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978-0-521-09846-5 - Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society

Verena Martinez-Alier

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A Study of Racial Attitudes  
and Sexual Values  
in a Slave Society

BY

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## PREFACE

When I first went to Cuba in 1967 my intention was to study its present-day family organization. I wanted to test the various hypotheses developed by sociologists and social anthropologists on family structure in other parts of the Caribbean and examine the extent to which the 1959 revolution had already brought about changes in the Cuban family. For bureaucratic reasons, however, I was only able to spend two months in the field in a small, predominantly coloured coffee-growing village in the Sierra Maestra. This brief stay allowed me to gain an overall impression of the villagers' family organization – the prevalence of stable consensual unions – but was clearly insufficient to understand its complexities, and much less to assess the impact of the revolution, although there were many indications that it had already affected family values in some ways. Thus I was often asked by the villagers, and in particular by the women, whether I had been sent by the revolutionary government in connection with the 'collective marriage' campaign, which had already reached other parts of the island and whose aim it was to give those couples who had so far lived in concubinage the opportunity to marry formally. While the women seemed to welcome this measure, men appeared to be more evasive. Also, the local political secretary, one of the judges of the local people's court, and the secretary of the peasant association pointed out repeatedly that as high-ranking members of the community they would have to get formally married at some point.

Before this short field-work trip and while waiting in Havana for an opportunity to return to the village, which in the end never materialized, I searched the National Archive in Havana for historical material on the family. The largest sections of the Archive, namely the Fondo de Gobierno Superior Civil, the Fondo de Gobierno General and the Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, are catalogued by subject matters. The heading 'marriage', particularly in the Fondo del Gobierno Superior Civil, proved to be a mine of information on marriage practice and policy in nineteenth-century Cuba. Supplemented by more scanty material from other sections, these data constitute the bulk of the information underlying this study.

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Another voluminous section, uncatalogued as yet, the Fondo de Miscelánea, yielded most of the material on elopement and seduction. Already in the early stages of checking and extracting these materials, the relevance of nineteenth-century Cuban marriage policy and practice for an understanding of the twentieth century became apparent. Thus I spent the rest of my stay of a year in the Archive, checking secondary sources at the Biblioteca Nacional 'José Martí'. Subsequently, I also spent some time in Spain at the Archivo Histórico Nacional of Madrid and at the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, but as the judicial questions in connection with marriage were for the most part the concern of the Cuban judiciary, the material in the Spanish archives is scarce.

I am much indebted to the people of the Cuban National Archive for their guidance to the various sections and for their never-ending patience in locating the documents for me, and also to Julio LeRiverend, its head, who made it possible for me to work there. I also want to thank José Luciano Franco, Juan Pérez de la Riva, Jorge Ibarra, Magnus Mörner and Ravindra Jain for the fruitful discussions we had on critical points of the study and for guiding me to useful materials and secondary sources.

This book is based upon a D. Phil. thesis submitted to the University of Oxford. Both for editorial reasons and for the sake of readability a substantial part of the evidence contained in the thesis has been omitted here. Anyone who should want to consult the thesis can find it at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. I am very grateful to the two examiners of the thesis, Tulio Halperín and John Campbell, for their encouragement to turn the thesis into a book, and in particular to Sidney W. Mintz for subjecting it to careful scrutiny and offering many useful comments. I owe special thanks to Malcolm Deas for his humorous criticism and helpful advice on how to thin out a dense thesis. And I want to acknowledge the help of the Bodleian Library and in particular Colin Steele in acquiring valuable secondary sources hitherto unavailable in Great Britain.

My particular gratitude goes to Peter Rivière who taught me social anthropology and who supervised the thesis, for his continual encouragement and his many useful suggestions. Paradoxical though it may seem, considering the view on marriage proposed in this study, I have a husband. It is to him that I owe my greatest debt. His patience in coping with the various domestic crises that arose throughout my work did much in providing the peace of mind the work required. Our many fruitful quarrels clarified many points which would otherwise have remained



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obscured. As he grew increasingly fascinated with the subject he gracefully undertook for once to play second fiddle, and became a most useful research assistant.

St Antony's College, Oxford  
*February 1973*

V. M.-A.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana
GSC	Gobierno Superior Civil
GG	Gobierno General
AP	Asuntos Políticos
CA	Consejo de Administración
Misc.	Miscelánea
AHNM	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid
AGI	Archivo General de Indias, Seville
ACEM	Archivo del Consejo de Estado, Madrid
CDFS	Richard Konetzke (ed.), <i>Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica, 1493–1810</i> (3 vols, Madrid, 1953–62).
Leg.	Legajo – a box or bundle of documents