

Chapter 18 / Capítulo 18



*Time, Power, and Resistances in Latin America:
Narratives, Democracy, and Global Reconfigurations
(English Version)*

ISBN: 978-9915-704-40-1

DOI: 10.62486/978-9915-704-40-1.Ch18

Pages: 167-173

©2026 The authors. This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 License.

Violence, Gender and Morality. A reflection on Cuba

Violencias, Género y Moral. Una reflexión sobre Cuba

Aliuska Brizuela Vega¹

¹Universidad de Guanajuato, Maestría en Análisis Político. México.

ABSTRACT

Activists and independent media outlets in Cuba report a significant increase in feminicides and gender-based violence. In addition to the absence of a comprehensive law against gender violence and the government's refusal to classify femicide, femicide, and vicarious violence as specific crimes, we consider that this situation occurs largely because collective morality in Cuba is based on machista codes that normalize women's subordination and dependence on men. This is a deeply rooted social problem in the imaginary culture, because "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute; she is the Other".

Keywords: Cuba; Violence; Morality.

RESUMEN

Activistas y medios de comunicación independientes en Cuba confirman un significativo aumento de los feminicidios y las violencias de género. Además de la ausencia de una ley general contra la violencia de género y la negativa del gobierno a tipificar el feminicidio, femicidio y la violencia vicaria, consideramos que esto sucede en gran parte, porque la moral colectiva en Cuba está basada en códigos machistas, de sujeción y dependencia de la mujer hacia el hombre; una problemática social arraigada en la cultura imaginaria porque "Él es el Sujeto, él es lo Absoluto, ella es lo Otro".

Palabras clave: Cuba; Violencia; Moral.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2022, Cuba entered the Latin American Map of Femicide for the first time, a tool created by the international association Mundo Sur. Then, in 2023, it became the Latin American country with the highest increase in crimes marked by sexist violence that year. The 86 confirmed femicides double the historical maximum since records began, according to the article "Violencia Machista" (Gender-Based Violence), published in *Diario de Cuba* on November 23, 2023. During 2024, independent observatories recorded 56 femicides, and so far this year, there have been 19, according to recent reports on the Facebook page YoSíTeCreo en Cuba and the Alas Tensas Gender Observatory.

The figures would not seem alarming when compared to any other country in Latin America. However, it should be noted that, first of all, these figures are underreported and based on data collected by independent activists with limited resources, in a context that penalizes with imprisonment any demonstration, action, and/or activism not approved by the establishment.

Secondly, we must emphasize that femicides are the tip of an iceberg based on different types of gender-based violence, which are normalized in everyday life and intimate spaces such as the home, the community, the workplace, and school. This happens, in large part, because collective morality in Cuba is based on macho codes of subjugation and dependence of women on men; a social problem rooted in the imaginary culture because “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 2014, p. 18).

Addressing the issue

Gerardo was summoned to the police station. His ex-wife accused him of continued physical violence and attempted rape. A black eye, bruises on his body, and the testimony of two family members were not enough for the officer on duty that day. Solidarity was with the aggressor because he was only protecting his morals from a woman who wanted to “leave him after so many years.” They were sent home, Gerardo with a fine of 30 pesos and she with the advice to solve “the problems between husband and wife.”

This is not an isolated situation in Cuba. The behavior of men as owners of women, and at the same time as educators and punishers of them for transgressing the rules, their rules, responds to what Rita Segato (2018) calls “ownership,” referring to control over a territory and the bodies of its women as part and emblem of that territory. For her, it is no longer enough to talk about inequalities; it is necessary to understand the dynamics of power and control, and how their structures work to dismantle gender-based violence in all its dimensions.

Segato (2018) coined the term “pedagogy of cruelty” to refer to “all acts and practices that teach, accustom, and program subjects to transmute the living and their vitality into things” (p.11). In this sense, the researcher asserts that the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and girls are the most perfect examples and, at the same time, allegories of this pedagogy of cruelty.

Other feminists, such as Marcela Lagarde (2006; 2008), study the supposed exemplary role of men, which they even use to justify rape and femicide. This exemplary role can be understood in its full magnitude if we understand the existence of a social-sexual contract established between men, where women are the commodity.

However, the primary basis for this violence and its normalization lies in morality, because it is precisely morality, understood as unwritten norms, values, and customs that a person and/or culture has as a perception of good and evil, that regulates behavior. And while it is true that this concept helps us understand human beings and their behavior, it is also true that, on more than a few occasions, the concept of morality is distorted precisely because of the burden of subjectivity it carries. The Cuban patriarchy, together with the country’s totalitarian regime, has been very adept at taking advantage of this.

Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Kant, Socrates... are some of the best-known philosophers today who studied morality. They agree on the importance of focusing on the individual and on society.

Aristotle focused on moral education. Descartes, for his part, explained that moral rectitude consists in the disposition always to do what is best, and how the will is strengthened by knowledge, education, study, and science, which acquire moral value.

Kant argues that morality is not just a theory. On the contrary: it is in itself a practice in

the objective sense, since it is the set of unconditional laws according to which we must act... The fundamental value of morality is respect for people and the demand for self-respect... For Kant, the foundation of morality is freedom of will” (in Granja, 2018).

However, the freedom pointed out by the famous philosopher is only plausible for rational people.

On the other hand, Marxism-Leninism understands morality solely in relation to specific historical conditions. And only that which leads to the socialist system and destroys capitalism is morally correct. Supposedly, the triumph of the socialist revolution would bring with it a new morality: the same morality that in the 1970s and 1980s in Cuba praised promiscuous men but punished them if their wives were unfaithful, or allegedly so.

“Morality is one of the forms of social consciousness. It determines the obligations of men and their relations with each other and with society,” states the Marxist Philosophical Dictionary (1946, p. 224). Thus, morality should be a tool that links individual needs and interests with social ones, for the benefit of fair coexistence among all.

However, morality in Cuba does not apply according to this definition; rather, it becomes repressive for half the national population. And its supposedly objective principles become partial because they do not have universal validity, as they conform to the subordination of women to men and are used as a tactic and strategy to sustain patriarchy.

Morality is biased when it allows an aggressor to use as a legal mitigating factor that his wife dressed inappropriately, that she did something he did not allow her to do, or that she tarnished his honor. It is also biased when schools require “boys’ clothes” and “boys’ haircuts,” and when boys are allowed to go out and have fun at home, but girls have to stay home to avoid comments. These are just a few everyday examples, which are magnified in rural areas, far from cultural life, “development,” and technology. Although it also occurs similarly in cities, albeit to a lesser extent.

Cuba is the only country in Latin America that does not have a comprehensive law against gender violence. Nor does it have laws against femicide, feminicide, or vicarious violence. However, some laws and regulations supposedly protect women, starting with the Constitution, which states in Article 1 that:

Cuba is a socialist state of law and social justice, democratic, independent, and sovereign, organized with all and for the good of all as a unitary and indivisible republic, founded on the work, dignity, humanism, and ethics of its citizens for the enjoyment of freedom, equity, equality, solidarity, well-being, and individual and collective prosperity (ANPP, 2019).

However, social conventions, myths, and stereotypes that benefit the macho male who defends his honor and manhood carry more weight; after all, these are “husband and wife problems,” as in the case of Gerardo and his wife.

So, on the one hand, we have a false morality in Cuba that is legitimizing and normalizing gender-based violence, to the point of reaching femicide and being ingrained in social, political, and cultural structures and institutions. On the other hand, there is a clear increase in gender-based discrimination and violence, problems that are exacerbated by the country’s

extremely poor social, economic, and political conditions and that punish women in multiple and synchronous ways in their roles as workers, mothers, homemakers, caregivers... roles that are also simultaneous.

Gender violence is a problem that affects not only the direct victim; it affects the family, Cuban society, and its progress, as it impacts the use of talent and labor, exacerbates economic differences and the inequality gap in access to education, health, and technology, and negatively impacts family, community, and social harmony. And despite this damage, because it is rooted in false morality, gender discrimination and violence are normalized in Cuban society to the point of being imperceptible in the vast majority of cases, even reaching the culminating point of femicide.

Taking into account the above reflections and our own experience, morality mediates the individual and collective actions of Cuban society. This false morality conceived by the Cuban collective imagination is legitimizing behaviors of violence and discrimination, which originate at home and reach the institutional level. Therefore, this is an issue that requires an interdisciplinary study, with perspectives from ethics, education, politics, and culture, to name just the most basic ones. Such a study is vital to promote social practices, structures, and laws that break down patterns, stereotypes, and prejudices that legitimize gender-based violence, including femicide and feminicide, in everyday life. Furthermore, it is vital for articulating programs and solutions that transcend and deconstruct myths related to race, sexuality, and religious beliefs, among others.

CONCLUSIONS

This text is not intended to be a theoretical or philosophical study on the subject. We do want to reflect on this issue to highlight gender-based violence, which is on the rise in Cuba, and to help raise awareness of the urgency and the right to equality, which is ultimately a universal human right. For this reason, we reiterate the urgency of a gender perspective that enables individuals to see themselves and their peers as beings with individual and collective identities, capable of influencing others and changing opinions and attitudes.

When values are distorted, gender-based violence is legitimized, made invisible, and/or normalized, and thus perpetuated. Because false morality blames the victim and not the aggressor, and that is precisely why many women do not report the violence they suffer.

This distortion is naturalized in language, attitudes, and routine behaviors. It is also evident in the discourse of the mainstream media and entertainment, which portrays jealousy as proof of love, in stories where women are rarely the protagonists but instead wait for a Prince Charming to save them. All of this serves to legitimize patriarchy and the otherness that is defined from the moment our sex is known. Because it is true that this false morality also harms men, as it forces them from an early age to maintain a pose of what is considered masculinity. "Boys don't cry," they say.

For this reason, to confront this false morality and the entire framework that sustains patriarchy, discrimination, and gender-based violence, an education system with a gender focus is required, which de facto does not exist in Cuba. Public policies and public awareness campaigns with a gender perspective are also needed, as well as training for officials, police, and managers on gender issues. All of this must be accompanied by raising awareness among the population through community work carried out using popular education techniques and/or

supported by new technologies and audiovisual productions that warn about the risks, routines, and their deconstruction.

But deconstructing macho morality will not be a one-day task; no major project is. However, it would involve separating morality from the law; breaking cycles of invisible and justified violence; improving the quality of life; and, above all, fulfilling a universal human right so that no “Gerardo” goes unpunished.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular. (2019). *Constitución de la República de Cuba*. La Habana: ANPP. Disponible en: <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/constitucion-de-la-republica-de-cuba>

Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular. (2022). *Ley 151/2022. Código Penal*. Gaceta Oficial; sep 1. p. 2557-2696.

Castro, F. (1961, jun 30). *Discurso como conclusión de las reuniones con los intelectuales cubanos*. La Habana: Gobierno Revolucionario. Disponible en: <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html>

Colomé, C. G. (2023, oct 9). *Romper el silencio de los feminicidios en Cuba: “Esa bestia va a venir y me va a matar”*. El País. Disponible en: <https://elpais.com/opinion/2023-10-09/romper-el-silencio-de-los-feminicidios-en-cuba-esa-bestia-va-a-venir-y-me-va-a-matar.html>

De las Américas, C. (2018). *Mujer, saber, feminismo*. La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.

Descartes, R. (1995). *Los principios de la filosofía*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Diario de las Américas. (2023, jul 5). *Ya son 48 los feminicidios ocurridos en Cuba en seis meses*. Disponible en: <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/ya-son-48-los-feminicidios-ocurridos-cuba-seis-meses-n5338946>

Diccionario filosófico marxista. (1946). Montevideo: Ediciones Pueblos Unidos.

Díaz-Canel, M. (2024). *Discurso en la clausura del XI Congreso de la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*. La Habana: Presidencia y Gobierno de la República de Cuba. Disponible en: <https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/presidencia/intervenciones/>

Elton, M. (2015). *Experiencia de los principios morales: Kant y Tomás de Aquino*. Disponible en: https://www.scielo.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0718-92732015000200003

Figueredo, O., Sifontes, Y., & Tamayo, A. T. (2021, may 18). *Mujeres tras las sombras: Desafíos del feminicidio en Cuba (I)*. Cubadebate. Disponible en: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2021/05/18/mujeres-tras-las-sombras-desafios-del-femicidio-en-cuba-i/>

Figueredo, O., Sifontes, Y., & Tamayo, A. T. (2021, may 20). *Mujeres tras las sombras: Desafíos del feminicidio en Cuba (II)*. Cubadebate. Disponible en: <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2021/05/20/mujeres-tras-las-sombras-desafios-del-femicidio-en-cuba-ii/>

Granja, D. (2011). *El postulado de la inmortalidad del alma en la filosofía moral kantiana*. Disponible en: <https://www.scielo.org.mx/>

Kant, I. (1978). *Crítica de la razón pura*. Madrid: Alfaguara.

Kant, I. (s.f.). *Fundamentación de la metafísica de las costumbres*. Madrid: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. Disponible en: <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/fundamentacion-de-la-metaphisica-de-las-costumbres--0/>

Lagarde, M. (2006). *Del femicidio al feminicidio*. Desde el jardín de Freud, (6), 216-225.

Lagarde, M. (2008). *Antropología, feminismo y política: violencia feminicida y derechos humanos de las mujeres*. En *XI Congreso de Antropología* (pp. 209-239). San Sebastián: Ankulegi.

Morales, J. (2017). *Descartes: filósofo de la moral*. Estudios de Filosofía, (55), 11-29.

Muñiz, E. (2018). *Feminismo, sujeto moral y violencia: una trayectoria por la construcción de la violencia en la obra de Virginie Despentes*.

Muñoz, M. (2024, ene 30). *Cronologías y datos: feminicidios en Cuba en 2023*. Martí Verifica. Disponible en: <https://martiverifica.netlify.app/cronologia-y-datos-feminicidios-en-cuba-en-2023>

Segato, R. (2018). *Contra-pedagogías de la crueldad*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros. Disponible en: <https://www.academia.edu/97976350/>

FUNDING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Data curation: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Formal analysis: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Research: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Methodology: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Project management: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Resources: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Software: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Supervision: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Validation: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Visualization: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Writing - original draft: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.

Writing - review and editing: Aliuska Brizuela Vega.