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Why did I write this paper?

To settle a debt with Cuban social scientists specialized in gender studies in Cuba, whose works are scattered all over Cuban and foreign publications. It is a sort of “epistemological” debt I owe these persons, for I consider that their methodological approaches have been very serious and creative, and that we can all learn from them, once they have been summarized. This was the first reason, which made me interview the 22 researchers in my sample.

There is a second debt: this time with social scientists from other countries, who are specialized in gender studies, and who are usually surprised when they get to read some of the works written by their Cuban colleagues. They had access to the many books and articles published by non-Cuban authors on Cuban women, but they knew little about the reflections from the Cuban scholars. In this paper I try to construct the Cuban gender studies “jigsaw-puzzle”, emphasizing only on its methodological approaches and its gender perspectives.

Since 1985 I have focused my research on Cuban women in traditional and non-traditional jobs, as well as on images of women in Cuban mass media. Beginning from
1973, I have been teaching Methodology and Methods in Sociological Research at the University of Havana. The crossing of both subjects in research and teaching, helped me submit the questions of the in depth interview to the persons in my sample, asking them to focus on items concerning methodological approaches and methods, which are linked to the gender perspectives they used in their studies. The questions were the following: How do you define the gender perspective you have used in your studies? When did you start researching gender relations? Which were the motivations that led you to study these questions? Name the methods which you have mostly used in the course of your gender studies, as well as the schools of thought related to them. Which are the main “rules” you would suggest specialists starting to deal with gender topics? I also tried to reconstruct the social and historical context prevailing in Cuba fifteen or twenty years ago, to understand the moment when the majority of Cuban researchers started studying gender items –mainly women–, and to explain why we started many years after our colleagues from Latin America, the States, Canada and Western Europe did so. In Cuba there was no such “boom” of social research on gender. I would prefer to describe what happened as a sort of a flow of studies in this direction, which all of us decided to join in smoothly. The reasons for doing so can be found at the macro social level as well as other stages concerning the professional and spiritual needs of the researchers.

This paper is also meant for Cuban university students, specially those engaged in social sciences, who are willing to use a gender perspective throughout their professional lives.
Writing this article has been a highly participative experience, because the colleagues I interviewed changed the questions I posed them, and added others I had not imagined. It made us rethink methodological matters dealing with gender research or even start dealing with others we had never thought about.

The second part of this paper is the most important one: it is the Annex, which lists the works on gender written by the researchers in my sample, printed in a few Cuban journals, in many foreign publications, in books, or still unedited. This was due to the fact that the bulk of our studies were ready for print in the nineties, in the midst of the Cuban crisis, when printing facilities were very limited and several publications were temporally closed. I also asked them to mention the students’ thesis they had tutored at the undergraduate and graduate levels. I respected the way in which each of the persons in the sample listed their works. For the sake of space, in the printed version of this paper I summarized these lists (I included only five works from each researcher). The electronic version of the Annex includes the unabridged lists.

I wish to clear up four ideas.

First. This paper is limited to analyze the way the persons in the sample answered the questions concerning how they studied gender relations. I did not study the contents of their works, although I am familiar with most of them. This would be a further step in this investigation, which is open for those who wish to use the articles and books listed in the Annex.

Second. I am not a specialist in gender theory, and did not ask about it during the interviews. I did not focus either in the difficulties they confronted when they tried to apply the results of their studies.
Third. The sample includes only Cuban social scientists specialized in gender relations living in Havana. Therefore, this study does not refer to the many colleagues dealing with gender relations outside the capital.

Fourth. I included in the sample colleagues from different disciplines and age groups. They are persons who basically have specialized in gender issues and others who, although do not focus solely in these topics, pay attention to gender relations throughout their research.

The articles written by Mayda Alvarez, Luisa Campuzano, Nara Araujo, Norma Vasallo and Carollee Bengelsdorf during the second half of the nineties, dealing with gender studies in Cuba, were very inspiring while preparing this paper. (1)

The sample and the methods

I interviewed 22 persons, and among them only three were men. Their ages range from 23 to 65 years: three of them are in their twenties, one is in her thirties, five are in their forties, six in their fifties and seven in their sixties. There are eighteen whites and four blacks.

According to their professions, there are six sociologists, five historians, three specialized in arts and letters, two lawyers, two psychologists, two demographers, one biologist and one psychiatrist. Almost all of them acquired two professions through master degrees and doctorates. Fifteen are doctors and seven have masters degrees, which they defended in Cuba, the ex USSR, the ex German Democratic Republic, Chile, Romania, Hungary and Mexico. There are eleven full professors and one assistant professor.
full researchers and three assistant researchers, which are the highest ranking teaching and research categories in Cuba.

Several of them hold decision making posts: the director of the Center for Studies on Population and Development at the National Statistics Office of Cuba and also of the National Census of 2001; the editor in chief of the journal Revolución y Cultura and the Women’s Studies Program at the Casa de las Américas; the head of the Women’s Studies Center at the Federation of Cuban Women; the presidents of the Women’s Studies Program of the University of Havana and of the “Catedra Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda”, belonging to the Institute of Literature and Linguistics. Other specialists in the sample are heading now or have headed departments and research teams at the university and centers belonging to the Academy of Sciences.

They deal with the following topics referred to gender relations, basically concentrating on women: history of Cuba in the XIXth and XXth centuries (families, Black female slaves and women underground and guerrilla fighters during the fifties); the role of women in history, culture and the shaping of the Cuban identity during the XIXth and XXth centuries, emphasizing on the way they were represented in literature, history, political documents and all types of texts; women in population and development studies in Cuba; gender and empowerment; women and race; traditional and non-traditional feminine jobs; images of women and men in mass media; women and rural relations; homosexuals; feminine prostitution in the XIXth century and today; women and health, health policies and reproductive health; middle aged women; women, generations and youth; women in comparative and family law; differences related to gender in life standards of people suffering stigmatized illness (HIV, TB and Leper).
They work at the University of Havana, in institutes of the Ministry of Sciences, Technology and the Environment, at the National Office of Statistics, in the Casa de las Américas, in the journal “Revolución y Cultura”, at the Institute of Medical Sciences, at the Ministry of Culture and in the Federation of Cuban Women.

From May to July of this year I submitted them a questionnaire.

I intentionally selected the persons in my sample. I have been repeating this procedure all along the case studies on women I conducted in the past 15 years, and I always tend to apologize for not fulfilling the requirements of a statistically representative sample. I decided not to apologize this time, and will rather defend the excellences of working with intentional samples as the one used in the present investigation.

Studies of this sort, which pursue to bring forth outlooks concerning subjectivities, basically the diverse ways in which scholars approach gender relations and the motives guiding them towards these topics, require deep professional and personal empathic relations among those who ask questions and those who answer them. These empathic relations favor exchanges among equals. In my case, people in the sample followed the basic guidelines in the questionnaire, but they changed some of the questions, cut out others and included topics I had not considered.

As I decided to become part of the sample, I exchanged my views with the persons I interviewed. I did so because they wanted to know my own answers and also because I felt the need to dissent with their opinions or to agree with them. I wanted to turn the in depth interviews into actual dialogues, in order to avoid what Pierre Bourdieu criticized long ago. He stated that sociological interviews usually do not favor the free flow of ideas, for the interviewer controls the question-making process, leaving the
interviewed to just answer his/her questions, while they listen to them. Therefore, information runs only in one way: from the person who is answering to the researcher guiding the interview; from the commanded to the person in command.

The guilt I felt for not following the rules of orthodox methodology vanished, when several persons in the sample said that researchers must engage the rules of gender perspectives, in the sense that they must understand their own subjectivities in order to explain the subjectivities of the persons they are studying. It is not a matter of denying the right of my own subjectivity to take part in the research process. It is a matter of understanding our ideologies from a scientific point of view, of controlling their inclusion throughout the research process, so that we are able to restrain from imposing our own views on the views of those persons we are investigating.

Can you define the gender perspective used in your studies?

Practically all the specialists in the sample confessed that they do not spend much time throughout their research process defining what gender approach means, whether it is in terms of theory or methodology. Some admitted that they had never defined this concept. I do not mean to say that they lack methodological or theoretical knowledge in terms of gender. Their minds are well trained due to their readings on gender and their observation abilities. What happens is that they prefer to spend more time deciding how they are going to approach their subjects, to collect the required information, to organize their own database and to infer knowledge from them. Therefore, when I asked them to define their gender perspectives, their answers were very rich.
Before summarizing the ways in which they specifically defined gender perspectives, let me underline some general traits of this definition, which they pointed out. According to the social scientists in the sample, gender perspective is a methodological concept with multiple definitions, for the reality it focuses on is ontologically diverse. They add that when you approach society with a gender perspective, you do it with different views, according to your professions and your personal life experiences. It is a definition opened to new knowledge that will be gathered in the future, and, subsequently, it undergoes a constant process of construction. It is a non dogmatic conception.

Practically everyone in the sample started using a gender approach in their research intuitively. This even happened to those who began studying gender relations in the nineties. Some wanted to bring out matters concerning social actors, basically women, who were marginalized, concealed, invisible or discriminated. Luisa Campuzano, Susana Montero and Mirta Yáñez studied women in Cuban literature during the XIXth and the XXth centuries, to help redefine the history of literature and the way women perceived this process. Way back in the seventies, Juan Carlos Alfonso, Sonia Catasús and Niurka Pérez evidenced interesting differences coming out of their demographic data due to the use of the variable sex, although they still lacked a gender approach. Others suffered at the end of their research, for they acknowledged loosing precious information because they had omitted gender related topics. This happened to María Isabel Domínguez in the eighties when she was studying generations and youth.
Once the specialists in my sample engaged the gender perspective in a scientifically conscious way, they kept enriching its definition.

I have grouped in four parts the widely ranged definitions of gender perspectives, according to the specialists in the sample.

First. Everybody agrees on the so called broad definition of this concept: to approach society understanding that men and women not only have biological sexes; societies where they lived assigned them different roles, agreeably to how they acknowledged men and women.

They clarified three ideas.

. Some of the specialists in the sample proposed to review the dichotomic definition of gender, which admits only the masculine and the feminine. It is biased by societies based on patriarchal culture, and, therefore, a scientific definition of gender has to include homosexuals.

. The majority established differences among sex, gender and sexual orientation.

. Almost all of them considered that the trends which identify gender perspectives with women are a vulgarization. For example, you gain knowledge when you analyze the impact of men’s behaviors in the fertility process, instead of focusing it solely as a feminine phenomenon. All of the specialists believe it is time to study men.

Second. The use of a gender perspective is a scientific imperative for all social sciences. Without it, it is impossible to understand either social processes in Cuban history or contemporary events.

Its scientific meaning lies in the fact that it promotes the need to use a historical perspective in order to understand contemporary phenomena. Consequently, those of us
who studied survival strategies developed by Cuban women during the crisis of the nineties, had to acknowledge the survival abilities and the sense of creativity which are part of Cuban culture, inherited mainly from African slaves and their offspring. Digna Castañeda's article on women slaves’ working conditions in colonial Cuba contributed to understand this heritage.

The gender perspective helps understand the subjectivities of those who are studied and also of the researchers. Many of the specialists in the sample admitted that they stopped feeling guilty and uncomfortable, for having incorporated their own subjectivities and emotions in the course of their studies. It is not a matter of denying one's and the others' ideologies, for it is impossible to do so, but to be capable of understanding how they operate in each person's everyday research activities. Those who study violence because, to some extent, they were subject to it, have to pull out of their subjectivities all feelings and emotions linked to their own violent experiences, in order to attain the difficult balance between involvement and detachment. This is the only way to produce valuable reflections from life experiences of one's own.

Whenever you practice these rationalizing procedures concerning subjectivities, all persons involved in the research process will be able to participate in it in a very creative way, and will contribute to enhance everyone's self-esteem.

There is another scientific quality in gender perspective: its appeal to admit differences in society and study them; the need to take others into account and to promote constant comparisons to bring out essences. This approach avows to analyze general and global levels of society as well as the individual and differentiated levels.
The gender approach is an inclusive one, for it underlines the need to understand gender linked to all other structures of a given society: class, generations, political and ideological conceptions, among others.

It is a Marxist perspective for it implies a feminist commitment, which pursues social justice for all and not only for women. In the words of Luisa Campuzano, it is Marxist, because it is engaged in the feminization of equality and criticizes those trends of thought that admit only one sided flows of equity, e.g., trends which do not acknowledge differences in their aspirations for equity.

The gender approach is a non dogmatic one, for it does not accept fixed or established truths. It promotes discussing and questioning everything, and avows its dislike for any imposition of power towards researchers’ thoughts.

Third. Gender perspective has to do with politics and power. It helps to understand the essence of inequalities between men and women, by means of revealing sexist traits in political decision making, along the social and legal policy making and its realization in every day life. It helps to disentangle the network of repressions and power, at the societal and personal levels, and, consequently, paves the way towards equity.

Luisa Campuzano believes that the gender perspective is much more a political than a methodological one: it means that each person has been submitted to ideological schemes, linked to given societies. She and other specialists in the sample think that it is also a political and revolutionary position, as it seeks to unveil the hidden structures which explain the ways people think and act, in order to help change them for new and more just attitudes.
Fourth. Persons using the gender approach must assume it as part of their identities, in the same way they accept their race and their birth place. Mirta Yáñez said she had to incorporate it “…as one of my essences”. 

Specialists in the sample consider that you have to practice it in your daily personal and professional lives. You cannot study women’s employment and the double shift, and accept a sexist division of labor at home.

Consequently, scholars using gender approaches must practice ethics in agreement with the goals of justice and equality. They must be capable to take up full responsibility on those research processes dealing with gender, which begin by studying gender relations and end up by analyzing society as a whole.

Which were the social settings in Cuba in the mid eighties? Which were the personal settings of the researchers in the sample?

The majority of the researchers in the sample started focusing their studies on gender relations, mainly on women, in the middle of the eighties or early in the nineties. Therefore, I decided to reconstruct the social and personal conditions they were living in at that moment, to help understand why they decided to begin dealing with gender related topics.

Before I do so, I wish to admit that my sample is biased. I did not include in it well known scholars, who strongly contributed to develop gender research and teaching in Cuba. I am thinking of Graciela Pogolotti, Adelaida de Juan, Mirta Rodríguez Calderón and John Doumoulin. Specialists in the sample mentioned their names, as well as those
of Vicentina Antuña, Mirta Aguirre, Camila Henríquez Ureña and Isabel Larguía, who are no longer among us.

I will go back to the sample.

The three researchers under thirty became familiar with gender topics in the course of their undergraduate studies during the nineties. This fact explains why they wrote their thesis for their BA’s and Master’s degrees concerning gender relations. They began dealing with these themes younger than the rest of the specialists in the sample and with a wider culture on them.

In the midst of the seventies, the two demographers and the sociologist who taught demography were the first specialists in the sample to acknowledge the differences coming out of statistical data, on using the variable sex. But they started using a gender approach only at the beginning or in the middle of the eighties.

Next came the specialists who, early in the eighties, wanted to evidence women in Cuban literature of the XIXth. and XXth. centuries.

The rest of the persons in the sample started investigating gender relations during the second half of the eighties or early in the nineties.

I cannot explain yet why the process of entering the field of gender studies evolved this way among the scholars in my sample. Maybe it had to do with their professions. Anyway, in order to answer scientifically, I would have to submit these inferences to the specialists I interviewed, so that we could arrive at conclusions seriously.

Which were the social contexts related to women when the bulk of gender studies began developing in Cuba? Which were the personal settings of the researchers?
At the societal level, Cuban women’s development was strongly evident around 1985-86. In terms of employment, they represented 37.7% of the labor force and 56% of all professional and technical workers in the State civil sector. (2) The feminization of education was visible, for 52% of all university graduates and 54% of all graduates from upper secondary levels were girls. (3) Women workers had higher educational levels than their men coworkers.

At the political level, the “rectification” process, which expanded from late 1984 up to 1988-89, was aimed to amend certain discriminations suffered by women, mainly women workers. This was one of the reasons for the massive construction of nurseries, houses and new schools. In 1986, the Third Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba declared the need to promote women, blacks and youth to decision making positions.

The IV Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women in 1985 evidenced the rise of women’s participation in all spheres of life. This organization promoted that Cuban specialists (women and men) attended international events, where they could compare the situation of Cuban women with those of women in other countries. I will mention three examples: the preparatory meeting of Latin American and Caribbean representatives for the UN Conference in Nairobi on the Decade of Women (Havana, 1984); the International meeting of women on the external debt (Havana, 1985) and the UN Conference for the Decade of Women (Nairobi, 1985).

The presence of Cuban specialists in international exchanges concerning women grew since 1985. As experts they attended events related to the UN Decade for Women, organized by Cuban organizations or UN agencies. Cuba, through the Federation of Cuban Women, was represented in the meetings of the Convention for the Elimination of
all Forms of Exploitation on Women (CEDAW) at the United Nations headquarters. In the course of these meetings, Cuban delegates were able to feedback the implementation of social policies benefiting women in Cuba. Cuban scholars exchanged with their colleagues from Latin American, American, Canadian and Western European universities, and became acquainted with their Women’s Studies Programs. They were attracted by the feminist trends of thought aimed at unveiling and explaining inequalities between men and women, specially questions related to the feminization of poverty. At the same time, UNFPA promoted studies on Population and Development, underlining the need of using sociological approaches to analyze demographic data.

The Federation of Cuban Women coordinated social research programs on Cuban women with Cuban and foreign scholars. These investigations mobilized a revival of sociological research in Cuba, not only research referred to women. As examples I will mention the study with women workers at the textile factory “Celia Sanchez Manduley” (1987), the study carried out by Helen Safa and the Federation of Cuban Women in the textile factory “Ariguanabo” (1986-89), and the comparative study on women’s employment in five countries of the Americas (1987-88). Participants in the National Seminar on the Implementation of the Nairobi Strategies for Women in Cuba (Havana, 1988) developed multidisciplinary reflections on the situation of Cuban women.

In 1991, Cuban scholars and the Federation of Cuban Women jointly created the Women Studies Program at the University of Havana, as well as Women and Family Programs in other Cuban universities. The Federation created the Houses for Women and the Family at the municipal levels, and the Center for Research on Women of the Federation of Cuban Women.
Casa de las Américas, the Cuban Union for Artists and Writers (UNEAC), the Institute of Literature and Linguistics and the Union of Cuban Journalists (UPEC) created permanent spaces to discuss gender matters among Cuban and foreign specialists.

Since 1986, the scientific conferences organized by Cuban universities and the Academy of Sciences have dedicated working groups to discuss gender issues. They are usually the most attended ones.

The crisis of the nineties in Cuba, the so called “special period”, acknowledged the basic role played by Cuban women in it, thanks to the creative ways in which they implemented strategies to survive and to live with very little resources. Likewise, differences between men and women openly appeared in terms of access to empowerment, and questions related to youth. Prostitution reappeared, and although it had new traits, on comparing it with prostitution in other periods of Cuban history, it worried and worries Cuban citizens.

Social scientists in my sample lived throughout all these experiences inside Cuba and they studied them, balancing with difficulty matters of involvement and detachment.

During the second half of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, the specialists in the sample had fully developed their personal and professional lives. Of course, I exclude the three younger specialists.

As professionals, they had defended their doctorates or were preparing to do so. Many of them had already defended their master’s degrees. They were full or assistant professors and/or researchers, which are the highest ranking categories in Cuban academia. They had accumulated a considerable amount of research in the topics they had specialized. From these positions, they engaged in gender studies. They were
capable of selecting matters in which they were definitely interested in, and which they could connect to their previous research topics and scientific culture. They were, therefore, able to open a permanent process of feedbacks between feminist knowledge and the outcomes of knowledge in which they were specialized: for example, methodology of social research, social history of Cuba, compared and family law, relations among rural workers.

Reading the curricula of the specialists in the sample I can state that in the last fifteen years they have developed very wide contacts with colleagues around the world. They have discussed papers in conferences; they have joined organizing committees for international scientific events; they have taught in foreign universities; they have joined international multidisciplinary research teams; they have received scholarships from outstanding scientific agencies; they have worked as experts for UN and other international agencies.

Since the middle of the eighties and up to the early nineties, these persons had fully lived their personal life cycles and had matured from these experiences. They had raised children; changed their marital status or stayed with their original couple; had lost their parents or were taking care of them.

They had lived through processes that made them take decisions constantly. Engaging feminism and/or gender studies was one of them.

I have to work out more the intertwining of these three levels: what happens at the level of society as a whole, at the level of their professional environments and at the level of their personal lives. Plus what is happening at the global world level concerning gender studies. All this would enable me to explain comprehensively and sociologically
how each of these levels has stamped its seal in the research process of these Cuban scholars.

I have also to consider the fact that feminist trends were stigmatized in Cuba during many years, and prejudices towards them still persist. It is necessary to consider this fact on analyzing why we engaged so late in gender studies, compared to our colleagues from other countries.

**Which were the motives that prompted you to study gender topics?**

The main incentive that led all specialists in the sample towards gender studies was their will to attain social justice and to erase discrimination towards women, in the first place, and homosexuals. Practically all of them sense that there is a need to study men in order to understand their role in the social and individual networks which have marginalized women and homosexuals. They also want to unearth the social, spiritual and physical problems suffered by men, due to the roles which society assigned them.

The wish to struggle against the “nobodyness” assigned to women in many levels of society, flourished from discriminations experienced by several of the women in the sample in the course of their lives. Historians Gladys Marel García, Sonnia Moro and Elvira Díaz Vallina, who fought in the underground movement against Batista in the fifties, were compelled to prove that they were as good as the men they fought with.

Other two graduates from arts and letters were annoyed by the lack of information on Cuban literature written by women and by the low participation of women in literary anthologies and juries. Several women in the sample acknowledged that they were
motivated to join gender studies by their feminist involvement. According to Luisa Campuzano, it is a wide conception of feminism, an inclusive one, which respects differences and pursues a feminization of equality, e.g., an understanding of equality which does not erase the differences between genders.

The second motive urging them to focus on gender topics was the need to accomplish a comprehensive scientific approach of society. They were experienced scholars in their fields of knowledge, who at a certain point of their careers admitted the need to include a gender view in their scientific approach, in order to understand society both globally and individually. Historian María del Carmen Barcia used the gender perspective in her studies of the role of Cuban families in Cuban social history of the XIXth century. Digna Castañeda worked with it when she studied the role of women slaves’ labor force during the nineteenth century in Cuba and the Caribbean. Lawyer and sociologist Olga Mesa applied the gender approach in her studies of comparative law, to understand why, although there is legal equality for men and women in Cuba today, many subtle and even open inequalities persist, due to cultural machismo persisting in men and women.

According to scholars in the sample, one of the basic scientific traits of gender approach is that it does much more than mere diagnosis: it transcends it, searching for diversities which they can compare in order to find essences, and because it helps them to attain a comprehensive understanding of society, without leaving out individualities. Therefore, all researchers using this perspective start focusing on gender matters and end up by studying the social environment as a whole. In the seventies, sociologist and demographer Juan Carlos Alfonso became acquainted with a huge amount of social
and demographic information in the Department of Demography where he started working when he graduated. He admitted that all data had been impeccably calculated, but they lacked “sociological imagination”. He began noting the differences arising in them when he submitted them to the variable sex. “Imagine what happened when I used the gender approach many years later.” As a way to explain this idea, he referred to the rich information you can infer when you analyze fertility not just as an issue concerning women. You have to understand the social and economic settings where women and their partners are living, and you have to question how men’s behaviors affect the reproductive process.

When Cuban organizations started publishing statistical data on women, many of the researchers in the sample were interested in explaining the different behaviors among men and women. They mentioned Mujeres en cifras (Women in Numbers) (Federation of Cuban Women, 1975), La población de Cuba (The Population of Cuba), (Center for Demographic Studies of the University of Havana, 1976), the Statistical Yearbooks on Cuba (which stopped being published in the nineties due to the crisis) and the recent Statistical Profile of the Cuban Woman in the Threshold of the XXI Century (published by the National Office of Statistics in Cuba, 1999). They also referred to other publications edited by the Federation of Cuban Women since the midst of the seventies, with data on women.

Another reason which led specialists in the sample to use the gender approach, was that it was useful to bring out the small, omitted and forgotten things of everyday life, and to understand their meaning in society. This is the case of the jokes used by women agricultural workers of the town of Guanímar to challenge their men coworkers,
hammering on their sexual impotence. At one point, men usually were unable to defend themselves from these jokes, and they always retreated. The investigator inferred that this could be a way in which women workers practiced their power towards men. There is another example. In her book Reyita, Daysi Rubiera, whom I could not interview, tells the story of her mother, a Black woman born from slave parents. Using the method of life history and paying attention to the most insignificant details of Reyita’s life, the author embodies the intricate network of gender, class and race in Cuba mainly in the first half of the XXth century.

The youngest specialists in the sample, who started studying gender in the nineties, were motivated to transcend the limits of research on women, to be able to focus on men and homosexuals. They wanted to dig much more in the differences among sex, gender and sexual orientation, and to deepen the hypothesis which says that patriarchal cultures constructed the men-women dichotomy, leaving out homosexuals. They were willing to unveil the conception which proclaims that homosexuals are a social pathology. This is why Gryska Miñoso studied differences in criteria on quality of life among HIV patients, and why Luis Robledo wrote his master’s degree thesis on homosexuals in Cuba.

Third motive. During the nineties, specialists in the sample started studying gender relations or continued doing so, thanks to their participation in discussions carried out by several multidisciplinary groups among Cuban women. They usually invited foreign specialists. This is the case of the workshops organized by the Women’s Studies Program at the University of Havana, Casa de las Américas, the Federation of Cuban Women and its Fe del Valle school, by UNEAC, UPEC, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center,
the Cátedra Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda of the Institute of Literature and Linguistics and by Magín.

Reading foreign authors specialized in gender matters and getting to know them personally, has been a permanent source of motivation to develop gender studies. They also mention the fact that they have learned much from working together with foreign specialists in Cuba or abroad. Throughout these exchanges, both parties benefited. They referred to the Mexican Elena Urrutia and her Interdisciplinary Program for Gender Studies at El Colegio de Mexico; to the Brazilian Mary Garcia Castro and the American Helen Safa, who headed the Ariguanabo textile factory research on women; to the American Carmen Diana Deere and Colombian Magdalena León de Leal in studies with rural working women; to Dominican Magaly Pineda and to anthropologists Dolores Juliano, Verena Stolcke from Barcelona.

Several specialists in the sample began studying gender topics, because they were asked by Cuban organizations to help them do so. Once they started, they could not stop. Only one of these specialists was already a feminist when she was invited; the rest engaged feminism later.

Mention the methodological approach, the methods and the techniques used by you in gender studies. Which are the non Cuban schools of thought and authors, referred to methods and methodology, which have influenced more on you?

At the end of the XVIIIth century, Don José Agustín Caballero recommended intellectuals in Cuba to practice an “elective approach”. Thus he urged his students to
extract knowledge from all readings and experiences that could help them understand their realities, wherever they came from.

All those in the sample have widely practiced “electivism”. They named it a non dogmatic approach, “illustrated eclecticism” and also referred to it as the infinite capability to absorb all wisdom that contributes to understand reality in an intelligent and committed way.

Specialists in the sample studied Marxism in the course of their careers, their masters degree programs and their doctorates. They have used it to implement their methodological perspectives. They became acquainted with the Soviet Marxist handbooks, but preferred to draw out methodological hints from the works of the classics and the contemporary Marxist authors. They referred to Karl Marx’s “The Method of Political Economy” (mainly his categories of the “concrete represented” and the “concrete thought”); to the works of Antonio Gramsci (useful to explain subjectivities, hegemony and the mechanisms of power); Che Guevara and his “Notes to Study the Ideology of the Cuban Revolution” (where he suggest the need to use Marxism in a scientifically natural way, devoid of dogmatism) and Marxist Western European intellectuals like Thompson (who criticized the artless dichotomy of basis and superstructure).

A solid academic formation plus all the vital experiences she attained from living in Cuba and working as a professional, maybe led Mirta Yáñez to exclaim: “I practice Marxism with a historical and logical perspective, from Havana, and from my perspective as a middle aged woman, who is always trying to keep her condition as a science fiction writer”.
All members of the sample favor constructing their own information and reflecting upon it, for the purpose of drawing their personal conclusions. Historian Maria del Carmen Barcia writes social history or historical sociology following recommendations she brought out from the works of Charles and Louise Tilly: she analyses data she has personally collected, and opposes those who use ideas written by others, adding afterwards a theoretical framework picked up also from other authors.

I summarize some of the methodological approaches used by specialists in the sample.

- They practice the so called “epistemological vigilance”, which means they refrain from imposing their own ideologies on those they are studying, in order to facilitate the flow of the latter’s ideas.

- They try to control the power they impose on the persons they study throughout the investigation. Specialists admit that when they interview people and observe them, they actually “invite” and “make” them unveil parts of their lives which interest the researcher, and which are usually very intimate. On the other hand, investigators never share their own experiences.

- They learn from everything that helps them understand gender relations: literature, lyrics of songs and from the messages contained in mass media. They love to disentangle the most sexist manifestations conveyed in texts and images, to be able to learn what they really mean and how they have been constructed. They say it is very revealing to learn from negative experiences.

- They confer meaning to unnoticed events in everyday life: those performed by the marginalized and the forgotten.
. They consider that all researchers must amply practice intuition in matters of gender, but within a process led by their intelligences, which have been highly trained in gender issues.

. They persist in assuming the ethics of feminism throughout their professional and personal lives.

In matters concerning methods, practically all researchers in the sample declared using both quantitative and qualitative methods, favoring the use of the latter.

They use socio-demographic information to understand the social and historical settings where the persons they study live. They compare statistical data concerning people in their samples with macro socio-demographic information, to be able to seize similar and different traits in their behaviors, leading them to withdraw conclusions. For example, age of women when they have their first child; type of family they live in; marital status; race.

Researchers in the sample combine quantitative and qualitative methods for the purpose of identifying people they study in demographic terms, mainly to measure their quality of life.

They privilege qualitative methods for the two following reasons.

. They contribute to analyze subjectivities of persons, as well as other facts of their lives, which questions contained in surveys are unable to disclose.

. They are cheaper in terms of material and human resources, at least in the case of Cuba. The crisis of the nineties drastically cut down the possibilities to print questionnaires and to mobilize huge numbers of surveyors.

Qualitative methods used by them vary according to their professions.
Historians use procedures of historical anthropology and of micro history. While studying families they apply methods of formal sociability worked out by Maurice Agulhon and those of informal sociability used by Casey. They also referred to Michel Foucault’s methods related to capillary history, to analyze the diverse and unseen levels of empowerment not included in the political sphere.

They always analyze documentary sources and secondary ones. When they study contemporary history, oral history conveys historians to explore subjectivities of the persons they are interviewing. This a procedure that requires empathy among researchers and their objects of study. It also permits all persons involved in the research process to uncover their affections, and it is a method which releases the needs of persons to be heard. When you use it properly, it is difficult to find persons unwilling to talk. Specialists in the sample are familiar with the works of Mexicans Eugenia Meyer and Marcela Lagarde, and with those of Americans Angela Davies, Marietta Morisey and Rebecca Scott.

Those in the sample specialized in studying women in literature approach literary texts focusing on their contents and the social and historical environments where they were produced. They also consider the intertextual and intratextual relations, as well as the biography of the authors they study. They privileged reading and gaining experiences from those foreign authors who practice a critical social view, and who analyze race, gender and class. They mentioned American bell hooks, Jean Franco, Mary Louise Pratt, Julia Kristeva and Ellen Showalter, and Latin American authors Silvia Moloy, Elena Urrutia, Aralia López, Marlyse Meyer and Rosario Ferré. They also referred to Italian Luisa Murano and the philosophers of the Diotima group from Verona.
Susana Montero has used idiothematic analysis (análisis idiotemático) to search for the diverse expressions arising from women and men readers. She submitted literary texts written by women to masculine and feminine readers, and found out how differently they interpreted those texts according to their genders. For example, men saw in them historical perspectives, myths and elements of continuity. Women brought out the semantics of denial, the intentions of breaking with traditional feminine discourses and the purpose of denying social rules.

Sociologists and anthropologists use participant observation for it contributes to reveal even the most insignificant behaviors of men and women. It also helps researchers to become involved in the social process they are observing. They consider that investigations must start with observation methods, because it is a way to become acquainted with those parts of society on which they are focusing in. These methods are useful to design research projects, for they enrich the visions of social scientists, and they helps decide on the samples. When sociologist Luis Robledo developed the exploratory phase of his research on homosexuals, he visited several gay groups in Havana until he decided which of them would be invited to his discussion groups. In studies with women in traditional and non-traditional feminine jobs, in others carried out by Niurka Pérez with women agricultural workers and peasants in rural communities and in María Isabel Domínguez’ studies with young women, observation methods served to decide which groups were going to be submitted to questionnaires, in-depth interviews and, finally, which persons were going to be subject to life histories.
Sociologists and anthropologists in the sample have read Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, Carmen Diana Deere, Magdalena León de Leal and Maria Aparecida Morais to become acquainted with the use of observation methods. Researchers who have practiced observation techniques with their “equals” (gays, professional women, middle aged women) admit that it has been easier for them to develop empathetic links with these persons. But they are conscious of the risk of excessively committing themselves to these persons, as well as the danger of developing transference and counter-transference. Both mistakes could block their visions and limit their capability to watch how others behave.

In-depth interviews provided them with information that people transmit only when they trust their interviewers. Therefore they became acquainted with traits of their sexual behaviors, problems arising from relations between subordinates and chiefs and with topics of violence.

They admitted learning on in-depth interview procedures from authors such as Mary Garcia Castro, Yolanda Prieto and Helen Safa.

Sociologists and anthropologists in the sample have also used group interviews, discussion groups and techniques related to Popular Education. They used them to complement other methods to collect information; to submit final reports to group discussions; and to feedback persons who have been studied with the conclusions and the recommendations of the research. Among the sources they have consulted for these methods are texts produced by the Center for investigation and action on women (CI PAF) headed by Magaly Pineda in the Dominican Republic, by the Center for Women’s Studies (CEM) in Chile and the works of Pablo Freyre.
Sociologists have used content analysis to bring out the images of women transmitted by Cuban mass media and to unveil the new needs and values related to gender, which are present in Cuban ideology today. This was the main method used in studies on images of men and women in the lyrics of the traditional and the new “trova”, and images of women in tourist advertising made by Cubans. The foreign authors mostly consulted were Michelle and Armand Mattelart and Maureen Honey.

Specialists in the sample are acquainted with life history methods developed by Oscar Lewis, Elena Poniatowska, Elsa Chaney and Arlie Hochschild, but they have used it very little. The only sociologist who has published a work based on life history is Niurka Pérez; it is Ana’s Home (El hogar de Ana).

Biologist and anthropologist Leticia Artiles has combined methods from Sociology, Anthropology and health studies in her research on women and health policies and middle aged women and reproductive health. She has read the works published by the Pan American Office of Health and its Program on Women, Health and Development; those edited by the Latin American Network on Gender and Collective Health; the ones written by Dolores Juliano, Verena Stolcke, Carma Valls and other members of the Center for Analysis and Health Programs in Barcelona and those written by Argentine Deborah Tajer.

What would you suggest those who start researching gender relations?

I arranged the suggestions considering the importance given by the specialists in the sample. My paper concludes here.
1. Whoever decides to begin studying gender relations must consider gender as a relational category, which expresses hierarchical cultural attributes of one sex in relation to the other. They must not forget this approach when they analyze the history of cultural relations in terms of power and domination at the societal level and at the personal ones. They have to study feminism in its ample conception, and they must not reduce it to the vulgar and wrongful meaning that considers feminine gender as the superior one. Gender includes both men and women and we have to look at both. But it is necessary to scientifically view men, in order to study their attitudes in the process of manipulating power mechanisms, and the traumas they have suffered by playing these roles. This does not mean that women’s studies are over. The fact is that there are more studies on women than on men. And many of the recommendations coming out of these studies aimed at equity cannot be implemented until there is enough scientific knowledge on the role of men in the social patterns used to dominate women.

2. Specialists must be familiar with theoretical and epistemological works on gender relations, and must also read research reports. They must know the social settings in which each of these works was written. On doing so, they will be able to decide how they can be applied to Cuba, and how they can be used to produce comparative studies to explain Cuban gender relations. First you have to know the life experiences, the historical and present facts which you are studying, and only afterwards you can submit them to updated theory. This is the only way to avoid imposing “straight jackets” on society, to elude submitting social relations we are studying to theories which are unable to explain them.
3. Gender perspective is instrumentally valuable to analyze economical, political and ideological relations in a given society. It is impossible to study any matter concerning social behavior without a gender perspective. You have to understand gender linked to social and historical structures, linked to class, race and generations. Therefore there is a need to transcend the description of what men and women do. You have to rise beyond the limits of how they think of themselves to be able to understand how each of them constructs their truths in specific social systems.

4. Scholars studying gender relations cannot behave with double standards. They must believe in what they are studying, and must be able to change their most intimate conceptions and attitudes, in order to approach their studies in an honest, genuine and legitimate way. To commit themselves to the gender approach in their professional and personal lives means to passionately dedicate themselves to change people’s lives, policies, cultural productions, all scopes of life. Those who study gender relations cannot be pleased only with publishing their works; they have to do everything possible to apply the recommendations of their research to the way they and others think and act. They must fight all sorts of repressions towards their works.

5. When they approach the objects of their studies to explain them, they must avoid depending solely on previously established criteria, however consecrated they could be. They must act without prejudices, to elude biasing their studies.

6. All along the investigation process, they must be creative: from designing it to concluding with recommendations.

7. Researchers must select methods that facilitate dealing with the diverse facts, which are present in gender relations. We are talking about methods that, from an
epistemological stand point, do not contradict the principles of a diverse and inclusive, Marxist feminism, one that rises above the limits of gender relations and tries to understand society as a whole.

8. One must confer leading roles to the persons being studied, even those who play minor roles. This is also valid when you are studying history. It spares the predominance of the researcher’s voice. In contemporary studies, you must practice participative research/action, whenever possible.

9. You must succeed in balancing involvement and detachment.

Havana, August, 2001

NOTES
(3) IBIDEM, Tablas XIII.10, pag. 521 y XIII.11, pag. 522.

ANNEX
Works on gender written by specialists in the sample
NOTE: In the printed version of this article I summarized the works on gender written by the researchers I interviewed, whether they are published or not. In each case I selected up to five of these works, to give the readers a preliminary version of the unabridged lists of articles, essays and books, attached to the electronic version of this paper. I respected the way in which each author listed their works.
Juan Carlos Alfonso Fraga. Sociologist and demographer. As author and co-author, he has published seven books, reports and essays and twelve articles. Six articles are in print.


María del Carmen Barcia. Historian. Has published two books and seven articles on gender.

Luisa Campuzano. Philologist, essay writer. She has compiled, introduced and written the notes of three books. She has published thirty three essays, articles and reviews.


Digna Castañeda Fuertes. Historian. Her work on Cuban women slaves in the XIXth century has been published in several countries.


Nayibe Díaz Machado. Sociologist.


Elvira Díaz Vallina. Historian. Has written three works.


María Isabel Domínguez García. Sociologist. Has published seven articles and written twelve papers on gender.


Gladys Marel García Pérez. Published three books and essays. Is writing nine essays on gender.


Julio César González Pagés. Historian.


Olga Mesa Castillo. Lawyer and sociologist. Has published five articles and one book is in print.

. “La situación jurídica de la mujer en Cuba”, en el libro Diversidad y Complejidad Familiar en Cuba, editado por el Centro de Estudios Demográficos (CEDEM) de la Universidad de La Habana y el Instituto Iberoamericano de Estudios sobre Familia, Santa fe de Bogotá, 1999.
. Temas de Derecho de Familia, libro en proceso de edición en la Editorial “Félix Varela” de la Universidad de La Habana.

Susana Montero Sánchez. Pedagogue and specialist in Hispanic language and literature. Has published one book, co-edited another and has written several articles.


Gryska Miñoso Molina. Sociologist. Her works have not been published.
...“Estudio de calidad de vida de personas viviendo con VIH SIDA con un enfoque de género”, Instituto “Pedro Kourí” de Medicina Tropical, La Habana, 1996.
. “Estudio de calidad de vida de personas viviendo con lepra con un enfoque de género”, Instituto “Pedro Kourí” de Medicina Tropical, La Habana, 1997.
. “Estudio de calidad de vida de personas viviendo con tuberculosis con un enfoque de género”, Instituto “Pedro Kourí” de Medicina Tropical, La Habana, 1998.
. “Estudio de personas viviendo con VIH SIDA en una comunidad de ayuda mutua”, tesis con la que obtuvo el Master en Sociología, Universidad de La Habana, 2000.


. Miria Rodríguez Calderón, Sonnia Moro y otras, Queda mucho por andar., PNUD, La Habana, 1995.
. Miria Rodríguez Calderón, Sonnia Moro y Marta Núñez, “¿Es varón la Calabacita?”, Revista Bohemia, No. 1988, La Habana.

Marta Núñez Sarmiento. Sociologist. Has published twenty one articles and has written an unedited book.

. Mirta Rodríguez Calderón, Sonnia Moro y otras, Queda mucho por andar., PNUD, La Habana, 1995.
. Mirta Rodríguez Calderón, Sonnia Moro y Marta Núñez, “¿Es varón la Calabacita?”, Revista Bohemia, No. 1988, La Habana.

Marta Núñez Sarmiento. Sociologist. Has published twenty one articles and has written an unedited book.

. “Necesidades y valores nuevos en la identidad de género en Cuba”, en el libro Cuba: Sociedad y Trabajo, compilado por el Dr. Julio Busquets y editado por el Ajuntament de Barberá del Vallés y la Fundació Comaposada, Barcelona, 2000. pp. 107-120.
Niurka Pérez Rojas. Has published six books as author or co-author. Has published eighteen articles.


Luis Robledo. Sociologist. Has written four studies on gender, unedited.


Norma Vasallo. Psychologist. Has published one book, six articles and several papers.

Mirta Yáñez, Philologist, journalist and writer. Has published an essay, has selected works for six antologies on women and has written introductions for them. Has published twenty one articles, testimonies and interviews.

- Cubanas a capítulo (ensayo), Editorial Oriente, Santiago de Cuba, 2000.
- Selección e Introducción a Album de poetisas cubanas, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1997.

NOTA: Falta n los resúmenes de los trabajos de Mayda Alvarez, Sonia Catasús, y Ana Violeta González.

Havana, August 2001