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Editorial

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Editorial

Dalia J. Llera

The Cuban Experience

In recent years Lesley University has established a cultural and educational exchange with Cuba. Students, board members, faculty and administrators have had an opportunity to visit the island and participate in the exchange of ideas and a common quest for knowledge and understanding. This experience has encouraged the Cuban focus of this special issue of the *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice*. During the last 44 years Cuba has established itself as a socialist nation. Among its most difficult economic challenges Cuba has endured 40 years of U.S. Embargo and the more recent "Periodo Especial" (Special Period), a consequence of the end of socialism in Europe and the loss of its Eastern European partners. Since 1959 Cuban history has been witness to the resilience and capacity for survival of the Cuban people in the island and abroad. Those in Cuba have faced the struggles involved in the creation of a socialist nation. Those abroad have faced the challenges of exile and immigration. At a more personal level, all have felt the consequent ruptures, losses and separations so typical in these political transitions.

As guest editor to this special issue on the Cuban Experience I found a meeting place between my professional life as Associate Professor at Lesley University and my personal experience as a Cuban living in the U.S. for 37 years. This issue is unique because all of its contributors, like myself, are Cuban/Cuban-American scholars and writers who have been affected in a very personal way by the Cuban experience. Feminists say that the personal is political and in this issue there is evidence of the very personal ways in which the political has influenced the lives of Cuban people. The articles, stories, poem and essays included here tell us part of the Cuban story and add to our understanding of the complexity and contradictions embedded in it.

Miren Uriarte's article *Holding to Basics and Investing for Growth: Cuban Education and the Economic Crisis of the 1990's*, chronicles the commitment of the Cuban government to education since the early 60's and relates recent challenges that have led Cuba to open itself to world economy. *Patria? Potestad?* written in Spanish by Flora Gonzalez and Raysa Mederos offers us a historical understanding of their experience. It tells part of the story of their parallel lives as young Cuban women who as a consequence of revolution end up in very different places. Flora Gonzalez is one of the children sent out of Cuba through Operación Peter Pan (Operation Peter Pan) in 1962 and Raysa Mederos is a child born and raised post-revolution and relates the story of some of her experiences at Escuela al Campo (School in the Countryside). The

Cuban Revolution and their adolescent transition one in the U.S., the other in Cuba, influenced their educational experience, in very disparate yet similar ways.

The contributions by Vivian Poey, Nicole T. Clark-Ramirez, Berta Berriz and Dalia Llera speak to longing and identity. These are common themes encountered in the accounts of Cubans attempting to make a home abroad while longing for the motherland. Vivian Poey's performance art piece *On Fictional Grounds and Culinary Maps* is accompanied by slides. It features the Cuban sandwich and uses food as a metaphor for the dynamics of culture, cultural transitions and acculturation. Nicole Clark-Ramirez' poem *Ramirez* raises questions of identity. It celebrates the assertion of her Cubanity through the reclamation of her name. Berta Berriz's *Political Autobiography* encompasses the affirmation of her identity and the integration of that process into her life and work now as a bilingual third grade teacher. My own piece *Caminando por La Habana /Taking a Stroll in Havana*, offered to the reader in English and Spanish, speaks to longing and encounter as she enters and exits the land of her birth.

All of these works are windows into the experience of a people in transition. Cubans in the island and abroad, in spite of political differences all form part of *una sola casa*, (the same home). It is a home grounded in a common history that nourishes us, pains us and unites us. In this issue we offer to you a glimpse into our home and invite you to join us in the understanding of our experience.