Setting the agenda for Cuban sexuality: the role of Cuba's CENESEX.

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In recent years an increasing amount of media attention has been focused on Cuba's Centro Nacional de Educacion Sexual, or CENESEX (National Centre for Sexual Education) and, in particular, the role of its director, Mariela Castro Espin. In a country in which machismo and homophobia have been widely condemned, changes in the approach to accepting sexual diversity have been significant at both the public and government levels. In recent years large anti-homophobia parades have occurred in Havana and other Cuban cities, sexual reassignment operations have taken place in the country, and gay film festivals have been held. The country's parliament is even considering changes to the national Family Code to protect and strengthen the rights of the LGBT community. Clearly, radical changes are in the air, with the work of CENESEX playing a major role.

Originally established in 1977 as the Grupo Nacional de Trabaj o de Educacion Sexual, or GNTES (The National Group for Work on Sexual Education), the centre has since dramatically evolved into one of the world's leading organizations working for LGBT equality (Hamilton 2012, 49). The director of the centre and noted sexologist, Mariela Castro Espin, has been a driving force behind CENESEX. As the daughter of current president Raul Castro and Vilma Espin, the former head of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), she has increased the national and international profile of the centre and its work. However, while her connection to the president is consistently used as the introduction for media coverage on the centre, this interest is increasingly accompanied by praise for the significant work of CENESEX.

International media coverage continues to focus solely on the current work of the centre, with little analysis of its dramatic evolution in recent years. There has been little analysis, for example, of the role of feminist discourse in the evolution of CENESEX, or indeed educational processes employed by the centre, the development of the Cuban government's official stance on homosexuality, or the competing national understandings of sexual diversity. Similarly, scholars have not explored the centre's significant history in great detail. Contributions to the LGBT discussion have been made by, among others, Emilio Bejel (2001), Marvin Leiner (1994), Ian Lumsden (1996), and Dwayne Turner (1989). Their work, however, mainly employed an historical or literary analysis to focus strictly on the evolution of homophobia in Cuba. Moreover, their studies, while providing an important analysis, have not been updated, in some cases, for 20 years, leaving the role of CENESEX in contemporary Cuba largely ignored. How

did a Cuban organization develop from a basic sexual health education function in 1977 to become one of the world's leading organizations working toward LGBT equality--and this in a country with a profoundly rooted tradition of homophobia? This article seeks to explore and analyze the evolution of CENESEX, examining, in particular, both the significant role it has played in revolutionary Cuba and the major challenges that remain.

The Evolution of CENESEX

Before examining the evolution of CENESEX, it is important to first understand some of the early history of homophobia in Cuba, as it has played an important role in defining the origins and subsequent mission of CENESEX. Indeed, as aptly stated by Epps, "the significance of homosexuality in revolutionary Cuba is the work of history" (1995, 236). Two statements by former Cuban president Fidel Castro are quite telling. "Cuba's leaders," Castro noted in 1965, "could never believe that a homosexual could embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true Revolutionary" (Lumsden 1996, 93). But twenty-seven years later he stated, "I am absolutely opposed to all forms of oppression, contempt, scorn, or discrimination with regard to homosexuals" (Leiner 1994, 59). These quotations illustrate clearly the evolution of official thought during the revolutionary process.

There are two main reasons for the markedly negative attitude toward sexual diversity in revolutionary history, among males in particular. The first of these is as entrenched in Cuba as in any former Spanish colony: machismo. As it is often confused with patriarchy, it is important to distinguish between the two terms. Patriarchy refers to a form of social stratification that promotes male superiority, or "male social privilege" within a society, and that incorporates various levels of women's exploitation or marginalization (Firestone 1970, 176; Seidler 1989, 24; Dunphy 2000, 81; Whitehead 2002, 18; Figes 1970, 23; Coward 1983, 188).

By contrast, machismo (1) is a more complex version of this social stratification, incorporating significant elements of Latin American and Caribbean colonial history (Leiner 1994; Hamilton 2012, 25, 111). Indeed, machismo in Cuba is the result of almost four centuries of Spanish colonial rule, supported by a deeply rooted Catholic value system. It refers to the idealized man as hyper-masculine, virile, strong, paternalistic, aggressive, sexually dominant, and unfaithful. The term also incorporates the glorification of female virginity (and by extension their faithfulness as wives), as well as the rejection of sexual diversity (Sternberg 2000, 91; Maynard 1998, 191; Pena 1991, 33; Ramirez Rodriguez 2006, 40; Yglesias 1968, 251-271; Gonzalez 1996).

As a result of machismo, Cuban culture has condemned homosexuality and mystified women's sexuality (Leiner 1994, 11; Lumsden 1996, 45; Arguelles and Rich 1984, 668). Homosexuality was particularly rejected in rural areas, where one's sexual preferences could not easily be

hidden, and prejudice against perceived homosexuals (particularly men) was commonplace. For this reason, many homosexuals gravitated toward more urban areas, where there was a greater possibility of sexual anonymity. Prejudice occurred more often against homosexual men than against homosexual women. Indeed, lesbians have had a different societal experience, as they were significantly less visible, and women's sexuality continued to be repressed and misunderstood--lesbianism was either ignored or viewed as "correctable" (Smith and Padula 1996, 170; Ferdinand 1996, 48). That said, it is impossible to determine the exact levels of prejudice suffered by lesbians, as it has not been documented in the same extensive manner in which prejudice against males is tracked, and research on the topic is limited at best (see the limited coverage in Smith 1992; Smith and Padula 1996).

The second main factor that has shaped attitudes toward homosexuals in revolutionary Cuba was the association of homosexuality with capitalist decadence. Particularly in the 1950s, drugs, gambling, and prostitution were widely present in Havana and largely controlled by elements of the Cuban bourgeoisie and US crime syndicates (Turner 1989, 65). Homosexual males received greater employment opportunities in the tourist sector, as they were often used to satisfy the prostitution needs of US military personnel and tourists (Bowry 1989, 6; Arguelles and Rich 1984, 687). Homosexuality was thus seen as an extension of pre-revolutionary ills, and as a trend that needed to be uprooted by the revolutionary government.

Homophobia continued unabated throughout the 1960s. Although the Revolution boasted that liberation had been achieved for all, homosexuals soon became the political "other," as they simply did not fit into the Cuban government's view of the "ideal" revolutionary. The leadership sought to cleanse the country of everything believed to be decadent or morally corrupt--a category that included homosexuality. By 1965, the concepts of the true "revolutionary" and the "New Man" had been fully developed, and the term "anti-social" began circulating, often used to include homosexuality. Increased polarization within Cuba and international tensions bred an air of mistrust toward the political "other" and to "counterrevolutionary" elements, and pre-revolutionary history was regularly used as "evidence" against homosexuality. Indeed homosexuality was vehemently considered anathema to the Revolution. In particular, the government's rather dogmatic position toward sexual diversity was evident in the official 1965 Ministry of Public Health report, which stated that there was no known biological cause of homosexuality; therefore, it theorized, homosexuality was a learned behaviour. Orthodoxy in western science at the time also affirmed that homosexuality was a mental illness and emphasized the possibility of "curing" individuals (Leiner 1994, 27; Turner 1989, 67, 69).

Small changes began to occur in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was suggested by some scholars that these changes were attributed to East Germany's legalization of homosexual acts between adults in 1968 and its subsequent influence in Cuba. They argued that the Cuban government's desire to compete with what were seen to be other progressive countries motivated

the government to begin reassessing policies and attitudes (Arguelles and Rich 1984, 92). Moreover, it was suggested that this change was also driven by the gradual change in the official approach toward homosexuality in other countries across Western Europe (Turner 1989, 70, 71). Others noted that, although these foreign influences were important for the promotion of liberalizing attitudes toward gender and sexuality, Cuba's own distinctive feminist discourse has been the vital element (Leiner 1994). These conclusions, however, were drawn almost entirely in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and have not since been readdressed.

A contemporary analysis suggests that it is the continual teaming of Cuban feminist discourse and educational practices that has had a tremendous effect on the liberalization of attitudes regarding gender and sexuality. The complex and significant development of these internal factors and their negotiative relationship has largely been responsible for the attitudinal change. Notably, while educational processes were evolving, a profound feminist consciousness, radically different from its North American counterpart, was developing within Cuba at the same time, led by Vilma Espin and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), an initiative that would ultimately have a major influence on Mariela Castro Espin and on CENESEX as a whole.

It is worth noting that the marked evolution of gender roles is an important product of the Revolution as it both engaged and contributed to the development of the island's own complicated brand of feminism. Cuban feminism does not fit into the typical frameworks of Marxist, Socialist, Liberal, or even "Third World" feminism. Rather, Cuba has encouraged the development of a unique form of feminism that is based on a combination of universal values and Cuban revolutionary ideology, and that has continued to change with the various challenges facing the Revolution. This stance can be attributed to the highly complex relationship between colonialism, neocolonialism, and US hostility, as well as the participation and mobilization of women, with particular emphasis on the role of the FMC (Proveyer Cervantes, Fleitas Ruiz, Gonzalez Olmedo, Munster Infante, and Auxiliadora Cesar 2011, 7; Baksh-Soodeen 1998, 74; Lutjens 1995, 100; Stoltz Chinchilla 1991, 294). Indeed, it is significantly owing to the thrust of feminist discourse that women, a historically marginalized group--especially in Latin America--have developed a strong presence and a role within the Revolution, and have consequently participated in the gradual liberalization of attitudes toward gender roles and sexuality as a whole.

Significantly, CENESEX is largely the result of collaboration between Cuba's development of feminism and educational processes; while efforts were made in the 1960s to dissuade and punish the practice of homosexuality, greater efforts were also made to promote gender equality. Undoubtedly, one of the successes of the Revolution is the promotion and development of equal gender rights, largely spearheaded by the FMC, which was founded in August 1960 (Kampworth 2002, 129; Holt-Seeland 1981, 93). The FMC was initially established to mobilize women into the workforce, yet soon evolved into an organization centring on the promotion of gender

equality--and enjoyed nearly all the political authority of a public ministry (Proveyer Cervantes et al. 2011, 11, 17). As Vilma Espin explained in 1971, "All the FMC's activities are designed to mobilize women, organize them and improve their condition" (Smith and Padula 1996, 33). Espin also noted in 1972 that "back in 1959, when they talked to us about creating a woman's political organization, we were far from ideologically prepared for the task ... As soon as the project got off the ground, the need for such an organization became clear to us" (Randall 1981, 125).

The FMC has succeeded in many ways in improving conditions for women. In terms of sexuality, both sexual education and sexual health soon became integral aspects of the demands for equality. The First Congress of the FMC in 1962, for example, established the need for the institutionalization of safe abortion procedures within the national health care system (Castro Espin 2011). This was later expanded in 1965, with demands that the procedures be provided at no cost to patients and performed only by experts (Castro Espin 2011). This was particularly important, as it clearly indicated the early political role of feminism, the importance placed on women within the Revolution, and the consequent effects as the government took note and instituted the demanded reforms. Women's rights would continue to increase in other areas as well.

As a result of significant changes in the role of women in Cuba, largely promoted by the FMC, the Family Code was presented in 1975 (Hamilton 2012, 33). Through it, women sought to redefine themselves as equals in the home, and change the reality of the notable societal sexism that was prevalent. The Code was an involved document that called for, among other changes, equal participation by both sexes in childcare and household responsibilities. This was largely the result of Cuban feminism; conversely, since machismo did not support the revolutionary values regarding equality, it was increasingly challenged. The implementation of the Family Code was also highly important to an evolving understanding of gender roles as it formally legitimated the importance of women in the home and workplace, as well as highlighting the value of gender equality. This Code was historically important for the LGBT community, as it was the first government declaration that broadened the national understanding of gender roles. However, it was also problematic in that it focused on the needs of the nuclear family, implying that heterosexuality was the only option for families. As well, the Code had an obvious negative accompanying implication: that to be a good Cuban one had to be heterosexual. Nonetheless, it was successful in challenging ideas and promoting a diversification of gender roles.

Following the liberalization in attitudes toward gender roles--alongside a series of complex amendments and legislative changes--sexual education was officially institutionalized in 1977 with the establishment of the National Group on Sexual Education (GNTES), later renamed CENESEX. Directed by Dr. Celestino Alvarez Lajonchere, its aim was to devise and oversee a sweeping national sexual education effort, the National Program of Sexual Education, as well as

to research the latest information and theories regarding sexuality (Castro Espin 2011; Smith and Padula 1996, 174-175).

In terms of liberalizing sexual education, GNTES was extremely important. In 1979, for example, the group published El hombre y la mujer en la intimidad,, the Spanish translation of East German sexologist Siegfried Schnabl's Man and Woman in Intimacy. The book examined sexual behaviour, psychology, and sexual education, and its last chapter, "Homosexuality in Man and Woman," was particularly controversial (Bejel 2001, 107). Along with basic sexual education material, Schnabl also provided an ardent condemnation of East Germany for its treatment of homosexuals. Using statistical evidence of high suicide rates among young homosexual males there, he argued that the denigration of gay people was enough to "break a person's soul." A significant number of copies (27,000) were printed in Cuba, 15,000 of which were reserved for doctors, post-graduate students, and clinical psychologists who worked for the Ministry of Public Health (Leiner 1994, 45). The wide distribution of this sexual health textbook indicated a development in the liberalization processes of education in Cuba, as well as the direction that GNTES was taking, namely shifting from basic heterosexual physiological sexual health to the incorporation of sexual diversity and related psychological interpretations. Moreover, the work of the group as a whole indicated a significant shift in the importance placed upon sexual education and sexual-related issues, just as it was of paramount importance for a national evolution of attitudes toward sexuality.

The year 1979 also proved to be an important year for the acceptance of and respect for transsexual and transgender citizens, or "trans community." Following requests from the FMC, and several initiatives of the GNTES, the Ministry of Public Health authorized the establishment of a specialized multidisciplinary team that would provide assistance to members of the transgender community (Castro Espin 2008). The aid originally came in the form of hormone therapy, diagnostic procedures, and other health-related support. As research and understanding of the topic developed, the program soon evolved into an integral treatment model that included psychological support and social integration assistance. The Ministries of Justice, Public Health, and the Interior, among others, were all incorporated into the newly integrated model (Acosta 2006). In terms of the development of treatment for trans people, the first gender-reassignment surgery was undertaken in 1988, although it would be twenty years before other operations were undertaken (Castro Espin 2008).

By 1985, as a result of the growing research and work conducted by GNTES--which included publications, work with foreign specialists, and developing the National Program of Sexual Education--the Ministry of Public Health began incorporating sexual health into social medical practices. Moreover, in 1985, a sister organization named the Cuban Multidisciplinary Society for Study of Sexuality (SOCUMES) was also established (Castro Espin 2011). The growing numbers of groups and organizations related to sexual education indicated an increasing need for

social liberation of sexual health education, sexual diversity rights, and an increased professional presence in the field of sexuality as a whole. As evident in the work of the GNTES, attitudes toward sexuality largely evolved through an internal series of negotiations between feminist discourse and educational processes. Dependent on a teaming of the two aspects, the GNTES was able to accomplish significant developments in sexual education and a noticeable liberalization of attitudes toward sexuality as a whole.

In 1989 GNTES was re-established as the National Centre for Sexual Education (CENESEX), a specialized organ of the state. The centre introduced postgraduate opportunities, including master's and diploma courses, as well as other services including therapy and research (Castro Espin 2011). By 1994, CENESEX employed some twenty staff members, including professors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and support staff (Leiner 1994, 93). The specialized journal, Sexologia y Sociedad ("Sexology and Society"), was also established, along with a section of the Juventud Rebelde daily newspaper, titled Sexo Sentido ("Sex Sense"; Castro Espin 2011).

Education, though always a cornerstone of CENESEX, soon significantly increased in importance and breadth. In 1996, for example, the centre, teaming up with the Ministry of Education, implemented an improved and more comprehensive sexual education model throughout all levels of the national education system (Radio Netherlands 2011). The new system focused on gender issues, as well as sexual health. As CENESEX director Mariela Castro Espin explained, "We insist that it is necessary to work closely with teacher training schools and universities. If teachers are homophobic, they will pass on their homophobia; if they are misogynistic, they will transmit their discriminatory attitude towards women" (Acosta 2011).

These changes in the liberalization of attitudes toward gender roles continued to increase as women took increasingly important roles in political and educational forums. With respect to education, both the quantity of material and content regarding women developed as revolutionary principles of equality and universality were gradually incorporated into the system. As increasing numbers of women took up post-secondary studies, the influence of women was clear. By 2011, 72% of employees within education were women. Similar trends are apparent within politics, as the numbers of women and the importance of their roles continued to increase. The last data available indicate that 42.7% of the members of Parliament are women--far greater than the approximate 9.9% in neighbouring Panama, 8.8% in Guatemala, or 19.3% in Costa Rica (Proveyer Cervantes et al. 2011, 12-13). Indeed, the increased presence of women within various societal levels, particularly education, has contributed greatly to the liberalization of attitudes and the implementation of change.

In 2004, studies indicated that levels of tolerance toward the nonheterosexual population had increased significantly from those of the 1960s and 1970s, although major challenges remained, such as greater legislative and societal respect for sexual diversity (Acosta 2004; Pereira Ramirez

2008). For this reason, the central goals of CENESEX shifted, placing significant emphasis on the employment of an integral approach to achieve juridical and societal respect for sexual diversity (Roque Guerra 2011). Mariela Castro Espin explained that, if the interests of the LGBT community were not present in legislation, then they were essentially left unprotected (Sierra 2008). Thus, although it represents only one of the fourteen "Areas of Work" cited by CENESEX, the area of sexual orientation rights and gender identity has significantly expanded since 2004, and has since become one of the centre's main focal points.

Particularly important was the establishment of the centre's website in 2004, on which extensive information regarding sexuality and sexual health was published. Information was available on, among other topics, sexual health, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual diversity. The website explained, for example, that "being homosexual or bisexual is not a disease, it is not synonymous with perversity, nor does it constitute a crime." The importance of the website can be gauged from a 2004 report which stated that it was the most visited Cuban Internet site, receiving some 150,000 daily hits--indicating the wide interest in the centre (Acosta 2004).

The CENESEX website has since continued to be an essential medium of communication and education, and is revealing of the centre's main areas of interest. The website's section on objectives, for example, lists four main goals, three of which encompass the use and importance of education. Moreover, the mission statement clearly identifies the importance of the management and application of appropriate sexual education. In addition, online copies of its journal, Sexologia y Sociedad, provide articles from both national and international experts on various matters regarding sexual health and sexuality. Although online copies are only available from 2008 onwards, a trend in the increasing numbers of articles dedicated to LGBT issues is evident. In 2008, for example, only 2 of the 16 articles published were specifically focused on LGBT issues, while they were 4 of 12 published in 2011. The material focused on judicial issues, successes and challenges facing LGBT communities, and LGBT history in Cuba. What is apparent from the extensive material found on the website is the dedication of CENESEX to education, and its commitment to communicating awareness of, and respect for, sexual diversity and related issues.

The centre has also continued to employ an approach teaming education with various advocacy groups--including student groups--to establish meaningful change. Some of the numerous events produced as a result include the Gay Cinema Festival (beginning in 2005), celebrations for the International Day Against Homophobia (beginning in 2008), as well as many and frequent debates and campaigns, such as the "Diversity is Natural" campaign, and the National Education Campaign for Respect for a Free Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Castro Espin 2011; Roque Guerra 2011; Grogg 2009). All of these initiatives continue and are increasingly supported by the Cuban population.

In particular, notable success has been achieved in the field of care for transsexual and transgender people. In 2005 CENESEX, building on the 1979 multidisciplinary GNTES team, established the National Commission for Integral Care of Transsexual People (Acosta 2006; Roque Guerra 2011). According to a 2008 report, the National Commission for Integral Care of Transsexual People had received 92 applications since its 1979 establishment. While many remained in the stages of diagnosis, 27 had been diagnosed as transsexuals, of whom 19 were seeking to receive gender reassignment surgery. As of 2008, 13 of the people diagnosed had received authorization to change the names and photos on their national identification cards (Acosta 2006, 2008). Moreover, an important success in the care of trans people was achieved on 4 June 2008 when the Public Health Minister, Jose Ramon Balaguer, signed Resolution 126 (Roque Guerra 2011; Grogg 2009). The resolution authorized the creation of a centre that would provide comprehensive health care for transsexuals, including free gender-reassignment surgeries and therapy (Acosta 2006, 2008).

CENESEX has also been working to change the country's historically homophobic legislation, as well as amend the Family Code. The Penal Code, for example, has maintained clearly homophobic legislation; particularly until 1979, the government had largely been recycling laws that dated back to the Cuban Social Defense Act of 1939 (Arguelles and Rich 1984, 693). This included Article 490, which resulted in a prison sentence of up to six months for anyone who "habitually engaged in homosexual acts" or "flaunted" their homosexuality in public (Lumsden 1996, 82). In 1979, the Penal Code was amended to officially decriminalize homosexuality, although the amendments were only superficially more liberal, as new potentially homophobic laws were established. One such law is the vague and highly subjective Ley de la Peligrosidad, under which one can be arrested for participating in "anti-social" or "dangerous" behaviour, leaving the interpretation of the law in the hands of discriminatory officials (Bejel 2001, 106). The centre continues to work toward updating these laws.

Particularly telling was the response of CENESEX to Cuba's official government stance on international regulations dealing with LGBT issues. For, while Resolution 126 was considered an achievement in progressive legislation dealing with sexual diversity in 2008, it was largely eclipsed in November 2010 by Cuba's role at a United Nations General Assembly's Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs committee. The Cuban diplomats on the committee voted in favour of an amendment that was suggested by Mali and Morocco, which would replace any reference to "sexual orientation" with the expression "discriminatory reasons on any basis." In other words the specific reference to condemning homophobia was replaced by a diluted argument condemning all acts of discrimination. Cuba was one of seventy-nine countries--and the only Latin American country--to vote in favour of the amendment (Acosta 2010a). So, although substantial changes have taken place domestically, in this important international forum Cuba was clearly taking a step backwards in terms of protection of the LGBT community.

Following the vote, CENESEX and SOCUMES were the first to publicly criticize the government's decision. Dr. Alberto Roque, the leading physician at CENESEX, who also works closely with SOCUMES, stated, "Failure to specifically mention discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation gives the green light for many states and governments to continue to treat homosexuality as a crime" (Acosta 2010b). This opposition to the official government position illustrates the growing confidence, and influence, of CENESEX.

While national legislation has not changed dramatically regarding sexual diversity, some liberalization has occurred in the political arena. In 2010, for example, former president Fidel Castro publicly assumed responsibility for much of the late-twentieth-century homophobia in Cuba, particularly seen in his government's involvement in re-education camps (2) for homosexuals built in the mid-1960s. Castro blamed these decisions on the cultural influence of machismo as well as on US threats in the 1960s (Reuters 2010). This assuming of responsibility was extremely important, as it encouraged Cubans to rethink the formerly staunch understanding of what it means to be a revolutionary. Moreover, it provided affirmation that a change in attitudes toward sexual diversity was required and was occurring. While Fidel Castro did not suggest dramatic policy changes, his address did provide a vital step for the acceptance of sexual diversity and a criticism of what, for decades, had been official government policy.

Moreover, this step was expanded upon a year later as the 2011 National Congress of the Communist Party made bold alterations to the Fundamentos del Partido (the Party's Fundamental Principles). Of particular importance was Section 54, which explained that discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation would not be tolerated, especially for anyone working in the public sphere, participating in political organizations, or in general working for the defense of the Revolution. Section 65 stated that media outlets, and all sections of the press, were to reflect the "reality" of Cuban diversity, including gender, skin colour, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation (Cubadebate 2011; El Universal 2011). This development was both an official recognition of the rights of the LGBT community and a condemnation of any form of homophobic conduct. The definition of the very nature of a revolutionary was thus being radically reinterpreted.

CENESEX and the FMC have also been responsible for a proposed modification to the Family Code, submitted to the National Assembly of People's Power in 2005. Its primary alteration focused on the legalization and recognition of same-sex couples, while another aspect of the proposal called for non-heterosexual women to utilize the country's reproductive technology, a process that, in the past, has only been offered to married heterosexual women. This plan has not yet been discussed in the National Assembly, a result that many believe to be out of fear of the prospect of the legalization of same-sex marriage (Roque Guerra 2010; Ramirez 2007; Sierra 2008). Moreover, changing legislation is a long, involved process: the proposed reforms must go through various channels, including the Political Bureau of the ruling Communist Party. Also,

numerous ministries would be required to participate in the changes to related resolutions (Inter Press Service 2007). Passage of this legislation has remained a struggle in which CENESEX continues to participate. It is worth noting that, in a concession to traditional Cuban values, CENESEX has amended its proposal, dropping all references to same-sex "marriage" and instead referring to the legalization of "civil unions."

CENESEX recently held a two-day celebration for the International Day Against Homophobia--17 May 2012--including the annual and much publicized public parade in downtown Havana. Notably, the speeches and reports of the celebration did not emphasize CENESEX's work toward the acceptance or tolerance of the LGBT community in Cuba, but instead focused on the need for respect. The work of the centre continues to demonstrate the importance of education in attaining the goal of equal rights and respect for all Cubans--regardless of sexual orientation.

Conclusion

CENESEX has dramatically evolved from its original 1977 position as the National Group for Work on Sexual Education, to become one of the world's leading national organizations focusing on LGBT rights and education. This is particularly significant in light of entrenched homophobia found throughout Latin America. In fact Cuba is now leading the way in the region in defining an agenda for sexuality, particularly in terms of LGBT issues. The centre currently employs 43 staff, with a wide range of specialists including sexologists, physicians, psychologists, and public relations personnel. Particularly since 2004 CENESEX has focused its efforts on LGBT rights, increasing awareness and understanding through education. Led by its director, noted sexologist Mariela Castro Espin, the centre has continued to develop, working toward respect for sexual diversity in revolutionary Cuba.

CENESEX has achieved significant success, including the development of a comprehensive National Sexual Health Program, the official redefinition of homosexuality as "normal," annual and celebrated parades opposing homophobia, the development of extensive care for members of the trans community, and the official incorporation of sexual diversity into the Party's Fundamental Principles. CENESEX has brought LGBT rights to the forefront of the national political agenda, as well as creating a dialogue and strategy for continued change. Yet challenges remain: among others, the new Family Code remains to be implemented, same-sex marriage and adoption have not been legalized, and some discrimination is still evident (Hernandez, Espinosa, Hoyos, and Kindelan 2010, 246; Grogg and Acosta 2010, 228-247).

The evolution of CENESEX has been, and continues to be, a highly complex process of negotiations involving many disparate cultural, social, and political elements, including machismo, feminist discourse, educational practices, the government, the populace, and competing understandings of sexual diversity rights. The centre grew in the midst of a society in

which homophobia was profoundly rooted, and developed through the navigation of competing elements to create what can now be understood as one of revolutionary Cuba's achievements. However, CENESEX is also revealing of the Revolution itself. The evolution of the centre challenges the widely understood contention that revolutionary Cuba and its government is a staunch monolithic structure. While scholars have often routinely employed the expression "Castro's Cuba" or discussed revolutionary Cuba in related terminology, the examination of CENESEX's evolution suggests otherwise. The centre undoubtedly pushed the boundaries of what was, or is, considered "revolutionary"; often it did so by working almost autonomously from the state. Government policies, regulations, and even official vocabulary related to LGBT issues were not established wholly from the top down, but rather employed significant elements of a bottom-up approach, as the centre developed new ideas and integrated them into society through educational processes.

According to Ludlam (2012) and Kapcia (2008, 179; 2009), there has been a shift in the way the Revolution is understood. They suggest the Revolution is a series of constant small changes and negotiations, and should thus not be understood strictly as a closed political organization. It is a complex system that is consistently in a stage of evolution and is dependent upon internal negotiative processes. These internal forces are not present in scholarly Cuban debates, nor are related official documents readily available to those outside the Revolution--yet they are evident in the system's evolution. Indeed these debates and processes have been ongoing, and affect all aspects of the Revolution. In the case of CENESEX, the centre's complex evolution supports the understanding of change through internal processes. Although much of the international media has discussed the centre's success as a direct result of Mariela Castro Espin--whether attributing it to her familial ties or to her work in the field--it is in actuality much more complex, incorporating numerous elements of the Revolution. Nonetheless, further analysis is needed. In the meantime, CENESEX will continue to evolve through its complex negotiative development model--and the world will continue to take note.

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Notes

(1) The use of the term machismo can be problematic, due to cultural connotations and at times the ambiguous use in international literature (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 830; Marshall 1981, 133). Nonetheless, literature focusing specifically on sexual diversity in Latin America regularly employs the terminology as a descriptive tool.

(2) The Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP) camps were opened in 1965. The camps were not solely designed for (perceived) homosexuals, though they were reportedly treated the worst of the approximately 60,000 inmates (Bejel 2001, 101; Ocasio 2002, 84; Turner 1989, 69). The camps were created to re-educate, rehabilitate, and re-orientate, as well as provide ideological reformation and masculinize men who, in the eyes of the Revolution, were "anti-social" (Epps 1995, 242; Ocasio 2002, 84). Those in the camps were required to work for minimal payment and in poor conditions, and were unable to leave without being accompanied by a military supervisor. After significant national and international protest, the camps were closed by 1968, although they have remained a symbol of traditional Cuban homophobia (Bejel 2001, 101).