurture and Material

Pregnancy and childbirth are highly politicised issues that have occupied a central place in the state agenda since the early days of the revolution. A system of state-run maternity homes and hospitals was installed as early as in the 1960s in order to prevent infant mortality (Perez 2002). Special state protection for pregnant women and babies is emphasised and Cuba's low infant mortality rates have for long been Fidel Castro's pride and joy, both at home and internationally. The care provided by the state to pregnant women and infants is therefore of particular ideological importance to the overall legitimacy of the socialist state system in the country (see also Andaya 2007, 2009b; Kath 2010).

The state closely monitors women throughout their pregnancy. A woman is required to have regular medical checks, see a dentist, have two interviews with a psychologist, and expected to follow the strict dietary and sexual health advice given to her by the doctor.[40] For example, a female informant was strictly advised to have sex only with a condom in order to avoid STDs and infections. She was also told to renounce eating any white flour products, ice cream, sugared juices, sweets, and soft drinks because she was thought to be gaining too much weight during her pregnancy. The doctor recommended her to follow a diet of milk, chicken, and fish in order to avoid her blood pressure going too high or too low. Normally my informants followed such doctor's orders, judging them to be in the best interests of the baby and themselves.

40 Kath states that in total, the minimum number of check-ups is between 10 and 12 (2010: 29 ff. 15, 90 ff. 4).

Andaya (2007: 86-118) states that women resist such dietary requirements and argues that they form part of state efforts to mould pregnant women into modern, disciplined subjects. However, this point of view does not pay close attention to food as a substance. In the context of personal social relations, food is a way to embody care and while recognising the normative quality inherent in such state practices, my informants' close conforming to the dietary requirements suggests that they conceptualised such state practices primarily as indicating care rather than discipline.

In the local health care clinics pregnant women are given priority over other patients. After a baby is born, a woman has to continue visiting her local health clinic regularly until the baby is at least six months old. If she does not do this, the nurse comes to see her at home.

If a woman is considered to belong to a group of "high-risk" (Andaya 2007: 98) pregnancies, she is interned in a state-run maternity home or to a maternity hospital where she is required to stay for as long as necessary. The women who are seen to be of 'high-risk' are normally those who are perceived as receiving insufficient nutrition or as having inadequate housing conditions or problems (such as violence) at home. Often these tend to be women from the lower income groups (Kath 2010: 97, 127 ff. 6). Women who are carrying twins are almost always interned in a maternity home for a few weeks before the birth, as well as women with a permanent health condition, such as diabetes. Andaya (2007: 87-118; see also Kath 2010: 92-98) points out that women with a previous history of several miscarriages are particularly likely to be placed in a maternity home since they are seen as undisciplined in their reproductive practices.[41]

These state actions focus exclusively on the mother-to-be. While for the pregnant woman check-ups and doctors' appointments take place almost weekly throughout the pregnancy, the father-to-be is required to be present only in one appointment during the whole process. It is extremely rare for a man to accompany his partner to other medical checks and often men know little of what goes on during these encounters.

Indeed, pregnancy and childbirth as a whole are conceptualised very strongly as something that men are not even expected to handle, both in the context of state practices as well as more generally. A statement from Rosa, when I asked her whether her partner would go with her to the hospital when she goes to give birth, illustrates this well. Outright appalled by the suggestion, she replied: "Nooo! He would have a heart attack if he saw that! No, they [the

41 The only one of my informants who was interned in a maternity home had a history of several abortions, which also is likely to have influenced her being labelled as a "high risk" pregnancy.

hospital employees] don't allow you to take anyone there with you; *no one*." During the actual childbirth, men are required to expect outside the hospital until they are called in to see the baby after the actual delivery is over.[42] (Men often sit on the steps at the entrance of the hospital with a bottle of rum waiting for the news).

The maternity leave starts on the seventh or the eighth month of pregnancy depending on the type of work the woman is doing.[43] However, many women stop working earlier. The maternity leave continues until the child is one year old and during this time, the woman is paid a full salary. There is no paternity leave.

Organising day-care for workers' children so that women could work in paid jobs was one of the earliest priorities of the revolution in the 1960s (Bell et al. 2007: 29). A woman has to be employed by the state in order to gain access to state kindergartens and the child has to be at least one year old, able to walk, and toilet trained. Private arrangements widely patch up the problems in state arrangements. Female kin help each other in childcare and some women maintain unlicensed 'private day-care centres', where they take care of children for a small fee. Andaya (2009b) points out that deficient state services in the field of childcare during the post-Soviet period have shifted more caring work to women, resulting in an increased feminisation of nurturance as, for instance, grandmothers care for their daughters' children more often than before the fall of the Soviet Union. At the same time, it should be reminded that such arrangements have been prevalent in the Caribbean for long (e.g. Smith 1996a) and are therefore likely to have existed alongside the state-provided child care institutions also during the 'good years' of Cuban socialism (see Rosendahl 1997: 56).

The state has tried to balance the gendered nature of nurturing practices by promoting men's responsibility for the care of their dependent kin (see also Andaya 2009b). However, historically Cuban socialism has maintained an ambiguous stand regarding local conceptualisations of the gendered division of labour. On the one hand, the need for both men and women's equal participation in childcare and domestic work forms part of the Cuban Family Code (*Código de familia* –law on family relations). On the other hand, the state discourse strongly emphasises women's central role as mothers (Andaya 2007) and in practice expects foremost material contributions from men when it comes to childcare (in the form of alimony payments).

42 Kath (2010: 127 ff. 12), however, mentions that some maternity hospitals allow men to be present during the labour.

43 In her ethnography on 1980s East-Cuba, Rosendahl mentions that women have an 18 weeks' leave six weeks before the birth (so that 12 weeks are used after the delivery) and that they can be assigned easier or less dangerous work after the delivery (1997: 55). This differs from what my informants told me, reflecting possibly a change in state policy.

Women's close connection with nurturing work seems to relate to both more-long term conceptualisations of gender and kinship in the Caribbean area and to shifts in state policies during the post-Soviet period. Therefore, even though state actions may cause shifts in gendered kinship responsibilities, they are often unable to overthrow these types of formal features of the local gender and kinship system completely (e.g. Cohen 2005; Friedman 2005 for China).

This relates to the question of the relationship between state structures – as both constraining and enabling – and the agency of individual women in the context of reproduction. In her account on the Cuban mother-infant healthcare program, Kath (2010) argues that the healthcare system is paternalistic and interferes with the individual agency of women to make decisions over their pregnancy and delivery. In a similar vein, Andaya emphasises the regulative and disciplining aspect of such state practices. While also recognising the nurturing qualities of state policies, she highlights women's rejection of such close state involvement in their reproductive lives, stating, for instance, that women feel fear and horror towards maternity homes. (Andaya 2007: 110-111). Both of these accounts draw attention to the dark side of Cuba's extraordinary health statistics and the regulatory character of the state power.

While I understand the reasons that make researchers emphasise the controlling characteristics of Cuban state power, I never witnessed my informants directly criticise the state for trying to take excessive control over their pregnancies. However, my informants frequently complained about the bad quality and insufficiency of state services (see also Kath 2010: 104-109). When talking about maternity hospitals, my informants said that the rooms were too crowded, the food was bad, and the toilets were in a horrible condition. A female informant who was particularly critical of the conditions in the maternity hospital and who had been interned in her seventh month of pregnancy even ran away from the hospital before she was given the permission to leave. However, even though this could be interpreted as a rejection of the state participation in her pregnancy, she never explicitly stated that this would have been the reason for her leaving the hospital. While she was certainly unhappy with the conditions in the hospital, I would be cautious in automatically interpreting this as a rejection of the state system as such, as she never expressed that this was actually her intention. I did not witness my informants rejecting the actual state mother-infant care program nor did any of my informants question the authority of the state physicians that were treating them during their pregnancy; rather, my informants emphasised their expertise.[44]

Rather than highlighting the regulatory aspects of state power in relation to

44 The only exception is Desiree, who criticised the doctors treating her infertility.

their pregnancies, my informants embraced a view that in Cuba, pregnant women and children receive the best share of scarce resources, including the most nutritious foods available. They also mentioned that the state may help those pregnant women who have trouble with housing to find (at least a temporary) place to live. This view conforms to the official state ideology of emphasising pregnant women as a group that enjoys special protection from the part of the state. Thus, while the close monitoring of pregnant women gives the state control over the pregnancy, it also supports maternity.

Considering the state's strong ideological commitment to the prevention of infant mortality, pregnant women's wellbeing is crucial to Cuba's reputation in the international arenas (see also Andaya 2007; Kath 2010). While my informants were of the opinion that pregnant women are prioritised as a group in Cuba, they also thought that the state should do more, in particular when it comes to material conditions. The issue was thus about the state not fulfilling its caring responsibilities adequately.

These deficiencies in state care are compensated through personal social relations. A pregnant woman's kin visits her in the hospital and brings her little gifts of food and material items (such as cotton), that are frequently missing in the hospital. More importantly, the baby's father supplies the pregnant woman with money and/or objects to be given as gifts to the health care personnel in order to ensure her a better treatment during pregnancy and delivery. Depending on the financial possibilities of the provider, these gifts may range from cans of soft drinks to large, expensive leather-coated agendas. I was told that without gifts, the health care personnel may refuse seeing the patient or treat her badly. Despite the socialist rhetoric of free health care, gifts are in practice almost indispensable in order to receive (decent) health-care (see also Brotherton 2005; Andaya 2009a; Kath 2010: 131-164).[45] While this is an aspect of the health care system that my female informants criticised, the contributions from their partners and families allowed them to overcome such problems. Moreover, by downplaying the importance of the state as an adequate provider of material care whether in the context of the maternity collection or the conditions in the hospital, my informants gave more emphasis to the material contributions from their male partners and/or family members.

45 However, doctors do not blatantly refuse to treat a patient if he or she does not bring them a "little gift" (*un regalito*). Rather, gifts install an amicable social relation between the doctor and the patient and therefore ensure a better treatment for the patient (see also Andaya 2009a). Desiree commented on the subject like this: "How I dislike these doctors that don't even talk (...) to you, or explain to you why you have to do this, they only tell you that you have to do this test and that's it, nothing more! I dislike it so that it takes away my desire to go to the doctor. And you have to bring them something because if not, they don't attend you. The other day I went there empty-handed and he didn't even speak to me, (...) they should tell you why, that; 'do yourself this little test so that you will finally resolve your issue (*resolver lo tuyo*), and can have your little child.' Now I have to take four soft drinks; I will call Osbel so that he resolves it for me at work, because they are a team of doctors; [two] nurses and two doctors."

At the same time, such deficiencies in the state services increase the pressure that women lay on their male partners to supply them with cash during pregnancy and when their children are small. My informants frequently complained that especially children's clothes, shoes, and other material items are too expensive. Due to Cubans' meagre level of income, a pair of shoes can cost more than a month's salary and people frequently criticised the state's inability to provide them with affordable goods.

In terms of gendered notions of care, the state provides pregnant women with two forms of care: 'female' nurture and 'male' material care. However, what my informants complained most about was how the state fails to provide them with sufficient material care. This suggests that the state fails as a source of male care in particular. This appears to have shifted more emphasis on individual men as providers of material care than during the more prosperous years of Cuban socialism.[46]

The current deficiencies in state services and the greater introduction of globalised consumption models to Cuba since the 1990s may have shifted more expectations on individual men as material providers. Thus, while Andaya (2007: 169-175, 205-221, 2009b) argues that more caring work has shifted on women during the post-Soviet era, I suggest that there has also been a change in male caring work in the sense that since the fall of the Soviet Union, the expectations have shifted more on individual men to patch up for the deficiencies in state material care. At the same time, coping with the state's material deficiencies with the help of their partners and family members provides women with an opportunity to reject full engagement with the state as a social relation of primary significance and emphasise other types of relationships instead: those based on kinship and alliance.

After Birth: Catholic Baptism

One way in which the birth of a child allows the parents and their kin to both expand their social networks and negotiate their earlier connections is via Catholic baptism and ritual kinship.

After the relaxing of the state policy towards ritual practices of various kinds in the 1990s, the popularity of Catholic baptism grew after many years of a more difficult relationship between the state and the church, during which the practice of Catholic rituals was very discreet. In the past, no one who was a member of the Communist mass organisations could be baptised. For example, one of my female informants stated that her grandfather did not

46 I am grateful to Martin Holbraad for suggesting this to me.

permit any of his grandchildren to be baptised because he was a policeman and a member of the Cuban Communist Party. However, at the time of my fieldwork, Catholic baptism was one of the two most popular Catholic life cycle rituals (the other being last rites in funerals). The most popular churches – those associated with the Catholic saints that have a synchronistic counterpart in the Afro-Cuban *orishas*, such as the church of the Virgin of Charity of Cobre (*Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre,* Ochún) or the Virgin of Mercy (*Virgen de la Merced*, Obatalá) – have two or three daily rounds of baptisms on Saturdays and up to 40 children are baptised during each round. The age at which a child is baptised ranges usually from two or three months up to six or seven years.

Catholic baptism allows the parents to create ritual kinship connections to the child's godparents, to create a spiritual bond between the child and the god(s) as a way to bestow a general blessing and protection on the child, and opens up the possibility for further spiritual connections between the child and the *orishas,* for Catholic baptism is a pre-requisite for Santería initiation.

The Catholic Church tries to curtail the synchronism and teach Cubans the 'proper' interpretation of the ritual's significance by inviting parents to preparatory meetings before a child's baptism. In these, a priest teaches the Catholic faith, the meaning of the ritual, and proper conduct during the event. The priest stresses the importance of a continuous commitment with the church that the baptism initiates, by stating that the baptism is like "a gift that [the Catholic Church] gives [to the parents and the child], which includes the commitment to teach [their children the Catholic faith]" or that the baptism is "like a loan that they are given but have to return, in the same way as in the banks of the capitalist world." He also tells the parents that when the child is eight or nine years old, the parents have to bring him/her to the church to receive the first communion. This way, the church conceptualises the baptism as a spiritual gift that installs a reciprocal relationship between the parents, the child, and the church. By receiving the gift – accepting baptism – the parents commit to reciprocating it in some way in the future.

Nevertheless, very few parents respect this commitment. For instance, in the church of Regla – a very popular church for baptisms since it syncretises with the most maternal Santería *orisha* Yemayá – a priest told me that 250 children are baptised annually but only 22 of them undergo First Communion. Thus, the priests' efforts to install a lasting, on-going relationship with the Catholic Church show very little success at this life stage. Moreover, most parents emphasise that baptism installs another type of reciprocity instead, that between the child and god and/or *orishas*, in addition to expanding the

family's social world via ritual kinship. What becomes emphasised is not an individual's or a family's relationship with the Catholic Church as such, but rather the way in which the ritual allows to create and strengthen the parents' personal social relations, as well as the child's spiritual connections to gods.



FIG. 4: A MOTHER AND BABY AT A CATHOLIC BAPTISM

The child's godfather plays a central role in the ritual. As dressing up is very important, he is expected to buy the child a special outfit for the event and the baptism may be put off until the godfather has money to do this. (Sometimes the child's mother or father is the one who buys the outfit if the godparents cannot fulfil the role that is expected from them.) The child's godfather should provide money for a party to be celebrated after the baptism, but this happens rarely. Even though the baptism itself is free (although in some churches there is a small payment of 20 pesos at the maximum; less than 1 USD), the acquisition of the outfit and hiring of someone to do the videotaping and/or photographing for the day (as is preferred), raise the cost of the ritual.

Baptisms are usually not very large-scale events in terms of participants, even though sometimes quite a few people from the child's extended family may be present (from the matrilateral, patrilateral, or both sides). The Catholic Church strongly expects the child's mother to be present in both the preparation for the baptism as well as in the actual baptism and this is

practically always the case. However, the child's father – who has a general tendency to be 'missing' in the kinship system – is often equally present in both occasions. Other persons who usually participate in the baptism include the child's (matrilateral, sometimes also patrilateral) grandmother and aunts. In other words, the most important persons participating in the baptism are the child's parents as well as their close female kin.

However, even though baptism thereby presents an occasion with the potential to create and/or maintain the affine relation between the mother's and the father's family, this is not always the case. For instance, when Ixis was angry with the father of her son because he did not want to maintain a love relationship with her, she baptised her son without telling the baby's father and chose the child's godparents without consulting him. This way, baptism may become the mother's statement on her social relations; a way for the child's mother to take agency in relation to the baby's father. In this case Ixis evaluated her relationship with her son's father in terms of the central value of reciprocity. Since he had offended her by not granting her the intimate role she wanted in his life – and she was also rejected by his family to a certain degree – she, in turn, did not let them participate in the pleasurable occasions connected to the birth of a child. The baby's father, along with his mother and sisters, was deeply offended by Ixis' act of baptising the child without their presence. However, when the situation calmed down after some time, the balance was restored so that the baby's first birthday party was celebrated at the father's work place. Like the gendered dialectics of care taking place during pregnancy, baptism allows parents and their kin to (re-) negotiate their social relations. Baptism carries the potential to affirm affine links and refashion relationships, but it also exemplifies the way in which motherhood grants agency to a woman.

Godparents

The child's mother is usually the one to choose the godparents for the child. The father may also pick one and the mother the other godparent. Sometimes this may result in a conflict between the child's parents and their families over whom to choose. Teresa was very worried about her son's ex-girlfriend Ixis picking up the godparents to their child because Ixis had many male friends who were gay and the whole father's side of the family was very preoccupied that this might have a bad influence on the child's later development (i.e. he might become gay). However, in the end, it is usually the child's mother who gets the last word in the issue and this is what happened in this case as well.

Cuban godparent relationships differ in some ways from the pan-Latin

American *compadrazgo* relationships. My informants' godparent relationships tended to be less formal, less lasting, less asymmetrical, and often less important than the *compadrazgo* relationships in Central America (Foster 1961, 1963; Crandon-Malmud 1993: 575, 585, 591 ff. 5; Danziger 1996: 69, 77, 79 ff. 5; Rothstein 1999: 585, 587; see also Smith 1988: 45). The term *compadrazgo* itself was never used by my informants. However, godparent-kin terms (godmother, godfather, godson, and goddaughter – *madrina, padrino, ahijado, ahijada*) are in frequent use and people have various different types of godparent relationships, not all of which are religious.[47] However, most frequently godparent-relationships relate to the Catholic baptism or to Afro-Cuban ritual kinship relations.[48]

Godparenthood is a commitment that installs certain responsibilities and rights between the child, the parents, and the godparents. While these are not rigid or necessarily (very) binding, they are serious enough to make some my informants refuse godparent relations suggested to them. In such cases, my informants stated that the reason for their refusal was that they were not close to the child's parents and that the child was "very bad-mannered" (*muy malcriado/a*). Therefore, the child's qualities may also influence the forming of a godparent relationship, not just the relationship between the possible co-parents. Unlike in other parts of Latin America, the relationship between the godparent and the godchild is emphasised over the relationship between the co-parents (cf. Foster 1961, 1963; Mintz and Wolf 1950: 355; Rothstein 1999: 590 ff. 22; Danziger 1996: 79 ff. 5; Crandon-Malmud 1993: 591 ff. 5).
However, in other ways the Cuban godparent relationships are similar to the Latin American *compadrazgo*. In Cuba (as elsewhere in Latin America), godparenthood is a relation that is strongly defined by the economic aspects of the bond (e.g. Foster 1961, 1963; Crandon-Malamud 1993: 582-583, 587-588, 591 ff. 5). However, mutual liking, closeness, and the personality features of the possible godparents may sometimes weigh more heavily in the choice.

Nevertheless, usually parents want to find someone with money who will buy things for their child and who will help them financially if needed. For this

47 There are also godparenting relationships that are created outside religious contexts and that are based solely on friendship, trust, and mutual liking. In such relations, usually the younger party chooses someone as his or her godparent and starts employing the kin term *padrino* or *madrina* to refer to the person. Sometimes the older person may suggest starting a godparent-relationship, at times even poignantly insist on it, but the younger party usually retains the right to refuse such connections. These types of relations tend to last for as long as the relationship is pleasurable for both partners and they may include similar reciprocal help and care as the more formal godparent relationships. The use of the kin term is a sufficient indication to strengthen the friendship that previously exists amongst such partners and install the godparenting relationship and giving up the use of the kin term to terminate the bond. Sometimes this transforms the relationship to a less intimate form of friendship, but it may also terminate it completely. Using the term *padrino / madrina* to refer to strangers is also a way to imply a form of intimacy, usually in a situation where a person wants a favour of some sort from the other.

48 Two of my informants who were born in Eastern Cuba had godparents that had been assigned to them in an "*echar agua*" (spill water) ritual. I was told that this ritual is performed mostly in *Oriente* and is the equivalent of baptism even though it is not an institutionalised Catholic ritual. My focus here is on Catholic godparenthood.

reason, many people want to have foreigners or Cubans who have emigrated outside of the island as godparents to their children. This is the only aspect of godparenthood that displays gender differences. Often people have both a godfather and a godmother, but since men are usually the ones who are expected to have money and pay for things, male godparents are preferred to a certain extent. Since material contributions represent a male form of care, this is a way from the child's parents (mother) to try to ensure the future material security and care for their child. An employee of the Catholic Church even told me that some parents baptise their child several times in distinct churches in order to secure the child several sets of godparents, as well as to get the godparents to pay for several distinct baptism parties. This is a way to expand the social relations installed via baptism as much as possible.

For a childless person in particular, becoming a godparent may provide a way to establish a type of parenthood relationship with a child and this may motivate the godparent to dedicate more time and material resources to create and maintain a relationship with the godchild. On the other hand, a man with very little money and other material resources may struggle to establish godparent relationships and may risk being left completely childless in the context of both ritual and non-ritual parenthood.

The religious criteria of the Catholic Church for choosing baptism godparents is looser in Cuba due to the fairly weak status of institutionalised religions. Since it would be extremely difficult to find godparents who fill the usual requirements of the Catholic Church (baptised and confirmed Catholic adults), the church tends to accept any godparents chosen by the child's parent. However, a Catholic nun told me that the church hopes that godparents are a (catholically) married couple, although in practice they exercise no control over the issue. Moreover, while the church states that godparents should not be kin, in practice godparenthood and kin relations overlap frequently.

Sometimes an existing 'consanguine' relationship is strengthened by a ritual kinship bond. Migration, for instance, occasionally creates an incentive to solidify a person's tie with the kin on the island and a migrated Cuban may pick a godparent for his or her child among his or her (usually matrilateral) consanguine kin. Godparent relationships are often used to strengthen relationships between siblings in particular. Moreover, sometimes people choose their own or their child's godparents on the basis that the same person is already the godparent of a kin member.

Occasionally a godparent-relationship offers a way to solidify the usually more marginal patrilateral kinship links. A child's godparents may be the father's

aunt or sister or a more distant patrilateral relative. Godparent relationships may also reinforce affine relations and sometimes godparent relationships strengthen both patrilateral and affine connections at the same time, for example when a child's godparents are the father's sister and her partner. Sometimes ritual kinship bonds reinforce several types of kinship connections at the same time, for example when a child's godparent is the father's brother's wife's sister – a relationship that combines patrilateral, matrilateral, and affine links.

There is a tendency to create ritual kinship relations with the persons whom one already considers to be a type of relative and to whom one may refer with a kinship term. Thus, an existing discursive kinship relation is strengthened by turning it into a ritual kinship relation.[49] To use my own situation as an example, my Cuban family considered me as a kin member but wanted me to become their youngest son's baptism godmother.[50] In their view, this would make our kin relation "official" and enable me to get a visa to Cuba on the basis of family membership, making kinship a way to tackle state restrictions.

Moreover, many ask their neighbours to become their children's godparents. Several aspects relating to socialism make it important for people to be in good terms with their neighbours. Cubans repeatedly need all types of little services and help from their neighbours; water, domestic appliances, or sugar may be borrowed in a reciprocal cycle of exchanges (see Rosendahl 2010). In addition, since almost everyone is in one way or another involved in some type of illegal activities (or at least in the informal economy), it is important to have good relations with one's neighbours in order to prevent problems with the police or the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (*Comités de Defensa de la Revolución*, CDR). Due to neighbours' physical proximity and frequent interaction, a ritual kinship bond is seen as reinforcing a relationship that is already a close relation and making it more reliable. In this sense, physical proximity carries in itself the potential to develop into a kinship bond.

Ideally, the godparent-godchild relationship is modelled after the parent-child bond so that the godparents form a second set of parents for the child, thus expanding the child's social relations. At its best, godparenthood creates a relationship of reciprocity and mutual aid between the child, the child's parents, and the godparents. The most important issue is to maintain the relationship and practice mutual visiting or at least talk on the phone, as stated by a male informant: "My mother and my godmother have not stopped

49 I call this *discursive kinship* because I reject the use of the term "fictive kinship," as if such ways of creating kinship connections would be somehow 'less real' than others.

50 For another example of incorporating the anthropologist to the kin network through godparenthood, see Weismantel 1995: 689.

seeing each other even though they live very far from each other and spent years without meeting each other. It is an obligation." Some informants' godparents had been a great help to their mother in their childhood. An elderly female informant had lived at her godmother's place from the age of five until the age of 13 because her own mother could not take care of her.

During pregnancy and a child's infancy in particular, godparent relationships may become highlighted in various ways. A pregnant woman may receive the type of help that is supposed to be provided by the child's father from the child's godfather or from her own godfather. In such a case, she may sometimes have a child without expectations of material contributions from the child's father "because she has a godfather" who gives her money or she may stay at the child's godfather's home for some time after giving birth if needed – as stated by a male informant on his godson and the child's mother: "Their house was under construction and the father did not take care of him." The godfather may thereby step in to provide the mother(-to-be) with the care that the child's father fails to provide. However, the birth of a child may activate also a father-to-be's relationship with his own godparent. A male informant stated that his godfather was "the person who most rejoiced" about his partner's pregnancy when he was about to have his first child. Thus, like in the context of affinity and patrilateral bonds, to the new-born's parents and godparents alike, the birth of a child represents an opportunity to strengthen relationships also in the context of ritual kinship.

However, all godparent-relations do not exhibit close connections. Neglecting ritual kinship bonds usually intertwines with the material contributions that the godparent is supposed to make to the godchild. However, if the godparent does not fulfil these expectations, not much happens. Many informants told me that their children's godparents had forgotten about their godchildren and had not kept in touch after the child's first years. However, they were not overly annoyed or bothered by this, which implies that the godparent relationship does not entail very serious obligations. Migration, in particular, may cause a loss of contact, but on the other hand I also had some female informants who continuously received gifts of clothes from a godmother or money from a godfather in the US. Such material gifts from a godparent were taken as signs of their "love" towards the godchild.

The godchild's responsibilities towards the godparent are slightly greater. The godchild is expected to help and visit the godparent frequently. On the other hand, if the godchild does not do this, the consequences are not severe either, apart from a slight frowning from the part of the godparent and usually from the godchild's mother. Consequently, the godparent relationship is not

by its nature a very obliging or intimate bond either for the godparent or for the godchild although it does carry the potential to become such. Therefore, godparenthood has the potential to create or reinforce the relationship between the involved persons, but people do not always seize this opportunity.

When Cubans speak of baptism, they usually assign the agency to the godparent in the sense that it is the godparent who is seen to make the baptism happen instead of the priest. For instance, Caridad urged me to organise her son's baptism by saying: "Go to see the priest and tell him that you have a godson and you want to baptise him on the day of his birthday." Thus, rather than the priest, it is the godparent who is conceived as the social agent in the situation. This suggests the church is not regarded as the agent that provides the required service; rather agency is held by the persons with whom the parents enter into a relationship in order to make the baptism happen. Therefore, baptism is an occasion that allows the parents and their kin to multiply their social connections by creating ritual kinship links and negotiating affine links, while at the same time doing their best to guarantee a protected future for the child, safely embedded in connections that will yield both spiritual and material help.

Naming

In an attempt to reject earlier naming practices based on Spanish laws and the Catholic almanac, the Cuban revolution changed the naming law. This was part of a policy to create the New Man based on egalitarian principles and on the rejection of colonial, Catholic, and bourgeois cultural and social practices. Naming was made completely free (García Cardentey 2012).[51] The socialist state has been very successful in rejecting pre-revolutionary naming practices.

On the one hand, Cubans embrace inventiveness and uniqueness in name choices, trying to find names that no one else would have (some of my informants even felt sorry for me when they found out that my name is included in the almanac). On the other hand, there is also a considerable tendency to emphasise diverse types of relationships in naming practices.

Even though the state does not regulate naming, some Catholic priests are uncomfortable with baptising children with clearly non-Catholic names. Sometimes this is circumvented with an addition to the name chosen by the child's parents, for instance "Yusniel de Caridad". A child may also be named after a saint if s/he is born on the day of a specific (Catholic or Afro-Cuban)

51 The article 43 of the Naming Law (*La Ley de Registro del Estado Civil Cubano*) states that names should be "within the educational and cultural development of the people and its traditions" but in practice this does not set important limits (García Cardentey 2012).

saint (such as Regla) or if the mother has made a vow to a saint before the birth (for instance, requesting a pregnancy). Thereby, the name bears testimony of the mother's great desire to have the child and brings future blessing and protection to the child, participating in such a way to the mother's care for the child.

A child's name may be chosen by the mother, the father, or by the two together. The mother is more likely to decide on a girl child's name and the father upon a boy child's name.

There is a considerable tendency to emphasise the usually more marginal patrilateral relations in naming practices (see also Clarke 1974: 48). This trend relates to first boy children in particular who may be named after their father, but I also had one female informant who was named after her father (Yemel → Yemela), and another female informant who was named after her father's matrilateral aunt who had raised the father. Various informants stated that "before in Cuba sons used to be named after their father," but this was seen more as a practice of the past that had already lost its power. However, in some families this tendency was very much in evidence, as in a white, fairly affluent family that was full of men called Carlos: the father was called Carlos, he had a son called Carlos Manuel, who in his turn had a son called Carlos. Another son of the first Carlos (the first father) was called Carlos Juan and he had a son called Carlos ('Carlito') and another son called Brandon Carlos ('Brandon'). Therefore, naming may become a way to give positive emphasis to marginal relations (see Turner 1979b: 184, 192).

Tendency to pass names matrilaterally for girls is much weaker than the tendency to pass names patrilaterally for boys. A girl's name can sometimes be passed on from her mother or matrilateral grandmother. The most complete matrilateral name passing I encountered was in a white upper-class family that had fled the revolution to Miami in the early sixties. The women of four generations shared the same rather curious name: the grandmother, the mother, the daughter and the daughter's daughter.
A child's name may also be a combination of the mother's and the father's name (Uskiel and Anavy → Usnavy) or siblings may have similar names (Yanay, Yoana, Yanet) as a way to indicate their mutual connection to each other.

The assigning of a child's last name is a further way to negotiate social relations. Usually this follows standard Spanish practice (where a person has two last names, the first being his father's first last name and the second his mother's first last name; i.e. there is a patrilineal tendency). However, sometimes a mother does not want to give the child the father's last name at

all and uses only her own last name(s) instead. If the mother's relationship with the child's father is improved later, she may change the child's name to include also the father's last name. Having their last name bestowed on a child was very important for my male informants and their families. As last names are taken as an indication of consanguine kinship links between persons, the establishing of a patrilineal last name for a child becomes a way to affirm a man's biogenetic fatherhood.[52] This illustrates the quality that names have in indicating, creating, and maintaining relationships.

Names are taken as an indication of a type of social relation or a kin connection between persons. They bear witness of past social relations and offer a way to create new ones. Along with the way in which children's bodies are seen to represent a combination of past relationships in their appearance, names are another way to make relationships visible, indicating in a child's name those persons that have played a significant part in the child's creation, whether by offering nurturing or material or spiritual help. Names may retain the memory of the past sexual union between a child's mother and father well after the relationship has ended. A neologism inspired by the child's mother's and father's name reflects the way in which the birth of a child brings about a new combination – something that is partly mother, partly father – and thereby also a new, potentially lasting affine relationship between the two families. This way, the child becomes not only an embodiment of past and future relationships but also a unique new entity. Naming connects with the conceptualisation of personhood as relational but simultaneously recognising the individuality of persons.

Naming may also be a way to create a continuing presence for a marginal bond that has ceased to exist in other practices. This may be the case of boys named after their father, which is a way to make the often marginal patrilateral (and at times also patrilineal) links continue via naming practices, or names may be a way to cherish the existence of a loved, deceased kin member, creating continuity in family connections. Naming thus becomes a particular way to reinforce those links that are in danger of disappearing, to retain and remember marginal kinship bonds.

Conclusion

Both my informants and state practices conceptualise pregnancy and childbirth solely as a women's issue when it comes to the medical, psychological, and to a great degree also to practical aspects of pregnancy.

52 My informants considered having the same last name with someone to be an indication of a consanguine kinship link between the persons also if they met new people with whom they shared a last name. If they could not specify the exact connections, they would label the person into the category of a "cousin" (*primo*). This is another indication of the way in which kinship functions as a general idiom for social relations.

This close connection between women and children is usually approached in the literature on matrifocality especially as a women's burden because it makes women materially very vulnerable. However, pregnancy also gives a woman considerable agency and leverage to negotiate her social relations. Women's gendered agency in reproduction should not be dismissed, for it is an important form of power, in particular in a system where parenthood and children form the focus of individual life course. While it is obvious that this does not cancel the fact that women's close connection with children also restricts and burdens them, it is important to recognise this other side of the issue. Reproduction not only makes women particularly dependent on male contributions when their children are small but also makes men depend on women for fulfilling their aspirations of parenthood.

A baby's father is expected to make material contributions both to the child's mother and to the baby especially during the pregnancy and immediately after the child's birth. The material contributions that the father makes to the wellbeing of both his partner and the child during pregnancy and after birth represent a male form of care that should be given more importance when discussing kinship in the Caribbean. While in many ways 'missing' and 'marginal' in relation to their children, fathers make some contributions towards caring for their children and partners. While a mother cares for a baby via a nurturing, immediate presence, a father contributes by providing both the baby and the mother a material form of care via money and various objects. Thus, social relations centre on a gendered notion of care. Both nurturing care and material care are ways of showing love and maintaining, creating, and reproducing social relations.

The affine relationship appears when a child is born. This takes place most importantly via the man's female kin's nurturing care towards the mother-to-be. Even though the sexual relationship between a couple may dissolve, an embodied connection between the two families is created via the child. While the change in an individual's kinship status (i.e. a man becoming a father) carries the potential to transform a wider range of relationships, such transformations are not always embraced. This potential for the emergence of an affine bond at the time of birth also shows that marginal relations do not display a constant presence but emerge only momentarily. At the same time, this potentiality for an affine bond highlights the birth of a child as a special moment when a particularly wide range of kinship links materialise and become visible.

As a living proof of the man's and woman's earlier union, a child makes past relationships emerge, embodying the history of past encounters. A child's body

may reveal connections that people want to keep secret and a child's name may retain the memory of marginal kinship links. At the same time, the child also embodies the potential for new connections.

The birth of a child represents for the mother, father, both their kin, and the ritual kin a possibility to establish new relationships and to reorganise and negotiate their existing social bonds. For both men and women, a child represents the possibility to secure oneself social relations in the future – to make sure that they are not left alone. Thereby the birth of a child offers a possibility to create relationships that someone involved in the pregnancy hopes to bring about via the child – whether it is the woman who wants to "tie a man" to herself via the pregnancy, a man for whom a pregnancy provides a proof of his partner's love for him, a matrilateral grandmother who wishes to enlarge her kin group, or a man's mother who hopes for grandparenthood for herself and for full adulthood for her son.

During pregnancy, gender-differentiated parenthood is highlighted. Parenthood is vital for full social adulthood and having a child more or less completes the process of becoming a gendered adult for both men and women. Simultaneously, as the expectations and practices surrounding a baby-to-be are strongly gendered, the gendering of the new human being starts already during pregnancy.

There is a degree of ambiguity regarding biogenetic notions of fatherhood. Therefore, making material contributions to his partner and the new-born is an important way for a man to create a relationship to the child. While not all men make such contributions, the expectation is there as a possibility that the man may seize or not, depending on his willingness to create such relations. This also highlights the importance of a man's ability to provide such material contributions as a factor determining his desirability as a father in women's view, carrying also the potential to marginalise some men.

The godparent relationship created at the Catholic baptism is yet another way for the child's mother to ensure the future well-being of her child by securing the material aid of the godparent for her child. While godparenthood is importantly a sponsorship relation, it is not a very reliable way to secure a child's economic future, which is more easily achieved via a kinship bond with a rich father. However, modelled after the parent-child relationship, the relationship between a godparent and a godchild represents a potential to become a close relationship of reciprocal care if both parties are willing to contribute to it. Like naming, godparenthood represents a way to affirm especially those connections that are in danger of becoming marginal

over time, creating a way to connect a child with past as well as future relationships.

4. Becoming a Woman: Quince as a Moment of Female Sexuality

Introduction

When Cuban girls turn 15, their birthday is celebrated with a lavish, luxurious coming-of-age ritual called *la fiesta de los quince* that marks a girl's transition into a woman. Boys do not celebrate quince or have any equivalent celebration. Quince celebration is very important for Cubans and even very poor families try to mark the 15th birthday of their daughter in some way. While quince's ritual symbolism employs Spanish colonial imagery, it is also a highly sexualised ritual that focuses on the young girl as a beautiful seductress. Most importantly, quince centres on the mother-daughter relationship and represents a markedly women's ritual – symbolising in a clear way the fundamental significance of gender difference in Cuban society.

Since there is no comparable ritual for boys, it is important to examine quince in the context of the kinship system in order to understand why growing up to be a woman is of such significance. The ritual does not have an effect on the girl alone but influences social relations more widely. In addition to the girl's coming-of-age, the ritual also marks another moment of transition; that of the girl's mother into a higher status female as the mother of a sexually adult female. From then on, the girl's mother will be defined not so much by her own sexual and reproductive activity as that of her daughter: the children that her daughter is soon likely to produce transit her into the higher status of a respected grandmother.

Quince represents a decisive moment in the life cycle. The social relations that materialise at this life stage may resonate with later life stages. Especially the way in which the marginal patrilateral relations appear at this life stage may have important later consequences and shortcomings will be remembered in the years to come.

La Fiesta de los Quince

> *Grisaida sits like a queen on her throne atop the back seat of a fancy 1950's Chevy convertible, horn blaring, cruising Havana's favourite seaside promenade, the Malecón. She is wearing a wide, red Rococo styled dress complemented by elbow-length white gloves. Fake diamonds dangle from her ears and form a loop around her neck. On her head sits a crown. She smiles radiantly; she is living the moment she has dreamt of for the past 10 years.*

A girl's 15th birthday is celebrated as a very special occasion and usually at great expense to her family – especially the girl's mother, who typically has to save for years to pay for the festivities. Often celebrations include a lavish party and expensive professional photo sessions of the girl and the whole day is captured on video. If the family is too poor to organise a big party, a house party often takes place at the girl's home or out in the street with all the people of the neighbourhood invited. Only girls' 15th birthday is celebrated as a special, socially important occasion; a boy's 15th birthday passes without any special celebration, making quince a very gender-specific ritual.

A quince party is seen as a popular social event and can feature a guest list of up to 300 invitees: the girl's – and most importantly her mother's – kin, friends, neighbours, and schoolmates are all invited to attend. The girl's mother carefully chooses the outfits, decorations, locale, program, and food and drinks for the occasion. In the most extravagant cases, a court-style ballroom dance-event is organised, featuring 14 couples in addition to the *quinceañera* and her male dancing partner, *el galán*. A professional dancer has choreographed the piece and the young performers have practiced it between one and three months in preparation for the event, often under the supervision of the girl's mother.

On the day of the party, the *quinceañera* is paraded around the city in either an old, American convertible or in a horse-drawn carriage, wearing a wide, 18th century-style dress known as *traje colonial*. The drive ends at the location of the party where she enters accompanied by her father – or another male figure – and a little girl called *la damita*, acting as a court maid carrying flower petals and sprinkling them before the *quinceañera* as she advances.

In the party hall on a centre stage there is a huge cake, often lavishly decorated with adornments such as running-water fountains, lights, candles, little dolls depicting the dancers on the lower levels of the cake, and the *quinceañera* standing on the top level of the cake.

The dance always begins with a waltz. Dancers performing in this formal phase of the event are wearing 18th-century style outfits imitating the Spanish colonial era; girls in puffy wide dresses similar to that of the *quinceañera* and boys in black or white suits, often tuxedos. After the waltz, the dancers perform other dances in which the *quinceañera* takes the lead role (such as *casino*, *danzón* or reggaeton).[53] After the conclusion of the formal events, the dance-floor is free for the attendees to take over and the festivities continue into the early hours of the morning.

53 *Danzón* and *casino* are traditional Cuban dances; reggaeton is a newer import from Puerto Rico, very popular amongst young Cubans.



FIG. 5: A QUINCE CAKE

In addition to the party, the photos – taken by a professional photographer in specially chosen locations and scenes – are an important element of the ritual. Photos are often viewed as even more important than the actual quince party (see also Rosendahl 2010: 50). Even when a girl's family is very poor and unable to organise a party for her birthday, they usually make everything in their power to provide her with proper quince photos. Quince photos represent a specific, well-established cultural format in Cuba, much like wedding photos in most parts of the western world. The photos represent the minimal 'condition' that has to be filled for a girl to "have quince" (*tener quince*); to have undergone a ritual celebration that marks her coming-of-age. Currently the photos are usually accompanied by a video. Even though the video follows a highly similar trajectory as the photos and the general outline of the quince party, it never undermines the importance of the photos.

In the photos the girl poses in "colonialist" settings wearing the *traje colonial*, as well as a range of more modern outfits. These may range from whatever is in fashion to fantasy set ups such as the girl sitting in the jungle next to a lion in leopard-skin garments, driving a motorcycle in thigh-length PVC boots, appearing as a mermaid with a fish's tail, or appearing in the poster of the American TV series *CSI Las Vegas* (very popular in Cuba at the time of my fieldwork) as one of the stars of the show. In quince's ritual imagery, girls are

never depicted as workers, soldiers, or students – roles that in reality are open to women in Cuban society – but rather as characters that are not in line with the ideology of the modern-day Cuba like pirates, royals, or oriental dancers. In some photos the girl wears nothing at all besides a basket of flowers or other props to cover her breasts and genitals. In a playful way, the photos function as a testing ground for new ideas and ways of being to the girl – as a practice that allows for her to test, imagine, and dream of what it is like to be an adult woman.

The girl and her mother in particular take great pride in showing her quince photos to anyone who is willing to watch them. The photos are circulated widely in the community: shown to family, friends, and neighbours and hung on the walls at home (as well as keenly presented to foreign anthropologists, especially by women). Quince photos are also sent to kin living abroad: for example, there is a frequent interchange of girls' photos between Miami and Cuba.

As all of these distinct aspects of the ritual imply, quince requires considerable amounts of money. In addition to the showy party featuring a professional dance group and a celebrity performer to host the event, the photo and video sessions with all their special effects can result in an overly expensive ceremony for an average family.[54] It is not unusual for the *quinceañera* and her dancers to change their outfits up to seven times during the event and the organiser is expected to pay for all this. In addition, there are costs related to makeup, hairstyles, and manicure. No *quinceañera* wants to appear poor on her big day.

Everyone who knows the girl or her mother typically expects to get invited to the party (although such hopes do not always materialise in practice). It is expected to have food and drinks in abundance in quince parties (much more so than in weddings), as well as good music to dance the night away. One of my young informants was anxious before her party because according to her people are very quick to criticise quince parties for the lack of food or drinks and therefore she desired to have a night out in the disco with her friends instead.[55] Mona Rosendahl (2010: 50-51) sees quince parties as an equalising income distribution mechanism in Cuban society. It is true that quince parties represent an important moment for the social sharing of resources in the community, when neighbours take turns at inviting each other reciprocally

54 At the time of my fieldwork in 2007, the average monthly salary was about 260 pesos, the equivalent of $10 USD. However, almost everyone had other sources of income. During my fieldwork in 2008, there were rises in both salaries and prices. Since then, there have been continuous fluctuations and changes in the economy and the labour market.

55 This shows that while quince is a moment of fun and celebration, it may also resurface underlying tensions in social relations, as well as ambiguities between more relational and more individualistic orientations between the girl, her kin, and the whole neighbourhood.

to their daughters' quince celebrations. However, in my view the ritual's great importance lies first of all in the way in which it structures and restructures the *quinceañera*'s kinship universe and defines gender as the primary social difference in society.

Even though there are significant differences between the most luxurious and poorest quince parties, the ritual is not primarily an event marking class difference. While quince circulates imagery about appearing wealthy, even poor girls celebrate their quince in one way or another. Although my informants sometimes brought up the issue of wealth when discussing quince – stating the social pressure to organise a fancy party – they still emphasised quince's significance as a gendered girls' ritual beyond any class-related connotations the ritual may have.

Moreover, even though the ritual significantly employs Spanish colonial imagery, girls of all colours celebrate their quince more or less similarly. My informants never expressed that the ritual would have any significant 'racial' connotations despite the fact that they were very clear about the ritual's symbolic imagery derived from upper-class Spaniards of the colonial era. Thus, the ritual cannot be seen as race-specific or significantly differentiated racially.[56]
Girls often dream about their quince since they are children and wait for the day with great excitement and anticipation. In speech, the expression *quinceañera* is used to describe an idealised age where a young woman is at her most beautiful with the world at her feet.

Beauty and Sexuality

The celebration of quince marks the girl's "moment of beauty" and reaching of sexual maturity. The statements that girls gave on how quince changed their lives emphasised the ritual's role as marking a transition "from childhood to adolescence." Girls stated that "starting from then, you start to see life differently" and they also said that their bodily appearance changed: they were allowed to use (more) makeup and cut their hair. Quince thereby entails an expectation of the girl's transformation. This was pointed out particularly clearly when someone failed in this, with frowning comments from my informants: "She still looks like a child!"

Many girls said that after the celebration of their quince, they had more freedom and their parents allowed them to stay out late at night, their parents

56 There is some degree of racialised difference in the ritual praxis in the sense that the magnitude of quince parties tends to reflect more general income differences and thereby the most lavish parties are often organised by girls of lighter skin colours because their families have more money available for the party. However, this is not a clear-cut distinction and individual situations may vary.

trusted them more than before. This life stage coincides with adolescents' finishing school and many youngsters move to a boarding school away from their parents to continue their studies in high school or in professional education. This often adds to their sexual freedom (Hamilton 2012: 82).



FIG. 6: A QUINCEAÑERA POSING IN A PHOTO SHOOT

Niurka, a mother who had recently celebrated her daughter's quince, reflected on the subject:

> *They feel themselves a little like adults, they look different. (…) They know that already at 15, [it is] when they start having a boyfriend and all these things… A little more responsibility is on her because one already has to start telling her that she has to take care [of herself] and all the things that may happen to her starting from then. (…) Everybody starts to see her as a bigger person; he, who did not see her as… a woman, starts to eye her up because she is 15 and he starts to see her differently; men start to see her differently. But for this we prepare the girls before their quince party (…), they must become more responsible. You always tell them that I'm sorry for what happens to her, but the one who's going to be more sorry for it, is she herself, because she has to answer for what happens to her.*

Here Niurka refers vaguely to the possibility of a pregnancy that is something

that girls have to take into notice at the age of 15.[57] Thus, increased liberties are combined with more responsibility as a more autonomous and independent moral person.

During the party, the *quinceañera* is frequently referred to as a "beautiful flower" and the venue of the fiesta is usually decorated with abundant flowers. Moreover, in the photos, *quinceañeras* frequently pose amongst flowers and with flowers all over their body, often nude. Sunflowers are the most common flowers because by their religious significance they connect with the Santería *orisha* Ochún, a beautiful, highly feminine *mulata*, the goddess of sexuality, sensuality, and love. Flowers are a very feminine symbol and they are given to women by men (to give a man a flower would be to insinuate that he is homosexual). The use of flowers in the ritual – sunflowers in particular – emphasises the girl's femininity and sexuality, stressing her position as a gendered, sexually mature 'almost'-adult.[58]

Sexual symbolism is emphasised throughout the ritual and can be seen in the outfits, the nude-photographs, and the performances that take place in quince parties. During the photo session, a girl's female relatives often urge her to show more skin and sometimes *quinceañeras* are photographed in lingerie next to a stripper's pole. In Yolanda's party the choreography of the dance show emphasised female agency and sexuality: girls danced alone on the stage gyrating their hips whilst the song in the background stated "Women! Watch your man's body and dance!" (*Mujeres! Ve al cuerpo de tu hombre y baila!*). After this, boys came to the dance floor, kneeled down and the girls sat on their back while a song titled "Love without clothes" (*Amor sin ropa*) started to play. Thus, the girls' role on the dance floor was one of a male-objectifying sexual dominatrix. Sometimes this stress on female power/agency is made very explicit in the ritual: for example, Maribel was photographed as a 'girl power' -type superhero with a sword in her hand.

I connect this emphasis on autonomous female sexuality in the ritual to the fact that quince marks the girls' transition into sexual adulthood. This is further stressed by the fact that traditionally the meaning of a quince fiesta is to mark the moment when a girl is officially allowed to have a boyfriend and in the process, sexual relations.[59] In the Caribbean, full adulthood means participation in sexual interaction and procreation (Smith 1996d: 205). The Cuban quince ritual represents female sexuality in a very different light than,

57 Although children as such are welcomed, they do interfere with a young girl's studies and place a considerable strain on her economically if there is little guarantee of the father's participation (see also Hamilton 2012: 96-116).

58 Not yet fully adult, for parenthood is needed for this.

59 This does not mean that *all* parents allow girls to have sexual relations at the age of 15 or that all parents prohibit sexual relations for girls who are under 15 years old. However, see also Hamilton, whose several female informants stated that they started to have sexual relations at the age of 15 (2012: 98-99).

for example, the more virginity-stressing *quinceañera* ritual in some other parts of Latin America (see Napolitano 1997: 284-288 on Mexico; Davalos 2003: 302-305 on Mexican immigrants in the US).[60] Quince's ritual imagery represents the girl as an ultra-feminine sexualised seductress, thus underlining the ritual's position as marking gender difference in Cuban society in a fundamental way.

In the performances of the quince ritual, the girl's sexuality is not directed towards one single man who would represent her future husband, but rather towards men in general, emphasising her position as an independent, yet heterosexually-oriented seductress. The purpose of the ritual is not to prepare the girl for marriage, but for sexual life and via this, potentially to reproduction and motherhood.[61] None of my informants conceptualised quince as a ritual for the purpose of 'catching a husband.' This often became evident within a year or two of the ritual, as quite a few of my young informants tended to have a baby rather than a husband in their arms. Motherhood does not require marriage in the Caribbean and the making of a girl into a fully gendered, heterosexual adult woman is more important than her joining a man in marriage.

Cubans are surprisingly willing to spend their hard-earned money on girls' 15th birthday celebrations – much more so than on weddings.[62] When talking about weddings, people often complained about the price of the party and claimed cost as a major contributing factor for not getting married themselves, but when it came to quince, women especially were prepared to save for years in order to organise an over-the-top celebration. Youmara, a Cuban sociologist observed: "The parties now can cost up to 20,000 Cuban pesos [about 870 USD], it's the party of the parents, of the grandmother, they are parties to show off; 'the more I have the more I value'. There are families that lose [i.e. sell] their most important domestic equipment in order to make a party for a day to their daughter for her quince. It is more important to the mother than to the girl."

60 In her discussion on nineteenth-century Cuba, Martinez-Alier states that virginity (before legal marriage) was highly valued and that it still continued to be of great importance in 1969, when she conducted fieldwork in Cuba (1974: 141). Rosendahl (1997: 53, 67) similarly mentions that virginity and chastity are important to women (before entering consensual unions) in her ethnography on 1980s Eastern Cuba (see also Hamilton 2012: 25, 98-100). Since virginity had no value whatsoever amongst my informants (it was a non-topic) there seems to have been either a significant change in this regard since the 1980s or there are great differences between Havana and more rural parts of Cuba (see also Lumsden 1996: 22). However, since also those of my informants who were born in the late 1960s and early 1970s said there was no problem with them starting to have sexual relations around the age of 15, this suggests that virginity did not play a significant role before the Special Period either, at least in Havana. In the larger context of Caribbean kinship and gender relations, disregard for virginity is not surprising (e.g. Smith 1996c).

61 In this sense, quince's portrayal of the girl reflects the idea of "independent production" discussed in Chapter 3.

62 This marks a difference in the position of weddings taking place in Cuba and many other parts of the Caribbean because traditionally weddings have been depicted by researchers as *the* ostentatious ritual representing the marrying couple's high class position in the English-speaking Caribbean (see Clarke 1974: 74-76; Smith 1996a: 149).

Mother-Daughter Relation

Quince is very much a women's tradition and especially important to the girl's female relatives (particularly on the matrilateral side). Even though the whole family often collaborates in the organisation of a girl's quince, it is the mother who bears the most important ritual responsibilities over the celebration. She is the one to plan the party, organise the photo shoot (standing in the queue since early morning because especially the more affordable options are highly popular), rent the location and the dresses, cook food for the party, as well as to organise its serving. The girl's mother is usually present at her photo shoot, telling her to smile and pose in specific ways. She is the one who makes the final decisions about everything in the party and therefore she is also the person who is the most nervous about the successful outcome of the ritual, as stated by Niurka: "In my daughter's quince party I have full responsibility; the mother is the one who decides." The amount of work mothers do to organise a quince is reflected in frequent statements by my female informants that their daughter's party had completely "finished" them.

The girl's mother is the first person a girl thanks for making her "beautiful dream come true" (*la realización de un lindo sueño*) on the occasion of her quince celebration. The girl's mother is in a very central ritual position during the festivities: for example, she walks around the stage with her daughter at the beginning of the celebration. Moreover, the mother was the most likely person to consent to be interviewed regarding her daughter's quince and was sometimes more eager to show me her daughter's quince photos than the girl herself.

Youmara remarked that both the girl's mother and matrilateral grandmother wield great power when deciding the makeup of the whole celebration: "When I ask her [a *quinceañera*]: 'why did you have the photos taken?', the girl says: 'to please my mother, my grandmother.' And that's why they have the party." Even if a girl would rather spend the money on new clothes or on a night out with her friends – although not very common amongst my informants – her mother often insists on a formal fiesta with colonial-type dresses and a large number of invitees.

In the context of the precarious financial situation that the majority of Cubans experience, the ritual is a huge investment on the part of the girl's mother, requiring enormous amounts of time, money, energy, and attention. Odalis, the mother of 13-year-old twin-girls stated this particularly clearly: "I'm the one who is going to celebrate quince and I'm alone, I don't have a father or siblings, I don't have a husband [to help me]." Odalis' statement shows that

while there are significant expectations on the girls' father to provide money for her quince, this often fails to happen.

Some mothers start saving money for their daughter's quince when the girl is born. At the latest two or three years before her daughter's quince, a mother starts planning and stocking up money, food, and drinks according to her possibilities for the daughter's party. Her mother and sisters usually help her in this. I had two informants whose quince party was paid by a matrilateral aunt living in the US and in both cases the party was postponed until the aunt had a holiday and could come to Cuba to attend the fiesta.

If the mother has no kin or a male partner to help her financially, she may try to connect with a man – preferably a wealthy foreigner – around the time of her daughter's quince so that the man would provide the money for the party. It is normal for women to take into account a man's wealth when they assess his attractiveness as a partner, but as their daughter's quince approaches there is extra pressure to provide the money for the occasion in one way or another. While a great part of this expectation is channelled towards the *quinceañera*'s father, the girl's mother is ultimately the person on whom it depends whether her daughter will or will not "have quince." Moreover, since what is at stake is ultimately almost more *her* honour than that of her daughter, it is likely that she will do everything in her power to organise her daughter money at least for the photos, the most important part of the ritual.

Father-Daughter Relation

I have one informant who had not celebrated her quince.[63] Despite the centrality of the *quinceañera*'s mother in the organising of the celebration, Xiomara – the girl without quince – did not harbour bad feelings towards her mother for such neglect. She knew that her mother had absolutely no money to spend on her celebration at the time, in the middle of the Special Period after the fall of the Soviet Union. The mother had spent the little money she had to take her children to the Havana zoo in order to mark her daughter's 15th birthday somehow. However, Xiomara was very bitter towards her father for a long time for not having sent money for her quince.

The girl's father sometimes pays for the photos and the video. Especially if a girl's mother is not able to cover the cost of the photo shoot, the girl's father is expected to pay for it. This is also the reason why Xiomara was so resentful towards her father years after her quince: since he had not sent her money – knowing that her mother did not have the means – she was left without photos; she did not have quince.

63 Curiously, she was also one of the very few informants who suffered from infertility – coinciding with quince as the ritual that makes girls mature and fertile.

Despite the father's generally very marginal position in a girl's quince celebration, important expectations are directed towards the girl's father to provide money for the occasion. Both the girl and her mother expect the father to contribute money, or at the minimum, some other type of material assistance. Failing to meet these demands may have long-term repercussions to a man's relationship with his daughter. In its most extreme, a man's failure to provide money for his daughter's quince may be interpreted as a denial of the relationship altogether, which may lead to a complete break-up of their kin bond. It is thus very important for a man to participate in the expenses of his daughter's quince – in any possible way. It does not matter whether a man has had little (or no) contact with his daughter before she turns 15 or if he has separated from her mother, the expectation is there all the same.

If the girl's father fails to supply her with money, her mother's new partner sometimes takes on the responsibility of providing the money for the party.[64] I had one informant whose mother's new foreign partner paid nearly for her entire quince party – a feisty celebration where the whole neighbourhood was invited. The girl's parents were separated and her father lived in the same neighbourhood, but he avoided the celebration site on the day of the party. My informants stated that the father must have "been ashamed" (*le dio pena*) to have another man pay for the party.[65] The mother's new partner occupied the father's ritual position in the celebration, both escorting the *quinceañera* at her entrance to the party salon as well as dancing the waltz with her. Since he had supplied the great majority of the money for the occasion, he had in a way replaced the girl's biogenetic father in all aspects of the ritual. (However, I was told that the girl took her father a piece of cake after the party, as a way to include him even a little).

The girl's father has a central ritual role in the normative form of the ritual – he is expected to escort his daughter at the entrance to the party and to dance a waltz with her. However, in practice, a girl often dances with another male figure, such as her matrilateral uncle, a cousin, her mother's new spouse, or her own boyfriend. The ritual structure is thus flexible in this regard. For such ritual tasks the girl's father may be easily replaced by another man with no major consequences. However, a man's failure to contribute materially to his daughter's quince is interpreted by his daughter as a serious sign of disregard for their relationship.

A quince party carries the potential for a man to renew and strengthen his relationship with his daughter if he is willing to seize this possibility. If he

64 Sometimes this can also be another male figure who has a close relationship with the girl, for example the mother's ex-partner who was around when the girl was a child.

65 The girl's father gave her a little money, but significantly less than her mother's new partner.

has had little contact with his daughter (sometimes for years), quince provides him an occasion to state his love and care for his daughter and to affirm his position as the girl's father in a socially significant way. However, if he is not able to fulfil the expectations, quince also provides the possibility of creating an even deeper cleavage between himself, his daughter, and the girl's mother.

Sometimes the girl's father pays abundantly for the whole party. If he is not short of money, this is a good opportunity for him to make it socially noticed and let everyone know that he is doing well economically. I had one informant whose father paid for the girl's godmother, the godmother's boyfriend, and a group of other people a flight ticket from Havana to Santiago de Cuba so that they could attend the girl's quince party at the other end of the island. Most Cubans have never been on a plane so this is quite an extreme case of spending from the father's part. Another informant's father was working two jobs and putting money aside for quite some time in order to make a contribution to his daughter's quince. One of my male informants had two daughters by two different mothers that both turned 15 within two months of each other. He contributed money to both girls' parties; in the case of the first daughter, her mother's new foreign partner helped importantly in paying for the party, but Pablo occupied the normative father's position in the ritual. In the case of Pablo's second daughter, her fancy quince party was paid jointly by her father, her mother, her matrilateral grandmother, and her patrilateral sister who had recently migrated to Puerto Rico. (In both cases, the girls' patrilateral grandfather offered to contribute some money for the celebration but their father said that there is no need for it).

Male informants often saw quince as a ritual that is predominately about money and showing off wealth. Women, on the other hand, stressed more quince's position as a very special occasion that happens only once in a lifetime, and as a ritual that is essentially about the *quinceañera*'s beauty and about her mother's accomplishment in raising up such an attractive daughter. Thus the body becomes highlighted in women's views, while men emphasise the significance of wealth.

Men are expected to provide women with money in their kinship relations on various distinct occasions. Indeed, money represents the type of care that is expected from men. In contemporary Cuba, money makes things happen, including things that are of crucial importance for the reproduction of the local kinship system – such as enabling the organising of a girl's quince ritual. In this sense, money is an instrument in the service of reproducing gender difference, for quince parties are what being a girl is about in Cuba: as boys are excluded from such practices, they are ways to reproduce gender

as a difference. But money makes gender also in the sense that money is something that is primarily a contribution that is expected to flow from men to women and children. In this sense, money is an object that makes men's kinship links visible: it materialises a man's position as part of the kinship structure and allows men to create and reproduce relationships as gendered beings.

Marginal Relations in Quince: Patrilateral and Affinal Bonds

During my fieldwork, three of my Cuban father José's sons' daughters turned 15. In the first party – Lizzete's quince – the girl's mother and matrilateral aunt decided upon the guest list and gave Lizzete's father several invitations to be distributed to his family (the party was paid by the mother's new foreign partner and featured a large crowd). The invitations resulted in José, José's spouse (who was not Lizzete's father's mother), José's ('not-biogenetic' and not Lizzete's father's sister in this sense) daughter Liudmila, as well as José's spouse's two daughters (i.e. Yadira and myself, the non-biogenetic daughter) going to the party and all being seated together. In addition, Lizzete's father's brother and his daughter sat in our table and Lizzete's father moved later on to the same table as well. Lizzete herself sat at a table with her mother, her mother's new spouse, her mother's sister, mother's mother, and her matrilateral grandmother's new spouse. During the course of the party Lizzete paid very little notice to her grandfather and patrilateral uncle, concentrating instead on having her photos taken with her matrilateral kin in front of the fancy cake. Yadira frowned upon Lizzete for ignoring her grandfather in such a way – for him the party was a very important ritual occasion. Throughout the party, the girl's attention was centred on her matrilateral kin (and later in the evening on her boyfriend).

In the second and the third party, the guest list was more limited. In Melinda's quince her mother, along with her US-residing matrilateral aunt – who paid for most expenses – decided whom to invite. Melinda's patrilateral grandfather José was invited at the last minute, as well as Melinda's father's brother along with his daughter Lizzete. José was allowed to bring his spouse Caridad, but the rest (of us) – Caridad's children and José's 'non-biogenetic' daughter Liudmila – were disappointed for not being invited to this highly expected party. Melinda's father was embarrassed and very apologetic towards Caridad and her children (myself included) and made his visits to José's and Caridad's home (the centre of family interaction) very short.

The third quince party followed a similar trajectory, with the girl's mother

deciding upon whom to invite to the party and limiting patrilateral and affine kin to Zara's grandfather José, along with his spouse, and to Zara's patrilateral uncle along with his daughter Melinda (Zara's patrilateral cousin). Despite several efforts, I never managed to see these two girls' quince photos even though I was in a regular contact with both girls' fathers; the girls' mothers controlled the photos. This demonstrates the overall marginality of patrilateral – as well as affine – relations in a girl's quince celebration.

Even though girls usually state that the "whole family" participates in the organising of their quince, they usually enumerated siblings, aunts, cousins, uncles, and grandparents, in addition to their mother and father, when asked to be more specific. Although affine kin is sometimes invited to the quince party, girls never mentioned affines separately in their listing of either the persons who had helped to organise the party or the persons invited. It is possible that affines are included in the general concept of "family" (*familia*) but it is equally likely that they are not – my informants used the term *familia* most often to refer to their matrilateral kin. Moreover, as evidence from José's grandchildren's quince parties shows, affines are by no means always invited to the party. Affines thus come across as particularly marginal kin in this regard. Both patrilateral and affine relations therefore appear as potentialities – the quince party gives a possibility to bring them into being via diverse types of contributions towards the celebration, as well as invitations to the party, but at the same time not everyone seizes this potential.

Quince as Reproduction and Producing Fertility

Quince – as a ritual made by women and celebrating girls as potentially reproductive seductresses – connects in an important way with the central importance of the mother-child relationship and the matrifocal form of kinship relations. Because of the strong emphasis on motherhood, it is the girls' coming-of-age ritual that is centrally important in Cuban society.

Girls' transition into fully gendered and sexual adulthood is central because of their important role as mothers in the kin structure. Through her transformation into a mature adult the girl is also transformed into a potential mother. This is significant to the girl's mother, since the growth of the matrifocal kin group boosts her position as a head of the kin group. She is valued because she can claim to have produced another member capable of expanding the matrifocal kinship structure. This is why quince is so important for the girl's mother, why she is congratulated on the side of her daughter, and why she often holds a central position in the organisation of the celebration. This rewards her fifteen years of efforts in raising the girl and

makes her at some stage in the future a potential grandmother or a great-grandmother, the respected head of a kin group. Thereby quince also marks the girl's mother's transition towards a higher-status senior woman.

The photos play an important role in the way in which I interpret the quince ritual as reproducing the matrifocal kinship structure. My informants saw the photos as the proof of the celebration of the girl's quince and thus as a testimony of her womanhood and potential motherhood. This is further emphasised by the fact that these types of ceremonial photos are never taken of boys. Women's eagerness to show around girls' quince photos and videos is a means to make the ritual public; to set the photos and videos into circulation to be seen by a wider audience. As circulating images of female beauty and sexuality, quince photos are pictures that are set to motion by women and circulated amongst the widest possible audience.[66] As such, they represent a women's discourse, but a discourse that circulates amongst everybody, also between men and children. The quince ritual and the circulating photos highlight girls' position as gendered, sexually mature women as a socially central concern in the community. Girls' quince photos also circulate widely in time; historically from one generation to another. This circulation is important to the reproduction of the matrifocal kinship structure because the photographs function as a proof of the girl's maturity and her potential to become a mother and can therefore be regarded as material manifestations of 'matrifocality.'

Quince's History and Relationship with the Socialist State

When examined in the context of Cuba's socialist state ideology, quince represents a return to the past: an imagining of what it was like to be a woman in pre-revolutionary Cuba, a continuation of a tradition that is thought to stem from the era when Cuba was still a Spanish colony. Indeed, my informants conceptualized the ritual in terms of a "tradition" (*tradición*). The state discourse seems to recognise this as well, for it describes the ritual foremost as a leftover of the colonial or bourgeois past (see el Diablo Ilustrado 2006: 199-205).[67] Quince thus represents continuity with the pre-revolutionary past.

66 Currently quince photos are also circulated widely in social media, expanding their publicity.

67 A popular Cuban author writing under the pseudonym *El Diablo Ilustrado* discusses the quince ritual in a local best-seller book (2006). The question as to what degree el Diablo Ilustrado's views can be seen to represent state discourse is a complex one. However, since the quince ritual is highly absent from other sources of state discourse, I believe it is possible here to apply Susan Eckstein's (1994: xiv) statement that "because the print media are state-owned and controlled, they tend to present an *oficialista*, officially approved, view of Cuba" and treat el Diablo Ilustrado's views as representing the state discourse (see also Lumsden 1996: 185).

This aspect of the ritual emerges as of interest when examining historical evidence on quince in Cuba. While it is difficult to locate an exact historical timeline for the practicing of the ritual, it is certain that quince was celebrated by the rich, mainly US-originated upper class in Havana prior to the revolution.[68] A statement from Ismael, a Cuban art historian, refers to this: "[quince parties] have been celebrated for many years. Here before the triumph of the revolution, persons with money used to do it."



FIG. 7: TWO QUINCEAÑERAS AT A PHOTO SHOOT IN HABANA VIEJA

Since the 1959 revolution, the most reliable evidence I have located on the subject are random photos dating from different decades. As I have not come across quince photos dating from the 1960s, and it seems possible that the ritual disappeared completely from any form of public circulation for some time during this period. This might be due to the strict ideological atmosphere of the new revolutionary state when it came to ritual expressions such as quince, the Afro-Cuban *fiestas de santo*, and other religious processions (see Tweed 1997: 26; Wedel 2002: 36-38).[69] Ismael implies this: "For a while these parties [quince parties and Afro-Cuban *fiestas de santo*] were not celebrated

68 See for example any 1958 issue of the newspaper *El Mundo*. I have also seen photos on quince parties from 1950s Havana for which I am deeply grateful to Mrs. Henrietta Pryce.

69 This cultural change affected particularly the diminishing influence of the Catholic Church in the society (Azicri 1988: 89, 188-195, 2000: 251-252, 268) and through this it also introduced changes in rituals (i.e. the practice of Catholic rituals diminished).

due to certain situations... What were done were activities at home with the *quinceañera*: a family fiesta or a meal. Later this tradition of dancing the quince parties came back."

In the mid-1970s, the photos emerge again, although in a more moderate form than in contemporary Cuba, and the same trend seems to have continued throughout the 1980s. Paradoxically, the effervescence of quince celebrations appears to have returned in the 1990s in the midst of the poverty of the post-Soviet Special Period. During this time, quince parties became more lavish, coinciding with the first appearance of the big "colonial" style dresses. The first time I witnessed evidence of such a dress was in a quince photo dating from 1993. The emergence of such dresses in quince photos, as well as the public nature of the ritual achieved by the circulating photos and videos, mirrors the more general ritual upsurge in Cuban society in the 1990s and the opening up of the socialist state towards ritual expressions of diverse types (see Wedel 2002: 38-39; Holbraad 2004: 644-645). Quince is thus a ritual practice that seems to have continued throughout the years of the revolution although adopting more discreet forms during the early revolutionary years and when the state politics relaxed in the 1990s the popularity of quince celebrations exploded – similarly as the celebration of Afro-Cuban religious practices (Holbraad 2004: 644-646).

This continuity is significant, for making a clear break with the pre-revolutionary past – the creation of a New Man and a new society where the old bourgeois-colonial past is rejected – has been a central part of the socialist ideology.[70] However, the transition that quince marks is too important for Cuban women to give up: state pressures to renounce the practicing of non-socialist rituals did not have a lasting effect in this respect. As a girls' coming-of-age ritual quince connects with the continuity of women's kinship relations and personal life projects via the children that are expected to be born to girls when they become women – the children that will add up to the matrifocal kinship structure and ensure its continuity through time.

Conclusion

Quince marks girls' transition into sexual adulthood. At the same time, a girl's mother transits to the position of a higher status female: she becomes a potential grandmother, the respected head of a matrifocal kin group. Her

70 See Díaz Tenorio 1993: 5; Guevara 2005: 2-34; Ramonet and Castro 2007: 202, 215-240, 307, 360, 391, 401-404. The fact that quince was seen with somewhat suspicious eyes by the state authorities can be observed, for instance, in a combined study that the Centre for Youth Studies (*el Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud*) was asked to conduct on the issue of quince and tattoos – indicating that these both were seen as representing possible social problems from the point of view of revolutionary morality; brought about by the more general moral 'decay' of the post-Soviet era (see Jiménez Cantero 2006).

mother becomes esteemed as a senior adult, but this is not yet the peak of her authority, which comes at old age. Still, from this moment on, the girl's mother has her mind set towards her future grandchildren. The ritual employs highly sexual symbolism and its emphasis is on the girl's sexuality as a means of enabling her to have children – the children that allow the reproduction and continuation of the matrifocal kin group. The girl's matrilateral kin is eager to help her mother in organising the girl's party because the children that the girl will have in the future contribute to the growth of the whole kin group.

At the same time, while the ritual highlights the relationship between a mother and a daughter, matrilateral kin relations, and female transition, certain contributions are expected from the girl's father at this life stage. These may play a significant role in determining a woman's relationship with her father later in life. Neglecting his daughter's expectations of material support for her quince may incite the girl to reciprocate her father's neglect later in life by refusing to restore her relationship with him when he is old. Thus, for a man, his daughter's quince represents the occasion to either affirm or undermine his position as a father.

The girl's larger patrilateral kin has an opportunity to reinforce their relationship with the girl, but they represent marginal kin at this life stage. While no specific contributions are expected from them, they may choose to contribute, thus reinforcing their relationship with the girl and her matrilateral kin. The patrilateral kin may also step in to help the girl's father in gathering the contributions that are expected from him for his daughter's party. Affine kin relations come across as particularly marginal kin in this regard, but the celebration offers the opportunity to a mutual reinforcing of the relationships between the girl, her matrilateral kin, and her affines.

Quince is a highly popular ritual and occupies a central position in the context of other life cycle rituals. This, along with the ritual's continued celebration in the context of state socialism, shows that the ritual marks such an important transition that state pressures for change are not likely to make women give up marking the transition in some way, even if quince's ritual symbolism may undergo changes over the years. Quince accentuates the gender difference as a crucial social division in Cuban society – without which there would be no sexuality, no reproduction, no children, and no kinship relations.

5. Nobody Likes Sleeping Alone: Love, Sexuality, and Adult Gender Relations

Introduction

"It's better be with someone than to be alone" said Yuniel about his girlfriend that he had met recently, while already contemplating on terminating his relationship with her. Sexual and love relations form a significant way of creating wide networks of social relations. Such alliances are not only important as such – having a partner prevents solitude and affirms one's sexuality – but also because they carry the potential to create new relationships, both through the birth of children and through the expansion of contacts by links of affinity. This chapter examines adult relations between genders and the making and breaking of alliances.

Despite the high value that Cubans place on living in couples, relationships are often fragile and complicated. The dynamics of love and break-up relate significantly to the praxis of gendered reciprocal care in relationships. In my understanding of Cuban practices of care, I draw on Jennifer Cole's (2009) discussion on gender relations in Madagascar. Cole describes a long-term local conceptualisation of love as both material and moral/emotional, acted out in reciprocal exchanges of goods and labour shared among social networks. However, she argues that recent political and economic changes, such as the increased inequalities and heightened monetisation, are connected with changes in local notions of love. This has brought about new meanings to the concept of love as well as created problems, distorting the idea of love as a reciprocal emotional-material exchange between men and women. (Cole 2009). In contemporary Havana, love, attraction, and material wealth are complexly intertwined. Although the Caribbean has a long history of fragile gender relations (e.g. Clarke 1974; Martinez-Alier 1974: 124-130; Morris 1979; Smith 1988, 1996a; Barrow 1996: 181, 439; Olwig 1996; Simey 1996: 39), I find Cole's approach helpful in trying to examine the dynamics of this instability, as well as to understand the ways in which the meanings of love may have shifted during the post-Soviet period.

This chapter pays particular attention to the various ways in which the expected notion of gendered reciprocal care becomes distorted in the practice of love and sexual relations. Some Cubans struggle to fulfil the requirements of gendered reciprocity, whereas others may have great reservations in engaging in relationships due to the difficult nature that love and sexual relations often represent in practice. Distortions of the gendered reciprocal care easily lead to the break-up of the relationship. Moreover, gendered

practices and notions of sexual desire, passion, jealousy, and control may all both affirm and undermine an alliance between a man and a woman, breaking the reciprocal care that reproduces bonds between them. Thus, breaking up is a matter of scale rather than an essential change of quality in the relationship.

Love and sexuality are conceptualised as something uncontrollable and potentially dangerous because they have the potential to create deep feelings of attachment and dependency on one's object of affect that undermine a person's individual's will and rationality. This type of conceptualisation of love as a deep, passionate emotion conforms to the notion of romantic love that is frequently seen as an individualising force as it embraces personal choice and a couple's autonomy over larger kinship concerns (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006: 10-13; Cole and Thomas 2009: 10-12; see also Wardlow 2006a). In Cuba, the history of romantic love dates at least to the 19th century (see Villaverde 2005). At the same time sexual and love relations take place between social persons whose lives are deeply embedded in larger webs of kin relations.

As kinship is an area of deep emotional attachments, sexual love is often negotiated in the tumultuous intertwining of other types of connections. Heterosexual relations create gendered conflicts especially between a man's mother and his partner. This easily leads to conflicting demands in terms of men's material contributions. While conflicts between consanguines and affines have for long been noted to characterise Caribbean kinship by R. T. Smith (1988, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c, 1996d) and others (e.g. Clarke 1974), I suggest that these should be seen as significantly gendered due to the gendered nature of the contributions of both parties in the relationship. Moreover, these conflicts connect with gendered differences in the ways in which men and women experience and relate to passionate love.

This suggests that the relationship between love and personhood is more complex than a straight-out opposition between individual passion and a more relational orientation towards kinship concerns. Engaging in sexual relations is a fundamental aspect of marking adult status, thus reproducing generational distinctions (Cole and Thomas 2009: 5). Love relations between adults are characterised by intense emotions, passion, and sexual desire that are significant as such, but they simultaneously form part of a larger whole as a stage in the reproduction of the kinship system. Sexual desire is what draws men and women together – creating reciprocal care between them – as well as enables the birth of children, bringing about intergenerational care and reproducing kinship. Even though affine relations with kin are often difficult, alliances are also desired by lovers' kin members because it is not good for

anyone to be alone. This makes sexual love and kinship relations complexly intertwined – in good and in bad.

Recently, same-sex relations have emerged as a new form of alliance in Cuban society. However, in practice same-sex relations continue to be relatively marginalised socially and heterosexuality is strongly emphasised (see also Lumsden 1996: 86; Lundgren 2011: 144-163). According to my informants, homosexual and heterosexual relations differ in the types of alliances that are created and reproduced via them. Even though many heterosexual unions do not result in the birth of children, heterosexual relations are conceptualised through their potential to generate new kin members, thus reproducing the family structure in a form that has continuity in time. Thereby, for many heterosexual informants, same-sex alliances represent a disruption of how the life cycle should develop. In order to further examine the intertwining of gender, sexuality, and reproduction, I will discuss local notions of same-sex sexuality – often approached in the theoretical literature via the notion of "homophobia" (Allen 2011: 67; Hamilton 2012: 117-148) – from the point of view of family dynamics and their implications on a person's expected life course.

Gendered Attractiveness

> *Yadira and Livian met in her neighbourhood when Livian gave Yadira a lift in his car. Since she was a pretty mulata and he was single, he asked her out. She agreed, and he took her on a few dates to bars to drink beer and eat chicken. After a few meetings (and some kisses exchanged), he appeared to her door with his bags in order to move in with her. Yadira lived alone in a two-room house but she was not particularly pleased with his move.*[71] *However, since Cubans are often very bad at saying 'no' and since she wanted to avoid arguments in the new relationship, she allowed him to stay. After moving in, Livian immediately started to buy Yadira household utensils (such as a series of proper knives and a casserole), and to fix the house by painting and doing other little jobs. Via his work as a chauffeur, Livian had access to a car and he drove Yadira to work early in the mornings, saving her from East Havana's very crowded and unreliable public buses. The car also allowed them to do little trips on weekends and to engage in Yadira's favourite past time: spending a day at the beach without the bothersome public transportation of getting there. Almost every day, Livian brought home food and beer to which he had access via his work and she cooked a meal for him. Livian often took Yadira out to bars and restaurants on weekends and gave her 100 Cuban pesos (about 4,50 USD) every month. Yadira, however did not find him attractive – for her taste he was too dark-skinned (they were both mulatos but she was lighter than him); at 40 too old (even though they were nearly the same age), and not good-looking. However, this new life-style appealed to her and the extra money allowed her to fix her house and buy new*

71 I usually shared Yadira's flat with her but when this happened I was temporarily living elsewhere.

> *furniture. Moreover, Yadira's biggest dream was to have a child and her mother and sister constantly urged her to settle down with a proper man who does not cheat on her, who works, and fixes the house.*

Yadira's and Livian's story exemplifies the expectations of gendered reciprocal care that create and reproduce love and sexual relationships. Many of these intertwine with material possessions: Livian is interested in gaining access to Yadira's house, she is attracted to his car, money, and the amusements he is able to offer her. Moreover, the fact that they are both over the usual childbearing age and childless emphasises the expectations that they both face from the part of kin and other people to settle down with a permanent partner and start a family – conforming also to (especially Yadira's) personal wishes of parenthood.

For both men and women, wealth and material possessions are factors that increase their appeal as partners. Access to housing increases a person's attractiveness in the eyes of possible partners and may sometimes represent the main reason for entering a relationship. Havana continues to be filled with deteriorated and over-crowded apartments, making anyone with access to decent housing a good catch.[72] For men in particular, owning a residence grants advantage in attracting women, as this places a man in the position of a well-established man mature enough to start a family. For a woman, having a place of her own gives security and more freedom to choose her lovers. Hamilton notes that since pre-revolutionary times, heterosexual relationships have provided Cuban women with a way to acquire housing (2012: 220, 224-226, 229). This increases the importance that having access to (decent) housing has to a man's ability to attract partners. While Pertierra (2008) argues that during the post-Soviet era, the household has increased its symbolic value for women, I suggest that housing also holds central value to men. As the ideas of family and home/house (*casa*) often merge in Cuba (Pertierra 2008: 753-754), housing – through the notion of a "family home" – becomes connected to security, stability, and kinship continuity.[73] Although in practice Havana's on-going housing crisis often forces Cubans to negotiate this ideal, providing housing for his partner forms part of local conceptualisations of responsible masculinity and gives a man significant appeal in the field of love and sexuality. Women, on the other hand, may have ambivalent feelings about the issue when such gendered expectations are reversed. Thereby the importance of housing has to be understood in the context of the overall gendered

72 *Havana Times* (Morales 2013) points out that in Cuba there are approximately 3,3 million residences (for a population of over 11 million), 57 % of which are in a bad condition.

73 Housing is the most important material possession that is passed down as inheritance at old age, representing a significant piece of wealth throughout the life cycle. In other parts of the Caribbean, notions of kinship continuity are importantly connected to land (see Besson: 2002; Mintz 2010 [1989]). However, Karen Richman (2005) states that in Haiti, the house occupies a position of central importance.

conceptualisation of male and female contributions in a relationship.

Consumption is another factor closely intertwined with attraction, significantly gendered, and linked to conceptualisations of desirable masculinity. Allen (2011: 38) notes that in contemporary Havana, wealth must be worn and consumed, and conforming to this view, when meeting a new man, my female informants usually assessed his wealth on the basis of the types of clothes, watch, and shoes he was wearing, as well as on the basis of his use of money. In order to be able to go out on a date, a man needs to have money: both men and women told me that a Cuban woman does not take any money with her when she goes out with a man. For female informants, dating was not only a fun diversion but importantly a means to eat and drink better than normally, to achieve various little gifts, and to fulfil their desires of accessing items and places that are considered luxuries (such as a weekend in a house at the beach or a pair of new shoes). One of my female informants was rather straightforward in her views about dating: the more she could get the man to buy her things, the more successful she considered the night.

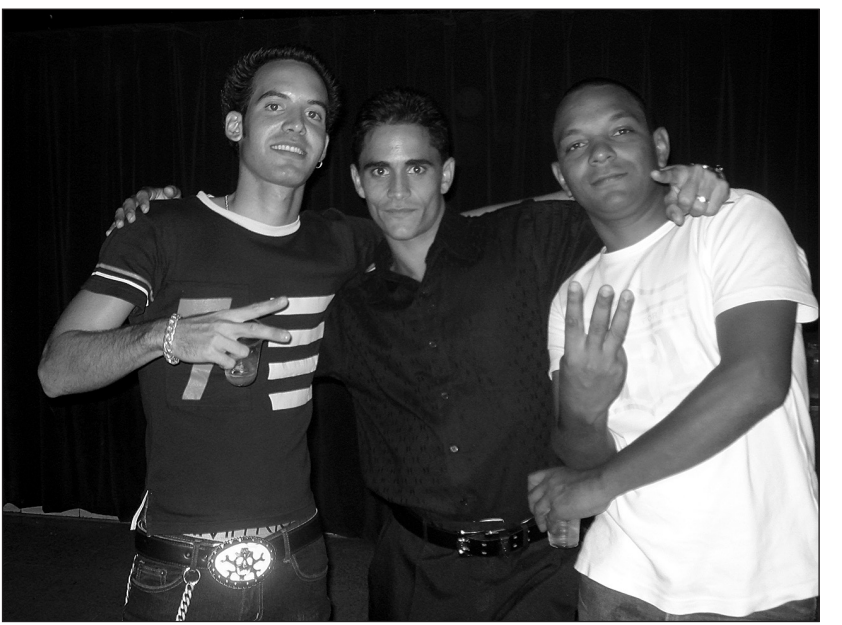

FIG.8: YOUNG MEN ENJOYING A NIGHT OUT

In the context of most of my male informants' low-income levels and Cuba's high prices, such gendered courting practices place a big strain on a man's income.[74] A night out in a disco may take up an entire month's wage, even

74 Most entertainment places operate in the expensive CUC economy. The majority of the population are paid in Cu-

more. While women spend their money primarily on food, buying things for their household, for their children, and consanguine (matrilateral) family members, men spend much of their money on the women with whom they are romantically involved or with whom they wish to be romantically involved. This makes it important for a man to have money because without it, he often struggles to find a date or a partner.

Mark Hunter describes similar notions of desirable masculinity in South Africa, where in the midst of economic difficulties since the 1980s, the ability to consume and shower girlfriends with gifts became the qualities that women find the most attractive in men, as opposed to the previous views that emphasised hard work and the ability to provide bride wealth (Hunter 2009: 146-152). Cole and Thomas (2009: 22) connect this with a shift from an economy of production towards an economy of consumption. Although there are great differences between the Cuban context and the South African situation described by Hunter, his data shows similarities with the ways in which my female informants emphasised a man's wealth and his ability to spend as central to his desirability as a partner. While Cuba can hardly be considered to represent an economy of consumption as such (there is little to consume), this does suggest that Cubans' intensified desires for consumption (Porter 2008) intertwine importantly with gendered expectations in love and sexual relations – at the same time as exemplifying the continuing significance of generosity to notions of masculinity (Rosendahl 1997: 48, 62; see also Holbraad 2004). In a transformed situation, more long-term conceptualisations of masculinity are reworked by women to place new demands on men (Hunter 2009: 148).

Although there are men who enter into relationships with women in arrangements in which money flows from the woman to the man and not vice versa, this is an inversion of how things *should* go. Some of my male informants felt uncomfortable with such gendered exchanges and many women considered that a man should take money from a woman only in the case of an extreme emergency (for example, if his mother was very ill and he needed to buy medicine).

In the context of contemporary social relations, money is importantly gendered; it is something that men are expected to contribute to women in a system of reciprocal exchange where women respond with nurture, sexual access, and children. This does not mean that women would not desire sexual relationships with men if it were not for the money, but rather that money is

ban pesos (MN, *moneda nacional*) while most commodities are sold in *pesos convertibles* (CUC) – a currency that replaced the US dollar in circulation in 2004. The CUC economy is more expensive than the peso economy, yet CUCs are currently indispensable for day-to-day survival.

an object that allows men to create relationships; both sexual and non-sexual. While women also have their own money, money is importantly the means via which a man expresses an interest towards a woman: giving her little material gifts and taking her out to eat, for drinks, or dancing. It is via his material contributions to her that she assesses whether he is a responsible man and someone who can help her in life. For women, receiving money and material support from their partner represents the correct way in which a man should behave towards them and confirms their femininity. A man's provision of material support therefore becomes an evidence of his emotional commitment (Cole and Thomas 2009: 24).

Although wealth has played a role in women's views of a desirable partner also in the past, its significance to men's ability to attract partners seems to have gained more prominence since the 1990s. In her account on 1980's Eastern Cuba, Rosendahl (1997: 69) states that even though women expected material contributions from their partners, a man's wealth was not particularly significant to his attractiveness to women. Women stressed instead the importance of finding a "good" man who takes care of them and respects them (Rosendahl 1997: 69). However, in contemporary Havana, regular monetary contributions to his partner are what make a man "good." This suggests that while the importance of a man's wealth to his attractiveness to women is not anything new as such, its significance has intensified in the post-Soviet era in the context of the declining state contributions and the heightened monetisation of day-to-day life.

This relates ambiguously to the findings of Safa (2005, 2009) and Pertierra (2008), who argue that the post-Soviet era has seen an increase in the position of women as the primary providers for their households. Pertierra (2008) argues that during the Special Period, the work done by women has become more prevalent and important to the household economy, at the same time as men have lost their employment in the public state sector. Pertierra states that by engaging in informal employment at home, women contribute larger shares to the household economy and depend less on men. These dissimilarities between Pertierra's and my findings may reflect differences between my lower-income *habanero* informants and her *Santiaguero* research participants.[75] Nevertheless, this perspective does not take into account the high degree of female employment embraced by the state already during the Soviet era (e.g. Eckstein 1994: 144). Moreover, it does not take into consideration that even though employment in the state sector diminishes, which affects both men and women, men as well work extensively in the informal economy ("*en la calle*") and their earnings are often higher than women's. Stubbs (1997: 255) points out that since the 1990s, women "appear to

75 Safa's argument, however, draws on data from Havana.

be retreating back into a family survival role." Andaya's (2007: 212-220) views on the increased feminisation of nurturance also point to this direction. Even though she argues that matricentrality has become emphasised "both as a gendered ideology and a familial economic strategy" during the post-Soviet period due to the weakening socialist state (Andaya 2007: 220), she acknowledges that ideas about the male provider have simultaneously resurfaced (2007: 232).

As the state security nets continue to crumble, the current trend seems to be women's greater dependence on their male partners. While it is likely that women contribute more to the household economy via their increased income-generating activities at home, this should be examined in the context of increased informal labour of *all kinds* in post-Soviet Cuba. On the other hand, everything has simultaneously become more expensive, particularly in the CUC economy. A neighbour cannot raise the price of manicures (5-10 pesos; about 0.20-0.40 USD) or the *pancitos* (little sandwiches) that she sells in the street for one peso (0.04 USD). As a result, such typically female forms of employment yield too little money to be the sole source of income. My ethnography suggests that in contemporary Havana – characterised by the seriously undermined state subsidies and services – women are significantly dependent on men's contributions, even if in practice in some families and/or households the majority of income may be provided by women.[76] This is experienced through a type of an ideal on the male provider that characterises gender relations: if a woman is romantically/sexually involved with a man, there is a strong expectation on him to provide her with some money, gifts, and food.

Women's beauty connects importantly with their possibilities to gain access to men's material contributions. As beauty enables women to attract wealthy partners, it becomes an important asset that carries the potential to create real material consequences. Alexander Edmonds (2007), in discussing the huge popularity of plastic surgery amongst Brazilian women, argues that during the last two decades, neoliberal state policies in Brazil have made beauty more important for women in the midst of the constantly growing (economic and racial) inequalities and anxieties surrounding the new markets of work and sex, for in a neoliberal society, poor women can only gain social mobility via their beauty. Discussing Soviet-era Cuba, Rosendahl mentions that it is important for women to be attractive (1997: 66), but in the absence of other evidence it is difficult to say whether being beautiful has become more important to Cuban women during the post-Soviet period. While Cuba lacks

76 The Caribbean has a long history of non-white, lower-income women in particular working outside of home, although this has been connected more profoundly with the English-speaking Caribbean (e.g. Mintz 1971; Clarke 1974: 152; Wong 1996).

capitalist work markets, since the 1990s the increasing inequalities of wealth, the continuous deficiencies in state subsidies, changing possibilities of social mobility, and the heightened monetisation, may all contribute to making beauty more important for women. Beauty increases a woman's chances of attracting wealthy (or foreign) partners – important in helping her to patch up for the deficiencies left by the declining state subsidies and systems of support. The significance of beauty to women highlights the ways in which focus on the body takes shape as a gendered process.

Although good looks may occasionally provide material advantages also to men, their appearance is not significant in the same way. A man may always overcome his lack of good looks with money. While I frequently heard women referring to a man as so unappealing that he could *only* attract a sexual partner with money, I never heard of a man being referred to as so unattractive that he could *not* attract a woman with money. Yet, when it comes to women, both men and women considered that some women are *so* unappealing that they could not attract a man (to have sex with them) *even* for a payment. Thus, money is a way for a man to overcome shortages in any of the other types of factors of attraction, while women have little cure if they are not pretty. [77] However, this conceptualisation does not as such suggest an opposition between love and money but rather between money and physical attractiveness.

At the same time, these contemporary conceptualisations of gendered attractiveness often result in the reproduction of situations that are reminiscent of Caribbean sexual arrangements in the past. Frequently, the types of wealthier men sought after by many women are relatively older and lighter-skinned than the women with whom they partner.[78] The current meanings relating to beauty, attraction, and wealth thereby reproduce inequalities between men and women and inequalities *amongst* men and amongst women that draw on more long-term gendered and racialised conceptualisations and hierarchies in their practical outcome. Women experience such pressures importantly via the significance of beauty as an avenue for social mobility because they gain power and agency as sexual beings via their bodies – the potential locus of both seductive beauty and reproduction. At the same time, the contemporary importance of wealth and consumption in gender relations places pressure on men to have money for without wealth, a man may struggle to find a partner – and eventually, to have children.

77 On the other hand, the conceptualisation of men as 'by their nature' constantly desirous of sexual contact contradicts this idea.

78 This relates ambiguously to racialised conceptualisations of beauty. Both men and women named a "*mulata /mulato* with green eyes" as their beauty ideal.

This suggests gendered differences in the ways love and sexuality are experienced and shows how forms of emotion connect with gendered notions of the body and attractiveness. While women become valued via their beautiful bodies as objects of male passion, men become marked most of all by their ability to provide reciprocal contributions.

Moral Economies of Gendered Care: Negotiating Love through Food, Gifts, and Labour

As the case of Yadira and Livian shows, in a relationship, a man is expected to give gifts to the woman, whether this is food, drink, flowers, or other material objects (ranging from a tube of toothpaste to a pair of shoes). While this practice easily fades in long-term unions, there are strong cultural expectations on such romantic gestures from the man's part. Most often these gifts are food and even though flowing from men to women, they frequently end up circulating for the benefit of a larger group of people than the receiving woman alone when the food is distributed amongst the woman's (matrilateral) kin and children. Such resources are thus socially shared, conforming to notions of gendered reciprocity.

Food, in particular, connects strongly with showing love and care in relationships. This association is so strong that a man's alimentary contributions to his partner and her children may make a woman tolerate many other types of misgivings from him. A statement from Yenny, an elderly woman, exemplifies this: "I'm lucky because I have never had to be hungry or needy (*necesidad*); Yeichel's father had his issues (*tenía sus cosas*) but I never lacked a plate of food on the table; he always brought food first to his family." If Yeichel's father had not cared to provide food for his family, Yenny would have interpreted this as a complete lack of interest and would have perhaps separated from her partner much faster. However, since his alimentary contributions signalled his love and care towards her, Yenny stayed for 15 years with a man who cheated on her openly with several other women and was violent towards her and her children. His alimentary contributions to her and her children kept up an image of him as a man who cares about his family.

While money is the type of care that, at least at an ideal level, flows unilaterally from men to women in the context of sexual relationships, food is care that flows in all directions. At the same time, food exchanges and their circulation in social relations are largely gendered and in the context of sexual relations, there is some degree of gendered dynamics in terms of the raw and the cooked (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Sahlins 1983): men usually give women raw food and women reciprocate by preparing food for their partners. There are

exceptions to this, for instance, if a man works as a chef and brings home food to his partner. On festive occasions, the cooking of pork is always done by men outside. While men may cook on special occasions or sometimes on weekends, women usually do the everyday food preparation. For instance, after we had eaten in a restaurant, 12-year-old Cheena gave her view on why the food was bad: "All the people cooking were men, that's why." In her view, men were not expected to know how to cook, emphasising the gendered character of cooked food. Knowing how to prepare food is seen as a priority for a woman in a relationship. Before Yadira entered into a relationship with Livian, she used to eat daily at her mother's. However, when Livian moved in with her, she started to cook for him, even though she greatly disliked cooking. Cooked food becomes an evidence of a woman's care and love for her partner.

As we saw in Chapter 1, this significance of food as care also connects with the body. A person's well-fed body may function as a proof of his/her partner's love for him/her. In order to convince his female kin of the happiness of his new relationship, Leonardo stated: "Everybody sees that I'm not lacking food from the table, Tania cooks for me. [He gave a pat on his stomach:] I'm getting fat." Leonardo's fatness therefore functions as a visible proof of Tania's love and care for her partner. The signs of this gendered care or its neglect – either from the part of men's supply of food or women's preparation of it – show in an individual's body, as the care that materialises via food shapes Cuban perceptions of bodies. Thereby, food plays a significant role in creating and reproducing social relations, whether in gender relations or between kin. While food provides a way to negotiate love and care in social relations, it also allows people to express critique and conflicts.

Via accusations of neglect, food provides a channel for the affine conflict that often takes place between a man's partner and his female kin. When Leonardo's female kin was suspicious of his new relationship with Tania (a significantly older woman), he had an argument with his mother and matrilateral aunt, stating: "When I was unemployed, sick for a year, the one who put me the plate on the table was not [my mother] Edolaisa or my aunt Niurka but Tania!" Here Leonardo's critique to his female kin is particularly sharp because he accuses his mother – the person who should bear the primary responsibility over his welfare – of neglecting him. The fact that Tania provided food to Leonardo when he was in a particularly weak condition and unable to participate in the normal gendered exchange between men and women, proves the love that Tania feels for him.

Domestic labour is another practice that is strongly gendered and easily becomes a source of quarrel between a man's female kin and his partner. It

is seen as nearly impossible for a man to live in a household on his own since he needs a woman to do the domestic work for him (cook, clean the house, do laundry, dishes, iron, as well as to take care of children – see also Rosendahl 1997: 56).[79] If a man looks somehow badly groomed or scruffy – for instance, his clothes are dirty or wrinkled – the blame falls on his female partner (or in the case of young boys, on his mother and sisters). This is seen as a sign that the man's partner is not taking as good care of him as she should. Such behaviour from the part of a woman in a relationship is easily seen as abusive from the point of view of the man's female kin, who may think that the man is doing his part correctly while his partner comes across as being unilaterally at the receiving end of the relationship. A man's mother in particular easily states to her son that his partner is guilty of such neglect, emphasising instead the amount of housework that *she herself* does for him (and the reason she has to do *so much* work is because his partner does not do her *fair* share).

For a man's mother, such accusations function as a way to claim priority of 'ownership' of her son over his partner. Rosendahl mentions similar accusations taking place from the part of women to their husbands as a way to protest, but also to affirm, the relationship (1997: 72-73). Domestic work therefore becomes a measure in the moral economy of loving care in the conflict between a man's partner and his mother. The work done by a woman in a love relationship participates simultaneously in two kinds of moral exchanges: one is the reciprocal bond she has with her partner, but the other is the affine relationship she maintains with the man's mother, where one woman's contributions should all the time try to outweigh the labour of the other. Housework therefore becomes the measure of a woman's love.

For a man, such a moral economy of loving care consists of his use of money and engagement in distinct types of labour. Men easily direct a great deal of their time and energy towards the women for whom they have affection and women expect men to do several tasks for them in a relationship (some women are even rather skilled in having their admirers work to their advantage). Performing heavy duties and running errands for his partner therefore becomes a sign of a man's affection for a woman. The woman's home is usually the centrepiece of such male labour. A man may take up the fixing of a woman's home, whether this includes bricklaying (for instance, in order to build a bathroom), digging a well, or painting the walls. The couple's joint labour therefore focuses on the household: the man builds the house, makes home improvement, and fixes anything that is broken and the woman takes care of the interior of the house through cleaning and cooking.

79 The Cuban Family Law (*Código de Familia*) makes domestic work the responsibility of both partners (*articulo II, sección primera, capitulo* 26), but in practice this is strongly gendered.

However, the way in which a man uses his time and the work he does for his partner easily becomes a source of affine conflict. Mothers often blame their sons for spending too much time at their partner's household doing work for her, while neglecting to help their mother at home (and often such accusations are not too far-fetched).[80] This flow of labour, time, and material gifts from men to the women to whom they are attracted is a constant source of quarrel between sons and mothers and often leads to a conflict between a man's mother and his partner over his money and material resources.[81] This dynamics easily results in mothers (and other female kin) welcoming a daughter's partners to the family more eagerly than a son's because the social expectation is on men to contribute material resources to the woman's family (as sons-in-law) whereas women are seen as 'draining' resources from the (man's) family (as daughters-in-law). At the same time, such considerations are never based on economic considerations alone and all mothers want their sons to eventually have a partner. Even though the father's kin can claim fewer rights on children, (as they belong primarily to their mother's kin group), the importance of having (grand)children is more significant than any pragmatic considerations that a man's female kin may have regarding his partner.

These problems in affine relations are affective conflicts that centre on the negotiation of female nurturance and male contributions as signs of love. They further exemplify the view that Cubans hold of men as being more likely to neglect their mother as they "lose their head" (*perder la cabeza*) over women, whereas women are seen as more reliable in their feelings of responsibility and attachment towards their kin. This shows that the affine conflicts typical for Caribbean kinship should be understood as importantly gendered. Moreover, this highlights the interconnected character of sexuality and kin relations and the significance of strong emotional attachments to both. Consequently, the praxis of gender relations sits uncomfortably with the idea of a dichotomisation between kinship (as 'structural reproduction') on the one hand and sexual love (as 'individual emotion') on the other.

Moreover, gendered labour is a way to reproduce gender as a difference and in this process also heterosexuality. This is exemplified by the fact that doing housework undermines a man's masculinity. Rosendahl mentions that men do housework only at night so that nobody can see them because this might contribute to them being viewed as homosexuals (1997: 62-63). Gender becomes

80 The man's partner, on the other hand, rarely engages in similar accusations towards his mother. It would be very unwise for a woman to directly criticise his partner's mother in his presence. Due to the highly respected position that mothers hold, this could easily lead to a severe conflict.

81 Sometimes even the woman who receives a man's gifts and contributions may herself frown upon him for spending all of his money on her and neglecting his mother – while at the same time being content to receive such needed material help from her partner.

reproduced as a difference via distinct day-to-day practices, intertwining heterosexuality with gendered reciprocity. For these two reasons – the role of gendered reciprocity as a measure of love and care and the significance of the division of labour in the reproduction of the gender difference – such practices do not change easily. This also illustrates how the praxis of Cuban gender relations differs from Western feminist notions. Although women may reject the amount of labour brought by having a man in the house, in my experience they do not usually complain about this division of labour as such (i.e. expect men to do more housework, cf. Rosendahl 1997: 23, 53-54, 72-73; Andaya 2007: 202-203; Hamilton 2012: 90-96), but rather criticise men's lack of material contributions to them (which I will discuss below).[82] If a man doing housework undermines both his partner's love for him (implying that she does not love him because she does not show it via domestic praxis), as well as his position as a man, it is understandable that the revolution has not been successful in its efforts to transform such gendered practices.

Another example of a similarly ingrained gendered aspect of everyday life is provided by the meanings and practices associated with machismo.

Respect, Control, and Jealousy

In a relationship, a man is expected to display assertiveness and a dominant position as well as to protect the honour of his female partner. Another man trying to dance with his partner or talking to her while he is out with her is viewed as an effort to pick her up and a grave challenge to his masculinity. In such cases, a man is easily expected to react with physical violence because failing to do so may compromise his masculinity both in the eyes of other men as well as in those of his partner (who may even opt to leave with the other man who does not lack masculinity).

Cubans often say of foreign men in particular that they are "floppy" (*flojos*) in their control over their female partners because, for instance in a nightclub they let their partners dance with Cuban men in front of their eyes although "a Cuban man always has bad deeds in his mind" (*el cubano siempre tiene el mal en la cabeza*). In tourist locations, both men and women may openly try to openly seduce a foreigner accompanied by a (non-Cuban) partner in ways that a Cuban partner would never permit. Foreigners are thought of as being weak, allowing local men to show dominant masculinity and women to display their superior skills of seduction in relation to foreign women. In addition to being 'nationalised,' such interactions are also racialised so that white Cubans are seen as more "floppy" than others and non-white Cubans possessing

82 Women rarely lack in nurturing care without being seen as completely abnormal. See also Pertierra (2008) who argues that maintaining their household clean and their kin well fed is a source of personal pride for women.

greater skills of seduction than whites. This is a way to turn around the imbalance of wealth, power, and racial meanings that are connected to the global tourist industry. Although women reject some aspects of machismo, male assertiveness and a man's position as a *machote* are considered sexually attractive and highly desirable. In this sense, manliness depends importantly on an individual's public performances of masculinity (see also Lumsden 1996: 133, 153; Allen 2011: 35-38; Lundgren 2011: 96-111).

If a man's partner behaves badly in public, this reflects on him and puts his masculinity at risk. Men are usually very possessive of their partners and unwilling to let a woman do things such as to go to a party unaccompanied.[83] Such events immediately imply the possibility of infidelity and provoke jealousy. A male informant told me that a man should feel that he is in full control of his partner: "A *latino* likes to have all the reigns in his hand, he wants everybody to know that you're no longer free, that you have a master (*quiere que todo el mundo sepa que tú ya no eres suelta, que tú tienes un dueño*)." Ideally from the male point of view, the man controls the relationship and the woman should depend on him in some way – either in terms of money or housing (see also Lundgren 2011: 62-67). However, women often have a somewhat different view of the desirable relationship dynamics, which easily incites men to describe them as deceitful and "bad." At the same time, a degree of independence is attractive also in a woman: a person who submits to her partner's every wish is described as a *comemierda* (a shit-eater) – someone who lets others take advantage of herself and does not claim for herself the appropriate reciprocity and thereby does not deserve good treatment.[84] Moreover, women are possessive of their partner as well and are expected to react with anger and even physical violence if another woman tries to seduce him. Respect and possessiveness are thus qualities that define both genders, although men are expected and permitted to display them to a greater degree.

Jealousy is seen as an inextricable part of love and sexuality. Cubans say: "who is not jealous, doesn't love" (*si no cela no ama*). Jealousy is seen as an expression of passionate love in both men and women. Statements of jealousy are a means to claim possession of one's partner (Rosendahl 1997: 72) as well as to affirm heterosexual desirability in a relationship (Lundgren 2011: 51-62). Thus, jealousy affirms the alliance. Both men and women take a certain pride over their partner's jealousy because this confirms their partner's love for them and gives them a certain position of dominance in a relationship, as the desired

83 Lundgren (2011: 57) points out that it is also unwise for a woman to do such things because this reflects badly on her partner's masculinity, which in turn reflects badly on her if she is with a man who is seen to be lacking masculinity.

84 The same notion applies to men. *Comemierda* is one of the worst insults in Cuba.

partner has the other 'wrapped around his/her finger.'[85] The one who loves more is more jealous. At the same time, displays of jealousy are a way to avoid being (emotionally) mistreated by one's partner. Since the state of being in love puts a person in a vulnerable position, someone who is not jealous over his/her partner is seen either as emotionally indifferent towards the partner or as a fool who is not smart enough to supervise him/her. Not displaying jealousy is therefore interpreted either as being a *comemierda* since this implies that one does not know how to keep hold of what is one's own, or as a lack of love when non-jealousy becomes indifference. Both scenarios are likely to almost 'invite' infidelity from the partner: if someone is 'too stupid' to keep his/her partner at bay, it is seen as fair enough for him/her to suffer infidelity. If non-jealousy is interpreted as a lack of love, it is also thought that the other partner can seek out someone else – such events might even re-evoke his/her partner's original feelings of love and jealousy.

Even though jealousy in a relationship concerns both men and women, there are differences in the ways in which men and women experience and display jealousy. In this regard, there is thus a degree of gendered complementarity in emotions (Lutz 1988: 143). Since women's relationships were often based on more 'reasoning' than men's amongst my informants, men were more worried that women deceive them. Moreover, jealousy is socially more acceptable and encouraged in men than in women. Jealousy is a way to show a man's machismo, his fierce and passionate nature, and women may take pride in recounting to other women the types of insanities their partner has done when caught by mad jealousy. Tortured by jealousy, a man may sit by the roadside close to the woman's home in order to keep track of her comings and goings or of any passing men.[86] At her home, he may search through her belongings, questioning the woman where she acquired them. If he finds objects that he suspects to be gifts from another man, he may destroy them in rage – displaying the close connection between sexuality, love, and materiality. In a moment of intense jealousy, a young male informant even produced a gun, showing it to his girlfriend and threatening to kill her if he ever caught her with another man.[87]As described by my male informants,

85 Lundgren points out that this is why it is the better to invent more clever ways to keep the partner under control without overt displays of jealousy. At best, the partner who was initially more jealous manages to turn the situation around by trying to invoke his or her partner's jealousy so that s/he him/herself becomes the object of the partner's jealousy. Especially women should be smart enough to know how to control their man by invoking his jealousy. (2011: 51-62).

86 Some men even ask for a friend to perform this watching duty while they themselves are unable to carry it out. This displays the degree to which Cubans live their lives via social bonds; an individual's personal presence in a certain place may be replaced by another person. I experienced this personally when I was sent to replace my Cuban brother's presence in a wedding to which he was invited.

87 While in his opinion, this was the ultimate declaration of his love and should have brought them closer together, it had the effect of seriously frightening his partner and as a result, her distancing herself from him, which eventually led to their separation. Despite the occurrence of such threats, I never learned of cases of a man killing a woman in jealousy.

tortured by jealousy whenever he is not with his beloved, a man in love does not eat, sleep, or sit still. He is unable to think about anything else because his thoughts centre on the whereabouts of his partner and he may get very drunk as a way to try to defy and ease up his suffering. Such emotions are experienced very visibly via the body; a person in love tormented by jealousy is thin due to the loss of appetite.

I did not witness similar extreme displays of jealousy from the part of women (cf. Lundgren 2011: 51-62). While stories about female jealousy circulate frequently,[88] I have never seen a woman suffer or burst into rage in the same way as men over jealousy. Women's displays of jealousy tended to take on a more 'controlled' and indirect character. Moreover, men often display indifference in front of overt female jealousy. In front of other men, a man has to display unresponsiveness to his partner's displays of jealousy in order to show that a woman cannot order him around (see also Lundgren 2011: 51-54). Since jealousy is culturally more accepted and encouraged in men than in women, a woman risks more with overt displays of intense jealousy. Since men are expected to appear as independent, detached *machos* in their relationships with women, a woman's fierce jealousy may become too much of a threat to a man's supposed autonomy and lead him to terminate their relationship. The limits of acceptable and encouraged possessiveness are much narrower for women than for men. While jealousy is seen as normal in both men and women, due to machismo it is seen as more acceptable – and indeed, desirable, at least from the male point of view – for a man to thrive for a high degree of control over his partner than it is for a woman.

Women, on the other hand, rarely resort to indifference in front of male jealousy. Rather, they try to curtail their partner's possessiveness via elaborate manoeuvrings. A particularly inventive way one of my female informants used to handle male jealousy was an 'imaginary husband' that she resorted to as a way to keep her partner at an arm's length. She told her partner that she has a "husband" with whom she lives so that her partner would not try to move in with her and so that she could control the frequency of their meetings better. She let her partner stay over at her place once a week saying that her husband is out of town, but then hurried him to leave early in the morning so that the husband would not catch him with her when he returns home. She also told her partner that she cannot leave her husband because he is the one who gives her money, whereas her partner was of a rather meager income. This case exemplifies not only women's inventiveness in handling male jealousy and efforts of control but also the importance of men's monetary contributions to women, as well as the significant place housing holds for negotiating gender relations.[89]

88 Such stories include the case of a woman who poured gasoline over her treacherous lover while he was sleeping, setting him on fire, and the Santería *Patakí* (mythical story) about the *orisha* Ochún's jealousy over her man Changó.

89 Moreover, such an "invisible affine" brings an interesting twist to Caribbean kinship theory in general – I am

In their efforts to keep men's possessiveness at bay, women may sometimes come across as cunning and deceitful. Annoyed by the "detective complex" (as stated by a female informant) a man may have, a woman may prefer to avoid living together with her partner if possible, for co-habitation gives the man greater control of her whereabouts. A woman may refuse to see her partner for some time and try to avoid carefully any routes where he may be on the watch. If he comes to see her at home, she may act as if she is not there or refuse to open the door for him. While some of these measures may sound somewhat striking, they are often ways to negotiate space in a relationship and do not need to lead automatically to a break-up. Nevertheless, despite the great cultural acceptance of male jealousy, sometimes it may start to feel annoyingly excessive even from the woman's point of view. Thus jealousy – the function of which is to affirm the alliance – becomes disruptive when it is seen as excessive (cf. Lundgren 2011: 51-62).

The Break-Up of Love: Failing Reciprocal Care

> *Important reasons why Yadira had entered into a relationship with Livian included her female kin who urged her to settle down with a peaceful man and economic considerations that were connected to her expectations of pleasurable outings with him. Nevertheless, after the early courting phase such amusements became more and more rare and Yadira quickly started to get bored of sitting her nights at home as opposed to her previously busy dating life. She soon began to accept invitations for a date from other men during the afternoons when Livian was out of town working, trying to hide her misdemeanours from him when he returned home. He started to become increasingly jealous and tried to supervise her comings and goings as much as his work permitted. Soon afterwards he had problems at work and his income diminished. Livian started to give Yadira less money every month and had less access to such luxuries as an occasional can of foreign beer or some extra food via his work, which led to quarrels with Yadira. One night Livian drank heavily in anger, went driving drunk and ended up having his licence suspended for some months. He asked for their next-door neighbour to replace him at his work as a chauffeur while his licence was suspended, but ended up losing his job completely because his boss preferred the neighbour as her chauffeur. Yadira's frustration in the relationship grew and she came to the conclusion that the relationship is not giving her anything anymore: "Why would I give him something if he doesn't help me?" After several attempts, she managed to force Livian to leave her flat and ended the relationship. Livian, on the other hand, saw the situation differently. He drew upon the idea of reciprocity to highlight her lack of affection for him: "I'm annoyed since I know that she doesn't think of me and I think of her."*

Men's failure to meet women's material expectations intertwines importantly

grateful to Kevin Birth for pointing this out to me.

with conflicts in gender relations and the break-up of reciprocal care easily leads to a separation. In this case, Livian losing his job and not being able to fulfil the expectations of male care (money and material contributions) that Yadira placed on him was the event that led Yadira to break up a relationship where she had been unhappy for a long time.

Such gendered notions relate to the relation between heightened monetisation, growing inequalities, and intimate attachments. Similar large-scale changes that characterise post-Soviet Cuba have been noted to complicate intimate relations and more long-term forms of reciprocity in various parts of the world. Cole (2009) argues that in Madagascar, recent political and economic changes have introduced a new Western style opposition between love and money, which has brought along problems of the commodification of intimacy. Urban Malagasy respond to these changes with gendered strategies: men try to find wage work and women seek out wealthy, preferably Western foreign partners with whom they engage in exchanges of sex for money (Cole 2009). Wardlow (2006a) discusses a similar theme in Papua New Guinea where monetisation transforms and breaks the more traditional cycles of reciprocal gendered exchanges between men and women. Men's greater access to cash resources brings changes to the traditional bride wealth exchange, undermining women's position and driving them to engage in negative agency via prostitution (Wardlow 2006a).

Both Cole and Wardlow describe situations where local notions of gendered exchanges in intimate relations become undermined due to increased monetisation and inequality, leading to an increasing emergence of commodification of sexuality. Although Cuban gender relations have displayed instabilities also in the past (e.g. Martinez-Alier 1974: 124-30; Villaverde 2005), contemporary *habaneros* are no strangers to such problems. However, I had no informants who would have engaged in exchanges of sex for money. Despite the great importance that women place on a man's wealth in considering his desirability as a partner, all such relationships that I witnessed were working on some types of expectations of reciprocal contributions. Yet, the increasing inequalities and the heightened monetisation since the 1990s have to a degree changed expectations related to love and sexuality.

My data suggests that even though Cubans differentiate between "material interest" (*interés*) and relationships driven by other types of motivations, in practice notions of love, intimacy, and affect are deeply intertwined with materiality in most day-to-day situations and it often becomes impossible to differentiate between the two. Material contributions are the way to express and prove the existence of emotional attachment and bonds of love.

Love is defined by actions. As a matter of fact, my informants never spoke of "true love." While men could sometimes declare their love for their partner (e.g. "she is the love of my life" – *ella es el amor de mi vida*), it was not typical for women to use the term "love" to describe their attachment to men. At best, they could say that they "liked" someone ("*me gusta*") but this attraction was always intertwined with being very pleased with the material help or forms of entertainment that a man was able to offer them. While I kept on pressing my female informants with questions about whether they *liked* a man or were mainly interested in what he has to *offer* at the beginning of my fieldwork, most of the time it was impossible to try to distinguish between the two. Moreover, although women may not speak of love as such, they may stay cooking, cleaning, and caring for a man for years, which is something that should also count as an indication of an affective attachment of some sort. Thus, love becomes tightly intertwined with the gendered reciprocal care and actual material practices, suggesting that my informants' conceptualisations of heterosexual attachments differ from the Western dichotomisation between love and money to a certain extent and that there are gendered differences in the ways in which men and women relate to notions of passionate love.

At the same time the large-scale transformations that Cuban society has experienced since the 1990s are closely connected to certain complexities in intimate relations. Due to gendered notions of male and female contributions in a relationship, the contemporary importance of wealth and consumption in gender relations places pressure especially on men to have money. As wealthier men often maintain an advantage in attracting women, some of my male informants saw it as a constant threat that another man would appear offering more to their partner. Due to the significance that women place on a man's material contributions in a relationship, this is a rather viable concern on the men's part. The current importance of consumption and the transformations related to the possibilities of social mobility have an impact on sexuality and love, but they are experienced as gendered.

In salsa and reggaeton song lyrics in particular, women are frequently portrayed as deceitful and running after the man with the most material advantages to offer. However, while men may sometimes complain about women's 'greed,' in the end it is not in their interest to portray their relationship with women this way, for this would imply that a man's relationship with his partner is not based on any type of proper reciprocity. For a man to imply that his partner is taking advantage of him easily evokes an image that he lets himself being used by cunning women, leading to a perception of him as weak and lacking masculinity. Moreover, emphasising a man's single-sided contributions in a relationship may also suggest that a man

is so unattractive that he can *only* charm women with his money. This would deny any emotional attraction on the woman's part, which again carries the potential to question his masculinity. Notions of reciprocity are important also to men's conceptualisations of their material contributions to women.

My male informants sometimes expressed annoyance about the amount of claims that their partners made on them or complained about how much money they had spent for the benefit of a woman in a relationship. However, this usually took place when a relationship was also flawed by other problems or after a woman had ended the relationship. At the same time, even when expressing such views, my informants never explicitly denied women's rights to make material claims on them. Rather, they complained that women expect too much. What is at stake is the negotiation of a properly balanced reciprocity in a relationship. Even though reciprocity does not need to be symmetrical, relationships that completely lack reciprocity are seen as abusive.

As the lack of male material care is an important reason for a woman's desire to separate from her partner, a man may notice this and try to fix the situation by starting to contribute more to the relationship. When Yadira was trying to end her relationship with Livian, he made one last effort to try to make her change her mind. He suggested that he starts to dig a well and installs a system of running water to her house. In her view, this was a way for him to make himself useful and to stop her from trying to make him move out. However, as she truly wanted to end the relationship, she did not want him to start doing the work because this would have placed moral pressure on her to reciprocate his labour by continuing the relationship; evicting him after such a huge job would have been extremely rude.

Rosendahl describes how men revenge women's decision to end a relationship by taking away the items they have bought or helped to buy (1997: 72-73). While this sometimes took place amongst my informants, men were always shameful of such acts and stated that the items that they required back had been "loans" from someone else in the first place and that they were supposed to give them back; that they had never been actual "gifts." Women reacted to such acts with anger, frowning, and annoyance. This suggests that men's contributions to women are considered an integral part of the reciprocity in the relationship and it is morally questionable and shameful for a man to require his contributions back at separation. However, the example from Yadira and Livian shows that a woman as well may reject a man's contributions as a way to refuse the reciprocity and the continuation of the relationship that this would entail when she wants to end her relationship with her partner.

This highlights the fact that it would be too simplistic to see women's claims on men's material contributions as an indication of women being 'greedy.' As women continue to maintain far greater responsibility for dependent kin than men, they often share the little resources they have with wider networks of kin whilst simultaneously trying to secure their children's material wellbeing. At the same time, these types of large-scale transformations may highlight more dichotomised understandings of intimate relations if they increase the pressure that women feel to partner with men who – apart from their wealth – have little appeal in terms of other factors of attractiveness (such as good looks, dancing skills, and courteous behaviour).

Sexual Desire and Infidelity

Infidelity is frequently the reason that breaks the gendered reciprocity in a relationship. Especially when a man starts to neglect the material care to his partner, a woman has good reason to suspect that he is taking his contributions to someone else. Juana's description of her ex-partner Hector exemplifies this dynamics from a female perspective: "He never gave me gifts. I was a woman of the house, cooking, ironing, cleaning, and he was with the whores of *Habana Vieja*, 12 years and I got tired! Because of his affection for [Juana's son] Yamel I put up with him but I got tired. (...) I felt empty; I didn't feel myself a woman." This eventually led her to terminate the relationship.

Juana's statement highlights three issues that are central to understanding the break-up of gendered reciprocity through infidelity. First, distorted reciprocity: while her partner's infidelity was hurtful, what particularly annoyed Juana was that Hector did not do his share in the relationship; he did not give her anything even though she performed diligently her caring practices for his benefit. Gifts and food testify of a man's love for his partner and may make his partner overlook his infidelity, but if these are lacking, there is not much left to support the relationship. Secondly, like Juana, women sometimes endure years with a man with whom they are not happy because they think it is best for their children. A man's economic help to his partner's children may be of a crucial importance to a woman and this is why she may wait until her children are older before breaking up an unhappy relationship. Third, notions of heterosexual desirability connect centrally with a person's gendering (see also Lundgren 2011). Juana's statement connects heterosexual desire essentially to women's experience of themselves as gendered beings – Juana's partner's lack of desire towards her questioned her gender. Being a woman means being both the subject and the object of sexual desire in relation to men. Heterosexual desire also intertwines with notions of male gendering, but most importantly from a subject position: men need to orient their desire on women.

In the Caribbean, sexuality is seen as a normal part of adult life for both men and women (Barrow 1996: 397; Smith 1996d: 205; see also Miller 1994: 120-121, 172-182). This makes infidelity to a certain degree acceptable for both men and women. While sexual desire is seen as the glue that keeps a couple together, it is unpredictable and may tear lovers apart. Although both men and women may engage in infidelity, conceptualisations of infidelity are importantly gendered. While men tend to display more jealousy, in practice women are more at risk of experiencing their partner's infidelity. There is a great degree of cultural tolerance – even encouragement – for male infidelity and it takes place more openly and more often than female infidelity.

Infidelity increases a man's machismo. A male informant stated: "a *latino* always has many women and doesn't let himself be tied down," and another man explained: "a Cuban man likes to have two women. If one behaves badly with him, gets angry with him, he can go with the other. I'm like that." (In case of having problems with both women, he was of the opinion that a man stays with the woman with whom he has been the longest). A third male informant explained the issue with the need for variety against boredom in the relationship: "Between a cabbage and a cabbage, a lettuce" (*entre col y col; una lechuga*). However, while there is a great degree of tolerance for male infidelity, a man should be discreet about his misdemeanours and not flare his other woman too openly (see also Rosendahl 1997: 63-64). Being too evident about his affairs (like bringing his child from another relationship to his home, as one female informant stated her long-term partner to have done) is considered a grave insult and a complete "lack of respect" (*falta de respecto*) for one's partner.

While sexual desire is seen as intrinsic in both men and women, men are conceptualised as constantly desirous of sexual contact (see also Lumsden 1996: 31; Rosendahl 1997: 66; Lundgren 2011: 54-58). Men are expected to display their masculinity and position as a *machote* by showing interest in women and women are supposed to be sensual seductresses who attract men. At the same time, this does not mean that women would be passively responding to male agency. Women may make rather strong advances if they have their mind set on a certain man and a man may find it difficult to reject such straightforward passes in fear of being accused of homosexuality. Caridad explained this: "There are women here who provoke [men] and the man has to respond even if he has a woman; he has to show that he is a man because if he doesn't respond, the woman will say that he is a *maricón* [a very offensive term for a homosexual]." Thus, masculinity lays on a precarious foundation and men need to engage in constant public displays of heterosexuality in order to affirm their manhood (see Jordan Smith 2009 for similar notions of male peer prestige practices from Nigeria).

The way in which Cubans speak about someone having a propensity to seek out multiple sexual partners – having 'a high level' of sexual desire – is highly gendered. Men are called *enamorado* (someone in love) while women are referred to as *puta* (whore). Yet neither of these terms is unambiguously negative. *Enamorado* conveys the idea that male infidelity takes place because men "fall in love" and have amorous feelings to various different directions, while the notion of *puta* suggests that women seek out material profit. However, in intimate contexts, the word *puta* refers more to having an 'abundance' of sexual desire than to the practice of exchanging sex for money. Women are thereby seen as going after sex, not money, when they cheat on their partners. *Enamorado*, on the other hand, may sometimes be found as a slightly comical quality in a man, but it is never a really negative characterisation. *Puta* may be used either as a very negative term or it may be something that a woman might quite positively call herself – even Ochún, the beautiful seductress Santería *orisha* admired by virtually all Cubans, is described as "a little bit *puta*" due to her strong sexual desire towards various men. Yet, at the same time female sexuality is expected to take place within certain limits.[90]

The fact that women are seen as going after sex when they cheat on their partner makes it very insulting for him, since this makes a man less of a *macho* that is able to keep his woman sexually happy. When a woman "puts horns" (*ponerle cuernos*) on her partner by having an affair with another man, this compromises his masculinity.[91] While heterosexual desirability defines also female gendering, the fact that female infidelity may break a relationship while male infidelity alone often does not, suggests that men feel the insult more severely. Female infidelity represents a bigger threat to a man's masculinity than male infidelity to a woman's femininity – male infidelity is, after all, a highly expected practice. Infidelity thus represents more danger of losing a respected position for men and they are the most fearful of it.

Men and women often differ in their views on the acceptability of female infidelity. While a 28-year-old male informant stated: "It's acceptable for a man to have many women but a woman can't have many men," one of my young female informants expressed the issue as follows: "Men are very bad so it's better to have two boyfriends" (*los hombres son muy malos entonces es mejor tener dos novios*). Nevertheless, it cannot be considered that female infidelity is merely a reaction to male infidelity, for it also takes place on its own, disregards of a woman's partner's (in)fidelity.

90 If a woman is seen as having a too strong sexual desire – if she is incapable of settling down with any man – she is called *loca* (crazy – also the term used to refer to drag queens according to Allen 2012: 331). A man is called *zorro* (fox) if he is seen as *very heavily* prone to having multiple sexual relations simultaneously (see also Rosendahl 1997: 64-65). *Machetero* (literally: "one that uses *machete*") is a term that is used to refer to men who go with foreign women for the money and assets that they can provide – this is a very negative term.

91 Rosendahl (1997: 63) mentions that in the past, men who could not control their wives were expelled from the Cuban Communist Party.

However, even if a man catches his partner with another man, this does not automatically lead to a break-up. Sometimes a man may be too much in love with a woman to want to separate from her even when there is evidence of infidelity. Moreover, as in the case of male infidelity, considerations of reciprocal care may sometimes outweigh the shame caused by his partner's infidelity – as shown by this statement from a female informant on a neighbour known to be unfaithful to her partner: "As long as she doesn't have a child with another man he maintains her, because he needs someone who washes and cooks." This exemplifies the role of children as proofs of love, discussed in Chapter 3. However, even a woman's pregnancy to another man does not automatically lead to a break-up, as stated by one of my male informants: "My mother was very liberal; she had two daughters who were not of my father. [And] when she married my father she was pregnant to another man." HH: The two first ones are not of your father then? Danel: "No, [two] in the middle. [And] Olga doesn't have the same father." Thereby also female infidelity is to a large degree tolerated in practice – even by men who may strongly reject it in their verbal statements.

At the same time, infidelity also hurts people and breaks relationships. The fact that both men and women may take great pains to hide their infidelity from their partner shows that there are expectations of fidelity in relationships – or at least, the impetus of not getting caught. Women are often very knowledgeable of the ways in which men try to avoid getting caught of cheating, and usually the 'extra' partner knows about the 'more permanent' partner, so that s/he knows to be careful of not being seen by him/her – which again suggests a relative degree of cultural tolerance of infidelity. No particular stigma is directed toward women or men who are caught cheating. However, if a person does not even *try* to hide his or her misdemeanours anymore this means a complete lack of interest towards one's partner and a desire to end the relationship.

Possibly due to the greater visibility and frequency of male infidelity, female infidelity is often ignored in studies on Caribbean sexuality, leading to a description of men as 'womanisers' while women are presented as aspiring to 'monogamy' (e.g. Barrow 1996: 439; Smith 1996a: 30; Andaya 2007: 195, 201-245; Hamilton 2012: 96-116). However, my data shows that this conceptualisation is erroneous and that the notion of sexual desire as an uncontrollable inner force defines both men and women.

Since sexual desire is conceptualised as such an unpredictable, powerful force, the occurrence of infidelity is not seen entirely as an individual's personal responsibility. Therefore, a couple is supposed to keep a strict watch over each

other and if infidelity takes place, a part of the blame falls on the person who failed to properly supervise his/her partner. When a man or a woman is unable to supervise his/her partner, kin (both the man's and the woman's) or friends are supposed to keep an eye on the partner instead. This illustrates the way in which Cubans embrace a more relational notion of personhood and the degree to which sexuality is lived in the close intertwining of kin relations and other social networks. Nevertheless, when there is no one watching over a person, women in particular are expected to have enough reason and responsibility to take care of themselves. Neglecting such caution in sexual relationships may easily involve danger.

Gendered Violence

Men and women tend to react differently to break-ups. Since it is usually the woman who terminates a relationship (see also Rosendahl 1997: 72), women often seem to make rather pragmatic judgments over breaking up with one partner and going with another man who might be able provide them with a better living standard. I did not witness women expressing great sadness over a break-up or great longing for an ex-partner in the same way as men. Even if a woman was very attracted to her partner, she was often more inclined to reflect on the reasons why the relationship cannot work in a 'rational' way. Men, on the other hand, tended to suffer greatly from a break-up when their partner left them. At the same time, this should not be automatically interpreted as women's lack of love or affection for their partners – as shown, for instance, by the plots that some women develop in order to make an ex-partner return to them, or by the frequency with which women may take back a man that they have previously broken up with. Rather, this suggests gendered differences in the ways men and women experience and express emotion/affect.

Sometimes jealousy, infidelity and/or one partner's desire to end the relationship may have very dramatic consequences. Caridad told me of a woman that had used *brujería* ('sorcerism') to get back at her unfaithful partner: "[The man] had another woman and she gave him something to drink and he died, she poisoned him with *brujería*." This narrative describes significantly certain aspects of infidelity. The fact that my informants are of the opinion that infidelity may sometimes lead to murder shows that – despite its 'cultural normality' in many ways – infidelity may be a very hurtful issue to which persons react violently. In this sense, 'love magic' thereby functions as an evidence of love and passion, as argued by Cole and Thomas (2009: 7). Moreover, this story illustrates the gendered nature of agency and the way in which women often express their emotions through indirect agency.

Male agency, on the other hand, takes place through direct action and may in the case of serious problems take the form of violence against women (see also Rosendahl 1997: 73; Lundgren 2011: 91-94). Since emotions and notions of control are to a great degree lived through the body, this may sometimes result in violence. Danel's statement exemplifies this: "Here it [domestic violence] is very usual. The man gives blows to the woman and the woman gives blows to the man. Of 100 Cubans, 80 hit a woman: his wife, his girlfriend, his mother, his sister, his daughter. (...) The Cuban is very loving; very affectionate, but also very violent." While according to Danel, violence is a frequent occurrence in various types of social relations, most cases I was told about concerned men being violent towards their partners, their children, and their partners' children.[92] Jealousy and infidelity are frequently the instigators of violence.

The fact that social relations and emotions are lived through the body to such a degree makes male violence towards women to a degree tolerated – despite the official state efforts to diminish it (see Lundgren 2011: 92). Most cases that I learned about had taken place in very complex situations where feelings of love were mixed with a woman's practical dependency on her partner. If a man's fierce nature is conceptualised as passion and violence is perceived as an expression of this, then it is understandable that violence does not automatically lead to a woman wanting to break up with her partner. Thus, there must be a cultural logic guiding gendered violence.

Deborah Thomas (2011) suggests that we should not examine violence only as destructive, but also as producing something. In Cuba, a man's violence is usually ascribed to jealousy, and jealousy is seen as a sign of a man's love for a woman ("*si no cela no ama*"). In this case violence is seen as "productive" from the *man's* point of view in the sense that for him, violence represents a way to try to gain control over his partner in a very physical way; a desperate effort to try to affirm the alliance.[93] However, the consequence of such actions may easily become the opposite of what the man was aiming for.

Women are not passive in front of male violence. For many women, male violence is completely unacceptable and leads immediately to a break-up. In *Centro Habana*, Graciela told me about a neighbour who beats up his spouse: "He hits her hard; she already has a problem in her feet. (...) She has been (...) [with him] for five years and she doesn't leave. The neighbours try to protect her, but he is crazy and when he has a couple of drinks, even more. Personally, if a man hits me, he will never touch me again." Graciela's statement suggests

92 The physical disciplining of children is considered perfectly normal. I have never heard of anyone being violent against his/her mother and this seems unlikely considering the high degree of love and adoration that Cubans usually feel towards their mother.

93 See also Rosendahl (1997: 73) who states that men resort to violence when they feel that they are losing control over their wives.

that neighbours may interfere if they notice severe abuse taking place. Even though the high density of living conditions in places like *Centro Habana* is often described as a negative factor leading to conflicts (e.g. Fernandez 2010: 92-95, 149-171; Lundgren 2011: 68-77; Hamilton 2012: 218-229) and people may experience the high density of flats at times as a very annoying lack of privacy, at the same time, the close neighbouring relationships may create a certain degree of safety from violence in the domestic space when neighbours try to care for each other.

The other side of Havana's housing crisis is that women do not always have the possibility to leave a man even if they would want to do so. When a woman resides in her partner's flat, it is difficult for her to leave if she has nowhere to go, in particular if she has children. This makes those women who do not have close kin in Havana especially vulnerable to abuse. One of my elderly female informants, native of Eastern Cuba, lived for 17 years with a violent partner until her brother migrated to Havana, allowing her and her four children to stay in his little wooden shack on squatter land.[94] Sibling relationships in particular become crucial in such situations. Such efforts from the part of kin and neighbours to help abused women suggest again the responsibility that the people around share in trying to take care of an individual. What happens in a relationship is thereby not only the business of the couple alone.[95] Persons are not expected to be entirely autonomous individual subjects, but rather social beings cared for by those around them – illustrating again my informants' relational views of personhood.

Neighbours and kin are not the only persons from whom a woman may seek help if her partner is violent. She may denounce him to the police. Two of my female informants had done this, although in both cases, the only thing that followed was an overnight's arrest of the man. Still, in this way the state participates, along with kin and neighbours, in providing women with a safety net in situations of violence (although usually not very efficiently). At the same time, one of my female research participants – despite having herself experienced violence from the part of her step-father as well as partners – was of the opinion that there is no need for the state to take action against male violence against women, since there is "so little" of it in Cuba.

In the light of the earlier male informant's view that emphasises the frequency of male violence against women, this statement is rather curious.

94 Despite the importance of the brother-sister bond in such situations, male kin rarely interfere directly if a woman's partner is violent towards her.

95 Unlike Lundgren (2011: 77), I do not see this as a new development due to the tightening economic circumstances but rather as forming part of more long-term cultural tendencies that highlight the ambiguity and fragility of conjugal bonds. This may also reflect differences between Lundgren's more 'middle-class' research participants and my informants.

While women may often denounce the violence suffered by their female kin members from the part of male partners, I very seldom heard women talking about their personal experiences of violence. Stories about violence circulate most often via gossip, told by other persons than the victim herself. Violence from the part of one's partner is very hurtful and shameful and women often prefer not to talk about it. Letting others know about violence would also demand some type of action, both from the woman herself as well as from the part of those who care for her. To stay in an abusive relationship would make one look like a *comemierda* who lets other people walk over her; a distortion of the type of reciprocity that should characterise relationships between men and women. Hamilton (2012: 202) describes how a similar view is embraced by some state officials in the case of male violence against women: "She puts up with him because she wants to. Love, if you want to call it that. In case you haven't noticed, there has been a Revolution here and women do not have to put up with that kind of treatment. In Cuba no woman is forced to take such treatment from her husband." As acceptation of abusive treatment from her partner is seen as the woman's 'own fault,' telling others would make it more urgent for her to leave her partner, which she might not be willing to do. The importance of being a person respected by others may thereby be a factor that makes many women reluctant to denounce male violence.

State Discourse on Love and Sexuality

The state campaigns against violence, but at the time of my fieldwork, infidelity was highlighted over other concerns. As a part of its efforts to promote more egalitarian gender relations, more stable family bonds, as well as to fight the spreading of HIV/AIDS, the state campaigns against infidelity. As in many parts of the world (see Hirsch et al. 2006), such state campaigns are directed primarily at women who are urged to take action against male infidelity, regardless of any practical considerations they might have. For example, the Cuban Women's Federation circulates educational TV 'advertisements' which urge women to choose "education" and "respect" over staying in an unsatisfactory relationship due to the material safety that this union may offer:

> *A woman says: "Infidelity is the major cause of conflicts in the relationship. Even though both women and men cheat, men continue to be the ones who practice infidelity more often, due to a model of machismo." In the program two women talk: a friend gives advice to a woman, telling her not to leave her partner "because you're not a woman used to the hard life (a pasar trabajo)" and tells her that it would be best just to forget her partner's infidelity since things are well materially. Next we see the woman's partner arriving home from work. The phone rings and the man answers, telling the caller that he will*

> *arrive shortly. The woman starts shouting: "You're cheating on me!" The man says: "I have a meeting," completely ignoring his partner's anger, and states: "Serve me the food or if not, there's the door!" The woman does not leave because "I can't be egoistic, I can't go to my parents' house and [looks at her little daughter] the girl (la niña)..." Another female friend says to the woman: "You can finish your studies so that people respect you, so that they don't crush you (aplastar)". At the end of the advertisement the narrator states: "Infidelity is a matter of life and death in the age of AIDS." (Cuando una mujer, Cubavision, 5 June, 2007).*

While this program instigates women to take action against male infidelity and demand respect for themselves, its way of empowering women is ambiguous. Writing about sexual education programs against male infidelity in Mexico, Jennifer S. Hirsch, Jennifer Higgins, Margaret A. Bentley, and Constance Nathanson (2006) state that targeting women in sexual education programs is based on the expectation that men are unable to change their behaviour whereby women are made responsible for transforming men's conduct. In Cuba, this state view connects with a wider cultural notion of women as more capable of mature responsible reasoning, whereas men are seen as 'slaves' to their passions. By making women responsible for changing men's behaviour, they are also made responsible for stopping the spread of STDs in the country (although in practice it is usually men who are reluctant to wear a condom).[96]

The program also urges women to leave their unfaithful male partners and to educate themselves instead of staying with a man for the sake of material gain. However, in practice things are often less straightforward than what is depicted in such educational announcements. In post-Soviet Cuba, due to the very low level of salaries in nearly all other professional areas except tourism, there are few chances that education may really offer women (or men) any genuine possibilities of enjoying a satisfactory independent life. Many young Cubans in particular view education as useless for social ascendance because it offers very limited chances of gaining a better economic standing. This type of state discourse thereby fails to acknowledge some of the ways in which practical life differs from socialist ideals in post-Soviet Cuba. Most importantly, this state discourse does not pay notice to the ways in which men's material contributions to women connect with notions of reciprocal care, playing a significant part in how both men and women conceptualise love.

This allows us to return to the relationship between romantic love and machismo. Discussing love in Africa, Cole and Thomas describe how women

96 However, amongst young Cubans the state has taken a more egalitarian orientation. I visited a sexual education course where 15-year-old girls and boys were instructed on the importance of safe sex.

often place expectations of more equal gender relations on relationships based on romantic love but soon become disappointed (2009: 13, 27). My *habanera* female informants, on the other hand, tended to place few expectations on romantic love: they often talked about men's "evilness" (*"los hombres son muy malos"*), men's tendency to violence, excessive drinking, and to cheating on their partners, as well as about men's excessive need to supervise and control them. At the same time, women entertain an ambiguous stand to machismo and to certain notions of gender equality. When machismo concerns someone else than their male partner – a male kin member such as father, brother, or son – women often take pride in their male kin's sexual conquests of women. This highlights those aspects of machismo that are embraced as positive qualities by both men and women, as well as points out the highly contextual character of women's condemnation of male behaviour, as women may sometimes incite their male kin to embrace similar practices that they reject in their partners.

The views of my female informants thus differ considerably from state notions of gender egalitarianism as well as from the state rejection of machismo. Moreover, women relate ambiguously to notions of romantic love and highlight the lack of male reciprocal care as the reason that is the most likely to lead to a woman's willingness to terminate a relationship. As uncomfortable as it feels in terms of feminist goals, it is only rarely that violence, infidelity, or excessive jealousy alone can make a woman leave her partner.

Breaking Up: Harming Sociability

Even when they are unhappy in a relationship, both men and women are often very unwilling to initiate a break-up. As a result, fights are used as an excuse for separations. When Yuniel had met a new woman and wanted to break up with his (very jealous) partner, he said: "I'm waiting for any pretext in order to finally take her off my back. (...) I don't go to her house anymore. And since she wants me to stay, she stays silent. I'm looking for whatever pretext, but she's not giving me any." Thus, break-ups often take the form of arguments so that the partner desiring to end the relationship leaves, as if being angry about the quarrel. The other person gets the blame for the break-up, even though his/her partner had plotted the whole thing. At the same time, in this case for instance, since both partners know how the story goes, the person who suspects that her/his partner wants to leave but is him/herself unwilling to end the relationship tries to avoid fights at any cost in an attempt to avoid the separation.

This connects with the argument that I have made throughout this study on my research participants' more relational notions of personhood. Like in the case of infidelity (where persons are not seen as fully autonomous actors who would be in complete control of themselves, but instead need to be watched over by other people), this manner of ending relationships 'frees' the person desiring a break-up from taking full responsibility and blame over the separation. Instead, the blame for disrupting the alliance shifts to the other partner, making the *abandoned* person seem like the acting agent in the situation (often against his/her will). The person who started the fight becomes the one who harmed the relationship and broke the bond between the couple, not the person actually desiring the break-up. When the situation requires the breaking of a relationship, both men and women engage in indirect agency.

Since relationships are often not exactly terminated, one of the partners may just stop being in contact with the other. This is why relationships are frequently revived. People separate and after some time get back together with their partners (see also Rosendahl 1997: 72-73). Some relationships are in a state of constant flux, as a female informant explained of the relationship between her (poor migrant-worker) cousin Karel and his partner (equally poor) Anielka: "She throws him out constantly, (...) when she feels like it, she takes him, when not, no." Thus, break-ups do not really terminate relationships, allowing people to maintain wide networks of connections.

I see this style of separation as being related to two aspects of the great significance and value that Cubans place on social relations. First, break-ups present such an insult to the social bond between the couple, as well as to the abandoned partner's self-respect, that separations can easily become highly conflicting and even dangerous to the partner who wants to end the relationship, especially to women. Thus, persons rather avoid breaking up altogether and just let the relationship fade away, in best cases open to be continued later if minds change.

Nevertheless, as things do not always work out as smoothly as planned or intended, at least one of the partners may easily feel offended. In such cases, a person may reject all contact with his/her previous partner. Problems in sexual and love relations are closely connected to the reasons why men become marginal in their family relations and may easily lose contact with their children. When a relationship breaks, children usually follow their mother. There is thus a serious threat for a man to lose contact with his children if the relationship goes wrong.

Due to the great importance of social relations to individuals' day-to-day lives, as well as the close intertwining of sexual alliances with notions of gender and personhood, harming social bonds is a serious matter, since at its worst, it places an individual at risk of suffering from loneliness.

"I Have No Luck in Love": A Woman Alone

Although it is seen as good for everyone to live in a relationship, love relations often go wrong and people sometimes end up spending relatively long periods without a partner. In this section I wish to examine women who live alone.

When her daughter was still childless and living alone at the age of 40, Caridad was worried about her: "I want Yadira to find someone who lives with her; who takes care of her and whom she looks after (*que la cuida y que ella lo atiende*) (...), because a woman cannot live alone." As this statement shows, Caridad does not justify her views about her daughter's need to have a partner through notions of romantic love. Rather, she emphasises the idea of gendered reciprocal care and the security and wellbeing that this brings to both partners.

Although similar views feature centrally in Juana's account, she – a black, 48-year-old woman living on her own – was one the very few women who spoke about her expectations in terms of love. Juana described the downsides of her life:

> *I'm a luchadora woman [someone who makes her living, fights to get ahead in life], and all that I have, I have bought myself, I have bought my own clothes, my shoes, my things. You have seen that nobody comes to my home, that none of the neighbours come here. Because if they come, they look around and say: 'You are a woman alone, you don't have a husband, how have you been able to buy this [takes a cup] or this [points to the TV] or this [points to a saucepan]?' I have a boyfriend (novio) but he comes every now and then (él viene un día y otro no), (...) he doesn't live here and I need a companion, someone who is here with me, (...) who caresses me (alguien quien me pasa la mano). (...) I have no luck in love (yo no tengo suerte en el amor). (...) It is very sad to eat alone and be at home alone. (...) When I'm alone, I don't eat at the table, I eat there [points at the living room] in front of the TV, or in the kitchen.*

Juana's account describes the loneliness she feels for having no partner (see also Andaya 2009b). Her account portrays well the expectations of male material care along with the fact that a woman acquiring material wealth without a male partner is seen as somehow suspicious. As a woman alone, she has had to fight much harder to manage to buy the little material wealth

she has. Juana's statement also refers to eating/food as a significant aspect of sociability: eating alone becomes the symbol of Juana's solitude and the sadness she feels because of it.[97] Men and women are seen as needing each other to fulfil their position as gendered beings; they are perceived as complementary to each other (Lutz 1988: 143).

At the same time, some women are so fond of their independence that they intentionally seem to avoid stable relationships (cf. Rosendahl 1997: 69; Lundgren 2011). Yadira tended to date only men with whom she had no intention of getting serious and with whom she had no desire to co-reside. In her case, owning a flat allowed her to cherish her independence and – despite the wishes of her female kin – Yadira was not keen on looking after any man. Her mother once stated that Yadira's problem is that she is too much into "*fiesta y pachanga*" (partying) to live with a proper "husband." This defines her almost as a "*loca*" (crazy), i.e. a woman who is unable to settle down with a single partner. Yadira was more interested in 'playing' men in order to receive their material contributions without allowing them too much control over her life (see Gregg 2006; Cole 2009: 125; Hunter 2009 for similar ideas from Brazil, Madagascar and South Africa respectively). At the same time, her relationships were not devoid of the moral expectations of reciprocity. In addition, Yadira performed acts of female reciprocal care towards her partners, although on a smaller scale than many others and doing her best to simultaneously maintain her male partners at an arm's length.

Nevertheless, despite her love of freedom, Yadira too started to reside with a man when she was desperately trying to have a child. Even though some women may cherish their independence, they may also feel that they need a male partner in their life when they desire to have children. This relates importantly to the need to receive male contributions of reciprocal care in the context of declining state subsidies and rising prices, as well as to the feeling that this way they may offer their child-to-be a better start to life. Sometimes children may become the ultimate reason that 'pushes' men and women together – even if all other factors would support their relative independence.

For men, on the other hand, living alone is a more complicated matter.

Heterosexuality and Homosexuality

While being without a partner does not as such threaten a woman's heterosexuality and gendering, for a man, living without a female partner may quickly lead to questions about his heterosexuality. The social expectation

97 See Lutz 1988: 129-132 for a similar description on the significance of food as conveying care and affection on a Micronesian atoll.

that Cubans place on persons to continuously have a partner concerns men more crucially than women.

When a man's relationship with his partner ends, he usually starts very quickly dating someone else (even if he may still be in love with his ex). If a man stays sad over a break-up for some time and does not quickly find himself a new woman, his position as an assertive male is rapidly questioned. This undermines his masculinity and – if the situation continues longer – his heterosexuality and thereby his gendering. If a man is never seen with women and never brings girlfriends home, he is immediately taken to be gay. Caridad explained this to me: "Norma's son Wilber is gay." I asked: How do you know? Caridad: "Everybody knows it." HH: Does Norma know it? Caridad: "No, I don't think that they know it at home. But how can you have a son who is already past 30 years and has never had a woman?" Thus, men need to be with women in order to affirm their heterosexuality (see also Rosendahl 1997: 69; Padilla 2007: 124).

However, even being publicly seen with women is not always enough to prove a man's heterosexuality. Talking about her daughter's problems in finding a permanent partner, a female informant stated: "There are many men here nowadays of whom you think that they are men (*hombres*), but then they go out with men. They go out with [both] men and women, and you think that they are interested in you, but then they are *maricones* [a very insulting word for a homosexual], here it has become fashionable, bisexualism, and she is afraid of that." This fear seems to relate to the state's recent openings towards sexual diversity. My informants were of the opinion that homosexuality had become much more prevalent in Cuba since the 1990s. This statement also connects with a particular *telenovela* (soap opera) called *La cara oculta de la luna* (The hidden face of the moon), aired in 2006 and featuring a bisexual male character (Lundgren 2011: 139-144). While the purpose of the TV series was to create greater tolerance for sexual diversity amongst the public, in some of my informants the series seems to have inspired most of all fear. This leads me to examine some aspects of the cultural logics of Cuban notions of "homophobia" (Allen 2011: 67; Hamilton 2012: 117-148).

A child's homosexuality may represent a serious crisis in the family, exemplifying the degree to which sexual and love relations take place between social persons embedded in larger webs of kinship relations. While some parents have no problems with a child's homosexuality, more often I was told stories of very difficult family crises. All the cases that I was told about concerned male same-sex sexuality. Sometimes, (as in Caridad's statement about Norma's son), a man's homosexuality was represented as a public

secret that "everybody" in the neighbourhood supposedly "knew" but was never brought up especially with his parents. Other times, a son's confession of his homosexuality was described as inciting a violent reaction from his parents. A female informant told me about a male relative who had confessed his homosexuality to his parents. As a result, his mother "wanted to die" and the father "got angry, (...) wanted to kill him [and] didn't want anything more to do with him." Yonder's homosexuality led to a serious breakdown of his relation with his parents: his father forced him to leave the house and for years, his mother said to kin that he had died. However, after some time, mothers often re-gain contact with their children because their connection is seen to be so strong that there is "nothing else" they can do. But for fathers the rupture is easily more absolute.[98]

As this case shows, homosexuality may represent a highly difficult issue on both a personal level as well as in the family (see also Lumsden 1996: 98, 135-136). However, as parenthood is significantly gendered, so are also the ways in which homosexuality influences the relationship between a parent and a son. If a woman's only son is gay, she will never become a grandmother because the expectation is that there will be no children.[99] A man's same-sex orientation may thus influence strongly his mother's life course. Yet, a gay son may end up living his whole life with his mother, taking care of her throughout her old age.

For fathers, however, the disruption may be so serious that there is little possibility for reconciliation. This suggests that a son's same-sex orientation not only disrupts the possibility of a gender-based father-son companionship – which tends to be more important than the father-daughter bond throughout the life course – but also that the son's same-sex orientation carries the potential to question his father's masculinity. Since it is seen primarily as the father's task to teach a son how to be a man, the son's homosexuality falls partly on his father's assumed 'inadequacy' to perform his role. This may thereby question the father's position as a *machote*, making him lose respect amongst his peers and suffer ridicule. Men not only have to prove constantly that they are true *men*, they also have to be capable of producing true men in order to qualify as proper machos. While a woman may also lose social respect over a son's same-sex orientation, for a man this seems to carry the potential of fundamentally questioning his gendering and social position.

98 As siblings may break their relationship with a same-sex-oriented person as well, this may easily leave a person with little family support, making other kinds of networks crucially important, as shown by Allen (2011).

99 Obviously, not all heterosexual men end up having children either, but the potential is seen to be there. Childlessness represents a possible problem also in women's same-sex relations. I met only two lesbian women, but one of them had a child and the other was an activist reclaiming lesbian women's right to motherhood. For men, such claims would be much harder to present due to the cultural centrality of mother-child bonds. I have never heard a Cuban gay man express a desire to have children.

Same-sex or LGBT-identified persons are often described as "introverted" (*introvertida*). 'Inwards turned' implies the idea that same-sex oriented persons are seen as 'turning away' from social relations.[100] Therefore, this suggests that heterosexual Cubans are seen as 'outwards' oriented, constantly looking to create more connections. Thus non-heterosexual Cubans come to be seen as refusing to make the gendered alliances that are conceptualised as central to 'normal' life course.

But same-sex unions can be seen to represent a new form of alliance because they do create relationships – but different kinds of relationships. For my research participants, the potential to have children is at the core of heterosexuality: a person is supposed to enter into sexual relations with someone with whom s/he can have children.[101] Many see same-sex sexuality as problematic because it is perceived as denying this possibility. Homosexuality raises crucial concerns about the future of family continuity – in a way that is surprisingly similar to Fernandez's (2010: 149-174) description of the types of worries that her informants had over the influence of interracial relationships to family genealogy. Homosexuality thereby intertwines centrally with issues of family continuity and reproduction – in more than one way.

There is considerable ambiguity in the way in which my informants conceptualise homosexuality as something between nature and nurture. On the one hand, homosexuality is seen as 'contagious' – not as an 'internal state' – for there is a considerable worry about children being exposed to homosexual influences and developing similar tendencies in imitation of adults because "a child does everything that the parents do" (*el niño hace todo lo que los padres hacen*; see also Lumsden 1996: 84). On the other hand, homosexuality is seen as existing as an internal state since it 'cannot be changed': a homosexual man does not react to women no matter how beautiful they are. Moreover, it is recognised that not *all* children raised by a same-sex-oriented parent become homosexual themselves (for instance, a lesbian woman's adult daughter was never hinted to have similar tendencies herself). Thus, homosexuality is not seen as a state that is directly 'produced' by the parents, although they may be seen as bearing a certain responsibility for the situation. In another conceptualisation that I heard, both of these views were combined with a 'biomedical' explanation, as a young boy's homosexuality was explained with

100 See also Lumsden 1996: 106, who describes 1980s Cuban state sexual education manuals labelling homosexuals as "anti-social." The term *introvertida* may have originated from the concept of "inverted" used to characterise homosexuality in psychology in the beginning of the 20th century (I am grateful to Simo Määttä for pointing this out to me).

101 This is also the reason why my informants were so preoccupied with trying to avoid sexual relations between possible siblings; they were worried about the effect that such unions might have on the children. This fear of incestuous relations relates interestingly to a classical novel *Cecilia Valdéz* (Villaverde 2005 [1839]) where due to white, upper class men's multiple sexual relations, a young couple – in keeping with gendered and racialised meanings: a beautiful *mulata* and a white youngster – fall in love without knowing that they are in reality patrilateral siblings. The relationship results to be destructive to the man. (See also Fernandez 2010: 121-122).

the fact that he has a twin sister: "He took of women (...) because of her, as they were ['squeezed'] so close (...) in the same womb." This view combines a notion of biogenetics with relational personhood in such a way that closeness in the womb transfers qualities of personhood in ways that confuse the standard gender division. This way gender – and sexual desire as an aspect of gendering – becomes defined as something internal that one is born with but in such a way that the boundaries of the individual body are permeable and may to a great degree absorb qualities from those around, which come to form part of the individual's personhood. This reminds Busby's (1997) description of South Indian notions of gender and personhood.

This way of conceptualising sexuality and personhood intertwines with more general notions of gender. As we have seen, homosexuality is perceived as much more of a 'threat' to men than to women. Parents worry about their sons being gay if they do not have girlfriends at the age of 11-12 (Rosendahl 1997: 62-63) and if boys do not seem to be into fighting and hanging out in the street, and if they show too much inclination towards staying at home, doing housework, or – even worse – playing with dolls. Performing female practices such as doing housework, childcare, or paying too much attention to his looks may endanger a man's gender and sexuality (cf. Gutmann 2007 [1996]: 3, 74-79, 96-88, 151, 156). I never heard anyone express similar fears for girl children, which reflects the social invisibility of female same-sex sexuality (Lumsden 1996: 84, 186; Allen 2011: 11; Hamilton 2012: 172-190) as well as a considerable cultural focus on male sexuality (in the sense that male sexuality is somehow more under scrutiny than female sexuality). This constant concern over male (homo)sexuality makes male gendering relatively fragile – the dominant gender has to 'prove its place' constantly. Due to machismo, the limits of acceptable behaviour seem to be narrower for men without risking one's position as a man.

At the same time, homosexuality itself becomes conceptualised via the dualistic view of gender that centrally defines social relations and individual life course. For instance, same-sex oriented persons are often described as reversing the usual gendered expectations regarding the body: men are beautiful and women have short hair. Homosexual men are conceptualised as 'not men' since they are persons who act 'as if' they were women (see also Lumsden 1996: 30). This view is evident in a statement from a female informant who was amazed by the highly feminine clothes worn by male cross-dressers: "They are more women than women themselves, they dress in very daring clothes..." Thus, gender, bodily appearance, and sexual desire become tightly intertwined and conceptualised in a binary way.

This provides an opportunity to revisit the views of the early revolutionary policy on sexuality, when homosexual men were placed on UMAP camps and women were located in re-education centres in order to get rid of prostitution (see Chapter 1). These state efforts centred on heterosexuality: while the danger to female sexuality was considered to be its commercialisation, exchanging sex for money, the threat to male sexuality was considered to be the 'wrong' orientation of male sexual desire.[102] These same themes continue to 'trouble' gender relations today: the potential threat to women is seen to be the commercialisation of their sexuality, whereas with men, the concern is located in the proper orientation of their 'very strong' sexual desires. Such views thereby draw on more long-term local notions of gender and sexuality.

However, Cuba's recent change of attitude in its sexual politics seems to be making more room for sexual diversity. While I know only a few openly same-sex oriented sexual persons in Havana, sexual diversity has definitely gained more visibility and occupies people's minds both in the state discourse as well as in the streets. Recently, Mariela Castro has been advocating for Cuba to pass a law legalising same-sex unions, but the bill has not so far managed to be passed in the National Assembly of People's Power (*Poder Popular*). But in early 2013, I received an email from Yuniel stating that he had assisted a "lesbian wedding," something that is "totally taboo here." This suggests that same-sex relations present a new emerging form of union in Cuba. How this will influence the dominant views about heterosexuality as central to a person's gendering and gendering as fundamental to being, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Men's and women's reciprocal contributions in a relationship are gendered expressions of love and care that both create and reproduce alliances. As sexual and love relations are formed between social persons who live in networks of larger kin relations, heterosexual relations easily create gendered conflicts between a person's consanguine and affine kin. These conflicts focus most importantly on competing claims on a man's material contributions between his mother and his partner. Simultaneously, a woman's contributions of nurturing care are constantly assessed by her partner's mother in a moral economy of care. While notions of romantic love are central in Cuba, gender relations develop in tight interaction with larger kin relations. This suggests that notions of love as romantic passion do not always co-exist with individualism but can also be experienced in the context of more relational notions of personhood.

102 Interestingly, the reverse was not considered even as a possibility; the threat of the 'wrong' orientation of the female sexuality towards women or the fear of male heterosexual prostitution.

Along with reciprocal care, sexual desire, jealousy, and control are all qualities that affirm the alliance between men and women. However, these same qualities may also lead to a break-up when their scale changes. Reciprocity becomes distorted in the practice of one-sided care, neglect, excesses of control, infidelity, and physical violence. For both men and women, love relations entail a constant effort to balance between excessive possessiveness that may make their partner leave them, on the one hand, and being possessive *enough* in order to affirm the alliance, controlling one's partner to such a degree that the partner feels him or herself desired and does not cheat on them, on the other hand. Practices connected to such dynamics are importantly gendered and relate to notions of agency. In a relationship, men try to gain positions of power via direct confrontations, whereas women pursue their desires by engaging in indirect agency. Nevertheless, when relationships are broken, both men and women engage in indirect agency, for no one wants to be seen as the one that is harming social bonds.

However, due to the easily distorted nature of gendered reciprocity, women may prefer to live alone, whereas men without money find it hard to fulfil women's expectations of material contributions. If the distortions of reciprocity are seen as excessive, relationships break. This illustrates the dynamics of instability and fragility associated with Caribbean gender relations for a long time.

The body represents the site where reciprocal care takes a visible form: an ugly or a suffering body displays neglects of care from the part of one's partner or kin. The body is also the site where emotions are experienced. Sorrow over a break-up, longing for one's loved one, and loneliness take away the desire to eat; sensual dancing and beautiful bodies incite desire and (potential) love towards partners, and a man's intense feelings of jealousy may take the form of physical efforts to control his partner through violence.

The body also connotes a person's sexual orientation, as women's beautiful bodies become both the signal of their heterosexual desire towards men and the means for inciting it. Men need to prove that their sexual orientation is directed towards women by reacting to their beauty and through a strict avoidance of the bodily practices that are classified as feminine. Heterosexual desire affirms and reproduces gendering: being the object of male desire affirms a woman's femininity and being sexually active with women proves a man's masculinity.

My informants' understandings of love and sexuality suggest that gender is something with which one is born, reflecting a dualistic division

that centrally defines life and makes persons both different from and complimentary to each other. At the same time, gender as a difference has to be continuously affirmed and reproduced via bodily praxis by means of gendered reciprocal care as well as through heterosexually oriented desire. This connects with a view of the personhood and the body as "permeable" (Busby 1997: 275), as open to influences and connections to and from other people.

In this conceptualisation, sexuality is importantly something that can be incited or provoked by others. For instance, female beauty is seen as 'automatically' inciting male desire. Sexual orientation is thus not seen as entirely internal to the individual as it is strongly dependent on social incitement. Male sexual desire in particular is seen as something that is so strong that it may easily become oriented 'wrongly' (to men). This makes sexual desire relatively unstable in time. This conceptualisation of sexuality as relatively open to social influences illustrates why heterosexuality needs to be constantly affirmed. The focus of this affirmation is on the 'appropriate' orientation of male desire, worked out by emphasising the desirability of women's bodies as well as by maintaining a keen eye on men's bodily practices. Engaging in a continuous affirmation of their heterosexuality is thereby more crucial for men than for women, although women need heterosexual desirability to affirm themselves as women as well.

This life stage is closely connected to the reproduction of the overall kinship structure. Since heterosexual relations carry with them the potential for the birth of a child, the types of considerations that women have of men as desirable partners connect closely with their views on the qualities of an ideal father. Therefore, men that do not qualify in the scales of sexual attractiveness risk remaining childless, something that may be emotionally very painful and disrupts completely the expectations of a normal life course. This life stage represents a complicated phase for a man also in another sense: even if he has children, as love relations are often difficult and go wrong (and not insignificantly because of men's own actions), there is a considerable risk for a man to lose his relationship with his children. Thus, men in particular risk being unable to create and maintain the relationships that would take care of them in the future. The structure of Caribbean matrifocality becomes easily reproduced.

As matrifocality is seen to represent a long-term social structure in the Caribbean area (even though its historical prevalence in Cuba is more open to debate), this allows us to return to the relationship between individuals' gender and kinship relations and the state. One the one hand, state notions of

sexuality and gender relations maintain an ambiguous standing in relation to the practice of love and sexual relations. This is visible in the conflicting views on such issues as the role played by money and material contributions in individuals' love relations even though rejected by the state, and in many Cubans' ambivalent views on sexual diversity, although currently officially embraced by the state.

At the same time, Cubans' views and relationships are not immune to larger political and economic transformations. Even though no social relations remain the same throughout time, such changes as the increased monetisation, decline in state subsidies, growing inequalities, and transformed possibilities of social mobility have highlighted complexities in intimate relations in the post-Soviet period. Most salient is the way in which wealth has become a more prominent factor of men's attractiveness, simultaneously as women's dependence on men's material contributions has increased. This shows that larger changes take shape as gendered processes and are experienced via more long-term conceptualisations of gender and sexuality – at the same time as some aspects of them carry the potential to question local views.

Ordinary Cubans' views of gender relations often differ from Western feminist understandings. Many practices and aspects of social relations that are seen as forming part of gender equality play a central role in the reproduction of gender as a difference and are thereby difficult to change. Similarly, many of my research participants found same-sex sexuality troubling since it breaks their gendered expectations of a normal life course, focused around notions of family continuity and reciprocal care between generations.

6. Reciprocating Care: Old Age, Funerals, and Death

Introduction

"*Solo no se puede vivi*r" – one can't live alone – stated my Cuban uncle Omar one day when he once again expressed worry over my status as a childless woman. In his view, love relations being treacherous, combined with my sad faith as an only child with no nephews or nieces, made it urgent for me to have a child for "who will take care of you if you're sick, (...) when you're old? (...). A husband can be anyone, a wife anyone, there is no kinship there (*parentesco*); (...), but children are your *family*; (...) they are the only thing one has in life."

At old age, children play a crucial role in guaranteeing a person's wellbeing and social relations. Not only do Cubans place profound expectations on their children in reciprocating the care they have given them earlier, but without children, both men and women risk experiencing the saddest possible faith: dying alone.

This chapter discusses the transformations taking place in social relations at old age and death. I argue that this life stage shifts more emphasis on the previously marginal patrilateral relations, in particular to the father-child relation. Even though the mother-child relation still remains the central focus of the kinship system, the father-child relation emerges in a more significant position than in the previous life stages. A man's relationship with his children may re-emerge, sometimes after years or even decades of limited or no contact. While women's relations proceed as usual, a man/father may become more tightly integrated into the kinship structure at this life stage. At old age and death, the position of an individual as a parent becomes emphasised.

As life cycle rituals may represent a moment of change – being an event that carries the potential to reorganise and redefine social bonds – death has the potential to transform some of the divisions that are central in day-to-day social relations. Divisions of affinity may become temporarily undermined in the funeral ritual or the final burial site may join spouses together permanently, reversing the tendency to fragile marital relations. Moreover, at this life stage, the pervasive gender division that defines social relations at all the other life stages becomes less poignant for the benefit of emphasising a person's position as a parent and as forming part of a family line and its regeneration; the circulation of life between visible and invisible states via reincarnation.

As noted by Robert Hertz (2004 [1907]) and others (e.g. Bloch and Parry 1982), there are great similarities between the beginning and the end of life, for they both bring into being potentially risky and complicated transformations between two states of being: the visible and material and the invisible and spiritual. In Cuba, such similarities between birth and death take place in the field of ritual practices (most importantly, via the relevance of Catholic rituals, conceptualisations of reincarnation, and the circulation of names), but also in the context of social relations. Both birth and death create significant moments of marginal relations in the kinship system during which bonds of alliance take on more relevance than in the context of day-to-day life.

Reciprocal care emerges as a central orientation of social relations also at this life stage, characterising interaction during old age, in the funeral ritual, and in the afterlife. Via visits to the cemetery, Catholic masses for the deceased, as well as Spiritist and Afro-Cuban religious practices, the relationship between kin continues after death. Reciprocal care between family members takes material, nurturing, and spiritual/transcendent forms. This also includes inheritance, which becomes a way to reciprocate the care a person has received during life, as well as a manner for the deceased to continue caring for his/her kin after death.

Both the state and the Catholic Church participate as social actors in providing Cubans with care at this life stage. Funerals are the only life cycle ritual where both socialist and Catholic practices are combined. The 24-hour wake takes place in a state funeral home, but after the wake, at the Havana main cemetery of *Cristóbal Colón*, the great majority of bodies are blessed by a Catholic deacon before being laid to the ground.

Old Age and the State

Several researchers have noted that the elderly are amongst the biggest sufferers of the social, economic, and political changes that have taken place in post-Soviet Cuba (Eckstein 1994: 142; Pérez 1998: 526; Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010: 707). The increasingly monetised economy, heightened inequalities, expensive commodity prices, deficiencies in health care, and cuts in state subsidies to the population have all had a particularly harsh impact on the elderly. Thus, (like all the others), elderly Cubans now depend more on their own work and activeness to make a living, as well as on their personal social relations to patch up for state shortcomings.

During much of the revolution, Cuba has maintained a relatively low official retirement age (55 for women, 60 for men; Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro

2011: 705). However, recently the retirement age was raised to 60 for women and 65 for men as a response to government worries about the aging population and economic productivity (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2011: 707). While this change in the official policy called for elderly Cubans to make increased sacrifices for the country, this brought little practical change to the lives of my elderly informants. Virtually all of them were already engaged in daily employment, whether selling small food items by the road or repairing damaged clothes at home for a small fee. Cuban pensions are very small and as such far too insufficient for surviving in the increasingly expensive day-to-day life in post-Soviet Havana (for example, one of my informants received a monthly pension of 136 Cuban pesos, about 5,50 USD). While the pension system was designed to safeguard the elderly their well-earned rest (Bell et al. 2007: 286), in practice work is indispensable for many Cubans to get by. This goes against the revolution's early promises of a "secured old age" (*una vejez segura*, Bell et al. 2007: 286).

However, despite serious deficiencies in various fields of life, the state continues to provide certain services to the elderly via Grandparents' Houses and activities. These offer elderly Cubans varying degrees of very low-cost care, but due to the continuous lack of resources, vacancies are limited only to the most marginalised.[103] None of my informants participated in such services. The free health care forms another important part of the state caring structure in the context of old age, but access to both doctors and medication is frequently compromised. Such state services as doctor's appointments or cultural events for the elderly are repeatedly cancelled when employees are missing or do not have access to the needed equipment (due to the fear that employees will steal any valuables from the work place). As most state salaries are insufficient for making a living – at the same time as official regulations prohibit anyone from having more than one job – many Cubans are forced to try to scrape together their meagre income in the unofficial sector, often during their official working hours. So despite the well-intended ideals of state care for the elderly, in practice all these forms of nurture are flawed by several difficulties. While relying on the help of their children in times of need allows many elderly Cubans to subsist, the deficiencies and shortcomings in state services may alter their view of the state.

Moreover, the state itself tries to promote Cubans to take better care of their dependent kin. Promotional TV spots regularly urge men in particular to nurture their dependent kin instead of just making material contributions. One such TV spot featured a group of teenagers spending time with the elderly,

103 See also Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro (2011: 707). Moreover, many Cubans are reluctant both to intern their kin in these institutions and to reside in them themselves due to their low quality and because personal care is so important in kin relations. A Grandparents' House may be a solution when no kin member is able to take responsibility for caring for an elderly relative.

and in the background, a voice said: "They also need us. With love we can make their days happier." (8 April, 2008). While such a discourse conforms to the socialist goal of promoting solidarity and responsibility between kin members, it can also be interpreted as a state effort to shift some of the nurturing responsibility away from the state to individual Cubans.[104] This may raise the expectations that elderly Cubans place on their kin members in providing them with decent care.

Old Age as the Peak of Woman's Authority

Caribbean kinship systems have a long tradition in close, loving, care-based relationships between mothers and daughters (e.g. Smith 1996b: 44). Elderly women typically help their daughters in childcare and other domestic work. The bond between a woman and her daughters' children is particularly important and sometimes children are raised by their matrilateral grandmother if the mother is too young to care for the child herself, dies young, or has problems making her (new) partner accept her children.

As mother-daughter relationships are usually very close throughout the life cycle, when a woman gets older, her daughters assume the primary responsibility for caring for her, reciprocating the help and nurture they continue to receive from her. Women bestow feminine nurture on their mother, but they also frequently contribute male forms of care: they bring her food and give her money as well as little gifts (such as nail polish) whenever they can. If an elderly mother needs help or falls ill, her daughter may arrange for them to reside together either temporarily or permanently. When Misleydi's elderly mother became very sick and had to be admitted to a hospital, she took time off from her work in order to care for her around the clock.[105] Similarly, Carla – the youngest daughter of 16 siblings – left her partner, adult son, and life in Pinar del Rio when her mother called her from the other end of the island (*Oriente*) asking for her to move in with her in order to help her during her old age. As this case exemplifies, when a woman has several daughters, either her youngest, single, or childless daughter is expected to move in to care for the mother if she needs help at old age.

Childless women are particularly inclined to become caretakers for their elderly kin. Norlis, a 49-year-old black woman explained the constant responsibilities that such expectations may bring: "There is always someone to attend: my mother, my sister... (...) I wanted to change work in order to be

104 I was unable to verify when these types of advertisements started to circulate in the media and whether there was a significant rise in their amount during the post-Soviet period.

105 With the great deficiencies in the hospital care, Misleydi ended up spending several months in the hospital with her mother nearly without a break, attending to her mother's every need until her mother died. Cuban work environment is very flexible when it comes to kinship obligations, in particular when these concern one's mother.

closer to my father, since he has to be attended a lot, because he has always been asthmatic and all that, but when my [patrilateral] grandmother got sick and later passed away, my father got sick, and I'm taking care of him." Thus, what has usually been seen as the double or triple burden of women in socialist societies (e.g. Verdery 1996: 65) may sometimes become especially demanding for childless women who – although they do not have their own children to care for and to care for *them* in the future – are often expected to provide care for the elderly as well as help their siblings with child care in a greater amount than women with children.

However, while conceptualisations of care are strongly gendered, they are not rigid. Men also feel deep responsibility and love towards their mother and maintain a close relationship with her throughout their lives (see Clarke 1974: 107, 142, 162-164; Barrow 1996: 172; Gutmann 1997 for other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean). Even if a man neglects his children, he may simultaneously be very caring in his relationship with his elderly mother or a grandmother.

At the same time, men face fewer expectations to disregard their other responsibilities in order to devote their time to care for an elderly parent. Nevertheless, especially in the absence of daughters, a son may assume the primary responsibility for caring for an elderly parent. Ricardo, a white informant in his late twenties, devoted much of his daily time to take care of both his elderly grandmother and a sickly mother after his sister had migrated to Spain. Even though the primary responsibility lies with daughters, a son may also move in to live with an elderly mother if she needs help or falls ill – the most important thing is to ensure good care for elderly kin members.

Like the bond between mothers and daughters, the relationship between mothers and sons is deeply reciprocal. Sixty-four-year-old Caridad, who often gave her last pennies to her youngest son Yuniel, stated: "I still have to help him; I give him money now and one day he'll be the one helping me." Thus, while sons do not face as severe disapproval as girls if they fail to meet their mother's wishes, Caridad has strong expectations that Yuniel reciprocates her care later when she needs it. While Western discourses frequently highlight a mother's responsibility for her child (e.g. Howell 2001: 208-209, 221-222), in Cuba, even though a mother's devotion to her children is strongly emphasised, children's responsibilities towards their mother at an adult age are even stronger.

At an older age, a woman's position ascends and the more children and grandchildren she has, the better (Smith 1974: xi; Smith 1996a: 15). Especially

if a woman has daughters, she has the potential to become the respected head of an extended family, gathering her children and her daughters' children, sometimes even her daughters' daughters' children, to live in close proximity to her. (This may occasionally include also her sons' children, as sometimes a child may have more contact with his father's mother than with his father). This family form conforms to the classical notion of Caribbean matrifocality (Clarke 1974; Smith 1988, 1996a). An elderly woman may become the "queen" of the family (*la reina de la familia*) who makes all important decisions, gathers the whole kin group around her, and leads family rituals. This is the peak of a woman's authority. Since children belong primarily to their mother's kin group and kin relations have a matrilateral emphasis, only women are able to gather family around them in this way and to reach the position of a respected head of an extended family. This is much more likely to happen if a woman has many daughters than if she has only sons.

However, at old age, patrilateral relationships become more important as well, in particular if there is few other kin left. When Maria accidentally met her elderly patrilateral aunt in the street, she was extremely friendly with her despite her earlier complaints to me on how difficult the aunt is. After the aunt had gone, she stated: "I have to treat her well, she is the only aunt that I have left; all the others are dead."

Reintegrating a Father to the Kinship Structure at Old Age

While the deep responsibility that Cubans feel for caring for their elderly kin focuses on the reciprocal care between mothers and daughters, at this life stage, more emphasis may shift to the previously marginal patrilateral relations.

Many of my informants had a very sporadic relationship with their father. Some had no contact at all, barely knowing who their father was, some had not been in touch with him for 30 years and others saw their father twice a year; visiting him on Fathers' Day and on the father's birthday. Some of course had a regular close contact with their father, but (as we have seen), men often fail to fulfil the expectations of care that women and children place on them. It is not unusual for the relationships between men and women – and between men and their children – to become distorted via infidelity, neglect, poverty (i.e. a man's failure to make material contributions), alcoholism, or violence. As opposed to the mother – who is always there – the relationship with the father is more likely to emerge only at certain specific contexts.

A man's relationship with his children may be marginal throughout all the other stages of the life cycle but emerge into something more substantial only at a later age. When a man is getting older, his relationship with his children may develop into a closer bond and both sons and daughters may form a more active relationship with the father that may have been 'missing' from their lives for decades. When a man is getting older, he may try to re-establish the relationship with his children, especially if his health is poor and he feels that death is approaching. Moreover, his children's emotions towards him tend to become more ambiguous. While my informants frequently described their mother as endlessly good and their father as "bad" (*malo*), when the father grew older, their views often became milder and more ambivalent.

Xiomara's relationship with her father is a prime example of the way in which a man's relationship with his children may change at old age. Thirty-nine-year-old Xiomara had since childhood had a very bad relationship with her father. He lived at the other end of the island in *Oriente*, whereas she and her mother moved to Havana when her mother met the father of her two younger siblings when she was four years old. However, during my fieldwork her father was becoming old and frail. Her older brother – who had been left to *Oriente* to be raised by his father's kin – was constantly trying to persuade her to enter in contact with her father, but she refused. At the time of my fieldwork in 2008, Xiomara had not been in contact with her father for over twenty years. She described him as an alcoholic who had never given his spouse or children money. He had not even sent Xiomara money for her quince celebration even though he knew that her mother had no means to pay for it. As a result, she missed out the ritual, for her mother's new spouse did not contribute any money towards her quince either. In Xiomara's opinion, her father was evil.[106]

Some months later, however, her father sent her a photo of himself along with a message that he would very much like to see her. Xiomara was still unwilling to go to *Oriente*, but she reciprocated his gift by sending him a razorblade. When I returned to Cuba in the spring 2010, her mind had changed. During the summer (2009), she had finally agreed to go with her mother to visit her matrilateral family in *Oriente*, and at the same time, to go to see her father and his kin. Her father's initial gift had created a relationship of reciprocity between them that later substantiated in Xiomara's visit to her father. The visit had been such a success that now Xiomara wanted to go and see her father in *Oriente* whenever possible. Her father had put up a real party for her, showering her with food and drink to please her. He had slaughtered a pig for her – done only in major celebrations – and bought her as much beer as she could drink (a substantial amount). The return of his daughter was obviously a moment of primary importance for Xiomara's father and an

106 She described her mother's new spouse as even worse than her father.

opportunity to make up for his neglect in the past. Xiomara, on the other hand, was very pleased with the way her father had treated her and felt that she was being loved and appreciated.

This case exemplifies several aspects of the ways in which time may transform a man's kinship bonds, as well as the role played by reciprocal care as the focus of negotiating social relations. First, exchange is both a way to negotiate and affirm kinship bonds. Even a small, material gift may be a way to open up a relationship that has been dormant for decades. When Xiomara's father sent her a photo of himself after decades of non-communication, this installed a reciprocal relationship between them.

Secondly, a woman's relationship with her father is partly determined by his contribution to her quince party. If the father has not contributed to his daughter's quince ritual, it is possible that she refuses to 'do her share' and fails to establish a bond with her father at this point of the life cycle. Xiomara's reason for not wanting to enter in contact with her father was centrally connected with his lack of material contributions to her earlier in life: "Because when I was a child and an adolescent, (...) he never helped me in anything, he has never sent me money." Indeed, as we have seen, money is something that enables a man to create relationships: failing to contribute financially when his children are young may mean that a man risks missing out relationships when he is old.

Moreover, the amount of money matters, so that even if a man has contributed *some* money, but he has only provided the absolute minimum required by the state, this is easily seen as a lack of real concern for his child's wellbeing, since small sums are insufficient for fulfilling his family's proper needs. As stated by Xiomara: "My father sent me 20 pesos per month for maintenance, *sabes*, that is *nothing*; that was not enough for my food, for my clothes, for my shoes, it was not enough for anything. He has never written me or come to see me here [in Havana]." Thus, while even minor contributions may express emotional commitment towards his child from the man's part, the children themselves may not see it this way and very deficient contributions are easily interpreted as absence of love.

Third, as this case suggests, the way in which children relate to their father at adult age is to a degree gendered. Men tend to maintain a closer relationship than women with their father throughout their lives. Yet, sometimes father-son-bonds may become activated only as a 'last resort' when a man has little other kin to turn to. For instance, Norberto entered back in contact with the father he had not seen for many years after his mother died and all of his three

matrilateral brothers had migrated to the US. Since his father was the only close kin he had left in Cuba, he moved in to live with him from Santiago to Havana.

Especially if a man falls ill at old age, his children are likely to come to his help even if their relationship may have been marginal for many years. When Zenaida's father developed cancer, she moved with her children and spouse from Havana back to her natal Santiago in order to be close to her father and take care of him. With so many *habaneros* having roots in Eastern Cuba, such movements also take place in the opposite direction; when Vionaika's old father fell ill, he needed to have special medical treatment only available in Havana. From Santiago, he came to stay for some months at Vionaika's house (she lived close to the hospital). As these cases show, even though sons tend to maintain a closer relationship with their father throughout the life cycle, women's general position as the primary carers for dependent kin holds also in this regard and daughters are more likely to take the main responsibility for caring for their father at old age if he falls ill. Moreover, such cases of internal migration show how kin relations are the factors that make Cubans move back and forth across the country, and allow them both emotional and pragmatic support when life is difficult.

If a man has never had any connection with his children, or if he has been highly abusive towards them (or towards their mother), the relationship with his children may not re-emerge. In this case, a man's sisters' children may step in to care for him instead. Similarly, if a man has no children (either biogenetic or ones that he has raised), he may have a very close relationship with his sister's children throughout his life.

However, even when a man has maintained a relationship with his children, elderly men do not have the possibility of becoming the respected centres of family relations the same way as women do. Since the family system values motherhood and concentrates social relations around the mother, elderly men do not have similar possibilities of ascending in the kinship hierarchy. Unlike women, men are not expected or encouraged to maintain active kin relations with their children, so they do not become the respected heads of kin groups in the same way.

Nevertheless, elderly men may become cherished as grandfathers. Since Cubans tend to have several distinct partners during their life cycle and children from various unions usually follow their mother when she changes residence, a man is likely to be in a close contact with several children that are not 'biogenetically his' but with whom he maintains a relationship as a step-

father. While such relationships may at times be very difficult (in particular between a woman's new partner and her son), they may also create close, affectionate bonds between a man and his partner's children that continue in the next generation. In such cases biogenetic kinship links do not matter; what is important are a man's material contributions to his grandchildren and the affection and love that he displays towards them as a grandfather.

At old age, a man may also gain an important position in the context of ritual kinship. The extensive kin networks created in Afro-Cuban religions in particular grant older men the possibility of becoming respected spiritual leaders of a ritual kin group. In addition, ritual kinship relations created in the context of Catholic baptism may be significant at this life stage, as well as other, non-ritual godparent relationships (*padrino, madrina*) that Cubans may have formed at any life stage (see Chapter 3).

At old age, a man may get a second chance to redress the mistakes he has made over the years as a father. For a man, old age and the oncoming death carry the potential to redefine his relationship with his children. Death may indeed be the final transition that urges a man and his children to restore contact even after years of absence. Some of my informants only went to see their father on his deathbed, some in his funeral, and some made no contact at all. However, the status of a man as a father "remains a key point of reference for this transformation" (Turner 1979b: 204); for him to create a relationship with his children and to become more integrated into the kinship system. Thus while the mother remains at the centre of kinship relations throughout the life cycle, during old age and death, more emphasis shifts on the father in the kinship system – making this a moment of fatherhood in the life cycle.

During this life stage, the machismo central to notions of masculinity tends to relax. In addition, at old age, a man's alliance with his partner becomes easier as machismo eases up and he emerges from his more marginal position. The heterosexual gender difference that centrally defines the life cycle becomes less important; there is no continuous need for a man to prove his heterosexuality anymore. An elderly man may, for instance, be single and live alone without anyone starting to suggest that he is homosexual. Gender difference is no longer emphasised the same way as during other stages of the life cycle. At old age, a man therefore becomes less of a *machote* and at death, he becomes most importantly a parent and a kinsman.

Historical Context of Funerals

As a central aim of the Cuban revolution was to transform the society radically

and create a new state based on egalitarian principles, the field of life cycle rituals had to be transformed as well in order to make a fundamental break from the pre-revolutionary past (see Roth 1990 for similar notions from socialist Bulgaria). Since the objective was to build a society without differences in terms of wealth, race, gender, age, or place of residence, funerals were not supposed to reflect any of these distinctions either. Moreover, socialist funerals were to be atheist and devoid of any type of bourgeois symbolism – for example, the new socialist newspapers were to be free of the pre-revolutionary 'society announcements' informing readers on funerals.[107] While the basic two-part form of funerals – the wake in a funeral home and the burial at the cemetery – remained, the revolution brought changes to the religious aspects of pre-revolutionary funerary practices in particular.[108]

Before the revolution, funeral homes in Havana used to be privately owned.[109] With the revolution, funerary homes became state owned and were stripped of the Catholic religious symbols prevalent in pre-revolutionary times. Cemeteries had been owned by the Catholic Church prior to the revolution, but they were also annexed to the state in the 1960s. To my knowledge, a little chapel in the cemetery of *Colón* is the only exception and remains the property of the Catholic Church. The blessing of bodies in this chapel has continued throughout the revolution.

However, as state policies rarely succeed in bringing about exactly the intended results, in the 1990s, as a part of the general revival of distinct religious and ritual practices (see e.g. Azicri 2000), the popularity of Catholic rituals ascended as well.[110] At the time of my fieldwork, the original revolutionary policy had resulted in a mixture of socialist and religious funerary practices. The earlier two-part structure had given rise to a type of

107 In the 1960s, the revolution abolished the privately-owned press. The new socialist newspapers did not publish announcements about births, weddings, birthday parties, or funerals. While such practices are currently unattainable for most Cubans, the deaths of significant state personalities are featured in the state media. Such announcements can include anything from very high-ranking state personalities (such as Vilma Espin or Juan Alameida), to persons of a relatively low socialist ranking; such as well-known artists, musicians, actors, or athletes.

108 In the 19th century, wakes took place at home, after which the body was passed to the cemetery to receive a Catholic blessing (see Villaverde 2005: 436-437). I was also told that "before" (*antes* – i.e. at some point of the revolutionary period) people in *Oriente* used to perform wakes at home and in the countryside (in Havana province), wakes are sometimes still conducted in the home of the deceased. In terms of funerals today, there is remarkable continuity from the 19th century in this regard, with the exception of the change of place where wakes occur, and the lack of black clothes (which are described in Villaverde 2005: 436-437). It is possible that the current lack of a dress code in funerals has to do with socialist ideological notions, for I was told that before the revolution, Cubans used to wear black clothes in funerals, but currently they wear clothes of any colour and type. At the same time, it is likely that the material deficiencies of the Special Period diversified this practice even more, as clothes of any specific colour were hard to come by. I have not managed to locate exact information on when and why the habit of wearing black clothes in funerals disappeared.

109 After the revolution many of these funerary home companies moved to the other side of the Bay to Miami, where they continue operating with the same names as in pre-revolutionary Cuba, such as *Caballero Rivera* or *Maspons*.

110 At the same time, it is noticeable that Cuba has never been a particular stronghold of Catholicism (e.g. Azicri 2000: 370 ff. 7; Cardenal 2003: 505).

division of labour between the state and the Catholic Church. The 24-hour wake takes place in a state funeral home. Such funeral homes are numerous in Havana and in keeping with the equality-ideal of the socialist government, the services offered by them are entirely free (with the exception of flowers, catering services, and transportation of the body to other provinces, which are all very low-cost). After the wake, the burial takes place in a cemetery. In the Havana main cemetery of *Colón* where most of my observation took place, a Catholic deacon blesses most bodies prior to the burial.

Wake: Keeping Company to the Deceased

After his sudden death due to a heart attack at the age of 61, Javier Rodríguez's wake took place in a funeral home in a central neighbourhood of Havana.[111] *Everything happened on a very short notice and the wake started within 24 hours of his death. Since funeral homes (with one exception) lack refrigeration, wakes usually take place very soon after death.*

Since Rodríguez was a famous socialist personality, the funeral home was crowded. Some of the attendants wore green military uniforms and even a high-ranking government official was present. With approximately 130 attendees, there were more people at the wake than in the burial. Everyone who knows the deceased is expected to participate either in the wake or in the burial, but Rodríguez's closest family members and friends attended them both.

The wake was a quiet, simple occasion with no religious symbolism in evidence. Rodríguez's body was placed in a coffin with a see-through glass covering the top half and surrounded by wreaths made of dark yellow marigolds, white lilies, and white and red roses.[112] *They were brought by Rodríguez's kin members, friends, and colleagues as well as sent by important state officials (also by Fidel and Raúl Castro). After the wake, the wreaths follow the body to the cemetery.*

On the left side of the coffin, there were poems written by the deceased – a practice reflecting his life work as a writer and as the director of an important cultural

111 I chose Javier Rodríguez's (a pseudonym) wake for my description here because this was the only wake that I managed to observe properly. Cubans tend to live long and keep surprisingly healthy and active until old age and none of my close informants lost kin, friends, or neighbors during my fieldwork. Rodríguez's wake was a large-scale public event, making it easier for me to attend it. Death is a painful subject that Cubans often want to avoid, which makes it a difficult research topic. As opposed to the openness of baptisms and weddings, as well as the great frequency of quince parties, funerals were indeed very hard to access. However, I did manage to interview several informants on the subject in addition to my limited observations. At the same time, the fact that there were no deaths amongst the people with whom I worked, tells something important about Cuba's larger structural context: even amongst poor people there are very few infant deaths, the free state health care helps to curtail illnesses, and active social lives keep elderly Cubans in a relatively good condition.

112 Both Rodríguez's coffin as well as his wreaths were exceptionally exclusive in Cuban standards due to his high-ranking socialist position. For most Cubans, coffins are plain enclosed boxes with no decorations, and wreaths are made only of yellow marigolds.

institution.[113] *Due to Rodríguez's notable socialist achievements, the coffin was covered with a Cuban flag. The flag is received only by particularly significant state personalities to mark their special status as "Heroes of the Republic" (Héroes de la República de Cuba). These objects emphasised the deceased's position as a representative of the official state virtues.*

People passed by the coffin to leave their last respects and saying goodbye to the deceased. Some of them were crying. Rodríguez's son and his late-teenaged granddaughter stood constantly close to the coffin, crying. As opposed to the symbolism of the wake that emphasised Rodríguez's position as a prominent socialist, this emphasised his position as a loved father and grandfather.

Placed in the coffin, the deceased had closed eyes and he looked more like a wax doll than a dead body. This was due to the preparation done to the body before its display at the funeral home. In order to give the deceased the appearance of a live person, Rodríguez had received a coating of foundation on his face, blush on his cheeks, and red colour on his lips. Rodríguez was a bold man in life, but in death he had been given a thick brown wig and thick eyebrows.

Coffee and cheap, low-percentage local beer were on offer for the mourners – unusual for Cuban funerals, but an aspect connected to Rodríguez's high status in the state hierarchy. Even though Rodríguez was a notable socialist personality, there were no speeches, music or any other ceremonies at the wake (these may, however, take place at the cemetery).

As is usual, the wake lasted for 24 hours after which people started to leave. The closest family lingered inside along with a couple of close friends and the government official. The rest waited outside for the coffin to be brought out. As the coffin was brought to the hearse, people crammed close to the car, many of them crying and hugging each other. The car's driving away marked a particularly emotional moment. Most people did not follow the body to the cemetery but went home to rest. Only Rodríguez's closest family members and friends drove after his body to the cemetery.

Javier Rodríguez's wake was exceptional since he was an important state personality. Usually wakes are much smaller events – sometimes gathering only two to three persons – with no food, drink or offerings, no socialist elements or decorations and just a simple, plain coffin. However, this case exemplifies well some of the elements that I see as central to Cuban wakes.

First, the attention paid to the body: regardless of the gender of the deceased, all bodies receive make-up. While more make-up is usually put on women's

113 This is rather exceptional. It is rare for Cubans to place objects except flowers around the coffin or inside it at funerals.

faces, male bodies may receive an emphasised focus on their looks: Rodríguez's body was added a wig to replace the hair he did not have during his old age – the aim was thus not to make his body look like it was in life, but *better*. In other life cycle rituals, the modifying of the body centres almost solely on the woman. In this sense, funerals downplay the gender difference, which is central in day-to-day life.

Other aspects of the preparation of the body conform to the way in which Cubans relate to the body in usual contexts. As in life, in death the relationship to the body is profoundly social. A funeral home employee told me that the preparation of the body is completed in order to ensure that the body takes on a more lively, healthy, and pleasant appearance for the mourners attending the wake: "[the body] is given a form that is like slightly smiling on the lips so that family members do not see that he had a very traumatic cause of death." This relates to the way in which an individual's well-cared-for body testifies of the love of those around him/her. Here the care is provided by funeral home employees, but it also reflects the care that the deceased received at life from his or her kin: a very pale, suffering-looking body could hint at the neglect of those around the deceased to care for him/her when s/he was alive. Moreover, as looking good is 'socially respectful,' the preparation of the body – in order to make the deceased look more alive – also turns the deceased into a 'morally respectable' person in death (if not in life). This is also a way of helping the survivors in their mourning, for a more pleasant aspect of the body assures the attendants that the deceased is not suffering: s/he is in peace.

Secondly, the wake emphasises shared communality across social divisions. The purpose of the wake is to keep company both to the person who has passed away and to the grieving family. Usually anyone close to the deceased or to the family comes to make an appearance at the wake as a sign of caring and participating in the family's loss. The attendants include kin members of all types (matrilateral, patrilateral, affine, and ritual), as well as friends, neighbours, and work colleagues of the deceased and his/ her kin. An employee of a funeral home described the meaning of the wake as follows: "They are (…) keeping company to the closest family, showing solidarity (*solidaridad*) with them. In general we Cubans are fairly united, fairly solidary, the same with the neighbours, friends, companions [i.e. work colleagues]." This stress on the sheer *compartir* (sharing) is possibly further emphasised by the fact that not much happens during the wake.

Since wakes take place on such short notice, all those who want to participate do not always make it on time.[114] Two of my male informants stated that they

114 Since nearly all of my informants were originally from Eastern Cuba, many continued having a significant number of kin outside of Havana. When one of their kin members passed away, many had not managed to return to their

had missed a wake since they had been notified too late. In the first case, the deceased was the informant's father's brother and in the second case the deceased was the informant's sister's daughter's husband's sister. These are both kinship connections that are fairly marginal in normal contexts (patrilateral and affinal bonds), which is possibly reflected in the fact that these informants missed the wake. However, at the same time, given that both men wanted to participate in the wake, were greatly affected by it, and in the end *had* been notified of it, shows that at death, all types of kinship connections become significant. All those who played a part in the life of the deceased or are close with his/her kin, are expected to participate regardless of whether they are kin, neighbours, or friends. In this sense, death downplays the divisions that are central in day-to-day social relations.

Third, death emphasises the position of the deceased as a parent, a kin member and a person embedded in networks of social relations. Despite the fact that my informants considered that places associated with death may have contagious properties and pass on bad 'energy' ("*los malos*") to those going within their vicinity, people stay close to the body at the wake.[115] The children and the grandchildren of the deceased may stay close to the body for the duration of the wake, emphasising the position of the deceased as a loved parent and a kin member. One of my informants referred to the wake as "taking care" of the body and this is what the children and the grandchildren of the deceased in particular are doing by remaining constantly close to the body throughout the wake. Also in death, care becomes the expression of love that reproduces the bond between the deceased and those close to him/ her.

A man's children may attend his funeral even if he has had little or no contact with them for years, even decades. Since women usually maintain a continuous, close contact with their children, a woman's children would hardly ever miss her funeral. Children's participation in their father's funeral is more precarious, and it represents for the children the potential to either renew or undermine their relationship with their father. While a woman's/a mother's funeral displays a clear continuation of the more general mother-centred tendency in kinship relations, a man's/a father's funeral represents a change in the previously often marginal father-child relationship. People die as mothers and fathers: everyone needs children since they are seen as the only truly lasting relationship in a person's life – to die alone is the worst thing in the world.

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home province in time for the funeral due to the bad state of the transportation and lack of money for the ticket.

115 This conforms to Hertz's view of the body of the deceased as having polluting properties during the intermediary period as well as being exposed to dangers, which is why both the ritual and the company of the survivors is needed (2004: 199-201).

Burial: Catholic Last Rites

Depending on the wishes of the deceased and the family members, the body is taken either to the cemetery, to the crematorium, or to another province to be buried after the wake. Less people usually attend the burial than the wake: the (matrilateral, patrilateral, affinal, and sometimes ritual) kin as well as the closest friends and colleagues of the deceased are typically present. (However, it is not unusual for there to be only three of four persons present.)

At the cemetery of *Colón*, the body is usually taken to a Catholic chapel to receive the last sacraments.[116] This Catholic observance of the last rites is a favoured practice and represents one of the two most popular Catholic life-cycle rituals in Cuba (the other being Catholic baptism). In addition to the state, the Catholic Church is an important provider of ritual services at the time of death.

A deacon performs the blessing of the body, which is a very rapid and a rather improvised event that does not cost anything to the participants. Advance bookings are not required. Sometimes there is a queue of bodies waiting for a blessing outside the chapel.

The family members of the deceased decide either beforehand or on the spot whether the body will be taken to the chapel. Sometimes the blessing evokes heated arguments amongst the participants, when a part of the family wants to have the body blessed and others refuse to it. At times the situation is resolved so that some go inside the chapel with the body and stand next to it while the deacon performs the rites while those who label themselves as non-religious stay outside. Others may remain somewhere in-between, standing in the doorway of the chapel, half way between the religious and non-religious space, or moving between the two during the rapid, five to ten minute rites. For some people, such as Caridad, this was the only occasion they ever visited a church (for the funeral of her mother-in-law).

The deacon asks no questions on the religiosity of the deceased when a body is brought in. It does not matter whether the deceased would really be labelled as a Catholic by the Church or not, and Cubans themselves rarely see a problem in combining distinct religious practices. Olga, (a *mulata* woman in her early fifties and a practitioner of Santería, Palo, Spiritism, and Catholicism),

116 Seventy-eight per cent of Havana's deceased are buried at Colón (see anonymous 2010). It is possible that this practice is specific to urban Havana for a female informant described to me two recent burials in the Havana province countryside, stating that in neither of the cases there were blessings. She also said that one of the funerals was for her recently deceased grandfather, who had been a member of the Cuban Communist Party – a policeman who resisted any of his children or grandchildren being baptised because it would have fitted badly with the revolutionary ideology – so when he passed away, there was no blessing either.

conceptualised the reason for the performance of Catholic funerary rituals as such: "In the church of the cemetery they do a mass to let God know that you're going there." Some of my informants, like Serguei, did not separate Catholic funerary practices from Afro-Cuban and Spiritist religious practices, which are also frequently performed to the deceased and his or her family members at death: "There is something that is done so that the spirit rises to heaven. You have to do certain prayers so that the spirit does not latch on to the body. When a person dies, the spirit stays like fragmented; it is as if it doesn't know whether it's alive or dead."[117] Most of my informants perceived almost any type of religious rituals as bearing a general blessing and protection upon the person to whom they are performed.[118]

After the performance of the Catholic blessing, the body is taken to the burial spot in a funerary car. The extreme silence of the procession forms a marked contrast with everyday loudness, chatter, and vivacity: not a word is said, no music or singing performed. The procession is quiet and sad.

Upon arrival at the burial site, the employees of the cemetery open the vault, lift the coffin from the hearse, lower it to the grave, and close the grave. Men pass the wreaths from the hearse to the grave site and they are placed atop the grave. The attendees watch this ceremony silently and when the grave is closed, everyone departs.[119] Usually there are no speeches or any type of further ceremonies at the burial.[120]

However, in Raúl Castro's wife Vilma Espin's burial in June 2007, a tape featuring three songs sung by the deceased was played when her ashes were laid to the ground. My informants commented that this was "what she wanted" and that the songs were "lullabies for the children and the grandchildren" and a bolero for Raúl. Here music was Vilma's way to comfort the loved ones she had left behind – a way to continue caring for them after her death. Death could not put an end to her position as a mother, grandmother, and a spouse.

117 Another male informant told me that this ritual is practiced during nine days after the death: "Nine days with water glasses at home, every day the family prays and every day both the water and the spirit keep elevating."

118 This view conforms to Hertz's notion of protecting the body from the specific dangers to which it is exposed during the intermediary period. According to Hertz, ritual activity reinforces the ability of the deceased against harmful attacks. (2004: 199-201).

119 However, I attended the funeral of a man where before being lowered into the ground, the coffin was opened so that the grandson of the deceased could fulfil his last wish. The grandson went to stand right next to the grave and poured a bottle of rum into the coffin. He cried all the time and said: "This is the last drink that you and I will take together." He then took a drink from the bottle and poured the rest of the rum into the coffin. After that he placed the bottle and a small bundle of white flowers inside the coffin, after which the coffin was lowered to the grave. This practice emphasised the deceased's position as a cherished member of a kin group, a beloved grandfather, and the special connection he had with his grandson, who had been raised by the deceased when his parents had migrated to Miami.

120 If the deceased is an important socialist personality, there are speeches. When speeches take place, they tend to emphasise the deceased's achievements as a worker and a builder of socialism, stating, for instance, that the deceased was an "exemplary revolutionary" or a "good sugar-worker." Notable cultural personalities may have music played after the lowering of the coffin to the grave.

On another occasion, I witnessed also a state representation on funerals stressing an individual's kinship position rather than that of a distinguished socialist. During the evening news, the funeral of a significant state personality was described this way: "People did not say to him that he was an excellent [artist] – which he was. People said to him: "You are my brother, my son, you are a great friend." Here kinship idiom is employed to display the extraordinary personal worth of the deceased, but not in a manner that would emphasise the value of the deceased as a father, grandfather, uncle, brother, or son in his personal kin relations. Instead, kinship terminology is used to represent the value of the deceased as a *compañero* to those working with him, as a family member in a 'socialist kinship group'; here Cuba as a whole ("people") is represented as the kin into which the deceased is closely integrated. At the same time, the use of a kinship idiom emphasises the value such roles maintain in Cuba.



FIG. 9: A RECENT BURIAL SITE AT THE COLON CEMETERY

I attended a funeral where the deceased man's son-in-law spoke briefly at the end of the burial. In my opinion, this had to do with his position as someone at the same time 'far enough' and 'close enough' to the deceased. This is a practice that does away with normal kinship divisions – the son-in-law ceases to be an affine and becomes just "family" instead. This same tendency to turn

'affines' into "family" in funerals can be observed in the statement by Caridad (discussed earlier) whose only visit to a church had been when her mother-in-law passed away. Death has the potential to merge together those kinship bonds that are conceived as distinct in day-to-day life.

Death turns affines into family. However at the same time, such distinctions between who is or is not "family" are highly momentous, varying from one context to another. While affines become family during funerals, this should not be understood as a permanent transformation that automatically continues after the ritual. Rather, funeral is a moment where divisions temporarily disappear, but this is not a permanent fusion. Cubans live their lives embedded in networks of social relations and close kinship connections and that is how they die as well. At death, distinctions become temporarily downplayed and all types of links become important.

Burial Site: Origins and Unity

When Vilma Espin passed away, one of my male informants stated: "She asked to be buried where she was born." After death, there is a strong attempt to take a person's body where s/he is seen to 'truly belong.' This is understood as a connection to a place. I heard of many persons born in Eastern Cuba who had been taken back to *Oriente* for their burial after many years of residing in the capital. Being buried where one is born links the beginning and the end of the life, closing the circle of life.

Nevertheless, most often Cubans are buried in the municipal cemetery of the area where they are officially inscribed as residents (which may be very different from the place where they are actually sleeping their nights). The cheapest option (about 100 MN, 4 USD) is to have the body cremated and place the ashes in a little box inside of a wall at the cemetery. The wall displays a plate inscribed with the name of the deceased. Another, more costly alternative is to pay for a place in a burial vault in the cemetery, where the (un-cremated) body is placed along with an engraved tombstone or a plate. In *Colón*, there are collective state vaults as well as privately owned vaults that usually contain the rests of several family members. My informant estimated that a spot in the state vault costs about 200 MN (about 8 USD). Since privately owned vaults usually run in the family, there are few possibilities to acquire them and if they come for sale, the price tends to be very high (for instance, an internet advertisement in 2012 was selling a vault that can accommodate 6 coffins and 15 spots in the ossuary for the price of 800 CUC, while another was asking 500 CUC, see Anonymous 2012a; Anonymous 2012b). In Havana, another option (that is cheaper than a private family vault but exclusive in other ways) is to acquire a burial place in one of the pantheons owned by

distinct Spanish societies at the cemetery of *Colón*.[121] In the case of vaults, the kin of the deceased has to go and extract the bones in two years' time in order to make room for new bodies, but the tombstones remain. Finally, important state personalities are buried in pantheons specifically made for them and the bodies of the most significant state personalities are placed in separate, monumental grave sites set up especially for them, such as Che Guevara's grave site in Santa Clara or the burial site for several important socialist personalities, including Vilma Espin (and Raúl Castro's future grave), in *el Mausoleo a los Héroes y Mártires del Segundo Frente Oriental Frank País* (the Frank País Mausoleum to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Second Oriental Front) close to Santiago de Cuba. As opposed to the official state ideology of egalitarianism, this range of distinct burial sites shows a clear differentiation on the basis of a person's wealth and socialist accomplishments.



FIG. 10: A MAN'S GRAVESITE: "PAPI, WE REMEMBER YOU WITH LOVE. YOUR SPOUSE AND DAUGHTER."

The distinct Spanish societies that have functioned in Cuba since the 19th century offer ordinary Cubans a way to pay for a burial plot that is more private than a collective state vault but cheaper than a privately owned family

121 While there are other 'ethnic societies' for Cubans tracing their descent to a certain part of the world, such as the Arab Union (*Unión Árabe de Cuba*) and the Chinese Association (*la Casona* in *Centro Habana*), I am only aware of the Spanish Societies owning pantheons at *Colón* cemetery. However, Cubans who are Chinese descendants have their own cemetery in Havana. The cemetery was built in the 19th century like the cemetery of *Colón* (dating from 1854).

vault.[122] These societies collect together persons with descent from a certain region of Spain such as Galicia, Asturias, or Andalucía and they demand "a proof of kinship" in order to accept persons as members. (The only one of my informants who knew about these societies was unfortunately unable to tell me on what basis kinship is actually defined for such purposes, as he himself had been admitted without a "proof of kinship"). Most of the members are elderly, and for instance the "*Hijos de ayuntamiento de Buján*" (Children of the Municipality of Buján) states that out of its 260 members, 102 are Spanish and 9 are migrants from Spain (see anonymous 2012c). The associations charge their members a yearly fee. José paid the yearly amount of 144 MN (about 6,50 USD, out of a maximum yearly income of about 300 USD) to the "Aragonese Charity Association" (*Sociedad Aragonesa de Beneficencia*). While the sum is not high, Spanish societies differentiate persons on the basis of their known biogenetic kinship connections and ethnicity: whether they can be labelled as descendants of Spaniards to an acceptable degree. They are thus very strongly white associations; persons with a notable Afro-Cuban family background do not have the possibility to be buried in these pantheons. On the other hand, the Yoruba Association (*Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba*), for instance, does not to my knowledge own any kinds of burial sites.[123] Thus, death becomes a moment when 'ethnic' and/or 'racial' divisions become emphasised. While in life, the official state discourse – as well as, in many ways, everyday practices – stress Cubans' high degree of "racial mixing," at death such distinctions emerge again. Death differentiates those that are considered to be distinct, even though they would have been merged in life. Death categorises persons on the basis of wealth, ethnicity, residence or place, socialist achievements, and notions of 'biogenetic origins.' In this sense, burial sites come to represent a symbolic map of a specific social order, composed of clear divisions as opposed to the mixing (and creolisation) of practical life, providing the material symbol of the continuity of certain types of divisions (Bloch and Parry 1982: 32-35). Thus the burial site contradicts the tendency that funerals have to downplay such divisions temporarily.

However, death not only differentiates, it also joins persons together; unites those who are considered to belong together, even if they would have been apart in life. For José, it is important to be buried with his loved ones in the Aragonese Charity Association pantheon, where are buried his mother, his

122 Spanish societies seem to be comparable to the Jamaican "friendly societies" described by Jean Besson (2002: 237). Besson notes that these emerged in various parts of the Caribbean after the emancipation as mutual aid societies for all kinds of misfortunes. These operate by collecting membership fees and a significant purpose is to fund the members' funerals, which are expensive in Jamaica. (Besson 2002: 231-235). However, the friendly societies do not include a similar 'ethnic' differentiation as the Spanish societies in Cuba (although the Jamaican friendly societies are predominantly Afro-Caribbean), even though they do have connections to kinship through their functioning as regional or village-based associations in a context where many persons own bilaterally inherited family land.

123 However, distinct Afro-Cuban religions have a rich tradition of mortuary rituals so there are other ways in which Cubans may cherish these family connections.

two brothers, and his ex-partner.[124] Moreover, it is central for him that the remains can stay indefinitely in the Spanish societies' ossuary, creating a unified final resting place for kin and partners. The family tomb thereby unites persons irrespective of their gender. The burial site is a way to integrate a man to his kin; the family tomb becomes the ultimate way to unite a man to his family after death.

In José's case, the family tomb is also a place that merges matrilateral, patrilateral, and affine kin. Joining together spouses, death carries a strong potential to abolish affine divisions in particular. When Vilma Espin passed away, Raúl Castro ordered a massive rock to be made for her in the *Segundo Frente Oriental* and next to it, another rock where his body will be buried when he dies. While affine relations are conflict-ridden and difficult throughout the life cycle and affinity emerges only in momentary connections – even in funerals, affines become "family" only temporarily – burial in the family tomb abolishes such divisions, turning 'affines' in 'consanguines' (Turner 1979b: 184). Death merges family members, regardless of whether the bonds that connect them are matrilateral, patrilateral, or affinal. Certain distinctions that are significant in life cease to be so at death; the family tomb abolishes earlier divisions and fuses all kin together. Via the family tomb, death creates lasting kinship.

While affines are not *always* buried together,[125] this, however, suggests that death carries the potential to become a moment of transformation where previous divisions are undermined in favour of kinship unity. This proposes that sexuality is a force that has the potential to unite persons permanently, both via the birth of children as well as via a couple's burial into the shared family tomb. This is a way to recognise the significance of sexuality and affinity/affines as crucial to the creation of fertility (cf. Bloch and Parry 1982: 21) and the new relationships that it brings, despite the strongly matrilateral tendencies in Cuban kinship. In this sense, death creates a similar moment of affinity in the life cycle as the birth of a child.

In José's case, the connection to his kin and to an 'ethnicity' via the Aragonese pantheon is also a link to a symbolic place of origin – a bond to Aragón in Spain from where his kin once set foot to the Caribbean. This gives a symbolic

124 Since all these people were white and his current wife is not, it remained unclear to me how strongly the policy of 'Spanish roots' is imposed and whether José's current wife will possibly be buried in the same pantheon with him when she dies. Since José adores his current wife, it is obvious that he would want to be together with her also in death. At the same time, it is unlikely that he would have looked into the subject since the mere thought of losing her is too unbearable for him.

125 Sometimes the primacy of matrilateral kin connections holds also in death. Yusisley, a black woman in her late twenties, told me that both her mother and her father have their own family tombs where they will someday be buried. However, both her matrilateral grandparents were buried in her matrilateral family tomb, merging the initial affinal link.

continuity to his family history despite the shallow genealogical knowledge he has of his kin. Via the family tomb, family continuity becomes merged with locality (Bloch and Parry 1982: 32-34). As the Caribbean is a region particularly marked by historical disjuncture and Cuba even more so, in a context where land possession and inheritance were supposed to play no role, this allows creating a symbolic notion of a historical connection to a place. Tombs provide the material symbol for the continuity of kinship groups (Bloch and Parry 1982: 32-33).

At the same time, such unity at death abolishes exchange, for the internal divisions between the persons amongst who exchanges are performed, collapse or fuse together (Bloch and Parry 1982: 38). Transmission and memory thus become emphasised over exchange (Godelier 1998: 408-410). Nevertheless, the dialectics of reciprocal care that centrally define social relations continue in another form between the living and the dead.

Second Burial: Creating Family Continuity

Two years after the burial, the body has to be removed from the vault in order to make room for the recently deceased. At this point, only bones should be left (although in some cases, especially if the deceased was a young person there may be more bodily features left). They are removed from the vault and placed in an ossuary. The coffin is placed in the larger part of the vault and at the back of the same vault there is a small separated section, which forms the ossuary. This is the final resting place of the bones. The bones are wrapped in a piece of cloth, perfumed and sprinkled with talc.[126] This is done so that the bones would be well preserved ("p*a' que mantenga*"; "*para que se conserven*"). The bundle of cloth is then placed in a plastic bag and set in the ossuary. Since the ossuary is the place that preserves the family bones, it becomes a materialisation of kin permanence.

This "removal of the bones" (*sacar los huesos*) forms a second burial of the deceased, performed only by kin members. Yusisley told me that when her matrilateral grandmother, grandfather, and young (matrilateral parallel) cousin all passed away during the same year, their second burials were conducted at the same time and they were all placed in the same family tomb. Even though residing in Havana, Yusisley's mother's family was originally from provincial Havana. A large part of her matrilateral kin continued to reside there and this was also the location of her matrilateral family tomb. Yusisley's mother, her mother's younger sisters, her cousin's godmother,

126 I did not have a chance to participate in a second burial since I only found out about the practice at the very end of my fieldwork, when my neighbour Yusisley happened to visit me immediately after her kin's second burial. So I rely on her description of the event in this section.

and she herself went to the cemetery to perform the second burial. (Since her cousin died very young in his early twenties, his mother did not have the strength to come to the second burial.)

Yusisley described the event by saying that it is "very disagreeable, it is very sad (...) because you truly bury a person, s/he is dead but you bury him and (...) when you go to get the bones, [there is] nothing more [but the bones], it is unpleasant." The grief continues a long time after the death and the kin re-encounter the original feelings of loss when they visit the cemetery. At the time of the second funeral, the deceased is in a truly transformed state; what was a person has transformed into pure bones. Bones are unchangeable and the death cannot transform them anymore; the body of the deceased emerges from the grave completely altered (Hertz 2004: 202, 210). Yusisley's statement suggests that the second burial represents a particularly sad moment for the surviving kin since this is a moment of recognition: the deceased has undeniably transformed into something else that is no longer human. The altered state of the deceased at the time of the second burial as well as the special purifying treatment performed to the bones, conform to Hertz's (2004: 205) notion of the deceased receiving a new body during the second burial. Hertz sees that this profound transformation in the character of the deceased converts the deceased from a potentially malicious and dangerous being into a revered ancestor. I never heard Cubans making explicit connections between the bones and their ancestors. Nevertheless, the ossuary does represent a place where all the deceased of the family are gathered together, becoming in this sense a material representation of family continuity and permanence. Yusisley stated that "every family has to have a vault so that everything is (...) in peace and tranquillity." The specific plaque attached to the ossuary carrying the family name affirms the family connection of all those placed there and makes the deceased the true possessor of the place s/he occupies (Hertz 2004: 207). This way, the deceased begins a new life in a transformed form (Hertz 2004: 202).

In his classical discussion on the second burial, Hertz (2004) argues that the ritual marks the completion of the burial process since it represents the final passing of the deceased's soul to the afterlife (a complete integration to the land of the dead), the reintegration of the living to the normal life without the deceased, and the placing of the bones to their final resting place as opposed to the temporary, liminal state of the deceased before it. While Hertz argues for the universality of the second burial, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1982: 3) point out in a more recent volume that Hertz's view is unsuitable for many ethnographic contexts. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the Cuban practice of the second burial fit well with Hertz' view.

First, the second burial marks the final resting place of the body of the deceased and the bones placed in the family tomb represent permanence, stability, and continuity. This is suggested also by the manipulation to which the bones are submitted before the final burial "for their conservation." While the initial burial site within the vault represents a temporary ground for the body, the ossuary is a materialisation of permanence.

Secondly, the second burial incites the surviving kin to revisit intensely the grief brought about by the loss of a loved one. The second burial represents the final closure of the process of transition of the deceased from the domain of the living to that of the dead. The fact that Yusisley described her aunt as not having the strength to come to her son's second burial suggests that this final closure is experienced particularly intensely. Moreover, the grief of the survivors is closely connected to the state of the body. As Yusisley stated; "you bury a person," a human being, but take up only bones. In the second burial the beloved kin member has transformed into pure bones. The deceased in his/her earlier state is forever lost to the living and can only be reached transcendentally. On the other hand, Cuban burials lack a tight interconnection between the body, the soul, and the state of the mourning kin, since it is thought that the soul transits to the afterlife as early as nine days after the death.

However, since Yusisley states that every family must have a family vault for their own peace, it seems that the second burial also marks a type of finalisation in the position of the bereaved kin, as the placing of the bones in the family vault ensures tranquillity for the family – for both living and deceased. In this sense, the second burial finalises the process of mourning for the living (Hertz 2004: 203-205).[127]

In their discussion of funerary practices, Bloch and Parry (1982: 24-27) argue that women are often responsible for handling the body after death since due to their reproductive functions, women connect with biology, putrescence, and sexuality more than men. Bloch and Parry also state that women are often associated with the first, temporary burial – more linked to the biology-connected, negative aspects of death and the perishable individual – which the second burial rejects and surpasses (Bloch and Parry 1982: 24-27). To Bloch and Parry, the second burial is importantly linked with the regenerative aspects of the funeral process, which "create the permanent order and legitimize traditional authority" (1982: 11).

The Cuban case differs from this. The first burial is more collective in

127 The mourning period for the widow does not seem to follow the completion of the second burial (cf. Hertz 2004: 203), for a widow may enter into a new relationship before the completion of the second burial.

character and conducted by the state and the Catholic Church as the main ritual actors. The second funeral, however, is importantly family-oriented, and – as Yusisley's description suggests – may sometimes be conducted entirely by women. Since I lack other information on the subject, it is hard to say whether there is a specific connection between women and the second burial, but at least Yusisley's statement confirms that there is no specific connection between men and second funerals, as suggested by Bloch and Parry (1982). Following the importance that both Hertz (2004) and Bloch and Parry (1982) lay on the second funeral, this suggests not only a connection between women's important position in creating family continuity via birth-giving, but also the primacy of family continuity as a focus of orientation for Cubans as opposed to their more occasional contact with both the state and the Catholic Church. Thus, while both the state and the church importantly rely on a notion of temporal permanence and continuity, what becomes important for individual Cubans is their family continuity through time, attained significantly through women.

Death as Connection

Even though death as a process becomes finalised via the second burial, the relationship between the deceased and his or her kin continues in a transformed form. The dead form part of the lives of the living a long time after death. Via various practices Cubans attend (*atender*) the deceased: take care of a lost loved one. Such practices are also a way for the living to process the grief caused by the absence of a cherished family member.

Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day

Muertos (dead people) are considered to reside in the cemetery. On Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, the anniversary of death, and the anniversary of the deceased's birthday, the living visit their dead relatives (their *muertos*) at the cemetery bringing flowers, food, drink, and tobacco, performing Afro-Cuban religious rituals, and ensuring the tomb is clean and the grave-site in good condition. They talk to their *muertos*, some play music, and some may even sit on top of the grave drinking beer just keeping company to their deceased kin. In Cuba such practices do not stop at the second burial, but continue also after it (cf. Hertz 2004: 203).

On both Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day, Cubans' visits to the graves of deceased mothers and fathers do not include only their own biogenetic parents, but may consist of any persons who were parents in their lifetime and

with whom they had a close relationship.[128] These visits therefore provide an opportunity to remember deceased grandparents, spouses, in-laws, and ritual kin. For instance, one of my male informants visited the tombs of his mother, his two ex-spouses, and his brother's wife on Mothers' Day. This highlights the fact that Cubans die as mothers and fathers with wide kin networks.



FIG. 11: TA' JOSÉ, A MIRACULOUS MUERTO: "TA' JOSÉ, I THANK YOU FOR GRANTING ME WHAT I ASKED FOR AND FULFILLING MY DREAM."

While Cubans visit the cemetery in multitudes on both Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day, the Mothers' Day collects by far the largest crowds; few people miss a visit to their deceased mother's grave if they live in the same province (see also Rosendahl 1997: 65). On Mothers' Day, buses are extremely packed since everybody heads to visit either their living or deceased mother and streets flood with sellers offering flowers to be taken to the crowded cemetery. In honour of the Mothers' Day, José even took his mother's grave plate to his home in order to give it a proper wash and to enforce the engravings in it. I see all these practices as a way of taking care of one's deceased kin, as a way to continue the relationship after the death.

128 The same concerns the celebration of Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day amongst the living: Cubans congratulate any person who is a mother or a father on these special dates. Moreover, all women who have reached sexual maturity are likely to receive congratulations on Mothers' Day – showing how all women are conceptualised as potential mothers (see also Andaya 2007: 200 ff. 11).

This care is reciprocal. On both Mothers' Day and on Fathers' Day, people ask for distinct favours from those *muertos* that are especially capable of performing miracles; such as *Amelia la Milagrosa* – a mother who passed away in the 19th century and is buried together with her child (see Martiatu 2006: 143-146) – and *Ta' José*, who was a powerful *palero* in life and continues to be one in death.[129] Thus, the dead may also help and take care of the living.

Misa de los Difuntos and Spirits

Catholic Masses of the Dead (*misa de difuntos / misa de muertos*) enjoy a very high degree of popularity and are performed at least once a week to full audiences. In the most popular churches, masses for the deceased are performed several times per week.[130] The position of the Mass of the Dead is so central to Cubans' relationship with the Catholic Church that a Catholic priest noted to me that the word mass (*misa*) itself automatically refers to the Mass of the Dead amongst Cubans.

While Catholicism has historically been more popular amongst white Cubans, these masses gather Cubans of all colours; white, black, and *mulatos* and the religious conviction of the people attending the masses varies between Catholicism, Santería, Spiritism, and Palo.[131] However, what connects the participants is a desire from the part of the living to maintain a relationship with their *muertos* and to show love and care towards their deceased kin.

Along with Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day, the anniversary of the death, and the birthday of the deceased may call for a Mass of the Dead. The Masses of the Dead are conducted at various distinct occasions, forming a way for the living to try to ease and improve the condition of the deceased.

In these masses, the priest reads aloud the names of deceased persons and the attendees request blessings for them.[132] Especially during the week preceding Mothers' Day, the church office gathers long queues of people wanting to place the names of their *muertos* for the Mass of the Dead. The church charges a small

129 A male informant explained this: "Ta José and Leocadia; Leocadia is the spirit that works with him, people go there to ask for health, housing, to solve a problem; all the things in life."

130 For instance, the Havana cathedral has four weekly masses, the little chapel at the *Colón* cemetery has a mass every day Monday through Saturday and two masses on Sundays; Regla has two masses per week. On Fathers' Day, the *Colón* cemetery has three masses performed to full audiences and on Mothers' Day even more.

131 In Regla, which is a strongly Afro-Cuban area, a Catholic priest told me that the two weekly Masses of the Dead have been divided between people who are more Catholic and persons who come to the mass primarily to practice Santería and Spiritism. I participated in both. In the first mass, of the 42 persons present, 30 were white and 12 were black or *mulatos*. In the second mass, of the 38 persons present, 24 were black and *mulatos* and 14 were white.

132 I saw another variation of this practice, where the attendees to the mass had been told to bring with them a piece of paper with the names of those *muertos* to whom they wanted to perform a mass and at a sign from the priest, they were told to stand up and read the names aloud all at the same time. After that, they took the piece of paper to the priest.

fee for this service (for instance, one peso MN – 0,04 USD – per name in the church of *la Caridad* in *Centro Habana*).[133] The Mass of the Dead has the potential to be a very emotional event and on Mothers' Day in particular, many women cry in the audience.

The Catholic Church emphasises strongly the continuity of life in the Mass of the Dead and in my opinion, this idea is what particularly appeals to Cubans. In a mass that I attended in *Centro Habana*, the priest stated: "Life does not terminate in death, it transforms." The sermon in the Mass of the Dead also resonates with the idea that the mass is a way for the living to take care of the deceased: to secure the wellbeing of the deceased and to help the soul of the deceased towards the right direction. The priest stated: "For our dead family members, for the parents, for the siblings (...), we want this to produce them peace and happiness. All that you ask from God, God will concede it to you. Your brother will resuscitate. (...) This morning we come to give them [the deceased] love; to remember them. (...) If God is father, no father is indifferent to the death of his children. (...) God will concede them the eternal peace." This way, the Mass of the Dead becomes a way for the living to continue their relationship with the deceased. *Muertos* live in a transformed state and the actions of the living are capable of influencing their wellbeing.

Muertos also have their ways of expressing their wishes to the living. Via mediums, spirits of the dead come to visit their living relatives and via dreams, they offer the living their insight and advice on life (see Espirito Santo 2009). They may ask for the living for a Mass of the Dead or for other services (such as offerings of food, lighting a candle, or taking flowers to a Saint in a church).[134] A female informant described a Spiritist consultation like this: "At home people have a glass of water and they go to consult [a Spiritist medium] and there you pay what the spirit asks you to or you pay for the work that they do for you." Many of my informants had a Spiritist altar in their home where they had placed glasses of water for deceased loved ones. In addition, photos of kin are sometimes placed on the altar. The altar is a way to maintain the relationship with one's *muertos* as well as to take care of them.[135]

However, *muertos* may also be potentially dangerous to the living. While all

133 This shows the degree to which Cuban society is monetised as by rule all Catholic sacraments should be provided free of charge. If a person cannot afford to pay for the mass, it is possible to do a "stolen mass" (*misa robada*); to pronounce the name of one's *muerto* quietly at the same time as the priest is pronouncing the names of those deceased whose masses were paid for. As this shows, Cubans are inventive in circumventing official regulations.

134 This, along with the practice of the "stolen mass," suggests that money is needed not only to create and reproduce one's relationships to the living, but also to the dead.

135 Some of my informants had at home distinct altars for the *muertos* (Spiritism), for Santería, and for Palo. At Juana's house, photos of living kin who had migrated abroad were placed in the Santería altar, whereas deceased kin was cared for via the Spiritist altar. Similarly as the Spiritist altar is a way to care for deceased kin, the Santería altar is a way to care for living kin that is far away.

muertos may cause turbulence in the lives of the living a long time after death (Ramón Ochoa 2010), recently deceased persons are seen as particularly dangerous (Bloch and Parry 1982: 38-40; Hertz 2004: 205). Sometimes ritual actions are vital to prevent the possibly very dangerous consequences of death in the family. Since old women in particular may maintain highly central ritual positions in life, the death of such a head of the family calls for special ritual practices in order to "close the grave." Danel told me about the death of his matrilateral grandmother who had held a ritually crucial position in the family:

> *When my grandmother died, it is said that the hole was open (...) The tomb was not closed, that when one person dies, (...) other persons in the family may die. Something religious must be done in order to cover the hole so that no more people die. Since my grandmother was the oldest in the family and she was the only one who had santo done (tenia hecho santo) [had undergone Santería initiation], (...) when she died, the hole was open. (...) [In order to prevent further danger], after that, my mother's godfather gave us the guerreros.*[136]

This story from Danel conforms to the classical view (Hertz 2004) of the soul as a malicious, dangerous creature when it is in the marginal state between life and death: already deceased but not yet properly integrated amongst the dead. If the tomb was not ritually closed, the restless soul of Danel's grandmother may have brought more death to the family. At the same time, this statement exemplifies the very close bond between family members and the social interconnectedness of both body and personhood – when one person dies, she may (accidentally) take others with her.

In addition, the often marginal fathers may come to reclaim their rights and cause havoc as malicious spirits after their death. For both men and women, failing to establish a bond with a 'missing' father may result in the father coming to haunt his children in their dreams after his death. This way, the 'missing' father may establish a presence in the child's life after his death, reinstating 'by force' the kinship relation that was not correctly restored previously.

While some *muertos* may have a purely gentle, benevolent character, others maintain their ambivalence more permanently (see Bloch and Parry 1982: 38-40). Even after the second burial, *muertos* may appear to the living and scare them or they may be friendly, even temporarily take on a human form and engage in sexual relations with people. *Muertos* may appear to persons in dreams and let them know about a buried treasure or about ways to gain money. Indeed, via dreams in particular, relationships with *muertos* may

136 *Guerreros* are warrior *orishas* that persons receive for protection.

influence the lives of the living in very practical ways (see Espirito Santo 2009). Danel told me that the only time he has played the Cuban (unlicensed) 'lottery' *la bolita* was when his deceased grandmother appeared to him in a dream and gave him the numbers with which to play.[137] He won 1500 pesos (about 65 USD). As this shows, the dead may have very material ways to take care of their kin. In Danel's case, this care was particularly significant, since he was constantly out of money. Thus, while many of the practices discussed above show that the living need money in order to continue their relationship with the dead, the dead may also sometimes contribute money to the living as a way to honour the relationship and care for their kin.

Moreover, money may emerge as significant in the relations between the deceased and his/her kin also in another way. A medium may contact the spirit of a deceased person in order to communicate with him/her and help to expose the misgivings in the deceased's social relations even after his or her death. Serguei described a Spiritist mass that had taken place in his home for his uncle who had passed away almost a year earlier: "There were my mother, a friend, and two *espiritistas* [persons who practice Spiritism]. They evoke him and the medium calls for him in order to communicate with him, to ask him certain things (...) that had been a little unclear. [They] got clarified; he died in circumstances that were not very clear and [the events] were conformed later on. (...) A nephew had stolen money from him and this caused him to have a heart attack." This story points to the dark side of kinship and monetisation; the danger that social relations become commoditised and material desires becomes prioritised over the importance of a close bond. At the same time, it introduces the severe consequences of such selfish actions and warns that mistreatments may become exposed and condemned also from beyond the grave, that disregard for one's social bonds may have consequences later in life.

These examples suggest multiple connections between material exchange practices and the dead. Theft amongst close kin may cause death and become revealed later. The dead may bring riches to their deceased kin, demand the living to spend money for their benefit, or require for the living to steal them a Catholic mass without payment. While such practices seem to maintain a close contact with Cuba's history and the continuity of capitalist notions despite years of state socialism, most importantly for my focus, they highlight the significant role that material contributions play in the social relations between kin – dead and alive – by expressing and materialising reciprocal care as well as the lack of it.

137 See Holbraad 2007 for more details on *bolita*.

Inheritance

Since a crucial part of socialist ideology is to control the accumulation of wealth, Cubans should have only few possessions to pass on as inheritance. For many this is true and they die without leaving almost anything to their bereaved kin. However, the main valuable that circulates as inheritance is housing. During my fieldwork in 2008, the state changed the housing policy and started to give those persons who lived in state-owned houses with usufruct rights ("*usufructor gratuito*") the possibility to acquire the ownership of their flat. One of my elderly male informants participated in this process:

> *I have usufruct rights. That means that I can live [in the flat] without paying but I'm not able to do any transactions with anyone, I can change with another person with usufruct rights but I can't exchange with anyone who is the owner because (...) the state is the owner. I can live in this house until I die but I can't pass it on as inheritance and the people who are here with me [his wife and her 24-year-old son] go to the street. Or if they are inscribed they can stay, but they can't pass it on as inheritance. (...) And now I went to the Reforma Urbana (Urban Reform Office) so that they would give me the ownership. I don't pay [to live in this house] but for the ownership I pay a lot on one go. But then I will have the ownership and when I die, I will be able to pass it ahead. This is why I'm in the process now (estoy en trámite).*

As this statement shows, inheritance is a very important issue for many elderly Cubans in order to pass on their home to their close kin and thus continue the relationship of reciprocal care even when they themselves are no longer there. As I have shown in the previous chapters, a home is a very significant valuable that plays an important role in motivating intimate relationships as well as considerations regarding the person with whom to have children. For both men and women, having a decent home provides the needed stability to start a family of their own and to reproduce life via the birth of children.

Daniel Miller (2007) argues that inheritance practices have a strong tendency to stress the normative, formal aspects of kinship. In Cuba, this formal side of inheritance becomes emphasised by the norm that a grandchild inherits the flat when an elderly person dies. In fact, children often live with a grandparent when the grandparent is still alive. Inscribing a grandchild as officially residing in the grandparent's flat allows the grandchild to continue occupying the grandparent's residence after the death of the residence's owner, as well as to claim legal ownership of the flat.[138] This is a way for the

138 Regarding the property rights bestowed by the *Reforma Urbana* in the 1960s, Eckstein (1994: 267 ff. 20) writes as follows: "Inheritance rights changed. Upon the death of an owner, whoever lived in the domicile at the time had rights of occupancy, whatever their relation to the original owner. If the owner lived alone, ownership passed to the state."

grandparent to provide his/her grandchild with the type of care that forms the most crucial contribution to continue the family via the birth of new life.

My data suggests that this normative form of inheritance is gendered. Since women tend to outlive men, the residence of an elderly man often passes to his spouse at his death (in 2012, Cuba's medium life expectancy rates were 75 years for men and 80 years for women, anonymous 2012d).[139] In my view, this explains the fact that many of my informants had received their residence as inheritance from a grandmother but no one from a grandfather. At old age, many women tend to become house owners.

A woman's residence typically passes to a daughter's daughter when she dies. When women change residence during their lifetime, daughters usually follow their mother while sons may occasionally live elsewhere. At old age, women are more likely to move in with their mother in order to take care of her and a woman's own daughters may follow her in such moves. This creates a situation where an elderly woman's inheritance goes to her daughter or to her daughter's daughter. However, sometimes a daughter's son may inherit his grandmother's possessions, in particular because house ownership is considered to be more important for men so that they can foster stable intimate relationships and start a family of their own. For this end, boys may go to live with their matrilateral grandmother during their childhood or youth (and sometimes even later). Moreover, one of my male informants had inherited his residence from a patrilateral grandmother because after the death of both his mother and his matrilateral grandmother, he had moved to live with his patrilateral grandmother and inherited her residence when she passed away.

Both men and women may also leave their residence to their children (of either gender) when they die. The choice usually depends on which one of their children is considered to need a place to stay most urgently.

Since I am not directly aware of any cases of a man in possession of a flat passing away childless, I do not know who would inherit him in such a case. However, one of my informants stated that his patrilateral uncle had passed away and his flat had been passed on to his brother (the informant's father) so that he could move in with his spouse and little daughter. I am not aware of whether the deceased man had children or not, but I suppose that he probably died childless because otherwise his children would have played a role in the

139 By law, at the death of a person, his/her property is divided between the (consensual or conjugal) spouse and the (biogenetic or ones that are assumed to be such, as well as legally adopted) children of the deceased (*Código de Familia*, *Capitulo II, sección quinta, articulo 38*, *Capitulo V, sección primera & sección segunda*, *Capitulo VII, articulo* 116). If the deceased has made a will, this influences the division of the inheritance.

inheritance.

I had some informants who had inherited their residence from a childless aunt (either their mother's or father's sister). Boys are raised by (either matrilateral or patrilateral) childless female kin more often than girls, and this is why they become more often than women the inheritors to kin other than their mother or matrilateral grandmother.[140] Two of my male informants had inherited their residence from a childless matrilateral aunt and one from a childless patrilateral aunt.

Indeed, old age is the time when having children becomes particularly significant (see also Andaya 2007: 216-217). For childless persons in particular, care, inheritance, and house ownership may become tightly intertwined already during their lifetime. Due to insufficiencies in state care for the elderly, people who do not have close kin around them to patch up for the deficiencies in state nurture may find a solution to the situation through a flat that they own. Many Cubans are engaged in relationships in which they are committed to care for an elderly neighbour or a more distant relative with the promise (or hope) that the elderly person will then leave them the house as inheritance when s/he dies.

Since women are more frequently flat owners at old age and due to women's more likely role as nurturing caretakers, these arrangements most frequently take place amongst women (although I also had one young male informant who was engaged in this type of agreement with his patrilateral grandmother's sister).[141] Such practices may or may not be based on the explicit definition of the type of reciprocity that is expected in the relationship.

Sometimes such deals are practiced as a more direct exchange. In the case of Amelia, a woman from *Centro Habana*, her kin already had proper homes but they were too busy to take care of their old aunt and so her niece contracted a woman to take care of Amelia with the promise that the woman would receive the house when Amelia dies as a reward for her caring work. (This is a viable solution since many Cubans have little else to promise.) Caridad saw the desire to inherit the old person's residence as the only motive behind such relationships: "They do that a lot here: take care of *viejitos* but for that purpose (*pero con este fin*)." For her, this practice breaks the basic moral rules of social

140 This connects with women's tendency to prefer girl children as well as with the fact that the relationship between a woman's new partner and her son may easily contain rivalries and become conflicting. Moreover, it is seen as more appropriate for a boy child to be raised by his father and father's kin than for a girl child (although this also takes place).

141 I did not hear of any cases where a childless man would have been engaged in this kind of an arrangement. I believe this is due to the fact that flat-owning childless men are likely to attract younger female partners who care for them and then end up inheriting the flat.

solidarity according to which care should be motivated by a genuine desire to help instead of purely material rewards.

However, Cira, another female informant, who had herself inherited the residence of an elderly neighbour whom she had helped throughout the neighbour's old age, conceptualised the relationship as based on normal good-willed care between neighbours: "She lived alone and she didn't have children and I was helping her (...), and one day she fell and was shouting there [at her home] and [Cira's daughter] Yailen heard her. And she had broken her hip and I had to take care of her! And can you imagine that the *viejita* [old lady] when she died had done me a will and she left me the house with all the furniture! *Ay*, I was thinking: But I didn't take care of you so that you would give me the house!"

These two standpoints exemplify the types of moral ambiguities that sometimes characterise care at old age and inheritance practices in contemporary Cuba, intertwining with matters of material gain, social solidarity, and reciprocity. This makes inheritance a dynamic practice where both the elderly person and the inheritor may try to actively negotiate the process on the basis of reciprocal care. Most importantly, inheritance allows to continue the relationship between kin and other close persons after death, with the care of the future generations in mind.

Ancestors: Rebirth and Reincarnation

My informants believed in the possibility of reincarnation and saw that it is possible to obtain information on a person's past lives via mediums and cartomancists. Reincarnation may sometimes create a connection especially between men and their children. In Serguei's case, information regarding reincarnation and his past life revealed a spiritual connection between Serguei and his father's village. Serguei's father had passed away when he was only three years old, but several years later, a cartomancist told Serguei that he had become an accountant because a deceased accountant from his father's village had reincarnated in him. Thereby, Serguei's connection with his father takes the shape of a spiritual connection to his father's village, making kinship and place intertwine; his link to his deceased father becomes simultaneously a bond to a person and to a place. This relates to the way in which many of my informants conceptualised their family history and the notion of ancestors.[142]

Kinship relations in the Caribbean have been noted to be wide in the lateral

142 At the same time, I never heard anyone making explicit links between ancestors and reincarnation (so that a specific, deceased kin member would be born again after a certain time in a child). Serguei was the only one of my informants who had specific knowledge of the identity of his past lives.

sense but to contain little depth in the vertical sense; retaining only very shallow genealogical conceptualisations (Smith 1988: 47-79). Often the little that my informants knew about their "ancestors" was limited to their matrilateral kin (see also Smith 1988: 58-60), following the overall tendency of kinship relations to prioritise matrilaterality.

However, following possibly the revolution's interest in "roots" (*raices*),[143] there was great enthusiasm amongst my informants to "know one's roots." Most often this manifested itself in an interest towards the geographical origins of one's relatives or ancestors. My informants mentioned the following locations as the 'place of origin' of their kin: Spain, Arabia, Africa, France, Haiti, and China. Serguei had a fairly typical family history. He said that his matrilateral great-grandmother was from the Canary Islands and his patrilateral great-grandmother was from China. The rest of his family were "Africans." However, although most people knew where their great-grandparents (*bisabuelos*) had come from, very few knew the names of their relatives beyond the generation of their grandparents.

Sometimes my informants' interest in their ancestors was fuelled by rather pragmatic concerns. One aspect of this was the circulating stories about large inheritances waiting to be claimed in foreign countries. Yet the knowledge of one's family background could also be useful in another way: it could sometimes serve as a way to gain nationality in another country, enabling a person to migrate out of Cuba.[144] At the time of my fieldwork in 2008, Spain started to grant nationality to second-generation Cubans who could trace their family history and population register inscriptions back to Spain. Cira was one of the people whose interest in her Spanish family roots was fuelled by this type of pragmatic concern.

A white woman in her fifties, Cira was one of my most knowledgeable informants when it came to her family history, but her information was also limited to her immediate great-grandparents.[145] However, when Spain presented the plan to grant nationality to Cubans with Spanish grandparents, she devoted more effort to explore her family history. I quote her at length because her account is the most specific one concerning ancestors amongst my informants and illustrates vividly the way in which genealogy and kinship

143 This tendency has been especially visible in relation to Afro-Cuban cultural practices (see Daniel 1991; Eckstein 1994: 25; Benitez-Rojo 1987: 338-349, 1999: 197-198; Pacini Hernandez 1998; see also Perez Sarduy and Stubbs 1993). Yvonne Daniel (1991: 1) states that the policy of promoting Afro-Cuban rumba dancing as Cuba's national cultural heritage began in 1979.

144 Cuba lifted the earlier travels restrictions on 14 January, 2013.

145 Cira is most likely from an upper middle class background, for she had been in a private Catholic school as a child before the revolution and most of her family was now in Miami. This may be related to her better-than-normal knowledge about her family history. She was in many ways different from the majority of my informants.

sometimes intertwine closely with state politics:

> *My great-grandmother, the mother of my maternal grandmother, was from the Canary Islands, but she came [to Cuba] already as a young girl. But my grandmother says that her father never spoke to her about her mother, because she [the grandmother's mother] died, and he remarried a woman called Consuela and he said: 'No, because Consuela will get angry'; my grandmother said that at that time you didn't speak about these things. My paternal great-grandfather was from Vizcaya, from Castilla, somewhere over there, and I do know the date when he died, but he didn't inscribe his children as Spaniards, he inscribed them as Cubans so that they would have it easier; at that time they wanted to have the nationality of the new country and he didn't go to the Spanish embassy to inscribe them as Spaniards as he should have done. But he came alone, there's nothing left of him. Now Spain was going to nationalise all the grandchildren of Cuban Spaniards, but they counted that it was going to be nine million people and they backed up. Yes, because here everybody then wants to have [Spanish] nationality; everybody wants to leave because this is insupportable. As for me, I'm obsessed about leaving.*

Thus, Cira's interest in her family history was to a great degree motivated by her eagerness to leave the country. Her family genealogy becomes tied to nationalism and the beginning of a new life, both in the past and in the present, representing a pragmatic counter force to state regulations on migration: a means to tackle the strict border-crossing rules of not only the Cuban state, but also on a more global scale. Family history becomes a way to circumvent powerful local and global state policies. This shows how both now and in the past, family bonds hold important pragmatic significance to Cubans in the negotiation of distinct types of large-scale structures.

But family genealogy has significance also beyond pragmatics as a symbolic connection to other times and places; binding together past, present, and future and intertwining with the continuity and reproduction of one's kin line. Via reincarnation, death and birth are intrinsically related (Bloch and Parry 1982; Hertz 2004). Although none of my informants expressed that there would be specific links between reincarnation and one's ancestors, the circulation of the names of deceased kin to new-born children is a practice that connects with the continuity of the family relation and the kin line after death. As we have seen, this concerns especially patrilateral names and primarily boy children, offering a channel for marginal kin relations to take on primary significance (see Turner 1979b: 184, 192). Naming and reincarnation thus provide the deceased kin a certain presence in the social world of the living, a re-integration despite the separation caused by death.

Church and State: Catholic Life Cycle Rituals

On my visit to the church of Regla, a Catholic priest stated that Cubans' contact with the Catholic Church "is almost reduced to two occasions (…): the baptism (…) [and] the deceased; when someone dies, most of all the Mass of the Dead." In general, most Cubans have little contact with the Catholic Church (e.g. Crahan 1979: 166; Dodson and Nuzzi O'Shaughnessy 1990: 3-4, 116; Eckstein 1994: 4, 122; see also Tweed 1997: 17). However, as opposed to the other life stages, at the end of life and at the beginning of life, the Catholic Church becomes an important institutional actor in many *habaneros*' lives.[146] This suggests that the influence of the Catholic Church in Cubans' lives is the strongest at the most precarious points of the life cycle.

While Afro-Cuban and Spiritist religious practices are practiced frequently in day-to-day life, Catholicism is a ritual practice that emerges as relevant only during very particular life stages. It is thus a practice the popularity of which is highly temporal. It is therefore important to try to understand the meaning of Catholic rituals to Cubans at these specific moments.

The temporarily alternating character of Cuban Catholicity becomes particularly visible in the number of attendees to distinct ritual practices, as stated by the priest above. For instance, the only Catholic statistic that I managed to locate for Havana states that for the year of 2009, baptisms number 101 755, first communions 6 380, and weddings 359 (*Oficina de prensa de la Iglesia Católica en Cuba* 2012). There were no confirmations and the number of final rites (or the number of participants in the Masses of the Dead) were not included in the statistics.

The number of participants in Catholic life cycle rituals shows an increase since the 1990s when the Cuban state policy underwent significant changes. Azicri (2000: 267) states that during the 1990s, baptisms nearly tripled and attendance to Catholic mass doubled. A Catholic publication (anonymous 2001) states that in Havana, the amount of baptisms went up from 27 609 in 1990 to 33 735 in 2000 (a 2.6 % increase) and the number of final rites from 4 054 in 1990 to 5 769 in 2000 (a 42.3 % increase).

During the recent years there has been an official rapprochement between the state and the Catholic Church (Azicri 2000: 251-274). At the same time, many Cubans who were closely involved with the Catholic Church in its 'official' form stated that there continues to be tension between the Catholic Church and the state. As examples, they pointed out the frequent presence of police

146 However, as the statement from Yusisley above suggests, the situation may be different in other parts of Cuba.

cars in front of churches, the difficulty of gaining permission for religious processions, and the need for the priests to do parts of their work with a very low profile. Thus, while at the official level relations seem to become closer, on the ground certain tensions persist, from the part of both the state and Catholic actors.

The Catholic Church is often seen as a counterforce to state socialism (Crahan 1972, 1979; Kirk 1989; Dodson and Nuzzi O'Shaughnessy 1990: 3-4, 116; Dominguez 1990; Eckstein 1994: 122; Tweed 1997: 24-24, 30).[147] However, the way in which my informants relate to the Catholic Church complicates this interpretation. The popularity of certain Catholic life cycle rituals during specific moments of the life cycle amongst my small-income and mostly non-white research participants suggests that the issue is more complex than the traditional state view of the Catholic Church as the white preserve of the elites (e.g. Cardenal 2003; Sigler 2005: 208).[148] Nor do the meanings that Catholic rituals hold for my informants conform to the views of official Catholicity. My informants' reasons for practicing Catholic rituals relate most importantly to the continuity of family relationships and the desire to continue relations of reciprocal care between the dead and the living.

This suggests that the popularity of Catholic rituals should not be interpreted directly as a sign of increased support to official Catholicism as such because the reasons for practicing these rituals relate most importantly to Cubans' desire to take care of their family members and intertwine closely with the practicing of Santería, Palo, and Spiritist rituals. Neither can the popularity of Catholic rituals at the beginning and end of life be seen as a critique of the Cuban government, for none of my informants engaging in such practices saw this as bearing political connections. What these practices do testify is the indisputable significance of transcendental connections in Cubans' lives and their deep affection for their kin members.

Paralleling the highlighted relevance of the Catholic Church in Cubans' lives at the beginning and end of life, the state presence is also at its strongest during these points of the life cycle. While the state provides pragmatic, material security at these fragile life stages (although deficiently), Catholic rituals allow Cubans to bestow spiritual protection and care upon their loved ones – both the living and the dead. Catholic ritual practices allow individuals to continue the relationship with a deceased loved one in ways that the state practices do not. Yet, both these institutional actors are important to Cubans

147 The Latin American liberation theology is an exception.

148 However, all those who 'really' identified themselves as Catholic in ways that the Catholic Church favours (i.e. by excluding the practice of other religions) were white, so in this sense the Catholic Church seems to have maintained its predominantly white character throughout the revolution.

at this specific life stage. While the state helps the living to take care of the body of the deceased, Catholic rituals allow Cubans to care for the deceased as a transcendental kin member. This shows how the significance of both the state and the church as an agent in Cubans' lives varies from one point of the life cycle to another.

Conclusion

Social relations are transformed during old age and death. This life stage carries the potential to consolidate those relationships that play a marginal role in day-to-day life, shifting more emphasis on previously marginal patrilateral relations. Even though the mother-child relation still remains at the central focus of the kinship system also at this stage, the father-child relation carries the potential to emerge in a more significant position than in any of the previous life stages. Moreover, death has the potential to create a moment of affinity in the life cycle and it may sometimes generate even more permanent affinity if spouses share their final resting place. Thus, despite its generally fragile nature, sexuality carries the power to convert marginal relations into lasting kinship.

Old age and death carry the potential to relax some of those distinctions that are central in day-to-day relationships. This is particularly visible in the way in which the gender division – an absolutely crucial characteristic of social relations in all other contexts – becomes less accentuated at this life stage. The difference between male and female bodies becomes less marked and men's relationships with their children become more important than displays of machismo, increasing willingness to repair past mistakes. As opposed to the usual gendered language, in the context of death, the deceased is often referred to just as a lost "loved one" (*un ser querido*). At the same time, at this life stage persons are markedly parents: Cubans die as mothers and fathers but this means most of all that they die as social persons who have kin around them and descendants to take care of them and continue life after them. Having children becomes a way to avoid the saddest possible faith: a lonely death. Cubans live their lives embedded in networks of social relations and close kinship connections and that is how they die as well.

While during old age, a person's children reciprocate the love and care – or the lack of it – that a parent has given them earlier, the living and the dead maintain reciprocal relationships based on mutual care and affection after death. Despite the separation and mourning brought by the death, the relationship continues via religious and material practices such as inheritance. Inheritance of a home grants a lasting connection between a

grandparent (usually the grandmother) and a grandchild as a way to continue the family. Thus, inheritance expresses reciprocal care between generations as well as memory and transmission, carrying the potential to contribute to the well-being of new, yet-to-be-born family members in the future. Material dimensions therefore intertwine importantly with temporality and highlight the connections between birth and death.

Death reorganises social relations and like birth, it carries the potential to highlight those kinship relations that are more marginal in day-to-day contexts. Thus, death carries the potential to emphasise the patrilateral relation as well as to undermine the distinction between 'consanguinity' and affinity, in the same way as birth creates a moment of affinity and patrilaterality at the beginning of a new life cycle.

Both the state and the Catholic Church provide Cubans with care at this life stage. Due to the historical relevance of the Catholic Church, it is Catholicism – as opposed to the more day-to-day character of other religions – that becomes highlighted as a ritual expression at these specific moments. This suggests that while the Catholic Church has lost a lot of the ground it may have had in pre-revolutionary Cuba, its relevance continues via ritual practices. Both the church and the state have the strongest presence in Cubans' lives at those moments of the life cycle in which persons are at their most fragile. At the same time, the way in which Cubans relate to both the state and the church at this life stage emphasises more the importance of taking good care of their family members than that of embracing the official discourses of either of these two institutions.

At old age, deficiencies in state nurture become the most blatant, accentuating children's role in guaranteeing a person's wellbeing at this life stage. Caring practices for the elderly suggest a tendency to the feminisation of nurturance as well as a degree of privatisation and commoditisation of care. Nevertheless, at death the role of the state becomes more relevant because it provides Cubans with material help and security in a crucial moment of loss. The role of the Catholic Church, however, is central as a provider of spiritual comfort. In the potentially dangerous transformations between life and death, the state and the Catholic Church come together, allowing Cubans to ensure their loved ones a safe passage to the afterlife as well as to maintain a reciprocal relationship between the living and the dead.

7. The State as Family

"My grandparents left me this, what is the most important [in life]: the family."
"Mis abuelos me dejaron éste que era lo más importante: la familia."
A woman on TV

"The youth is tremendous, tremendous..." (Extract from the "No me da mi gana Americana" song by Cola Loca:).
"La juventud que es tremenda, tremenda" (Cola Loca: No me da mi gana americana).

Introduction

It has been central in socialist societies to try to establish a direct relationship between the state and the individual. The Cuban state discourse not only builds centrally on the idea of care in order to create a relationship between the revolution and individual Cubans but also employs family metaphors in the conceptualisation of this relationship.

As we have seen, the degree of state presence in people's lives changes over the life cycle. The state manifests itself strongest in the lives of individual Cubans in the most precarious moments of their life: at the beginning and the end of life, which are also the moments in which most state redistribution services are concentrated. This dialectics of care plays an important role in creating moral legitimacy to the revolution.

The relationships between the distinct actors that participate in this dialectics of care are framed via family metaphors. The state employs kinship terminology and a particular emphasis on the notion of family to construct a relationship with individuals. This tendency is reinforced in the state discourse via the metaphorical position of Fidel Castro as 'the father of the nation.' Family metaphors are also used to conceptualise social relationships at an intermediate level between neighbours. Thus, entire Cuba is conceptualised as one big family that is mutually involved in the dialectics of care between distinct actors.

The state discourse circulates an image of the revolution as the protector of the most fragile population, children in particular. Children form a key value in Cuban society that is shared by both individual Cubans and the state because they are fundamentally important to the reproduction of the family and the society. This emphasis on the role of children exemplifies the revolution's ideological commitment to a specific *culture of life*, both at home and in international arenas.

The social construction of time is closely connected to political processes (Bloch and Parry 1982; Munn 1992; Rutz 1992; Verdery 1996: 39-57; Gal and Kligman 2000b: 109-117; Yurchak 2006) and recently Fidel Castro's ailing health has become the clearest example of how the state depends on time for its reproduction. Even though state authority is built to give the image of continuity and endurance – a negation of time – the death of individuals threatens such images of immortality. The discourse of socialism as progress that has centrally characterised the revolution since its early days is accompanied by another state discourse that is not oriented towards the future but dwells in the past by highlighting bygone national heroes. In this conception, a popular, circulating metaphor describes socialist heroes as having a "presence in absence." This discourse does not employ a linear concept of time as in the Marxist idea of social evolution, but embraces a notion of time as the unending repetition of past events and state continuity.

This chapter examines the larger institutions, cultural discourses, and values that frame the lives of Cubans and mediate the relationship between the state and individuals. This is done most importantly in the discourse of the state as family. Three issues are particularly central in this regard: (1) the state distributive system and the services provided by the state as a caretaker, (2) the ideological use of family metaphors, (3) and the conceptualisation of time embraced by the state discourse. The temporal duration of the society as a whole is centrally created on the basis of specific values that play a fundamental role in the reproduction of both individual lives and the state as a collective. My focus is on the ways in which the state creates claims to temporal continuity and on the role played by kinship in the creation of continuity for the revolutionary social order.

The State and the Dialectics of Care

The idiom of kinship serves both as a general way to conceptualise social relations and a mode to create political unity. This type of use of family metaphors as a way to legitimise state power in socialist contexts has been usually discussed via the concept of socialist paternalism (e.g. Verdery 1996: 24-25, 63-64, 69; Gal and Kligman 2000a: 5, 2000b: 5, 87; Kath 2006, 2010; Andaya 2007: 63, 82). Verdery (1996: 63) defines socialist paternalism as "a quasi-familial dependency" that posits "a moral tie linking subjects to the state through their rights to a share in the redistributed social product" and argues that this cultivates dependency rather than agency or social solidarity. The notion of state paternalism suggests that the amount of state participation renders people passive and deprives them of agency. This view relies on the idea that the state should do less, embracing a liberalist

notion where the role of the state is highly restricted. The concept of state paternalism in socialist societies is connected to the character of socialist societies to claim political legitimacy via the notion of lifelong nurture whilst at the same time being indifferent to people's actual wishes and demands.

I find this concept problematic for two reasons. First, this was not the way in which my informants themselves conceptualised their relationship with the state, and secondly – as Sahlins (1996) has successfully argued – this type of thinking is problematic due to the basic assumptions involved in the Anglo-American liberalist political tradition. The idea of state paternalism plays on a notion of individuals as being against the state, on the idea that the essence of the state is built on coercive power.[149] For example, Verdery sees socialist states as comparatively weak and constantly undermined by internal resistance and hidden forms of sabotage at all system levels (1996: 20). However, as Sahlins (2004) points out, power is always a culturally mediated relationship and a culturally defined concept: what constitutes power is culturally organised and experienced. I suggest that we should not see the Cuban state power as something that works mainly by force of coercion on people. No power structure is so dominant that it defines a person's entire being without leaving room for human agency, contingency, and alternative outcomes (Sahlins 2004). The notion of the state as paternalistic is misleading because it suggests a rejection of state participation in people's lives from the individuals' part and this is not the case with many Cubans.

I suggest that the notion of dialectics of care provides a more fertile way to examine the Cuban state than the notion of state paternalism. Care forms a central focus (see Stasch 2009: 4) in terms of which Cubans conceptualise the state and assess its contributions as well as its shortcomings. The dialectics of care thereby frames the relationship between the state and individuals and contributes to the reproduction of the state. The notion of dialectics of care catches better the shifting nature of state care as it alternates between distinct points of the life cycle as well as historically. In their claims for legitimacy, socialist states have traditionally relied on the notion of providing individuals with nurture from cradle to grave. A large role in this has been played by the system of re-distribution, cited as the main source of socialist state legitimacy (e.g. Verdery 1996: 23-26, 63-64). The state participates in the dialectics of care via such services as health care and the education system as well as via its distributive services to the population. By emphasising the contributions the state manages or fails to make to those in need, it becomes conceptualised as a social actor in the overall dialectics of care that centrally defines social relations. This also catches the shifting nature of caring practices between

149 See also Yurchak (2006: 4-8), who criticises the way in which communism is repeatedly approached through dichotomies that place the state on the one hand and the people on the other as antagonistic opposites.

the state and other actors. Most importantly, the idea of care corresponds with the way in which my Cuban informants conceptualised the state. Since the dialectics of care is something that defines family relations, participation in it affirms the state's ideological claims to the family discourse.

The notion of the state as being attentive to the needs of the most fragile groups of the population has particular ideological importance among individuals. My informants valued especially the free health care that gave them a feeling of safety and confidence that in Cuba no one would be left in the street to die due to a lack of money, a horror picture that they saw characterising the US and its system of private health care. Cubans know that they are not left alone in situations of sickness or loss or that they would need to worry about the high costs of health care, funerals, or education. This was seen as one of the special merits of Cuban socialism.

The state provides special advantages and social circles to those who were particularly merited during the revolution. José was a member of the *Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana* (Association of the Combatants of the Cuban Revolution) on the basis of his participation in the revolutionary troops in Eastern Cuba in the sixties.[150] This status gives him access to a better than normal health care. When he had health problems, he and his wife were promised a week's holiday in a health-oriented mountain resort for free.[151] State contributions like this made him love and respect the revolution and feel a deep gratefulness towards it while giving him a sense of being cared for by the state. (However, his biggest gratitude towards the state was due to the revolutionary literacy campaign that had taught him to read).

Elderly Cubans have traditionally been amongst the greatest supporters of the revolutionary process (see e.g. Armengol 2011: 535), forming the only part of the population that can still have an experience-based personal commitment to the 1959 revolution. José's view reflects the ways in which many elderly Cubans relate to the state (see also Rosendahl 1997: 22). Elderly people often compare the current situation to the times *antes* (before) – before the revolution – and tell stories about the deep poverty, hard work cutting the sugar cane, diseases, and illiteracy.[152] At the same time, life is hard for many Cubans (and in particular for the elderly). As we have seen, wages (an average of 19 USD per month in 2012, 15 USD at the time of my fieldwork) and pensions (an average

150 A Cuban website (see *Ecured*, no year) states that younger persons may be admitted as members as well if they have been especially good revolutionaries but I only observed elderly members of this organisation.

151 To my knowledge, this promise never materialised. José had, however, received such a holiday package once in the past when he worked for the FAR (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* – Revolutionary Armed Forces).

152 This reflects a generational difference, for when younger Cubans speak of *antes*, they usually refer to the time before the Special Period, when the economy was much stronger than after the fall of the Soviet Union (see also Lumsden 1996: 16).

of 10 USD in 2008, Mesa-Lago and Vidal Alejandro 2010: 707) are too small to make a living and almost all Cubans work second or third jobs in order to supplement their income. While the state-subsidised rationing system was created in order to secure all Cubans with their basic needs, in practice these state contributions have been far too insufficient for a long time. Although the state has struggled in order to be able to maintain the special contributions it gives to pregnant women and children, Cuba's aging population has created the need to divert a larger share of the scarce state resources towards care for the elderly (see also Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2011).

Nevertheless, despite the great array of troubles in contemporary everyday life, I met only a few Cubans who explicitly questioned the legitimacy of the revolution because of this hardship. José is an excellent example. He constantly complained that he has to work hard in order to make a living (he got up at four a.m. every morning to work in the family coffee stand), but at the same time he was a loyal supporter of the revolution. José did not reject the state from failing to fulfil its promises of economic support. Rather, he saw the problem originating from the US economic embargo that forces Cubans to fight poverty and struggle for their survival.

However, since the 1990s the state has had serious problems in fulfilling its role as a nurturer and re-distributor (e.g. Eckstein 1994; Rosendahl 1997: 168-182; Azicri 2000: 69-176, 277). The continuous material shortages and lack of services that have characterised life in Cuba during the post-Soviet period are a frequent source of complaint amongst locals.

One issue my *habanero* informants often complained about was that in Eastern Cuba, people are treated better by the state than in Havana. They, for instance, said that in *Oriente* people get telephone lines set up quicker than in Havana (almost none of my informants had a telephone), or that new fridges are distributed to the people earlier than in the capital. Eastern Cuba has traditionally been both the stronghold of the revolution as well as the poorest part of the country (Eckstein 1994: 16, 149-154; see also Rosendahl 1997: 16-21). Both these issues contribute to the region being prioritised in many social programs (Eckstein 1994: 149-168). This reflects the idea of material incentives as a reward for socialist loyalty (for Eastern Cuba can be seen to demonstrate exemplary attachment to the revolution), but it also relates to the idea of revolutionary social justice which makes it a priority to shift resources to the poorest parts of the country – especially as the colonial-era governments used to neglect rural Cuba in their policies (see Eckstein 1994: 149-153). Moreover, as Fidel Castro is originally from Santiago and *Oriente* is where the whole revolutionary movement begun, eastern Cuba has special ideological importance to the revolution. A *mulata* woman in her mid-sixties from *Centro*

Habana complained: "In *Oriente* they [state social workers] go to the homes and pay the pensioners [their pension money]. Look, it is more behind (*atrasado*) and they treat (*atienden*) them better." Thus, many informants were of the opinion that the promises made by Fidel seemed to be filled quicker in Eastern Cuba than in the capital. They complained that they were being neglected by the state; they wanted to receive better care from the state and faster responses to their needs.

Material deficiencies were a frequent source of criticism. Teresa, an elderly woman, stated a view that I heard repeated on many occasions by younger Cubans, stressing that pensions and wages are too small for surviving in Cuba where everything is too expensive. At the same time, in her words "everything is illegal," which prevents people's efforts to sustain themselves in the precarious economic environment. In her view, the problem lies in the lacking state contributions, on the one hand – the state should pay people more money in the context of Cuba's high prices – and in the inflexible state regulations, on the other hand.

Especially the heavy bureaucracy involved in state processes frustrates Cubans and undermines the structure of care that the state claims to provide. Most of the time the problem is not the state involvement as such, but rather the difficulty of access to state-provided forms of nurture, as well as the frequently very insufficient nature of this care. Once, when I had a particularly difficult day in trying to sort out my student visa, Caridad commented:

> *There is a film here – a Cuban one! – which is about that, it is called Burocratismo.*[153] *A person dies and it was a desmadre (a mess, very difficult) to bury him and they could not bury him because they were always lacking a paper. And at the end they have the condors circulating above the house because of the smell. But it's like that; they throw you there, they throw you here, and don't resolve you anything (pero es así, te tiran pa' allá, te tiran por acá y no te resuelven na'a).*

Housing is a field of life that is particularly plagued by heavy bureaucracy. Yet since the beginning of the revolution, housing has played a particularly important role in the socialist state ideology, as the revolution aimed that all Cubans should own their home as a fundamental aspect of social equality (Trefftz 2011). Nevertheless, as we have seen, Havana continues to suffer from serious housing deficiency due to a constant lack of building materials and complex state regulations on house construction and ownership.[154] Moreover, when trying to handle housing bureaucracy, in many cases the high bribes expected by state authorities force individuals into intricate manoeuvrings

153 The film is actually called *la Muerte de un Burócrata* (The Death of a Bureaucrat, 1966).

154 As the housing law underwent significant changes in 2011, it is possible that currently the issue is less complex.

that are plagued by uncertainties and illegalities at all stages of such processes.

Despite the noble ideals, the practical execution of distinct state activities frequently encounters obstacles, which are also (ironically) generated by the state system. The lack of resources, decent wages, and employee motivation, as well as complicated bureaucratic regulations, frequently undermine the notion of the state as a provider of care to its citizens, as well as the desire of Cubans to rely on state services. Consider the statement: "Here the state *pretends* to pay you and you *pretend* to work." *(Aquí el estado hace como que te paga y tú haces como que trabajas).* It is not unusual for a physician to fail to be present in a promised meeting, or for a health care station to lack basic utensils. Elderly informants in particular complained about the bad service that they received in their local policlinic, having to wait for their turn for hours and stating that employees prioritise pregnant women above all other patients, despite the long time that others have spent waiting. In addition, other people protested that all doctors have been sent to Venezuela, with no one left to care for Cubans. These complaints reflect the prioritisation that the state continues to grant to the mother-infant program (Kath 2010; Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2011: 704) and to medical diplomacy (Feinsilver 1989; Huish and Kirk 2007) in its national and international politics.

All kinds of cancellations and material deficiencies in state contributions are frequent in Cuba, but such little occurrences undermine the trust and sympathy that many poorer people in particular still feel towards the state in taking care of their needs. Moreover, in practice, a large part of the material and nurturing care that used to be provided by the state in the Soviet era now comes to Cubans from the part of their kin members.

Health care is a field of life that is particularly significant in this regard since it is one of the main pillars of the moral legitimacy of the socialist revolution. In some cases, a great deal of the care that Cubans actually receive while hospitalised comes from their kin. A person's kin may also be of crucial significance in acquiring some of the basic materials needed in health care (such as gauze, disinfectant, and medications). Moreover, sometimes the types of gifts that the patient or his or her kin is able to provide to the health care personnel are crucial in securing a decent treatment during hospitalisation (see Brotherton 2005; Andaya 2009a; Kath 2010). This strongly influences the possibilities of those Cubans that are in particularly dependent positions to receive the care that they need.

In socialist societies, family relations have often been seen as a site for

rejecting or resisting the state (Gal and Kligman 2000b: 69-70; see also Verdery 1996: 66). This was not how my informants viewed their relationship with the state. Rather than viewing the state and the family as being in a state of (permanent) opposition, my informants conceptualised the state as playing a part in a dynamics of shifting allegiances, as an actor that in some issues was on their side, but not in others. They relied on state care in certain issues (such as in the state protection to pregnant women), and saw it as failing in others (such as in the creation of material comfort), thereby shifting their reliance and social orientations between state practices and personal social relations at distinct moments.

Yet, since the 1990s, the state has been increasingly shifting responsibility for everyday care and nurture to individuals in numerous areas of life. While personal contacts have for a long time played a significant role in the access to goods and services in socialist societies (Verdery 1996: 22, 86, 160-161), the changes since the 1990s have made Cubans continuously more dependent on their personal social relations to gain access to all forms of care in various fields of life. Many people rely on their kin and partners to provide them with various food items, all kinds of day-to-day utensils, and money, at the same time as housing is eagerly sought after via love relations and inheritance. Moreover, such changes are experienced as gendered: while the post-Soviet period has increased the expectations of material care placed on men, women perform a high degree of nurturing care.

While mostly women were certainly responsible for nurturing work already in the Soviet era (Rosendahl 1997: 56), the feminisation of nurturance has become particularly emphasised during the post-Soviet period (Andaya 2007: 212-213, 2009b). Verdery (1996: 67-69), connects this with post-socialist tendencies. The importance of Cubans' personal kin relations to care for the dependent represents a clear shift away from the notion of the service-providing socialist state. In particular since Raúl Castro's taking over in 2008, there has been a continuous tendency for the state to retire from more and more areas of social life: in practice Cuba has for some time now been undergoing re-structuring in many areas of life and showing a shift towards neo-liberally oriented politics.[155]

Yet the power of this tendency to lead to a more heavy criticism of the state from the part of individual Cubans may be counteracted by the fact that people often attribute their everyday annoyances more to individual actors

155 This is particularly visible in the contemporary lay-offs of large numbers of state workers and the call for greater amounts of private entrepreneurs. Moreover, a newspaper article (Tamayo 2012) suggests that Catholic charity organisations are on the rise in Cuba as the state fails to provide care for the elderly. All these tendencies suggest a shift in caring responsibilities away from the state towards other actors. Neoliberal tendencies characterise also other parts of the Caribbean and are seen by some researchers as a profoundly unifying factor in the region (Cabezas 2009; Guadeloupe 2009).

with whom they are dealing than to the entire state system as such. Often my informants, for example, saw that the workers of the old people's homes are lazy or that the health care personnel are rude. A similar inclination to attribute material shortcomings in particular to individual actors instead of the state is observable in the context of kin and gender relations, where shortages often result in conflicts in family relations instead of taking the form of criticism towards state policies. It is possible that shifting more responsibility on individual Cubans as providers of care for the dependent also shifts more blame on individual actors when the caring structure works badly. Thus, state shortcomings bring more pressure to Cubans' personal gender and kinship relations because people expect higher contributions from each other in terms of nurture, money, and material help.

Godelier (1999: 1-9) points out that in this kind of situations of liberalist-capitalist structural transformations accompanied by a heightened monetisation, the retirement of the state from distinct areas of social life requires more contributions from individuals because without them those with the most pressing needs will suffer greatly. In such societies, an individual's existence starts to depend on money and the ability to earn an income as an individual. In a context where social life depends on the economy, a person cannot have a social existence without money. Being without income thereby becomes a threat to a person's whole being. The economy becomes the main source of exclusion that creates marginalisation that is not only economic but threatens to exclude people from society itself, with slim chances of ever being re-integrated. (Godelier 1999: 1-9). As the Cuban state retires from more aspects of life, people's personal social relations have to make up for state deficiencies. Individuals are imposed with an increased demand for their material and nurturing assistance to those around them and such contributions are vital in everyday life. Thus, while Cuba's on-going re-structuring of the state economy and politics creates increased opportunities for some (e.g. Cabezas 2009; Fernandez 2010: 98-106,130-133,178-185; Allen 2011), it threatens to exclude others more permanently from the core fields of sociability that are vital for social existence.

Nevertheless, despite such (neo-liberalist) structural transformations, the Cuban state continues to claim its official status as a socialist society. Taking part in the dialectics of care – however deficiently – is important in order to create legitimacy to such claims and it guides significantly individual conceptualisations of the state as the larger framework for their lives. Participating in the dialectics of care has ideological importance as a way to substantialise the idiom of the state as a family.

Currently, the use of family metaphors in the state's discourse is a more important way of creating state legitimacy and national unity than the redistributive system alone. This view of the state as a family is also visible in the context of neighbourhood relations, forming a mediating level between the state and the individual.

Neighbours as Family: "El vecino es la familia más cercana"

There is a saying in Cuba, "the neighbour is the closest family," and neighbourhood relations are indeed close – in good and in bad. People have constant social interaction with their neighbours and help them in several types of little daily chores (such as assisting them to carry heavy objects, borrowing them little food items, plastic bags, or tools, and informing them when the meat arrives to the *bodega*, the state redistribution spot). Neighbouring relationships are based on reciprocity (Rosendahl 1997: 28-50) and if someone continuously refuses to reciprocate or help others, s/he will soon be left with little support. In some neighbourhoods (such as the one where José lives), people feel a genuine concern and care for the people with whom their lives have been deeply intertwined, sometimes for decades. The fact that neighbourhood relationships are often strengthened with ritual kinship relations (godparent-relationships are common amongst neighbours) and with the mutual use of terms of address (*vecino*, sometimes used as a kinship term) makes them even more similar to family relations.

At the same time, there is considerable social pressure to get along with one's neighbours and life may become rather difficult for a person that completely shuns neighbourhood interaction. Even though much weakened from the earlier decades of the revolution, the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR, Committees for the Defence of the Revolution) are still operating.[156] While some CDRs are very passive, others are more active, and in almost every neighbourhood it is good to be on friendly terms with the CDR President as well as with the CDR 'actives' (sometimes called *militantes*). Since nearly all Cubans are involved in some type of illicit activities, each neighbour is a possible informer to the police or (if a Cuban rents a room to a foreigner without a license) to the immigration authorities. When someone is under suspicion, the President of the CDR is the first person the state authorities contact in order to find out about the suspect. Moreover, neighbours may complicate a person's career path, for when applying for certain state jobs

156 In *el barriecito*, the CDR even continued to practice the revolutionary night-time watch guard when I last visited in April 2010. In this, two persons from the neighborhood sit in the street watching everyone who comes and goes from ten p.m. until two a.m. and write down in a little notebook all suspicious activities that they see. In the morning, this notebook is handed over to the President of the local CDR.

(such as military-related), the local CDR is asked about a person's reliability. One of my informants lost a good position in the army some years ago because the neighbours had said that he has a sister who lives abroad (his sister was dating a Spaniard who had invited her to go and stay in Spain for three months, after which she came back to Cuba).

Officially, the CDR President and the CDR actives should be the first ones to interfere if they see something illegal taking place in the neighbourhood. However, many Cubans pay their CDR membership fee and turn up in events organised by the CDR in order to give the impression of being good revolutionaries and therefore continue their unlicensed activities in peace. (I even heard of a man who had become President of his local CDR so that he could better continue renting rooms to foreigners in his flat without a license). On important socialist dates, it is necessary to at least show one's face at the front door if unable to attend the celebratory event organised by the CDR, or at the least leave one's front door open so that everybody knows that the people in the house are supporting the revolution. (At the same time, little codes such as keeping one's door shut on important socialist dates are subtle ways to protest against the government and the way the country is run). In 2008, when the annual CDR party of July 26th was judged to be particularly tedious, one of my elderly female informants confessed that she would have rather stayed at home to watch *Spiderman* on TV instead of attending the neighbourhood fiesta, but she felt obliged to participate at least for some time.[157] Even though such revolutionary organisations as the CDR have lost of a lot of their previous power, they continue to exercise a certain type of 'moral pressure' on people.

In her ethnography on late 1980s' *Oriente*, Rosendahl (1997: 135-155) describes the strong social pressure that exists for people to conform and participate in neighbourhood issues. For example, when the state fails to provide certain basic services to people, Cubans expect to be able to count on their neighbours for help in addition to their family members. In summer 2008, when three hurricanes passed very close to Havana within two weeks from each other, half of the neighbourhood where I lived was left without running water (usually water comes during some hours every other night, or at least once or twice a week). Since the people in the opposite row of houses received water, the deal was that every house in the lower row fills up the necessary water tanks for the house opposite from it in the upper row. However, Yadira's neighbour over the road refused to fill up her tanks because (in her words) "they have little solidarity."

157 July 26th is the date when Fidel Castro and the revolutionaries made a failed attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba in 1953, giving rise to the July 26th Movement (*Movimiento 26 de Julio*), Fidel Castro's movement in order to overthrow the Batista regime. July 26th is particularly associated with the CDRs.

As this example shows, the social pressure to participate has definitely eased up. At the same time, these types of little refusals – whether aimed as a critique towards the revolution as Rosendahl interprets (1997: 144-145) or just mere displays of indifference – do little to harm the state, but may bring great damage to relationships between neighbours because they deny the expectations of reciprocal help. In post-Soviet Cuba, while state surveillance may be diminishing via liberalisations (although there are also those who are of the opinion that Raúl Castro has lifted the game with military efficacy, making the state surveillance apparatus more efficient), there are shifts in the notion of social solidarity that easily result in conflicts amongst people. As the following example shows, even the role of the CDR may at times be open to re-interpretation.

At the same time, despite the diminished role of socialist moral pressure to conform in the neighbourhood, neighbours continue to exert some degree of social control. Even though virtually everyone is involved in some types of illicit activities, (and in some neighbourhoods there prevails a certain type of complicity between neighbours in such issues), in both neighbourhoods which I followed closely during my fieldwork, there were issues where one neighbour had turned others in for illicit behaviour. The more serious event occurred in *Centro Habana*, where Vladimir, a man in his early forties, turned in Thalia, a pretty girl in her late teens for *jinetear* (going around with tourists for money, not necessarily involving sex) and this was stored in her (criminal) record, making it more difficult for her to obtain, for instance, access to higher education and many jobs. Moreover, Vladimir went more public than normal with his complaints; a female informant told me how people had commented the issue to her husband who was previously the President of the local CDR:

> *A mulatona who lives around there [close by] started to say to Miguel that how come we let him [Vladimir] speak about that on TV, that someone who lives back there [behind the corner] is fabricating [a part or an extension to her house, apparently illicitly] and he [Vladimir] complained about her, that he was in this program where people can call and tell their problems and he talked tremenda mierda (tremendous crap), speaking badly of the neighbourhood; that how come we let him do that. And Idel [Thalia's mother] says that Thalia got an expediente [a note on her personal record] for jinetear, and it is true that Thalia was jineteando but still…*

In this case, the CDR – the instrument of revolutionary social control that is supposed to stop people from doing illicit activities (Rosendahl 1997: 147) – changes its meaning to individualCubans as something different from the official purpose of the institution. In this woman's view, the local CDR should have interfered and stopped Vladimir from divulging neighbourhood secrets

– that is, the CDR should have exerted social control in order to protect the interests of the *neighbours* instead of the revolution. This shows that Cubans may re-interpret the tasks of the socialist institutions, aiming to use them for their own advantage instead of the state (as is evident also in the case of the man who became President of his local CDR in order to secure his illicit activities of renting rooms to tourists). In this case, many of the neighbours thought that they should support and care for each other as a community even if this goes against state interests. Vladimir acted selfishly in his attempt to raise his own social position in relation to the official state discourse as well as in his attempt to harm those neighbours who enjoyed some of the newer, more globalised, and tourism-related forms of material advantages to which he did not have access.[158] He ended up seriously harming his relationships with nearly all of his neighbours – an event that resulted in leaving him socially rather isolated in the neighbourhood.

Such cases show that there is considerably room to go against the expectations of social solidarity in the neighbourhood. While socialist states are characterised by a strongly concentrated system of state power that extends to the grassroots level of individuals via such mediating institutions as the CDR, this does not prevent the fact that in this process of mediation, 'the message' may change and the notions of social solidarity, loyalty to the revolution, as well as friendly reciprocity, may be reinterpreted and gain new meanings and even turn against the state in some cases. This also shows that while people in socialist societies are often seen as somewhat powerless, dominated by the 'evil' state by force (Yurchak 2006: 4-8), ordinary people have means to exert agency in their local communities, whether by trying to use state apparatuses for their own purposes or at times by just ignoring the state discourse. This suggests that the Cuban state exerts its power primarily via other means than the traditional views about socialist surveillance, intimidation, and threats, and that even institutions of surveillance may be transformed in the process.

Family Metaphors and the Revolution's Culture of Life

On the eve of the *fiesta* of July 26th, a TV advertisement for the upcoming festivities stated: "The country advances today in the name of its daughters and sons, congratulations Cubans!" This type of use of family metaphors is frequent in state discourse. In various state media, Cubans are often referred to as "sons" and "daughters" or "children of the fatherland" (*hijos/hijas de la patria*), and similar language is circulated in various state rituals. In addition, distinct types of state services are frequently conceptualised via the use of

158 In both cases that took place in the two neighbourhoods where I did my fieldwork, as well as in other similar disputes that I witnessed, the confrontation also intertwined with issues relating to gender and race.

family metaphors. For instance, a TV advertisement spot for youth internet facility clubs referred to its services as "the computer for the Cuban family" (*la computadora para la familia cubana*).

Even foreign politics practiced by the state is framed via the use of kinship terms, so that certain countries are referred to as "the sister nation" (*el Haiti, la hermana nación*) or "the sister republic" (*la hermana república de Argentina*). This state discourse implies that even though situated geographically in the very close proximity of its powerful foe, at a time when the support of the Soviet camp is long gone, Cuba is not alone and it still has friends close by. Family metaphors are used most importantly to refer to Latin American (e.g. Venezuela, Bolivia) and Caribbean countries (e.g. the Dominican Republic, Jamaica), but also to African nations (e.g. Ethiopia, Angola), as well as to Cuba's allies in Asia (China, Vietnam, East-Timor) and elsewhere (Iran, Belarus). Most of these countries fit to the scope of Fidel Castro's 1980s declaration of Cuba as an "Afro-Latin nation" (Jackson 2006: 29) and the rest are likely to be included to this category due to their leftist or anti-American sympathies. Despite its continuing relations with Cuba, Russia is not included in this family discourse, whether due to bitter memories of its dominant role during the Soviet era or because of an ideological rejection of its role as a socialist state that collapsed – Gorbachev is considered a real 'villain' in Cuba. Spain, the former coloniser, is never referred to via kin terms either. Thus the use of kinship metaphors in world politics is a way to create a concept of history: a denial to include Cuba's ex-colonisers (Spain, the US, and even Russia) as kin nations is a way for Cuba to make a certain break with its past and emphasise a more egalitarian concept of world politics where Cuba is an independent nation engaged in relationships of mutual, reciprocal help with nations that are not threatening it. In the state discourse, family metaphors are thus an important way to conceptualise the relationship between individual Cubans and the state, the idea of Cuba as a nation/community, as well as Cuba's place in the world as supported by kin-like allies, even after the fall of the 'socialist brotherhood' (see Verdery 1996: 61-82, 1999: 41 for similar examples from socialist Romania).

This tendency to use family metaphors as a way to frame relationships is replicated in other contexts both in the state discourse as well as amongst individuals. For instance, when an employee was trying to urge people to move further towards the back of a bus in a hugely overcrowded route, he shouted: "*Vamo', familia!*" (let's go, family). Also Cuban religions frequently conceptualise relationships via the use of family metaphors, whether in Santería (Holbraad 2004: 646 ff. 5), Palo, Spiritism, or Abakúa (Miller 2000: 164, 2005: 34-35). The metaphorical use of 'family language' and kinship terms thus represents a

general way to conceptualise relationships in Cuba.

Two groups of people are particularly highlighted in the state discourse via the use of family terms: mothers and children.

Women are frequently praised in their position of mothers. The TV often features spots that show women with children and quote phrases – most often from José Martí – stating; "mother, the support of our life," or "to the mothers (...), to these marvellous Cuban women." Magazines may feature poems like this one in a youth organisation magazine with the title: "You are mother, you are life" (*Somos Jóvenes* September 2007), or state institutions may have phrases painted on their walls such as this one in a bakery that stated: "Mother, the source of life. You deserve tranquillity and the purest form of love." The birthdays of deceased mothers or spouses of historical male heroes are frequently featured in TV with statements such as this one referring to Mariana Grajales – Antonio Maceo's mother and the most iconic of Cuba's 'suffering mothers': "The mother of all Maceos (...), the spouse of Maceo and the mother of 13 children (...), the honoured heroine of all Cubans, and especially of the women." (12 July, 2007).[159] Mothers are also praised in certain state rituals, such as during the International Women's Day. As mothers, women become important symbols of the culture of life that centrally characterises the state discourse.

The tendency to use motherhood as a political discourse has characterised also other socialist states. While Romania's pronatalism in the 1970s and 1980s represented an extreme case (Kligman 1998), Verdery (1996: 68) writes that the same tendency was visible also in other Eastern European socialist countries. She argues that although in the state discourse women were exalted as heroines of socialist labour in their roles as mothers and raising children was seen as women's supreme mission aimed at securing the nation's future, in practice the state took over the labour of birth in such a way that male doctors were regarded as agents of reproduction. There was a persistent gendering of power in men's favour. (Verdery 1996: 65-68). In Cuba as well, (biological) reproduction is closely monitored by the state (see Andaya 2007; Kath 2010) and the state power is strongly gendered. At the same time, this discourse of motherhood was something that was genuinely embraced by my informants, with both men and women seeing motherhood as a woman's greatest vocation in life. This shows that such state discourses resonate with local cultural meanings.

Children form another specific focus in the state discourse. Both TV and newspapers frequently feature reports on what the state is doing for children

159 Antonio Maceo (1845-1896) is a hero of the Cuban war of Independence from Spain.

(see e.g. Castro and Ramonet 2007: 542-543). There are reports about distinct types of children's activities (such as the *Proyecto Acualina* for protecting the environment), the start of the school year ("the revolution provides free education for children," 25 August, 2007), and news clips featuring the numerous children's activities that are organised constantly by the state (such as children's discos or clown performances).

Children's health, in particular, is frequently featured in TV in spots as these examples show:

> *A woman writes a letter and says: "Dear caraqueña [a woman from Caracas], we have a new vaccine for children against five illnesses (...) meningitis, hepatitis B (...). I wish that all the children of the world could have this vaccine. Greetings, Ana, la cubana (the Cuban woman)." (7 August, 2007).*
>
> *(After this, the report continued by saying how well the elderly are taken care of in Cuba and after that, showed a picture of smiling children.)*
>
> *A workplace in Eastern Cuba is shown in the national news as being vanguardia nacional (national avant-garde, exemplary socialist). The TV shows pictures of newborns in oxygen chambers and a man's voice says: "Producing oxygen for life." (10 August, 2007).*
>
> *The TV news announced the graduation of a course of genetic advisers (asesor genético) who monitor neonatal and prenatal congenital illnesses, allowing the state to "improve the quality of life of the Cuban people" (mejorar la calidad de vida del pueblo cubano). (7 June, 2007).*

The state discourse highlights the role of the socialist state as a special protector of children and other persons in a fragile position. Even though reality is often less rosy than what the media makes it appear, part of this discourse does connect with day-to-day experience, forming an idea of the state that cares for those in need. This becomes a crucial way to argue that the state is committed to a *culture of life*, protecting in particular those who are the most crucial to the continuity of life: children. I use this concept to refer to the way in which the state discourse promotes a view of the revolution as the protector of those who are in the weakest position in society, children and pregnant women in particular. The politically prioritised position occupied by the mother-infant care program is a prime example of representing the revolution's moral commitment to a culture of life.[160]

160 Although Kath does not herself pay attention to the issue, Cuba's culture of life is exemplified in the cover picture that Kath has chosen for her book (2010) on the Cuban mother-infant care system. A picture from the local policlinic shows people in the waiting room and on the wall behind them is a phrase from Che Guevara (along with his picture), stating: "The life of one human being is more valuable than all the gold possessed by the world's richest

In the media, this message is often strengthened by contrasting the conditions in Cuba with the US:

> *The national evening news quoted an American man who was visiting Cienfuegos with the North American caravana de paz (peace caravan): "Here in Cuba the word orphan is not even in use because there are no children without parents, everybody has family support." (23 July, 2007).*

The frequency with which US war operations are displayed in Cuban media further highlights the contrast between Cuba's culture of life, including its medical diplomacy, and the American way of conducting its international relations: leaving behind death, crying children, and desperate mothers.

In the Cuban state discourse, the US is presented as corrupt also in other ways. While health care and the US wars are probably the most obvious examples, some discourses employ sexuality. For instance, a report in the front page of *Granma* stated that 25% of young women in the US suffer from STDs (12 March, 2008). This way, the US is represented as morally corrupt both due to its poor and highly unequal health care system and through allegations of sexual decadence among American young women. The fact that this state discourse highlights in particular the sexual (un-)health of young women can be understood via Cuba's discourse of culture of life because STDs easily evoke infertility and young women evoke the expectation of becoming the future reproducers of the nation via their role as mothers. Thus, such media representations suggest that the moral corruption of the US seems to be leading to its destruction as it jeopardises both children and those who could mother them, thereby putting at danger the continuity of the country as a whole (and, as implied by the US war imagery in the Cuban state media, also that of the globe as a whole). Cuba, on the other hand, embraces life in its national politics – via its health care, education, and special protection to pregnant women and children – as well as via its international politics of medical diplomacy (see Feinsilver 1989, 1993; Huish and Kirk 2007). By protecting the health of its citizens and, in particular, pregnant women and children, Cuba becomes a life-giver rather than a taker of life in such state discourse.

The education system is another accomplishment of the revolution that has special ideological importance. Before Obama's presidency, Cuban TV circulated an advertisement that stated that "the plan Bush" wants to privatise Cuban education. In the advertisement, young people told what would happen to their lives if education was privatised: "I would not have money to study (...). Education is important for liberation." (6 June, 2007).

man." (*Vale más la vida de un ser humano que todo el oro del hombre más rico del mundo*).

Since the advertisement ended with the phrase "*le zumba el mango*" (literally "his handle is shaking"), I asked Yadira what this means. She stated: "That let's see if they dare, that Cubans are here with braveness defending our own (...); these people [Americans], it's so difficult to get them out of here, you have seen how they don't want to leave from the Guantánamo base and there have already been various efforts to throw them out but they don't leave, and on top of that they even made it into a prison." The US comes across as trying to deprive Cuba from all the good things created by the revolution: the universal education system as well as safety and future for children, and on top of that it submits Cuba's national territory to highly unethical ventures.



FIG. 12: A POSTER ON THE STREET IN VEDADO: "...THE PLAN BUSH WILL DEPRIVE YOU OF THE KISS IN THE MORNING, OF THE HUG AFTER SCHOOL, AND OF THE CONSTANTLY CHEEKY EYES."

Similar messages are spread in distinct public places, such as in big roadside posters like this one that stated: "The plan Bush will deprive you of the kiss in the morning, of the smile in the afternoon, and of the hug in the evening"; with an image showing a little girl wearing a school uniform hugging her mother (a way to combine the emotional potential of kinship, children, and education). Sometimes (although more rarely) such posters feature also other persons in a fragile position, such as the one hanging from the wall of a hotel and depicting two old men sitting in a park bench engaged in a conversation:

"The plan Bush will take your park benches from you." All these messages play on the idea that US government wants to harm those who are in the weakest position in society and deprive Cubans of the warmth of their daily social relations, whether by stealing children from their mothers or by suppressing pleasant social moments shared in the park between friends.

In a music video that gained great popularity during my fieldwork, images of children were harnessed to display the more recent threats to Cuba from the part of the 'morally corrupt' US, particularly in the form of Miami Cubans who come to Havana to 'lure' the youth with their material wealth. In "*Johnny la mula*" (a female mule or/and a shameless, badly behaving person), the band *Hoyo Colorao* sings:

> *You think you're a rich guy because you come by plane. Coca Cola, knick-knacks, and pleasure running wild. (...) Some think that in Havana everything is for sale; 'to Havana!', said Johnny la mula one day and pawned all his savings at the jeweller: spaghetti-strapped tank top, a gold tooth, trinkets, everybody knows Johnny in Hialeah. (...) Johnny la mula keeps coming [to Cuba], he wants my heart; I'm not selling it.*[161]

Not only does the video critique (and reject) the common moral dilemma of the intertwining of money and sexuality in post-Soviet Cuba, but, more importantly for my argument here, it represents the hinted sexual corruptness of Miami Cubans as a threat to Cuban children. The video displays a cartoon where Johnny tries to seduce a little boy dressed in a pioneer outfit by spreading his money, but a sea of black flags from the *Tribuna Anti-Imperialista* (the Anti-Imperialist Tribune in Havana) rises to stop him. While a music video is not state discourse as such, it conforms to the way in which the state discourse embraces a view of itself as defending Cuban children from the 'lack of morality' it sees characterising the US.[162]

Such historical examples as the Operation Peter Pan (1960-1962) and the case of Elián González (in 2000) show, that children in particular form a long-term and important tool for Cuban state politics.[163] Children and youth were highlighted in the revolutionary discourse already in Che Guevara's texts and in Fidel Castro's early speeches (2006 [1962]). Guevara (2005: 26-27) writes: "In our society the youth and the Party play a great role. Particularly important

161 *"Tú crees que eres el tipo del melón porque vienes en avión. Coca Cola, pacotilla y vacilón. (...) Hay quién se cree que en La Habana todo se puede comprar. Pa' la Habana, dijo Johnny la mula un día y pasmó to' los ahorros en la joyería. Ropa de hilo, diente de oro, bisutería, a Johnny lo conoce todo el mundo en Hialeah. (...) Johnny la mula sigue viniendo, quiere mi corazón, yo no lo vendo."* (Hoyo Colorao 2007)

162 This also exemplifies how sexuality is a highly political issue and a way to discuss state morality.

163 Operation Peter Pan was a secret evacuation program organised by the US State Department, the CIA, and the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami that took more than 14 000 children (aged 6-16 years) from Cuba to the US in order to escape the socialist/communist regime and upbringing. The children were sent by their parents in fear that the Cuban government would take away their children to be raised in collectives (Sahlins states that even cannibalistic rumours circulated, 2004: 171). The operation lasted from November 1960 to October 1962. (See Robinson 2010; Daly 2012).

is the first one because it is the malleable clay with which we can create the New Man without any of the anterior toil. (…) [In youth] we will deposit our hope and prepare to take from our hands the flag." (Guevara 2005: 33-34, my translation).[164] The youth was thus seen as the particular group that carries the hope of the future of the revolution and is likely to embrace the ideas of the state leaders more than any other group because young persons were not considered to have been corrupted by the earlier bourgeois society (see Castro Ruz 2006: 298).

More recently, Elián González has symbolised the reproduction of the revolution via the politics of youth that Che Guevara talked about although in a rather different political and economic situation. Currently Elián is the most important – if not the only – youth icon of the revolution, as his past role as a miracle child has made him a symbol of socialist continuity.

Sahlins (2004: 167) argues that what happened in the Elián case was "the interpolation of these greater national and international struggles into the family conflict over custody of the child: a meaningful-structural magnification of the interpersonal relationships that gave them correspondingly large political effects." In the Elián incident, two distinct cultural registers or structural levels mixed in such a way that national-political issues took on the character of family values and family issues became merged with national-political consequences (Sahlins 2004: 169).

I suggest that such merging of family relations with politics is not limited to the Elián case but takes place in the Cuban state discourse more generally. The discourse of the state as a family creates repeatedly similar "symbolic transfers between the political macrocosm and the familial microcosm" (Sahlins 2004: 170). For many Cubans, such use of family metaphors is not mere 'empty' political discourse but resonates with the importance that people place on family relations, care for the dependent, general sociability, and the central role of children in their lives.

Children form the focus of individuals' life projects as well as of the state's ideological claims to the supremacy of the Cuban mode of socialism in

164 Nevertheless, Che Guevara maintained also more ambiguous views towards children. In his writings, Guevara (2005: 31) envisioned a society where loyalty to socialism would be greater than a person's love for his (and her?) family: "For a man (*un hombre*) (…) to dedicate his whole life to the revolution, his mind cannot be distracted by the preoccupation that his son is missing a certain product, that the shoes of his children are broken, that his family lacks a certain needed possession, [for] under this reasoning he lets the seeds of future corruption to infiltrate [into his thinking]. In our own case, we have maintained that our children must have and be deprived of the same things as the children of the common man must have and live without, and our family has to understand this and fight for it." (My translation). However, in contemporary state discourse, the idea of redistribution to children in particular plays a central role in state efforts to maintain political legitimacy. In current state discourse, the idea of sacrificing one's life to socialism via direct loyalty to the state above one's family attachments has been taken over by a notion of the state as a family, with children at its ideological focus.

relation to capitalist countries. Children represent the key to the reproduction of individual lives as well as the state and thus embody the reproduction, continuity, and duration of Cuban society as whole. One way in which these types of political discourses are brought to life in Cubans' everyday life is via the various state rituals that place special emphasis on children and family.

State Rituals as Family Rituals

State-organised family events take place frequently and many state rituals address directly children. On Sundays, different *plazas* in Havana feature children's activities, with music for kids to dance and performances by children. The International (United Nation's) Children's Day is celebrated as a big event in Havana, including numerous activities and performances for children and the carnival celebration also includes a special children's event. Even Fidel Castro's birthday is usually celebrated with a children's event along with music, dancing, and clowns performing, marking a very visible symbolic connection between Fidel Castro and children. Even though Fidel has been considerably out of publicity since he fell ill in July 2006, the tradition to celebrate his birthday amongst children has continued. Castro has often celebrated his past birthdays in the Palace of the Pioneers (the headquarters of the *Organización de Pioneros José Martí*, the school children's political organisation) and this tradition has continued organised by the UJC (*Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*, the communist party youth organisation) even after he has been unable to attend (Anonymous 2012e; Rodriguez 2012). Other yearly children's events include various literature, theatre, and puppet festivals, as well as occasions such as the "Day of the Pioneers and UJC" (anniversary of the Pioneer organisation UPJM and of the UJC). Apart from certain sections included in the directly political children's events, many of these events include little or no explicitly political content and concentrate more on emphasising the concept of "*la familia cubana*" (the Cuban family) in the speeches and symbolism. The directly political events such as the UJC anniversary usually go on for days and include an official celebration as well as several smaller events that blend together political speeches and performances from popular musicians, attracting a crowd of younger people in particular.

In addition, other types of state-organised children's events often draw large crowds of parents with children (as well as some adults on their own) and these social events enjoy considerable popularity amongst Cubans. Most of my informants were willing and even eager to participate in distinct state-organised children's and youth events. They wanted to see the performances, listen to the music, dance, as well as see their children, nephews, nieces, or godchildren perform. While Verdery (1996: 49) sees socialist state rituals

as a way for the state to seize time from individuals as a compulsory activity imposed on them, my ethnography shows that (even) in a socialist society, people may find state rituals pleasurable and feel committed to them. The social pressure to participate in state events seems currently to be limited to the more official festivities administrated by schools or work places, but in the context of the more apolitical state events or even during the more culturally-inclined events in the context of important socialist festivities, I noticed no pressure to participate.[165] Sometimes people were even upset if they for some reason could not participate in an anticipated event.



FIG. 13: WAITING FOR THE PARADE'S ARRIVAL AT THE CHILDREN'S CARNIVAL.

Children's events are particularly sensitive in this respect. For example, on the days before Fidel Castro's birthday, there had been a TV announcement on a children's event in the *Plaza de la Revolución* in his honour. I witnessed two women with three children walking around the empty square on a very hot day, trying to find the event. They asked a policeman who said that he does not know anything about the event, and a passing construction worker told them that nothing is taking place in the *plaza*. The women became very angry and left, shouting at the police: "What they say on TV is pure lies!" I later heard

165 A fellow anthropologist told me of a case where a teenaged girl had refused to go to her school's UPJM and UJC-event and her mother had panicked out and called her flat mate so that he would convince her to attend. The mother was very worried because the daughter's name would be missing from the list of those who attended and she worried that this would risk her daughter's possibilities of continuing her studies or trying to obtain a scholarship to study abroad in particular.

that children's events had taken place to mark the date in other places that had not been previously widely announced. There had been cake, performances, gifts of toys to the kids, and visits from famous artists as well as from state officials, and people had been very pleased with the event.



FIG. 14: THE FIRST OF MAY PARADE TURNED INTO A FIESTA

These examples show that people may relate to state rituals in various ways: despite their political nature, not everyone is automatically against them. While some people's reactions conform to Verdery's (1996: 49) description about Eastern European socialist state rituals as a waste of time for the local people, elderly Cubans in particular may find such rituals highly meaningful. Moreover, the young generation often embraces distinct state rituals as just a good party; I have witnessed the *fiesta de los CDR* and May Day parades turn into dancing, music, and rum drinking.[166] The political meanings of such practices are ambiguous for while they do not appear exactly like the expected solemn displays of political support for the revolution, they cannot be seen as acts against it either (in the sense of Scott's 1990 infrapolitical moves).

Rather than reflecting social pressure to participate, the state rituals described here are events that Cubans are eager to embrace if given the

166 Eckstein (1994: 117-118) points out that the amount of state-organised youth events increased during the Special Period, with the aim of diverting youth from becoming politically critical of the revolution – a strategy that seems to have been a success to a certain degree, for my young informants frequently embraced such occasions as fun social events.

possibility to do so. However, the numerous organisational mistakes and minor deficiencies make people upset and therefore undermine the image of the family-friendly state that such events aim to create. At the same time, the frequency and popularity of the various children's events does contribute to a notion of the state as a family with a special interest in children.

Fidel as Father of the Nation and Present Absence

In August 2007, Fidel Castro's birthday (that had recently passed), was featured on national TV news with a statement saying: "From Martí, Mella, and Guiteras until Fidel" (25 August, 2007).[167] These types of statements are frequent in the context of official state rituals. By evoking lists of heroic past leaders that terminate in Fidel, such statements and imagery in state rituals create a notion of the state based on a metaphorical patriliny of socialist founding fathers that culminate in Fidel Castro. (Even though Cuban Presidency was at the time of my fieldwork already transferred to Raúl Castro, he was not built into such state imagery). Such use of state symbolism makes Fidel Castro a metaphoric 'father' or 'grandfather' of the nation via a metaphoric patrilineal succession of heroic socialist founding fathers (see Verdery 1999: 13, 41, 61-82 for similar notions from socialist Romania).[168]

José Martí is usually referred to as the "father of the fatherland" (*padre de la patria*) in the media, but in August 2006, when Fidel Castro first fell ill, even foreign media circulated a letter written by Elián González in which Elián referred to Fidel as "dear grandpa" (*querido abuelito*, Anonymous 2006). In a similar vein, in the advent of Fidel Castro's birthday I saw a sign in a house terrace in *Vedado* that stated "*Felicidades, papa*" (congratulations, dad). On Fathers' Day, TV news stated that "the *Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas* realised an activity for fathers and especially to the irreplaceable (*imprescindible*) Fidel and Raúl." Moreover, the way in which Fidel Castro's birthday is celebrated with a children's carnival reinforces his image as the 'benevolent state patriarch.' By referring to Fidel Castro as "grandpa", Elián's letter evokes similar ideas of continuity like the way in which grandchildren are seen to continue the family in individual kinship relations.

There are also other ways in which children are symbolically connected to Fidel Castro and the revolutionary patriliny. Making symbolic connections between Fidel Castro, the early revolutionaries, and children plays a crucial

167 José Martí (1853-1895) was the most important hero of the Cuban War of Independence from Spain, Julio Antonio Mella (1903-1929) was one of the founders of the Cuban Communist Party, and Antonio Guiteras (1906-1935) was an important socialist politician in the 1930s. Martí represents the figure of Cuban nationalism in general, embraced by such diverse actors as Miami Cubans, the Cuban Catholic Church, as well as the revolutionary state discourse.

168 This type of language is reserved only for men; I never witnessed women being referred to as 'the mother of the nation' – a practice that differs considerably from Cubans' day-to-day experience in their personal kinship relations.

role in the reproduction of the state. As part of the annual celebrations for July 26th, the pioneers made "symbolic attacks" to the Moncada and Carlos Manuel Cespedes quarters in Santiago de Cuba. Wearing their school uniforms and armed with baseball bats and sticks, a group of children ran into the barracks while someone was 'firing' at them. This way, children were symbolically connected to the early *barbudos* (bearded ones), replicating events that took place more than 50 years ago. Children represent the future and continuity of both individual lives and the state. Their role is to take over the work of the early revolutionaries although only as a replication of the past. When new life is born, this does not represent change but rather creates continuity, as generations repeat what was in the past.



FIG. 15: A CARTEL ON A PORCH AROUND FIDEL CASTRO'S BIRTHDAY: "CONGRATULATIONS, DAD!"

Indeed, the creation of continuity for the revolution is a pressing issue for Cuban state authorities as the revolutionary actors keep getting older. In August 2008, rumours spread that Fidel Castro is dead (partly due to an email that I received from Europe saying that a Swedish newspaper had written so) and my informants were doubtful about this claim:

> *Caridad stated: "If he dies, they have to do him something; a [special] ceremony, (...) because that's not going to be a normal funeral. They have to do something similar as for*

Vilma [Espin who passed away in June 2007], cremate him, do a mausoleum, do what they did to Lenin, embalm him. We need Chávez to come because when Chávez visits, he [Fidel Castro] always comes out, that is how we know."
José said: "They always say that but Fidel does not die. Someone speaks here and they hear it there [in Miami] and then it's already in the newspapers that Fidel is dead. It's better to not say anything."
José's son Pablo stated: "When Fidel got sick, in Calle Ocho [in Miami] there was a party."
Pablo's teenaged daughter said: "They put it on the antenna [satellite TV] that Chávez appeared and Chávez said that Fidel never dies because he lives in people's hearts."

Several of my informants maintained a personal relationship with the image of Fidel Castro. Usually he was referred to only by his first name; there was a picture of Fidel Castro on Caridad's and José's kitchen wall. José was deeply worried about Fidel Castro's illness and became incredibly happy on the day when the media announced that Fidel is doing better. Some informants emphasised that Fidel also genuinely cares about Cubans, saying things like this elderly female informant: "Whenever there's a cyclone, Fidel is there. He goes (...) to see that things work well, that the population is well cared for – no President risks himself like that!" Thus for some, their loyalty to *el comandante* is reciprocated by his true affection for the population.

Even though Fidel Castro was no longer the official head of the state during my fieldwork, his presence was strong. A news clip on national TV featuring the conference of the UNEAC (Cuban Writers' and Artists' Union) showed a speech by Fidel Castro being read aloud and every single person in the conference jumped up to applaud for an extremely long time after the speech. In the central celebratory act for July 26th in 2008 – the first officially presided by Raúl Castro – Raúl gave a speech turned towards a massive picture of Fidel Castro, dedicating his words to his brother.[169] Undeniably, Cuba's political system is very strongly built around Fidel Castro's persona. "Fidel is a country," said the May Day celebration posters of 2007, accompanied by a picture that portrayed Fidel Castro's profile as made up of an image of a crowd of Cubans. This creates an image of the Cuban people as personified in Fidel Castro, but also of Fidel Castro as made up of a multitude of Cubans: as if every Cuban 'contained' a bit of Fidel Castro, indeed, as stated by my informant above, continuing his existence in "people's hearts."

The way in which Fidel Castro continues to play a central role in Cuba even though he is rarely seen as an actual physical person, connects with the notion of "*ausencia presente*" (present absence) that was frequently used to refer to socialist heroes such as Che Guevara. For example, I saw a poster on the wall of

169 Raúl Castro has acted as the Cuban President since July 2006, but he was officially appointed to the position in February 2008.

an old people's home with the picture of Che Guevara and the text: "40 years of present absence." Thus, important state personalities continue to be present in society even when they are not physically there anymore. With the exception that in this case no material icons are needed for bringing a person into the realm of timelessness, this treatment of deceased socialist heroes in Cuba resembles Verdery's (1999: 5) description of statues: "By arresting the process of that person's bodily decay, a statue alters the temporality associated with that person, bringing him into the realm of timeless or the sacred, like an icon."

Vilma Espin's treatment after her death in June 2007 is an interesting example. The Day of the FMC (Cuban Women's Federation presided by Vilma Espin) in August 2007 was featured widely in the media. Even though Vilma Espin was deceased, she continued to be the President of the FMC. The speech for the anniversary was written by the "national secretariat" of the FMC; no particular person was specified as the author of the speech. The national news referred to Vilma Espin by stating: "Even though she is no longer physically with us, her spirit continues guiding us" (23 August, 2007), giving Vilma a presence after her death. I had a conversation about the issue with an FMC official and she remarked that "that position [of the President of the FMC] will not be filled anymore." In this case, the position of the President is built so strongly around Vilma Espin's personality that no one else is seen as capable of replacing her in the position, and she continues to occupy the position even after her death.[170]

Vilma Espin is currently the most important woman who receives such special treatment in the state discourse.[171] Notions similar to those displaying Fidel Castro's connection to the Cuban people were used to refer to Vilma after her death. A photo exhibition that was displayed in Vilma Espin's honour soon after her death was titled: "Vilma's battles are our battles" (*las luchas de Vilma son nuestras luchas*), evoking the idea that all Cuban women are sharing Vilma Espin's pursuits and that Vilma shares the pursuits of all Cuban women. Similarly, as in the imagery used to refer to Fidel Castro, Vilma Espin is seen to continue her presence via "living in the hearts" of individual women as "present in absence."

The notion of "present absence" relates significantly to the question of social changes in society. Via personalised feelings of connection to some individuals as well as via political discourse, absent state personalities continue to be

170 After Vilma Espin's death, her daughter Mariela Castro has started to have a much more prominent presence in the Cuban as well as in the foreign media, but she leads the CENESEX (the National Sexual Education Center) and has no special connection to the FMC.

171 Other revolutionary female heroes include Haydee Santamaría (who committed suicide in 1980), Tania la Guerrillera (who was killed in 1967), Melba Hernández (still alive), and most importantly, Celia Sánchez (died in 1980). For Celia Sanchez's position as the symbol of Cuba's revolutionary new womanhood, see Thomas-Woodard 2003.

important social actors. It is as if some of the dead never really die, making some younger Cubans in particular feel that there is no room for changes, as stated by this male informant: "Here the only solution is to leave because if not, *no se puede* (you can't)... Yes, because this is not going to change anything, it will never change, you saw that Fidel left, but nothing changes and now all those that are in the *buró político*, in the Party, they are the most fanatic communists there is, the oldest and the most fanatical." When I tried to suggest that all these people are old already and have to die someday, he stated: "Yes, but in the meanwhile one is going to die here waiting." The constant existence of the 'present absent' social actors in political symbolism creates a strong sense of continuity that supersedes individual lives, building on a metaphorical timeless succession of socialist heroes that never really disappear.

Discussing the connection between death and authority, Bloch and Parry (1982: 11) argue that in certain societies, "positions of authority are conceptualized as belonging to an eternal and unchanging order, and their inviolability is therefore premised on a denial of history." The rejection of ideologically threatening duration is accomplished by a denial of death because it is a process of discontinuation. They cite two ways to deny the ruler's mortality: either by transforming his body into something imperishable (such as a mummy) or by merging the leader with his forbearers and denying his individuality. (Bloch and Parry 1982: 11, 35). In Cuba, dead socialist heroes play a central role in the discourse legitimating revolutionary state authority. However, while Fidel Castro is symbolically connected to the metaphorical state patriliny of like-minded heroes, at the same time his rule is that of an individual whose presence displays qualities of immortality, even though the state of his actual physical body is currently unknown to public. The situation in Cuba therefore combines features of both of the possibilities described by Bloch and Parry, whilst at the same time conforming to their (1982: 41-42) argument about the social order and its authority structure being created by transforming the dead into a transcendent, eternal force that produces the continuity of the national community.

Thus, the state becomes conceptualised as a special mode of time which is reproduced as a suspended, transfixed, unending repetition by the continuing present absence of dead socialist heroes, reminiscent of the ways in which Pavel Campenau (1986: 22, cited in Verdery 1996: 57) describes time in socialist Romania: "Becoming is replaced by unending repetition; history becomes atemporal, immobility, history loses the quality of duration." It is impossible to discard socialist heroes: even dead, they continue to be present. Their bodies may be buried but their personas continue to act in the society. And since the

dead do not move on, life cannot change: time stands still.

The past is not left behind but continues to occupy a significant place in the society. The past invades on the present and influences on the experience of it (Birth 2006b). When new life is born, this is not change but creates continuity, as generations replicate what was in the past. This concept of time as standing still – in the sense that everything truly important took place in the past – is different from the linear, futuristic orientation of Marxist evolutionary trajectory.[172] The Cuban state discourse is thus strongly marked by two contradictory conceptualisations of time.

Conclusion

The notion of the state as a family mediates the relationship between individual Cubans and the revolution. This notion is emphasised over discourses of the state as a political or cultural community and extends also to Cuba's way to conceptualise its standing in world politics: some states are included in Cuba's family group whereas others are left out. Kinship is thus for Cubans a fundamental way to conceptualise social bonds of any magnitude, whether amongst individuals or large-scale collectives.

The same dialectics of care that defines individuals' family relations also characterises relationship with the state. Although the distinct forms of care provided by the state have been seriously deficient since the 1990s and have even taken a more neo-liberally oriented turn recently, the state continues to participate in the dialectics of care by emphasising an image of itself as the protector of the weak – of children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

This notion is highlighted by the fact that state presence is strongest at the beginning and at the end of life when people are seen to be at their most fragile. Underlining its special care for children – along with such institutional investments as state-provided health care, education, and the unique mother-infant program – allows for the state to argue that the revolution represents a culture of life, thus creating an image of moral righteousness, in particular in relation to its powerful neighbour. In the Cuban public discourse the US represents a threat to the nation's most vulnerable population and in particular to those that both individuals and the state cherish the most: children. Thus, loyalty to the state becomes fused with notions of love for one's children, creating strong forms of emotional transfers.

The notion of a metaphorical state patriliny infuses the state discourse with

172 See also Birth (2006a, 2006b, 2008: 8-9), who points out that distinct temporalities may coexist simultaneously in the same place.

continuity far beyond individual lives, granting important state actors a "presence in absence" that from the point of view of some younger Cubans in particular freezes time into a state where no changes are possible. The state discourse embraces two differing concepts of time. On the one hand, it employs the future-oriented idea of socialism as modernist progress towards a better society, symbolised by the central value of children to Cuban society as a whole because children are the key to the reproduction of both individual lives and the state. On the other hand, the strongly past-oriented discourse of the metaphorical state patriliny of deceased national heroes places the reproduction of the future in a position where new generations come to replicate past instead of creating something different. Time is both linear and still.

Conclusion: Kinship, Love and Time

The fall of the European socialist camp in the 1990s brought social, economic, and political transformations to Cuba. The state was forced to diminish its contributions to the population in all areas of life ranging from health care to food rations, to allow for a greater presence of a private sector, as well as to make several other concessions to the socialist ideology. These changes have also reinforced the monetisation of Cuban society, as money is needed for the acquisition of services and goods that before the Special Period used to be provided by the state. All this has given rise to heightened inequalities: those able to access new sources of income such as jobs in the tourist sector or foreign remittances have gained notable privileges of cash, goods, and possibilities of social mobility in relation to others trying to get by on meagre state wages or in the risky informal economy. Material wealth therefore occupies a greater role in social life than before. While social connections have always been important – and have been emphasised by state socialism in very specific ways – the contemporary transformations have highlighted the crucial significance of personal social relations in order to survive and manage day-to-day lives in urban Havana in ways that differ from the era when state socialism was standing on a firmer ground. In post-Soviet Cuba, education, official career, or political merit play a marginal role as ways for social mobility whereas personal social bonds and inventiveness outside of the state sector are embraced as sources of possibilities for "getting ahead" (*avanzar*).

These types of large-scale processes of economic and political transformation are mediated by such factors as gender, race, and age. While Cubans experience the post-Soviet era changes as significantly gendered, they also have racialised and generationally differentiated consequences. As seen through the lives of lower-income Havana residents, the socially differentiated influences of these transformations centre on the notion of reciprocal care as a way to create, reproduce, and negotiate social relations. Due to the gendered nature of care, significant cuts in state services in the field of health care, child care, and care for the elderly have emphasised women's more long-term role as providers of nurturing care. At the same time, such factors as heightened monetisation and increased desires for consumption have influenced men's position in particular because they are expected to provide women and children with material contributions. As I argued in Chapter 3, the feminisation of nurturance in the post-Soviet period is accompanied by a masculinisation of material care.

In the Caribbean area, the matrifocal kinship structure has been noted to have long-term continuity and my study points to the relevance of this

family system also in Cuba. However, my argument about the contemporary importance of wealth to men's abilities to create relationships fits somewhat uncomfortably with the views that suggest that since the revolution, Cuban kinship system has become more matrifocal and women have increasingly become the main breadwinners of their families. Rather, among my research participants, women have instead become more dependent on men's contributions. This change appears to be linked to the economic and political shifts of the Special Period, which have made the position of those who have never been particularly privileged more difficult than during the Soviet era, at least in urban Havana. It is possible that the situation is different among wealthier urbanites or in other parts of the country. As my informants were only marginally engaged in transnational kinship links and lacked other cosmopolite connections or income from tourist engagements, they are more vulnerable to Cuba's current economic changes than the protagonists of many other ethnographies.

At the same time, in my view, there is no inherent contradiction between these women's contemporary dependence on men's material contributions and matrifocal kinship as such: it does not make family relations unambiguously 'patriarchal.' As we have seen, women continue to maintain the primary responsibility over dependent kin, gain respect as mothers despite their marital status, and enjoy relatively high degrees of sexual agency while relationships are often unstable. None of my evidence suggests an increased focus on the father in family relations. This shows that matrifocal kinship may co-exist with multiple expectations of contributions from men as partners and fathers in all stages of the life cycle. Since women maintain a high degree of responsibility for dependent kin (both children and the elderly), they need to be able to mobilise material resources from men as way to care for their loved ones, for in contemporary Havana it is very difficult for most people to survive relying only on their own salaries and even less on state contributions. At the same time, men who have no material wealth or access to any other assets (such as good looks, light skin colour, or opportunities to travel) risk childlessness because they struggle to find a partner who would be willing to "give birth for them."

Without children, a person becomes marginalised from the type of sociability that is seen as fundamental to normal life course: having a family. Childlessness is a serious tragedy for both men and women. A childless person never attains true adulthood and is not able to complete his/her gendering as a real man or a woman. Children are emotionally and pragmatically central to individual life projects. They are the way to create new social relations and expand one's networks and they are of crucial importance in securing care

during old age and even after death. Children are the ones who make sure a person has a safe passage to the afterlife. For both men and women, one's most trusted social bonds are based on parent-child links and after one's parents' die, children become the "only thing one has" (*lo único que hay*).

However, throughout the life cycle, men often fail to provide the type of material care that is expected of them or engage in practices that completely distort and disrupt notions of reciprocity. As men are the ones who are constantly moving 'in and out' of the more central family nexus of women and children, they in particular have to worry about not dying alone.

Love relations are usually the factor that complicates a man's relationships with women and breaks his bonds with his children. Throughout the life cycle, love is expressed in the continuous care for one's kin and partner through concrete nurturing and material exchange practices. Love that does not materialise itself via actual caring practices remains empty and meaningless. Showing love is thereby closely connected to everyday practices and exchanges. Practical contributions are crucially important to the creation, maintenance, and affirmation of love.

The central role played by reciprocity in notions of sociability shows that understanding the material claims made in the context of gender and kinship relations as a mere commodification of social relations is misguided. The practice of the appropriate reciprocity in relationships makes a difference between loving care and the pragmatic interests that troubles people in post-Soviet Cuba. The maintenance of an appropriately balanced – not necessarily symmetrical – reciprocity feeds into love. Yet love also lends itself to excesses and abuses of reciprocity. Love thereby represents a constant peril of distorted reciprocity and a dangerous degree of dependence for men in particular who – while expected to constantly engage in public displays of heterosexuality – should at the same time appear as autonomous *machotes* in order to affirm their masculinity. Love – like reciprocity more generally – requires constant and often complex negotiations.

Over the life cycle, both kinship and gender relations as well as the relationship between individual Cubans and the state are negotiated through the dialectics of care. The dialectics of care integrates time, reproduction, emotions, and the large-scale structures of state economy and politics into the notion of reciprocity. Social and material processes interweave with temporality as care flows in various directions between people; over time contributions of care reproduce and transform social bonds and contribute to the creation of gendered persons. Symbolic and material, emotional

and pragmatic, normalised and contingent, dialectics of care avoids easy dichotomisations simultaneously as it enters into play with wider political and economic changes. Reproductive time and historical time intertwine and interact.

Time transforms love, care, and reciprocity. The birth of a child forms a decisive moment in social relations, as the beginning of a new life allows a wide range of individuals to redefine and reorganise their social bonds, carrying the potential to create new bonds and affirm and negotiate previously existing relationships. Certain points of the life cycle are particularly fertile moments.

As we have seen, particular events and life stages call forth different aspects of a person's web of social bonds. The life cycle consists of moments where distinct social relations emerge as being more central and at other times, fade to a more marginal position. In this regard, my data conforms to Terence Turner's model of the gendered transformations of kinship relations over the life cycle. However, Cuban kinship also differs from Turner's theory. In particular, the alternations between separation and integration over the life cycle are characterised by potentiality rather than definite transitions. As I argued in Chapters 3 and 6, the usually marginal affine and patrilateral bonds have the potential to become more relevant particularly at the beginning and the end of life. Marginal kinship bonds take shape as something that may or may not materialise, but some points of the life cycle offer a particularly good opportunity to create and reproduce such relationships. The life cycle thus consists of moments of affinity and moments of patrilaterality. While matrilateral bonds usually remain constant throughout the life cycle, for a father, such life stages as the birth of a child, his daughter's quince party and old age form crucial opportunities to re-organise and affirm his relationships. While marginal kinship relations may never develop into stable and lasting everyday interaction, their sporadic appearances are highly significant and expected ways of creating and asserting relationships.

This shows that it is important to pay close attention to the ways in which matrifocal kinship systems are transformed over time and in particular to the ways in which certain moments offer possibilities for distinct bonds to develop in order to form very wide networks of relations the composition of which may vary greatly in different contexts. As observers of Caribbean kinship often concentrate on the relationships between women who share links of filiation or sisterhood, other types of bonds are easily neglected. I have explored kinship amongst Cuban informants as a dynamic system where the mother-child bond and matrilaterality form a constant presence whereas other relations may

shift considerably. By concentrating on the particular meanings and practices that reproduce the different stages of the gender and kinship system, I have tried to avoid approaching matrifocality as a 'problem to be explained away,' examining it instead as a system in its own right. I have shown that men are not "missing"; they just move differently in and out of the different stages of the kinship system. The high degree of mobility and frequent changes in social relations make the kinship system very dynamic and flexible, but such dynamics also creates a whole range of connections and relationships. And precisely because of this character, time is a crucial element in understanding social relations.

Cuban life cycle is most importantly a process of gendering. Gender as a difference – a category that organises social action, emotions, personhood, and individual life course – is constructed via social relations that constantly emphasise gender as a distinction through various meanings and practices. Persons become gendered already before their birth and the perfection of their gendering continues throughout the latter stages of the life cycle. For women, the quince ritual presents a significant affirmation of their gendering. Heterosexual relationships further strengthen their gendering and motherhood completes their womanhood. For men this process is different. They lack a coming-of-age ritual and need to constantly affirm their gender by public displays of heterosexuality. Even though fatherhood brings an important affirmation of their gendering, it does not suppress the constant emphasis on heterosexuality as the assertion of a man's masculinity. Death undermines these processes and removes the need for an emphatic affirmation of gender as difference. This is intertwined with the tuning down of heterosexuality as a central characteristic of adult life at old age and with a more general undermining of some of the central kinship divisions in this context. While after death, some ancestors and spirits continue to be gendered, others are significantly undifferentiated and ambiguous. At this point of the life cycle a person becomes most of all a kinsperson: primarily a loved parent whose presence is gravely missed by his or her children and whose memory continues to be cherished by them.

These shifts and gendered transformations in the kinship system also change people's relationship to the state. While socialist states are often conceptualised as being highly alienated from people's everyday lives, I argued in Chapter 7 that the contemporary Cuban state shares in the idiom of kinship that is central to individuals' conceptualisations of social relations in everyday contexts. As a measure of political morality, via its investments to children in particular, the state continues to participate in the dialectics of care that defines individual social relations as a way to justify the conceptualisation of

the state as a caring family. At the same time, throughout this study we have seen that currently the state fails to fulfil its promises of care and nurture to individuals, highlighting the centrality of social relations to people's life projects not only on an emotional but also on a pragmatic level. As the state retreats, the significance of having children has become all the more important in guaranteeing an individual with reliable relationships and practical care, at old age in particular. During the most fragile life stages – at the beginning and end of life – one must either be wealthy or have children in order to access practical nurture. Large-scale changes thereby bring certain transformations to the reproductive cycle in ways that were not intended or expected by the authorities planning the policies.

Such political shifts connect with the temporal reproduction of society and the ways in which the state discourse creates a notion of continuity that goes beyond individual lives. Although there are differences in the ways in which the state and individuals in their kinship relations do this, both draw on the notion of children coming to take the place of those that have passed away. Even though Caribbean genealogies are usually shallow, kinship creates a sense of continuity for both individuals and the state.

The centrality of notions of kinship at all levels of the society suggests that human beings are considered inherently social, making my informants' views of personhood to a great degree relational. Despite the (neo)liberal turn that the state has taken since the 1990s (and especially since Raúl Castro assumed Presidency), Cubans cannot automatically be seen as embracing individualism in the Western sense. I am not claiming that there are no individualistic notions at all or that such views have no relevance at certain moments. This is shown for example by the importance of notions of respect and self-assurance for all human beings as individuals, as well as the type of direct agency that men in particular are expected to exercise in distinct situations. Nevertheless, when we examine the life cycle as a whole, the profound sociability of existence becomes emphasised. Even though the post-Soviet period has seen the emergence of Cubans' increased desires for consumption, travel, and new experiences as well as the crumbling of state safety nets, such desires are complexly interwoven with concerns for one's kin.

However, as social relations change, this may also transform conceptualisations of personhood. Romantic love has been frequently connected to the emergence of more individualistic forms of personhood. Nevertheless, in Cuba, while romantic love has a long history, my research participants live their lives in ways that are socially embedded to a significant degree. On the other hand, certain changes in social relations may transform

this notion of personhood. For example, since remaining childless transforms the way in which a person experiences relationality, this may feed into more individualistic notions of personhood. As children provide an individual with the most reliable possible social bonds and allow the parents to expand their social networks significantly, children embody the desire for close kinship connections and an orientation to the close embracing of social bonds. Therefore, shifts such as an increase in voluntary childlessness are likely to implicate a profound change in notions of personhood. However, as we have seen, people continue to take it for granted that "everyone wants to have children." This suggests that contemporary Cuban society represents a coexistence of some individualistic tendencies with an emphasis on more relational forms of personhood.

Throughout the life cycle, the focus on social relations takes shape via the body. The body becomes the site where diverse relationships and the care bestowed by them at distinct moments in time, come together. A person's body does not 'belong' only to the individual, but importantly also to those around him or her. Since presenting oneself in public with messy hair, without nail polish, or in untidy clothes is considered to be socially impolite, the body represents a person's moral integrity and decency. For both men and women, a fat, skinny, groomed, or untidy body bears testimony of the love, care, or neglect of those around him. Social relations and the emotions intertwined in them are experienced through practices of care and perceptible bodily states. The signs of other people's actions become clearly visible in a person's body. A person is not fully individually responsible for his or her health, wellbeing, and moral conduct, but needs other people to stay on the right track and in order. This tendency repeats itself in various different contexts such as infidelity, where other people are supposed to watch over a person to keep him or her on the right track, and, for instance, in the way in which mothers are held responsible for making little girls look beautiful – a girl's lack of beauty is seen to be due to her mother's indifference rather than to the girl's 'internal' qualities. The different modifications and practices focusing on the body are also a way to reproduce and highlight the gender difference as the central social division characterising Cuban society: people as gendered persons come into being through social relations. Even plastic surgery is foremost a way to partake in inscribing bodies with gender difference by highlighting the beauty and heterosexual desirability of female bodies as opposed to male bodies. Thus, conforming to Maurice Godelier's (1998: 388) argument, the body becomes "like a ventriloquist's dummy, summoned to give voice to the order that reigns or should reign in a society," reflecting and giving an idiom to social relations. In contemporary Havana, conceptualisations of the body and personhood differ from notions of Western individualism and the dualistic

concept of the inside (personality) and the outside (looks) seen as two separate things, proposing instead a more socially embedded way of existence.

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