

(Em)bodied Exiles in Contemporary Cuban Literature: Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Sarah Anne Miller Boelts

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Luis A. Ramos-García, Adviser

June 2010

© Sarah Anne Miller Boelts, June 2010

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my adviser, Professor Luis Ramos-García, for his consistent support and encouragement from the beginning of this project. My other committee members, Ana Forcinito, Raúl Marrero-Fente, and Patrick McNamara have also been instrumental in this process.

A special thank you goes to Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero who so graciously invited me into their homes and shared their lives and their literature. It is my goal for their voices to shine through in this project. I do agree with Valdés that we are all “bailando con la vida,” in “este breve beso que es la vida.”

Also, crucial to my success has been the unwavering presence of my Dissertation Support Group through the University of Minnesota Counseling and Consulting Services. Our biweekly meetings kept me on track and helped me to meet my goals while overcoming obstacles. I have learned more from this group of people than I could ever give back.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my high school Spanish teacher, Ruth Lillie, for instilling a love of languages and cultures in me. Her continuous interest and passion for the Spanish language and Hispanic culture influenced me greatly as I continued with my college studies and study abroad opportunities.

Finally, my family has offered their constant encouragement and support. My husband, Tim, always gave me the time and space needed to complete this project, while helping in any way possible. From a young age, my parents, Rev. Bob and Suzie, provided me with opportunities to see the world and explore new cultures. For that, I will forever be grateful. My sister, Leah, was my frequent companion on trips to Mexico and pushed me to succeed in the way that only she could. My grandmother, Mickey, gave me my first opportunity to visit Mexico and practice my Spanish, and has continuously supported me through her kind words and prayers. I will never forget the weeks that we spent together in Chapala and Ajijic. My grandfather, Dr. Wray Brady, who passed away in November 2008, prompted me to follow in his footsteps and dedicate myself to academia. I always cherished his advice, even on the little things. I regret that he is not still with us today.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the distinct meanings of exile that embody Cuban women's experiences in the 20th and 21st centuries. This thesis centers on female-exiled subjects within the Cuban Diaspora. The focus is on two Cuban women writers living in exile, Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero, noting the ways that exile constitutes a physical and emotional topos in their literature. Using exile theory along with feminist theory, this study analyzes the ways that these authors use women's bodies in exile as a discursive terrain of liberation. My analysis situates these negotiations of gender within a broader nexus of political and cultural discourses, in which women's struggles for recognition and equality intersect with complex issues of human rights and contested notions of Cuban identity. Valdés and Montero use their literature that focuses on women and their dreams as a way to oppose and critique their lack of power in Cuba and give women a voice in society. Through literary analysis and personal interviews with the authors, I demonstrate how women are placed in the center, away from the margins. While many studies center on Cuban diaspora writers in the United States, this study emphasizes those who have taken alternate routes, to Europe and the Caribbean. The novels by Valdés and Montero are in dialogue with other literary representations of Cuban exile, but emphasize their new places of residence.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
I. Introduction	1
A. Exile Writing.....	1
B. The Body and Feminist Expression	12
II. Chapter One: Diverse Views of Feminism in Cuba.....	22
A. History of Feminist Movements up to the Cuban Revolution	22
B. Women’s Involvement in Society since the Revolution	32
C. Critiques of Feminism and Women’s Issues in Cuba	45
D. Images of Cuban Women.....	50
III. Chapter Two: Zoé Valdés: Imagining a Cuba with Physical and Emotional Exile	56
A. Exile and the Island.....	56
B. Women’s “situation” on the Island	62
C. Mother/Daughter Relationships	74
IV. Chapter Three: Mayra Montero: Literary Bodies in Pain.....	82
A. <i>Como un mensajero tuyo</i>	86
B. <i>Son de Almendra</i>	96

C. <i>El Capitán de los Dormidos</i>	106
V. Chapter Four: Violations on the Body	114
A. Sexual Violence	120
B. Physical Violence.....	127
C. Psychological Violence.....	138
VI. Chapter Five: Reflections on the Self.....	145
A. An Interview with Zoé Valdés	145
B. The Interview with Mayra Montero	162
C. Analysis of the Interviews with Valdés and Montero	176
VII. Conclusions: Future Cuban Bodies	188
Bibliography	196

Introduction:

Exile Writing

The literature of exile written by Latin Americans became very prominent in the twentieth century and has carried over into the twenty-first. The political and social turmoil that the majority of Latin American countries has faced throughout the dictatorships and military rule is evident in the novels and short stories by various authors, some who have stayed in their respective countries and others who have left or have been forced to flee their homelands. In the particular case of Cuba, hundreds of thousands of citizens fled the country in waves after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, due to the socialist ideology of the country's new leaders.¹ Most of these exiles sought refuge in the United States, settling in large cities, most notably in Miami, Florida, where there are still outstanding numbers of exiles today. Many, but not all, of these exiles are dissidents and have joined groups of dissidents that are opposed to the socialist regime in Cuba.² Other exiles traveled farther away, to Europe and the capital cities of Paris, Madrid, and Stockholm. It is important to note that the majority of the first wave of Cuban exiles was opposed to a leftist ideology, whereas exiles from other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, criticized conservative military dictatorships and authoritarian governments.

For many exiles, one of their outlets is writing, which is why so many exiles publish novels and stories. It becomes a passion, or an obsession in some cases, for them

¹ Between 1959 and 1974, approximately 600,000 Cubans left the island, mostly those from the upper and middle classes (Wright 28). In 1980, there were 124,799 Cubans that departed from the Mariel port and in the summer of 1994, 35,000 more Cubans fled the island on rafts (Valdés, *En fin, el mar* 4-5). All in all, more than one million Cubans have gone into exile, representing a tenth of the island's population.

² These dissident groups are not as strong today as they were in the 1970's and 1980's.

to get their ideas down on paper. Although they may physically be in another country, the country of origin is the point of interest for these authors. Most exiles write as a way to resist and to remain visible and worthy (McClennen 121). Sophia McClennen, using one of Julia Kristeva's phrases, remarks, "Insofar as exiles, like women, are subject to "the paternal order of genealogy" they too must use speech and writing as a means of resistance, or else face invisibility, i.e., non-being" (121). Exile is difficult for all people, but artists deal with this through their works, whether they are paintings or literature. Observes Edward Said, a famous exile, "Artists in exile are decidedly unpleasant, and their stubbornness insinuates itself into even their exalted works" (182).

Exile was not a new phenomenon in the twentieth century. It began in ancient Greece as a legal and social punishment, along with the practice of ostracism, which banned a person from Athens for ten years. Some of the most famous Greek citizens that received this punishment were Cimon, Themosticles, and Aristides the Just. Exile was also common in the Roman Empire as a form of punishment for those that were out of favor with the respective leaders. Ovid, the well-known Roman poet, wrote of his personal exile in his work entitled *Epistulae ex Ponto*, which narrates his feelings of sadness and longing. Besides Ovid, one of the most famous exiles in history is the Italian poet Dante Alighieri, whose *The Divine Comedy* is considered one of the greatest works of literature ever produced. Dante chose to include the experience of exile in his great epic poem, illustrating the pain of having to leave one's homeland.

When using the term "exile," it is necessary to differentiate between the types of physical exile that an individual may experience. There is internal exile, in which one

must relocate within the native country, or those that choose self-exile or self-silence, while remaining in their country of origin. External exile is common, in which one is forced to leave the country of residence. Usually these individuals are a threat to the power of a given society's leaders and so these leaders force the opponent or resistor into exile. Some decide to go to a new land in opposition to the current government or political situation or due to fear of death or imprisonment. In some instances, the individual is allowed to return or chooses to return to the native country, when there is no longer fear of punishment or a change in government has occurred. Many Cuban intellectuals and artists have gone into exile, due to their resistance to the political regimes in power.

Some exiles are considered "false exiles," in that they insist that they are leaving for political reasons, but in reality they are searching for better economic possibilities. They are also known as "economic refugees," which implies a lack of status in their native land. This has led to certain tension and ambiguity among the labels that exiles employ, especially those from Cuba. Leonardo Padura Fuentes notes the differences between these two groups, in cultural terms:

The "economic" exiles are able to maintain links with Cuban cultural institutions, to enter and leave the country, and to exhibit their work here in Cuba, a development which has meant that they have not broken completely with Cuba, even if their work is for the most part produced and distributed outside Cuba. By contrast, their "political" counterparts, definitively distant from the Cuban system, have become the last legion of

political dissidents who are officially recognized as such. A significant part of their work-if not all of it-supports this definitive rupture, since it appears irreconcilable, at least given the parameters being debated at present. (184)

Displacement or forced migration differs from exile, meaning that one is forced and coerced into leaving the place of residence. Oftentimes displaced persons are subject to ethnic cleansing and must flee to other nations. This took place in the United States with the removal and elimination of many Native Americans. This has also occurred in Africa, the Middle East, certain parts of Asia, and Eastern Europe, most notably in Yugoslavia and Albania.

There are several exile discourses that are currently prominent. The theme of Cuban exile has become an outstanding one among those living on and off the island, especially when speaking of the diaspora due to the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Nico Israel believes that exile “tends to imply both a coherent subject or author and a more circumscribed, limited conception of place and home” (3). One of the most famous Cuban-American writers and spokesman on exile is Gustavo Pérez Firmat, who explores the condition of Cubans in the United States in his groundbreaking book entitled *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. He explains the three-step process that exiles go through, having himself experienced this visceral reality. First, the exile tries to “imagine” that the place in which he or she is currently living is Havana, but “gradually the awareness of displacement crushes the fantasy of rootedness” (10). The second step is “destitution,” where the exile feels that he or she has no place in the new land. In the

third and final phase, the key word is “institution,” which is “to stand one’s ground, to dig in and endure” (11). It is essential to note that each exile passes through these phases at different times.³

While exile is individual, a diaspora is collective. Many Cubans live in exile, but also form part of the Cuban diaspora. Gabriel Sheffer defines what diaspora is: “Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin-their homelands” (3). Robin Cohen refers to the Caribbean diaspora as a cultural diaspora, as opposed to labor or victim diasporas (x). Cohen continues to explain the features of diasporas:

Normally, diasporas exhibit several of the following features: (1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland; (4) an idealisation of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members of other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries. (180)

³ Fernando Ortiz, a famous Cuban ethnologist, claimed that Cuba is a land of *aves de paso*, or migratory birds.

One of the most important elements for those in the diaspora is their relationship to the place of origin and the new place of residence: “Diaspora cultures thus mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place” (Clifford 311). The issue of “home” is continually ambiguous and changing. Home is “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (Brah 192). Without a doubt, one experiences trauma and separation, but on the positive side, they also experience new beginnings (Brah 193). However, most people that belong to diaspora communities “remain embodiments of ‘otherness’ (*altérité*)” (Safran 23). Diaspora also poses a new set of issues for women: “Life for women in diasporic situations can be doubly painful—struggling with the material and spiritual insecurities of exile, with the demands of family and work, and with the claims of old and new patriarchs” (Clifford 314).

The theme of exile and diaspora in Cuban literature does not only pertain to the literature written since the 1959 Revolution. In fact, José María Heredia started this with his writings against the Spanish, followed by the famous José Martí and his literature of exile produced while residing in several different countries. Women wrote as well, including Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Mercedes Merlín (Alvarez Borland, *Cuban-American Literature* 4-5). Alejo Carpentier later went into exile in 1928, as did Guillermo Cabrera Infante and Reinaldo Arenas, after the triumph of the 1959 Revolution. With these last two writers, “exile becomes an enabling metaphor that asks broader questions of the human condition” (Alvarez Borland, *Cuban* 10). It can also be said that “history drives the writing of the exiles” (Alvarez Borland, “The Writers” 118).

While there is currently a strong corpus of Cuban exile literature from the United States, there are Cuban writers that choose to live and work in other countries. However, the issue of exile remains salient in this literature. According to Lucía Guerra Cunningham, “En el espacio no sagrado de la historia latinoamericana, el exilio originado por la represión política, la marginalización social y la alienación cultural constituye, sin lugar a dudas, la marca esencial de toda su producción literaria” (63). Benedict Anderson, speaking of “imagined communities,” emphasizes the importance of cultural products in the formation of nationalism (141). The literature produced in exile is one of these cultural products. Two important women’s voices from this category include Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero, whom in the last ten years have risen to international fame and success, more in their countries of exile than in their homeland of Cuba. These women differ in their approaches to literature, but their novels are bold and honest as they perceive and analyze Cuba from the outside looking in. It appears that they follow Hélène Cixous’s advice, that both men and women should write violently and truthfully, as that is the only writing that has any worth (“Difficult Joys” 22).

Using Said’s terminology, Valdés can be considered a self-exile, but also an expatriate, those who “voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons” (181). Valdés, who was born in La Habana in 1959, the year of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, lived and worked on the island until 1995, when she decided to leave for Paris, France. She currently resides there with her husband, Ricardo Vega, a filmmaker, and her daughter, Attys Luna, where she constantly publishes on various topics. She won second place and a \$100,000 prize in 1996 in Planeta’s literary contest

for her novel entitled *Te di la vida entera*, which will be discussed in this dissertation.

Along with this work, Valdés has an impressive list of published literature, both poetry and prose. Her novels include: *Sangre azul* (1993), *La nada cotidiana* (1995), *La hija del embajador* (1996), *Café Nostalgia* (1997), *Traficantes de belleza* (1998), *Querido primer amor* (1999), *El pie de mi padre* (2000), *Milagro en Miami* (2001), *Lobas de mar* (2003), and *Los misterios de La Habana* (2004). Her most recent books are entitled *Bailar con la vida* (2006), *La cazadora de astros* (2007), and *La ficción Fidel* (2008).

One critic, speaking of Valdés, comments, “Se convierte en la vigilante de la memoria común, la guardiana de la melancolía, la que sabe conservar la nostalgia de un mundo que todos van perdiendo” (Gac-Artigas 318). I will show how her narratives are an attempt to carry on the memory of her experiences in Cuba, while her vision of the island is usually negative, depicting human suffering, boredom, and apathy. Besides requiring the labor camps, the Revolution banished prostitution and women working as servants in wealthy homes, while instead providing alternate ways for women to get an education and have rewarding careers. However, in the novels that will be discussed in this project, which are *Te di la vida entera*, *El pie de mi padre*, *Café Nostalgia*, and *La hija del embajador*, the only woman to have a successful and meaningful career is Marcela in *Café Nostalgia*, working as a photographer in Paris and traveling around Europe for different job opportunities. Valdés does not demonstrate women in Cuba having professional and respected careers, but instead completing menial and unfulfilling tasks on a daily basis. This mirrors her own life before her self-exile, as Valdés “was a brash young writer in Havana with no tools to write, not even paper, only meager

portions of rationed food on her table and a meaningless job at a state-sponsored film magazine” (Santiago 25).⁴

Mayra Montero Tabares was born in 1952 in Cuba and raised there, but moved to Puerto Rico with her family when she was a teenager. Her father decided to take the family, in opposition to the political situation, and Montero has chosen to stay there with her husband to work and to publish. Due to her time in both countries, she considers herself *cubano-puertorriqueña*, having been a journalist and correspondent throughout the Caribbean and Central America. In 2000, she won *el Premio la sonrisa vertical* for her novel entitled *Púrpura Profundo*, which is a prime example of her erotic literature. She currently writes for *El nuevo día*, a major newspaper in San Juan, and has no plans to reside in Cuba in the future. Her published novels, many of which have been translated into various languages, include: *La trenza de la hermosa luna* (1987), *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995), *Del rojo de su sombra* (1996), *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1998), *Aguaceros dispersos* (2000), *La última noche que pasé contigo* (2001), *El Capitán de los Dormidos* (2002), and *Son de Almendra* (2005). Montero has also published numerous short stories and articles, most notably, “La Habana en el espejo,” which clearly demonstrates her feelings toward her native city. Her novels that I will analyze in this project are *Como un mensajero tuyo*, *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, and *Son de Almendra*.

Both Valdés and Montero bring new perspectives to the literature of the Caribbean, albeit in different ways, while demonstrating a “consciousness of exile” (Herrera xvii). It could be said that these writers have a *contrapuntal* awareness, to

⁴ This personal opinion contrasts with what several government officials have said about Valdés; they claim that she had all the privileges given to her, which explains why there is such conflict with her to the present day.

borrow Said's term, because the exile is familiar with two cultures, giving her a "plurality of vision." Said explains, "For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (172). Although these authors live and work outside of Cuba, many of their novels and short stories take place on the island or involve Cuban characters off the island. Notes Susanna Regazzoni, "La Cuba de los escritores exiliados es tan viva y real como otras representaciones de la Isla" (18). The constant and elusive search for identity is evident in their works, oftentimes reflecting the authors' personal realities. It is certain that their current situations of living between cultures is revealed through their writing, as their present visions differ, with Valdés being influenced by French society and culture and Montero still residing in the Caribbean, on an island close to Cuba. Despite this difference, the "sensual" and "sensorial" are features in all of their works. We could consider both of these writers "political intellectuals," following the argument by Fredric Jameson that "in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual" (325).

Isabel Alvarez Borland argues that Cuban literature differs depending on how long the writer lived in Cuba before going into exile. She distinguishes between two groups of authors: the first generation and the second generation. The first group consists of those that were adults when they left Cuba, so Zoé Valdés would fit in this category, as she was educated on the island. The novels of these first generation writers "reflect nostalgia and anger toward their homeland" (Alvarez Borland, *Cuban* 9). The second

generation can be divided into two groups: the “one-and-a-half” generation and the Cuban-American ethnic writers (7).⁵ Mayra Montero would fit into the “one-and-a-half” generation, as she left Cuba during her adolescence, at age 17, and is the daughter of first generation exiles. Regazzoni notes the precarious position of those who left Cuba without a choice, under the direction of their parents: “Entonces el choque generacional, en esta situación se alimenta también del conflicto de las culturas políticas divergentes” (15).

There are differing theories on what “Cubanness” is. Some argue that, “Cuba is also an illness, physical and mental, that must be fought off if one is to become whole and well” (Smorkaloff 46). The other side theorizes that, “Cubanness is a source of strength and renewal, a tonic against alienation” (Smorkaloff 46). I opine and will show that Valdés and Montero fit into the latter category, as they continue to include topics of Cuba in their works and write in their native tongue, Spanish, instead of French or English, the languages spoken in the countries in which they currently reside. As Julia Kristeva suggests, although one doesn’t live in his or her native country, “It is brought to life again in signs, in the mother-tongue” (Smith 48). The Spanish language must be a constant reminder to these writers of the island that they left. Amy Kaminsky believes that, “For the exile writer, language is the means by which the connection with a fragmented culture can be maintained” (*Reading the Body Politic* 42).

The idea of “cubanidad” or “cubanía” is one that projects itself through all Cuban writers.⁶ Mayra Montero reveals this in her literature, through her inclusion of *santería*

⁵ The “one-and-a-half” generation was first labeled by Rubén Rumbaut, a Cuban sociologist.

⁶ John Kirk defines “cubanía” as a concept “poorly translated as “profound pride in being Cuban” (xix).

afrocubana: “Esta práctica es importante, puesto que significa la esperanza de encontrar ayuda de fuerzas sobrehumanas para poder seguir viviendo, para hallar soluciones en las numerosas dificultades de la vida de un exiliado” (Regazzoni 17). Cintio Vitier, a well-known Cuban writer, responds to this idea of “cubanidad:” “Nuestra aventura consiste en ir al descubrimiento de algo que sospechamos, pero cuya identidad desconocemos. Algo, además, que no tiene una entidad fija, sino que ha sufrido un desarrollo y que es inseparable de sus diversas manifestaciones históricas” (18). Another important definition of “cubanidad” is brought forth by the Cuban theater critic Rine Leal, who believes that those writers living off the island possess “la mirada más penetrante y lúcida de lo cubano” (xiii). He writes, “Lo que aporta la otredad a nuestra cultura y su teatro es una visión “distanciadora” pero al mismo tiempo abarcadora de las esencias de la cubanía, que busca anhelosa la unicidad como oposición a la otredad” (xiii).

The Body and Feminist Expression

Valdés and Montero are two important women’s voices in Caribbean literature today that, besides writing in exile, include the female body in various ways, in a search for feminist expression. I propose that these literary bodies are sites for pain and memories and can be seen as sites of oppression and struggle, “a battleground for competing ideologies,” (Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury 7) but also of liberation and recovery. There are many distinct approaches to the body, such as approaching it as a biological body or as a performance or social construction. The approach that I will take to this thesis is that of feminists before me; I will approach the body as a *situation*,

following Toril Moi's proposal "to restore the concept of woman and of women's bodies as a situation" (Castro-Klarén, "Feminism" 19), which is taken from Simone de Beauvoir in her groundbreaking book entitled *The Second Sex*. Moi explains Beauvoir's phenomenological approach to the body: "My body is a situation, but it is a fundamental kind of situation, in that it founds my experience of myself and the world. This is a situation that always enters my lived experience" (*What is a Woman?* 63). Beauvoir notes the difficult position that women are in, "shut up in their world, surrounded by the other, they can settle down nowhere in peace" (629). She is concerned with a woman's experiences and interactions with the world: "In this way, each woman's experience of her body is bound up with her projects in the world" (Moi, *What* 66). Beauvoir opined that a woman is someone with a female body, "but that body is her situation, not her destiny" (Moi, *What* 76). She seeks liberation for women, saying that "there is no other way out for woman than to work for her liberation" (660). Other feminists, including Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Gayatri Spivak, and Jane Gallop, take a similar approach to the *lived body*: "They are concerned with the *lived body*, the body insofar as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures" (Grosz 18). Ultimately, this leads to new feminisms that "arise from logics rooted in the corporeality of women's experience" (Olea 196). I believe that both Valdés and Montero show women's bodies as situations in their novels, all reacting and fighting for their liberation from exile.

Sara Castro-Klarén draws on embodiment theory, which is "embodied beings socially positioned as "women" ("Feminism" 19). She notes the importance of always going back to the body, which is "the return of the woman's body as a constitutive part of

the historical and with it the recuperation of the concept of lived experience” (“Feminism” 20). Much of feminist theory is based on embodied differences, which mean the “differences as being lived and experienced in and through the body, and as constituting an important part of one’s identity” (van den Ende 141-142). Elizabeth Grosz also urges the development of an *embodied subjectivity*, of *psychical corporeality*, which denotes ending the dualism of mind and body (22).

Jean Franco has been an important voice in writing about Latin American feminism. She has spoken about rethinking women’s history in Latin America and of the *testimonio*. She also believes that literature sees the family as a patriarchy, which is a national allegory (*Conspiradoras* 225). Many women writers have included parodies of national myths, and some, including Elena Poniatowska, have seen women’s literature as part of the literature of the oppressed (*Conspiradoras* 230-231).

There are certain points where exile and the body converge, as the two have an outstanding effect on each other, in that the body experiences the physical and mental exile. Kaminsky is one of the researchers in this area and theorizes that the entire exile experience affects the body: “As exile is a bodily experience, acculturation, which is part of the process of one version of *desexilio*, is also experienced bodily” (*After Exile* 16). The body thus becomes part of the entire, difficult transition. This means that both Valdés and Montero have felt this bodily transition and have chosen to present these feelings through certain literary characters, as is shown by their continuous actions, responses, and feelings. Marcela Sabaj notes that there is a strong link between the

author and the characters that she creates: “The author not only invents but also becomes emotionally involved with her character” (3).

Luce Irigaray is concerned with women’s exile, in terms of language and female desire, positing that culture deprives women of their desire and ability to express it “because language and the systems of representation cannot ‘translate’ that desire” (“Women’s exile” 71). She also posits that culture tells women that they are nothing by themselves and “that is when they are exiled from their auto-eroticism” (“Women’s” 65). In her opinion, all women suffer “the same exploitation of their body, the same denial of their desire” (“Women’s” 67). Irigaray criticizes male theorists before her that leave women’s bodies out of the process. She believes that “nearly all women are in some state of madness: shut up in their bodies, in their silence and their ‘home’” (“Women’s” 74). She opines that woman is man’s Other, which turns into negativity (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 133).⁷ It is the purpose of Valdés and Montero in their novels to show women’s desire through the expression of language and the bodies of their characters.

It is necessary to mention Judith Butler and her groundbreaking book entitled *Bodies That Matter*. Latin American feminism has been influenced by this book and this current of thought. Butler has been an important voice since the 1990’s and her postures about gender and sex are unique and controversial. According to Butler, nothing is natural, but gender and sex are social constructions influenced by the actual society. She follows Foucault and his theories about sexuality and power.⁸ According to Butler, gender is understood through citation and repetition and it is an act of performance of the

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir also alleged that woman was man’s Other.

⁸ For him, society acts through heterosexual sexuality.

body. Moreover, society can read and interpret the bodies, which shows that gender changes and is not fixed. She opines, “Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act,” but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (2). Butler uses transvestive performance or “drag” as a form of resistance due to disobedience and rebellion, but does not say that this is the solution. These performances can be seen in certain Latin American literature, for example in some short stories by Cristina Peri Rossi, the Uruguayan writer. Like Butler, Jean Franco takes the idea of performance and applies it to Frida Kahlo, the famous Mexican artist, in her work entitled “Las dos Fridas.” Franco opines that the clohing of the two Fridas represents a performance and that the work shows suffering, pain, and “lo abjecto” (“Mares” 109).

Besides Butler, several French women writers have influenced the idea of the “feminine” and corporality. They react against the psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, specifically in terms of their theories over the Symbolic and the Imaginary. Hélène Cixous was interested in the idea of feminine writing during the 1970’s in France and she participated in the fight against the patriarchy for the liberation of women. She wishes to create a space for women’s sexuality. In terms of feminine writing, Cixous opines that both men and women can be authors of feminine writing and she proposes a new bisexuality. Cixous also demands that women write through their bodies (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 417). She includes references to the body of the mother and the milk and honey that comes from the body to show what comprises the writing of a woman (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 113).

It is certain that body images are constantly changing, depending on cultural and social influences and situations. Irigaray puts much emphasis on the body image, which is “a sort of ever-changing map or cartography, which is the result of the ways in which I, as an individual, sense and experience myself and the others around me, and of the ways others react to or affectively invest in my body” (van den Ende 144).

Returning to Latin American women, Castro-Klarén notes that there is a double negative working against the Latin American woman, as she is a woman and she is a mestiza (“La crítica literaria feminista” 43). Therefore, women writers in Latin America for a long time have lived on the margins of society, not respected for what they do, as this work is not deemed worthy or an important cultural product. Marta Traba, an Argentinean writer, affirms, citing Pierre Bordieu, “Hablar, en cambio de *ser hablado*, podría ser una de las tareas de la contracultura” (26). Debra Castillo opines, “Women reading/women writing provide, then, a viable, profound, and morally defensible alternative to the dominant cultural mode” (50). She later adds, “Pragmatically then, one of the jobs of the woman writer is to probe delicately at the edges of this official indifference, to force the dominant culture to recognize these regions, to unleash their dormant power, to impinge upon official consciousness without inciting it to even harsher reprisals” (58). It seems that it is a constant struggle for women writers. But, Traba warns us, “Es decir, no que una mujer trate de escribir como un hombre, sino que acepte escribir como mujer” (25). Rosario Ferré, the celebrated Puerto Rican author, predicted the future of Latin American women writers. She wrote in 1980:

Las escritoras de hoy saben que si desean llegar a ser buenas escritoras, tendrán que ser mujeres antes que nada, porque en el arte la autenticidad lo es todo. Tendrán que aprender a conocer los secretos más íntimos de su cuerpo y hablar sin eufemismos de él. Tendrán que aprender a examinar su propio erotismo y a derivar de su sexualidad toda una vitalidad latente y pocas veces explotada. (16)

Many of the sexual topics now employed by Latin American women writers, such as Valdés and Montero, were considered taboo before. Marting observes this change: “Her body is the site of pleasure which she actively seeks and in some measure experiences” (199). Notes Castillo, “Commentary is intended not only to describe the ellipsis but also to recuperate, reintegrate, recodify the fragmented language of the female body, to construct, if such a thing is possible, a tentative dictionary of the unspoken” (65). This is the reason that some consider Montero’s work erotic, while some critics declare that Valdés’ writing is pornographic. These writers are reacting to the history of sexuality in Latin America and wish to change women’s situations. According to Elizabeth Jelin, the Argentine sociologist:

The story is well-known: because life originates in the bodies of women, the ability to exercise power over reproduction requires the appropriation and manipulation of women’s bodies, whether privately or publicly (e.g., population policies, ideologies, and desires of paternity). The wishes of women can be taken into account or not. And something similar happens

with the history of sexuality: the pleasure is man's, the woman "serves."

(75-76)

Sex can also be a symbol for other things. Valdés has employed it as a metaphor for fight and the need to escape from oppression (Santiago 26). Sexuality signifies many things: "The way, for instance, in which people speak/write about the sexuality of other people may say more about the individuals communicating than about their subject" (Borim Jr. and Reis xx).

Virginia Woolf was the first to advocate that women writers tell the truth about their bodies and it appears that Valdés and Montero accomplish this. Hélène Cixous urges women to let their bodies talk and to "write through their bodies" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 417). Rosario Castellanos, the renowned Mexican feminist, firmly critiqued the fact that women should ignore their bodies under the patriarchal system. Castillo notes, referring to Castellanos:

Her position, and implicitly the position she stakes out for other strong Latin American woman writers as well, is one of alterity, of double-voicing, in an uncommon sense: not the commonplace denigration/apotheosis of woman as a vaguely defined and safely distanced Other but another woman, a mestiza/criolla parallel in another context to what Luce Irigaray provocatively calls the Other Woman, a creative woman for whom social commitment is an enabling condition of writing, the difficulties of which it would be naïve to underestimate. (26)

Nelly Richard, the Chilean feminist, posits that the postmodern feminine is the privileged site of insubordination, in her groundbreaking collection of essays entitled *Masculinofemenino*. Like Castillo, she calls for women to be moved to the center and says, “This theoretical aperture . . . extends the contestatory valence of the feminine to a range of antihegemonic practices-in order to weave solidarity-based alliances transversal to the categorizations of sex and gender linearly defined” (22). Her vision is not just about equality between males and females. There are many things that could be considered feminine, even practices by male artists (Franco, *Critical Passions* 102). Like Castro-Klarén proposing “embodied beings socially positioned as “women” (“Feminism” 19), Richard continues to explain that women can mean many things in this theoretical space and are “mobile constructs,” where power is not located in one center, “but rather there exist diffuse networks which multiply and disperse their points of antagonism and lines of confrontation” (64). John Beverley and José Oviedo would be in agreement with Richard, as they note that “the margin is becoming the center” (15). Elizabeth Grosz’s innovative book entitled *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, takes a new approach to the body, “so that it moves from the periphery to the center of analysis, so that it can now be understood as the very “stuff” of subjectivity” (ix). She believes, in agreement with Richard, that the body “must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being” (12).

In this project, I will examine the distinct meanings of exile that embody Cuban women's experiences in the 20th and 21st centuries. The project will center on female-exiled subjects within the Cuban Diaspora. I will analyze the ways that Zoé Valdés and

Mayra Montero use women's bodies in exile as a discursive terrain of liberation. They use their literature that focuses on women and their dreams as a way to oppose and critique their lack of power in Cuba and give women a voice in society. It is my intent to show that they have chosen to use women's bodies, although in exile, as a way toward liberation and to put them in the center, away from the margins.

Chapter One:

“Diverse Views of Feminism in Cuba”

History of Feminist Movements up to the Cuban Revolution

As in other countries around the world, Cuba has had a contentious history in regard to feminist movements and acts. But unlike many other countries, their movements were laced with socialism in the 20th and into the 21st centuries. Overall feminism in Latin America has been nourished by foreign influences, mainly those from the United States and France, and differs in each respective country. Women such as Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray have made an impact on ideas in Latin America. The most prominent feminist scholars in Latin America today are arguably Nelly Richard, who is based in Chile, Marta Lamas of Mexico, Francine Masiello of Argentina, and Carmen Ollé of Peru.

There are various definitions of feminism and it is necessary to define them for the purposes of this project. The United Nations Decade on Women (1975-1985) helped to redefine the feminist movement in Latin America into the themes of “Equality, Development, and Peace.” Ofelia Schutte, a Cuban scholar, notes, “From this standpoint, consciousness-raising begins with the denunciation of violence against women in developing countries and with the social impact of the women’s struggle for the attainment of basic economic, social, and political rights” (211). A struggle for power has always been present in Latin American countries since the beginnings of Spanish colonialism. This is also the case with Cuba and women’s issues. Margaret Randall

remarks, “Power is a feminist issue, perhaps the central feminist issue” (*Gathering Rage* 16). We will examine how this struggle and subsequent imbalance of power between men and women has been played out in Cuba’s history and present state.

Despite the influences from other countries, even those in Latin America, Cuba has had its own brand of feminist thought and action, which sought to “alter legal codes to accommodate women’s needs” (Stoner 8). Cuban feminism was, as expected, markedly different between centuries and slow to take effect. During the 18th century, the Independence of the United States in 1776 and the French Revolution from 1789 to 1799 clearly influenced Cuba. However, the feminine issue was not pressing for the male leaders of the time, as they attempted to mold the new Cuban society. Stoner notes that the feminists up to this point and into the twentieth century were from the upper classes (3). Cuba followed the Spanish model, in that women should preserve the traditional role that had always been assigned to them. According to one of the religious leaders of the time, Félix Varela, this meant “una imagen paradigmática de mujer- madre, educadora de la familia, encargada de preservar la moralidad y el espíritu cristiano de la sociedad” (González Pagés 20). Honor, especially sexual honor, was of utmost importance in 19th century Cuba, but this also carried over into the 20th century, as well. Verena Martínez-Alier concludes that “nineteenth-century Cuba was a rigidly stratified social order in which ascription and only secondary personal achievements defined an individual’s place in society” (119).

Prior to the Spanish-American War and the ceding of Cuba to the United States, Cuba followed the Spanish Civil Code, which granted few property rights to women.

Under this code, men were allowed to commit adultery, without further consequences. On the other hand, under the Penal Code, a husband could kill his wife if he caught her having an affair and would usually receive impunity (Stoner 50). Finally, in 1917, a new bill was passed by Congress that gave women more legal rights, including those to their children and property (Stoner 45). It should be noted that this was for middle- and upper-class white women.

The Catholic Church, as has been the case in various countries in the past and still in the present, has influenced the role of women and their behavior and reputation in society. From early on, the Church encouraged young Cuban women to marry, have children, and instill extremely conservative values in their daughters. To this end, the Church proceeded to form an association named *La asociación de madres católicas*. The purpose of this group was for a priest to meet with mothers and teach them proper religious practices in order to strengthen families and the Cuban society (Suárez Polcari 79). According to Julio César González Pagés, in his extensive study on the history of Cuban women, there were only two options for single women after the age of 25: “Las mujeres <<solteronas>> debían refugiarse tras los hábitos o quedarse en el hogar de los padres o hermanos para cuidar de niños y ancianos” (22). The absence of marriage in a young woman’s life brought shame and humiliation to her entire family.

Referring to the status of honor, Martínez-Alier notes that there were only three options for women in an interracial elopement in 19th century Cuba: marriage, the criminal’s conviction, or the parent’s accepting the shame (114). We will see this type of

interracial relationship later with the situation of Aida, in Montero's *Como un mensajero tuyo*.

Other scholars would concur with this assessment of the Catholic Church's power and influence. Lois Smith and Alfred Padula have published one of the most complete studies on Cuban women since the 1959 Revolution entitled *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba*. They conclude that in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, there were two distinct images of women: Yina, the prostitute, and Virgin Mary, or the *Virgen de la Caridad*, as she is referred to in Cuba (8). According to this study, "Men were perceived as impulsive and dominated by sexual drives, and it was the women's duty to accept and forgive this moral weakness. Men were sexual, women spiritual" (8). Most of the 300 women that were active participants in the revolutionary movement prior to 1959 were not feminists nor were they gender conscious (Luciak 2). Karen Kampwirth argues that this was due to the Catholic Church in Cuba and their encouragement of traditional gender roles (127).⁹ In the early years of the twentieth century, Cuban feminists attacked the Catholic Church and blamed them for women's subjugation. Two of these women were Dulce María Borrero de Luján, a poet, and Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, who "considered the Catholic Church hypocritical and a morally coercive force that crippled women's capacity to excel" (Stoner 94).

Life was different for minority women and those of the lower class. These included black and mulatta women and those of the lower class who worked in public,

⁹ Several prominent feminist writers would agree that the Catholic Church is to blame for these sexualized roles and bodies. The Chicana author Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males" (39).

usually on the streets (Stoner 3). As seen from the quote above, the Catholic Church attempted to control *all* women's lives in Cuba by encouraging them to follow certain acceptable social mores. However, poor women were not able to follow these strict behavioral patterns, as many had children out of wedlock, while working long hours in demanding jobs. Stoner explains, "For these women, marriage, religion, notions of the "bello sexo," the arts, charity, tenderness, and deference to men had no place" (15). As is known, many minority women became the mistresses of upper-class white men, while others resorted to prostitution as a means to provide for themselves and their children.

To continue with the history, the beginning of Cuba's independent movement with the Ten Years' War (1868-1878) brought women into the action. They collaborated in various ways, such as "funciones tradicionalmente femeninas, como la costura de banderas y uniformes, recopilación de alimentos y medicinas, enfermería y cocina" (González Pagés 26). Spain would eventually defeat the Cuban soldiers in this war, while those in power on the island continued to deny suffrage and full citizenship to women.

There were women, known as *mambisas*, who fought for Cuban independence against Spain, and assisted in various ways, from nursing to campaigning to actively fighting. One of the most famous *mambisas* is Ana Betancourt de Mora (1832-1901), an activist from a wealthy Cuban family who fought for women's liberation. She compared women's situations to those of slaves and prompted the lawmakers to address these issues. She urged equal rights and justice for women and participated in the fight against Spanish colonialism, which many troops were involved in during that time. Betancourt

became passionate about women's suffrage and frequently petitioned male leaders for their support. She later lived in exile in Madrid, Spain, but continued to write letters on women's injustice in Cuba (González Pagés 28). Now numerous schools for rural girls that are scattered throughout the Cuban countryside are named in honor of her bravery and ingenuity. In the first few decades of the Revolution, these schools trained thousands of girls from rural areas, naming them *anitas*.

The feminist movement in Cuba promoted women's rights and was partly initiated because of demands and changes in the education system for women. The leader in this arena was María Luisa Dolz y Arango, who had traveled extensively in the United States and Europe (González Pagés 31). The movement began to pick up speed during the 1890's, as women demanded more rights, such as suffrage, and equality. In 1892, *el Partido revolucionario cubano* (PRC) was formed and 15 women created *El club Mercedes Varona*, so that they could vote for the delegates in the PRC. This group allowed women to actively be part of a political group, one of many groups that were formed to make plans for the future independence of Cuba. Although these groups were controversial in the eyes of certain Cuban leaders, they would keep growing in terms of membership and continue to be influenced by ideas from the United States.

With Spain's loss to the United States in the Spanish American War in 1898, Cuba began to feel even more influence from the "Yankees." This intervention by the United States had begun before, but increased after Spain's loss. The United States took control of the naval base at Guantanamo, which they still possess today. Women had fought in this war and many were against U.S. policies on the island. Lillian Guerra

notes that “female popular nationalists proved themselves eager to assert a much more autonomous, self-defined role in the processes of social improvement that U.S. forces set in motion” (92). During this time, Americans began to impose a class hierarchy based on color, something that many Cubans had fought against in the previous wars. Notes Ada Ferrer, “To apprehend these societies, Americans marshaled racial knowledge formed in the United States, but they also daily confronted new subjects who did not always conform to premade categories . . .” (191). The goal was “Americanizing” Cubans, especially when it came to public education on the island (Guerra 102).

José Martí (1853-1895), arguably one of the most influential Cuban writers, fought against the Spanish for Cuban independence. In his opinion, Cubans should look inward and not rely on foreign influences to govern the island. He consistently warned against the “Colossus” to the north, the United States, and its threatening influence on the people and policies. This is evident in “Our America,” written in 1891. In that same year, Martí helped establish the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC). Notes Guerra, “A perfect example of the multilayered discourse Martí would adopt in bringing together nationalists of all stripes, the PRC program promised to rid Cuba of the authoritarian and bureaucratic colonial government” (37).

The Americans entered the island between 1899 and 1902 and began to impart their views on women there, as well: “For the next half century the United States became the primary model for modes of life and behavior for Cuban women” (Smith and Padula 13). These views included suffrage for women, as well as banning women from going to Cuba to practice prostitution (González Pagés 47-48). Cuban feminism was always

juxtaposed to North American feminism (Stoner 195). Debates began on the island, but the decision for women's suffrage was voted down in 1901. After this, 1,256 teachers from Cuba were sent to Harvard University for a summer course. This experience had a profound effect on these educators and their ideas of equal rights for women. González Pagés notes that there were two visions of women during that time: "mujer-ciudadana de elevado nivel cultural y mujer- ama de casa, formadora de hombres para el poder" (53). Women began to wonder why there was such discrimination, so they formed new feminist groups in La Habana, including *el Partido popular feminista*, *el Partido de sufragistas cubanas*, and *el Partido nacional feminista* (González Pagés 55). Two important laws were passed in 1917 and 1918, respectively: *la ley de la Patria Potestad* and *la ley del Divorcio*, which gave women more autonomy in their personal relationships. *El club femenino de Cuba* was then created, which addressed various social issues for Cubans of both sexes.

One of the most well-known Cuban feminists of this time was poet and journalist Mariblanca Sabas Alomá, an active member of *El club femenino*, among other organizations that she also founded. Some called her the "Red Feminist," while she published numerous articles in newspapers and magazines, such as *Carteles*. Sabas Alomá wrote frequently about working Cuban women and the exploitation that they faced on a daily basis. For her, there were three aspects to the feminist fight: the economic, the moral, and the political (61). She wished to break down the old societal traditions regarding the spheres of men and women. For example, Sabas Alomá

criticized the notion that men belonged in the public sphere, on the street, while the women belonged in the home, being led and controlled by men (86).

In the 1920's feminism continued, but only among small groups of educated people. The first *Congreso nacional de mujeres* in Latin America took place in La Habana in 1923 and representatives from various Latin American countries openly discussed numerous ideas.¹⁰ The most popular theme was that of women's suffrage, which would not come until later in Cuba. It is important to note that not all feminists were suffragists, but had other goals for women on the island. There was a subsequent *Congreso nacional* that took place on the island in 1925. Although there were distinct groups of feminists with varying opinions and goals for women, they all agreed on three objectives: "political equality for women, social reform, and institutionalizing their programs to aid and represent women" (Stoner 77). According to Vilma Espín, the first two congresses "were eminently bourgeois and elitist" (*Cuban Women* 58).¹¹ Smith and Padula note that, "By the late 1920s almost a quarter of the students at the University of Havana were women" (17).

After the second Congress, Cuban women began to receive support from the president of the island, General Gerardo Machado y Morales, who had positive relations with the United States. His reign is known as the *Machadato* and included the importing of many American businesses to the island that brought with them numerous visitors and foreigners who moved there permanently. With the formation of several other important

¹⁰ Stoner explains, "Pilar Morlon de Menéndez established two objectives for the conference: (1) the creation of new options for women in twentieth-century Cuban society, and (2) the articulation of women's views regarding problems that affected individual, family, social, and national matters" (61).

¹¹ The idea that feminism is a bourgeois Western concept is still in force today in Cuba.

feminist groups, the government felt much pressure over the suffrage issue, which was pressing in other Latin American countries as well. The newspaper became an important medium for the suffragists, printing articles on this topic that reached a wider audience (González Pagés 74). However, Machado later abandoned his support of women's suffrage, which "became the symbol of Machado's infidelity to Cuban democracy and the metaphor for reform" (Stoner 115). Violence ensued on the island, as political groups waged war against each other. Feminists were not immune to this violence and several were attacked, disappeared, or killed due to their actions and opposition of Machado (Stoner 116). In 1933 President Machado was forced to renounce and leave Cuba, and Fulgencio Batista appointed a temporary replacement, Dr. Ramón Grau San Martín. Grau San Martín would ultimately be the person to grant women the right to vote in 1934, which was earlier than several other Western countries, including France and Switzerland.¹² It is vital to note that women received the right to vote as a way for the male leaders to "bolster support and moral approval for their policies" (Stoner 125-126).¹³ The United States influence at this time challenged feminist goals, as they "battled to keep their concerns before the provisional administrations" (Stoner 125).

During the third *Congreso nacional femenino* in La Habana in April of 1939, new issues were brought to the fore, including demands for labor and political rights for women. The motto for this congress was "Por la mujer, por el niño, por la paz y el progreso de Cuba." The main argument of this congress was "la igualdad de ambos

¹² The only other Latin American countries to grant women's suffrage before Cuba were Ecuador (1929), Brazil (1932), and Uruguay (1932).

¹³ In 1934, Cuba passed a maternity code, which "was one of the first and most progressive legal provisions for women in the Western Hemisphere" (Stoner 178).

sexos” (González Pagés 98). During this time, the biggest contributors to new ideas were Mirta Aguirre and Mariblanca Sabas Alomá. After this congress, between 1939 and 1959, the movement slowed down and was not as prominent. General Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar was elected president in 1940 and it was during these elections that several women were elected for the first time. He would later be defeated by Ramón Grau San Martín in 1944, but would seize power again as dictator on March 10, 1952 in a military overthrow of the government. Batista worked very closely with the United States and cooperated with them on the majority of issues. The United States had much control over Cuba during this time, both economically and politically, while many American businesses were established on the island. Nevertheless, Batista was not as open to women in political positions. Although laws were passed in favor of women, most were still “comfort and sex objects for a highly *macho* male population” (Randall, *Cuban Women Now* 7). Statistics reveal that in 1958, only 17% of Cuban women worked outside the home, while 25,064 were beggars and 11,000 were prostitutes (Randall, *La mujer cubana ahora* 86). The women’s movement that had been strong earlier “ran out of steam in the 1950s” (Smith and Padula 21).

Women’s Involvement in Society since the Revolution

Women gained momentum again with the efforts and subsequent success of the Cuban Revolution. A group of revolutionaries, including Fidel Castro, staged a coup on July 26, 1953 on the Moncada Barracks in Santiago to overthrow the dictator. Most of the attackers were killed by execution after the attack. This movement is now known as

M-26, *el Movimiento del 26 de Julio*, and would continue to attack until their imminent victory in 1959. The main motivation for this nationalist-independent movement was to establish autonomy from the United States. While the regime has been victorious in this respect, they established a patriarchal government, based on socialism. Fidel Castro and the other male revolutionaries looked to the Soviet Union as an ally and became an authoritarian state. This has led to the government limiting freedoms for its citizens, which has resulted in less independence and more Human Rights violations. Several women, mostly from middle-class or upper-class backgrounds, were key members in the attempts to overthrow the Batista regime, including Vilma Espín, Melba Hernández, and Haydée Santamaría, an activist who would later publish narratives on her involvement in the movement.¹⁴ Fidel would later start in his famous speech of 1966 entitled “The Revolution within the Revolution, “I believed that an enormous potential force and extraordinary human resources for the revolution existed in our women” (qtd. in Stone 48).

These women were indispensable in carrying out the goals of the movement. Although some were involved in guerrilla warfare, they remained mostly in support roles, as opposed to combat¹⁵ (Lobao 266). Women were seen as “compañeras en la lucha.” Several participated in actual combat, while most had more traditional, behind-the-scenes roles that included cooking, cleaning, sewing, nursing, and carrying messages between

¹⁴ These writings “suggest her own personal struggle to find a satisfying place for herself in the patriarchal national revolutionary family” (Byron 16). Santamaría eventually committed suicide in 1980, unable to ever find this place, much like Zoé Valdés, whom I will discuss in subsequent chapters.

¹⁵ This was the same during the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua in 1979 that defeated the Somoza regime and also in El Salvador. However, in the case of the Shining Path women of Peru, they held higher positions of power in the movement, which began in 1980. They were part of the “cúpula” and were trained as members of the “killing squad.”

revolutionaries.¹⁶ Two of the most well-known *compañeras* are Lidia Esther Doce Sánchez, a close friend of Che Guevara's, and Clodomira Acosta Ferrales, who both risked their lives carrying secret messages across long distances (Smith and Padula 28). Other well-known names are Celia Sánchez, Natalia Revuelta, and Castro's sister, Lidia.¹⁷ In an interview, Vilma Espín was asked if there were any difficulties for women involved in the movement. She responded:

Allí a nadie se le ocurrió jamás esto como problema. Y no era solamente la coordinación; nosotros teníamos jefes de Acción que eran mujeres. Además, en Santiago de Cuba, por ejemplo, se dio la situación de que los hombres jóvenes que salían a la calle por la noche estaban en peligro constante de ser detenidos por la policía y registrados, sobre todo después del 30 de Noviembre, pero no tanto a las mujeres, de manera que utilizábamos compañeras para transportar medicinas y armas, e incluso empezaron a ser ellas las que realizaban los sabotajes, cargaban la dinamita y llevaban los mensajes. Además, salían con los compañeros para ejecutar las acciones, porque una pareja siempre despierta menos sospechas que un grupo de una persona sola. Es decir, jugaron un papel

¹⁶ During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), women named "las soldaderas" o "las galletas" had important roles as well. But the main difference between these women and the Cuban women is that "las soldaderas" were mainly indigenous or poor mestizas (S. Soto 44). They cooked, cleaned, and organized everything among the revolutionaries to show support of their loved ones and of the revolutionary ideas. Some brave "soldaderas" even fought daily at the side of the revolutionaries, including the Zapatistas, the Villistas, and the Carrancistas (S. Soto 46). Some women helped with the dispersion of ideology, as they wanted a brighter future for their children, much like the Cuban women.

¹⁷ There were several relationships that developed from the revolutionary activities. Fidel Castro, although married to Mirta Díaz Balart, began a relationship with Celia Sánchez, one that would last for many years. Che Guevara, married to Peruvian Hilda Gadea, met Aleida March, whom he later married after getting divorced from Hilda. Raúl Castro, Fidel's brother and current President of Cuba, met Vilma Espín and was married to her for many years.

muy importante y muy activo en aquella etapa de la lucha. (*La Mujer en Cuba* 42)

Although women held indispensable roles during this time, their importance is not as noted as the efforts of the male comrades. As Kristine Byron explains, “Women are remembered as “heroines of the revolution” but can never seem to compete with the male icons of Cuban revolutionary culture, especially Fidel Castro and Che Guevara” (142). The women seem to remain in the shadows of history. Fidel recognizes them as being pertinent to the revolution’s success, but they are rarely in the spotlight nor do they “figure as a subject of critical inquiry” (Byron 143). On the other hand, male participation and importance is frequently lauded and announced when speaking or reading of the Revolution.

The most well-known group of women to participate in the Cuban Revolution is known as the Mariana Grajales Women’s Platoon, named after a Black woman who fought for Cuba’s independence from Spain. She had many sons who fought for Cuban independence, including Antonio Maceo, a famous fighter in the struggle for independence. Vilma Espín openly lauds the efforts of Mariana Grajales, who some consider a feminine symbol of Cuban nationalism: “Mariana Grajales representa la rebeldía y el patriotismo de la mujer cubana en todas las épocas y su historia extraordinaria ha constituido ejemplo y estímulo para las combatientes” (*La Mujer en Cuba* 43). This platoon was formed in 1958 and these women actually participated in combat prior to the victory on January 1, 1959. Fidel Castro formed this group and furthermore trained them to use arms and to fight in guerrilla warfare. Authorities

tortured some of these women in hopes of getting information about the movement, while others were shot and killed by police (Smith and Padula 29). Che Guevara offered his sentiments on women's participation in the revolutionary movement:

La mujer es capaz de realizar los trabajos más difíciles, de combatir al lado de los hombres y no crea, como se pretende, conflictos de tipo sexual en la tropa. En la rígida vida combatiente, la mujer es una compañera que aporta las cualidades propias de su sexo, pero puede trabajar lo mismo que el hombre. Puede pelear; es más débil, pero no menos resistente que éste. Puede realizar toda clase de tareas de combate que un hombre haga en un momento dado y ha desempeñado, en algunos momentos de la lucha en Cuba, un papel relevante. (131)

During the Revolution and after its triumph, the topic of feminism on the island became vital. Ilja Luciak explains, "Having experienced the relative freedom and equality of combat, which was characterized by the predominance of nontraditional values, many women were reluctant to return to the straitjacket of gender equality imposed by traditional societal norms" (11-12). After Castro's victory and seizure of power, one of his priorities was the issue of women and their future in the socialist society. To this end, the *Unión femenina revolucionaria* (UFR) was formed to help guide women in the transition to a socialist state. Later in 1959, a group of Cuban women went to a congress in Chile entitled "The International Federation of Democratic Women," which started the new movement in Cuba (Randall, *Cuban Women Now* 300). Soon after, a big step was to create the only women's group that currently exists, the

Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), which was founded on August 23, 1960. During that time, Cuba was contending with the Bay of Pigs incident, in which CIA-trained exiles tried to overtake Castro's government in 1961. Later, many assassination attempts of Castro were carried out by the United States. These threats were top priorities in Cuban politics for many years. In 1960, Cuba began to establish close relations and align itself with the Soviet Union, declaring the country socialist that same year. The United States embargo against Cuba also began in 1960.

Vilma Espín, Fidel Castro's sister-in-law, was one of the key women revolutionaries and leader of the FMC from 1960 until her death in 2007. Espín, arguably the most powerful woman on the island and one of the most well-known female communist leaders, was from an upper-class family and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). She consistently claimed that women now have their own space due to the socialist principles (*Cuban Women* 74). The main goals of the FMC are to bring women together in support of the ideologies of the revolution and to integrate them into Cuban society: "The FMC is a fundamental force in raising the ideological, political and cultural level of women, protecting the full exercise of women's rights, ensuring equal access to opportunities, in all areas and levels of society" (Espín, *Cuban Women* 54). This feminine organization changed the role of women in society, from being private citizens to public citizens.¹⁸ Women received the assignment to go out and recruit new members for the organization. This was a new concept for them, to be actively engaged in the public realm, and many men were uncomfortable with this notion: "El problema era, como siempre, <<salir a la calle>>" (Holgado Fernández 269).

¹⁸ Espín maintained that the FMC was feminine, not feminist (Molyneux 12).

The FMC has steadily grown through the years¹⁹ and by 1990, had a membership of 3.2 million, which was 80% of the adult females on the island, making it the largest women's organization in Latin America to date (Molyneux 5). Marxists claim that if there is class equality, then gender equality will follow; for them, capitalism is the beginning of women's repression. Throughout the FMC's history, most of the members, including Espín, were against feminism, just like in the Soviet Union. They didn't want their struggle to be against men, which they perceived was happening in the United States.²⁰ They saw this as a divisive movement from the United States, which was in direct opposition to the communist system in place there. Belkys Vega, a member of the Cuban group *Colectivo Magín*, whose complete name was the *Asociación de mujeres comunicadoras*, was asked about her opinion on feminism and she replied:

In Cuba the term *feminism* has . . . been seen as somewhat negative. It has been seen as negative and this of course has not allowed some people that have . . . defended the feminist principle to call themselves feminist. There are a lot of women in Cuba who have fought for women's equality, for equal opportunities, for the right to [access] to all job positions, for being recognized as professionals in equal terms as men, [but] you can notice there have been a lot of problems with feminism. . . . (qtd. in Shayne 150)

¹⁹ The FMC hit its lowest point in the late 1980's, as many women were disillusioned with the group's purpose.

²⁰ Espín said in 1977, "We have never had a feminist movement. We hate that. We hate the feminist movement in the United States. We consider what we are doing is part of the struggle. We see these movements in the USA which have conceived struggles for equality of women against men! That is absurd! For these feminists to say they are revolutionaries is ridiculous!" (qtd. in Molyneux 12-13).

However, these anti-feminist views began to change in the 1970's, due to the insistence of the United Nations Women's Advocacy and other feminists in Latin America. Cuba actually sent several women to Europe to learn more about these issues and realized that they needed to be more progressive in "women's emancipation" (Molyneux 13). Vilma Espín explained in 1989 what feminist groups meant to her:

In particular, I believe in those feminist groups who tie the solution to the oppression of women, of the liberation of women, to the liberation of the exploited, the oppressed, the discriminated against, which also means taking into consideration social, political and ideological, as well as economic problems, from the perspective of a class, sex and race analysis.

(Cuban Women 55)

To counter inactivity and to get more women involved in supporting the revolutionary mission, the Family Code was written and ultimately adopted in 1975. The mission of this Code stated that both women and men would share equally in the responsibilities in the home and with the raising of the children. In theory this was an advancement for Cuban women, but not always in practice. The *machismo* underpinnings that are embedded in Cuban culture have been hard to surpass. Even Espín admits that there have been shortcomings in this area since the Revolution: "We have not yet seen the same progress on men's participation in the sphere of family life, in the fulfillment of their responsibilities as fathers and co-participants in the establishment and development of the family" (*Cuban Women 66*). If we think of the term "socialist," it is arguably the same process. It takes many years to change a country and its system of

government, especially from a capitalistic, bourgeois way of life, to one of socialism. The only way to change it is to educate the following generations of children in the new political system. However, the time involved in this process is variable, as Cuba has been trying for 50 years to educate new generations.

Fidel Castro took advantage of many opportunities to speak in public about the situation of women and the changes that would be made under his regime. His most famous motto around this issue was that the state of women was “a revolution within a revolution.” On December 9, 1966, Castro made an important speech at the Fifth National Plenary of the FMC in Santa Clara. In the speech, he included notable advances by women, but he began by saying, “And if were asked what the most revolutionary thing is that the revolution is doing, we would answer that it is precisely this- the revolution that is occurring among the women of our country!” (in Stone 48). His most famous work on this is entitled “Thesis: On the Full Exercise of Women’s Equality,” which he presented at the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in December of 1975 and is still referenced today when speaking of women’s issues and rights on the island.

While women’s equality has been consistently lauded, the stance on homosexuality in Cuba has tended to be negative and the government has dealt harsh punishments to those that admit to being homosexual as well as to those that are suspected of being gay.²¹ The State has typically been harsher with male homosexuals than with lesbians. In the early years of the revolution, these men were incarcerated in work camps and were forced to do physically demanding work on a daily basis, while

²¹ The State also criticizes American males and females for being effeminate and macho, respectively.

being treated as criminals. Homosexuality was a crime and, without a doubt, counterrevolutionary. Supposedly, these men had turned away from their masculine side and were considered hopeless and dangerous to society. However, society viewed lesbians differently, as “childlike,” and possessing a problem that could be fixed (Smith and Padula 170). Therefore, we can see that women did not have a specific place in society. As Smith and Padula ask, “This abhorrence of homosexuality displayed early on by the regime raised serious questions about women’s place in the revolution. If the revolution were “a matter for men,” where did women fit in?” (173). It appears that women continue to have to fight for a place in society, while trying to avoid being counterrevolutionary in the eyes of the government.

What the Cuban State posits is that women’s basic needs have been met by the Revolution and refuses to admit that at times, this wasn’t so. There seems to be a noticeable denial in this aspect. Before the Revolution, unemployment and underemployment were widespread throughout the island. 70% of working women were domestic servants in the homes of wealthy citizens (Randall, *Women in Cuba* 23). As one can imagine, the working conditions for women were, for the most part, unfavorable. Stone even ventures to say that some maids were treated like slaves (6). But the victory of the Revolution has led women to gain access to free educations all the way up to the college level and to become an integral part of the labor force. In fact, in 1995, 42.3% of the Cuban workforce was made up of women (Shayne 136). Many women are now physicians and have earned terminal degrees in their respective professions.

To make it easier for women to go out into the public sphere and have meaningful careers, new daycare facilities were established on the island. At the beginning there were not enough daycare centers to care for all of the children of women who wanted to work. From the 1970's to the 1990's, there was only one spot open for every ten women (Smith and Padula 133). Some women have decided to hold private day care centers in their homes, which was one solution to the shortage.

Castro knew that sexuality was a crucial part of the revolution and so he “would attempt to mold sexuality to serve the revolution” (Smith and Padula 169). Birth control was widely available, along with free, legal abortions in clinics throughout the island. New sex education classes became mandatory in schools and intended to answer a variety of questions about relationships and pregnancy. Again, these ideas would take time to develop through generations of citizens, breaking the old molds of *machismo*. Sexuality is very different in a capitalist society as compared to a socialist state. Smith and Padula confirm, “The role of sexuality in socialist society, according to the revolutionary program, is to provide a source of security and happiness for workers which will allow them smoothly and efficiently to perform their duties and ultimately-and perhaps most important-produce a new generation that conforms to revolutionary expectations” (179). There was a definite decline in the influence of the Catholic Church after 1959, as it would have opposed these changes. This is another example of a patriarchal struggle between the Church and the socialist state.

Along with educational and economic reforms, there has been a change in the health care system, specifically dealing with reproductive rights. Cuba has a universal

health care system, with free medical care to all of its citizens. As an issue very relevant to women and their bodies, revolutionary Cuba has kept an open stance on abortion, which is extremely controversial in other Latin American countries. Abortion had been illegal in Cuba since 1879, due to the Spanish penal code. However, this changed somewhat in 1938, with a new code that allowed abortion in certain instances, and was standard until 1979. These instances were: to save the life of the mother, if the baby was the result of rape, or if it was known that the baby would have birth defects. Abortion was then legalized in 1979, but numerous procedures were performed before this time. Needless to say, before the legalization many women attempted self-induced abortions, which resulted in the death of the mother or severe complications. The government subsidized these abortions, which resulted in increased numbers throughout the 1980's and 1990's. By granting women more control over their bodies, the Revolution has a victory and has delivered on this promise, but we will see later in this chapter and dissertation that there are still shortcomings for women on the island.

The Special Period began in Cuba in 1991, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba's closest ally and major trading partner. There were effects on all aspects of life, but mainly in the economic realm. Women have been especially affected by the shortages and economic decline. During the Special Period, the FMC sought to support women by establishing the *Casas de orientación de la mujer y la familia* throughout Cuba. By 1994 there were 155 of these *Casas de la mujer* or *Casas* (Molyneux 25). These *casas* offered support and guidance around various issues, ranging from diseases to

abuse to legal advice. The problem was that these issues would later be reported to the government and legal action would be taken.²²

Despite the advances in the areas of economics, education, and health reform, life for women is still not easy. “La vida cotidiana” is still the same for many, along with discriminatory habits that permeate society. Many women complain of the infamous double or triple shift that they live on a daily basis. This includes their work outside of the home in the public sector, the housework in the private sector, and their involvement with revolutionary political activities. Many participate in the *Comités para la defensa de la Revolución* (CDRs), which monitor activities in neighborhoods in order to report any activity that might be considered counterrevolutionary. Women also played an effective role in the *brigadista* movement. They were volunteers who mainly worked in the health care sector, organizing talks on medical care and visiting homes of patients with certain illnesses. Women also banded together and volunteered with *las Madres combatientes por la educación*. By 1985 this group had 1,700,000 members (Holgado Fernández 273). However, due to the strain to complete all of these tasks, women have declined to be active in certain sectors, mostly in the political realm. This equates to a lack of political power, which in turn means that there is no opportunity to change the status quo.

Since the Special Period, the working situation for women has become precarious. There was a shortage of basic food and other domestic items. Due to this, women have taken drastic measures to provide for themselves and their families. In September of

²² Because of this, the number of visits dropped immensely, as women didn’t want trouble with the government for themselves or their family members (Molyneux 26).

1993, the Cuban government determined the work of *cuentapropistas* legal. This meant that citizens of both sexes could look for work on their own and accept pay for it. This became a way for women to make extra money, but they had to first get a license for this. Approximately 70% of the women who received these licenses were housewives (Holgado Fernández 112). Some women ran their own *paladares*, or small restaurants in their homes where they could prepare meals for a certain number of people daily. The clients could not sit and eat at the restaurant, but had to take the food and consume it elsewhere. The government also exercised control over what types of food and beverages the *paladares* could serve (Holgado Fernández 114). Another job that citizens started to exercise during this period was that of *puertapropistas*,²³ who would go door to door selling products and also delivering items from the black market. This shows that some women and men will do or sell anything in order to survive.

Critiques of Feminism and Women's Issues in Cuba

Despite the perspectives of those central to the Revolution's theories and practice, other scholars have a different view on women's progress that has been made in Cuba since 1959. Some claim that there is no feminist agenda on the island, for various reasons. Margaret Randall is a feminist scholar who has lived in Cuba for many years and has done extensive research on the island.²⁴ She opines that revolutionary Cuba has failed to incorporate a feminist agenda and that there is no space for female autonomy. Although recognizing that women's lives have improved since the Revolution, "women's

²³ This term was coined by the historian Sonia Moro.

²⁴ She has also lived in Nicaragua, documenting various aspects of the Sandinista Revolution.

lives were changed to better serve the goals of the revolution, not for their own self-realization” (Randall, *Gathering Rage* 133).

One example of this lack of autonomy is evidenced by the *Colectivo Magín*. Several Cuban female journalists attempted to form this group in 1993. While this organization refused to call itself feminist, its main goal was to bring in more group members from various fields to change the image of women in different spheres of the media (Shayne 145). *Magín* began to gain strength, hosting conferences and collaborating with other countries. However, in 1996, the government came out against *Magín*, declaring the group illegal, which in turn resulted in its disbandment. These women, known as *Magineras*, presently continue to work on individual projects, but the group no longer exists as a collective unit.²⁵

Julie Shayne is another scholar who has done extensive research in Cuba, Chile, and El Salvador, documenting women’s involvement in the revolutions in those particular countries. She has coined the term “gendered revolutionary bridges” to describe the role of women involved in the insurrections, women who “bridged physical space in revolutionary exchanges and partially closed the gap between the organized Left and unincorporated citizens” (133). Shayne agrees with Margaret Randall, in that there is no real revolutionary feminist consciousness in Cuba, due to various reasons, one of which is a lack of a collective feminist consciousness (154). While basic needs are met for these women, they are not allowed to organize, as in the case of the *Colectivo Magín*.

²⁵ The Cuban government claims that there are 10 national NGOs on the island with consultative status (United Nations, *Note verbale* 12).

The government has shown absolutely no support for these types of organizations; they are only allowed if they are sponsored by the government.

Ilja Luciak has done an in-depth study of gender relations in the political sphere of Cuban society since 1959 in his book entitled *Gender and Democracy in Cuba*. Luciak posits that, while there is formal gender equality, there are still not equal rights between the sexes. He affirms, “The successful implementation of social and economic politics benefiting women has effectively lulled the people and the Cuban leadership into the belief that traditional gender relations have been transformed in a more substantive way than the record supported” (105). We can see this by the low number of women in certain areas of representation. During the 1970’s elections began to be held on the island for certain positions at various levels. However, women were hardly nominated or elected, which is evidence of the discriminatory practices against them. For example, in 1974, only seven percent of those nominated were women and only three percent were ultimately elected (Randall, *Gathering Rage* 145). While the numbers of women as representatives have grown, this has mostly occurred at the national levels, such as their participation in Cuba’s *Poder Popular*. The *Comisión Electoral Nacional* reports that the percentage of women has grown since 1976 to 2003 from 21.8% to 35.9% (in Luciak 65). According to Luciak, there are several explanations for the low number of women participating in politics. First, most women do not want to get involved at the local or municipal levels because it is extremely time-consuming, underappreciated, and they receive no pay for their efforts (69). At the national level, the specific duties require less

time. Secondly, women are still subject to the *machismo* underpinnings in Cuban politics. Mayda Alvarez and her colleagues explain:

When positions are determined by direct vote, there are more possibilities that beliefs, prejudices, and cultural patterns inherited from a class-based and sexist society are expressed, which assign to the man the world of work and public power and to the woman the realm of the home; that is to say, the social perception still assigns a preferential masculine face to leadership. (qtd. in Luciak 70-71)

Women are also active in such organizations as the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) and the Cuban Workers Central (CTC), but there is an enormous gap in the decision-making powers of men and women in the highest spheres of government. In Cuba, two organizations make all of the decisions: the Politburo and the Central Committee, with Fidel Castro being the leader of both for many years until 2008. In 1985 and 1991, only 11.5% of the members of the Politburo were women and in 1997 this number dropped to 8.3% (Luciak 81). The Central Committee's numbers were higher, but still do not show equal representation. In 1997, only 13.3% of its members were women, which dropped from 16.9% in 1991 (Luciak 81). It would seem that, "When it came to power, the ideas, perspectives, and experiences of Cuban women simply did not count" (Smith and Padula 45).

Cuba's history has seen many drastic changes in leadership. Ileana Fuentes, activist and author of *Cuba sin caudillos: Un enfoque feminista para el siglo XXI*, looks forward to a Cuba without masculine leadership. She opines that the history of many

nations is from the point of view of the *yo* patriarcal: “ese diseño de nación que prescindió casi del todo de nuestra visión y de nuestro intelecto *es* el contexto en el cual poco a poco ha ido moldeándose el fenómeno totalitario que es hoy el comunismo cubano” (6). Women have their certain place in society, and are not allowed to step out of this place, unless they want problems with the government: “No hay espacio para identidades elegidas” (Holgado Fernández 320). Fuentes calls for the liberation of women, even before that of Cuba (7).

There have been women who have protested and complained about the problems in Cuban society. They have tried to step out of this confined space, but few have been successful. In 1990, at the Fifth FMC Congress, Castro was named “The Father of all Cubans, and guide to all Cuban Women.” In response to this, María Elena Cruz Varela, a famous poet on the island, wrote a letter of dissent, criticizing the human rights violations. She was subsequently dragged out of her home and tortured by a woman revolutionary who made her swallow the paper with her complaints on them. She was later imprisoned for 18 months (Smith and Padula 184). This shows the intolerance of an act considered counterrevolutionary, regardless of one’s gender. Another woman, Aline Hernández, member of the *Movimiento de madres cubanas por la solidaridad*, tells of her desire to leave Cuba, due to her opposition: “Yo sí, quisiera irme. Aquí estamos frustradas todas las mujeres. Aquí no se puede ni trabajar: en la cuadra están vigilando constantemente todo lo que yo hago, las actividades, quién va a mi casa y todo” (qtd. in Holgado Fernández 292).

Images of Cuban Women

When speaking of the image of women in Cuba, there are distinct differences between how men see women and how women see themselves. Despite the efforts of the revolutionaries to make equality a priority for women, this has still not been completely realized. It seems that the value that women attach to themselves or that others attach to them always deals in some way with their bodies. Most notably since the Special Period, many women still see themselves as being trapped in the domestic roles of housewife and mother. It is becoming more common for young girls and women to see their only human function as a reproductive one. Holgado Fernández affirms, “Los arraigados estereotipos sexistas que sobredimensionan la maternidad aboca a muchas jóvenes a buscar su realización personal a través de la confirmación de su capacidad reproductora” (191). Needless to say, this has led many young girls to quit school and enter the workforce in order to support their children. “Las adolescentes cubanas aprenden, desde muy temprana edad, esta actitud de vasallaje que las reconoce como servidoras de un deseo ajeno” (Holgado Fernández 192).

It also appears that women value themselves through their appearance and the admiration that their bodies get in public, as seen by the use of *piropos*. Most of these catcalls are sexually charged and liken the women’s physical attributes to other items. While foreign women may be offended by this attention, it seems that Cuban women come to expect it. One young Cuban woman, Luisa, went to Chicago and was very disappointed in the lack of these comments from admiring men. She asked, “Doesn’t anybody in the States stare at anybody? My body was so lonely to be watched”

(Thompson 67). Here we see a cultural contradiction. As some feminists are offended by this behavior and seek to eradicate it in Cuban society, other women come to expect and even seek this attention drawn to their bodies and appearance. As the lawmakers condemn sexism and the use of women's bodies to sell products, the use of *piropos* is in full force on the island and there are no consequences for the action of directing them towards women in public.

In response to the declining economy, some Cubans have turned to prostitution as a means to survive. Prostitution among Cuban women has declined since before the Revolution, but has still not been eradicated. Sadly, women of all ages have resorted to *jineterismo* as a way to earn a living or to provide necessary items for their children, which is their "lived situation" (Cabezas 159). Many of these young girls move to the cities from rural areas in search of a better life, or at least one in which they can reap more financial rewards. One critic suggests that women, "Han aprendido a concebir su cuerpo como instrumento para resolver la sobrevivencia" (Holgado Fernández 255-56). Men have been known to do this, but the majority of the *jineteras* are women. Shayne mentions, "A man might sell counterfeit Cuban cigars or offer his services as a "tour guide," while women are often put in the positions of selling their bodies" (144). They are also seen as objects in the eyes of the men who advertise their services and those who utilize their services. They are seen as the "objeto de la transacción" (Holgado Fernández 237). In the eyes of the government, these actions are counterrevolutionary.

Many young *jineteras* seek an opportunity to change their lifestyle by meeting a foreigner, or tourist, who has the potential to get them physically out of Cuba and into a

new country and life. There was a common joke in La Habana in the 1990's which asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And the answer was: a tourist (Thompson 69). It seems that these young people will do anything to attract the foreigner's attention. One woman on the island, Inés, responded when asked about this social crisis:

Hay también cambios en el sentido de que mucha gente joven aspira a irse del país, como fin y meta, irse o casarse con un extranjero. Olvídate de las jineteras: muchachas y muchachos jóvenes en general. Las jineteras lo consiguen por otras vías, pero gran parte de la juventud tiene como objetivo empatarse con un extranjero que los saque de Cuba. Entonces, eso ha ido deformando las relaciones. Ya no hay nada que se parezca al amor, sino ¿de dónde tú eres? (qtd. in Holgado Fernández 231)

One of the goals of feminists in Latin America is the shift from seeing women as passive objects to speaking subjects. In Cuba, traditionally women's bodies have been seen as objects, while some claim that this isn't present today. For example, Espín sees a positive change: "In our society today, woman is no longer considered an object" (*Cuban Women* 50). Furthermore, Stone comments, "Since Cuba is free of advertising in general, you don't see women's bodies being used to sell products" (20). However, other critics, like Fuentes, opine that this image is still prominent. She contends that Cuban officials continue to propagate the idea that women are objects and that these officials are at fault because they allowed *Playboy* to photograph Cuban women's bodies and publish an article "linking sand, sun, sex and socialism" (150). Fuentes also cites another interview

that Fidel Castro had with Diane Sawyer, an American television journalist, in March of 1993. Castro told her that “American men cannot imagine the beauty and the physical attributes of Cuban women” (151). Fuentes sees these statements as violations of human rights, under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948 by the United Nations. Even the Attorney-General of Cuba saw the need for a reevaluation of “tourist publicity” (United Nations, *Report* 15). As a way to expand tourism and direct foreigners to the beaches of Cuba, the Cuban tourist board began an advertisement of “dark-skinned beauties in minimal bikinis” (Smith and Padula 186). In essence, due to the economic deficit and shortage of funds, the government has been willing to objectify these women in an effort to rectify the current situation. Although the FMC protested against these advertisements, the board had no objections in producing them. Holgado Fernández argues, “Las mujeres son continuamente identificadas mediante sus atributos físicos o su rol doméstico y maternal” (201).

It is important to note that the ideal female body in the eyes of most Cubans is different than that of other societies, such as the United States and Canada. Smith and Padula note that all women, no matter what size, are seen as attractive: “In Cuba, women who in the North would be counseled on how to hide bulges with yards of material and minimizing patters sashay about in skimpy halters, miniskirts, and tight pants as if to announce, “Here I am and aren’t I beautiful” to which Cuban men respond, “Sí, Sí!” (171-172). There does not seem to be as much of an obsession with weight, weight loss, and bodily changes during pregnancy.

Some women rappers, although small in number, have decided to take these issues into their own hands. Many consider themselves feminists and try to connect their generation to that of older generations of feminists (Fernandes 117).²⁶ They seek to include in their music themes that are close to them and their bodies, such as *jineterismo*. As Fernandes says, “Women rap artists continue this legacy of negotiating sexuality and power with their lovers and asserting their presence as sexual beings, not objects” (114).²⁷ Randall reminds us that much discrimination against women can be found in the Spanish language. One well-known saying is:

La mujer en casa, y el hombre en la plaza.

Mujer a la ventana, o puta o enamorada.

Las mujeres buenas, no tienen ni ojos ni orejas. (*La mujer cubana ahora*
26)

In addition, there are books and television programs, especially the notorious *telenovelas*, which propagate these images of women in Cuba. Several key Cuban films have shown sexism and the problems that women have confronted in the socialist society. In *Hasta cierto punto*, produced in 1983, we see that Oscar, a filmmaker, cannot decide whether he wants to be with his traditional wife or Lina, a liberated woman who works with men on the docks. Oscar is making his own documentary about *machismo* throughout the film and it is obvious that he has not overcome it himself. In *Portrait of Teresa* (1979), Teresa tries to be the perfect woman in the socialist society, working at a

²⁶ Some women rappers even organized a forum entitled “Machismo in the Lyrics of Rap Songs” in 2003 to discuss this issue (Fernandes 111).

²⁷ One famous artist who has used her body for success in her work is the Caribbean singer and dancer Iris Chacón.

textile factory and being active politically to better her community. But this causes problems in her marriage to Ramón, as he wants her in the house, cooking, cleaning, and caring for their three sons. This leads to domestic violence and Ramón having an affair. We are witnesses to the double standard, in that women should forgive men, but men are allowed to control women. *Lucía*, produced in 1968, chronicles the lives of three women named Lucía in different time periods: 1895, during the Cuban War of Independence against Spain, 1932, and the 1960's, after the victory of the Cuban Revolution. In all three cases, the women and their spouses are unable to resolve their problems. These women suffer immensely, for love, and end up alone or in oppressive relationships.

It is obvious that there are many contradictions in the history of Cuban feminism that have carried over into the present. There are contradictions between what the State allows and deems appropriate for women in revolutionary society and what women desire in order to be fully realized. While oftentimes their basic needs have been met, they still lack a voice on the island, especially in politics and cultural production, including literature. The images produced still objectify women in various mediums, including movies, popular music, and billboards. It is not known how these images and issues of feminism will change as Cuba eases certain restrictions due to the changes in leadership and relationships with other countries. But it is clear that there will be new developments and that artists will continuously present their opinions and critiques of these words and actions. The Cuban writers Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero have already begun this process, as I will show in the following chapters.

Chapter Two:

Zoé Valdés: Imagining a Cuba with Physical and Emotional Exile

“The world a woman inhabits begins with her own body” (Schutte 226).

“To reread as a woman is at least to imagine the lady’s place; to imagine while reading the place of a woman’s body; to read reminded her that her identity is also re-membered in stories of the body” (Miller 355).

“They [contemporary women artists] also share the conviction that women’s bodies are sites of negotiation and struggle within history” (Grimaldo Grigsby 84).

Exile and the Island

Zoé Valdés, while residing in Paris, France, imagines the island of Cuba through her novels. Valdés wishes to bring women into the spotlight, so that their history is not excluded, but included in the history of the island. Without a doubt, Cuba is the focus of her novels and all of the main characters either live on the island currently or did in the past. Part of this imagining deals with the theme of exile. Her novels include, first of all, the physical exile of the Cuban people. In *Café Nostalgia*, the main character, Marcela, also nicknamed Mar, is a self-exile living in Paris, which mirrors the author’s life.²⁸ Her Cuban childhood friends have also gone into exile throughout the world, living in Argentina, the United States, and Spain, among other countries. These Cubans must deal with physical exile, as their bodies are physically off of the island or as Marcela frequently refers to it, “Aquella isla.” In this novel, Valdés chronicles the relationships

²⁸ Café nostalgia is also a restaurant/bar on the famous *Calle Ocho* in Miami, Florida.

between a group of exiles who were once friends back in Cuba. These friends and their past experiences together are constant images that invade Marcela's thoughts. They could even be considered obsessive thoughts that impede her daily routine. These exiles frequently leave messages on Marcela's answering machine and make arrangements to meet and to reconnect, usually off the island. Marcela admits to herself, "De nuevo me atacó la angustia de no poder recuperar un sitio en el mundo, un espacio en mi isla imaginaria, un lugar donde por fin pudiéramos hallarnos todos reunidos" (*Café Nostalgia* 312).

The obsession with the island is constant in the thoughts and words of the characters. For Marcela, the people may be gone, but their shadows remain on the island: "Las personas estarán obligadas al exilio, pero sus sombras quedan" (*Café* 176). Hilma Nelly Zamora notes, "Su condición de exiliados los lleva a desperdigarse por todo el mundo, sin una patria y con el recuerdo constante de aquella isla que dejaron atrás" (125). In this condition, Marcela uses the bodily senses to recapture the essence of Cuba for her, even while she is living in Paris. Valdés writes, drawing on the smells of Cuba through a diary that was written on the island, "El cuaderno era lo más cercano en tiempo que poseía de Aquella Isla, hasta olía a salitre y a moho de paredes de antiguos palacios habanaviejeros" (*Café* 203). Marcela consistently remembers the sights, smells, feels, and noises that invaded La Habana on a daily basis when she lived there.

In another of Valdés' novels, *La hija del embajador*, Daniela, although not living in Paris in exile, feels at times as though she doesn't belong either in Cuba or in Paris, but is living in between, in her own place of exile. She feels like an outsider, someone that

cannot be let in or accepted by anyone. Her boyfriend in Paris, Maurice, exacerbates these feelings when he tells her, “Olvidas que la extranjera eres tú” (*La hija del embajador* 52). She describes her journey in the new land as a movie, with her being the lead actress: “Cuando un cubano pone los pies en el extranjero ya no vive, actúa” (*La hija* 36). These examples would support Edward Said’s theory that “an exile is always out of place” (180). Exiles do not feel like they belong in their homeland or in their new country of residence. They feel alienated from both places. To complicate this situation even more, Daniela has mixed feelings toward her homeland. She is angry and nostalgic at the same time. On one hand, she refers to the island as “la isleta de mierda que tanto nos cagó la vida” (48) and one with few resources: “Olvidaba que era la hija de un embajador de un país en desgracia, pobre, solitario, y <<socialista>>” (70). On the other hand, she is genuinely nostalgic and cannot stop thinking about the island that she left: “En cambio, disfrutaba de todo eso y no podía quitársele de la cabeza aquella isla” (88). Reinaldo Arenas, a famous Cuban exile, opined that exiles are always in two places at once:

En cuanto al exilio, desde luego, una vez que uno deja Cuba, aún cuando tenga la libertad, no tiene la isla. Vivimos en dos territorios: el territorio de la nostalgia, de aquel mundo perdido, y el nuevo terreno donde uno vive, donde uno tiene que sobrevivir, que es el terreno, puramente, de la imaginación. Vivimos en una especie de ambivalencia. Somos dos personas a la vez: aquella persona que quedó allá y que uno recuerda siempre, y ésta que está aquí y que hasta cierto punto solamente es la

mitad. La otra mitad se queda siempre allá. O sea, yo camino por París y nunca puedo decir que estoy completamente aquí en París, sino que hay un personaje allá en Cuba que también me está observando y que soy yo mismo. Ésa es una condena que llevamos todas las personas que estén en el exilio. Nunca vamos a tener una identidad absoluta, siempre vamos a estar como en dos lugares a la vez. (qtd. in Machover 269)

To continue with the idea of physical exile, in several of Valdés' novels, there are scenes where young people attempt to escape on a raft to the United States, searching for "freedom." In *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca Martínez's best friends, la Puchunga and la Mechunga, along with a young orphan, Pepillo Loco, decide to leave because they are disgusted and fed up with the situation in Cuba. Valdés writes, "Habían resuelto seguirlo en su pasión por abandonar el país en una balsa artesanal" (*Te di* 333). The island is referred to here as "esta isla satánica" (*Te di* 333). They later return, as they were rescued and taken to Guantánamo Bay. But in the process, Pepillo Loco gets his leg blown off, due to the mine fields that are scattered throughout the American base. When her friends return, Cuca is relieved, but also sad, as she imagined them living a life of freedom. Valdés writes, "Después de todo, ya las hacían en libertad" (*Te di* 335).

Insularity is a topic frequently discussed in Caribbean literature and culture. As Goldman posits, "Islands are not merely a topos that offers fertile ground for social commentary but, instead, constitute a central trope of Hispanic Caribbean identity and expression" (14-15). While insularity refers to an island, it also refers to the inhabitants of an island, "cut off from intercourse with other nations, isolated; self-contained"

(“Insular,” def. 4a). Notes Leal, “Y esta insularidad, esta diferenciación marcada por una geografía implacable, produce en nuestra cultura una doble mirada interna y externa, cuyo entrecruzamiento enriquece la visión de la isla, desde Heredia a nuestros días” (xii). Valdés frequently alternates between seeing the island as decaying and putrid, while obsessing about the image of the wide open sea, “el mar.” It is something that will never change: “El mar siempre será el mar” (*Café Nostalgia* 338). According to Goldman, the relationship between land and sea “can be a source of anxiety” (7). For some, it signifies their imminent death, while trying to escape to “freedom.” It is an angry, unforgiving body that is defeated by some, but fatal for more.²⁹ The sea is a barrier that must be fought against and overcome, in order to have an opportunity for a better life. For the exiled author Reinaldo Arenas, “Volver al mar es volver a la posibilidad de la esperanza, a la posibilidad de la fuga, a la posibilidad de la comunicación” (qtd. in Machover 263). In *La hija del embajador*, while Daniela struggles to survive her abortion, images of innocent people drowning come to her mind: “Pensó en todos aquellos niños ahogados en el remolcador hundido en el mar” (94). These images are usually negative and appear at times when the characters are experiencing horrific moments or remembering their current positions of exile.

Besides the physical exile, the emotional exile or “*el insilio*” is another phenomenon that is equally important. Exile does not only mean physical or geographical exile, but also emotional or mental exile, a condition in which many people find themselves at times. Sophia McClennen, in *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time,*

²⁹ Every day *coyotes* pick up Cuban refugees and take them to the shores of the United States in turbo boats. Much like those that smuggle people over the United States/Mexico border, these *coyotes* receive large quantities of money for their services.

Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures, argues for the dialectics of exile writing that are about “change, process, and flux,” rather than “mutually exclusive binaries” (30). She comments, “The interpenetration of opposites explains the ways that exile texts include conflicts and oppositions” (30). One of these oppositions that she names is that exile can be both physical and mental. Physical exile is defined as, “Expatriation, prolonged absence from one’s native land, endured by compulsion of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for any purpose” (“Exile,” def. 1b). On the other hand, one can still be living in the country of origin to feel like he or she is in exile. Saúl Sosnowski explains what *insilio*, or internal exile, is:

El rechazo del régimen imperante y la marginación dentro del país como equivalentes a lo experimentado en un primer nivel distanciador por los exiliados, servía para distender las fronteras nacionales como única línea demarcatoria de las actitudes frente a la dictadura. “Insilio” daba cuenta de resistencias activas, de atronadores silencios, de meras supervivencias a la espera de otros despertares. (16)

According to José Lezama Lima, a famous Cuban author, “*el insilio*,” or interior exile, comes before physical exile. It is “an interior feeling that you experience for the first time living inside Cuba” (L. Soto 3). Many Cubans feel this “*insilio*” before actually leaving the island to pursue new opportunities in a different political system, while others endure this their entire lives.

There are episodes in several of Valdes’ novels that critique Fidel Castro and his regime, implying that the people are living in an oppressive situation and suffering

interior exile due to the political system.³⁰ Valdés shows characters suffering “*el insilio*” both on and off the island. Some feel this in Cuba, while other characters have left and experience this while living in other parts of the world, namely in France. In *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca lives her entire life in this “*insilio*” on the island. She is forced to leave her home in the country with her parents to go to La Habana to live with her godmother, as she has the best chance to succeed out of all of her siblings. She falls in love immediately with Juan Pérez, or Uan, and waits for him several times to return to her, once when she is young and another time when she is already an elderly woman.³¹

Women’s “situation” on the Island

While Valdés displays examples of exile and *insilio*, she also portrays the situation of women and their bodies³², demonstrating that their bodies and their lives are put in the center, away from the margins. Valdés theorizes that women have a feminine sensibility, which shows through their writing: “Ahora, hay esa sensibilidad femenina que creo que las mujeres tenemos, la que yo defiendo” (Personal interview). With these women characters in her novels, Valdés illustrates the perspective of a woman through the eyes of another woman, which is unique and has often been ignored.³³ Ana Gabriela Macedo confirms this by stating that the woman has traditionally been the “*objecto da representação*” and also “*espectadora de si própria representada*” (13). This is exactly

³⁰ It is important to note that not all of her literature is a critique of Castro.

³¹ Furthermore, in *El pie de mi padre*, the protagonist, Alma Desamparada, suffers this *insilio* each day, feeling that she is not an integral part of Cuban society.

³² This follows Beauvoir, as explained in the Introduction of this dissertation.

³³ Valdés fights against standard duties for women and their typical place in society. She writes, “Con ella, la Niña Cuca aprendió a lavar, fregar, cocinar, planchar y todo tipo de labores propias de su sexo (¡qué mal me cae usar esta formulita!)” (*Te di la vida entera* 15).

what Valdés rebels against in her novels, which can be considered erotic, using her own experiences to describe her female characters. According to Eva Löfquist:

Históricamente la mujer y sus sentimientos, experiencias, quehaceres, han sido descritos por hombres. En la ciencia, en el arte, en la literatura, en la moda. El signo mujer ha sido llenado por el hombre. A nosotras las mujeres nos han dicho cómo tenemos que sentir, cómo pensar, cómo reaccionar, cómo amar, cómo vestirnos, etc. La mujer ha tenido que soportar su descripción hecha fundamentalmente por hombres, incluso en sus campos más íntimos: la sexualidad y la maternidad. (145)

I believe that this historical situation is in the process of changing, due to political action and the writing of authors such as Valdés. She wishes to give women a voice in her novels and express her own, something that she claims that she was unable to do in Cuba under Castro's dictatorship.³⁴ She says in an interview:

For 36 years I had to talk in whispers. In the first few months in Paris, I still felt afraid to speak up. One day a friend and I were at a café, and I was, naturally, whispering something about Cuba. My friend said, 'Why are you whispering? You're in Paris!' And for the first time in my life I realized I had the freedom to speak normally and say what I felt out loud. It was amazing! Now I won't ever stop talking. I will never be shut up again. (qtd. in Anders 56)

³⁴ Some Cuban critics would refute this claim and say that she was always very opinionated and had no trouble expressing her opinions.

As seen in the Introduction of this dissertation, there are various views of the female body. Approaching it as a situation, a product of lived experience, it reacts to the world that surrounds it. As Elizabeth Grosz confirms, “The body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product” (23). Rosemarie Garland Thomson agrees, “The meanings attributed to extraordinary bodies reside not in inherent physical flaws, but in social relationships in which one group is legitimated by possessing valued physical characteristics and maintains its ascendancy and its self-identity by systematically imposing the role of cultural or corporeal inferiority on others” (7).

Monique Canto believes that women’s presence is the key issue, in order for there to be a change in the way in which society sees these bodies. She writes, “Feminist politics is real only if women, together with their bodies, their works, their labor, and their voice, are present in a place where everyone can see them” (339). These issues must be brought to light, or otherwise there will be no change whatsoever. This is the presence that Valdés brings to light in her novels.

In much of Valdes’ work, she personifies the island of Cuba as a woman and gives it human characteristics. One of Marcela’s friends in *Café Nostalgia*, Monguy, who speaks with a stutter, notes, “Lo qqque nos aniqqqquila es esa obsesión pppor creernos el ombligo del mmmundo” (220). For Valdés, it is a woman’s body, although controlled by men, that is constantly stuck in its own place of exile. She claims that Cuba’s past is masculine, through the thoughts and actions of her female characters.

Speaking of Daniela in *La hija del embajador*, “Ella sentía el pasado masculinamente y husmeaba el futuro como un efebo ante su maestro de filosofía” (14). The island is a very lonely woman: “En cambio, disfrutaba de todo eso y no podía quitársele de la cabeza aquella isla, ese país tan mujer, tan sola” (*La hija* 88). Fredric Jameson argues that third world texts are allegorical and “they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*” (319). Jameson goes on to say that “*the story of the private and individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (320). If we follow his argument, then we could say that Cuca’s story and situation is that of many Cuban women and their fight for a place in society. It could also represent the country’s fight for a place on the world scene and where it fits in.

Valdés also personifies the sea as a woman, with specific characteristics. As Goldman notes, “Caribbean writers postulate land-sea oppositions and explorations of the sea itself as a strategy through which they define and redefine identity” (48). Valdés perceives the sea as a prison, much like the prison that a woman inhabits: “Cuando una habita una isla no le queda más remedio que vivir prisionera del vozarrón del océano” (*Café Nostalgia* 177). For Cuca Martínez in *Te di la vida entera*, the sea is like a mother: “Esa masa vasta y gigantesca, salada, o dulzona y dolorosa, rugiente y amorosa, esa masa índiga de agua, tan buena a veces, tan dura otras. Tan parecida a una madre” (119).

Besides the main human characters in *Te di la vida entera*, there is another character that is of equal importance: the capital city of La Habana. Cuca makes various references to her native city, treating it as a woman who feels the same pain as she does. Despite all her sadness and abuse, La Habana is a constant in her life, which seems to

adapt to her feelings and desires. Cuca thinks to herself, “Aunque se esté cayendo a pedazos, aunque muera de desengaños, La Habana siempre será La Habana” (72).

She also compares a woman’s body to the city. Speaking of her one true love, Uan, she says, “En cada uno juró que se moría de amor por ella. Y por su ciudad. Como si mujer fuera sinónimo de ciudad. Y la ciudad tuviera útero” (*Te di* 90).

Like the physical and interior exile of the Cuban people, many of the women protagonists that Valdés includes in her novels feel like exiles in their own physical bodies. This is something that brings them together. According to Garland Thomson, “Only the shared experience of stigmatization creates commonality” (15). This is partly due to the fact that they worry about their appearance, which is reflective of societal expectations. It is obvious that the women in *Te di la vida entera* value themselves through their bodies and their appearance. So while they feel like exiles in their own bodies and skin, they are still looking for approval in the outside society. Cuca’s best friends, la Puchunga and la Mechunga, spend much time getting ready for a night out in La Habana club scene. They put on heavy amounts of make-up and tight clothing to call attention to themselves: “La Mechunga también inició el decorado de su cuerpo, y untó su piel con otro vestido de lame dorado, sandalias altas doradas también, y repintó su bamba de rojo escarlata” (*Te di* 24). These actions promote “la lectura erótica del cuerpo en una ciudad hecha para el placer de los sentidos” (Fernández 82).³⁵ Many references are also made to the uniqueness of Cuban women’s bodies. While Uan is in New York on business, he meets the woman who will eventually become his wife. He sees her and knows immediately by her bodily movements that she is Cuban (*Te di* 156).

³⁵ These two women represent the racially different body, as they are Black.

Men also value women by the appearance of their bodies. They crave the envy of others and want their women to show off their bodies in public. In *Te di la vida entera*, Valdés describes Uan, while thinking about Cuca's bodily actions: "A él, le encantó que gozaran a la muchacha, así se sentía sexualmente envidiado. Siempre ganador" (85). The men admire women walking through the streets of La Habana, shouting *piropos* about every aspect of their bodies. Valdés writes: "Ésa era La Habana, con sus mujeronas de carnes duras, muslos gruesos, largos como torres, resbalosas piernas parejas o tobillos finos, pies experimentados a la hora de poner los tacones a trabajar, a rumbear, senos pequeños y firmes, o turgentes y dulces, porque la habanera suele ser de poco busto, fina de talle y caderúa" (*Te di* 31).

Alma Desamparada in *El pie de mi padre* also feels like an exile in her own body. For her, it's a double exile. She asks, "¿Quién no ha estado preso en Cuba? Que levante la mano aquel que sea libre, un ciudadano sin una mancha en su expediente, aquel que no haya sido marcado por los grilletes" (77). She feels much pressure to have sexual relations with her boyfriend, although she isn't ready. Because of this, he breaks up with her to be with another girl: "Él se cansó de que ella le negara la posibilidad de la penetración, salvo por la boca" (28).³⁶

Later in her life, after finding out that her husband has just been killed in an airplane accident, Alma Desamparada's body reacts to the tragic news: "Sentí que mi cuerpo se esfumaba, célula a célula, partícula a partícula, por un vacío enorme que abierto dentro de mí actuaba como un remolino, un tragante. Se enfriaron mis pies, las

³⁶ Alma Desamparada doesn't wish to sleep with anyone, because Radamés never told her that he loved her: "Aquella primera ruptura había invadido su espíritu y su cuerpo de una inmensa indiferencia" (*El pie* 29).

manos, mi cuerpo entero se congeló. No me sentí” (152). This bodily reaction is the first one that the protagonist notices and reveals to show her pain.

The female characters in Valdes’ works constantly complain about having to sacrifice various parts of themselves to meet men’s needs. They must interrupt their schedules and change their lives in order to better those of someone else. Their lives revolve around the men that are close to them and the women can only hope that they return the affection. Daniela mentions, “Los hombres otra vez con sus regalos complicados y sus fugas” (*La hija del embajador* 27). Cuca Martínez asks, “Pero, ¿por qué siempre tenemos que estar prometiéndole felicidad al género más infeliz del mundo: el masculino?” (*Te di* 87). Alma Desamparada learns at a young age that her role is to encourage and assure men: “Lo peor que tenemos las mujeres es que siempre necesitamos asegurar al macho” (*El pie de mi padre* 27). She realizes later, as a married woman, that “Los hombres casi siempre imponen sus horarios” (143).³⁷

For some women, they feel more secure in society if they have a boyfriend or husband. For example, Alma Desamparada’s mother cannot live without a man. She constantly wants to have a boyfriend in her life, no matter how bad he treats her and abuses her. From Alma’s perspective: “Porque mamá Consuelo lo que ansiaba cada minuto era un hombre. Era un asunto que exigía, desafortunada: << ¡Ay, Santísimo Dios, no me castigues así, dame un hombre, uno de verdad!>>” (*El pie de mi padre* 70).

These women protagonists in Valdes’ novels use sex to act as affection, which they never had from their own fathers. Marcela says, “Al rato me fingí a mí misma como

³⁷ In another example, one of Marcela’s friends in Cuba notes, “Macho es lo que sobra en este país” (*Café Nostalgia* 131).

que todo me daba igual, hice como no necesitaba para nada de ninguna cosa ni remotamente parecida al cariño” (*Café Nostalgia* 33). These women also mistake desire for love. Marcela thinks to herself, “Sentí la voracidad de acostarme con alguien, de acariciar un cuerpo desnudo, de decir *te quiero, me gustas, no te vayas, por favor, mírame, no me abandones* (*Café* 32). She later realizes that she craves this affection and love, finally shown to her by Samuel.

In Valdes’ narratives, she demonstrates that human bodies, both male and female, can be bought in the Caribbean. According to Judith Maloof, before the Cuban Revolution:

The second largest area of employment open to women was prostitution. Young women migrating to the cities from rural areas often found that their options were either working as a maid in the homes of wealthy, bourgeois women or else catering to the sexual whims of U.S. tourists, businessmen, and military personnel in addition to the Cuban male population. (25)

Although Castro outlawed prostitution in Cuba, it has still existed through the years in the Caribbean, as a way to earn money in a harsh and declining economy. It has become more common in Cuba since the “Special Period,” which took place after the fall of communism in the Soviet Union. Nelly Richard writes that prostitution or “sexual commerce guarantees daily survival through the prostitute’s body, a body *for sale* by obligation (sex-necessity)” (48). In Valdes’ *Te di la vida entera*, a young boy solicits an older Argentinean woman, who scolds him for tarnishing the Revolution: “¿No te da pena

hacer eso, siendo hijo de una Revolución tan grande, no te avergüenzas de mancchar (por mancillar) la memoria del Che?” (294). His reply and excuse is that he has to eat. Cuca is even willing to sell her body: “Pero si tengo que negociar mi cuerpo con un turista en el Malecón, lo haré” (*Te di* 240).³⁸ Those who take advantage of these women and their situation consider these sexual bodies inferior. Moreover, Garland Thomson notes that “those bodies deemed inferior become spectacles of otherness” (8). This is another attempt to cast these bodies to the margins of society.

In *El pie de mi padre*, Alma Desamparada will do anything in order to earn some money. She is not against selling her body in order to make ends meet, although it never comes to that for her. She thinks to herself that she “prefería matar, robar, a prostituir su cuerpo. Con lo fácil que es ser puta. Pero en la isla hasta ser puta tiene sus riesgos ideológicos” (55). Her mother even becomes angry with her for being born and insults her by telling her that she should become a jinetera, because she does not want to have to support her (54).³⁹

Miguel González-Abellás has analyzed this phenomenon in the works of Valdés. He writes, “Las novelas muestran a la mujer como un bien material en una transacción entre el gobierno cubano y el turista extranjero, e invitan una reflexión sobre la situación sociopolítica cubana y su recepción en el llamado “primer mundo” (277). Many Cuban women, and some Cuban men, aspire to marry a tourist so that they can legally exit the

³⁸ In *The Agüero Sisters*, written by the Cuban-American Cristina García, Dulce also resorts to prostitution as a way to survive. We know that she did this in Cuba and also elsewhere: “I resorted to my old Havana tricks. I try to tell myself it doesn’t matter, that it’s always a means, not an end” (285).

³⁹ In *Café Nostalgia*, we find out that Nieves, a black woman and one of Marcela’s friends, is a jinetera, which ultimately causes problems in her relationship with her boyfriend.

country and start a new life in a foreign land.⁴⁰ In *Café Nostalgia*, Marcela takes advantage of a situation and marries a Frenchman that is old enough to be her grandfather, so that she can live in Paris and begin her life as a successful photographer. She later divorces him and remains alone in an apartment in Paris.

Valdés shows that women's bodies are used to signify pain and trauma in various ways, which adds to this bodily exile.⁴¹ The first deals with the issue of abortion. This has not been as divisive of an issue in Cuba, due to the high availability of contraceptives and legal abortions paid for by the government. Because of this, the birth rate in Cuba has dropped immensely over the last 50 years. Due to contraceptive use and the stance on abortion, these women exercise "far more control over their bodies in the sexual realm than in any other Latin American country" (Shayne 156). In fact, Cuba has the distinction of being "the first country in Latin America to achieve zero population growth" (Smith and Padula 151).

Several of the characters make the decision to have an abortion, which is free and readily available to any woman that wants one in Cuba. While this act frees them from the responsibility of a child, it brings on physical and emotional pain. In *La hija del embajador*, the novel ends with the readers not knowing whether Daniela will survive her self-induced abortion. We find out in *Café Nostalgia* that she did survive, with Marcela's help, but her experience was painful, both physically and mentally. She survived various hemorrhages and racing thoughts about her parents and Cuba, while Maurice, the father of the child, is not even a part of her life anymore and thus doesn't take on any

⁴⁰ This is true in other Latin American and Third World countries as well.

⁴¹ In *Café Nostalgia*, there is no doubt that Marcela feels like an exile in her body. She actually has a false pregnancy brought on by her mind, what the Cuban doctor calls "un embarazo psicológico" (99).

responsibility.⁴² Marcela informs one of her best friends about the effects of the abortion: “Pero Daniela quedó hecha trizas, era la primera vez que abortaba” (*Café* 51). Marcela secretly suspects that Daniela was trying to commit suicide, as she was very unhappy even before this incident occurred.⁴³

These women’s bodies always endure much pain through physically working in Cuba. The working body in Cuba deals with the political system and the labor camps in which young people are forced to fulfill their revolutionary duties. Valdés herself had to work in these and explains, “At age 12, we were sent to the countryside far away from our parents. I spent six years doing hard work under deplorable conditions” (qtd. in Santiago 27). In *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca’s daughter, María Regla, goes away to a labor camp to work and to learn to be more independent from her mother. It is necessary for children to complete this requirement in order to be admitted to college later on. Cuca also volunteers in the literacy campaigns and works tirelessly to help peasants learn to read.⁴⁴

Besides all of the painful abuses that the body endures, Valdés uses sexual experiences as a way to liberate these women. According to Moi’s interpretation of Beauvoir, there is always hope for liberation for women. Although these Cuban women

⁴² Oftentimes reproduction is seen as something only pertinent to women. Explains Nancy Huston, “Marriage and reproduction require the participation of both sexes; it is therefore surprising that they should be conceptualized as specifically “female” spheres” (132).

⁴³ Cuca Martínez en *Te di la vida entera* also has two abortions while she is with Uan, due to the fact that she was ignorant about birth control.

⁴⁴ After the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, the government encouraged mothers to spend ample time outside of the home, dedicating themselves to societal activities (Smith and Padula 166). Their working roles outside of the home were considered important and integral to the success of Cuba, and they were no longer expected to just stay at home and complete domestic duties. However, even with the Revolution, the women of the household, both wives and daughters, carried out the majority of the housework (Smith and Padula 166).

may not have a lot of power or voice in political or personal decisions on the island, these are moments when they feel free. They are in complete control of their bodies and make their own decisions regarding this. In *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca is proud of her virginity for many years until she begins dating her future husband and only love, Uan Pérez. When they are finally together, Cuca is able to liberate herself sexually, instead of waiting for this her entire life. Even when she is an elderly woman, she still wishes to give him her all. She muses, “Mi cuerpo ama con ternura, pero no con deseo” (262). Valdés’ protagonists decide when and with whom they wish to be and hold power in this way. Although Cuban women have sexual freedom, virgin women are still sought out and considered to be the most desired. According to Cuca, virginity is something very important to a woman: “Lo sé, porque el otro día subí, movida por la nostalgia de ver la terraza donde había entregado lo más preciado de una mujer, la virginidad” (*Te di* 248).⁴⁵

The women that Valdés portrays feel good about controlling their own bodies. This goes with what Susan Rubin Suleiman claims has been happening in literature and politics, which is women’s “control over their bodies and a voice with which to speak about it” (7). Marcela, after having her abortion, thinks, “Más bien me colmaba la euforia por llevar a cabo una aventura prohibida, por ejercer mis libertades femeninas” (*Café Nostalgia* 169). She feels powerful about making her own decisions regarding her body and her reproduction. Valdés, in these passages, is praising the rights and liberties that women have.

⁴⁵ Alma Desamparada in *El pie de mi padre* also is very aware of her virginity, which causes many young men to break up with her.

Although women have limited power on the island, they use their bodies to achieve all that they can. All Cuca really wanted in life was to be with Uan. Although their reunions are intermittent, he does come back to her at the end and she is able to give him her whole self: mind, body, and spirit. Marcela uses her body to marry a Frenchman and leave Cuba, becoming a successful international photographer. This type of work involves much creativity on the part of the protagonist. As Löfquist notes, referring to *El cuarto propio* de Virginia Woolf, “El cuarto propio está muchas veces relacionado propio con la *creación o creatividad* de la protagonista” (148). This is an area of Marcela’s life that she controls and that defines part of her existence while she is in Paris, away from her family, friends, and homeland. There are no restrictions in her work, in terms of what she can say or do. She can accept the jobs that she feels comfortable with and turn down others. Marcela becomes well-known for her work in Europe and is in high demand for her creative ability and talent behind the lens of a camera. It is important to recognize that none of this would have been possible without her agreeing to marry the Frenchman, but was a means to an end in her life.

Mother/Daughter Relationships

Relationships between mothers and daughters are another situation that deals with the body. An aspect that Löfquist mentions in literature written by women is, “la importancia de la *genealogía femenina*, es decir, los lazos con nuestras madres, abuelas y bisabuelas” (148). In this way, the female characters have links, although conflictive and combative at times, to other generations of women. Although these women obviously

have not lived the same experience as their daughters or granddaughters, due to political and personal reasons, they still have much in common, due to their sex and expected roles in society. They have also dealt with the same bodily issues of pleasure and pain, which is something that connects all females. Adrienne Rich, who attempts to create a female genealogy through writing, notes the contradictions that the body inspires:

The woman's body, with its potential for gestating, bringing forth and nourishing new life, has been through the ages a field of contradictions: a space invested with power, and an acute vulnerability; a numinous figure and the incarnation of evil; a hoard of ambivalences, most of which have worked to disqualify women from the collective act of defining culture.

(102)

Feminists have attempted to theorize relationships between mothers and their daughters, in relation to language. The most well-known French theorists are Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Cixous defines the patriarchal binary oppositions that show that the "Feminine" side is always passive and the 'Masculine' side is active and triumphant (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* 102-103). The first term is always better than the second one, for example, "Father/Mother" (Moi, *Sexual/Textual* 102). Cixous notes her theory on the mother: "Even if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from "mother." There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 312).

According to Luce Irigaray, Woman is “the Other” of Man, which puts her in agreement with Simone de Beauvoir. In “El cuerpo a cuerpo con la madre,” Irigaray focuses on the relationship with the mother. She emphasizes that a woman’s body is essential for procreation and man’s pleasure and suggests that, “afirmemos la existencia de una genealogía de mujeres” (42). Irigaray prefers the position of the daughter, seeing the position of the mother as “threatening her own autonomy as a daughter” (Siegel 152). She recognizes that society does not always value relationships between women and especially those between mothers and daughters. She opines, “But the fact remains: the relationships of women to their mothers and to other women-thus towards themselves-are subject to total narcissistic ‘black-out’; these relationships are completely devalued” (“Women’s exile” 75). Irigaray also defines the origins of a woman’s exile from herself:

A woman, if she cannot in one way or another, recuperate her first object, i.e. the possibility of keeping her earliest libidinal attachments by displacing them, is always exiled from herself. Yet, it is very difficult for her to find in her relationship with men the means for overcoming that loss of the first relationship with the mother’s body. It may be that some men are more maternal than others. But, this remains difficult because men-besides not having either the body or the sex of the mother-have become culturally distanced from their bodies. (“Women’s” 76)

She goes on to criticize the fact that women’s pleasure is linked to them producing children, “even before they have had an occasion to examine their pleasure” (“Women’s” 66).

According to Julia Kristeva, there is a maternal law that precedes the Freudian paternal law. She sees a connection between reproduction and *jouissance*, and notes that women's oppression is found in motherhood (Moi, *Sexual/Textual* 168). For Kristeva, women have two options: mother-identification or father-identification. "The semiotic *chora* is pre-Oedipal and linked to the mother, whereas the symbolic, is dominated by the Law of the Father" (Moi, *Sexual/Textual* 164-165). The *chora* comes from the maternal body, which signifies artistic creation. She notes in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy* (1987) that women suffer mourning and melancholy due to the separation from the mother, and girls have a more difficult time replacing this loss than boys. Kristeva also affirms, "Motherhood opens out a vista: a woman seldom (although not necessarily) experiences her passion (love and hatred) for another woman without having taken her own mother's place-without having herself become a mother, and especially without slowly learning to differentiate between same beings – as being face to face with her daughter forces her to do" (184).

Some of the female protagonists in Valdés' novels have very distant relationships with their mothers, which shows this passion that Kristeva mentions. It is pertinent to note here that the daughter oftentimes sees her future in the body of her mother (Siegel 8). Marcela's parents left her in Cuba, because they had the opportunity to leave from the Port of Mariel one day and didn't want to miss it. They promised to return for Marcela soon and moved to the United States, later divorcing. Marcela maintained little contact with her mother or sister after her move to Paris, as she always felt that they had abandoned her. In *La hija del embajador*, Daniela's mother despises her, as they are

exact opposites. While Daniela is spontaneous and informal, her mother is very proper, formal, and concerned with the family's reputation. Every conversation that the two have is marked by constant criticisms of Daniela and her lifestyle, even though she is not guilty of most of what her mother accuses her of. After meeting in the airport in Paris, after not having seen each other for a long time, her mother remarks, "Basta del disfracito de Boy George. Nada de pelados al rape ni de mechones sobre la barbilla, nada de abrigotes negros con huecos, ni punkerías, ni discotecas . . ." (*La hija* 30). Daniela's mother always yells at her father to deal with Daniela, although she never stops making comments and adding insults. One morning, she screams at her husband, "¡Las once de la mañana y durmiendo todavía! ¿Pero qué se habrá creído esta chiquita? ¡Para ponernos histéricos!" (*La hija* 56). Here the generational conflict is very evident between Daniela and her mother. They each have very different visions and hopes for their lives.

On the other hand, some of Valdes' characters have strong relationships with their mothers, as well as other female characters in the novels, which demonstrate the love and hatred that Kristeva proposes. Alma Desamparada, in *El pie de mi padre*, alternates between loving and hating her mother. Her mother, Consuelo, even tells the police that her daughter robbed possessions from the apartment, when in fact two men were the culprits. After this incident, there is tension between the two: "Desde entonces Alma Desamparada sustituyó el sustantivo <<mamá>> por el nombre propio de Consuelo. Aunque su madre nada tenía que ver con tal acción piadosa. Se trataban a pedradas, pero ambas se amaban" (85). At one point, when Consuelo is complaining about not having a man, Alma wishes to help her fill that void. She laments the fact that she, herself, is not a

man who could give her mother what she wants. Valdés writes, “Cuánto no hubiera dado por ser hombre. Así podría cortejar a su madre, conseguir que ella se enamorara perdidamente de él. Si ella fuera hombre, sería un hombre de provecho” (69). Even when Alma is an adult and an elderly woman, they remain close and support each other. In fact, Consuelo is the first person at Alma’s side when she discovers that her husband and the father of her unborn twins has been killed in an airplane accident. It would seem that even through the turmoil and problems, the links between mother and daughter are strong and hard to break. Gallop reminds us that a mother and a daughter are never completely separate (116).

In *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca has a positive relationship with her daughter, María Regla. At the beginning of her daughter’s life, she wishes to make Cuba a better place for her, so she volunteers many hours to the Revolution and to the improvement of the island. She says, “De todas formas, a mí me durmieron con lo de que estábamos construyendo el futuro de nuestros hijos, y como eso, el futuro de mi hija, era lo único que me interesaba, pues me apunté en la lista” (105). She also makes sure that María Regla has a quinceañera party to celebrate her passage to young womanhood and urges her to volunteer in the countryside so that she can go to college someday. Her daughter becomes very attached to Cuca’s friends, La Mechunga and La Puchunga, who are like her second mothers, having helped raised her since her birth. Due to this, she becomes furious when she realizes that they plan to leave on a raft. She screams at them and at her mother, “¡Yo que las veía como a mi familia! ¡Me engañaron, nunca me quisieron!” (333). She later buries her head in the sand, in an act of sadness and defiance.

Cuca also compares La Habana to her mother, which shows a very distinct relationship: “La Habana como mi madre, todavía joven, todavía mi único universo, todavía mi futuro” (*Te di* 354). For Cuca, La Habana is an inviting and caring mother, but we know that she is disillusioned because her “mother” country later tortures her and abandons her, after she loses her mind due to trauma. Reinaldo Arenas once said in an interview, “Yo creo que Fidel Castro es como la Madre Superior que trata de dictar las leyes morales y políticas a todos sus hijos. Cuando él habla, es como la gran madre que está controlando a todos sus hijos” (qtd. in Machover 265). If this is the case, then Zoé Valdés rebels against and rejects this mother figure, in her life and in her literary production.

Despite all of the bodily exile and painful relationships, Valdés offers hope and advice for the future of Cuban women. Alma Desamparada, after giving birth to her twins and being rescued from a raft, confidently states, “Sin bajar la cabeza. ¡Juro que jamás volveré a bajar la cabeza!” (*El pie de mi padre* 219). She wishes to start a new life with her daughter, as her son was stillborn. She later writes a letter to her daughter, as she had done earlier in her life to her father. She hopes that her daughter has a bright and engaging future in Cuba and does not experience many of the same problems that she had to endure. Alma Desamparada includes in the letter, “Anhelo que seas una mujer digna y libre en tu época, y que conozcas otros mundos, diversas culturas, y así con sensibilidad honres a la tuya propia, una cultura sólida porque es mestiza. Y ansíes la justicia para los demás como necesitas del aire que respiras para vivir” (222).

There are other examples of Valdes' vision for the future of Cuba and its women. In *Café Nostalgia*, a woman asks Samuel about women's roles in the future of Cuba and he quickly replies, "El futuro es mujer" (260). In *Te di la vida entera*, the day that Cuca arrives at the hospital to give birth to her daughter, almost all of the babies born are girls. Cuca refers to them as "las mujeres del futuro" (102).

In conclusion, Valdés provides numerous examples in her novels of the bodily exile that Cuban women face on a daily basis. Many of these literary examples mirror her own life, as seen through her biography and personal interviews. While her characters suffer through the different exiles, physical, emotional, and bodily, they become liberated through their bodies and their lived experiences. They do what they must do in their society to survive and confront new opportunities. Valdés shows that there is hope for the future on and off the island, but it remains to be seen what will happen in a post-Castro era. While there are some obvious examples of women's exile and isolation, I believe that Valdés is also showing Cuba's isolation on the world scene. In many ways, Cuba is cut off and not connected to the rest of the world, due to the United States embargo, or blockade, and other restrictions placed on public and private life in Cuba.

Chapter Three:

Mayra Montero: Literary Bodies in Pain

Mayra Montero was born and raised in Cuba, but moved to Puerto Rico with her family when she was a teenager. Due to her time in both countries, she considers herself *cubano-puertorriqueña*, having been a journalist and correspondent throughout the Caribbean and Central America. Her identity has changed, as she formally considered herself Cuban. Montero is known for writing erotic literature, of which she comments, “Eroticism perturbs us, makes us face forgotten feelings, reveals a courage and series of sensations that we didn’t even know were in us” (qtd. in Prieto 90). She is well-respected for her novels, but has also published numerous short stories and articles, most notably, “La Habana en el espejo,” which clearly demonstrates her feelings toward her native city. Her years in Cuba and the transition to living in Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States, were difficult, but she persevered through the changes. She admits:

I wasn’t a privileged child in Cuba. . . . When I was 17, I was kicked out of the college preparatory school because we were leaving. My family’s situation was terrible: my parents couldn’t work, we lived out of the generosity of our extended family. I didn’t travel around, I didn’t have any privileges, I was never a Young Communist or even a Pioneer. In other words, I had a terrible time throughout my adolescence. My father was sanctioned for his television and radio scripts, and then I had an awful time trying to make my way when I got to Puerto Rico. (qtd. in Prieto 88)

Mayra Montero takes a more journalistic approach to her writing, which is due in part to her training in this field. The author has completed research into the Caribbean's past, mainly focusing on Cuba before the Revolution, and intertwines these facts with her own fiction to create imagined stories of the past. As McClennen confirms, "Exile writing recuperates the past and re-imagines it; exiles write about the past and also about the future" (30). In *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1998), Montero explores the unsolved crime of the bombing of the Teatro Nacional de La Habana in 1920, which was an attempt on the life of the famous Italian tenor, Enrico Caruso. These were actual events that the exiled author re-imagines in her own creative way, bringing to life important and fascinating events in Cuba's history, knowing that these stories would probably not be possible in the country today. McClennen, citing Józef Wittlin, states, "Wittlin suggests that the exile lives in the present of his country of exile and in the past of his native land. Such a condition heightens the exile's remembrance of the past and creates a great nostalgia" (58). It seems that Montero focuses on this past in her novels, more than on current events in her country of origin.

Memory and nostalgia are distinct for Montero, because she affirms that she has left Cuba, but not the Caribbean. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel reminds us that Puerto Rico is known as the "other island" in literature by Cubans that have migrated there (47). She also comments that the writing has changed there, in that there is "a new Caribbean subjectivity of the 1990s, which sees itself simultaneously as Cuban and Puerto Rican" (62). Montero would fit into this category, as she clearly identifies herself as *cubano-*

puertorriqueña. She has fit in well in Puerto Rico, unlike other Cubans who have chosen to live there (Rodríguez 209).

Montero explicitly makes her feelings towards Cuba known in her short story entitled “La Habana en el espejo.” She describes the sights, sounds, and smells that remind her of Cuba, while promising that she will never give her heart back to the island. For her, “Cuba está allí, en el oscuro centro de mi memoria, como un espejo roto” (26). She doesn’t share all of her painful memories with the reader, but they are implied through the poetic language of the story. Her re-imagining of the Caribbean’s past depicts it as a paradise, while her vision of the present is ambivalent. She describes the beauty of Cuba, while expressing anger over the fact that she went into exile, due to her father’s political views. Thus a third party, not herself, brought on her exile. Montero has admitted that she is very concerned about Puerto Rico, although the Cuban exile will always be there. Speaking of the Cuban exile, she remarks, “I know that it is sad and painful, and I have suffered as we all have. But in the end we also have to pay some attention to the place we live in – don’t you think? – and to the problems that surround us” (qtd. in Prieto 88).

Montero does not feel the same hostility towards Cuba as Zoé Valdés, due to the fact that her relationship with the island is very different than that of Valdés. Another important distinction is that Montero’s novels are published within Cuba, as well as abroad, while Valdés’ works are not allowed to be published on the island. However, there is something that their literature has in common: “A literature born of exile is a literature that by force has to rely on memory and imagination more than any other since

the cultural reality of an exiled writer is no longer available to fuel his or her creativity” (Alvarez Borland, *Cuban* 157).

Throughout her novels, Montero reinterprets history in order to narrate “una realidad <<femenina>>” (Rodríguez 210). Going beyond this, she utilizes women’s bodies as sites for various types of pain. This deals with the materiality of the body: “Insofar as attempts are made to bring pain into the domain of language, to give meaning to pain, we are justified in speaking of pain in the context of the constructedness of the body” (Edwards 252). As Elaine Scarry notes in her groundbreaking book entitled *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), the most important aspect of pain is *its presentness* (9). According to Nietzsche, bodily pain is necessary for memory, “a memory fashioned out of the suffering and pain of the body” (Grosz 131). Beauvoir believed that women “can stand physical pain much better than men” (633). Several prominent theater critics have elaborated on physical theory, or more specifically the relationship between the body and a growing memory. Following the techniques of Jerzy Grotowski, Wangh describes the work that he does with actors and their training: “We do it with our bodies active because memories are not encoded only in our brains; they are trapped in our muscles, too” (111). Grotowski wrote, “Memories are always physical actions. It is our skin which has not forgotten, our eyes which have not forgotten” (qtd. in Wangh 103). Eugenio Barba, an authority on theater, opines, “An exercise is made up of memory, body-memory. An exercise becomes memory, which acts through the entire body” (128).

We must remember that the pain represented in literature has a distinct perspective than that of real bodily pain. Scarry writes that pain destroys the language of those in pain, so “it is not surprising that the language for pain should sometimes be brought into being by those who are not themselves in pain but who speak *on behalf of* those who are” (6). Scarry also comments that bodily pain is not frequently included in literary texts, because the writer “ordinarily falls silent before pain” (10).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Mayra Montero is an exception to this and brings these experiences of bodily pain to the forefront in her novels. It is indispensable to note that the readers always see the perspective of the victim in pain, as opposed to the person causing it.⁴⁷

Como un mensajero tuyo

In *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1998), Enrico Caruso, the famous Italian tenor, came to perform the opera *Aída* at the Teatro Nacional de La Habana. There is an explosion and an attempt on his life by the Italian mafia named la Mano Negra, which he survives due to the fact that Aida Petrirena Cheng, the protagonist, helps him escape from danger.⁴⁸ Her godfather, José Calazán, a witch doctor, had predicted this and the impending death of Caruso. Although Aida only spends a few days with Enrico, this relationship would change her life forever, most notably with the birth of their daughter, Enriqueta. Throughout the novel, which comprises a total of eight months, Enriqueta

⁴⁶ Scarry does note that psychological suffering is frequently evident in art (including literature) and that it “is susceptible to verbal objectification,” (11) which is different than physical suffering.

⁴⁷ Catharine Edwards puts forward this idea in her article entitled “The Suffering Body,” although she is speaking of Seneca’s *Letters* (258).

⁴⁸ Eliana Rivero notes that another theory of the origins of the bomb is that the workers at the theater put it there, owing to the fact they were paid so poorly that they couldn’t even afford to buy a ticket to Caruso’s show (111).

recreates those particular days of 1920, hearing recounts by her mother and various others that were involved in the incident. These narrative versions constitute very distant memory.⁴⁹

During the 1920's in Cuba, feminism "reached a certain peak" (Espín, *Cuban Women* 58). The three mandates during the 1920's in Cuba were "political equality for women, social reform, and institutionalizing their programs to aid and represent women" (Stoner 77). The intent was to give women more power in society, as well as a voice in politics and social programs. During this time, Cuban women and men had the same literacy levels (Stoner 131). Literacy rates went up for women, due to more educational opportunities on the island: "By 1919 the literacy rate for females over the age of ten had risen to 61 percent" (Smith and Padula 14). However, during these years, many women turned to prostitution as a means to survive and the majority of the women jailed were prostitutes (Stoner 147). Divorce was legalized in 1918, but this was controversial in the eyes of the Catholic Church and liberals (Stoner 156). Patriarchal control was still very evident during this time: "Husbands had almost total control over their wives' property and earnings. But conservatives argued that an orderly household required male control" (Smith and Padula 15).

In *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Aida is a source of "*mestizaje*," as she is both Chinese and a mulata.⁵⁰ She represents a racially different body throughout the novel, which has come to symbolize the erotic, according to Virgilio Piñera (Chichester 300).

⁴⁹ According to Rivero, "Sea como fuere, la muerte simbólica es la de un pasado que nunca se revela por completo, pero que persiste en el recuerdo" (115).

⁵⁰ The immigration of the Chinese to Cuba began in the 19th century. They worked on the sugar plantations and on the railroad, while marrying Cuban women and starting families (Lo 217). This began the miscegenation between the Chinese and other races.

Montero draws attention to the fact that Aida's body is used for sexual purposes. Notes Martínez-Alier, "It was often the coloured woman who satisfied the sexual needs of the young white man" (115). Aida realizes that her Chinese race sticks out and remarks, "Lo chino era lo primero que veían las personas" (*Como un mensajero tuyo* 30). But this has sexual connotations and turns into an attraction for several married men who become obsessed with her. A doctor who knew Aida when she was a young woman describes her: "Además tenía esa mezcla, no hay nada que caliente más a los hombres que esas mujeres mezcladas, los ojos, y el pelo chino, pero un cuerpazo de mulata que había que pararse a ver" (*Como* 174-75). Some scholars note the high incidence of discrimination in Cuba before the Revolution. Stone notes that there was segregation in certain public areas, as well as discrimination in hiring and job opportunities (23). Smith and Padula confirm that, "For many years Spain restricted interracial marriage out of fear it would give blacks a prestige which might undermine the slave system" (9).

Aida worked as a laundress, which was one of the options for women during that time. Most jobs for women were blue-collar jobs; 11,000 women worked in white-collar jobs by 1919 (Smith and Padula 15). During 1919, 8,680 Cuban women were laundresses, which was a popular profession among women then (Stoner 198). 46.6% of women in the labor force during that time were domestic servants (Stoner 169). More women worked in Havana than in any other place on the island (Smith and Padula 15). A stipulation was that the women had to be single, so that they wouldn't get pregnant (Smith and Padula 18).

Aida faced hardships due to the color of her skin and being from the lower class. As Stoner remarks, “Poverty, ill health, sexual exploitation, and disrespect for people of their class and race all hampered their living prosperous lives” (3). As noted before, abortion was illegal during this time. Birth control was not readily available, unlike since the Cuban Revolution, and many husbands considered these devices “a threat to their manhood” (Stone 6). Medical care was scarce and so most babies were born at home (Stone 6).

It is obvious that there are two distinct cultures represented in Caruso and Aida. Aguerrevere notes, “Caruso representa la cultura europea, lo viejo, lo caduco y lo decadente, mientras que Aída Petrirena Cheng representa la nueva, la mestiza, la que sobrevivirá el paso del tiempo” (77). Caruso’s performance in the opera also signals that he is part of the Western culture (Alcaide Ramírez 128).⁵¹ Later, Aida tells about her experience of making love with him: “Se hundió por su gusto en esta carne china, una carne que en la intimidad se mulateaba” (*Como* 213). A reporter also describes Aida: “Tenía el pelo chino, oscuro y liso, pero su cuerpo era de mulata. Estoy muy viejo para explicarle por qué ese cuerpo era de mulata, sólo le digo que allí se le notaba el chispazo” (*Como* 129). The first impressions of Aida by others always deal with her bodily appearance and movements, which are distinct from those of other women in the capital city.

Following Moi’s interpretation of Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, she notes the differences between bodies: “If I have to negotiate the world in a crippled body or sick

⁵¹ During the 1920s tourism from the United States flourished in Cuba, which meant more influence of this culture (Smith and Padula 17).

body I am not going to have the same experience of the world or of myself as if I had a healthy or particularly athletic body. Nor will the world react to me in the way it would if I had a different body” (68). Aida’s particular experience is undeniably different, as it is the most notable site for pain throughout the novel, beginning with the physical. Aida describes Caruso’s departure from her life: “Separaban mi piel de mi carne, mis huesos de mi sangre, mi corazón del sentimiento” (*Como* 81). When Enrico almost drowns due to a Santería ritual, Aida explains, “Volví a sentir esa punzada en la garganta, todo mi cuerpo se estremeció de dolor: era mi vida, y no la de Enrico, la que estaba cambiando al pie de esa laguna” (*Como* 118). Aida experiences internal pain, as well as external, mentioning her “dolor que me comía por dentro, la sensación de que Calazán estaba en lo cierto: Enrico ya no tenía salvación, y a su lado yo también estaba condenada a hundirme” (*Como* 111). It appears that there is a sense of solidarity between these two, due to their pain.

The sexual experiences that Aida shares with Enrico are her moments of liberation, just as in Valdés’ novels. According to Aguerrevere, Aida “es una voz que busca romper con la represión social y la concepción de la figura femenina como objeto de placer sexual masculino” (79).⁵² With her literature, Montero is giving women a voice with which to speak about their bodies.⁵³ Even though Aida and Enrico are only together several times, these are the moments when she feels free. She muses:

Enrico brotaba de mí como si fuera un pez, estaba empapado en sudor y su piel mojada resbalaba sobre la mía, haciendo el sonido de las olas cuando

⁵² I believe that Valdés would argue that women don’t have this voice in the political realm in Cuba, so she, like Montero, wishes to provide it in the literary realm.

⁵³ This follows Rubin Suleiman’s claim (7). Please see Chapter Two, p. 73.

pegan contra un bote. Yo era ese bote que él estaba llenando de peces vivos. Empecé a gritar por la caricia de los peces y Enrico me tapó la boca. Empecé a llorar y él me besó los ojos. Las gotas de sudor de su cuello rodaron por mi garganta y por mis pechos, como si entre los dos cayera una llovizna: una tormenta que nos venía empujando desde el mar, y que hacia el mar nos iba a conducir tarde o temprano. (*Como* 113)⁵⁴

After Aida becomes pregnant with Enriqueta, she knows that she can feel the baby inside of her: “Pienso que de algún modo mi cuerpo presentía que tú estabas dentro” (*Como* 166).⁵⁵ She also admits that there is a stronger religious force pushing her body to take certain actions. This is based on her belief of Santería: “Debí de tener a Yemayá revuelta esa mañana, una Yemayá bien brava dentro de mi cuerpo, un ojo de agua que lo miraba todo, lo machacaba todo” (*Como* 168). She undoubtedly experienced labor pain when she gave birth to her daughter, remarking about the beginning of “los dolores” (*Como* 243). However, this pain is seen as “necessary to a successful outcome and therefore should be suffered,” as opposed to “pain that is excessive and therefore should be treated” (King 277).

Aida’s body is also a site for Enrico’s pleasure and happiness. One of his favorite activities, besides singing and performing, is to draw nude pictures of Aida. While they are on the train together, which is slowed down due to flooding, Enrico draws various

⁵⁴ Affirms Alcaide Ramírez, “Al contrario que los romances nacionales de principios de siglo XX, escritos en su mayoría por hombres y donde la mujer apenas tenía voz, esta novela está escrita en primera persona y presenta la subjetividad femenina y racial de una chino-mulata” (130).

⁵⁵ Enriqueta never had the opportunity to meet or know her father, as he died a few months after leaving the island, away from Cuba and Aida.

nude pictures of his lover. The drawing of women's bodies is a traditional cultural aspect. Amparo Serrano de Haro writes, "La representación históricamente tradicional de la mujer es un cuerpo." In these activities, Enrico becomes the active observer and Aida the passive object that is being observed. As Serrano summarizes, "El hombre como sujeto activo que mira, la mujer como objeto cuyo trabajo o gracia esencial es hacerse merecedora de esa Mirada." This relates to Laura Mulvey's critique of the masculine gaze: "The masculine subject gazes, and the feminine object is gazed at" (Parker 152). In her opinion, in films and literature this gaze turns into abusive objectification. In this situation with Aida and Enrico, the reader gazes at Aida through the eyes of Enrico, in a process called the *masculinization of spectators*, which can "sway spectators-women and men both-into identifying with a masculine subject position (stance or point of view)" (Parker 153). The reader must be aware of the dangers of this *gaze*.

Besides the bodily pain and liberation that Aida experiences, the body also becomes a site for memories. Although arguably on a different level, the connection between the body and memories was noted by victims of the Holocaust. Karein Goertz, analyzing the works of Charlotte Delbo, a Holocaust survivor, writes, "Delbo presents deeply ingrained memories that resurface through the body and senses through recurrent nightmares and vivid flashbacks" (168). Like this, Aida links many memories to her body. While she is in excruciating pain after being taken from a safe house against her will and dragged to the countryside, where she ultimately loses several fingers, she invokes memories of loved ones from her past. In so much pain that she is almost unconscious, images of her mother, father, her deceased husband and daughter (before

Enriqueta), and her grandmother are the only lucid ones that come to her mind. She even has a startling revelation about the man that was not her biological father: “Pensé en mi madre y en Noro Cheng, que era mi padre en los papeles y que sólo en ese instante comprendí que era también mi padre en el corazón” (*Como* 234).

While Aida cannot speak, due to the physical pain, she can still think and experience active flashbacks. As Scarry confirms, “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). Pain also signifies power. Scarry comments on this in terms of torture, but I believe that it can be connected to any pain. When Aida is experiencing the physical pain, those inflicting the pain have power over her for those moments and the duration of that pain.

Montero proves that a woman’s body can also be a site of memories for others. This is another instance of a third party. Already ill and preparing to die shortly, Enrico tells Aida about his wet nurse back in Naples, Italy. Aida, through her body, reminded him of the body of his wet nurse: “No se borraron de su mente las formas de su carne ni el sabor de su pecho” (*Como* 78). While the wet nurse helped him to stay alive in the beginning, Enrico is now focused on Aida and her body to be with him at the end of his life.

Aida feels very connected to Enrico, not only emotionally, but also physically.⁵⁶ In their short time together, she wants to be physically near him at all times. She

⁵⁶ This is the same in Valdés’ *Te di la vida entera*, as Cuca wants to physically be with Uan throughout her entire life.

becomes fearful and filled with dread when she thinks that he is dead or going away from her. She refuses to leave his side, even when they are threatened with violence and imminent death. Aida thinks to herself, “Me arrimé más a su cuerpo, pegué mi oreja contra su vientre frío, oloroso a colonia, y tuve la certeza de que ese vientre me estaba dando una señal” (*Como* 166). She finds comfort in his body, making vital decisions based on their connection in this way. She also feels that she does not have much to give to Enrico, coming from a lower class family and being Chinese and a mulata. But she does feel that she can offer him her body, which she does on various occasions. This does not mean only in a sexual way. Montero emphasizes the use of Aida’s hands to comfort Enrico. While Aida is anxious and restless for a boat to arrive to take them to safety in Cienfuegos, she fusses with her hair and her hands, “que eran lo único que le podía ofrecer a Enrico: unas manos vivas y pecadoras, que no se helaban con facilidad” (*Como* 210).⁵⁷ It is obvious in this novel that Aida needs to make a choice between love and her country and she ultimately chooses love. This is the same in the opera *Aida*, which is still performed in many countries around the world today. The Cuban Aida would rather die than be without Enrico, which is the same in the opera where Aida chooses to die in the arms of her love, the Egyptian warrior, Radames. In Montero’s novel, Enrico Caruso actually plays the part of Radames on his tour, which is how he is dressed when Aida first sees him.

While Aida’s connection to Enrico is very strong, so is that of Aida and her daughter, Enriqueta. Aida connects her memories to those of her daughter. As Gallop

⁵⁷ While Aida is willing to offer her body to Enrico for comfort, several of Valdés’ characters only offer their body in a sexual way for money, such as the *jineteras*.

emphasizes, a daughter and her mother are never completely separated (5). While Aida is pregnant with Enriqueta, she thinks about her memories: “Entre tanto, tú estabas creciendo en mi interior, chupándome tal vez esos recuerdos. O guardándolos dentro de ti para que los sacáramos algún día, para que los evocáramos juntas, que es lo que hemos estado haciendo todos estos meses” (*Como* 241). Aida’s memories become those of Enriqueta, written down and recorded so that they are never forgotten.⁵⁸ Enriqueta was an illegitimate child at a time when these children were not looked at in a favorable light by the rest of society. In 1919, a year before this incident with Enrico and Aida, 24 percent of the population was illegitimate, and a majority of this population were those of color (Stoner 63). The feminists during this time wanted these children to be considered equal with legitimate children. During the early 20th century, racism was a reality in Cuban society.

Enriqueta cares for her mother until the day that she dies, due to cancer. Aida suffers this bodily pain at the end of her life, thinking about her past and knowing that her death is impending. Asserts King, “The chronically ill live in a continuous present, one day at a time; they may be unable to think about the future, because they are not sure that they have one” (281). It is important to note that some pain is controllable and other types are not (Edwards 256). Thus, some of Aida’s physical pain is caused and

⁵⁸ In another tragedy to come out of the explosion of the Teatro Nacional de La Habana, Manuel Martínez fell in love with Gabriella Besanzoni, an Italian singer on tour with Caruso. Like Aida, Manuel helped Gabriella after the disastrous bombing and fell in love with her, even though he was engaged to another woman. As she ran out of the theater, panicking and disheveled, her shirt became unbuttoned. Says Manuel, “Miré ese pecho como si fuera un ojo, y aquel pecho también me miró, pero ella no” (*Como* 85). He was drawn to Gabriella’s body, which is one of his most vivid memories from many years before.

controlled by others, or external agents,⁵⁹ while the cancer at the end of her life is out of anyone's control.

Son de Almendra

In Montero's most recent novel, *Son de Almendra* (2005), Joaquín Porrata, a young journalist for the Cuban newspaper *Diario de la Marina*, seeks to investigate the assassination of the Mafia leader Umberto Anastasia in New York City, which is a historic fact that took place in 1957. Once again Montero reaches back into the history of Cuba and re-imagines the events that took place at that time. It is well-known that Cuba was the playground for Americans before the Cuban Revolution, where they participated in illicit activities, among them prostitution and gambling.⁶⁰ Mafia leaders made millions of dollars through the casinos and other deals on the island.

During this time, Fulgencio Batista was the leader of Cuba and many women ended up rejecting his regime, due to the terror caused by him on the island (González-Pagés 112). Cuban women had a certain image during these years, before the Revolution: "Cuban women, in the eyes of the world, were caged in the tourist-poster image of the big-assed, rumba-dancing, bandanna-topped mulatto, carrying a basket of tropical goodies belonging to United Fruit and swaying under a palm tree belonging to Eisenhower-via-Batista" (Randall, *Cuban Women Now* 7). Men would even try to advertise their sisters' "services" to tourists (Smith and Padula 21). Randall notes that

⁵⁹ This idea of external agents inflicting pain is noted by Edwards (258).

⁶⁰ Ángel Rivera Torres believes that the events in *Son de Almendra* constitute a "comunidad inoperante," in which "comunidad en este sentido implica una comunidad abierta, que nunca es capaz de completarse a sí misma" (169).

women suffered various oppressions during this time: class, color, and sexual, “in which *machismo* and traditional mores were a bolster to the *status quo*” (*Cuban Women Now* 9). The movie entitled *Memorias del sub-desarrollo* takes place in 1961, during a time when many Cubans left the island. The main character, Sergio, has hope for new gender relations in the revolution, but realizes that there is too much underdevelopment and it is not possible. His biggest disappointment is with Elena, a young girl who wishes to be an actress. She is not at all interested in intellectual topics. Sergio basically fades away, not being able to find a place in society.

During Joaquín’s attempts to connect Anastasia’s death with the death of a hippopotamus at a zoo in La Habana, his brother, Santiago, is killed due to his revolutionary activities. We see La Habana preparing for the Revolution of 1959, although this is not the focus of the novel. At the end of the novel, we find out that Joaquín’s father committed suicide in 1961, and Joaquín, along with his mother and sister, goes into exile in Miami, Florida, due to the political repression. This is as close as Montero comes to including the Revolution and the political scene both before and after this controversial change. It is important to note that the readers are witnesses to the fading memory of a revolution.

During Joaquín’s investigations in La Habana and New York, he meets a young woman named Yolanda, who once worked in a traveling circus, but an accident severed one of her arms from her body.⁶¹ She begins a romantic relationship with Joaquín, who cares for her very much. What is noticeable is the constant obsession with her missing arm, both by herself and her lover. Almost everyone considers Yolanda less because of

⁶¹ The entertainment industry in Cuba opened up opportunities for many women, just like Yolanda.

this lack. She lives in a double exile and faces double discrimination, being a woman and disabled. As Garland Thomson asserts, “Both the female and the disabled body are cast as deviant and inferior; both are excluded from full participation in public as well as economic life; both are defined in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority” (19). Like Aida with her amputated fingers in *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Yolanda must live with this sign on her body every day.⁶²

We must also remember that during this time, the majority of the Cuban workforce was composed of men. In 1953, only 12.4 percent of the workforce was composed of women (Espín, *Cuban Women* 5). 70,000 of these women were domestic servants, earning very little (Randall, *Cuban Women Now* 9). 48 percent of Cuban service workers were women by 1957 (Smith and Padula 20). Most workers in the tobacco industry were women, and by the 1950’s many women worked for the Cuban Telephone Company, owned by the United States (Smith and Padula 13-14). Women had to battle on many fronts during these years: “In addition to humiliation, sickness, hunger, unemployment, illiteracy, and premature death, organized assassination and large-scale torture were also now fundamental aspects of the national scene” (Randall, *Cuban Women Now* 9). Notes Stone, “Women were discouraged from taking part in public life and in many families women were not even allowed to venture out of the house without a chaperone” (7). Fidel Castro noted, “For almost all women, in keeping with the dominant bourgeois mentality, it meant being regarded as a decorative figure and sex object, whose place depended on class affiliation” (qtd. in Stone 75). There were women that protested against Batista during this time, but most were repressed or

⁶² Edwards notes these signs on the body, referring to Seneca (261).

incarcerated. In 1955 women from the Women's Front urged a peaceful route to stop the political violence, but "scores of women were beaten and arrested by the authorities" (Smith and Padula 26).

Turning back to Yolanda, she cannot take these negative thoughts out of her mind or those of the people that see her in public. Upon meeting her, Joaquín's first reaction is that of shock and wonder: "Vi la manga recogida a la altura del codo y comprendí: no había mano ni antebrazo ni codo, ¿qué diablos era? Yo estaba hipnotizado y le miré el escote para hipnotizarme más" (*Son de Almendra* 44). Joaquín even thinks about what it would feel like to touch her and hug her, which would be a new experience for him: "Nunca había abrazado un cuerpo desparejo, ni tampoco había sido abrazado por alguien que lo hiciera a la mitad" (*Son* 47). It is almost as if Yolanda's missing arm arouses sexual curiosity or stimulation in him. After asking her on a date for the first time, Joaquín is intimidated as well as judgmental. He thinks to himself, "Sentí una felicidad vaga y difícil, me había tomado el riesgo de llamar a una mujer a la que le faltaba un brazo, una criatura indescribable, medio pollito en el sentido estricto de la palabra. No he conocido a un solo manco que no sea violento, violento o necio, la misma cosa" (*Son* 52). It seems that Yolanda even considers herself less because of this, as she refers to her arm as a "cachito." Joaquín thinks to himself, "Me pareció patético que despachara todo lo que le faltaba con esa estúpida palabra: cachito. Un cachito sus dedos, su mano de oprimir y acariciar, y su antebrazo suave" (*Son* 55).

Joaquín wishes for Yolanda's body to be whole again, meaning that the whole or complete body would be normal for him and society. This is the ideal for all parties

involved. Garland Thomson emphasizes, “Disabilities, in contrast, are imagined to be random transformations that move the body away from ideal forms” (28). Joaquín is attracted to Yolanda in a physical way, but cannot will himself to stop staring at her arm. He says to himself, “Llegué a preguntarme si no sería que mi fascinación estaba allí, en lo que no podía tocar. Echaba de menos el codo, la mano, los dedos, me ataba lo irrecuperable, el brazo desprendido, ¿dónde estaría ese brazo, el hueso al menos, el esqueleto de los dedos, la mano esquelética?” (*Son* 136). Rivera Torres affirms, “Evidentemente, el cuerpo mutilado y lo erótico quedan conectados en la narrativa” (160). Montero purposely included Yolanda and her lack of an arm to show what she did not possess. She explains, “Creo que inspira un poco de fetichismo en los hombres” (Personal interview). One definition of *fetichismo* is: “Desviación sexual que consiste en fijar alguna parte del cuerpo humano o alguna prenda relacionada con él como objeto de la excitación y el deseo” (“Fetichismo,” def. 3). Without a doubt, this lack is stimulating and exciting for Joaquín, as well as for other men who have crossed paths with Yolanda in the past.

It is obvious that Yolanda’s disability puts a strain on her romantic relationships, but it also has damaged her career plans and reputation. It is clear that cultural capital is analogous to the wholeness of one’s body. Her disability has cost her numerous opportunities, because “Feminization increases the woman’s cultural capital; disability reduces it” (Garland Thomson 28). Montero makes a point of telling the reader that Yolanda was once very talented in her circus routines and very desirable for the company, up until her accident. She was then relegated to working behind the scenes, out

of the view of the public, as “feminization prompts the gaze; disability prompts the stare” (Garland Thomson 28). Physically locating Yolanda out of the public’s eye reduces the stare, but also her opportunities for a fulfilling career that she enjoyed and would have liked to continue. Part of the problem is that she is physically unable to complete the daring routines that she did before. But I believe that another part is a desire to keep her out of view from the public, where she would no doubt “prompt the stare” (Garland Thomson 28). This would fit under the “stigmatization” of Yolanda, due to her gender and disability (Garland Thomson 32). Due to the fact that Yolanda is beautiful, a colleague even tells her that she could have been a model, except for the fact that she is missing an arm (*Son* 88). Notes Rivera Torres, “La deformidad es luego, aquello que es intolerable, que no se puede mirar, es una violación a lo que debe ser un ser humano” (162).

Although Yolanda’s body is damaged, she still offers Joaquín all that she can. He imagines one of their encounters at her apartment: “Me presentaría allí sin avisar, y cuando abriera la puerta, me lanzaría, no a sus brazos, el plural imposible, sino a todo su cuerpo con lo que podía ofrecer: un brazo, dos tetas volcánicas, una boca que navegaba al trasluz, como un pequeño buque embrujado” (*Son* 133). His entire focus is on her body, its features, and how it will fit into his lifestyle.

Before meeting Joaquín, Yolanda had fallen in love with a homosexual mulatto, Roderico (Rodney) Neyra, who created the magnificent shows in *El Tropicana*, a famous cabaret in La Habana. Due to the fact that he had leprosy, an illness that was always visible on his body, many of his colleagues shunned him. But this draws Yolanda to

Rodney, as she understands what it is like to be disabled in a world that does not accept disabled people. Their connection is bodily, which Yolanda describes: “Me di cuenta de que nos habíamos quedado conectados, enganchados en un plano que no era del espíritu, ni del alma, ni de ninguna de esas boberías, sino enganchados por la carne, por la miseria, por el lenguaje que sólo conoce un cuerpo herido” (*Son* 89). This bodily pain draws this unlikely pair close and causes Yolanda to think that she is in love with Rodney, always denying the fact that he is homosexual. Their bodily connection is one that others cannot understand nor accept. They escape to the United States, to Las Vegas, for a vacation together and Yolanda notices the different reception there, as opposed to the negative and hurtful comments and looks in Cuba: “Me alegraba de que allí no fuéramos una pareja tan llamativa como en La Habana, que íbamos a cualquier lugar y nos miraban y miraban hasta que nos dolía” (*Son* 140). Rivera Torres opines that this relationship is one of “una actitud de compasión, de cuidadosa atención a las necesidades de uno y de los demás, en desarrollar todas las oportunidades posibles de amor al *otro*” (167).

Going along with Yolanda’s disability is the idea that she once had her arm and that bodily experience, but it is now considered a loss. Weir Mitchell determined this to be called the phantom limb and confirmed that it is very influential on one’s body image. Elizabeth Grosz describes this body phantom as “an image of the limb which is now absent” (71). It takes patients much time to realize that what they once had is missing and can no longer function the way it used to. It is well-known that there is pain where Yolanda’s arm once was. This can lead to obvious physical problems and pain, which makes it difficult to complete daily tasks that were once simple and routine. Yolanda

thinks to herself, “Salí con los refrescos en una bandejita, ya me había acostumbrado a cogerla con un solo brazo, equilibrando el peso, con la necesidad se aprenden muchas cosas” (*Son* 208). At times, she must ask for help when she is alone: “Preparé un banquete con este brazo de mierda, le pedí ayuda a una vecina para poner la carne al horno” (*Son* 238).

This phantom limb can also cause psychological damage to the person that experiences it. Grosz explains:

The phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion. It is a memorial to the missing limb, a physical delegate that stands in its place. There is thus not only a physical but also a psychical wound and scar in the amputation or surgical intervention into any part of the body. The phantom limb is the narcissistic reassertion of the limb's presence in the face of its manifest biological loss, an attempt to preserve the subject's narcissistic sense of bodily wholeness. (73)

Yolanda suffers severe psychological trauma due to the missing arm.⁶³ The image of one's body is not just its anatomy, but the psychological aspect of it as well (Grosz 79). Yolanda remembers when her body was complete and also the accident that caused the incompleteness: “Me acordaba del brazo que me habían cortado, así, con esa sensación de haber perdido algo que era de carne y hueso” (*Son* 149). It is a loss that is never forgotten while she is in private or public, although it is more obvious when she is

⁶³ There has been some dispute about the idea of memory in the phantom limb. While traditional psychologists think of the phantom limb as a memory, Merleau-Ponty opines that it is “quasi-present” and not a memory (Grosz 89).

with other people. As Grosz confirms, “In the case of illness or pain, the effected zones of the body become enlarged and magnified in the body image” (76). Dominick LaCapra proposes the differences between absence and loss, noting that one does not necessarily equal the other. According to LaCapra, there are also differences between a loss and lack: “Loss is often correlated with lack, for as loss is to the past, so lack is to the present and future. A lost object is one that may be felt to be lacking, although a lack need not necessarily involve a loss. Lack nonetheless indicates a felt need or a deficiency; it refers to something that ought to be there but is missing” (53). I argue that Yolanda’s missing arm can be considered a loss and a lack. It was once there and useful, but was lost in an accident. Yolanda still feels this lack, as it always seems that her arm is missing.

The loss and lack cause more psychological damage for Yolanda. She invites company to her home one evening, which includes two young girls who will not stop staring at her arm. She thinks to herself, “Miraban extasiadas porque seguramente nunca habían visto a una mujer sin brazo” (*Son* 208). Yolanda even perceives that her own son, Daniel, doesn’t see her in the same way that he used to. She laments to her best friend, “Hasta creo que me despreció por manca, cómo me duele decírtelo, Chinita, que mi propio hijo piense que valgo menos porque me falta un brazo” (*Son* 238). Even if Daniel never said this or even thought this, it is still Yolanda’s perception of the situation, which causes doubt, anxiety, and pain. Following Sigmund Freud’s definition of melancholia, it appears that Yolanda fits in this situation. Freud wrote that melancholia consists of “all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, out of favour, or disappointed, which can import opposite feelings of love and hate into the relationship or reinforce an already

existing ambivalence” (161). Yolanda has lost this object, her arm, as well as other things, such as her career and abilities that she once had, and so she lives with mourning and ultimately melancholia.

What is certain is that the accident is still fresh in Yolanda’s memory and reminds her of the physical and emotional pain. After the accident during the circus spectacle, Yolanda describes her feelings: “Me curaron y me vendaron, pero la herida se infectó, sufrí muchísimo, estuve a punto de morir y le encargué a Chinita que cuidase de mi hijo. Luego de eso caí en un sopor, estuve inconsciente un par de días y cuando desperté, mi brazo había desaparecido” (*Son* 62-63). The memory of this is not one that goes away, but is brought back each time that she sees her arm.

Joaquín, after meeting Yolanda, cannot get these images of arms out of his head. He begins to compare everything to them. Even though the trauma never occurred to him, it still affects him. It is obvious that this is third party trauma. LaCapra reminds us that those that empathize with traumatized people experience trauma as well. He claims that they “may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma” (22). While Joaquín is thinking about one of the Mafia members, he thinks to himself, “Aposté a que Bulgado hubiera dado un brazo – solo se me ocurrían esas imágenes con brazos – a cambio de acompañarme a la entrevista” (*Son* 232). While Joaquín is in New York investigating the crimes, he dreams of Yolanda back in Cuba, along with his best friend’s mother, Aurora: “Se me pegó el recuerdo de Yolanda, y enseguida se mezcló con la cara de Aurora, con sus facciones, pero también con su voz y sus dos brazos. He dicho dos, ¿a qué más puede aspirar un hombre?” (*Son* 92). At the

end of the novel, he tells us that he didn't marry Yolanda, but thinks of her often. He ended up marrying an American girl named Leigh, whom he had met some years before in Cuba. Because of his experience with Yolanda, the first features that he notices on Leigh are her arms: "Aunque nada lo crea, la reconocí por la forma de sus brazos" (*Son* 273).

El Capitán de los Dormidos

Montero also strongly develops the character of a Puerto Rican woman in *El Capitán de los Dormidos* (2002), which takes place mainly on the island of Vieques. The woman is Estela and she is the mother of the narrator, Andrés Yasín. The background for this novel and tragedy is a failed revolutionary attempt against the United States government on the island in October of 1950. Montero wishes for Puerto Ricans, as well as others around the world, to learn about this event and recognize that it took place. The narrator, already an old man, describes the events that happened during those years, speaking to Captain John Timothy Bunker, an American who made deliveries to and from the island in his small plane.⁶⁴ While Estela is married to Frank, Andrés' father, she secretly has feelings for the Captain, and is truly in love with Roberto, a friend of Frank's from his childhood. Andrés can only put the pieces of the puzzle together many years later, as he speaks to the sickly and dying Captain.

⁶⁴ Andrés has a limp, which was caused by his fighting in Vietnam. He explains, "La explosión de un obús, en Vietnam, casi me arranca una pierna. Lograron salvármela, pero cojeo. Cuando amenaza lluvia, cojeo con dolor, con una especie de rabia que involuntariamente me frunce la boca; el resto del tiempo mi cojera pasa casi inadvertida" (*El Capitán* 14-15). It is obvious whenever he takes a step that he has a limp, which is another example of disability in literature.

For Andrés, as a young boy, his mother's bodily signs and actions reveal the mystery and are what he most notices about her. Her hands always draw his attention, as they changed with her moods: "Aquellas manos que no acababan de decidirse entre los dos indescifrables amarillos" (*El Capitán de los Dormidos* 106). Images of his mother constantly appear to Andrés and frequently disturb him. They are usually of his mother with the Captain, who loved her for many years. Andrés laments: "Me ardía la cabeza y por una fracción de segundo, tan sólo una fracción, vi la imagen de mi madre desnuda, y la del Capitán, sin su camisa pero con sombrero, estrechándola en la orilla del mar" (*El Capitán* 133). He also imagines their bodies in contact: "Y contra esa barriga, pensé, nacida del desparpajo más que de los atracones, se había apretado el vientre liso de mi madre. Contra esa barriga seguramente había apoyado su cabeza y dormitado. Los estuve imaginando así, como dos holgazanes satisfechos, aunque fuera miserable que los imaginara" (*El Capitán* 143). It is obvious that Andrés is confronting an Oedipus complex. Notes Montero, "En *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, hay una relación enfermiza entre el niño y su mamá. El niño está enamorado de su mamá. Tiene un Edipo allí que no ha resuelto" (Personal interview). Andrés becomes physically ill when he thinks of his mother with other men. According to Jacques Lacan, the Oedipus complex involves the "symbolic order," which is language. The child comes out of this complex and loses the relationship to the mother's body. Language cannot replace the desire for his mother's body, so he desires to take the place of the father. This is obvious in *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, as Andrés is extremely jealous of his father and the Captain, whom his mother cared for as well.

The male characters always describe Estela in terms of her body. The Captain tells Andrés, “Tu madre era una dormida perfecta, porque los más perfectos son aquellos que parecen muertos” (*El Capitán* 80). Andrés’ memories frequently involve the figure of her body. He thinks to himself, “No olvido tampoco la figura de mamá, con pantalón a media pierna y sandalias; y con su pelo rubio envuelto en una redecilla, sosteniendo la taza de café en una mano y el cigarrillo en la otra, embelesada con la fosforescencia de las olas, que era como un hervor” (*El Capitán* 162).

When referring to Estela’s true love, Roberto, the Captain comments on their glances, which he describes as carnal: “A él no se atrevió a tocarlo, pero lo envolvió con tal mirada de gratitud – esa gratitud carnal, fogosa, llena de contraseñas - que sentí ganas de sacudirla” (*El Capitán* 51). It is obvious that the Captain was very jealous of their connection and feelings for each other. Estela’s physical and emotional attraction to Roberto is apparent to others that observe them, even while Estela attempts to hide her feelings. She reciprocates these carnal feelings towards Roberto, taking control of her emotions and her body and making her own decisions in this respect. Women were expected to be faithful to their husbands in Puerto Rico, but some defied this code of conduct (Findlay 20).

Estela’s body is in physical pain frequently throughout her short life. After Roberto, her true love, is killed in the revolutionary attack, Estela is paralyzed by grief. The Captain tells Andrés that it is “como si aquellas balas también la hubieran traspasado a ella. La traspasaron, Andrés, se quedó muerta” (*El Capitán* 173). She has a nervous breakdown after Roberto’s death, but the Captain continues to love and care for her. He

describes her: “Ella estaba ronca, tenía los ojos hinchados y los labios partidos de tanto mordérselos. Seguía siendo la mejor mujer que vi en mi vida, la más completa y la más fuerte, porque aun en medio del derrumbe mantenía la fuerza” (*El Capitán* 174).

However, Estela died avoiding more physical pain. She couldn't bear living without Roberto and so she committed suicide, the other path. Andrés remembers seeing her dead body: “Subimos al cuarto de mi madre, la vi tendida en la cama y comprendí que se había muerto tan llena de dolor que no le cupo el último: el dolor físico que podían ocasionarle las pastillas” (*El Capitán* 195). She was now completely at peace, avoiding physical pain as well as emotional pain. She suffered this emotional pain throughout most of her adulthood, wishing to be with Roberto, instead of her husband and child. She held on until Roberto was killed and decided that the pain was too much for her to bear. Roberto's death caused her tremendous amounts of psychological pain and trauma, as the death of a loved one is one of the most traumatic events in one's life. It is clear that Estela's body becomes an object in her death, rather than a situation. It no longer signifies *lived experience*: “Only the dead body is a thing, but when I am dead I am lost to the world, and the world is lost to me” (Moi, *What is a Woman?* 63).

Andrés, even after all those years, believes that his mother's body was profaned by the Captain after she died. He laments, “El cuerpo de mamá había sido profanado” (*El Capitán* 208). This has haunted him and is the cause for his abhorrence of the Captain. However, the Captain describes the incident in a different way:

Me incliné para besarle los dedos, y resulta que después de besárselos, aquellos dedos, aquellas manos se desenlazarón, fue un gesto mágico que

dejó al descubierto los pezones. Me invadió un dolor y un desconcierto que me avergonzaron. Con gran vergüenza apreté mi cara contra su carne y subí olfateándola, en busca de un olor del que pudiera renegar más tarde. De repente me vi acostado junto a ella, literalmente abrazado a su cuerpo, y caí en la cuenta de que mi pantalón, sucio del polvo de la pista de Mosquito y asqueroso de vómitos, podía ensuciar las sábanas y la piel de tu madre, arruinando el soberbio trabajo que había hecho Braulia para dejarla nítida. Me levanté y me lo quité, lo tiré lejos y volví con Estela, hundí mi cara en su pelo y me quedé flotando, sintiendo que la modorra me ganaba, ese cansancio que me perseguía desde el mediodía; una borrachera distinta de la borrachera auténtica, pero también mezclada con aquélla. Medio dormido le busqué los labios, que los tenía entreabiertos. Sin asco, con amor y naturalidad, metí mi lengua a través de ellos, y sólo en ese instante alcancé el hielo, el estupor de la nada, un enigma viscoso que era el descanso de su propia lengua. Aparté bruscamente mi cara y la dejé caer sobre su pecho, sollozando a la manera de tu padre, como si estuviera sonando la nariz, mi cuerpo sacudiéndose, muerto de frío y de remordimiento.⁶⁵ (*El Capitán* 204)

It seems that what Andrés saw and felt is different than how the Captain describes the incident. The truth is most likely somewhere in the middle and may never be known.

⁶⁵ This narration is similar to that of the neo-romantic Spanish writer José Cadalso in *Noches lúgubres*, as the protagonist in that work wishes to disinter his lover that has died.

But talking about this helps to settle the feelings between the two men and also offers a distinct view of their last memory and vision of Estela's body.

While Estela is the main female character in *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, another female character whose body plays a strong role in the novel is Santa, a poor young Puerto Rican girl who helps Andrés' family with domestic duties. Her position in her family was typical of that time in Puerto Rico: "Girls helped their mothers with child care, cooking, tending animals, and other domestic tasks, as well as earning money through embroidery, street vending, and so on" (Findlay 49). As Estela could be seen as a pure woman, Santa would be considered a prostitute, noting the two images for women that were prominent in the Caribbean during that time. Santa takes money from several American Marines on the island in exchange for sexual favors. She also had several contacts with Andrés, encouraging him to experience his sexuality with her for the first time. Andrés describes one of these encounters with a Marine: "Miré hacia dentro y descubrí que Santa, una de las hijas de Matilde, estaba agitándose debajo de otro cuerpo, que enseguida me di cuenta de que era el de un *marine* por el tatuaje de águila que llevaba en la espalda" (*El Capitán* 39). This was common during that time as "algunos se echaban una novia que los acompañara en sus ratos libres, y que de paso les lavara la ropa" (*El Capitán* 61). We can term this as an act of prostitution, as it is a transaction in which Santa receives money from the Marine for having sexual relations with him. Santa suffers here because she is a poor, uneducated woman who must earn extra money by selling her body to foreigners. Notes Eileen Findlay, "Because sexual and racial meanings were often inseparable, racialized sexual norms and practices were central to

the construction of social and political orders in a number of ways in Puerto Rico” (8). Because Santa wasn’t considered moral or decent, she suffered from “repression and exclusion” (Findlay 10). She lived on the margins of Puerto Rican society, due to her lack of honor and “‘proper’ sexual practices” (Findlay 12). The only way to restore a woman’s reputation after a sexual experience was for a man to marry her (Findlay 24). This never happened with Santa, as the Marines never intended to marry her.

Santa’s life ends in tragedy, in an example of rampant violence against women. She is found dead and violated outside of the city. The Captain explains what happened to her: “Le arrancaron los pezones con los dientes. Le desprendieron el cuero cabelludo; eso lo hicieron mientras la arrastraban. Todavía estaba con vida” (*El Capitán* 97). The police blame this crime on a homeless man, but the Captain knows that two military men were guilty of these acts. Later, Andrés thinks of her: “No podía pensar en Santa como una persona muerta, así que, mientras me vestía, la vi delante de mí con su cuerpo desnudo, vivo y desnudo, y su voz pidiéndome que la tocara aquí o allá” (*El Capitán* 112). These men and Andrés always thought of Santa as a sexual body; those that employed her to do their laundry and other chores saw her as a working body. She is subjugated as a sexual object and as a manual worker. The strict military regime also viewed Santa as a sinner, as it didn’t tolerate the corruption of a sexual entity.

The idea of women’s presence is of utmost importance when analyzing these bodies in Montero’s literature. Montero brings these women’s bodies and stories into the present, so that they are recognized and not forgotten. Though they are fictional characters, their words and actions illustrate the pain, happiness, and memories of

countless Caribbean women. It is evident that these bodies provoke memories of the past for the characters in Montero's works, especially young Andrés Yasín in *El Capitán de los Dormidos*. He comments, after seeing the first dead body being carried out of the hotel, "Como si aquel cadáver se llevara consigo nuestra vida anterior, o la clave para volver a ella; una llave pequeñita dentro de su mano crispada" (31). He would like to go back to that time in his life to change what the future held for his family, especially his mother and her death at such a young age. But it is impossible to alter the past and change these women's lives; they will only continue to live on in memories.

Chapter Four:

Violations on the Body

“Each body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence” (Grosz 142).

“When women are abused, human rights are violated; anything less implicitly assumes women are not human” (MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?* 17).

As we have seen in the previous chapters, Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero utilize women’s bodies in their novels to show both pain and liberation. They also clearly demonstrate through their literature that numerous abuses take place, through the atrocities done to women’s own bodies and those of their loved ones, most notably their spouses and children. Some of these acts mirror actual violations that have taken place in Cuba and continue to occur today. These violations of the body take many forms, but the focus of this chapter will be on sexual, physical, and psychological violence towards the women characters in the respective novels.

There has been much debate about genre and what it entails.⁶⁶ Some scholars agree that it is possible to combine genres. Wai Chee Dimock opines that, “None does its work in isolation, and none without a continuous stream of input from other genres” (1380). Bruce Robbins notes that genres can be “the building blocks of potential histories that link the literary to the nonliterary, thus making a larger claim on our attention than individual masterpieces or, for that matter, individual periods” (1650). So that is why it is possible to combine both fictional novels with actual testimonies. These incidents, both actual and literary, illustrate “the social devaluing of the body that goes

⁶⁶ Please see the October 2007 publication of the Modern Language Association.

hand in hand with the oppression of women” (Grosz 10). Women are oftentimes the most vulnerable to attacks, abuse, and trauma, as they are “under siege” (Tal 9).⁶⁷ Ileana Artiles de León notes one of the myths commonly associated with violence: “*Que son pocos los casos, por lo que no es un grave problema*. En realidad, la cifra no nos debe dar la gravedad del fenómeno, sino su propia existencia” (33).

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and Cuba was a signing member of this. Since then, Cubans still on the island and others that have gone into exile throughout the world have reported numerous violations in Cuba. It is also certain that countless abuses occur that no one ever reports or makes known to the public. It is crucial to note the difference between State-sponsored violence and that not perpetrated by the State. The distinction between these two sources of torture and pain has not always been clear and some believe that it is due to the fact that there is ambiguity surrounding human rights and what exactly they entail (Tomaševski). Adding to the ambiguity is the existence of “non-supported” paramilitary groups that complicate this problem even further.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights lists and explains the rights that all human beings are entitled to, although these rights are violated every day throughout the world.⁶⁸ Valdés and Montero wish to note that these violations in Cuba have caused many deaths. Valdés includes in her writing: “Nunca sabremos con exactitud cuántos viejos abandonados han muerto de hambre, cuántos niños, han perecido por epidemias,

⁶⁷ While all women can theoretically be at risk, some women are more prone to abuse and violations, such as handicapped women and immigrant women (Tomaševski).

⁶⁸ Some scholars note the gap between human rights and gender, advocating for a better relationship between them (Tomaševski).

desnutrición y falta de medicamentos, el número de desempleados, cuántos desaparecidos en el mar, cuántos suicidios, crímenes, torturas, fusilamientos” (*El pie de mi padre* 175-76). Albertina O’Farrill, a Cuban woman who was sentenced to serve 30 years in prison, remarks, “Los atropellos, los abusos, los arrestos masivos y los fusilamientos acabaron llenando de luto la isla entera” (qtd. in Martínez Nieto 168). Despite these violations, many Cubans continue to maintain that the blockade imposed by the United States is the major source of violence that Cuban women suffer (United Nations, *Committee on the Elimination* 2).

Ofelia Schutte, a prominent Cuban scholar, has written on feminist theory as it pertains to cultural identity in Latin America. This is significant, as her view is strictly from and toward Latin American institutions and contemporary thought. Schutte emphatically supports a Latin American gender consciousness, which “is born from women’s experience of discrimination and oppression” (211). One of the primary areas that Schutte points out is violence against women (215), which I will focus on in this chapter. All forms of violence against women are destructive and degrading. Anthony Wilden elaborates on this: “The ever-present threat of male violence against women is a ruthless assault on women’s freedom to think and do and be as they are and run their own lives” (168).

Violence and abuse almost always lead to the victim experiencing some level of trauma.⁶⁹ In certain circumstances, if he or she does not, there is something else happening that deserves attention (LaCapra 79). In order to explore the trauma in the

⁶⁹ It is important to note that perpetrator trauma exists as well, although it is distinct from victim trauma (LaCapra 79).

literary representations, it is necessary to establish a definition of what I am referring to. There are various definitions of trauma that are currently outstanding. “Trauma” comes from Greek, meaning a bodily wound, but later came to signify a mental wound (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 3). Kai Erikson explains that trauma “can issue from a sustained exposure to battle as well as from a moment of numbing shock, from a continuing pattern of abuse as well as from a single searing assault, from a period of severe attenuation and erosion as well as from a sudden flash of fear” (185). Erikson concludes that the effects of these incidents are the same (185). In the novels by Valdés and Montero, there are numerous one-time incidents as well as prolonged abuse that can be categorized as trauma. Trauma should be viewed as the “*damage done*” in each individual case (Erikson 184-185).

Cathy Caruth, a renowned expert for her work on trauma and memory, notably Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), includes her definition of trauma: “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 4-5). She also confirms that, for those that are traumatized, the act of surviving the incident can be a crisis (*Trauma* 9). The survivor becomes a hero, “as the bearer of unspeakable truths” (Haaken 356). Caruth, greatly influenced by Sigmund Freud, adds that trauma “is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempts to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). It is indispensable to remember that one victim cannot represent every victim, even though the traumas or circumstances may be similar (Brison 29-30). Traumatic experiences also depend on contextual circumstances. Pierre Janet claimed

that “events are much more likely to be experienced as traumatic when a person is tired, ill, or under stress” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 170).

Various experts have proposed theories about the recuperation of memory after a traumatic event. One of the most well known is Pierre Janet, a French psychologist who studied how the mind processes memories. He discovered that there were distinctions between traumatic memory and narrative, or ordinary, memory (van der Kolk and van der Hart 163). Narrative memory is a social act that has a social function, while traumatic memory is a solitary activity (163). Janet also observed that victims of traumatic memories needed to take actions to recover (van der Kolk and van der Hart 175).

Memory is particularly vital and controversial in Cuba, as “For the island and the exile, collective and personal memories became a militarized zone sharply demarcated and jealously guarded by those bidding for power” (Torres 2). Most exiles, including those from Cuba, wish to hold onto the memories and want others to remember. As Simon Wiesenthal remarked, “Hope lives when someone remembers” (qtd. in McClennen 203). Moreover, despite the tragedies and violations that have occurred, the memories of the homeland have the potential to offer hope for the future.

It is essential to observe that there is a large gap between trauma in literature and trauma in real life. According to Kalí Tal, author of *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), “Textual representations – literary, visual, oral – are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience” (15). However, authors who oftentimes have experienced these traumas in their own lives or want the readers to perceive what has happened in their part of the world continue to

represent these events in literature. Tal's definition of this literature is pertinent to this particular discourse: "Literature of trauma holds at its center the reconstruction and recuperation of the traumatic experience, but it is also actively engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the writings and representations of nontraumatized authors" (17).

Therefore, the reader must first understand the author and his or her personal experiences and history of trauma in order to appreciate the literature. Dominick LaCapra has written extensively on trauma and history and argues that narratives in fiction offer "at least a plausible "feel" for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods" (13). In other words, one cannot possibly understand the pain or trauma caused to a person or group of people simply by looking at historical facts and documents.

We can say that Valdés' writing, especially, reveals traumatic experiences and memory, while it is her recovery process from what happened to her while she lived in Cuba.⁷⁰ As LaCapra notes, "Some of the most powerful forms of modern art and writing . . . often seem to be traumatic writing or post-traumatic writing in closest proximity to trauma" (23).⁷¹ Furthermore, it is typical in exile writing that the homeland "has become a place of torture and violence – a hell" (McClennen 191).

⁷⁰ Her literature can be seen as "escape and resistance" (Rosales 154).

⁷¹ He also distinguishes between the processes of acting out and working through trauma, positing that melancholia goes with the former, while mourning is paired with the latter (65). For more information on this, please see his book entitled *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence can come in distinct forms, including rape, coercion, and abuse (Schutte 215).⁷² According to Catharine MacKinnon, “In women’s experience, sexual violence is central to gender inequality, not outside it or a subdivision of gender-neutral violence that just happens to hit women” (*Are Women Human?* 109). Oftentimes the sexual violence also involves physical abuse, such as assault or murder. To women, much of this sexual violence and trauma occur in secret, behind closed doors (Brown 101). These are private incidents that lead to private suffering, as opposed to public spectacles. Tal emphasizes, “In a society where violence against women is supported and condoned, excused and rationalized, the testimony of survivors of sexual abuse is silenced, ignored, distorted, and drowned out by the thundering voices of the patriarchs” (197). She is referring to the society of the United States, but I believe that her opinion could apply to Cuba as well.

It is virtually impossible to find statistics on rape and domestic violence in Cuba, as they are not made public. Domestic abuse is not even considered a crime. The Cuban Penal Code lists the penalty for rape between four and thirty years in prison (Davies 118-119). However, it is difficult to gauge whether the laws are enforced (“Cuba” 10). One researcher on the island asked an official about violence against women and the response was that “the greatest violence is that of the blockade” (Molyneux 26).⁷³

⁷² Molestations occur frequently in Latin America to both young girls and boys. However, this is severely underreported but causes trauma. Oftentimes society blames homosexual men and women for these acts and in turn casts a shadow of distrust over them. Valdés and Montero do not touch on this subject in their novels, but focus on other instances of sexual violence.

⁷³ Amnesty International released a statement on the embargo in its 2001 Report: “Although AI’s mandate does not permit it to take a position on the U.S. embargo against Cuba or any other type of sanction, AI

Outside of the prison walls, women are much more vulnerable to rape than men. Susan Brison, a rape survivor, concludes, “The fear of rape has long functioned to keep women in their place” (18). Many experts, such as Brison and Tal, also opine that rape affects all women. Tal comments that “the demands of daily life, of child care, and of holding a job, make it impossible for women to entirely avoid being exposed and vulnerable. All women run the risk of being raped or assaulted” (20). Maria Root, a feminist therapist, has coined the term “insidious trauma,” of which rape is a part. Laura Brown, Root’s colleague, explains this term: “In consequence, many women who have never been raped have symptoms of rape trauma; we are hypervigilant to certain cues, avoid situations that we sense are high risk, go numb in response to overtures from men that might be friendly-but that might also be the first step toward our violation” (107). So this trauma is widespread in societies, including Cuba, among women survivors and those that have not been victimized. When the Special Rapporteur on violence against women visited Cuba in 1999, the Cuban Revolutionary National Police gave her statistics. These showed that in 1998 there were 963 cases of rape and 344 in the first half of 1999 (UN, *Report 7*).⁷⁴ The Ministry of Justice showed that there were 650 reported cases of rape in 1996, 747 in 1997, and 664 in 1998 (UN, *Report 10*). The President of the Supreme Court in Cuba reported that “the sentence foreseen for rape without physical abuse ranges from 4 to 10 years imprisonment and for aggravated rape . . . up to 30 years imprisonment” (UN, *Report 11*).

recognizes that the embargo has increased hardship within Cuba and has contributed, for example, to poor prison conditions” (85).

⁷⁴ However, in response to this report the Cuban government said that these figures “do not tally with data supplied by the Cuban authorities” (UN, *Note verbale 14*).

While rape can be defined as “an act of terrorism and torture” (MacKinnon, “Rape: On Coercion and Consent” 42), Zoé Valdés opines and illustrates in *Te di la vida entera* that it is definitely something that young girls and women have to fear on a daily basis.⁷⁵ Cuca Martínez, the protagonist, is almost raped by her godmother’s son, when she is only ten years old and he is 23. We know that this young man had gotten into trouble with the police before and after this incident for attempted rape. Cuca survives this particular attempt, as her godmother catches her son before he can harm Cuca sexually.⁷⁶ Valdés describes the incident:

Venía ya con la picha parada, como una tranca, se dirigió hacia la Niña y de un trompón la tiró, sin sentido, en la estera de los caracoles. Rápido, rpió el blúmer, abrió los delgados muslos cundíos de salpullido, y se disponía a violar su reseco bollito calvo con la mofletuda barra, cuando entró posesa, todavía en pleno trance espiritista, la madrina María Andrea, y con una tabla que tenía un clavo en la punta, rajó de un tablazo la espalda de su hijo violador, quien salió echando un pie, sangrando como una pila abierta. (*Te di la vida entera* 15-16)

This is Cuca’s first experience with anything sexual and would change the way that she felt about it for the rest of her life. This was a traumatic one-time experience for her. Brison tells us that rape, even if only attempted, changes the way that a victim perceives sex: “Rape affects the victim’s views about sex, about herself as a sexual being,

⁷⁵ MacKinnon also notes the distinctions between women in our society: “Virtuous women, like young girls, are unconsenting, virginal, rapable. Unvirtuous women, like wives and prostitutes, are consenting, whores, unrapable” (“Rape” 46).

⁷⁶ His action, according to Turcato, “is an attempt to gain control over someone who is in an inferior position to himself, thereby leaving him to feel that he has gained some sort of power” (77).

about men in general, about some men in particular. And an encounter with sexual murder (even if merely attempted) can completely (if only temporarily) shatter any assumptions a victim may have had about the connection between sex and love” (96). Cuca survived this rape attempt and violent act as a little girl, but was always affected after that when it came to sexual relations. It is likely that it was more traumatic for Cuca to be almost raped by someone that she knew, as opposed to a stranger, as this is true in most rape cases (MacKinnon, “Rape” 47).

It is well-known that women’s sexuality is considered a taboo in many parts of the world, and notably in Latin America. As Brison declares, “In the case of rape, the intersection of multiple taboos - against talking openly about trauma, about violence, about sex - causes conversational gridlock, paralyzing the would-be supporter” (12). This is not a topic that people usually discuss candidly, which makes it that much harder for the victim to recover from the traumatic incident on the body. As Reine Turcato observes, “Simply put, it is the bodies of women that are the ones most controlled by the taboo” (75).⁷⁷

In Latin America, the virgin/*puta* dichotomy continues to permeate the culture.⁷⁸ Even in the situation with the attempted rape on Cuca, the first thing her godmother wants to know is if Cuca is still a virgin (*Te di* 16). Although it may be important for girls to be virgins, Valdés shows that society in La Habana didn’t always adhere to this standard, as Cuca was “en una Habana despelotada y desmelenada que soportaba muy

⁷⁷ It is generally known that rapists in Latin American prisons are considered the worst criminals. Oftentimes, in retribution for their actions, they are raped and killed while serving time.

⁷⁸ This dichotomy is explained thoroughly by Gloria Anzaldúa in her groundbreaking book entitled *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, first published in 1987.

poco a las vírgenes” (*Te di* 62). It seems to be a constant dichotomy that the women have to confront and is a battle that they can never win.⁷⁹

While Cuca is not actually raped, one of Marcela’s friends, Ana, is raped as a child in Valdés’ *Café Nostalgia*. Marcela describes Ana, who now lives in Argentina, as “una muchacha que supo hacer de la violación sufrida en la infancia una extraordinaria carrera teatral” (20). It appears that Ana has dealt with her rape and turned it into something positive, which is not always the case. We do not know the severity of Ana’s trauma, as she is not one of the main characters, but can assume that this incident affected her in various ways. “Rape,” according to Shana Swiss and Joan Giller, both medical doctors, “commonly results in severe and long-lasting psychological sequelae that are complex and shaped by the particular social and cultural context in which the rape occurs” (614). The rape occurred in Cuba, but she has since moved to Argentina, far away from this memory.⁸⁰

Turning now to Mayra Montero and her novel *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, a young girl named Santa is raped and beaten outside of the city. Montero confirms the presence of violence against women in the Caribbean: “Aquí estamos lidiando todo el tiempo con la violencia machista” (Personal interview). Santa endures excruciating physical pain, while her body is left on an old, dirty road. Montero tells us the specifics of what transpired during the attack, which are those that the police determined from the lifeless body: “Le arrancaron los pezones con los dientes.

⁷⁹ This has been a battle for many centuries. Rich notes that in the fourteenth century, “The Virgin Mary could be worshiped while living women were brutalized and burnt as witches (115).

⁸⁰ In another incident in *El pie de mi padre*, Valdés tells of a young Cuban man, Ratero, Alma’s cousin, who is thrown into prison several times for raping women. Each time that they let him out, he repeats the action. Valdés writes: “Él aprovechó la libertad y estranguló y violó a nueve mujeres, tres por día” (44).

Le desprendieron el cuero cabelludo; eso lo hicieron mientras la arrastraban. Todavía estaba con vida” (*Como* 97). Montero also illustrates her dead body: “Quedó al descubierto el rostro de Santa, desfigurado y lleno de manchas, con unos labios grises que no eran los suyos, y unos ojos de párpados azules, hundidos en sus cuencas, perdidos en el mundo de la calavera” (*Como* 113). This incident shows a blatant violation of human rights on Santa’s body. Article Five of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” (Fomerand 442). Santa was most likely taken against her will or preparing to perform an act of prostitution, which we know that she had done previously various times. It is obvious that Santa was raped and brutally injured, which resulted in her death. Article Three of the Universal Declaration explains, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person” (Fomerand 442). With the actions of the two male perpetrators, whom were never arrested or punished, they took away Santa’s right to life, which she can never get back.⁸¹

Montero explains her inclusion of this incident: “Con Santa, quise introducir ese elemento de violencia sexual y de violencia de las personas que estaban ocupando la isla, que era el ejército americano. Yo quise una metáfora de lo que está pasando, que están cargando la isla y la están oprimiendo” (Personal interview). Montero explains that women had no recourse at this time: “Hubo muchas violaciones pero se callaron. O encontraban a una muchacha, la violaban, y la muchacha iba a la queja, a lo mejor ni se

⁸¹ The Captain tells Andrés that he knew which two men were responsible for the attack on Santa (*El Capitán* 98).

tomaban el trabajo de denunciar la violación” (Personal interview). Many women died and justice was never sought in the majority of cases.

Santa suffered much physical trauma to her body before she died and most likely psychological trauma as well. This could be considered an “act of terrorism and torture” (MacKinnon, “Rape” 42). Santa is forever denied her voice, never able to tell exactly what happened or how she was feeling during that time. We must also remember her loved ones that are affected by her abuse and subsequent death. They must go on with the memory of Santa and her abused body, which can be traumatic for them. They may think about her before the attack or remember the vision of her abused and mutilated body, which could trigger traumatic memory.

Knowing that Santa performed acts of prostitution leads us to this social issue, which is present around the world today, including on the islands of the Caribbean. At the time of the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, 70% of working women were domestic servants (Randall, *Women in Cuba* 23). Thousands of others, including many young girls from the countryside, were prostitutes. The Cuban government claimed repeatedly to have eradicated the problem with the Revolution, but it still exists today. Even Fidel Castro has finally admitted that prostitution is real and a problem that is only getting worse on the island (Human Rights Watch 162). According to Zoé Valdés, “Ahora, esta prostitución en Cuba es una prostitución que a veces es tolerada por el gobierno, porque saben que atrae turistas” (Personal interview). The claim is that Cubans do not resort to this due to economic reasons, but because of their lack of values (UN,

Report 12). Oftentimes the *jineteras* are thought of only as people of color, but this is not always true, as it is a very complex issue (Cabezas 83).

We know that Santa resorted to selling her body in Montero's *El Capitán de los Dormidos*. She received money in turn for sexual relations with United States Marines and most likely other men on the island. In Valdés' *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca's daughter, María Regla, must have sexual relations with a colleague in order to promote her career. Valdés writes, "Además, Programador Licenciado le ha encomendado por fin un reportaje. Claro, deberá pagar con tajadas de su carne fresca" (340). This violates María Regla, as she can only receive opportunities for reports if she returns sexual favors, which can be considered sexual coercion.

Physical Violence

While sexual abuse takes place in its various forms against women, physical violence is also present. Several scholars have noted the connection between the two. MacKinnon notes that rape and abuse are not so different: "A feminist analysis suggests that assault by a man's fist is not so different from assault by a penis, not because both are violent but because both are sexual" ("Rape" 49). Brison agrees with this, citing Jean Améry, "Améry goes on to compare torture to rape, an apt comparison, not only because both objectify and traumatize the victim, but also because the pain they inflict reduces the victim to flesh, to the purely physical" (46). Women in Cuba have been subjected to physical violence for many years, enduring domestic abuse in the private sphere.

According to Michel Foucault, bodily relations are related to power schemes. He suggests, speaking of the body, “Power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (26). I argue that Valdés claims that the Cuban government has held the power for many years and has used Cuban bodies to inflict harm and pain as well as tortured its own citizens.⁸² This could be considered a form of patriarchal control over the bodies of Cuban citizens.

Under an authoritarian and patriarchal government, women in Cuba have discovered a way to protest, which has been tolerated thus far. There is a group of Cuban women, *Las Damas de Blanco*, that fights passively for the release of male prisoners on the island. They began in 2003 and their objective is: “Marchar pacíficamente exigiendo la libertad de sus esposos, padres, hijos, hermanos y sobrinos” (Vivanco 11). They are much like Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, Argentina, who fought for many years to recover disappeared family members during and following the years of the brutal Dirty War (1976-1983). *Las Damas de Blanco* live with constant threats by Cuban officials, but continue marching each Sunday on the same route through La Habana. In essence, these women are moving “from psychological to political resistance” (Gilligan 38). They do not allow fear to dominate them nor stop them from seeking justice.

The sense of justice from the perspective of those facing sentences is different in Cuba than in other countries around the world. This was obvious when the well-known

⁸² Valdés describes actions by the police: “La policía vestida de civil, <<el pueblo combatiente>>, entró a la iglesia con palos, porras, bates, y se dieron gusto fracturando cráneos y costillas” (*El pie de mi padre* 173).

American director, Oliver Stone, interviewed Fidel Castro in May of 2003. There were eight young Cuban men on trial for hijacking airplanes, which they claimed was for purely economic reasons and not political ones. What is surprising to the viewer of this Stone documentary, entitled *Looking for Fidel (Buscando a Fidel)*, is that these men accept their 30-year prison terms or their life terms in jail, without question. They even say that they don't want clemency and take responsibility for their actions. This shows that the Cuban government and its people view very differently the punishments that fit each crime, which usually involve excessive amounts of years in prison.⁸³

Returning to torture, in Valdés' *Te di la vida entera*, she includes several incidents of torture by the Cuban government. Valdés draws our attention to these incidents and the cruelty behind them.⁸⁴ One of Cuca's friends, a young woman named el Fax, had a brother subjected to torture and violations while in prison. Valdés writes about this: "No contaré con lujo de detalles, por hipersensibilidad al horror, las torturas y las humillaciones a las que fue sometido el muchacho. De su estancia en el tanque, guarda una cicatriz en plena mejilla, a lo Al Pacino en *Scarface*, además de ciento sesenta y cinco traumas como consecuencia de las repetidas violaciones" (*Te di* 214). Because of this, and also the death of her boyfriend by firing squad, el Fax has severe mental problems and becomes a dissident. To remedy this, the Cuban government uses shock therapy: "La solución que encontraron los psiquiatras fue contraatacar con electrochoques. Contracandela a toda hora, una buena tanda de corrientazos en el

⁸³ Some Cubans have also been arrested just for trying to emigrate and have been subjected to "kangaroo courts." Many Cubans try to obtain legal visas to leave the island, but government authorities consistently deny granting them.

⁸⁴ Valdés gives an example of torture, with Alma's teacher in *El pie de mi padre*: "Él iría a torturar a unos cientos de periodistas encarcelados" (53).

cerebro, o en el culo, y basta de melancolía capitalista” (*Te di* 214). El Fax emerges from this a completely different person, as the government changed and manipulated her.

The second incident is the one that would prove to be the fatal blow to Cuca Martínez, both physically and mentally. The government arrests Uan, Cuca’s love, and Cuca insists on accompanying him to the detention center. While she is there, they torture her in various ways. Valdés describes the torture: “A ella la encierran en el cuarto frío, a él en el cuarto caliente. A punto de volverse témpano ella, y él sopa de cebolla, en la más prieta de las oscuridades. Aunque a veces encienden las luces a dos milímetros de sus pupilas, durante horas. Al rato, vuelve la negrura, y entonces es cuando entran los animalitos” (*Te di* 337). Cuca subsequently is dumped in her childhood home of Santa Clara, where she loses her mind due to the trauma. This is due to her previous torture, but also caused by the loss of Uan.

It is probable, at this point, that Cuca does not trust her body at all. It has been tortured, nearly raped, physically worked too hard, and taken advantage of sexually. What Brison says about her own body after her rape could be applied to Cuca’s body: “My body was now perceived as an enemy, having betrayed my newfound trust and interest in it, and as a site of increased vulnerability” (44). Cuca realizes that she can no longer depend on Uan nor trust the Cuban government. It seems that her mind and body split because of what she has experienced. Physically she is Cuca Martínez, but mentally she is a different woman. Alegria Ribadeneira believes that the fact that Cuca loses her mind shows the precarious position of the Cuban woman: “Tanto Cuca como su hija son mujeres revolucionarias, activas, fuertes, y decididas; sin embargo, la precariedad y el

incumplimiento de las promesas de la Revolución no les permite promover cambios dentro de su sociedad” (206).

While some Cubans risk their lives at sea, Valdés notes that others are sentenced to forced labor back on the island. In *Te di la vida entera*, she refers to one of Cuca’s friends, Xerox Machine, who is also a prostitute: “Nadie sabe por qué esa misma tarde *el pueblo combatiente* la sacó de su casa a patadas por las tetas y a halones de pelo, la encerraron, junto con testigos de Jehová, delincuentes y homosexuales, en campos de trabajo forzado” (221).

Valdés calls our attention to those Cubans that are thought to be traitors or *gusanos* by other revolutionaries and are punished with physical violence and pain at times. She speaks of Marcela, included in *La hija del embajador* as one of Daniela’s best friends. Daniela describes the physical abuse that Marcela had to endure, due to the fact that her parents left Cuba for the United States. The revolutionary Cubans reacted to their departure by taking their anger out on Marcela. They gathered around her house, yelled insults at her, and “recibió un tomatazo en pleno cuello, un cartón de huevos sobre el cuerpo, y cuando convencida de su estupidez dio las espaldas recibió una pedrada en el pulmón” (*La hija* 40).

These writers intend to show that physical violence is also present on the island in the public sphere. In Valdés’ *Café Nostalgia*, Marcela suffers an assault in the street. As she is walking outside one evening, a young man assaults her, attempting to steal her belongings. Marcela describes the incident, as the young man attacks her:

Traía una navaja y apuntaba a mi estómago. Al percatarse de que no

podía robar nada me arrancó las gafas de sol que llevaba inútilmente colgadas por un cordón del cuello. Traté de resistirme, pero entonces fui arrastrada por la áspera suciedad de la acera. Por fin cedí, pues comenzó a patear mi estómago y amenazó con destriparme si no se las entregaba. Una vez con las gafas en su poder escupió sobre mi cabeza y se fugó a toda carrera. (*Café* 152)

Montero also provides another disturbing example of physical violence in *Son de Almendra*, where the Mafia kills a woman named Betty in the cabaret. Yolanda is a witness to the dead woman's body, which causes her terrible distress later on. Yolanda remarks, upon seeing the woman for the first time, "Me fijé en eso, y después en la herida que tenía en la garganta, por allí se había desangrado y aún le salía un hilito" (176-177). She is told that it was an accident, but Yolanda knows that the woman was stabbed several times and killed. It is not clear to the reader exactly what happened to this woman or why. It is the intent of Montero to show that these types of incidents happened in pre-revolutionary Cuba, where there were blatant Human Rights violations against both men and women, as noted in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

It is known that there are stores throughout Cuba that cater exclusively to tourists and accept payment only in dollars from the United States. In Valdés' *Te di la vida entera*, Uan has access to many of these dollars and decides to enter one of these stores to purchase gifts for Cuca and María Regla, his daughter. While he waits to pay, Juan becomes angry because he doesn't want to wait for the credit card machine. He decides to use violence to get what he wants: "El Uan levanta delicado la mano, y sin pestañear

espanta tremendo galletazo seco en la mejilla de la tendera” (*Te di* 291). He also uses the threat of violence and fear to get his way. He tells the cashier: “Así que me cobras lo más pronto posible, o te parto por la mitad” (*Te di* 291-92). The cashier proceeds to do as she is ordered, while being petrified by Uan’s actions and tone of voice. This is how Uan obtains the goods: by using physical violence against a young woman and threatening her until she gives in. This shows a lack of respect for this woman and her position in the economy and in the overall society.⁸⁵

As mentioned in Chapter Three, Aida in Montero’s *Como un mensajero tuyo* suffers much physical violence at the hands of her lover’s enemies. At one point they drag her to the countryside, beat her, and leave her for dead. She tells Enriqueta, her daughter, many years later that there was “horror y sangre” (215). Aida tells us what she remembers, as the men were entering her room in the safe house:

Di un grito y salté de la cama, no sabía si Enrico ya estaba despierto, sólo traté de llegar hasta la puerta, pero fue inútil: el hombre me aferró contra su cuerpo y me tapó la boca. Sentí que me ahogaba y empecé a tapear en el aire, intenté morderle la mano. . . . De los forcejeos pasaron a los golpes, y no pude ver más porque me arrastraron a la sala. (*Como* 233)

It is not important to these men whether Aida lives or dies. She did nothing wrong, except be with Enrico and help him escape from those that wanted him dead. These men beat Aida so brutally that the doctor had to amputate several of her fingers. She describes this: “Un trozo de cristal me hirió los dedos, no me los cercenó de golpe,

⁸⁵ It could also be viewed as Uan taking out his frustration on this woman for the numerous times that he, along with other Cubans, had to wait in line to buy food items.

pero luego tuvieron que amputármelos: son estos tres, que me han faltado desde entonces” (*Como* 233-34). The physical trauma of the violence and subsequent loss of Enrico put her into a different mental state. The doctor remembers her pain, both physically and mentally: “Perdió tres dedos y tuvo una crisis nerviosa” (*Como* 252). The doctor adds, “Al llegar a la casa y no ver al cantante, echó a correr por el pueblo y se metió en la iglesia de la Santísima Trinidad, interrumpió la misa, tuvo un ataque de nervios y fue a parar a la ermita” (*Como* 255-56). Aida doesn’t recover for many months. She sits in her home with her mother and is completely incoherent. She remembers very little during that time: “Mi madre me contó que pasé dos meses desmemoriada, sin acordarme de que me llamaba Aida y sin acordarme siquiera de lo que había sido mi vida. Era como una muerta que se levantaba en paz por las mañanas, desayunaba seria y miraba por las ventanas” (*Como* 241). Aida seems to be a different person, accompanied only by her pain and sorrow. This is typical with traumatic experiences, as trauma “induces discomfort and pain, but the imageries that accompany the pain have a sense all their own” (Erikson 198).

Enriqueta compiles individual memories of what transpired during the specific days of Enrico’s disappearance from the theater, after the explosion. Several of the actors involved are more reluctant than others to revisit the tragedy and the painful memories that embody the experience. But their acts of revealing the truth to Enriqueta constitute narrative memory. Speaking about the experience helps in the recovery process (Brisson 68). Enriqueta is an active listener who has a genuine interest in the details of her parent’s history together and the misfortune that surrounded them. This helps the

narrator gain more control over these memories (Brison 71). Aida's act of telling her daughter about her love affair and subsequent heartbreak with the famous Italian tenor assists her in the recovery process, as she trusts Enriqueta with the information and knows that she has her absolute support and confidence. She is thoroughly convinced that Enriqueta deserves to know what happened and will benefit from hearing the truth about her biological father. As Aida is reliving the past, she feels closer and more connected to her daughter, as these memories are passed from one generation to the next. Even if there are particular incidents that are omitted or imprecise, the overall story is what is significant. Unintentionally, Enriqueta is controlling how Aida tells her story, because "speakers and listeners mutually influence the story that gets told" (Haaken 353).

Another area of physical violence involves domestic violence, which is suffered behind closed doors. Domestic violence in the private sphere occurs frequently among spouses, non-married couples, and their children. Many organizations see this "as a result of unequal status in family and society" (UN, *Domestic violence* 8). Ileana Artiles de León, an expert on sexual education in Cuba, confirms the existence of domestic violence: "Sin embargo, en el mundo *privado* de la familia, existen parejas donde superviven estas manifestaciones" (33). Oftentimes it occurs because men see women as their property; they feel that they have ownership rights to them.

The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas reported that in 1998, there were 75 cases of violence against women committed by men (UN, *Report* 20). The Cuban government has also addressed this issue, stating that the country is "Aware that domestic violence is a critical problem that has serious physical and psychological effects on individual family

members and that jeopardizes the health and survival of the family unit” (UN, *Eighth UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime* 59). However, when the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women visited Cuba in June of 1999, she found several areas that were lacking in terms of perceptions of domestic violence. The government perceives that domestic violence is not a significant problem there, as socialism is supposed to prevent this. There are no references to domestic violence in the Cuban Penal Code, as well (UN, *Report* 8). The Special Rapporteur urges law reform in this area (UN, *Report* 4-5). It is difficult to obtain statistics in this area, but the Cuban Revolutionary National Police gave the Special Rapporteur their numbers. In the first half of 1999, there had been 1,944 injuries reported against women and 5,791 in 1998 (UN, *Report* 7). In a three-month study of 110 trauma cases carried out at the Hospital Galixto-García in La Habana, the Special Rapporteur found that “10 cases involved physical violence against women, [and] 34 cases were of a psychological nature” (UN, *Report* 10).⁸⁶

According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1996, Cuba had clear procedures for victims of violence:

Under the law, women could seek redress for any violence committed against them. They could obtain the services of lawyers and notaries at little cost and could obtain certification of injuries from family doctors, polyclinics or hospitals. Such certification was automatically sent to police investigators. If women were unaware of their rights, they could seek guidance from government institutions, professional association or the Women and Family Counselling Centres established by the Federation

⁸⁶ The Cuban government later refuted these statistics (UN, *Note verbale* 14).

of Cuban Women. In that connection, the Federation of Cuban Women called on groups of professionals and specialists to impart information to the public on the various forms of violence, the need to prevent it, and ways of tackling it legally, psychologically and educationally. (CEDAW 8)

Valdés provides examples of domestic violence in *El pie de mi padre*. Consuelo, Alma's mother, goes crazy for the men that she dates, even though they treat her poorly. Alma does not care for these men, but has no power to alter the situation. Alma describes her mother's relationship with one of these men: "Pese a las manos de golpe que le daba, pese a las humillaciones, y que la había convertido en una aguantatarros de las que ya no hay ni se fabrican" (62). According to Alma, he also turned her mother into an alcoholic, whom Alma had to rescue frequently, "Porque alguien la avisaba de que había sido testigo de cómo su padrastro golpeaba salvajemente hasta dejar a la mujer en estado comatoso boqueando en el suelo" (*El pie* 63). This relationship between Alma and Consuelo mirrors the one that Valdés had with her mother. There was tension between them frequently, but they always loved each other profoundly. Valdés describes her mother's mistake: "Encontró a otro hombre en su camino que fue, a mi juicio, un mal hombre, que la metió en el alcoholismo" (Personal interview). It is not uncommon that women in these situations become alcoholics or drug abusers (UN, *Domestic violence* 10).

Psychological Violence

While sexual and physical violence affect the body in numerous ways, psychological violence affects the body as well, as the mind is part of the body. Oftentimes society does not consider psychological violence as important or as detrimental as other types of violence, but it is just as crucial. Many people argue that mental health, unlike physical, is “far more within the control of the individual” (Edwards 265).⁸⁷ Avtar Brah concludes, “Indeed, the whole body in all its *physicality*, *mentality*, and *spirituality* is productive of power, and it is within this relational space that the mind/body dualism disappears” (125). One of Grosz’s feminist approaches to the body is that a person should not be divided into mind or body (21). She explains how Sigmund Freud connected the mind and body: “the psychical cannot be unambiguously separated from the perceptual” (30). The mind and body are connected, which is why mental health issues frequently take a toll on one’s physical body and wellbeing. Grosz elaborates on her feminist approach of the body:

That human bodies have irreducible neurophysiological dimensions whose relations remain unknown and that human bodies have the wonderful ability, while striving for integration and cohesion, organic and psychic wholeness, to also provide for and indeed produce fragmentations, fracturings, dislocations that orient bodies and body parts toward other bodies and body parts. (13)

Valdés herself has theorized about the specific relationship between a woman’s body and her mind, arguing that “el pensamiento y el cuerpo femenino tienen una

⁸⁷ The context of this quote is Edwards’ analysis of Seneca’s *Letters*.

relación muy importante, mucho más de lo que pensamos. . . . La mujer tiene una gran relación muy, muy unida, muy junta, entre su cuerpo, su desnudez, sus enfermedades, y el pensamiento” (Personal interview). In her novel *Te di la vida entera*, Cuca experiences psychological trauma from different outlets in her life. As mentioned earlier, the torture performed by the government causes her to lose her mind and never regain it.

Zoé Valdés, by her own admission, had to suffer psychological violence, which is one of the reasons that she left Cuba and moved to Europe. They threatened her frequently in Cuba: “Me amenazaron de un tribunal, me amenazaron de que podía tener problemas de la policía” (Personal interview). Unfortunately, they continued to harass her as well as her family in Paris. Enrico Mario Santí, in a personal interview with Valdés in 1996, notes that “la escritora me contó del hostigamiento que ella y su familia repetidamente padecen a manos de oficiales del régimen de La Habana en París” (2).

Due to many reasons, thousands of Cubans currently live in physical exile, as well as internal exile.⁸⁸ Many say that exile is a traumatic experience for the person that experiences it. Exile, for some, can mean “a permanent mutilation” (Herrera xiii). Each individual experience is different, and many witnesses have written about their feelings after they have gone into exile throughout the world. The constant changes and uncertainties can be traumatic, while these exiles remember what life was like before, in their homeland. They are continuously insecure and vulnerable. Most people think of external exile, but fail to take internal exile into consideration. Teresa de Jesús Fernández has observed this other side, which is “that of the Other, the internal exile,

⁸⁸ Torres terms both exiles as “impotence” (10).

who is left with the estrangement, the sense of loss; it is the Other who is left to deal with absence” (77).

Marcela in Valdés’ *Café Nostalgia* suffers much during her time on the island and her exile in France. There are memories that she will not even mention, because they are too painful: “De mi estancia santacruzana prefiero no hablar, hay demasiado abuso en ella” (84). This would be an example of traumatic memory, in that it is a solitary act that is only present under certain circumstances (van der Kolk and van der Hart 163). Later, Marcela finds a notebook with Samuel’s movie script inside, where he includes the trauma that they have all suffered.⁸⁹ While one character still residing in Cuba notes, “Aquí estamos falta de psiquiatra” (*Café* 235), another complains of events that have happened in their lives. She says that one of their friends “debe andar traumatizado. De ahí la gagería, yo también soy <<traumoya>>. No es malo, me encanta estar traumatizada” (*Café* 235).

While Marcela’s friends in *Café Nostalgia* each suffer individually the effects of exile and trauma, there is a collective piece as well. There is interdependence between individual and collective memories because collective memory is composed of individual memories (Halbwachs 49). Marcela recognizes this, when she thinks to herself, “Estamos invadiendo los continentes; nosotros, típicos isleños que, una vez fuera, a lo único que podemos aspirar es al recuerdo” (*Café* 126). Their specific memories of Cuba invoke what Janet termed narrative or ordinary memory, which is a social act that has a social function: speaking about the experiences (van der Kolk and van der Hart 163).

⁸⁹ Alvarez Borland opines that this movie script shows “a migrant mentality and a sense of hopelessness for themselves and their country’s future” (“Fertile Multiplicities” 260).

These Cuban friends are linked by their memories and their time spent together on the island, even though they are now spread out in the physical sense. They remain connected through phone calls, pictures, and letters. The friends seem to crave these connections to each other and are not afraid or embarrassed to discuss past memories as well as current issues. Janet discovered that in ordinary memory the victim wishes to reconnect with others and sometimes wants their help in the recovery process (van der Kolk and van der Hart 163). It is apparent that these intimate exchanges among peers do help each member to move on with his or her life in one way or another. They are bound by a common thread, which is their trauma and memories, and share the same pain of nostalgia. Erikson observes that “trauma shared can serve as a source of commonality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can” (186). These friends will forever keep these memories present, no matter how far they go from Cuba. As Caruth notes, “The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them” (*Trauma* 5).

Cuca, in *Te di la vida entera*, also suffers psychological violence her entire life due to Uan, her love and father of her daughter, María Regla. She waits for him to come back to her several times, while he leaves Cuba and goes to the United States. Ribadeneira claims, “Tanto el embarazo de Cuca como su abandono subrayan la victimización de la mujer bajo el poder del hombre” (206). Cuca never wants to be with another man, although she has opportunities to remarry. Following Caruth, Cuca is “possessed by an image” which is Uan (*Trauma* 4-5). To combat this longing for Uan, Cuca immerses herself in revolutionary activities and dedicates her life to her daughter’s

happiness.⁹⁰ She constantly misses Uan, thinks about him, and wonders if he will come back to her. She falls for him completely each time that he returns, which is the main reason that she insists on accompanying him to the detention center and suffers the torture. She refuses to let him out of her sight. She even admits that she would die for him: “No pienso negarte nada, Uan, pide por esa boca. Lo que tú quieras, la vida, si es necesario” (*Te di* 263). Cuca is trapped in a vicious cycle from which she is never able to escape, which is traumatic, as trauma can be “a continuing pattern of abuse” (Erikson 185). This is also an example of domestic violence and psychological abuse, “Since chronic psychological abuse can be even more devastating than other kinds . . . it deserves to be included in the concept of domestic violence” (UN, *Domestic violence* 4).

Additionally, in Valdés’ *El pie de mi padre*, the protagonist, Alma Desamparada, is traumatized both as a child and an adult. She always dreams of meeting her father, knowing that they have the same feet, which is their only resemblance, according to her mother. As a young child, even her teacher wants to take Alma home, knowing what she has gone through. Valdés explains that “ella había comprendido el trauma de la niña y se sentía con fuerzas para ayudarla y compartir su inmensa soledad” (*El pie* 22). What Alma experiences is a classic case of parental neglect. According to Janice Haaken, a psychoanalytic clinician and feminist, neglect and abandonment are even worse than abuse: “It is easier to struggle against a demonic presence than a perniciously absent one” (357). Alma feels abandoned her entire life by her father, although she continues to look for him. She never recuperates from this neglect and absence in her life. Valdés reverses

⁹⁰ Ribadeneira says, “La entrega de la protagonista Cuca a un hombre que no la aprecia y la desilusiona puede verse como una metáfora de la entrega a la causa política y el subsiguiente desengaño” (198).

the roles in this novel, as Alma's search for her father takes the place of the son's search for his father, which is an archetype in literature.

As an adult, Alma's husband, Ernesto, is killed in an airplane accident and Alma is traumatized by his death. Adding to this is the fact that Ernesto had numerous lovers and even other children that Alma did not know about. In response to this trauma, she directs her anger towards herself. This is typical of traumatized people, as they "may initially respond with suicide attempts or other self-destructive behavior" (van der Kolk and van der Hart 176). Alma tries to commit suicide, but a neighbor saves her. Here she is attempting to take control of her life, by deciding when and how she will die. Many people who are traumatized do not feel that they have much control anymore over what happens and automatically expect the worst in most situations (Erikson 194). It is obvious that Alma feels helpless and hopeless and wishes to end her life before anything else harmful can happen to her. Even though she does not die in the suicide attempt, Alma later directs the physical violence at herself: "Había renunciado al sexo, mientras tomaba un baño rompía en sollozos en estertores, golpeaba mis senos y mi pubis, arañaba mi cuerpo" (*El pie* 169). It seems that Alma is trying to punish herself for the tragedies that surround her, as she has no choice but to react to them. It is indispensable to note that, following LaCapra, the relationship with her father can be considered a lack, as Alma never knew him and his love, while that of Ernesto is a loss, as she once knew him and continues to live without him. She will also feel the lack of this object, Ernesto, in the future.

As we can see, Valdés and Montero opine that Cuba has not been immune to violence, whether it is sexual, physical, or psychological. In many cases the victim experiences more than one type of violence that can lead to serious trauma, which may never be overcome. Women are more susceptible to certain types of violence. These women have not always been protected and it is evident that many have not seen justice come to those responsible for the abuse.⁹¹ Despite the fact that their approaches are different, I believe that it is the intent of Valdés and Montero to utilize their literature to demonstrate that these violations have occurred in Cuba for many years and that women have suffered greatly, both those on the island and those that have gone into exile. Valdés particularly wishes to argue that the government has been complicit in these acts, either as performing the attacks or failing to seek justice for the victims. Montero focuses more on the pain and memories from the past, both individual and collective, which have come out of the tragedies. All of this pain and abuse affects the body in various ways. By calling attention to this violence and trauma through literature, their hope is that the situation improves so that women can live full and productive lives, reaching their ultimate potential.

⁹¹ Schutte notes, that while Latin American women face physical violence, they face psychological violence as well, which includes that “suffered by mothers who do not know whether their children can survive or reach adulthood in the midst of conditions of extreme poverty and/or underdevelopment” (216).

Chapter Five:

Reflections on the Self

An Interview with Zoé Valdés

I contacted Zoé Valdés to interview her about her literary influences, her exile, and her novels. I traveled to Paris, France and conducted the interview on January 20th, 2008 in her office. What follows are her reflections and personal opinions. I will be using the original interview in Spanish.

Su vida personal y sus influencias:

Sarah Miller Boelts: Primero, voy a comenzar con su vida personal. Usted ha vivido en París desde 1995, ¿es cierto?

Zoé Valdés: No, yo vine a París por primera vez en el año 1983, a finales del '83. Incluso yo vine aquí con la muerte de Julio Cortázar. Lo primero que hice fue ir al cementerio, al entierro de Julio Cortázar. Y me quedé cinco años en París, trabajaba para la UNESCO, estuve hasta el año '88, pero con regreso a Cuba todos los años. Y después, ya al salir definitivamente en el '95, el 22 de enero del '95.

SMB: Y usted ha publicado varias novelas durante estos años, fuera de Cuba. ¿Hubo algo que hizo que se fuera de Cuba? ¿Valía la pena salir al exilio?

ZV: Empecé por trabajar en un instituto de cine, donde ya yo me había dado cuenta, incluso cuando trabajaba aquí en la UNESCO, en los años '80, la situación que vivía en Cuba y la situación que vivía la gente en Cuba. Y cómo los artistas, los pintores, y los escritores eran reprimidos. Y no sólo los escritores y los artistas y los intelectuales, sino también la gente de la calle, la gente del pueblo. Entonces me di cuenta, también, como vivían los dirigentes, de la manera tan cómoda, tan fácil, y tan bien en relación a cómo vivían los demás cubanos.

Pero además de eso, empecé a tener problemas personales. Al trabajar en la UNESCO, al tener relación directa con la prensa, al empezar después a trabajar en el instituto de cine cuando yo llegué a Cuba, y al trabajar en la revista *Cine Cubano*, empecé a sufrir la censura directa de un oficial de la Seguridad del Estado, Alfredo Guevara. Puesto que a pesar de que él era una persona a la que yo respetaba, quería, y admiraba, Alfredo Guevara tenía una gran fidelidad y dependencia física, moral, y psíquica de Fidel Castro. Ya yo no creía en Fidel Castro. Yo necesitaba trabajar como cualquier persona y tenía que trabajar en el gobierno porque todo lo que hay en Cuba pertenece al gobierno cubano: el instituto de cine, la UNEAC. Y cuando un escritor como Leonardo Padura dice que él no es funcionario, está mintiendo porque él fue funcionario de la UNEAC. Todo el que trabaja en Cuba es funcionario del estado cubano. Entonces de esa manera fue cómo yo empecé a tener problemas.

Además de eso, mi marido, Ricardo Vega, era disidente. Cuando yo lo conocí, ya era disidente. Y lo primero que nos sucedió fue que cuando él se quedó la primera noche en mi casa, la jefa de vigilancia de los Comités de la Defensa de la Revolución, vino a decirme que yo tenía que hacer un informe sobre Ricardo Vega porque había dormido en mi casa. Entonces, ésas son las situaciones tragicómicas que se dan en Cuba.⁹² Que como puedes comprender, no puedo hacer un informe sobre una persona con la que yo empiezo una relación amorosa. Porque ya

⁹² The purpose of these Committees is to be vigilant of any suspicious or "counterrevolutionary" activities and to report them to the government immediately.

estamos, entonces, en *La vida de los otros*, la película alemana que ganó el Oscar. Es lo que ha sucedido durante todos estos años en Cuba, exactamente lo mismo.

Después hubo otros problemas más colectivos, un hundimiento del remolcador “13 de marzo.” Mi padre estuvo preso en Cuba dos años. Mi padre nunca supo porque estuvo preso. Mi padre estaba en contra de Fidel Castro. No era una persona activa y sencillamente cayó preso dos años. Mis hermanos se tuvieron que ir del país para Estados Unidos. A mi madre tampoco le gustaba el régimen castrista. A mi abuela tampoco, pero mi abuela murió cuando yo era bastante joven. Así eran los problemas en mi casa, a nadie le gustaba Fidel Castro y sencillamente yo no traté de no ser militante, porque sabes que hay que ser militante obligatoriamente. Yo siempre traté de portarme un poco mal para que no me sacaran de militante. Entonces ésas son las situaciones que había que vivir siempre, de manera escabrosa, tratando de bandear y de tratar de escapar a una realidad que siempre te atrapa, que en alguna manera siempre te coge.

Además, quiero explicar que sólo dos escritores cubanos, viviendo dentro de Cuba, han firmado contratos con editoriales extranjeras *sin* la autorización del gobierno cubano. El primero fue Reinaldo Arenas y le costó dos años de prisión. Y la segunda fui yo. Yo no sabía que Reinaldo lo había hecho porque las *Memorias* de Reinaldo salen en el '91 y yo firmo el contrato en el '90. Entonces yo me entero por las *Memorias* de Reinaldo porque él cuenta su relación con Claude Durand y con Margarita y Jorge Camacho, unas personas que le ayudaron aquí en Francia. Yo firmé ese contrato y cuando llegué a Cuba, empecé a tener problemas con Jorge Timossi, que es el encargado de la Agencia latinoamericana del libro, que es una fachada. Es sencillamente un negocio para que los escritores cubanos le den un por ciento de sus derechos al autor a Cuba, al gobierno cubano. En aquel momento ningún escritor cubano había hecho un contrato independiente, con una editorial extranjera, salvo yo y Reinaldo Arenas. Yo lo hice. Me amenazaron de un tribunal y me amenazaron que podía tener problemas de la policía, el propio Jorge Timossi. Y fue Alfredo Guevara justamente al que yo fui a ver, a su despacho. Era mi jefe,

en el Instituto de Cine. Yo le conté lo que estaba pasando. Me dijo, “No debiste haber firmado el contrato, pero yo voy a llamar a Jorge Timossi.” Llamó a Jorge Timossi y le dijo, “¿Qué es lo que quieres armar? ¡Otro escándalo, lo de Reinaldo Arenas!” Y allí yo oí, busqué cuando salieron las *Memorias* y leí que Reinaldo Arenas había hecho un contrato sin la autorización. Eso fue lo que sucedió. Eso es uno de los problemas que tuve en Cuba, uno de los problemas fundamentales.

SMB: El exilio físico y el exilio emocional son algunos temas recurrentes en sus novelas. ¿Qué significa el exilio para usted, personalmente?

ZV: Para mí, el exilio es un castigo. El exilio no es un regalo ni un premio, como unos creen. En el caso de los cubanos ha sido, a mi juicio, un castigo. El hecho es bien evidente que los cubanos arrastran su país, su cultura, y su sufrimiento en su exilio.⁹³ Yo creo que ha sido una ventaja para el cubano, pero ha sido también un defecto, porque eso nos ha bloqueado bastante la relación al mundo y la relación a desarrollarnos con respeto al mundo.⁹⁴ Pero en mi caso particular es un castigo porque yo no niego que el exilio le brinda a uno, sobre todo, maneras de conocer tu propio país, que dentro de tu país, no lo puedes hacer.

Y es una manera de vivir libremente. Yo aprendí la libertad aquí en París. Yo no sabía lo que era la libertad. Yo no sabía lo que era entrar en una librería y escoger un libro libremente. Y hablar libremente del presidente, de los políticos y dar la opinión aun cuando fueran en contra, cuando fueran absolutamente en desacuerdo con la política del país. Yo no sabía que eso podía ser de esa manera. Entonces eso me permitió el exilio.

⁹³ This is evident in much Cuban and Cuban-American literature, art, and film.

⁹⁴ This is also true of citizens of the United States, who are not allowed to travel to Cuba to experience the culture. There are exceptions to this, however, with special visas and circumstances.

SMB: Salir hacia Europa siempre ha sido un estímulo intelectual para los escritores latinoamericanos. ¿Cómo ha cambiado su vida desde su salida de Cuba?

ZV: Bueno, ha cambiado mucho. Yo no escogí Europa, pero sí es cierto que yo conocía a muchas personas en Francia por mi anterior estancia en Francia por los años '80. Era el único lugar donde yo podía, de alguna manera, llegar y sentirme ayudada y apoyada. De hecho, hay que saber que para salir de Cuba hay que tener una autorización del gobierno cubano, una carta de invitación de alguien de afuera que te invita, y que se compromete a apoyarte fuera del país y a devolvarte al país. Esa carta yo la conseguí por la Escuela Normal Superior. Yo vine a dar una conferencia sobre José Martí. Gracias a Carmen Val Julián, que era mi traductora, ya yo había publicado una novela en Francia, mi primera novela, con mucho trabajo.

Europa para mí significa una gran cultura, el peso de los siglos, el peso de esta cultura que es un peso fuerte e impresionante. Me ha permitido viajar a Italia, a Alemania, a conocer a escritores, y leer de una manera libremente todo lo que se ha escrito en este continente. Este continente es una gran cultura y una gran fuerza. Y de aquí salió prácticamente todo el mundo para América. Aquí fue el origen de muchas culturas, el origen de lo que es la cultura americana hoy, en una manera.

SMB: He leído que usted admira mucho a los escritores cubanos Guillermo Cabrera Infante y a José Lezama Lima, que constituyen parte de su formación literaria. ¿Cuáles son sus otras influencias literarias?

ZV: Cuando yo leí a Guillermo Cabrera Infante, que yo lo leí tarde porque no era fácil encontrar sus libros en Cuba, me produjo una enorme ternura y un gran sentimiento de amor y de cariño de alguien que yo hubiera podido querer como mi padre. Yo no había encontrado todavía mi estilo,

mi manera de escribir. Y cuando yo leí a Guillermo, yo me di cuenta que yo, de alguna manera, había empezado a escribir como Guillermo, sin haber leído a Guillermo. Por una razón muy sencilla, porque soy habanera, y porque Guillermo escribe *La Habana* y describe La Habana. Entonces encontré con Guillermo, yo creo, un compadre literario.

Con José Lezama Lima, fue diferente. Fue una época en que yo era muy joven y leía mucha poesía. La poesía de Lezama me fascinó, me encandiló. Es una poesía de una gran cultura, pero al mismo tiempo de una gran humanidad y de un gran sentimiento por el lenguaje popular mezclado con el lenguaje culto. Yo creo que Lezama es Góngora, pero es también Quevedo. Y Lezama fue un descubrimiento a una parte de la cultura de mi país que se me había escondido. Gracias a Lezama yo conocí a Cintio Vitier y Fina García Marruz, que fueron en una época personas que me ayudaron mucho y escribieron sobre mi obra. Yo más recuerdo que les entregué mis poemas a Fina García Marruz y a Cintio Vitier, dos escritores del grupo *Orígenes*, y Fina me hizo cartas que conservo. Pero también Dulce María Loynaz, a la que conocí y fui a su casa. Conservo cartas de ella, que yo las publiqué en *Los misterios de La Habana*.⁹⁵ Fue una mujer que me dio mucho, sobre todo, desde un punto de vista novelístico, a pesar de que ella era una gran poeta. Su novela, *El jardín*, para mí es una novela muy poco estudiada, muy poco conocida. Es, como ella misma puso, una novela lírica, novela donde la prosa poética tiene una importancia enorme.⁹⁶ Pero realmente con quien yo me siento más identificada es con Guillermo Cabrera Infante.

SMB: Supongo que conoce a autores y autoras de varias partes del mundo. ¿Mantiene relaciones con estos escritores? ¿Quiénes en particular?

⁹⁵ This novel was published in 2004 by Planeta.

⁹⁶ Madelyn L. Alvariño wrote an important dissertation in 1999 comparing these two authors entitled “Voces de alienación y de(l) exilio en la narrativa femenina cubana: Dulce María Loynaz y Zoé Valdés.”

ZV: Mantengo relaciones con escritores cubanos, Juan Abreu, que vive en Barcelona e Isis Wirth, que vive en Munich, Alemania. También, escritores de Madrid. De París, desde luego, los escritores franceses que conozco, como Virginie Despentes. Pero tengo, sobre todo, amigos de todas partes, no tienen que ser solo escritores. Tengo muchos amigos que se dedican a la literatura, a la música, y al cine. Unos son Germán Puig y Pepe Triana, que vive aquí en París, que fuimos amigos, y que los seguimos siendo pero ahora hace tiempo que no nos vemos porque él estuvo enfermo. Pero personas a las que yo respeto y quiero mucho.

El cuerpo y el feminismo:

SMB: En la literatura cubana contemporánea, parece que las voces de escritoras se escuchan más, por medio de las perspectivas y las reacciones de sus personajes principales que son mujeres. En casi todas sus novelas, las mujeres son las protagonistas. He leído que ud. está muy enfocada en la cuestión de la mujer. ¿Se podría llamar a esto una obsesión y cuándo empezó?

ZV: Bueno, una obsesión desde niña. Te voy a decir por qué. Porque yo viví con tres mujeres: mi abuela, mi madre, y mi tía. Muy temprano tuve que asumir el rol del hombre de la casa porque esas mujeres eran mujeres magníficas que trabajaban, pero eran mujeres enloquecidas que no tenían ningún sentido de cómo había que llevar la vida. Porque en sociedades como éstas, muy a pesar de nosotras mismas y muy a pesar de lo que queramos, como mujeres, de alguna manera el orden está ejemplificado y representado por el hombre.⁹⁷ Entonces eso fue lo que sucedió. Después, me di cuenta que en realidad eran mujeres muy ordenadas, eran mujeres muy locas, también, pero al mismo tiempo, tenían un cosmos muy a ellas, que les pertenecía, que era muy particular. Y eso fue lo que hizo que a mí me haya obligado toda esa vida, toda esa

⁹⁷ This is one of the critiques dealing with contemporary Cuban society that I discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation.

situación, a refugiarme en la literatura, empezar a escribir, sobre todo eso, sobre todo lo que me ocurría diario a través justamente de un diario.

Yo no puedo mentir y decir que yo pertenezco al movimiento feminista. Yo no pertenezco a ningún movimiento feminista. Pero yo soy feminista porque yo soy mujer. No creo que haya una literatura feminista y una literatura masculina. Yo creo que hay una sensibilidad femenina y una sensibilidad masculina. Lo que no impidió que Marguerite Yourcenar escribiera *Memorias de Adriano* y que Gustave Flaubert escribiera *Madame Bovary*. En ese sentido yo pienso que lo principal es la libertad de la creación. Ahora, hay esa sensibilidad femenina que creo que las mujeres tenemos, la que yo defiendo. Y hay una necesidad absoluta mía de defender a las mujeres por una razón muy sencilla: porque soy una mujer y porque yo he sufrido en carne propia. Sé que tú llegas a un lugar y eres una escritora con diez libros publicados. Y aparece un hombre con dos libros publicados y le dan más importancia a ese hombre. Y eso lo he vivido yo en carne propia.

SMB: Para continuar con la pregunta previa, ¿Cómo ha evolucionado este enfoque durante los últimos años?

ZV: Yo no diría que haya evolucionado mucho. Hay gente que es muy optimista. Las mujeres siguen ganando lo mismo, menos que los hombres. Las mujeres en política todavía se les ven como trepadoras, como gente que quiere escalar. Cuando un hombre quiere ser político, no le dicen que quiere escalar ni que quiere trepar. Sin embargo, cuando una mujer quiere ser política, en seguida la ven como una alimaña.

Hay otra cosa que me perturba mucho, que es el nivel de desprecio que hay por el pensamiento y por el cuerpo femenino. Y los pongo al mismo nivel porque yo creo que el pensamiento y el cuerpo femenino tienen una relación muy importante, mucho más de lo que

pensamos. El hombre, sin embargo, tiene una independencia entre su pensamiento y su cuerpo y la mujer, no. La mujer tiene una gran relación muy, muy unida, muy junta, entre su cuerpo, su desnudez, sus enfermedades, y el pensamiento. Y eso es lo que me interesa a mí desde el punto de vista literario. Entonces esa percepción de que el cuerpo y el pensamiento de la mujer agreden me perturba mucho y no estoy de acuerdo y lucho justamente para que ese tipo de estupidez no se imponga en el mundo. Porque yo creo que si seguimos por allí, vamos a ir al gran desastre, a la gran estupidez. Hay que sentir más el cuerpo, tener mucho más amor, y muchas más ganas por el cuerpo. Hay que respetar el pensamiento de la mujer y respetar las reflexiones de la mujer. Hay cosas que la mujer no ha dicho y que puede aportar de experimento amoroso de discurso, amoroso para decirlo como lo hubiera dicho Roland Barthes: el discurso amoroso de la mujer todavía no ha sido escuchado y no ha sido valorado cómo se merece.

SMB: Emplea varias imágenes de los cuerpos cubanos en sus novelas, especialmente los de las mujeres. ¿Qué mensaje quiere desarrollar con estas imágenes en la literatura?

ZV: Justamente que el cuerpo de la mujer dice muchas cosas, que el cuerpo de la mujer va muy ligado a su pensamiento. Que por el cuerpo sentimos mucho las mujeres y a través del cuerpo nuestro pensamiento desarrolla, reflexiona, y expresa muchas de las cosas que el mundo necesita oír: de dolor, de angustia, de amor, de ternura, de pasión, y de inteligencia.

SMB: En su obra, hay muchos detalles sobre los actos sexuales y el cuerpo. Algunos críticos devalúan esta aproximación por considerarla escatológica y hasta pornográfica. ¿Por qué le interesan tanto las descripciones corporales y los actos sexuales? ¿Cuál sería su reacción a esta crítica?

ZV: La única persona que lo ha dicho es el Ministro de Cultura, Abel Prieto, de la dictadura cubana. Y después muchos cubanos, profesores de universidades, se han hecho eco de eso porque son castristas.⁹⁸ Entonces de las críticas que yo tengo de *El País*, *El Mundo*, *Le Monde*, *el New York Times*, *el Washington Post*, de las críticas de peso importante, ningún crítico ha dicho que yo soy escatológica y pornográfica. *J'aime de la vie*, como dicen los franceses. Ésas son bolas que echan a andar la dictadura castrista. Como dijeron que Reinaldo Arenas era un homosexual con mucho odio, que escribía bien, pero que tenía mucho odio arriba. Por eso ahora dicen que soy pornográfica y escatológica.

El Centro Georges Pompidou, el Beaubourg, que es uno de los centros de arte más importantes del mundo, en París, ha dictado que tal como se estrenan los años del pop en los '70, los '80 son los años del "revival," y los '90 son los años pornográficos. Y ha dicho que la pornografía adulta es un género artístico y literario. Yo nunca he escrito pornografía. Yo he escrito novelas eróticas, novelas donde hay historias de amor. Yo escribí un solo poema que se llama "Pornográfico mío." Y el poema tiene un lenguaje bastante convencional.⁹⁹

Sin embargo, a mí me gusta mucho la desnudez del cuerpo. A mí me gusta mucho decir cosas que dicen las mujeres a través del sexo en mis novelas. Me gusta sobremanera tener una relación sincera con el cuerpo. Yo no le tengo miedo al cuerpo. Me gusta que donde se dé haya tetas, haya tetas, que donde haya sexo, haya sexo, que donde haya nalgas, haya nalgas. Y que donde haya culo, haya culo. Y que esas palabras son muy bellas, literariamente.

Entonces, nadie dice que Charles Bukowski era pornográfico. Sin embargo, cuando sale comentando que Charles Bukowski le mete una patada a su mujer, para mí eso sí es pornografía.

⁹⁸ Catherine Davies remarks, "Zoé Valdés . . . has made a reputation for herself by criticizing the Cuban government and writing novels that some would call erotic and others pornographic" (223-224).

⁹⁹ To read "Pornográfico mío," see Valdés' book of poetry entitled *Toda para una sombra*. Barcelona: Taifa, 1986. The poem is found on pp. 45-46.

Cuando en medio de una entrevista, Charles Bukowski le mete una patada a su mujer, eso para mí es pornografía.

SMB: Hay varias definiciones salientes del feminismo que se usan y se debaten con frecuencia en el mundo académico. Se piensa por ejemplo que hay un feminismo norteamericano y otro latinoamericano. ¿Cómo define usted el feminismo? ¿Se identifica como feminista?

ZV: Yo soy una feminista no militante porque yo no milito en ninguna organización feminista. Pero yo soy feminista. Yo lo siento. Yo no puedo ser de otra manera. Yo soy mujer. Yo no puedo defender otra cosa que no sea lo que yo soy. Y yo he conocido a muchas mujeres que han sufrido mucho. Yo tengo una amiga que murió a manos de su compañero, una mujer muy conocida, Marie Trintignant, la actriz, hija de Nadine Trintignant y de Jean-Louis Trintignant, el gran actor del cine francés. Ella misma era una gran actriz. Murió a manos de su pareja, el cantante de rock, Bertrand Cantat. La mató a golpes.¹⁰⁰ Yo, nada más que por eso, soy feminista. Yo no me siento una feminista latinoamericana. Yo me siento una feminista cubana. Yo no soy como una mexicana. Yo no soy como una venezolana. Yo no soy como una brasileña. Yo soy cubana.

La literatura:

SMB: Ahora me gustaría hablar de la literatura y novelas específicas. En algunas de ellas, por ejemplo en *Te di la vida entera* y *El pie de mi padre*, hay un enfoque muy destacable en las relaciones de las madres y sus hijas. ¿Sería esto un reflejo de su propia relación con su madre? ¿Cómo influye en su escritura?

¹⁰⁰ Cantat was sentenced to eight years in prison, but was released in 2007 after serving four years, due to good behavior.

ZV: La relación con mi madre fue muy difícil. Mi madre era una persona muy difícil. Era una mujer muy tierna, muy cariñosa, pero sufrió mucho la separación con mi padre. Encontró a otro hombre en su camino que fue, a mi juicio, un mal hombre, que la metió en el alcoholismo. Eso a mí me perturbó mucho. Ella lo sabía. Yo se lo dije muchas veces de niña. Me tiraba y me arrodillaba en el piso, y le decía, “Deja de beber, por favor. Porque te vas a morir y me voy a quedar sola.” Eso a mí, me perturbó mucho, pero eso no quiere decir que yo no haya querido hondamente a mi madre. Mi madre murió aquí en París conmigo, de una cirrosis hepática, un cáncer del hígado. Y murió feliz aquí en París y está aquí en *Père Lachaise*, enterrada. Y fue hasta el final, su mano, mi mano. Pero fue una relación muy difícil.

Las relaciones entre madres e hijas son relaciones muy complejas. Uno tiene que tener una grandeza de una amplitud de espíritu para poder entender que hay una rebeldía en un cierto momento de la vida. Y que uno tiene que dejar de ser la hija para empezar a ser la madre. Entonces eso fue quizás lo que ella no entendió y siguió siendo bastante, de alguna manera, irresponsable. Pero yo siempre digo que mi madre, por ejemplo, llegaba borracha, pero llegaba con comida para que yo comiera. Y se preocupaba donde yo estaba y que yo estudiara. Y que yo tuviera un techo. Yo pienso que me quería. Me quería mucho. Era una mujer infeliz. Eso fue lo que ocurrió, pero yo quise mucho a mi madre y creo que ella me quiso mucho a mí, también.

SMB: Hemos hablado un poco de la violencia. La violencia en contra de la mujer es un tema muy importante y presente en Latinoamérica. Se notan algunos ejemplos de la violencia física y de la violencia psicológica en sus obras literarias. Cuca Martínez en *Te di la vida entera* sufre la tortura física, junto con Juan Pérez, su amor, y también la violencia psicológica. ¿Cree que esta violencia se está mejorando o empeorando en Latinoamérica, o más específicamente en el Caribe?

ZV: Yo creo que no ha mejorado la situación, que ha empeorado. Yo creo que, desgraciadamente, vivimos en un mundo muy violento. Las mujeres somos las víctimas y los niños. Cuando los niños lo viven directamente, cuando ven que un hombre pega a su madre, eso es fatal, terrible. Pero igualmente el hombre puede pasar de pegarle a la madre o a la mujer y de pegarles a ellos. Eso me preocupa mucho. Me da mucho dolor.

A mí, me gustaría mucho que esto llegara, por ejemplo, a temas de la UNO, a temas de la UNESCO, a temas de los organismos internacionales que se tienen que preocupar por esto. No sólo que sea tema de la mujer, que sea tema del mundo. Es una guerra sorda que la mujer está librando cada día ella sola. Un hombre mata a una mujer y a los cuatro años, ya está en la calle. Pasa cuatro años de cárcel y ya está en la calle. No es posible.

SMB: Entonces, habla de la justicia.

ZV: La justicia tiene que ser más dura, más firme con esta situación. Estas situaciones no son inconcebibles. Hay verdaderas masacres. Es impresionante, porque además como decía, hay una guerra sorda. No hay quien nos escuche. Hay asociaciones y organizaciones, pero se queda en la cosa estrictamente feminista, estrictamente de mujeres. Yo creo que los hombres, que también están en contra de esto, que son muchos, gracias a Dios la gran mayoría, tendrían que apoyar a las mujeres.

SMB: Me gusta mucho la novela titulada *Café Nostalgia*, que fue publicada en 1997. Me llaman la atención la memoria y la nostalgia por Cuba presentadas por las voces de los personajes exiliados en varias partes del mundo, más notablemente Marcela. Parece que la isla que dejaron es una constante en sus pensamientos y las conversaciones entre los amigos cubanos. ¿Nos puede decir qué papel tienen la memoria y la nostalgia en la vida diaria de los cubanos?

ZV: Yo creo que es un papel fundamental. Yo creo que los cubanos han vivido, durante todos estos años, tratando de mantener viva su cultura en el exilio. La prueba es Miami, pero la prueba también la tenemos aquí. Recuerdo la primera vez que entré en la casa de Guillermo Cabrera Infante en Londres.¹⁰¹ Era una casa por dentro absolutamente cubana. Todo lo que pasaba allí era como si estuvieras en una casa de la Habana. Yo creo que la memoria ha permitido recuperar lo mejor de esa cultura, conservar lo mejor de nuestra cultura, musical, literaria, pictóricamente. Y al mismo tiempo poner, como diría Martí, a un lado el dolor, pero no olvidar el dolor. No olvidarlo porque nuestro sufrimiento no ha sido reconocido. No ha sucedido, por ejemplo, como el exilio chileno o el exilio argentino. Que el dolor de ellos, de haber vivido esas dos dictaduras militares, se les reconoció el momento. Pero al exilio cubano, no se les ha reconocido el dolor. De alguna manera, siempre se ve a Fidel Castro como un héroe, como alguien que se enfrenta a los americanos, al imperialismo yanqui. Como una figura resplandeciente, mientras que al pueblo cubano se le denigra. Y cuando eres un exiliado cubano, eres lo peor del mundo.¹⁰² Entonces, eso ha permitido que uno se enfrente de manera grande, activa, y culturalmente a todo esto. Y que uno trate siempre de ser el cubano en todos los sentidos: en el sentido bueno, en el sentido bondadoso, en el sentido generoso, pero también en el sentido agresivo. Y que uno trate siempre de decir que uno no es tan malo como nos pintan. Que uno tiene unas cualidades de las que son verdad, que son ciertas. Nuestro dolor es cierto. Y nuestro exilio es verdadero. Ha durado ya 50 años y dura todavía.¹⁰³ En esa lucha, hemos permanecido todos estos años.

Yo lo he visto en el exiliado de mi padre. Por ejemplo, mi padre se mantuvo durante 30 años en el exilio. Murió en New Jersey. Todas las mañanas mi padre se levantaba a las seis de la mañana a trabajar y ponía el radio para ver qué noticias había de Cuba, y qué decían de Cuba.

¹⁰¹ Cabrera Infante went into exile in London in 1965; he passed away in 2005.

¹⁰² These comments are historically-based: The CIA and right-wing groups in Miami supported the exiles, while at the same time trying to sabotage the Cuban revolution.

¹⁰³ Valdés' permanent physical exile has lasted 14 years, since 1995. However, it seems that her emotional exile started long before her final departure from Cuba.

Tenía, también, una especie de orgullo, de ser cubano. Cuando alguien hablaba de Cuba, pues hablaba de Celia Cruz. Cuando le comentabas que tú eras cubano, te decía, “Conocerás a Celia Cruz, conocerás a tal película, tal pintor, a Wilfredo Lam. Conocerás a Guillermo Cabrera Infante, a Severo Sarduy,” por ejemplo. Entonces era algo que a él lo mantenía con mucho orgullo, igual como mi madre. Mi madre, cuando salió de Cuba, tenía esa ansiedad de seguir con la memoria activa viva, de no olvidarse de nada de su país, de ningún detalle, de ningún lugar, de ningún rincón. Y al mismo tiempo de construir a partir de esa memoria algo nuevo.

SMB: Para seguir con *Café Nostalgia*, vemos que Marcela se casa con un francés mayor para poder salir de Cuba, sin problemas del gobierno. He leído que esta situación representa un fenómeno cada vez más popular y presente en la isla, tanto como el “jineterismo.” Algunos opinan que en el fondo es una opción por la libertad y otros que es una manifestación de prostitución tolerada por el gobierno. En todos los casos afecta la imagen de la mujer en una sociedad económicamente deprimida como la cubana. ¿Cómo manejan las mujeres cubanas el tan debatido fenómeno del “jineterismo?” ¿Cuál es su opinión?

ZV: Por eso, yo escogí a una profesional, a una fotógrafa. Una mujer inteligente y brillante. Marcela es un puro producto del castrismo. Es una mujer que no ha querido estar anclada en la isla. Por eso se llama Marcela porque está entre el mar y el cielo. No está anclada, no está fijada en la isla. Está volando siempre. Es una mujer valiente e intelectual, pero al mismo tiempo necesita vivir, necesita comer. Quiere escaparse de Cuba. No es una prostitución como la que se ejerce en las calles de Brasil, Colombia, Estados Unidos, o en París. Es una forma de vivir, que yo no condeno. Es una forma denigrante para la mujer, pero hay mujeres que tienen que vivir de eso. No puedo condenar porque no puedo condenar al ser humano.

Ahora, esta prostitución en Cuba es una prostitución que a veces es tolerada por el gobierno, porque saben que atrae turistas. Pero a veces también ha provocado que haya recogidas de prostitutas. Las meten en granjas a trabajar y les rapan la cabeza. Ha habido una gran represión contra la prostitución en Cuba. Eso hay que saberlo. Cuando al gobierno cubano castrista le conviene, las acepta. Y cuando no, las denigra, las mete en prisión, y las mantiene en campos de concentración porque las granjas son campos de concentración, donde les rapan la cabeza a las mujeres, y las maltratan físicamente. Las ningunean y les trabajan tanto. La tortura psíquica es tan grande que moralmente las dejan devastadas.¹⁰⁴ Yo creo que estas mujeres, de alguna manera, no quisieran hacerlo. Yo no creo que ninguna mujer quiera prostituirse. Pero en algún momento no hay otra opción para ellas. En el caso de Cuba hay médicos, científicas, maestras, y no sólo mujeres, hombres, también. Pintoras, escritoras, gente que se tiene que prostituir para poder vivir. Eso es el producto de la revolución cubana. Es el responsable Fidel Castro. 50 años en el poder, una dictadura que él llama “revolución.” Ésa es la situación y no hay otra.

SMB: Su libro más reciente, *La cazadora de astros*, salió en 2007. ¿En qué está trabajando ahora?

ZV: *La cazadora de astros* es una novela sobre Remedios Varo, que me permitió meterme en su piel. Pero meterme en mi propia historia. Fue mucho más difícil escribir de mí que de Remedios Varo. A través de ella pude contar muchas cosas que me sucedieron a mí. Es una novela intimista, de percepciones, y de la sensibilidad de la mujer artista que me interesa mucho. Es de

¹⁰⁴ We saw in Chapter Four of this dissertation that there were prisons and rehabilitation centers for these women sponsored by the Cuban government.

cómo ven el mundo, de cómo crean un cosmos muy particular, muy individual, muy esencial para la comprensión de lo que nos rodea hoy, de todo lo que estamos viviendo.

Estoy trabajando en otra novela sobre otra mujer. Yo quiero hacer una trilogía de tres mujeres. Es sobre una fotógrafa, otra vez, pero una fotógrafa de los años 30, 40. Estoy trabajando en una novela, también, sobre Cuba, sobre un personaje muy controversial, que es el personaje de Fulgencio Batista. Es sobre ese período del que tanto nos han mentido. Porque Fulgencio Batista tuvo errores, pero tuvo, también, aciertos muy grandes. Fulgencio Batista hizo hospitales y creó escuelas. Era un hombre que tenía defectos y virtudes como cualquier ser humano. Entonces a través de mi prisma, de mi óptica yo voy a hacer esa novela. Ya después los que no estén de acuerdo, que escriban la suya. Yo escribiré la mía.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ These statements about Batista are very controversial, due to the fact that almost all accounts of him are negative. Most of Latin America despised him during his reign. Valdés shares these political opinions of Batista with other dissident groups in Miami who are against Fidel Castro. Some critics would say that Valdés is in denial of Batista's actions and that these statements are very arrogant as well as untruthful.

The Interview with Mayra Montero

I contacted Mayra Montero to interview her about her personal life, her identity, and her literature. I went to San Juan, Puerto Rico to conduct the interview on August 13th, 2008 in her home. What follows is this original interview in Spanish, with Montero's unique points of view.

Sarah Miller Boelts: Primero, voy a comenzar con su vida personal y sus influencias. Usted salió de Cuba como adolescente en 1970 y ha vivido en Puerto Rico por varios años. ¿Cuáles fueron las razones específicas por la salida de su familia?

Mayra Montero: Bueno, hubo una combinación de razones o de factores. En primer lugar, mi papá era guionista. Era escritor de radio y televisión. Era humorista. Hacía humor y programas de comedia. Y eran años muy duros en aquel entonces, en términos de la censura. Empezó a tener problemas con los chistes que hacía, con los guiones que escribía. Tuvo muchos problemas y se quedó sin trabajo porque no podía escribir y vivíamos de eso.

El otro factor es que una hermana de mi mamá, que era muy apegada a mi mamá, vino para aquí, para Puerto Rico, con el marido. El marido tenía familia aquí en Puerto Rico y vinieron para acá. Entonces, mi tía empezó a insistir que viniéramos, también. Mis padres ya no estaban contentos allá y en segundo lugar, mi tía estaba aquí y decidimos venir a Puerto Rico.

SMB: Ha confirmado que el exilio no afecta a su escritura. Pero, ¿el exilio le afecta a usted en su vida diaria?

MM: No lo diría en esos términos. Quizás diría que no vivo obsesionada con los temas del exilio. A mí, personalmente, fue muy duro para una muchacha de 18 años dejar el país donde vivía, la casa, las amistades, el novio, y el perro. Es un desarraigo muy terrible. Yo estuve muy deprimida, llorando mucho, todos esos primeros meses. No me adaptaba. Era muy difícil para mí. Creo que para todo el mundo lo era. Yo era una muchacha y me iba en un momento u otro. Tú sabes que los jóvenes nos adaptamos. Encontramos otro novio. Encontramos otros amigos. Pero hubo gente que salió con 40 o 50 años, al final de su vida, para empezar una nueva vida fuera, como mis padres, por ejemplo. Eso ya era un poco más duro. Sí, influyó muchísimo; fue un cambio, un desarraigo muy grande.

Además, como le comentaba a un amigo el domingo pasado precisamente, ahora la gente se va de Cuba. Sale un artista, sale un pintor, sale un ingeniero y sabe que en uno o dos años va a estar regresando de visita. No existe eso que existía antes, que te iba y te estigmatizaban. Te ponían un letrero encima de *exiliado*, de *gusano*, o lo que sea. No podías volver. En mi época, uno se iba para siempre. Esa es la diferencia. Ahora la gente se va, y aunque se vaya, por haber tenido muchísimos problemas, sabe que la situación es tan cambiante, que los líderes revolucionarios ya son unos viejitos, que se pueden morir en cualquier momento. Fidel es un viejito que se puede morir mañana o pasado mañana. Cuando yo salí, no era eso. Cuando yo salí, era otra situación. Te ibas y era una cosa muy definitiva y ya no ibas a volver. Eso fue muy duro.

SMB: Usted ha dicho que es una escritora cubano-puertorriqueña. ¿Cómo influye en su perspectiva del Caribe?

MM: Yo creo que no influye ni deja de influir. Mi tono, o mi manera de asumir la luz, es una perspectiva caribeña porque nací en el Caribe y me crié en el Caribe. Luego, cuando salí del Caribe, donde había nacido, me fui a otra isla del Caribe. Nunca he salido de aquí. Es como si un escritor africano de Nigeria va para Ghana o para Benin. Siempre ha estado allí, moviéndose en África. Eso es un poco mi situación.

SMB: Es obvio que ha hecho muchas investigaciones sobre la historia social de Cuba. Explique su interés notable en el pasado de Cuba, antes de la Revolución Cubana de 1959.

MM: Estuve investigando cuando investigué para *Son de Almendra*, por ejemplo. Y también para *Como un mensajero tuyo*. Para *Son de Almendra*, investigué lo que era la mafia en Cuba, la presencia de la mafia de origen judío y de origen italiano en Cuba. Para *Como un mensajero*, que es también dada en los años 20, del pasado siglo, un poco investigué lo que investiga todo el mundo, para darle verosimilitud a una novela.

No es que yo haga estudio sociológico, ni nada de eso. Lo que sí he investigado mucho es la cuestión religiosa: la santería en Cuba y el vudú en Haití.¹⁰⁶ He trabajado bastante con eso y he leído mucho. Del trasfondo social cubano, una cosa que yo sé, porque mis padres eran de esa época, de los años 50, de los años 40, es una cosa que yo un poco viví, o por mis padres o a través mío. No es una cosa que yo haya dicho, “Voy a investigar la sociedad cubana.” Realmente no he hecho eso.

¹⁰⁶ Montero focuses on Cuban Santería in *Como un mensajero tuyo* and Haitian Voodoo in *Del rojo de su sombra* (1996).

SMB: Sé que los escritores puertorriqueños Luís Rafael Sánchez, Rosario Ferré, y Ana Lydia Vega son sus amigos y tiene mucho contacto con ellos. Pero en cuanto a su estilo de escribir y sus novelas, ¿cuáles son sus influencias literarias?

MM: Cuando era jovencita, yo leí mucho a Alejo Carpentier. Pero he leído siempre, también, mucha poesía. La poesía me influye mucho cuando estoy trabajando. También, Julio Cortázar y todos los cuentistas del Boom latinoamericano me influyen.

A veces cuando se habla de influencias literarias, uno se olvida que a lo mejor son tan importantes las influencias de otro tipo, como las influencias cinematográficas o las influencias musicales. Yo creo que en esa época, en los años 60, en Cuba, vimos muchas películas francesas y muchas películas europeas en general porque había un bloqueo desde Cuba hacia Estados Unidos y no veíamos películas americanas. Había muy pocas. Tenían que ser películas de interés social. Lo que veía era mucho cine europeo de todo tipo: musical, policiaco. Eso influyó mucho en mí. Un cantante, como Silvio Rodríguez, por ejemplo, influyó muchísimo en mi manera de ver las cosas, de decir las cosas. Yo creo que ese tipo de discurso que había en sus canciones va nutriendo un escrito. Sobre todo, en aquella época en Cuba, que éramos adolescentes, éramos niños.

El cuerpo y el feminismo:

SMB: Ud. describe detalladamente los cuerpos de las mujeres cubanas y puertorriqueñas en sus novelas. ¿Cuál es el propósito de estos cuerpos en la literatura?

MM: Las protagonistas de mis novelas son haitianas, cubanas, y puertorriqueñas. Al escribir a estos personajes, los describo como yo los veo en mi cabeza. No porque tenga un propósito así de describir los cuerpos de estas mujeres. No son muy diferentes. Se sabe que la cubana es la

cubana típica, muy voluptuosa, con muchos fondillos. La puertorriqueña es un poco, también, tanto como la caribeña en general.

Pero a veces yo juego un poco con lo que son los estereotipos. Por ejemplo, en *La última noche que pasé contigo*, yo juego mucho con el estereotipo del negro caribeño. Me burlo de eso, de los estereotipos de que tiene un gran órgano sexual, que es muy fogoso, que es muy buen amante. Yo juego con esa creencia que hay del negro caribeño. Lo hago a propósito. Y, seguramente, con las mujeres, hago como una parodia.

SMB: Me parece que los cuerpos de las mujeres en sus obras son sitios para el dolor, la felicidad, y las memorias. ¿Qué tipos de memorias existen en estos cuerpos en la vida cotidiana en el Caribe?

MM: Yo creo que los cuerpos de las mujeres y de los hombres son sitios para el dolor, para la felicidad, y para todo lo que tú dijiste. No sólo en el Caribe, sino en todas partes del mundo. Yo creo que es una memoria vinculada, sobretodo, a los rigores del clima, por ejemplo. Aquí la gente anda muy despechugada porque hace mucho calor todo el tiempo. Lo mismo en Cuba que aquí y en la República Dominicana.

Mi marido es español. A él, le llama la atención y a veces le molesta que la gente en Cuba y aquí los hombres muchas veces están sin camisa. Van sin camisa porque tienen mucho calor. Eso es verdad. Él me dice, “Todos sin camisa. Míralos. Están sin camisa.” Yo creo que son cuerpos que tienen la memoria, incluso, de la esclavitud. Por eso, andan así despechugados de la memoria de los años esclavos. Es verdad que vamos revelando la memoria de los antepasados. Tenemos la memoria de los esclavos que andaban apenas con un taparrabo porque había mucho calor. Es una memoria condicionada a eso. También, es la cuestión de la sensualidad. Sus cuerpos están marcados, más que en otros lugares, por la sensualidad,

precisamente por todo ese calor.¹⁰⁷

SMB: Hay varias definiciones salientes del feminismo y de la literatura de mujeres que se usan y se debaten con frecuencia en el mundo académico. Se piensa por ejemplo que hay un feminismo norteamericano y otro latinoamericano. ¿Existen diferencias sustanciales entre ambos? ¿Cómo define el feminismo? ¿Se identifica como feminista?

MM: Yo creo que en la medida en que yo tiendo a reivindicar alguna lucha, alguna conquista de las mujeres, pues podrías decir que sí, soy feminista. Ya yo detesto que me inviten a congresos de mujeres o de literatura de mujeres. Yo abomino de todo que hace una distinción en la literatura entre mujeres y hombres. Porque pienso que es un modo de seguirnos marginando.

Yo no soy una especialista en feminismo. La verdad que no. Tengo amigas que sí, la son, que son de aquí, de Puerto Rico. Yo creo que eso está forzosamente condicionado por las luchas que se han dado en cada uno de esos países. En Estados Unidos han tenido que luchar en otras condiciones para mal o para bien. Ese feminismo está condicionado por estas luchas que ellas han llevado a cabo. Aquí el feminismo, igual que en España, se da en otras circunstancias, en otras trincheras. Se me ocurre que en Estados Unidos, en estos momentos, están lidiando menos que en Puerto Rico, o los países latinos, con lo que es la violencia machista.¹⁰⁸ Aquí estamos lidiando todo el tiempo con la violencia machista. Aunque allá hay hombres que agreden a las mujeres, en el contexto puramente americano, yo creo que ya existe una fase, más de otras luchas,

¹⁰⁷ Montero shows this sensuality through the protagonists in her novels, most notably in *Como un mensajero tuyo* with Aida Cheng and Enrico Caruso. Aida and Enrico are constantly sweating and battling the heat, which marks their bodies with sensuality. Aida explains, “Las toallas eran para secar a Enrico, que volvía a sudar como si todo en su interior se hiciera líquido, y ese líquido se apresurara en salir de su cuerpo” (*Como* 162).

¹⁰⁸ These statements show that this feminism is based on certain circumstances, with violence against women being the main one. Montero is united with other women in Latin America in their battle against this type of violence.

de esa violencia machista o la violencia de género, que no se refleja como aquí. Aquí, todavía, es terrible, igual que en España, por ejemplo. Nosotros venimos de esa educación española. En España, todos los días, matan a una mujer. Hemos heredado un poco eso.

La política y el racismo:

SMB: Para cambiar el tema, desde el triunfo de la Revolución Cubana de 1959, Cuba se declara un país multicultural. Se sabe que hay gente de varias razas viviendo allí hoy en día. El gobierno mantiene que el racismo ya no existe en la isla. ¿Qué opina de esta declaración? ¿Los otros exiliados cubanos estarían de acuerdo con usted?

MM: Yo creo que el racismo existe todavía. Creo que es un fuerte componente. Te puedo decir que es un fuerte componente de la idiosincrasia del cubano. Aun cuando digan que no existe, siempre hay un chiste y una manera de asumir las cosas que están ocurriendo, que tiene remanentes de racismo. Evidentemente, no es el racismo que existía hace 50 años. No es el racismo recalcitrante donde se les impedía a los negros entrar a ciertos lugares, a ciertos clubes. Pero, sí, hay racismo. Todavía, quedan remanentes del racismo.

Hubo racismo terrible, por ejemplo, con la comunidad china. Ya eso no se ve, porque apenas quedan chinos. Los pocos chinos que hay nacieron en Cuba. Son cubanos, pero cuando llegaban aquellas oleadas, eso marca el racismo, el chauvinismo. Se hacían muchos chistes a costo de los chinos. Fue una inmigración muy importante en Cuba, la de los chinos. Pero había mucho racismo. Mi abuela me preguntaba, "¿Qué quieres comer?" Entonces ella ripostaba, "Cualquier cosa es la mujer de un chino." O se decía, "Me engañaron como un chino." A veces, les decían a las mujeres cuando los hombres querían maltratarlas, "Busca un chino, que te ponga

un cuarto.”¹⁰⁹ Se supone que los chinos estaban allí para eso, para recoger a las mujeres que nadie quería.

Había mucho racismo, pero sobre todo, el racismo hacia la gente negra. Existía en comodidad de la población que duró hasta que yo estaba viviendo en Cuba. Duró muchos años después de la Revolución. En comodidad de la población cuando veían a una pareja multirracial, un blanco con una negra o lo que era peor para los cubanos, un negro con una blanca. Los miraban mal. Yo llegué a presenciar, en un autobús en La Habana, que se bajó de esa guagua un negro con una mujer rubia. Cuando se bajaron de la guagua un hombre les gritó algo asqueroso. Yo tenía como 12 o 13 años y ya la Revolución llevaba cinco o seis años. En Cuba era muy acentuado ese sentimiento. Ahora nadie se atrevería a decir eso. Ahora hay mucha más flexibilidad. Yo tengo una prima segunda que casó con un mulato, bastante oscuro. No hubo ningún comentario de la familia. Ha mejorado la actitud, pero ni siquiera porque es Cuba. Yo creo que en Estados Unidos es lo mismo. En Estados Unidos hace 30 o 40 años era muy difícil aceptar a una pareja multirracial. Ahora los ves y no hay ningún problema. El mundo, en general, ha ido evolucionando.

SMB: En junio, se dieron las elecciones, las primarias, en Puerto Rico entre Hillary Clinton y Barack Obama. Clinton ganó con 68 % de los votos, y 32% a favor de Obama. ¿Por qué hubo una brecha tan grande entre estos dos candidatos en la isla? ¿El racismo tuvo un rol en estas elecciones?

MM: No, no tuvo ningún rol el racismo. Lo que realmente fue importante es la politiquería local. Es importante quién logró mover. Votó poca gente, en realidad. No fue una votación masiva. Eran ciertos intereses internos, de la lucha partidista interna. Clinton hizo más campaña aquí en

¹⁰⁹ These types of comments still exist today in Latin America, coming from the mouths of citizens.

la isla. También, se organizaron mejor. Ella estaba más cerca de los puertorriqueños en Nueva York. Ella había venido aquí antes.

Yo creo que no tiene nada que ver con el racismo. Yo escribí una columna de una visita aquí que hizo Obama. Fue muy rápida, vino a buscar dinero, y no contestó preguntas. Se sospechaba que Puerto Rico no iba a ser muy importante en decidir el resultado en las primarias.¹¹⁰ A Puerto Rico, no le dan mucha importancia en eso. Después volvió y trató de arreglar, pero la primera visita cuando vino a buscar dinero fue muy desafortunada.

La literatura:

SMB: Ahora me gustaría hablar de novelas específicas. En *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Aida Petrirena Cheng es una mujer china y mulata. Me parece que a ud. le fascina la vida china en Cuba tanto como sus rituales. ¿De dónde emerge este interés?

MM: Los chinos más pobres llegaron a Cuba desde 1864. Venían casi en calidad de esclavos. Era gente muy pobre. Después, siguieron llegando los campesinos pobres de Cantón, de esos sitios. La Habana llegó a tener el barrio chino más grande, después que el de San Francisco, incluso más grande que el de Nueva York. Era un barrio chino con un periódico, bancos, y hospitales. Tenían su cementerio chino grande que todavía está en La Habana. Por lo mismo, que eran inmigrantes pobres al principio, después había una elite de comerciantes que estaban bien.

Venían solos; las mujeres chinas no venían a Cuba. Entonces, ellos tenían que casarse allí. Era muy difícil que una mujer blanca accediera a tener amores con un chino. Se dieron casos así, pero era difícil. Entonces, eran las negras, que estaban sufriendo la misma discriminación racial, quienes se juntaban con los chinos. De esa mezcla, de negras y chinos,

¹¹⁰ Puerto Rico had 55 delegates in the presidential primary race.

vinieron al mundo gente muy fea, como Wilfredo Lam, el pintor, que era feísimo, el pobre, hijo de un chino y una negra.¹¹¹ Un descendiente chino es Guillermo Cabrera Infante, cuyos antepasados eran chinos, chinos-mulatos. Lo mismo con Zoé Valdés. Ella tenía un bisabuelo o un abuelo chino.¹¹² En general, las negras se casaban con los chinos y en ese año que yo narro estaban naciendo esa primera camada, de descendientes de chino y de negra.¹¹³ Aida era una descendiente de esa mezcla. Se sentía cubana, aunque fue hija de chino. Creo que ella realmente desborda cubanidad. Ella y su identidad no tienen ningún problema.

Cuando viví en Cuba, vivía muy cerca del barrio chino. Estuve muy dispuesta. De niña, lo recuerdo todavía, cerca de mi casa existía la típica bodega regentada por un chino y la típica su amante mulata. Me influyó mucho la cultura china, la del origen. Yo creo que todos los escritores cubanos tienen eso en la cabeza. Están influenciados, porque éstos aparecen en las novelas de Zoé Valdés, en las novelas de Padura, y en las novelas de Guillermo Cabrera Infante.¹¹⁴

SMB: En la misma novela, *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Aida Cheng y su hija, Enriqueta, tienen una relación muy unida y cariñosa. Hay varias opiniones que se debaten en cuanto a la relación entre madres e hijas. ¿Qué piensa de estas relaciones?

MM: No he tenido una gran relación con mi mamá. La tengo con mi papá, pero no con mi mamá. Pero ella vive muy cerca y nos vemos constantemente. Hablamos por teléfono todos los días.

¹¹¹ It seems that Montero describes racism that is typical of certain Latin American cultures, instead of visceral or biological racism.

¹¹² Valdés narrates her Chinese grandfather's actual passage from China to Cuba in *La eternidad del instante*, published in 2004.

¹¹³ In *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Montero writes that Noro Cheng, Aida's father, "había tenido que conformarse con una mujer de piel oscura, que era a lo único a lo que podía aspirar en Cuba" (206).

¹¹⁴ Valdés includes Chinese characters in several of her novels; Cuca Martínez's father in *Te di la vida entera* is a Chinese cook who emigrated from Canton.

Pero no es la relación cómplice que yo hubiera querido tener con una madre. La relación de Aida y Enriqueta me parece una relación muy normal, de una madre soltera que cría a su hija. Esa hija está obsesionada por averiguar quién fue su papá. Me parece bastante saludable esta relación entre ellas dos.

SMB: En *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, se ve la trama por los ojos de un niño caribeño, Andrés Yasín. Este queda traumatizado a causa del suicidio de su madre, Estela. También, Santa, la trabajadora pobre, muere violada y abusada por dos hombres que nunca son castigados por sus crímenes. ¿Por qué se incluyen estos acontecimientos traumáticos?

MM: En *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, hay una relación enfermiza entre el niño y su mamá. El niño está enamorado de su mamá. Tiene un Edipo allí que no ha resuelto. Era muy niño cuando la madre muere; quizás es la etapa normal entre los niños que están enamorados de su mamá. Precisamente cuando la madre se suicida, él cree que el Capitán tiene una relación con la mujer, después de muerta. Eso lo trastorna toda la vida. Lo que debió haber superado, lo trastorna. También, tenía mucho miedo de que su madre lo abandonara, por el Capitán.

Con Santa, quise introducir ese elemento de violencia sexual y de violencia de las personas que estaban ocupando la isla, que era el ejército americano. Yo quise hacer una metáfora de lo que está pasando, que están cargando la isla y la están oprimiendo. Es una parte muy fuerte de la opresión y precisamente esa opresión sexual. Por otra parte, era casi inevitable cuando tienen una isla tan pequeña, llena de hombres jóvenes solos, soldados que están allí durante meses. Entonces salen al pueblo, los días que están libres, a beber. Ellos no son muchachos intelectuales; son muchachos del ejército. Se dio un caso de una muchacha violada y asesinada en aquellos años. Hubo muchas violaciones pero se callaron. Encontraban a una muchacha, la violaban, y la muchacha iba a la queja, a lo mejor ni se tomaban el trabajo de

denunciar la violación. En una isla ocupada de esa manera y en aquellos años, que eran los años 40 y 50, ¿a dónde vas a ir a denunciar?¹¹⁵

SMB: En la misma novela, *El Capitán de los Dormidos*, me llama la atención la personaje de Estela, la esposa y madre de la familia. Ella aguanta su vida con la familia, aunque está enamorada de Roberto, un amigo de la familia. Pero cuando él muere a balazos, ella no puede seguir viviendo y se suicida. ¿Quién o cuál fue la inspiración en el desarrollo de su personaje?

MM: El amigo mío que se crió en un hotelito en una playa, como un niño medio abandonado. La madre se lo abandonó a un tío. Entonces él siempre me hablaba mucho de lo que era crecer en un hotelito de playa, de lo que pasaba en verano, que se llenaban las habitaciones y él tenía que irse a dormir a otro sitio. Pero cuando era invierno él dormía en una de las habitaciones y pintaba las sillas de playa. Fue muy feliz allí. Entonces, dije “Yo quiero hacer una novela.”

Yo tengo un trabajo de por qué se escribió *El Capitán de los Dormidos*. Está escrito ese trabajo de por qué yo escribí esa novela y cuáles eran las influencias. Yo quería trabajar ese tema, quería trabajar la insurrección nacionalista del año 1950, que a mí me parecía muy interesante. También, la cuestión de este hombre que va y viene en el avión, llevando y trayendo muertos. Por eso, era el Capitán de los Dormidos. Había muchos temas que yo tenía en la cabeza que quería trabajar. Sobre todo, la insurrección nacionalista y el personaje de Roberto, un personaje real. Igual que el personaje del barbero. Yo tengo escrito otro trabajo sobre el barbero. Porque el barbero fue así mismo, todo lo que cuento, que se atrincheró en la barbería. El barbero es muy famoso aquí, entre los intelectuales. La gente de la calle no sabe nada de la insurrección del '50. Ahora tú te paras allí en medio de la avenida y preguntas, “¿Ud. sabe algo de la

¹¹⁵ Although rape is still a serious problem in Puerto Rico, presently there are harsher penalties for this crime there and crisis centers exist for rape victims on the island.

insurrección de octubre del año ‘50?’ Y nadie te va a decir. Todo el mundo te va a decir que no sabe nada. Es terrible lo que pasa aquí.

SMB: En su novela más reciente, *Son de Almendra*, Yolanda, la novia de Joaquín Porrata, es una figura única a quién le falta un brazo. La gente discapacitada no se ve mucho en la literatura contemporánea. Es obvio que la falta de este brazo siempre les afecta a todos los que la miran. ¿Qué quiere decir con la figura de Yolanda?

MM: Yo escribí una novela porque quería que casi todo el mundo es recordado por lo que tiene y no por lo que te falta. Yo quería tener un personaje que llamara la atención, que la gente lo recordara precisamente por lo que no tenía. En este caso, una mujer. Tienes razón; ella es muy voluptuosa, muy bella, pero le falta un brazo. De todas maneras, en ese ambiente, cabaretero, de *nightclubs*, y todo eso, tenía que ser una mujer guapa. En esos ambientes, las mujeres feas no tenían mucho futuro. Como cocinera o camarera, ni siquiera camarera en *nightclubs*, sino camareras o ayudantes de lavandera. Realmente buscaban la belleza.

Ella estaba en un circo y podía meterse en las cajas. Era una mujer con una belleza; la cubana típica, la mulata voluptuosa y joven. Una mulata joven, bonita, pero le faltaba el brazo. No sé en qué momento se me ocurrió cortarle el brazo a esta mujer. Era bueno que la recordaran por eso; es un punto de introspección, ese muñón. La gente la mira, ve el muñón. Hay un poco de fetichismo en eso. Creo que inspira un poco de fetichismo en los hombres.¹¹⁶

SMB: Para terminar, desde el 2005 hacia la actualidad, ¿en qué novelas o cuentos ha estado trabajando?

¹¹⁶ In *Son de Almendra*, Joaquín Porrata becomes fixated on Yolanda's lack of an arm, which I analyzed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

MM: Estoy trabajando en una novela que se llama *El milagro de la lana*. También, terminé una novelita de 80 páginas para adolescentes que está participando en un concurso aquí en octubre. El título provisional es *El viaje a la isla de Mona*. Tenía prisa por terminar la novelita adolescente porque hubo un buen premio. Claro a lo mejor lo gana otra persona, pero me interesaba participar. Si gano, la publican ellos. Si no gano, se la doy a otro editorial aquí para que me la publiquen. No gano tanto dinero, pero siempre se va a publicar. Es sobre un muchacho que va a la isla de Mona, que es una isla que está entre Puerto Rico y República Dominicana, pero pertenece a Puerto Rico, a rescatar a otro muchachito que lo han dejado allí, que viene de Santo Domingo. Es una isla en que hay que pedir permiso para entrar. A la que van cazadores porque hay cabras. Es una reserva natural y no permiten turistas ni nada. Hay gente que para allí en bote.

He estado trabajando mucho, haciendo mucho periodismo. Después de *Son de Almendra*, que salió en 2005, me hice una pausa para ganar un poco de dinero en el periódico. Me ofrecieron que fuera parte de la Junta Editorial del periódico *El nuevo día*. Me consume bastante el tiempo, pero tú sabes que no toda la literatura remite tanto dinero. Estando allí en el periódico tengo un ingreso fijo que me permite ahorrar para después ponerme a escribir. Escribo mucho para el periódico, también, en términos de una columna semanal, todos los domingos.

Escribo otras cosas. Hace un año, escribí una serie de entrevistas o largos ensayos con personajes o viajes que yo daba. Se tituló *Acido y Profundo*. Eran largos reportajes. Después estuve escribiendo unos artículos sobre las cronistas sociales en Puerto Rico, las viejas mujeres que hacían crónica social. El viernes sale un artículo mío, que no tiene que ver con la columna, sino con el editorial. Escribo para el editorial un par de veces a la semana. Es una entrevista que hice en un barrio aquí cerca. Eso es lo que he estado haciendo.

Analysis of the Interviews with Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero

The two previous interviews with Cuban writers Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero were similar in several ways, but different in others. In these interviews, it is evident that Valdés exudes much anger and frustration, while Montero clings to her Caribbean roots and wishes to draw attention to specific aspects of Cuban culture. Both interviews were intense and full of passion for the writers' respective areas of interest and criticism. Much of what they said confirmed my previous interpretations of their literature, while a few comments surprised me, as the perspectives were different than I had predicted. My analysis will begin with the strong similarities between the authors in the interviews and proceed to the major differences.

To begin with the similarities between Valdés and Montero, they both are engaged in the fight for women, which, they admit, make them feminists. Valdés says, "Pero yo soy feminista. Yo lo siento. Yo no puedo ser de otra manera. Yo soy mujer. Yo no puedo defender otra cosa que no sea lo que yo soy. Y yo he conocido a muchas mujeres que han sufrido mucho." Montero adds, "Yo creo que en la medida en que yo tiendo a reivindicar alguna lucha, alguna conquista de las mujeres, pues podrías decir que sí, soy feminista." Valdés and Montero seek to defend women in the real world, while showing that their literary characters fight, in distinct ways, to succeed and control their agency. Their agency is shown through the words, thoughts, and actions of the female characters in their respective novels.

Valdés and Montero agree that violence against women is a problem in the Caribbean and in Latin America as a whole. There are numerous violations of Human

Rights in that part of the world on a daily basis. Valdés opines, “Yo creo que, desgraciadamente, vivimos en un mundo muy violento. Las mujeres somos las víctimas y los niños.” Montero replies, “Aquí estamos lidiando todo el tiempo con la violencia machista.” *Machismo* permeates the culture, which causes much of this violence and trauma. They both agree that this is getting worse all the time, instead of improving. This issue is of utmost importance to them and they use their literature as a vehicle to bring to light, as well as to denounce, this violence. Valdés mentions the treatment of *jineteras* in Cuba, as the State sometimes puts them in special centers for rehabilitation. The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women noted her concern with these programs, stating that “the use of criminal procedure, such as imprisonment, forced labour in agriculture . . . violate their rights to due process of law” (United Nations, *Report 6*). However, the Cuban authorities have refuted this claim, saying that these women are not forced to work (UN, *Note verbale 15*).

Valdés and Montero believe that there has not always been justice for the women that are victims of violence and *machismo*. The perpetrators have not been punished for their crimes. It appears, through their words, that frequently women do not have recourse to denounce these violations. Valdés told me, “La justicia tiene que ser más dura, más firme con esta situación. Estas situaciones no son inconcebibles. Hay verdaderas masacres. Es impresionante, porque además como decía, hay una guerra sorda. No hay quien nos escuche.” Montero explains her impression of the past: “Se dio un caso de una muchacha violada y asesinada en aquellos años. Hubo muchas violaciones pero se callaron. Encontraban a una muchacha, la violaban, y la muchacha iba a la queja, a lo

mejor ni se tomaban el trabajo de denunciar la violación. En una isla ocupada de esa manera y en aquellos años, que eran los años 40 y 50, ¿a dónde vas a ir a denunciar?”

More organizations and departments need to draw attention to this, so that Latin America is a safer place for its women. Today there are more places for victims to go to denounce these violations in Cuba. La federación de mujeres cubanas (FMC) has set up “Casas de orientación de familia” for women so that they may seek help and advice for various problems (UN, *Report 21*). The Penal Code of Cuba includes the death penalty for rape.

According to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women:

In cases of violence, the woman went to the relevant authorities with a documented report of her injuries, which was provided free of charge by the public health services; she could also be accompanied by any witnesses. In such cases, the police investigator was responsible for bringing proceedings. Depending on the seriousness of her injuries, the case was brought before the municipal or the provincial courts. The woman could also appeal the local court’s decision before the Supreme Court. (7)

Furthermore, according to the Special Rapporteur on her visit to Cuba in 1999, there were many plans for future activities to recognize and protect women against violence, including new government curricula, training seminars, and discussion forums (UN, *Report 8*). UNICEF Havana has helped in various ways, for example producing short clips on the television and publishing booklets entitled “Women as objects and subjects of violence” (UN, *Report 20*).

Moreover, the literature of Valdés and Montero calls attention to women's bodies, which represent various things. Valdés sees a unique connection between a woman's body and her thoughts: "Justamente que el cuerpo de la mujer dice muchas cosas, que el cuerpo de la mujer va muy ligado a su pensamiento. Que por el cuerpo sentimos mucho las mujeres y a través del cuerpo nuestro pensamiento desarrolla, reflexiona, y expresa muchas de las cosas que el mundo necesita oír: de dolor, de angustia, de amor, de ternura, de pasión, y de inteligencia." Montero states, "Las protagonistas de mis novelas son haitianas, cubanas, y puertorriqueñas. Al escribir a estos personajes, los describo como yo los veo en mi cabeza. Se sabe que la cubana es la cubana típica, muy voluptuosa, con muchos fondillos." These bodies show the world all of their emotions, both painful and pleasurable. They use women's bodies, as they know them and have seen them in the Caribbean, to express suffering and liberation.

Their literary influences are similar, being influenced by poetry as well as the Cuban writers Guillermo Cabrera Infante, José Lezama Lima, and Alejo Carpentier. They mimic their styles of writing. Valdés says, "Fue una época en que yo era muy joven y leía mucha poesía. La poesía de Lezama me fascinó, me encandiló. Es una poesía de una gran cultura, pero al mismo tiempo de una gran humanidad y de un gran sentimiento por el lenguaje popular mezclado con el lenguaje culto." Montero agrees, noting, "Pero he leído siempre, también, mucha poesía. La poesía me influye mucho cuando estoy trabajando." Like Valdés and Montero, Cabrera Infante and Carpentier both went into exile; Fidel Castro banned Cabrera Infante from publishing in Cuba, due

to a video about nightlife in La Habana made by his brother. Carpentier went into exile due to his disagreement with the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado y Morales.

Turning now to their personal lives, both Valdés and Montero have felt the pain of exile. It has been a negative experience for both of them, unlike what others assume or believe. They have left their homeland and everything in it, except their immediate families, to live somewhere else. Even though many years have passed since their permanent exiles, the pain is still fresh and has not completely disappeared. There are certain qualities or physical experiences that cannot be replaced or imitated in another country. Valdés mentions, “Para mí, el exilio es un castigo. El exilio no es un regalo ni un premio, como unos creen. En el caso de los cubanos ha sido, a mi juicio, un castigo. El hecho es bien evidente que los cubanos arrastran su país, su cultura, y su sufrimiento en su exilio.” She has no immediate plans to return to Cuba. As “favored” children of the Revolution always receive the label of “traitor” when they go into exile, Valdés has frequently been called this. While exile has been an experience full of sadness and a difficult adjustment, it has also signified liberty and freedom for her. She told me that exile “es una manera de vivir libremente.”

What is certain is that Montero left Cuba in 1970, many years before Valdés, who left to permanently stay in France in 1995. As I am convinced that the pain felt by exile is relative and cannot be compared, I cannot and will not attempt to compare the suffering of these two writers. Montero laments, “A mí, personalmente, fue muy duro para una muchacha de 18 años dejar el país donde vivía, la casa, las amistades, el novio, y el perro. Es un desarraigo muy terrible. Yo estuve muy deprimida, llorando mucho, todos esos

primeros meses. No me adaptaba.” According to Montero, exile was different between the early years of the revolution and the Special Period of the 1990’s. There was more stigma attached to those that left in the early years, as opposed to those that have left more recently. Early on, the physical exile was a permanent situation, with little possibility for a return to the island. Montero explains, “No existe eso que existía antes, que te iba y te estigmatizaban. Te ponían un letrero encima de *exiliado*, de *gusano*, o lo que sea. No podías volver. En mi época, uno se iba para siempre.” Montero knew that when her family left, they would never return to Cuba. This decision for her was vital and life-changing, although she has never renounced her Cuban identity. It has shifted to form more of a hybrid with a Puerto Rican identity, but is not lost.

Many Cubans on the island criticize the exiles for being obsessed with victimization and unwilling to accept change or sacrifice anything. In the early years, those that left Cuba were considered traitors, while later being called counterrevolutionaries. Today many are considered “economic” refugees, which shows the shift from ideological terms to economical terms.

While Valdés and Montero show intimate relationships with mothers and daughters through the characters in their literature, both had difficult relationships with their own mothers. Valdés states, “Mi madre era una persona muy difícil. Era una mujer muy tierna, muy cariñosa, pero sufrió mucho la separación con mi padre. Encontró a otro hombre en su camino que fue, a mi juicio, un mal hombre, que la metió en el alcoholismo. Eso a mí me perturbó mucho.” Montero comments, “No he tenido una gran relación con mi mamá. La tengo con mi papá, pero no con mi mamá. No es la

relación cómplice que yo hubiera querido tener con una madre.” However, they include mother/daughter relationships in their novels that are positive and strong and reflect Cuban culture, such as in *Te di la vida entera* and *Como un mensajero tuyo*.

On the other hand, there are major differences in these interviews with Valdés and Montero. To begin, their reasons for exile are different. Valdés had problems with censorship of her literature and ideas, along with signing with a foreign editor, and so decided to leave in the 1990's. She went to Paris, saying that she had to fulfill work contracts there, but had planned to leave the island for good. She was already a grown woman and had lived her entire life in Cuba. But Montero left in 1970, due to the fact that her father had problems with censorship of his jokes and humor and was left without work. She was only a teenager at the time of her departure and has spent more of her life in Puerto Rico than in Cuba. While Valdés made the decision to go to France, along with her husband and daughter, Montero was taken with her family, without much say in the matter.

Valdés is extremely angry with Fidel Castro and the Cuban government and charges, “Es el responsable Fidel Castro. 50 años en el poder, una dictadura que él llama “revolución.” Much of her literature follows this pattern and throughout the interview she cast blame on Fidel for various problems and ills. While she mentioned his name six times in this interview, she also made references to the Castro government. This is the typical discourse of the “old Cuban extreme right” that resides in Miami. Without a doubt, Valdés did not follow the “rules of the game” as established in Cuba, but went against the current, like Reinaldo Arenas.

On the other hand, Montero is not as angry with the government anymore. She only mentioned Fidel's name one time during the entire interview, just to say that he is getting older and that things could change in Cuba any day, due to his death. Her attitude is closer to that of the Young Urban Cuban-Americans (YUCAS). While exile was difficult for her, she told me, "Quizás diría que no vivo obsesionada con los temas del exilio." Her literature does not focus on the Cuban Revolution or on her anger due to the political situation.

Valdés and Montero differ in the way that they perceive literature written by women and that written by men. Valdés believes in a feminine sensibility, which shows gender. She notes, "No creo que haya una literatura feminista y una literatura masculina. Yo creo que hay una sensibilidad femenina y una sensibilidad masculina. Lo que no impidió que Marguerite Yourcenar escribiera *Memorias de Adriano* y que Gustave Flaubert escribiera *Madame Bovary*. En ese sentido yo pienso que lo principal es la libertad de la creación." This is a theoretical approach to her own writing. Montero has a distinct perspective: "Yo abomino de todo que hace una distinción en la literatura entre mujeres y hombres. Porque pienso que es un modo de seguirnos marginando." Thus, her discourse is somewhat political, as she mentions marginalization. Valdés and Montero do not put constraints on the abilities and the potential for these writers. They deem them equally significant and noteworthy. This shows that they reject the idea of essentialism as it pertains to writing by men or writing by women. This allows for more creative opportunities and less prejudice in literary criticism and interpretation. It also permits more dialogue among writers and their works.

Valdés has numerous friends that are French writers, artists, and actors, such as Virginie Despentes and the late actress Marie Trintignant. She admits that her daughter speaks better French than Spanish. Montero continues to stay in contact with Caribbean artists, including writers and musicians. Her influences include the famous Puerto Rican writers Luis Rafael Sánchez, Rosario Ferré, and Ana Lydia Vega. Montero maintains a Caribbean visión: “Mi tono, o mi manera de asumir la luz, es una perspectiva caribeña porque nací en el Caribe y me crié en el Caribe.”

It is noteworthy that many of Montero’s friends and literary influences are very famous in their respective fields, including Rosario Ferré, Ana Lydia Vega, and the singer Silvio Rodríguez. But Valdés’ friends are not as well known throughout the world, such as Juan Abreu and Isis Wirth. Their creative and social circles are distinct, which impacts their writing.

Valdés and Montero are both very confident in their identities, although they are different. Valdés, without a doubt, sees herself as strictly Cuban. She enforces this throughout the interview, noting that she is Cuban and nothing else. Furthermore, she does not wish to identify with other Latin American countries. It is important to note that being Cuban bears more weight for her than being Latin American. She tells me, “Yo no me siento una feminista latinoamericana. Yo me siento una feminista cubana. Yo no soy como una mexicana. Yo no soy como una venezolana. Yo no soy como una brasileña. Yo soy cubana.” This shows her nationalistic pride above anything else, as well as her insularity. This is not necessarily a positive trait, as it can signify detachment from other

countries and writers, which can ultimately result in narrow perspectives. Oftentimes Cuban exiles receive criticism for being insular.

Montero sees herself as Caribbean, more than anything, a combination of the two islands. She identifies herself as “cubano-puertorriqueña.” She admits that she has always stayed in the Caribbean, which hasn’t changed her perspective that much. This surprised me, as the islands are so different politically and economically. Montero sees Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic as similar in several ways, in terms of the climate and the scorching heat, as well as the resemblances among human bodies.

While both authors include women characters in their novels in various ways, it is apparent that Valdés makes more of a conscious effort to do this. That is her purpose and goal in the literature. She says that she is focused on and obsessed with the “woman” question, due to her upbringing with women in the house. She brings their situation to light in a direct way, through her own experiences. She also makes a point of including women’s bodies in her literature. She believes that women deserve to be listened to more and should be able to express what they feel: “Justamente que el cuerpo de la mujer dice muchas cosas, que el cuerpo de la mujer va muy ligado a su pensamiento. Que por el cuerpo sentimos mucho las mujeres y a través del cuerpo nuestro pensamiento desarrolla, reflexiona, y expresa muchas de las cosas que el mundo necesita oír: de dolor, de angustia, de amor, de ternura, de pasión, y de inteligencia.” She has an interesting theoretical approach to her literature, which shows the difference between men and women: “Yo creo que el pensamiento y el cuerpo femenino tienen una relación muy

importante. . . . El hombre, sin embargo, tiene una independencia entre su pensamiento y su cuerpo y la mujer, no.”¹¹⁷

Conversely, Montero doesn't include these women for the same purpose in her novels. She does not seem as passionate as Valdés about her characters expressing themselves, but prefers to play with the stereotypes that currently exist about Caribbean women. Montero does note that these bodies are marked with a sensuality that is unique to this part of the world, due to the climate: “Yo creo que los cuerpos de las mujeres y de los hombres son sitios para el dolor y para la felicidad. No sólo en el Caribe, sino en todas partes del mundo.” It is apparent that she approaches both genders and all bodies in her literary works. Her primary focus is on the aesthetic, as she includes detailed descriptions of corporal beauty and ugliness.

Without a doubt, Montero engages in more journalistic activity than Valdés, due to her time at *El Nuevo Día* newspaper in San Juan. Her approach to literature reflects this, especially in *Son de Almendra* and *Como un mensajero tuyo*, in which she has investigated background information in order to be able to explain the plot. She explains, “Para *Son de Almendra*, investigué lo que era la mafia en Cuba, la presencia de la mafia de origen judío y de origen italiano en Cuba. Para *Como un mensajero tuyo*, que es también dada en los años 20, del pasado siglo, un poco investigué lo que investiga todo el mundo, para darle verosimilitud a una novela.” One of her characters in *Son de Almendra*, the protagonist, Joaquín Porrata, is even a reporter who gets involved in the entire conspiracy.

¹¹⁷ Margaret Randall would agree with this statement: “Feminism puts us in touch with ourselves, with our bodies as well as with our minds; a feminist vision honors feeling and thought *and the way the two connect*” (*Gathering Rage* 21).

Valdés, however, uses several of her own experiences in her novels. She has not needed to do as much research on background information as Montero. The settings reflect her time in Cuba and in Paris and the difficulties that she has confronted. Several of the novels, such as *Café Nostalgia* and *La hija del embajador*, mirror her exit from Cuba to Paris. As she left Cuba and went to France, so do the protagonists Marcela and Daniela, respectively. Valdés told me, “Marcela es un puro producto del castrismo. Es una mujer que no ha querido estar anclada en la isla. Por eso se llama Marcela porque está entre el mar y el cielo. No está anclada, no está fijada en la isla. Está volando siempre. Es una mujer valiente e intelectual, pero al mismo tiempo necesita vivir, necesita comer. Quiere escaparse de Cuba.” Many of the emotions that she felt are similar to those that her characters portray.

To conclude this analysis, it is also noteworthy that Montero mentions Valdés in her interview, before I even told her that I was writing about Valdés for my dissertation. It shows the knowledge and respect that she has for her fellow writer and her literary production.

Conclusions:

Future Cuban Bodies

As we have seen throughout this dissertation, Zoé Valdés and Mayra Montero are two writers that have made an impressive impact on contemporary Cuban and Caribbean literature. Although their styles of writing differ, the themes that they employ are similar and connect to the overall idea of an imaginary of Cuba, from the outside looking in. Their relationships to the island have been distinct, but their focus on and interest in it remain strong. Valdés and Montero are important voices in Cuban diaspora writing today, following in the footsteps of groundbreaking authors such as José Martí, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, José Lezama Lima, and Alejo Carpentier. Their unique experiences and perspectives weave themselves into their novels, displaying at the same time anger and hope for the future.

The issue of exile is always painful and embodies instability. No one knows how the recent changes in government and power in Cuba will affect the exiled Cubans. But what is certain is that those that have experienced exile, both physical and emotional, will never forget it and will carry these memories with them forever, whether they remain in their host countries or return to their native island. Without a doubt, exile has touched every single Cuban in one way or another, which distinguishes them from other Latin Americans. Exile is such a divisive issue and experience, as it separates families and friends who may never have the opportunity to see each other again. We can hope that throughout the future transformations on and off the island, the transitions are smooth and less traumatic for all involved parties.

Due to the current efforts to restore relationships between Cuba and the United States, it is probable that many lives will be changed and diaspora and exile may take on new meanings. There are several exile and diaspora discourses that are currently prominent in the academic world, some of which were explored in this project. With the new movements on and off the Caribbean island, as well as in this age of expanding globalization and technology, new theories and discourses are bound to emerge which will impact future scholarship and researchers in the area of Cuban cultural and literary studies.

Another area of research that could and should be expanded on in the future from this current project is that of race and the racially different body.¹¹⁸ I have analyzed the uses of the body and the images of women in the novels by Valdés and Montero. I have also mentioned that these women of Chinese, African, Spanish, and indigenous descent have very distinct bodies, in terms of appearance and the ways that they use them in society. Without a doubt, these texts are rich with possibilities for analysis of the racially-marked body. With the differing theories of race that scholars and students currently discuss and debate in university and college departments around the globe, there is much to add to this discourse by studying these Cuban authors and their writings.

Oftentimes writing from Third World countries is seen as unimportant as well as not intellectual. Therefore, it is pushed to the periphery of culture and marginalized. But I believe that this literature is of utmost importance for understanding diverse cultures and ways of thought and ultimately affects interests in other countries. Hispanic

¹¹⁸ The entertainment in Cuba sometimes raises this issue, as the dance performances show “an eroticized racial fetish” (Cabezas 99).

Literature courses in institutions of higher education in the United States and around the world should include this literature, and more specifically that of Valdés and Montero, so that students become aware of their voices and impact in the literary world. This will help to move their voices to the center, away from the margins, and bring respect to other writers from the Caribbean.

As several scholars and Valdés have noted, it has not been easy for Cuban women to receive credit for their work in Cuba. As John Kirk opines, “Nevertheless, the constraints of machismo have made it difficult for women . . . to receive the recognition that they deserve. And this is reflected in the subjects chosen, since there are few women who have made-or rather, have been encouraged (allowed?) to make-a significantly representative contribution” (xvii). The time has come for these women to contribute to the production of culture and for their voices and bodies to be heard and considered in a respectable way.

The history of feminism in Cuba has been different than that of other Latin American countries. Cuban women have fought in all of the wars and revolutions since the 19th century, while still struggling to have a voice in society. They have suffered abuse, *machismo*, and a lack of educational and employment opportunities. But they have persevered, gaining rights throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 turned the women’s situation upside down, as they became more educated and involved in socialist activities on the island. However, even with these changes, women today still lack a voice in Cuba, not having ample opportunities to make decisions in the realms of government and policy.

While Valdés and Montero fit into Cuban diaspora writing, they focus on women's situations and expression in an exceptional way. They emphasize the importance of women's bodies as lived experiences and give them a voice where they traditionally did not have one. María Cristina Rodríguez, speaking of Montero and Mayra Santos, another Caribbean author, notes, "Dentro de su proyecto caribeño, las escritoras buscan una historia propia que les permita detectar los misterios del silencio, de los manuscritos escondidos o destruidos en unos espacios habitados por mujeres o seres marginados por los dictámenes patriarcales" (205). They show the pain that these Caribbean women have suffered, both physically and psychologically, while demonstrating that they use their bodies for liberation from the pain and disillusionment of exile.

Women from every country around the world suffer abuse and pain on a regular basis, and each situation is distinct, depending on cultural and familial norms. It is also certain that women and children around the world suffer the most when there are economic changes (Whiteford 199). Women's abuse in Cuba has been unique due to the changes in government as well as Hispanic cultural factors stemming from its history of Spanish conquest and indigenous roots. This is an area that scholars and experts need to continually observe and analyze to prevent future abuse. Women need to be pushed to the center to inhabit this space, because "Our recent incursion into the public sphere still situates us in the margin, outside of the spaces valorized by the dominant culture" (Olea 197).

While some critics have condemned Valdés' literature for being pornographic, she insists that it is not. The Cuban government has taken a strong stance against pornography since the victory of the Revolution. One poet writes in her poem entitled "Pornography:"

In the revolution
there's no pornography
except in dreams.
Lovers on the Malecón
seen by an old man
who gives the woman
a name: *Dolores*
Dolorosa. Dolores
diamante. One difference in fate
and he would be the man
with her. See under the sunglasses
her eyes. (Ball 24)

There is such a fine line between what is considered pornographic and what is considered obscene, in relation to audiovisual and literary output. One definition of "Obsceno" is "impúdico, torpe, ofensivo al pudor," while "pornografía" is "Carácter obsceno de obras literarias o artísticas" or "Tratado acerca de la prostitución" (defs. 1 and 3). A connection exists between the "pornographic" and the "obscene," but most people,

including judges of high profile cases, cannot clearly define this difference.¹¹⁹ Some critics argue that certain images are pornographic, such as seeing children dying by starvation or violence against humans or animals. What they may actually mean is that these images or events are “obscene.” Again, there is ambiguity surrounding these terms, as evidenced by language and personal opinions.

These terms are absolutely relative to particular cultures: “Without sensitivity to different cultural norms obscenity trials can easily become weapons of cultural imperialism” (Brigman 64). In a classic study on this topic, the Mexican author Ángel Caamaño Uribe wrote *La pornografía: estudio sociojurídico de un problema mundial y eterno*. He argues, “Para establecer en dicho contexto la calidad pornográfica de una relación sexual, deberán tenerse en cuenta estas premisas: Solamente puede reputarse pornográfica, por definición, la actividad sexual que está ayuna de espiritualidad, es decir, de sentimientos amorosos” (59). This is a very Catholic approach. In almost every relationship that Valdés and Montero include in the novels analyzed in this dissertation, the women and men do love each other and have feelings for each other, beyond the carnal aspect of the relationship. If “pornógrafa” is a “persona que escribe acerca de la prostitución” (def. 1) it is safe to say that this is not the main objective of Valdés’ and Montero’s writing. As Valdés told me, “Yo nunca he escrito pornografía. Yo he escrito novelas eróticas, novelas donde hay historias de amor” (Personal interview). Thus, Valdés is practicing her freedom of expression and artistic liberties in these novels. For her, violence against women is pornographic and she provides an example: “Cuando en

¹¹⁹ As Brigman emphasizes, “To a very large extent an obscenity trial is an attempt to persuade the jury of the literary or artistic merits of the material on trial” (60).

medio de una entrevista, Charles Bukowski le mete una patada a su mujer, eso para mí es pornografía” (Personal interview). Needless to say, Valdés does not encourage this violence, but rather fiercely denounces it.

It is certain that Valdés focuses on women and their daughters in her novels. She is angry with Fidel Castro and the political situation, which emanates through her words and the responses of her protagonists. During the personal interview that I conducted with Valdés, I could see and feel her anger, but also her compassion and solidarity with Cuban women and all other women around the world. While her salient themes in the literature pertain to Cuban issues, others are universal. She believes that women and their bodies have much to tell us; these literary bodies become liberated from pain and exile in this privileged space. Through their chosen experiences, notably sexual, as well as relationships with their daughters, these women overcome the bodily exile that seeks to confine and control them. There is a vast amount of potential that Caribbean and Cuban women have yet to uncover and put to use; Valdés and Montero illustrate that now is the time for this change.

While Mayra Montero doesn't feel as much anger towards Cuba, the pain that she felt after her departure was profound. Her novels focus on women's experiences in Cuba before the 1959 Revolution. They have suffered the same pain of loss while fighting to survive in an unjust world, as their bodies become sites for pain and memories for themselves and for others. Montero is aware of this bodily connection with her readers and with her characters. She notes, “Se puede romper con el paisaje, con los padres, con

los cónyuges y hasta con los hijos. Pero no se puede romper con la piel, con lo que los poros absorben” (“Morir de Caribe” 230).

Valdés and Montero will continue to write and produce texts during the 21st century, on topics pertaining to Cuba as well as those in their current places of residence, France and Puerto Rico, respectively. As the Cuban State eases certain restrictions, the culture will certainly be transformed, especially in terms of contested spaces and gender roles. These contested spaces and gender roles are and will be brought to life not only in literature, but in art, film, and popular music, as well. While many studies center on Cuban diaspora writers and artists in the United States, scholars and critics need to emphasize those who have taken alternate routes, to Europe or other countries in Latin America. There is no doubt that Valdés and Montero will be the leading writers as they discuss, opine, and critique these changes in their textual productions. They have captured the essence of *cubanidad* or *cubanía* and their characters embody the fears, hopes, and desires of the Cuban people. As real changes occur, readers will be able to count on these writers for their insightful perspectives and interpretations of the current processes and happenings.

Bibliography

- Aguerrevere, Lucía Anglade de. "Dar voz al silencio: la mujer y la santería en *Las Hermanas Agüero* de Cristina García, *Como un mensajero tuyo* de Mayra Montero, y *Querido primer novio* de Zoé Valdés." Diss. Boston College, 2005. Microform.
- Alcaide Ramírez, Dolores. "Subjetividades diaspóricas, mestizaje y la re-canibalización del Otro en *Como un mensajero tuyo*, de Mayra Montero." *La narrativa de Mayra Montero: Hacia una literatura transnacional caribeña*. Ed. Kevin Sedeño Guillén and Madeline Cámara. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2008. 121-136. Print.
- Alvarez Borland, Isabel. *Cuban-American Literature of Exile: From Person to Persona*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1998. Print.
- . "Fertile Multiplicities": Zoé Valdés and the Writers of the '90s Generation." *Cuba: IDEA of a Nation Displaced*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera. Albany: State U of New York P, 2007. 253-266. Print.
- . "The Writers." *Identity, Memory, and Diaspora: Voices of Cuban-American Artists, Writers, and Philosophers*. Ed. Jorge J.E. Gracia, Lynette M.F. Bosch, and Isabel Alvarez Borland. Albany: State U of New York P, 2008. 116-120. Print.
- Amnesty International. *Amnesty International Report 2001*. London: Amnesty International Publications, 2001. Print.
- Anders, Gigi. "Love in Horrid Times." *Hispanic* 15.10 (2002): 56. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 6 Sept. 2007.

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. Print.
- Artiles de León, Ileana. "Violencia: Un problema social y de salud." *Sexología y Sociedad* 2.8 (1997): 32-33. Print.
- Ball, Angela. *The Museum of the Revolution*. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon UP, 1999. Print.
- Barba, Eugenio. "An Amulet Made of Memory: The Significance of Exercises in the Actor's Dramaturgy." *TDR: The Drama Review* 41.4 (1997): 127-132. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 27 Aug. 2008.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. Print.
- Beverley, John, and José Oviedo. Introduction. *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*. Ed. John Beverley, Michael Aronna, and José Oviedo. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 1-17. Print.
- Borim, Jr., Dário, and Roberto Reis. "The Age of Suspicion: Mapping Sexualities in Hispanic Literary and Cultural Texts." Introduction. *Bodies and Biases: Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and Literatures*. Ed. David William Foster and Roberto Reis. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. xiii-xxxii. Print.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London: Routledge, 1996. Print.

- Brigman, William E. "Pornography, Obscenity and the Humanities: Mapplethorpe, 2 Live Crew And the Elitist Definition of Art." *Rejuvenating the Humanities*. Ed. Ray B. Browne and Marshall W. Fishwick. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992. 55-66. Print.
- Brison, Susan J. *Aftermath*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002. Print.
- Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 100-112. Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Byron, Kristine A. *Women, Revolution, and Autobiographical Writing in the Twentieth Century: Writing History, Writing the Self*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007. Print.
- Caamaño Uribe, Ángel. *La pornografía: estudio sociojurídico de un problema mundial y eterno*. México: EDAMEX, 1989. Print.
- Cabezas, Amalia L. *Economies of Desires: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2009. Print.
- Canto, Monique. "The Politics of Women's Bodies: Reflections on Plato." *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. 339-353. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. Introduction. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 3-12. Print.

- . *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.
- Castillo, Debra A. *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992. Print.
- Castro-Klarén, Sara. "La crítica literaria feminista y la escritora en América Latina." *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas*. Ed. Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1984. 27-46. Print.
- . "Feminism and Women's Narrative: Thinking Common Limits/Links." Introduction. *Narrativa Femenina en América Latina: Prácticas y Perspectivas Teóricas*. Ed. Castro-Klarén. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2003. 9-38. Print.
- Chichester, Ana G. "Codifying Homosexuality as Grotesque: The Writings of Virgilio Piñera." *Bodies and Biases: Sexualities in Hispanic Cultures and Literatures*. Ed. David William Foster and Roberto Reis. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996. 294-315. Print.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Difficult Joys." *The Body and the Text: Hélène Cixous, Reading and Teaching*. Ed. Helen Wilcox, et. al. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990. 5-30. Print.
- . "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Literary Debate: Texts and Contexts*. Ed. Denis Hollier and Jeffrey Mehlman. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer and others. New York: The New Press, 1999. 410-421. Print.

Clifford, James. "Diasporas." *Cultural Anthropology* 9.3 (1994): 302-338. *JSTOR*. Web.

5 June 2008.

Cohen, Robin. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: University College London Press, 1997. Print.

Conboy, Katie, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury, eds. Introduction. *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 1-12. Print.

"Cuba." *Women's International Network News* 17.2 (1991): 10. Web. 11 July 2008.

Davies, Catherine. *A Place in the Sun?: Women Writers in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 1997. Print.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. 122.5 (2007): 1377-1388. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 28 Feb. 2010.

Edwards, Catharine. "The Suffering Body: Philosophy and Pain in Seneca's *Letters*." *Constructions of the Classical Body*. Ed. James I. Porter. Ann Arbor, MI: The U of Michigan P, 1999. 252-268. Print.

Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 183-199. Print.

Espín Guillois, Vilma. *Cuban Women Confront the Future*. Ed. Deborah Shnookal. Melbourne, Australia: Ocean Press, 1991. Print.

---. *La Mujer en Cuba: Historia*. Vilma Espín Guillois: *Discursos, Entrevistas, Documentos*. La Habana, Cuba: Editorial de la Mujer, 1990. Print.

- “Exile.” Def. 1b. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Print.
- Fernandes, Sujatha. *Cuba Represent!: Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures*. Durham: Duke UP, 2006. Print.
- Fernández, Morbila. “La habanidad en la memoria. Estudio del cronotopo en *Te di la vida entera* de Zoé Valdés.” *Divergencias* 1.1 (2003): 77-83. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 25 Oct. 2006.
- Ferré, Rosario. “‘La autenticidad de la mujer en el arte’ and ‘El diario como forma femenina.’” *Sitio a Eros: trece ensayos literarios*. México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1980. 13-27. Print.
- Ferrer, Ada. *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 1999. Print.
- “Fetichismo.” Def. 3. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. 2nd ed. 2001. Print.
- Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. Print.
- Fomerand, Jacques. *Historical Dictionary of the United Nations*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Allen Lane, 1977. Print.
- Franco, Jean. *Las Conspiradoras: La representación de la mujer en México*. Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994. Print.
- . “The Mares of the Apocalypse.” *Critical Passions: Selected Essays*. Ed. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 109-122. Print.

- Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." *Collected Papers* Authorized under the supervision of Joan Rivière. Vol. 4. London: Hogarth Press, 1957. 152-170. Print.
- Fuentes-Pérez, Ileana. *Cuba sin caudillos: Un enfoque feminista para el siglo XXI*. United States: Linden Lane Press, 1994. Print.
- Gac-Artigas, Priscilla. "La memoria fragmentada, reflexiones sobre la novelística de Zoé Valdés." *Reflexiones: Ensayos sobre escritoras hispanoamericanas contemporáneas*. Ed. Priscilla Gac-Artigas. Vol. 2. New Jersey: Ediciones Nuevo Espacio, 2002. 317-325. Print.
- Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1982. Print.
- García, Cristina. *The Agüero Sisters*. New York: Knopf, 1997. Print.
- Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. Print.
- Gilligan, Carol. "Joining the Resistance: Psychology, Politics, Girls and Women." *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations*. Ed. Laurence Goldstein. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991. 12-47. Print.
- Goertz, Karein K. "Body, Trauma, and the Rituals of Memory: Charlotte Delbo and Ruth Klüger." *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust*. Ed. Julia Epstein and Lori Hope Lefkowitz. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2001. 161-185. Print.
- Goldman, Dara E. *Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2008. Print.

- González-Abellás, Miguel Ángel. "Sexo trasnacional: La cubana como mercancía en la obra de Zoé Valdés." *Alba de América* 22.41/42 (2003): 277-285. Print.
- González Pagés, Julio César. *En busca de un espacio: Historia de mujeres en Cuba*. La Habana, Cuba: Ediciones de Ciencias Sociales, 2003. Print.
- Grimaldo Grigsby, Darcy. "Contemporary Women Artists' Representations of Female Bodies." *Dilemmas of Visibility: The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations*. Ed. Laurence Goldstein. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991. 83-100. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994. Print.
- Guerra, Lillian. *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba*. Chapel Hill: The U of North Carolina P, 2005. Print.
- Guerra Cunningham, Lucía. "La referencialidad como negación del paraíso: Exilio y excentrismo en *La nave de los locos* de Cristina Peri Rossi." *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 23.2 (1989): 63-74. Print.
- Guevara, Ernesto Che. *Escritos y Discursos*. La Habana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1977. Print.
- Haaken, Janice. "The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire in Women's Trauma Stories: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychotherapy." *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1998. 352-361. Print.

- Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Tran. Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980. Print.
- Hasta cierto punto*. Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Perf. Óscar Álvarez and Mirta Ibarra. Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficos, 1983. Film.
- Herrera, Andrea O'Reilly. Prologue. *ReMembering Cuba*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2001. i-xx. Print.
- Holgado Fernández, Isabel. *¡No es fácil!: Mujeres cubanas y la crisis revolucionaria*. Barcelona, Spain: Icaria editorial, 2000. Print.
- Human Rights Watch. *Cuba's Repressive Machinery: Human Rights Forty Years After the Revolution*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999. Print.
- Huston, Nancy. "The Matrix of War: Mothers and Heroes." *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. 119-136. Print.
- "Insular." Def. 4a. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. Print.
- Irigaray, Luce. *El cuerpo a cuerpo con la madre. El otro género de la naturaleza. Otro modo de sentir*. Trans. Mirela Bofill and Anna Carvallo. Barcelona: la Sal, edicions de les dones, 1985. Print.
- . "Women's exile: Interview with Luce Irigaray." Trans. Couze Venn. *Ideology and Consciousness* 1 (1977): 62-76. Print.
- Israel, Nico. *Outlandish: Writing Between Exile and Diaspora*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000. Print.

- Jameson, Fredric. "Third-world Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *The Jameson Reader*. Ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 2000. 315-339. Print.
- Jelin, Elizabeth. "Engendering Human Rights." *Gender Politics in Latin America: Debates in Theory and Practice*. Ed. Elizabeth Dore. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997. 65-83. Print.
- Jesús Fernández, Teresa de. "From This Side of the Fish Tank." *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys In and Out of Exile*. Ed. María de los Ángeles Torres. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003. 75-84. Print.
- Kaminsky, Amy K. *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999. Print.
- . *Reading the Body Politic: Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993. Print.
- Kampwirth, Karen. *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2002. Print.
- King, Helen. "Chronic Pain and the Creation of Narrative." *Constructions of the Classical Body*. Ed. James I. Porter. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1999. 269-286. Print.
- Kirk, John M. Prologue. *Culture and the Cuban Revolution: Conversations in Havana*. By Kirk and Leonardo Padura Fuentes. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2001. xv-xxvi. Print.

- Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia UP, 1986. Print.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.
- Leal, Rine. "Ausencia no quiere decir olvido." Prologue. *Teatro: 5 autores cubanos*. Jackson Heights, NY: Ollantay Press, 1995. vii-xxxiii. Print.
- Lo, Emily. "A Cuban-Chinese *Familia*." *Cuba: IDEA of a Nation Displaced*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera. Albany: State U of New York P, 2007. 215-222. Print.
- Lobao, Linda M. "Women in Revolutionary Movements: Changing Patterns of Latin American Guerrilla Struggle." *Women and Revolution: Global Expressions*. Ed. M.J. Diamond. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998. 255-290. Print.
- Löfquist, Eva. ". . . Se visten, se pintan, se peinan y posan . . ." ¿La literatura tiene sexo?" *Literatura escrita por mujeres en el ámbito hispánico: Narrativa y lírica*. Ed. Eva Löfquist. Stockholm: Colección Aspasia, 2002. 141-150. Print.
- Looking for Fidel*. Dir. Oliver Stone. HBO. 14 Apr. 2004. Film.
- Lucía*. Dir. Humberto Solas. Perf. Raquel Revuelta, Eslinda Núñez, Adela Legra, Eduardo Moure, Ramon Brito, and Adolfo Llauradó. The Cuban Institute of Art and Film Industries, 1968. Film.
- Luciak, Ilja A. *Gender and Democracy in Cuba*. Gainesville, FL: The UP of Florida, 2007. Print.

- Macedo, Ana Gabriela. "Re-presentações do corpo, questões de identidade e a <<política de localização>> - uma Introdução." *Re-presentações do Corpo: Representing the Body*. Braga, Portugal: Universidade do Minho: Centro de Estudos Humanísticos, 2003. 13-23. Print.
- Machover, Jacobo. *La memoria frente al poder: Escritores cubanos del exilio: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Reinaldo Arenas*. Valencia, Spain: Universitat de València, 2001. Print.
- MacKinnon, Catharine A. *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2006. Print.
- . "Rape: On Coercion and Consent." *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia UP, 1997. 42-58. Print.
- Maloof, Judith. *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1999. Print.
- Martínez-Alier, Verena. *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society*. Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1989. Print.
- Martínez Nieto, Mari Paz. *Son de Cuba: Conversaciones con el exilio*. Madrid: Libroslibres, 2001. Print.
- Martínez-San Miguel, Yolanda. "Puerto Rican Cubanness: Reconfiguring Caribbean Imaginaries." *Cuba: IDEA of a Nation Displaced*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera. Albany: State U of New York P, 2007. 47-74. Print.

- Marting, Diane E. "Dangerous (to) Women: Sexual Fiction in Spanish America."
Narrativa Femenina en América Latina: Prácticas y Perspectivas Teóricas. Ed. Sara Castro-Klarén. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2003. 197-219. Print.
- McClennen, Sophia A. *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2004. Print.
- Memorias del subdesarrollo*. Dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. Perf. Sergio Corrieri and Daisy Granados. Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematograficos, 1968. Film.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Rereading as a Woman: The Body in Practice." *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. 354-362. Print.
- Moi, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Methuen, 1985. Print.
- . *What is a Woman? And Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.
- Molyneux, Maxine. *State, Gender and Institutional Change in Cuba's 'Special Period': The Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*. London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996. Print.
- Montero, Mayra. *El Capitán de los Dormidos*. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2002. Print.
- . *Como un mensajero tuyo*. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 1998. Print.
- . "La Habana en el espejo." *Cuba: voces para cerrar un siglo*. Ed. Rene Vazquez Diaz. Stockholm, Sweden: Olof Palme Institute, 1999. 26-31. Print.

- . "Morir de Caribe." *La narrativa de Mayra Montero: Hacia una literatura transnacional caribeña*. Ed. Kevin Sedeño Guillén and Madeline Cámara. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2008. 229-231. Print.
- . Personal interview. 13 Aug. 2008.
- . *Son de Almendra*. Barcelona: Alfaguara, 2005. Print.
- "Obsceno." *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. 2nd ed. 2001. Print.
- Olea, Raquel. "Feminism: Modern or Postmodern?" *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*. Ed. John Beverley, Michael Aronna, and José Oviedo. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 192-200. Print.
- Padura Fuentes, Leonardo. "Living and Creating in Cuba: Risks and Challenges." Epilogue. *Culture and the Cuban Revolution: Conversations in Havana*. By John M. Kirk and Fuentes. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2001. 177-186. Print.
- Parker, Robert Dale. *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.
- Pérez Firmat, Gustavo. *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1994. Print.
- "Pornografía." Defs. 1 and 3. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. 2nd ed. 2001. Print.
- "Pornógrafa." Def. 1. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. 2nd ed. 2001. Print.
- Portrait of Teresa*. Dir. Pastor Vega. Perf. Daisy Granados and Adolfo Llauradó. Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industrias Cinematográficos, 1979. Film.
- Prieto, José Manuel. "Mayra Montero." Trans. Marina Harss. *Bomb* 70 (2000): 86-90. Web. 22 Oct. 2006.

- Randall, Margaret. *Cuban Women Now: Interviews with Cuban Women*. Toronto: Women's Press: Dumont Press Graphix, 1974. Print.
- . *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1992. Print.
- . *La mujer cubana ahora*. Caracas: Rocinante, 1973. Print.
- . *Women in Cuba: Twenty Years Later*. New York: Smyrna Press, 1981. Print.
- Regazzoni, Susanna. *Cuba: una literatura sin fronteras*. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2001. Print.
- Ribadeneira, Alegría. "Esferas trizadas: La guerra y el género en seis escritoras del mundo hispanohablante." Diss. U of Florida, 2006. Print.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. New York: Norton, 1986. Print.
- Richard, Nelly. *Masculine/Feminine: Practices of Difference(s)*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. Print.
- Rivera Torres, Ángel. "Mutilaciones, deformidades y comunidades inoperantes en *Son de almendra*." *La narrativa de Mayra Montero: Hacia una literatura transnacional caribeña*. Ed. Kevin Sedeño Guillén and Madeline Cámara. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2008. 155-175. Print.
- Rivero, Eliana. "Muerto, memoria y música en *Como un mensajero tuyo*, de Mayra Montero." *La narrativa de Mayra Montero: Hacia una literatura transnacional caribeña*. Ed. Kevin Sedeño Guillén and Madeline Cámara. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2008. 107-119. Print.

- Robbins, Bruce. Afterword. *Remapping Genres. PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. 122.5 (2007): 1644-1651. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 28 Feb. 2010.
- Rodríguez, María Cristina. "Las dos Mayras [Montero y Santos] y sus geografías caribeñas." *La narrativa de Mayra Montero: Hacia una literatura transnacional caribeña*. Ed. Kevin Sedeño Guillén and Madeline Cámara. Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2008. 205-226. Print.
- Rosales, Raúl J. "Narrating Selves: Autobiographical Acts in Contemporary Cuban Diaspora Writing." Diss. Columbia U, 2007. Print.
- Rubin Suleiman, Susan. "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism." *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1986. 7-29. Print.
- Sabaj, Marcela. "Texto, cuerpo, mujer: A propósito de *El tono menor del deseo* de Pía Barros" ("Text, body, woman: On Pía Barros's *El tono menor del deseo*"). *La época: Literatura y libros*, 24 November 1991. Print.
- Sabas Alomá, Mariblanca. *Feminismo: Cuestiones sociales y crítica literaria*. Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2003. Print.
- Safran, William. "Deconstructing and comparing diasporas." *Diaspora, Identity and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research*. Ed. Waltraud Kokot, Khachig Tölölyan and Carolin Alfonso. London: Routledge, 2004. 9-29. Print.
- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000. Print.

- Santí, Enrico Mario. "La vida es un salmón con grasa: Entrevista con Zoé Valdés." *Apuntes Posmodernos* 7.2 (1998): 2-13. Print.
- Santiago, Fabiola. "The Sweet and Sexy Sadness of Exile." *Criticas* 2.1 (2002): 25-28. *Academic Search Premier*. Web. 24 June 2006.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.
- Schutte, Ofelia. *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1993. Print.
- Serrano de Haro, Amparo. "Imágenes de lo femenino en el arte: atisbos y atavismos." *Revista Polis* 5.17 (2007): N. pag. Web. 15 Apr. 2009.
- Shayne, Julie D. *The Revolution Question: Feminisms in El Salvador, Chile, and Cuba*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.
- Sheffer, Gabriel, ed. *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. London: Croom Helm, 1986. Print.
- Siegel, Kristi. *Women's Autobiographies, Culture, Feminism*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. Print.
- Smith, Anna. *Julia Kristeva: Readings of Exile and Estrangement*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Print.
- Smith, Lois M., and Alfred Padula. *Sex and Revolution: Women in Socialist Cuba*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Smorkaloff, Pamela Maria. *Cuban Writers on and off the Island: Contemporary Narrative Fiction*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999. Print.

- Sosnowski, Saúl. "Dentro de la otra orilla: La cultura uruguaya: represión, exilio, y democracia." Prologue. *Represión, exilio, y democracia: la cultura uruguaya*. Comp. Saúl Sosnowski. Montevideo: Ediciones de la Banda Oriental, 1987. Print.
- Soto, Leandro. "Testimonio de un artista." *ReMembering Cuba*. Ed. Andrea O'Reilly Herrera. Austin: U of Texas P, 2001. 3. Print.
- Soto, Shirlene. *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940*. Denver: Arden Press, Inc., 1990. Print.
- Stone, Elizabeth, ed. *Women and the Cuban Revolution*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981. Print.
- Stoner, K. Lynn. *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Women's Movement for Legal Reform, 1898-1940*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991. Print.
- Suárez Polcari, Ramón. *Historia de la Iglesia Católica en Cuba*. Vol. 2. Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 2003. Print.
- Swiss, Shana, and Joan E. Giller. "Rape as a Crime of War: A Medical Perspective." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270.5 (1993): 612-15. Print.
- Tal, Kalí. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1996. Print.
- Thompson, Anna. "Eros and Chaos." *Lear's* Jan. 1993. 66-69. Print.
- Tomaševski, Katarina. "Los derechos de las mujeres: de la prohibición a la eliminación de la discriminación." *Revista internacional de ciencias sociales* 158 (1998): N. pag. Web. 15 Mar. 2009.

- Torres, María de los Ángeles. Preface and Introduction. *By Heart/De Memoria: Cuban Women's Journeys In and Out of Exile*. Ed. Torres. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2003. ix-13. Print.
- Traba, Marta. "Hipótesis sobre una escritura diferente." *La sartén por el mango: encuentro de escritoras latinoamericanas*. Ed. Patricia Elena González and Eliana Ortega. Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Huracán, 1984. 21-26. Print.
- Turcato, Reine Lynn. "From Silence to Obscenity: Tracing the Reappropriation of Misogynistic Language to Assert Female Subjectivity Through the Works of Ferré, Vega and Valdés." Diss. Florida State U, 2006. *ETD*. Web. 19 May 2008.
- United Nations. Commission on Human Rights. *Note verbale dated 8 March 2000 from the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*. 56th sess. Geneva: United Nations, 2000. *UNBISNET*. Web. 25 Feb. 2009.
- . ---. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/44*. 56th sess. Geneva: United Nations, 2000. *UNBISNET*. Web. 25 Feb. 2009.
- . *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*. 15th sess. New York: United Nations, 1996. *UNBISNET*. Web. 10 Feb. 2009.
- . *Domestic violence: Report of the Secretary-General*. Havana, Cuba: United Nations, 1990. Print.

- . *Eighth United States Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders*. New York: United Nations, 1991. Print.
- Valdés, Zoé. *Café Nostalgia*. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 1999. Print.
- . *La hija del embajador*. Barcelona: Emecé Editores, 1997. Print.
- . Personal interview. 20 Jan. 2008.
- . *El pie de mi padre*. Barcelona: Editorial Planeta, 2002. Print.
- . Prologue. *En fin, el mar: Cartas de los balseiros cubanos*. Palma de Mallorca, Spain: Bitzoc, 1995. Print.
- . *Te di la vida entera*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996. Print.
- van den Ende, Tonja. "In Search of the Body in the Cave: Luce Irigaray's Ethics of Embodiment." *Belief, Bodies, and Being: Feminist Reflections on Embodiment*. Ed. Deborah Orr, Linda López McAllister, Eileen Kahl, and Kathleen Earle. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. 141-150. Print.
- van der Kolk, Bessel A., and Onno van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. 158-182. Print.
- Vitier, Cintio. *Lo cubano en la poesía*. La Habana: Ed. Letras Cubanas, 1970. Print.
- Vivanco, José Miguel. Prologue. *Las Damas de Blanco: Las mujeres de los prisioneros de la Primavera Negra de Cuba*. By Erika María del Carmen Lüters Gamboa. Buenos Aires: Fundación Cadal, 2006. 11-14. Print.
- Wangh, Stephen. *An Acrobat of the Heart: A Physical Approach to Acting Inspired by the Work of Jerzy Grotowski*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000. Print.

- Whiteford, Linda M. "Children's Health as Accumulated Capital: Structural Adjustment in the Dominican Republic and Cuba." *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood*. Ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1998. 186-201. Print.
- Wilden, Anthony. *Man and Woman, War and Peace*. New York: Routledge, 1987. Print.
- Wright, Thomas C. *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991. Print.
- Zamora, Hilma Nelly. "La memoria del exilio y el abismo de la destrucción en *Café Nostalgia* de Zoé Valdes." *Explicación de textos literarios* 28.1/2 (1999/2000): 125-132. Print.