



# ¡Viva Cuba!

## WBASNY IN CUBA

I am thrilled to share highlights from the first WBASNY journey to Cuba! I was truly honored to lead our wonderful group that included members from upstate and downstate and some of their guests.

Everywhere we went we were greeted with warmth and excitement and I know that many of us plan to return. As we learned from meeting with lawyers in Havana, there are many changes taking place in Cuba. Hopefully, our nation will not go backwards and we will continue to reestablish close ties with our neighbors in Cuba.

Amy Saltzman  
 Corresponding Secretary, WBASNY



**Photos: Top:** Abel Matos Garcia Cuban Fine Art

**Bottom:** WBASNY in Cuba - October 2016

**First Row** (L-R): Rita Pereira (a Cuban attorney who served as our tour guide for the entire trip), Liset Imbert (one of the lecturers, who is a Cuban attorney working for the Cuban National Center for Sex Education), Meredith Holtzman, Ellen Holtzman. **Row 2:** Patricia Hennessey, Amelia (Amy) Klein, Rika Murray, Hon. Lisa Sokoloff. **Row 3:** Sandra Schpoot, Kimberly Morrell, Lawrence Rothbart, Rebecca Clancy, Laura Finkelstein. **Row 4:** Shirley Boris, Amy Saltzman, Kathleen Donelli, Carol Yutkowitz. **Row 5:** Mindy Zlotogura, Rhonda Gaynier, Keenan Ross, Elizabeth Bryson. **Not pictured:** Nikko Murray and Ed Yutkowitz.

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## MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES DE LA HABANA

By Hon. Lisa A. Sokoloff



Art reflects the character and culture of a country. The museum is a modern building, located in Old Havana across the street from the Museum of the Revolution. The first floor of the museum has an open green courtyard in the center, and contains several large, whimsical but thought-provoking pieces, including a castle-like structure composed of coffee pots. My favorite was a large cockroach with a human head hanging on the wall that made me wonder whether the artist had read Kafka, or simply had a bad day.

The museum collections are extremely

tiful, partially clothed, dark-skinned women being carried away by gunslingers. Although the title translates as “kidnapping,” the scene almost appears to be rape. Enriquez’ unique style expresses movement through placement of lines next to the object. You can see the woman on her back atop the horse struggling with her captor and the horse reacting to her struggle. A more consensual sexual encounter is captured in *El Beso*, *The Kiss*, by Mariano Rodriguez. The painting, like the encounter, seems impromptu and not fully fleshed out. The woman leans back across a chair into the arms,

*Cuba has a strong tradition of classical and contemporary artists whose names should be better known to an international audience.*



well organized in period and style: colonial, turn-of-the century, vanguard, and modern/contemporary.

The art from the colonial period spans the 17th-19th centuries, and largely consists of landscapes, scenes of daily living, and portraits of wealthy women. The art is similar to art of the same period in other countries. Guillermo Colazzo’s *Retrato de Carmen Bacallao de Malpica*, for example, could portray any other wealthy wife or daughter of the time in any European country.

The turn of the 20th century art is less realistic, more stylized and colorful than the art of the colonial period. One of my favorites was Victor Manuel Garcia’s *Gitana Tropical*, which features a beautiful young woman with large eyes, long dark hair and a sensuous mouth. Her portrait seems to burst forth from a flat and compressed background. She has an intense stare and an enigmatic expression. Her beautiful yet unreadable face, one I will not soon forget, makes her a strong candidate for the *Mona Lisa* of Cuba.

The Vanguard period appears to have been the golden age of Cuban art. Many of the subjects are political in nature, with sexual or violent overtones. Carlos Enriquez’ *El Rapto de las Mulatas* (the kidnapping of the mulatas) depicts two beau-

and mouth, of the man standing behind her. Her legs are slightly open and her left arm hangs open as if she is inviting the kiss. They look at each other with open eyes so close that their faces meld into one.

The modern/contemporary period from the late 1950s has much in common with contemporary art around the world. One of my favorites, *Paisaje de la Habana* (landscape of Havana) by Rene Portocarrero, depicts the multilayered, pulsing center of Havana, in a unique variation of pointillism.

The museum also displayed a moving blue, gray and orange piece by Fayed Jamis entitled *Pintura* (painting). Jamis, an abstract painter, part of a group of Cuban Modern painters called the Eleven, painted in Paris in the 1950s. Although the brush strokes are stronger and a bit sloppier, the *Pintura* reminds me of a Maurice Estève poster I have had since college. I could stare at it for hours and get lost in the colors.

An avid museum-goer, I had never seen any of this art, which is a shame. Cuba has a strong tradition of classical and contemporary artists whose names should be better known to an international audience. If travel to Cuba continues to get easier, perhaps they soon will be.





## **FUSTERLANDIA** *By Kim Morrell*

The studio of artist Jose Fuster is dazzling. In fact, it is a land unto itself -- Fusterlandia, to be precise.

For the last 30 years, Jose Fuster has created paintings, sculpture, and mosaics inspired by the likes of Picasso and Gaudi. In his neighborhood in the northwest of Havana, Jaimanitas, Fuster has created a wonderland of art that expands beyond the walls of his studio and spills with exuberance onto more than 50 nearby homes and public spaces. It's like the entire neighborhood has been turned into an art gallery. It really must be seen to be believed.

As our bus entered the area, we saw the gates of single-family homes adorned with a wide range of whimsical but often political mosaics. One depicted Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and other Cuban revolutionaries in a boat apparently sailing to liberate their country. Another offered a greeting from Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez.

Passing through the mosaic-covered gates of the artist's studio into a multi-level courtyard, we were greeted with colorful and surreal sculptures, many crafted with found materials, and mosaics covering every surface. We were treated to a tour of the artist's studio and gallery and had an opportunity to purchase original works of art before enjoying a delicious family style meal amid the wondrous art around us.

It's a bit off the beaten path, but Fusterlandia is a delightful and unforgettable stop on a visit to Havana.



## EDICIONES VIGÍA *By Kim Morrell*

One artistic highlight of our Cuba trip was the culturally rich colonial city of Matanzas, capital of the Province of Matanzas, about 60 miles east of Havana. For more than 30 years, the city, known for its poets and artists, has been home to a small but world-renowned art-object book publishing collective.

In a beautiful old colonial building with high ceilings and a great air of history, we were introduced to this handmade artistic book publishing collective, which came into existence during the difficult economic times Cuba experienced in the 1980's.

Ediciones Vigía, or "Watchtower Editions," began with a borrowed mimeograph machine and brown paper from local butchers. Since that humble beginning, the publishing house has attracted international attention. Even the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City, has recognized the publisher's resourcefulness and cultural importance.

The collective emphasizes the use of natural and found materials in the creation of its books of poetry, which are always limited to 200 copies. Each book is handcrafted by volunteer artisans, and each is an original work of art.

Materials used to enhance each small publication might include twigs, broken bits of porcelain, or sea shells. I was particularly drawn to a volume of Lo Feo, "The Ugly Thing," with lyrics and a recorded CD by Teresita Fernandez. On its cover a hand-colored image of a violet winds through a crocheted doily. The lyrics appear in the book in English and Spanish:

In an old wash basin I planted violets for you  
In an old wash basin I planted violets for you  
And being close to the river, in an empty shell ...  
I kept a bright star for you ...

In a broken bottle I kept a firefly for you  
In a broken bottle I kept a firefly for you ...  
And on a dull gray fence, a florescent coral snake was entwined  
Shining brightly for you.



A roach's wing was being carried to the ant hill.  
A roach's wing was being carried to the ant hill.  
In just the way that, at my death,  
I wish to be carried to the cemetery.

Garbage Man, no one wants to look at you.  
Garbage Man, no one wants to look at you.  
But just let the moon come out.  
And your cans will shine brilliantly.

Give a little love to life's ugly things.  
Give a little love to life's ugly things.  
And you will see that sadness  
Has a way of changing its color. everywhere.

Every single publication of Ediciones Vigía contains the image of an oil lamp. According to the University of Missouri, "The Vigía symbol, the oil lamp, became especially relevant during this time [of economic isolation and hardship in the 1980s]... the lamp became popular during the Special Period, when there were a lot of blackouts, and Cubans were using kerosene lamps everywhere."

In addition to serving an aesthetic purpose, the use of found and donated materials in the books reflects Vigía's ideological desire to remain relatively independent. As a rule, centers of cultural production in Cuba, including Vigía, operate under the government's Ministry of Culture which, "directs, guides, controls, and executes the implementation of the cultural politics of state and government."

Vigía makes a point of not relying on the government for support. Instead, workers at Vigía collect materials from around Matanzas and receive donations from local butchers, newspapers, and factories. The artisans who produce the books are volunteers, not paid employees. And writers published by the press do not receive cash payment. As Agustína Ponce, the editor of Vigía, explained in an interview, 'This is the only Cuban press that does not pay writers with money, no author's copyrights; we just give them copies of the book in exchange.'

Vigía's commitment and connection to its community is also apparent in the neighborhood's cats and dogs that come to the building for food and affection. As we sat and learned about this unique Cuban cultural institution, they wandered among their American visitors and made us feel welcome in the publishing house they call home.



## MUSEO FARMACEUTICO

By Elizabeth A. Bryson

What if you were in northern Cuba between the late 1880's and mid-1900's, became ill, and needed medicine? You would go to the remarkable "Botica Francesca" (the "French Botanical" pharmacy).

Established in 1882 by Dr. Ernesto Triolet and his wife Dolores Triolet, the pharmacy is located in a magnificently restored three-story townhouse on Milanese Street, in the city of Matanzas, which we visited on our first full day in Cuba. The pharmacy was a going business for more than 80 years, until it shut down in 1964. A full restoration of the building and grounds was completed in 2003. Now known as the "Museo Farmaceutico" (Pharmacy Museum), the museum is filled with many of the extraordinary inventions and innovations that transformed historic "apothecaries" to the full-service pharmacies we see today.

As we entered, we saw an enormous oak card catalog that still contains tens of thousands of index cards listing medicines made at the location during



One of the first things I noticed in the main room was a large glass jar with an ancient label on which the word "Ipecac" was carefully written in cursive using ink from a dipped quill. I instantly recalled the gross fact that "syrup of ipecac" was an essential medicine that was used for centuries to make people throw up if they ingested poison. Made from a

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*One of the historic flourishes in the museum is the fact that the first commercial telephone booth in Matanzas still resides its front hallway.*

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its years of operation. Then we entered the two front galleries, which display a wide assortment of jars and vessels, many still holding medicines in tablet, liquid, and powder form, as well as tools to make, measure, and ship pharmaceuticals. The first room also displays a variety of decorative items from the late 1800's, including two enormous flower vases bearing the portraits of the pharmacy's founders.

Drawn to Cuba by the diversity of the plant life, and the opportunity to discover new medicines or refine existing ones, the Triolets ultimately developed more than 500,000 distinct formulas for treating diseases. Within days of their creation, each concoction was meticulously entered into handwritten journals, portions of which were on display.

Brazilian root, it was first brought to Europe in the 1600's.

Each room held more and more wonders, from forceps used in delivering babies, to World War I era gas masks, to a wide range of scales, different types of mortars and pestles, devices to form solid pills, and other tools and machines that were clearly in use for decades. One of the historic flourishes in the museum is the first commercial telephone booth in Matanzas still resides its front hallway.

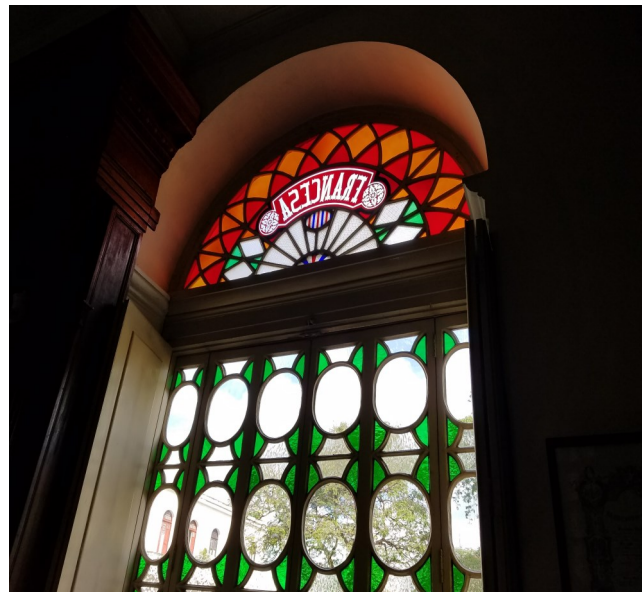
I was personally thrilled to enter one room that held an early version of an "ice box." Cuba was among the first places outside of the most northern parts of the Americas to store and use ice, which was a boon to early pharmacists. In the same room, we

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saw an early still, which was used to make alcohol-based drugs, such as cough syrups and pain medicines.

There was also beauty in the museum. The Triplet's daughter was a stained-glass artist, and we got to see some of her beautiful works in the windows of the building. Enormous original oil paintings that are quite magnificent grace the upstairs residence hallways. During the 2003 renovations, workers found thousands of colorful glass medicine bottles, which became a kind of sculpture when displayed on their sides in the museum's bookcases.

The pharmacy is located across the street from what is now "Libertad Park" (originally known as "Plaza de Armas," or the "Old Parade Grounds"). Filled with red and purple bougainvillea in full bloom when we visited, the plaza is a favorite gathering place for Cuban families, and we saw several happy couples having their wedding photos taken. Our group was thrilled to gather in the park for our own group photo to officially kick off the first day of our Cuban adventure.



## RITA M. PEREIRA RAMIREZ, OUR TOUR GUIDE

*By Amy Saltzman*



Our trip to Cuba, the first ever by WBASNY, was led by an amazing tour guide, Rita M. Pereira Ramirez. Rita has been a tour guide for 13 years, but our group was the first that arrived on a commercial flight. A lawyer herself, Rita was pleased that we shared a professional bond and interest in women's issues.

Rita left Cuba for the United States with her parents when she was five years old. She returned to her homeland several years after the revolution, when she was 12 years old, on December 17, 1964: St. Lazarus Day. Perhaps it was prophetic: St. Lazarus is a healer and 50 years later, on December 14, 2014, President Obama announced that diplomatic relations and a process of normalization would begin between our two countries.

While Rita is today a law professor at Havana University, she started out in medicine. The change of professions is unusual in Cuba, where undergraduate and graduate education is combined and students generally choose their careers before beginning university. Rita was working as a clinical lab technician until she had children -- two boys -- and was a stay-at-home mom until going to law school. She received an LLB in 1987, followed with a master's degree in sexuality from the National Center of Sex Education of the University of Medical Sciences of Havana in 2007.

In addition to teaching law, Rita leads one to two tours per month.



Given her passionate interest in women's issues and that she presently teaches Gender and the Law, we could not have had a better tour guide.

Her English is superb, as is her knowledge of U.S. and Cuban history. She is well-traveled, having attended international conferences on women's issues and returned to visit New York on occasion. She gave us historical, political and cultural insight into the Cuban people, in particular about the contributions and work of Cuban women. She was warm and gracious and she and our group shared a genuine

bond of affection. As she remarked, our countries are "neighbors, we will always be neighbors and neighbors should talk."



## THE JEWS OF HAVANA

By Mindy Zlotogura

Google “Jews in Cuba” and one name consistently comes up: Adela Dworin, the President of the Casa de la Comunidad Hebrea De Cuba. Our group had the good fortune to meet Ms. Dworin, the President of the Jewish Community Center and the Jewish Conservative Congregation, in the building known as the Grand Synagogue of Cuba (the “Patronato”).

For a diminutive woman who by all appearances is the stereotypical Jewish bubbe (grandmother), the Yiddish-accented Ms. Dworin has a lot of responsibility. Despite the difficulty of life in Cuba, her reason for staying is simple: “I love Cuba and it is my home.”

Her story could have easily been that of my family if my grandfather got off the boat from Poland in Cuba, instead of going all the way to New York. Adela’s father left what is now Belarus in 1924, but not having enough money for a visa to the United States only got as far as Cuba, where worked as a peddler before opening a small “Shmata” (clothing) store and eventually owning and operating a large garment factory. Adela’s mother arrived in 1930.

Adela grew up in an Orthodox home where Yiddish was spoken. They were pillars of the Jewish community, whose 15, 000 members in the late 1950s enjoyed a financially solid and culturally robust life. But after the revolution in 1959, the government nationalized Jewish businesses and properties and encouraged Soviet-style atheism. After the revolution, for the United States,

The Jews who remained doors of three synagogues keep Judaism alive for the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba. Today, approximates as “Jewish.”

In 1998, Fidel Castro visited Adela noted that he spoke hours – short for the note with the government on the wall of the synagogue brother Raul, the current President, helping a young girl light a menorah.



90% of the Jewish community left Canada, Argentina and Israel. had to work hard to keep the synagogues open in Havana and to their children. But with the fall of religious life began to revive in matly 1,500 Cubans define them-

ed the Patronato during Hanukkah. to the community for “only” two riously verbose leader. Relations tinue to be good. In fact, hanging gogue is a photograph of Fidel’s

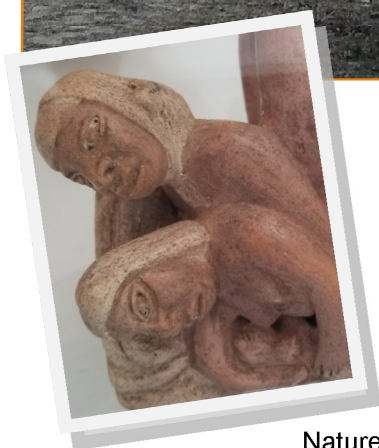
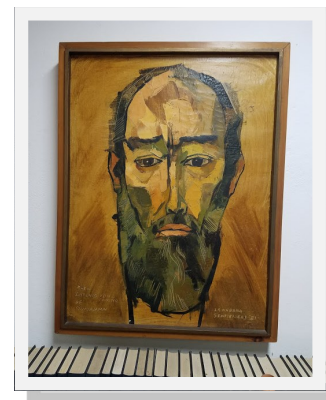
Among the stories with which Adela regaled us was one about a visit by a rather scruffy looking American who asked her what she needed to encourage Zionism among her community’s young people. Offhandedly, she said she would like to send a team to the Maccabee games in Israel. The tourist turned out to be Steve Tisch, the owner of the NY Giants, who followed up by paying for the teams’ participation in the games. The team, she proudly noted, came home with five medals.

The community maintains outreach programs for the sick and disabled. Adela appreciated the over-the-counter drugs and sundries that we and other visitors have brought for distribution to members of the community, but noted that there is a great need for prescription medicines, especially for diabetes and asthma.

The community’s impressive library has internet access, something of a luxury in Cuba, and conducts youth, senior, and Hadassah groups and educational classes for both children and adults. While there has not been a permanent congregational Rabbi in Cuba since 1959, the congregation holds Sabbath, High Holiday (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) and b’nai mitzvot services led by lay leaders. Sabbath meals are provided to all in attendance. On occasion, rabbis from South America perform marriage and conversion ceremonies.

## FUNDACION DE LA NATURALEZA Y EL HOMBRE

By Larry Rothbart



**A**s we entered the Fundacion de la Naturaleza y el Hombre (FANJ – Foundation of

Nature and the Humanities), we came face to face with the legacy of a man who was part Indiana Jones, part Zelig, part Margaret Meade, part Jacques Cousteau and part Thor Heyerdahl. The former home of Antonio Nunez Jimenez, the building is now a museum and renowned research center.

Antonio Nunez Jimenez was an anthropologist, an explorer, an adventurer, an environmentalist, a collector of art and historical artifacts, as well as a revolutionary. The walls of his home are covered with original paintings of central figures in Cuban and South American revolutionary history, including portraits of Jose Marti, Simon Bolivar, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro and Vilma Espin. These are the original works from which

many well-known revolutionary posters have been copied. Also displayed were copies of the many books that Antonio published on various topics, including cigars, Cuban geography, and agriculture.

The next room holds artifacts from Antonio's explorations. He traveled and explored the lands and waters throughout the Caribbean as well as Central and South America which included expeditions through caves. He traveled throughout the Amazon region. He collected objects of interest and photos from it all. Included in the collection were head-dresses as well as a large collection of small terracotta erotic Meso-American figurines described as the "Latin American Kama Sutra."

The room is dominated by a large canoe. "Hatuey" was the canoe from an expedition organized by Antonio to prove that the Caribbean islands could have been settled by the peoples of the Amazon and that trade could have been thriving through these regions (the expedition in Canoa Del Amazonas). The expedition built canoes deep in the Am-

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azon basin high near its source and then paddled down the river and up through the Antilles to end in Cuba. It was similar to the trip organized and run by Thor Heyerdahl in his famed boat "Kon Tiki." The trip is chronicled throughout the room in maps and collections.

When we entered a room covered from floor to ceiling with books containing Antonio's notes and photographs from his many expeditions, we learned how Antonio evolved from scientist and explorer to revolutionary. In his extensive work in the 1940s and 1950s, he exposed Cuba's agriculture and agrarian society as a class system. The Cuban dictator at the time, Fulgencio Batista, felt Antonio, or more importantly his thinking and writing, threatened the regime. Antonio was arrested, ultimately fully converted and committed to the revolution (proof of this conversion are contained in the display cases), and later served as a captain under Che Guevara in central Cuba. Once the triumph of the Revolution was secured Antonio continued to serve his country. He served as director of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform, putting into practice his thoughts developed in his

previous work. He also served as president of the Cuban National Bank, president of the Academy of Sciences, and as ambassador to Peru.

Antonio Nunez Jimenez donated his home to the Foundation to continue his work in the sciences, exploration, and conservation/environmental protection. Now a non-governmental organization charged with researching and protecting Cuba's land and water and its natural habitats, the FANJ conducts research on weather, climate change, and the land and water of Cuba. It plays a key role in stopping poaching and in enforcing the environmental laws of Cuba, and is working to encourage the development of wind and solar power sources and technology to create a sustainable energy structure

In one example of its activities, FANJ research helped demonstrate that a dam planned for a river in eastern Cuba to "solve" water issues in the region and throughout the country would in fact cause large-scale environmental damage. FANJ was instrumental in stopping the project and protecting vital irreplaceable land.





## LA COMPAÑÍA HABANA COMPÁS DANCE

*By Carol Yutkowitz*

While most of the WBASNY members on our trip were meeting with Cuban lawyers and judges, the non-lawyers in our group had unique opportunities to participate in special “guest programs.”

One of these programs was a special trip to the home of La Compañía Habana Compás Dance, a dance company based in Havana that has performed around the world.

The company’s rehearsal studio is an unassuming building in a residential Havana neighborhood of Marianao. While the performance space was rather austere, the walls were covered with beautiful murals celebrating various types of Cuban music as well as other Cuban themes, all painted by the musical director of the group.

While we were there, members of the company performed a few numbers, impressing us with their skill, joy, and most of all energy. We were fortunate to observe them learning and practicing their techniques on congas and other percussion instruments, and to engage in a free-form percussion jam. They characterize their art as flamenco, but it is not the traditional performance but rather a high-energy dance with Afro-Cuban influences and diverse and highly sophisticated percussive elements.

The troupe employs brightly painted wooden chairs, common in rural parts of the country, in some of their routines. The young female performers we saw used drumsticks to create intricate rhythms on the tops and sides of the chairs and to explore the unique acoustic qualities of the rawhide seat covers.

## VISIT TO THE FEDERATION OF CUBAN WOMEN

By Patricia Hennessey

During our time in Havana the WBASNY delegation spent a morning at the offices of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC – the Federacion de Mujeres Cubanas). A non-governmental organization, FMC was founded by Vilma Espin in August 1960, during the early days of the revolutionary government led by Fidel Castro.

Vilma fought in the Sierra Madre mountains alongside Fidel and Raul Castro in the late 1950s, and later married Raul Castro. She remained the head of the FMC until her death in 2007. (Mariela Castro, daughter of Vilma and Raul, is the Director of the Cuban National Center for Sex Education, and the country's most visible activist for LGBT rights in Cuba).

While the FMC has maintained since 1959 that its first goal is the defense of the revolution, its focus is on developing an entire culture of equality and social inclusion for women in Cuba. Through the FMC's efforts, the government of Cuba has recognized that women have been subjected to different forms of oppression than men, including oppression based on race, class and gender. The Cuban government states that it is dedicated to transforming the status of women in Cuba, and to find a solution to gender inequality.

50 years. For decades, 100% of Cuban girls have received free comprehensive education (equivalent to that available to boys) from primary education through graduate school in law and medicine. In 2016, more than 50% of the university students are female.

The FMC publishes two magazines on a regular basis throughout the year: "Mujeres" ("Women") and "Muchachas" ("Girls"). The FMC also maintains a web site, but internet access is not widely available in Cuba, except at the Universities. The issues of FMC publications we examined contained articles of general interest and the accomplishments of members of the FMC, and at least one article on contraception and reproductive health. It is a goal of the FMC to educate Cuban women about sexual and reproductive rights (contraception and abortion are free and widely available in Cuba.) The FMC recognizes that full participation by women in the workplace and as equal citizens requires women to have control over their reproduction.

The FMC has been granted NGO status at the United Nations, which allows it to help organize and attend major international events of interest to women in Cuba, such as the 1997 Conference on Women in Beijing China, and various

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*Cuba has recognized that women have been subjected to different forms of oppression than men, including oppression based on race, class and gender.*

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The FMC is decentralized, with functional organizational structures at four levels: grassroots (blocks or neighborhoods); municipal (cities and towns); provincial (larger political areas like states) and national. They charge a modest annual membership fee (\$3 CUP, or Cuban peso). More than 90% of women 14 years of age and older in Cuba belong to the FMC.

The FMC is widely regarded as the "essential" organization that has contributed to the advancement of gender equalization and health improvements for Cuban women over the past

meetings of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Following the 1997 Beijing Conference, FMC proposed a "national plan of action," which was enacted into law. Every branch of the government was charged with making changes to comply with the goals of true equality for Cuban women. The action plan emphasizes the need for equality in employment and has educated women on their rights – and opportunities – in

*(Continued on page 14)*

Cuba's emerging private sector.

Throughout its history the FMC has been focused on raising the level and status of women's employment in the Cuban economy. At the time of the revolution, only 25% of Cuban women were employed outside the home. After the revolution, women who worked went into the service sector, including teaching and child care. With the literacy campaign that began in 1959, which brought near universal literacy to the Cuban population, and a focus on free and universal education for all Cuban children, far more women became educated and trained for a wide range of employment opportunities. Today Cuba has the one of the highest literacy rates among countries in the world.

Equal pay is the law in Cuba: women and men are paid the same wage for the same job. It seems that law and government have become professions of choice for more recent generations of Cuban women. In 2016, women make up 61% of all attorneys in Cuba; 49% of the judges; and 47% of the Judges of the Supreme Court. Women hold 33% of the positions of Minister (among them: Education, Finance, Justice Water, and Food Security), and 45% of the Council of Ministers (which includes Vice Ministers) of the Cuban government. The level of participation of Cuban women in the courts and in government far exceeds the rates in the U.S.

The FMC has been very active in the legislative arena over the years. It was very influential in the revision of the Family Code (the domestic relations law),

which since 1975 has provided equal property and social rights to Cuban women in their home and at divorce; paid maternity leave; and more recently equal maternity and paternity leave.

In our discussions, the leaders of the FMC acknowledged that sexist behavior still manifests socially. Cuba has a history of more than 500 years of patriarchal rule and conduct, including hundreds of years of slavery. FMC is waging a campaign against violence against women and recently established two national telephone complaint lines, monitored by staff Cuba's Attorney General, that women may use to report incidents of violence or threatening behavior if their local police are not responsive. The FMC also works to sensitize families and employers to issues of gender inequality in an effort to "undo" the pervasive cultural baggage of "machismo."

As a member of a women's organization devoted to obtaining equal justice for women in New York, I was struck by the remarkable level of gender equality in Cuban law and policy. Cuban women are secure in the exercise of legal and political rights that we in the United States still struggle for – access to free reproductive health care, including contraception and abortion; free government sponsored health care generally; universal free education offered equally to girls and boys through graduate school; and food security. Women lead major ministries of the government at significant, and growing, rates. The FMC should receive enormous credit for these accomplishments on behalf of women in Cuba.

## THE RESTAURANT SCENE IN CUBA

*By Sandra Schpoont*

While Cuba is emerging as a tourist destination, it still has problems providing enough food to its people while catering to its rapidly increasing number of visitors.

During our visit in October, our group could see that food was in short supply for many Cubans. The government provides a small monthly ration of the most basic nutritional necessities, and some food is available for purchase in a nascent "free market" economy.

As tourists, our meals were ample. But in general, the food was not the highlight of the trip.

We started our tour in Varadero, a resort town about two hours from Havana. The hotel Melia had many options for dining, including a 24-hour café, but the food didn't seem authentically Cuban. It was built to cater to large groups and many of the meals were served "cafeteria" style. The Cuban coffee served in the morning was excellent, as were the omelets. Unfortunately, other offerings, including the pancakes, breads, and meats, were mediocre.

On the other hand, we had a wide array of options for dinner, some in beautiful settings overlooking the ocean. It's hard to beat their outside bar with a margarita or Cuban beer in hand.



(Continued from page 14)

One of our better food experiences was lunch at El Chiquirin, in the town of Mantanzas. In the small café, a trio played Cuban pop standards (as well as medley of La Bamba and “Twist and Shout”) that got us up dancing. The Cuban specialties included Ropa Vieja, which means “old clothes” in Spanish, but which is in fact shredded meat, onions and peppers. One of Cuba’s national dishes, it did not disappoint.

In Havana, we stayed at the Hotel Nacional, Cuba’s most famous hotel. Built in 1930, the hotel was once owned and operated by gangster Meyer Lansky, and before the 1958 revolution accommodated a virtual who’s who of international



celebrities – including Frank Sinatra, whose room next door to Lansky’s suite had a secret passageway so that they could visit undetected.

The hotel still retains much of its elegance – as well as photographs and floor-to-ceiling posters of Fidel Castro. It also offers tours of the underground tunnels and bunkers built to protect Cuba from invasion during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Unfortunately, our meals at the Nacional weren’t particularly good. The breakfasts were again served

## THE CUBAN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

By Meredith Holtzman

The opening line of every episode of *Law and Order* states, “In the American criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate yet equally important groups: the police, who investigate crime, and the district attorneys, who prosecute the offenders.”

The Cuban criminal justice system has both similarities and differences, as members of WBASNY and I learned when we met with a panel of experts during our trip.

In the Cuban criminal justice system, the police and prosecutors are aided in their work by criminal investigators. While our tour guide, Rita, translated “criminal investigators” as “criminal instructors,” for clarity, I will use the term “investigator.”

Criminal Investigators, like the police and prosecutors, work under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, but are considered a separate entity, not part of the Office of the General Prosecutor or the National Revolutionary Police Force. While there is no direct corollary to criminal investigators in American law enforcement, they most closely resemble police detectives.

When a person is detained by law enforcement, the criminal investigator has 72 hours to investigate and to decide whether or not to impose bail conditions, which can include house arrest, or money bail.

During the investigation a defendant may be interrogated but must be advised that he or she has the right to remain silent.

If the investigator detains a defendant, he or she must notify the prosecutor, who will then decide whether or not to recommend charges by way of a charging instrument similar to an indictment. The document must name the accused and specify acts that constitute the crime. The prosecutor has the authority to order detention of defendants against whom he or she has brought charges.

Once a defendant has been formally charged with a crime, the case will move forward to trial. Plea-bargaining is not permitted. If the prosecutor has ordered preventative detention, that detention should not exceed the minimum sentence that a defendant faces after trial. On average, the time from the commencement of an investigation to conclusion of trial is 10 months.

A criminal defendant has a right to an attorney. Defense attorneys work in Lawyers’ Collectives (lawyers in Cuba do not work in private practices). Their fees are fixed by the state and are very reasonable.



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buffet style, but our options were limited. And we had a truly unsatisfactory meal at the hotel's outdoor restaurant: the fish had a funny taste and a fruit puree had an unappealing texture.

Our first lunch in Havana was at La Casa, in the residential neighborhood of Vedado. The restaurant, a privately owned paladar, is in a converted house and serves large parties. Owner/host Alejandro was warm and welcoming and the place has a lively atmosphere. Since we were in a large group we couldn't order off the menu, but the fish, vegetables, ubiquitous rice and beans, and plantain chips were all well cooked. Not gourmet fare, but certainly decent.

Our worst meal was dinner that night at El Templete, a government-run restaurant ostensibly known for its seafood. The food was unappealing and the service barely hospitable. While conveniently located near Morro Castle, at which we attended a somber evening ritual featuring soldiers in Spanish colonial uniforms marching to a solemn drumbeat followed by a series of cannon blasts, I would avoid this place if I return to Cuba.

Three of us had our best meal of the trip one night on our own. I researched restaurants and found La Guarida, a private restaurant where the 1995 Oscar nominated film *Fresa y Chocolate* was filmed. Located on the third floor of a beautifully dilapidated building, one enters by walking up a filigreed wrought iron staircase. The room was romantic and the food up to New York standards. We started with delicious appetizers: papaya lasagna, cerviche, and other gambas (shrimp) a la plancha. The entrees

Heavily influenced by Civil Law countries, criminal cases are decided by a panel of professional and lay judges, not by a jury. Professional judges must have a law degree and serve full-time, while lay judges are elected by the community and serve for one month per year. They do not have a formal legal education and generally hold full-time jobs when they are not fulfilling their responsibilities as lay judges.

Misdemeanor charges (like the USA, Cuba considers any crime punishable by up to one year in jail to be a misdemeanor) are heard in Municipal Court. A panel of three judges, one professional and two lay, decides these cases. Felonies and death penalty eligible cases go to Provincial Court, where a panel of two professional and three lay judges determines a defendant's guilt. The Cuban Supreme Court hears appeals and crimes by high-ranking government officials. A panel of three professional and two lay judges decides cases in Supreme Court.

At trial, a defendant has the right to speak, but is not obligated to do so.

Unlike our country, Cuban law does not allow for pre-trial suppression hearings, where a defendant can challenge the admissibility of evidence. Instead, judges make their determination about the admissibility of evidence during the trial. When rendering its decision, the court must specify what evidence it accepted and what it rejected as illegally obtained.

When deciding legal issues or matters of sentencing, precedent does not bind judges, although they may look to prior cases for guidance. When deciding a case, judges are obligated to resolve doubts about factual issues, and about the application of laws, in favor of the defendant.

Our panelists were incredibly generous with their time, staying well beyond the two hours allotted for their presentation to answer our many questions. Still, there was much more that I wanted to learn. How do the rules of evidence in Cuba compare to the rules of evidence in the USA? How is a trial structured? Do attorneys make opening statements and closing arguments? What kind of crime statistics do they maintain and how do their crime rates compare to ours?

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were equally delectable, and showed us that sophisticated meals are available in Cuba, if you know where to find them.

Other members of our group had similar positive experience on their own. Several went to Dona Etumia, tucked down a small alley by the Plaza Cathedral. Pleasantly decorated with original art, the small restaurant offered a good tapas-style appetizer menu, a varied entree selection, and great frozen mojitos. Moreover, the service was excellent and it was very reasonably priced.

We also had lunch at El Aljibe, a huge restaurant known for its roast chicken. For some reason, most of the restaurants didn't have chicken, but this one did, and it was very good with the ubiquitous rice and beans. Another good lunch was at Jose Fuster's studio and outdoor, where enjoyed a lightly fried white fish, a nice change from our usual heavy meals, under one of his enormous sculptures.

Dinner our last night was at El Jardin de los Milagros. We ate outside under beautiful bougainvilleas and had a good meal. I again had Ropa Vieja, which was a fitting ending to our Cuban adventures.

Unless you go off on your own, as we did one night, you may not get a real taste of the inventive cooking taking place in Havana's restaurants. But as economic conditions improve and the country's ties to the United States strengthen, it's likely that the intersection between interesting indigenous foods and cosmopolitan food trends will lead to a more rewarding dining experience.



## THE CUBAN JUDICIAL & ECONOMIC SYSTEMS: ON THE PRECIPICE OF CHANGE?

*By Kathleen Donelli*

Upon our arrival in Veradero, we were met by Rita, our wonderful tour guide, who spoke English with a pronounced New York City accent. Once on the tour bus, Rita explained that she and her family immigrated to New York City before she started grammar school and returned to Cuba when Rita was a teenager. I assumed that Rita and her family left Cuba around 1955 to escape Fulgencia Batista's deeply corrupt, racist, and brutal regime.

Growing up in Inwood in the 1960's, there was an influx of Cubans moving into our neighborhood to escape from Fidel Castro, who deposed Batista in 1959. Rita's family returned to Cuba in the 1960's, after the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. While the Cuban Americans I grew up with hated Fidel Castro, who had taken away their families businesses, homes, and wealth, Rita praised him for providing all Cubans with excellent educational, medical, cultural, and sports systems.



Rita described what the Cubans call their "Special Times," after the Soviet Union dissolved in 1992 when, due to the food shortage, the general population did not eat every third day; instead, they drank sugar water. Rita explained that in 1996, un-



der President Clinton, the American economic embargo was expanded: America would not trade with any foreign country who traded with Cuba for six months. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the American embargo, Cuba is poor: Its building are decaying or decayed, the monthly average income is \$32, each person receives a ration of two pounds of meat per month; and there appears to be a shortage of the most basic supplies, including glass, automotive parts and prescription drugs.

I was – and am- fascinated by our trip to Cuba: the contrast between the Castro haters and worshipers; the generations of Cubans who were active in the communist revolution and the younger generation of Cubans, born after 1959, who yearn to increase foreign trade and investment; who seek economic reforms to encourage the budding private sector in Cuba, now mostly consisting of small businesses, such as restaurants, taxis, repair shops, and farmers markets.

On October 18, 2016, we met with two Cubans who epitomized this generational divide: Dr. Espirio Suarez, a retired Supreme Court Judge and Dr. Guillermo Ferriol Molina, President of the Cuban Society of Labor Law and Social Security, who was probably more than 25 years younger than Dr. Suarez.

Dr. Suarez explained that the Cuban legal system is civil law (like France) not common law (like the U.S. and England). Dr. Suarez defended Cuba's current judicial and economic systems: explaining, for example, that there was no need in the Cuban legal system for a private right of action to protect the environment because all a Cuban citizen has to do is alert the "civil authorities" and the environmental harm will be fixed. When I asked Dr. Suarez if Cubans could obtain loans secured by collateral, such as a mortgage secured by real property, he replied that Cubans can borrow money from the government. When I suggested that increasing people's ability to borrow money might stimulate the Cuban economy, Dr. Suarez reminded us that the "mortgage crisis" in the U.S. was the result of our system of "secured loans." Dr. Suarez defined Cuba "not as a market economy" but as an "economy with a market."

In sharp contrast, the younger Dr. Molina appeared eager to embrace economic change. He explained that since 2009 (in 20078, Raul, who is now 85 years old, formally replaced Fidel as Cuba's president) laws have been modified to make the Cuban economy "more efficient" and to encourage foreign investment: 70% of foreign investment goes to the Cuban state while 30% goes to private investors. There are now 500,000 workers in the private sector. While not directly referring to a "generation gap" in Cuba, Dr. Molina observed that the "Cuban population is aging" due to the low birth rate (1.69 children per family); by 2021, 25% of Cuban population will be over 60 years old.

Dr. Molina told us that labor disputes for state-owned businesses are resolved in the workplace itself by a conflict resolution group consisting of a representative of the employer, a representative for the worker and three to five workers. The private sector is developing similar conflict resolution methods. Private employment has four conditions: no more than an 8 hour work day; secure conditions; at least seven vacation days a year and a salary "not lower than a state salary." Dr. Molina emphasized that industrial resources and factories have been hurt by the American embargo; Cubans want joint ventures with the U.S. and the normalization of the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. While Dr. Suarez defended Cuba's current judicial and economic systems, Dr. Molina appeared extremely eager to advance economic reforms.



Throughout our meetings with Cuban officials and representatives, we were all careful not to insult each other's political systems. I did not get an answer to a question that I frequently asked: is there a transition plan for Cuba after the Castro brothers? However, I felt the generation gap between the Cubans who remember the racism and repression of Batista and Cubans born after 1959 to who Batista is a distant, if not somewhat despicable, dictator. Of course, since our return from Cuba, Fidel has passed away and we have a new President. I hope that the steps taken by President Obama to "normalize" our relations with Cuba continue and encourage everyone to visit our neighbors in Cuba.





## COMMITTEE OF THE DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION

*By Ellen B. Holtzman*

On Wednesday, midway through our visit to Cuba, we spent the evening with the local Committee of the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) in Havana. Our itinerary described the meeting as a chance to “enjoy the evening with Cuban residents and community representatives.”

Our evening started with a bus ride through local neighborhoods which were in the same disrepair and decaying infrastructure we saw throughout Havana and ended in an evening filled with food, entertainment, dance and speeches. The last few miles of the trip we were escorted by a motorcycle rider who led us to our destination. As we departed the bus, we were greeted by a throng of excited children, some as young as two (2) years of age and many teenagers eager to test their English on us. One girl of about twelve (12) years stood out. Verbal (in English), charming and engaging, in thirty seconds she found out where I was from and that I was happy to be in Cuba. The consensus of our group was that we had just met the future first female President of Cuba.

Our evening can only be understood within the context of the CDR and its role in Cuba.

What is the CDR and why was the evening not simply with the residents? Were the residents there because they wanted to be there or they were told to be there?

The CDR was the mer President, Fidel vention of the Cuban be the eyes and ears day the question is mendable neighbor-remains a grassroots

It is a grassroots or-sense of the word. no more than several has a President, vice organizer (an official force) and another for ideologic controls.

dated to know the activities of each person on their respective blocks and to know these activities so well that an individual file is maintained for each block resident.



creation of the late for-Castro. It was an in-Revolution designed to of the Revolution. To-whether it is a com- hood watch scheme or spying system?

ganization in the purest Each CDR is limited to city blocks. Each CDR president, treasurer, an responsible for the work organizer responsible CDR officials are man-

The primary and original purpose of the CDR, as stated by Castro, was to discover and denounce counterrevolutionary behavior, to defend the revolution from “the enemy within.”

The CDR leadership carries out its tasks by legwork, doorbell ringing, handing out and displaying printed material and neighborhood meetings. They watch, listen and instruct.

Security was the dominant concern during the first months of the CDR and reports of people who were engaging in “counterrevolutionary” activities was a primary and fundamental purpose of the CDR system.

The role of the CDR has expanded beyond surveillance. When a hurricane struck in 1963 the area CDR was called upon to supply emergency work and a disaster force. When it was thought that too much water was being wasted in Havana, the CDR was mobilized in a campaign named “Operation

Leak” to discover and repair faulty plumbing. In 1960 Castro announced the nationalization of those private businesses which were still operating. Within a few weeks, thousands of shops, restaurants and factories were placed into the hands of the government and thousands of “people’s administrators” were chosen from the local CDR.

Rationing of scarce goods was and still is a way of life in Cuba. From our tour guide, Rita, a Professor at the University of Havana, we learned that each individual is allowed two (2) pounds of meat a month and six (6) pounds of rice (not a huge amount when you stop to think that a mixture of rice and beans was served to us every day twice a day and is a staple of the Cuban diet). Each CDR was put in charge of creating a “Census of Consumers” and became responsible for rationing. That rationing remains in place today and the CDR continues to be responsible for the distribution of rationed goods. The difference between rationing “then” and rationing “now” appears to be that in the early years there was nothing more than the rationed portions. Today, according to Rita, if someone has the money to do so, they can buy more of a rationed item at the market price. While an option, the impression was that not many people had the financial ability to take advantage of this opportunity.

The CDR remains a mainstay of the country. In February 2016 more than nine thousand (9,000) military troops were deployed in Cuba along with medical students to conduct a national health campaign to eliminate the mosquito that spread the Zika virus. Pairs of soldiers with fumigating machines teamed with medical students who took a census and wrote down pertinent information. Each team was expected to inspect one hundred (100) households each day. Twice a day they reported to local representatives and provided information regarding the houses to which they had or did not have access. The uncooperative people were fined. One of the CDR organizers, in an article written about this project, said she made sure her neighbors opened their doors. Just as the organizers did fifty-six (56) years ago when Castro founded the CDR, she reported that “I called them myself, knocked on their doors. If they refused to fumigate, they paid a fine.”

Did the CDR leader knock on doors to let residence of his area know that they would be attending a block-party with us on that Wednesday night? It seems that much has changed and nothing has changed in those 56 years.

There was a large crowd waiting for us, welcoming us with warmth and enthusiasm. Everyone seemed genuinely happy to be there. The square was set up with microphones and chairs. The chairs were only for us. We sat down, surrounded by men, women and children. We were welcomed by two speakers. The first speaker was clearly higher in the pecking order of the CDR system, overseeing more than a few streets. The lights were turned on, the microphone handed to him, and he spoke, and spoke and spoke-for close to 30 minutes-about Cuba and the history of U.S.-Cuban relations since Fidel Castro came to power. We listened politely as did the entire gathering. The second man to speak, the motorcyclist who had escorted us earlier, was the local leader, much more mellow and welcoming. He was more focused on telling us what the CDR does to advance the needs of the residents. We all relaxed. It was during his speech that I decided to let everyone know who we were. I asked Rita if I could say a few words. My suggestion was received with surprise, enthusiasm and encouragement. I took the microphone, thanked everyone for the wonderful and welcoming reception and let them know that “We are lawyers with the Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York and we have come to learn more about your country.”

Our evening ended with the women serving us delicious homemade food, entertainment by the children, and music, loud, wonderful, enervating music, which led to many of our members joining in the dancing and singing. We were each given a handmade gift (I received a beautiful lace handkerchief, others received hand painted fans). As we were leaving, we were hugged and kissed by our hosts and boarded our bus back to the hotel for a few hours of sleep before the morning brought us to another day of activity and learning.



