



Cuba Futures Series

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Presented at the International Symposium
CUBA FUTURES: PAST AND PRESENT
March 31- April 2, 2011

The Cuba Project

Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies
The Graduate Center, CUNY

CUBA FUTURES: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Edited by M. Font

Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies

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The Graduate Center/CUNY, March 31–April 2, 2011

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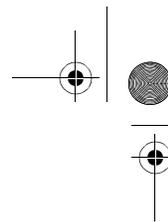
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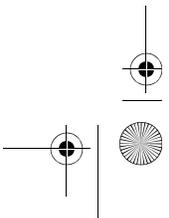
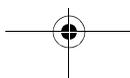
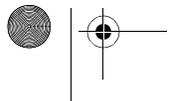
Preface



The dynamics of contemporary Cuba—the politics, culture, economy, and the people—were the focus of the three-day international symposium, Cuba Futures: Past and Present (organized by the Bildner Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY). As one of the largest and most dynamic conferences on Cuba to date, the Cuba Futures symposium drew the attention of specialists from all parts of the world. Nearly 600 individuals attended the 57 panels and plenary sessions over the course of three days.

Over 240 panelists from the US, Cuba, Britain, Spain, Germany, France, Canada, and other countries combined perspectives from various fields including social sciences, economics, arts and humanities. They provided in-depth treatment of a wide range of topics, including US-Cuba relations, healthcare, the history and legacy of the Cuban revolution, the increasingly complex Cuban diasporas, cinema, music, literature, and cultural institutions, the visual and performing arts, religion, the role of intellectuals, urban spaces, civil society, democracy, the impact of the Internet and technology, social development, non-governmental organizations, Afro-Cuban cultural movements, gender and sexuality, tourism, and race and ethnicity. The conference also discussed Cuba's links to the rest of the world.

The conference was organized by Bildner Center director Mauricio A. Font and the Cuba Futures organizing committee, consisting of a growing number of Cuba specialists at the City University of New York, with support from the Bildner Center staff. Since 1997, The Cuba Project has been organizing related conferences creating a space for sustained dialogue on contemporary issues of Cuban society. The papers in this volume were presented during the Cuba Futures conference and focus on Cuban history.



1 Democracy in Cuba: Principles and Practice, 1902–1952

By Mary Speck

Cubans and Cuba scholars (like their U.S. counterparts) tend to stress the island nation's exceptionalism. Before 1898, Cuba was exceptional as "*la isla siempre fiel*," one of only two Spanish colonies in the Americas (along with Puerto Rico), that did not win independence in the early 19th century. It was exceptional again after it finally broke away from Spain in 1898 only to the humiliating status of US protectorate under the Platt Amendment. Cuba became even more exceptional after 1959, when Fidel Castro succeeded in transforming the island into the only communist state in the Western Hemisphere. This thrust Cuba into the center of the Cold War, spawning a profusion of books and articles on the origins and evolution of the Cuban revolution.¹

The rarity of work—especially comparative work—on the Cuban Republic contrasts starkly with the abundance of scholarship on the Cuban revolution. Few historians and political scientists have both-

1. I would like to thank the National Endowment for Democracy where I conducted research for this paper as a visiting fellow.

ered to compare Cuba's political or economic evolution with the trajectory followed by other American republics. Instead the island nation has often been relegated to outlier status: an anomaly whose political and economic history is interesting primarily as a case study in US imperialism and/or a breeding ground for radicalism. Many historians dismiss Cuba's First Republic (1902–1933) as a US protectorate that afforded Cuban politicians and entrepreneurs little or no autonomy. Why study agriculture or industry in early twentieth century Cuba if US trade and investment “excluded Cubans from agriculture and mining, utilities and transportation, trade and commerce, industry and manufacture, banking and finance.”² Why examine Cuban domestic politics if “U.S. hegemony empowered North Americans to set and maintain most of the rules by which Cubans lived.”³ Under the Second Republic (1934 to 1952), the island is said to have languished under the direct or indirect rule of Fulgencio Batista, who (with US support) allegedly quashed the Revolution of 1933 and with it the kind of populist reforms that transformed—and roiled—politics in the rest of the region. A popular textbook of modern Latin American history dismisses as uneventful the twenty-five years of Cuban history leading up to the Cuban revolution: “Cuban politics saw little change between 1934 and 1959,” it states. “What had happened to the revolutionary fervor of 1933? Where was the coalition that had so frightened Washington? It had gone the way of all Cuban nationalist movements—rendered impotent by the unbeatable alliance of Cuban elites, their political and military handmaidens, and Uncle Sam.”⁴ The revolution of 1959—according to this narrative—represents the beginning (and for some the end) of post-colonial Cuban history.

2. Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 213.

3. Thomas G. Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 7.

4. Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 4th ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 272.

This essay argues that Cuban exceptionalism has been greatly exaggerated: in principle and in practice, politics on the island prior to 1959 resembled politics in the rest of the region. Nowhere is the shortfall in comparative work more striking than in the fertile field of democracy studies. Whether democracy has or could thrive in Cuba should be of vital interest both to historians and to the scholars and pundits who study and write about contemporary Latin American issues. And yet the debate on Cuba has too often focused on the role the United States should—or should not—play in the island’s future. The pre- and post-Castro era alike are reduced to a struggle for nationalist self-definition, which becomes the prism through which historians and political analysts view the island’s political and economic development.

The question of whether Cubans have ever lived under a democratic government is not simply academic. Cuba’s alleged democratic deficit prior to 1959 is used to explain the absence of democracy on the island today. Cuba expert Julia Sweig, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, argued that international critics who demanded the Castro government hold multiparty elections, release political prisoners and guarantee rights such as freedom of speech and association, were asking Cuba to become a country it “has never been, even before the revolution.”⁵ Historian Louis Pérez criticized President Obama for calling on the Castro government to free political prisoners and lift restrictions on political dissidents arguing that such attempts not only amounted to interference by the United States but also ran counter to “the logic of [Cubans] own history.”⁶ Such critics do not simply oppose US meddling in Cuban affairs, they assert as a matter of historical fact that Cubans—unlike the citizens of other Latin American countries—have little or no experience with competitive elections and have never enjoyed basic democratic freedoms.

5. Julia Sweig, “Fidel’s Final Victory,” *Foreign Affairs* 86 (January/February 2007): 54.
6. Louis A. Perez Jr., “Welcome Change in U.S.-Cuba Policy, but Not Far Enough,” *The Progressive*, 30 April 2009, at <http://www.progressive.org/taxonomy/term/634>.

The idea that democracy is alien to Latin American political culture and contrary to the logic of Latin American history is not new. During the Cold War, some scholars invoked Hispanic political traditions to explain the breakdown of democracy and the rise of right-wing military governments throughout most of the region. Corporatism, they argued, was a feature of Latin Americans' political culture that was deeply rooted in their Spanish colonial heritage. Thus the emergence of (or reversion to) authoritarian rule reflected Hispanic traditions favoring centralized over local rule, clear lines of authority rather than competing jurisdictions, top-down regulation instead of grass-roots competition. At their best, studies of political culture help us understand how past experience or ingrained tradition can influence the preferences and prejudices that help determine behavior. At their most simplistic, they suggest a sort of historical determinism that had trapped Latin America in an authoritarian past. As elected governments took hold in the 1980s, monographs on the anti-democratic nature of Latin America's Hispanic heritage have faded out of fashion while analyses of democratic institutions—parties, legislatures, electoral systems and the formal and informal rules that govern them—have taken their place.

Except, that is, when the subject is Cuba. In Cuba's case, the past is often still treated as prologue. Because Cuba has no history of genuine democratic governance, Cubans are considered immune to the third wave of democratization. Because Cubans are nationalistic, they must reject norms associated with the United States. Therefore foreign criticism of the Castro brothers becomes at best naïve and at worst interventionist. Cuban dissidents are dismissed as a tiny and irrelevant minority that does not share the values and interests of the Cuban majority. Cuba remains Communist not because the Cuban government has constructed an efficient police state but because Cubans support an authoritarian regime that is said to provide them with material benefits—such as health care and education—that were unavailable to Cubans prior to 1959.

Was the 50-year Cuban Republic merely a pseudo-republic without genuine political competition or popular participation? Or a neo-colony whose leaders acted primarily on behalf of US interests? Did pre-revolutionary institutions create the conditions often associated with democracy, such as rising affluence and the growth of middle classes? Or did they simply satisfy the needs of a relatively small, oligarchic minority? Does pre-revolutionary Cuba deserve to be called a democracy—even an oligarchic, limited or semi-democracy—at all?

These are not easy questions. The minimalist definition of democracy, derived from Robert Dahl's classic, *Polyarchy*, is a regime that allows people to express their preferences through elections that the opposition has a chance of winning.⁷ Others argue that competitive elections are not enough, that democracies must protect political liberties, such as freedom of speech, and guarantee due process with the right to habeas corpus. Still others would argue that countries where the military or any other non-elected authority (such as a foreign power) has veto power over elections do not deserve to be called democratic.⁸ Just as there is no universally accepted definition of democracy there are no objective yardsticks with which to compare the degree of democratic governance across countries or time. Each index has its drawbacks and critics who point out flaws of conception and measurement. Indices that aggregate a number of different indicators (such as the Freedom House Index) tend to be complicated and subjective, making them difficult for historians to replicate. Simpler measures based on electoral or economic data reduce democracy to specific attributes, which may or may not accurately reflect the genuine degree of competition, participation or satisfaction across different nations, cultures and times.

With these caveats in mind, this essay looks at the history of elections in Cuba as compared to other Latin American countries. It also

7. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 2-4.

8. See Scott Mainwaring, Daniel Brinks and Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, "Classifying Political Regimes in Latin America, 1945-2004" in *Regimes and Democracy in Latin America: Theories and Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 125-128.

offers some comparative data, both political and economic. Though these measures of democracy and economic well-being may be imperfect, they imply at the very least that pre-revolutionary Cuba deserves a place in the study of Latin American democracies. It seems that Republican Cuba was indeed an outlier—but perhaps not in the direction commonly supposed.

Elections in the Americas

Hotly contested elections have been a feature of Latin American politics since the former colonies won independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century. Though often tarnished by violence and corruption, electoral campaigns have been “amazingly ubiquitous” in Latin America from the 1800s through the 2000s, writes the historian Paul Drake.⁹ Although the United States and Latin America began to diverge economically in the nineteenth century (when most of the former Spanish colonies suffered prolonged civil wars), they continued to share political values. In both Americas, constitutions and laws—not divine right or family heritage or ethnic identity—have been the key source of political legitimacy. Though often only partially enforced or implemented—and periodically changed to convert *de facto* regimes into *de jure* governments—the formal rules embodied in constitutional law established norms, beliefs and expectations that have persisted over the past two centuries: that leaders should be elected to fixed terms, that there should be balance between the executive, legislative and judicial powers and that citizens should enjoy equality before the law along with certain civil and property rights.

Until well into the twentieth century, however, voting rights came with an asterisk that excluded—by law or by practice—the participa-

9. Paul W. Drake, *Between Tyranny and Anarchy: A History of Democracy in Latin America, 1800-2006* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3. Jonathan Hartlyn and Arturo Valenzuela state that North and South American include “the oldest continuous Republics of the contemporary world.” See “Democracy in Latin America since 1930,” in *Latin America: Politics and Society since 1930*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 63.

tion of women, blacks, indigenous people, immigrants and other minorities. Again, this was true in both Latin and Anglo America. When the US constitution was written only white male property owners (between 10-16 percent of the population) could vote and some state constitutions (despite Article Six of the US constitution) mandated religious prerequisites. Over the first half of the nineteenth century, states eliminated such restrictions, though women and slaves remained excluded from the vote. Former slaves got the vote (in principle) with passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870 while women had to wait until the 19th Amendment in 1920.

These changes were not linear, however. Local and state governments would use such devices as literacy tests to keep undesirables (immigrants in the north, former slaves and their descendants in the south) out of the voting booth. The United States did not achieve universal suffrage until the mid-1960s when the Voting Rights Act prohibited literacy tests and the Supreme Court outlawed poll taxes—or perhaps not until 1970 when the Supreme Court upheld the elimination of such fees in the Voting Rights Act. As historian Alexander Keyssar writes: “The United States may have been among the first nations to begin dismantling class limitations on suffrage, but it was among the last to complete the process.”¹⁰

The process in the republics of Latin America was similarly convoluted. In Colombia, men won the right to vote in 1853—extended to illiterates in 1936—while women had to wait about a century, until 1957. Argentine, Mexican and Venezuelan men got the right to vote in 1857; though only in Mexico did this include those who lacked an education, while in Argentina and Venezuela, illiterates had to wait until 1912 and 1946, respectively. Women, again, had to wait far longer: until 1946 in Venezuela, 1951 in Argentina and 1954 in Mexico. By 1920, men had won the right to vote in most of Latin America, with the exception of the Andes, where Peru did not extend the franchise to all literate males until 1931 and Bolivia waited until 1952. The

10. Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History Of Democracy in the United States*, (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 219.

last countries to eliminate literacy requirements were Peru (1979) and Brazil (1988). The last to grant the vote to women was Paraguay (1963).¹¹ Many Latin American constitutions still prohibited voting by members of the armed forces, whose duties included safeguarding the often turbulent electoral process.

THE FIRST REPUBLIC, 1901-1933

How does Cuba fit into this picture? Elections came late to the island, which remained a Spanish colony until 1898. Cuba's first elections, to choose mayors, council members, judges and other local officials, were held in June 1900 under US occupation. The electoral law promulgated by Governor General Leonard Wood, provided for a secret ballot but limited the electorate to native-born men over the age of 21 who could read and write or had approximately \$250 worth of property, though it made a rather large exception for veterans of Cuba's liberation army. Most of the Cuban notables summoned by Wood to discuss the measure favored much broader suffrage in opposition to the more conservative (electorally speaking) US general. Although the literacy requirement potentially excluded about a third of the adult white males and two-thirds of those of color, the exception made for Liberation Army (or *mambi*) veterans significantly widened the pool of both voters and candidates.¹²

The municipal elections took place relatively peacefully with veterans winning a majority of the seats.¹³ Even though the vote took place under US occupation, the results did not favor pro-US candidates. "Much to the disappointment of the Americans, nationalistic candidates won almost everywhere," writes historian Luis E. Aguilar.¹⁴ Just

11. Drake, *Between Tyranny and Anarchy*, p.44.

12. On Cuba's first elections see Charles E. Chapman, *A History of the Cuban Republic: A Study in Hispanic American Politics* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1927), p. 130 and Rafael Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los Primeros Años de Independencia* (Paris: Le Livre Libre, 1929), p. 118, 120. Illiterates holding sufficient property could also vote.

13. Mario Riera, *Cuba Política, 1899-1955* (Havana: Impresora modelo, SA, 1955), p. 18.

14. Luis E Aguilar, "Cuba, c.1860-c.1930." *Cuba: a short history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 38.

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two months later, in August 1900, a second election took place to select representatives to a constitutional convention. Again, among the most prominent winners were *mambises* who were fierce opponents of the occupation, including men such as Colonel Manuel Sanguily, a prominent intellectual, orator and veteran of the Ten Year's War, and Juan Gualberto Gómez, a mulatto intellectual and close ally of José Martí who fought for both independence and racial equality. The inclusion of such fervent nationalists frustrated Wood, though the US government praised the peaceful outcome of the elections in public. "I hoped they would send their very best men," he wrote Secretary of War Elihu Root. "They have done so in many instances, but they have also sent some of the worst agitators and political rascals in Cuba."¹⁵

The nationalist character of the constitutional convention assured a fierce debate over the notorious Platt Amendment, which the US insisted be included in the island's new constitution before it would consider withdrawing US forces. Though it bore the name of Senator Orville Platt, who attached it to a defense appropriations bill, the amendment was probably written by Secretary of War Root, whose main concern was to forestall any European designs on the new nation. The Platt Amendment promised US warships access to Cuban coaling stations, forbade treaties that might impair Cuban independence, placed restrictions on the amount of foreign debt Cuba could assume and, infamously, stated that "the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the government of Cuba."¹⁶

Although the Constitutional Convention eventually accepted the amendment on a narrow 15-14 vote, it did so only after a contentious

15. Hermann Hagedorn, *Leonard Wood: A Biography*, vol. I (New York and London, Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1931), p. 323.

16. For the text of the amendment see the Internet Modern History Sourcebook at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1901platt.html>.

debate.¹⁷ The delegates made it clear that they accepted US impositions under duress to speed the withdrawal of US troops and, perhaps most importantly, win tariff concessions from the US government. Apart from the Platt Amendment, the Constitution of 1901 was a liberal document, more democratic in some ways than those in the rest of Latin America, which tended to strengthen centralized authority. Cuba's fundamental charter provided for the election of mayors and governors by popular vote, thus limiting the power of the national authorities; it also promised universal suffrage for adult males, eliminating the property and literacy restrictions imposed under the US occupation.

So—at least in principle—Cuba granted universal male suffrage in 1901, more than a decade before Argentina (1912), Uruguay (1918), Colombia (1936), Venezuela (1947), Costa Rica (1949), Chile (1970), Peru (1979) and Brazil (1985).¹⁸ What did Cuban politics look like in practice under the First Republic? Much like politics throughout much of early twentieth-century Latin America (and much of the United States): political parties were based primarily on loyalty to a political boss or caudillo, voters were mobilized through patronage networks; elections were marred by accusations of intimidation and fraud. Stakes were high in Cuban presidential elections: the winner got to preside over the massive redistribution of government jobs, ranging from cabinet minister to post-office clerk. Institutional checks on presidential power were few, given the weakness of the courts and the Congress, which nonetheless provided the venue for passionate debate, even fisticuffs. To expose and deplore these machinations, Cuba also had a vigorous, relatively unconstrained press. Given the large percentage of illiterates, the press served principally to give voice to competing elite

17. The US forced the assembly to vote twice when it protested against a gloss in the first version of the constitution, which included a gloss that repeated private US assurances that it would abstain from “meddling or interference” in Cuban affairs. When Root objected to these observations, the convention removed them and voted a second time, passing the constitution by a vote of 16 to 11, with four delegates absent. There were two absences for the first vote. See Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba*, p. 274, 281 and Reira, *Cuba Política*, pp. 26-27.

18. Hartlyn and Valenzuela, “Democracy,” p. 36.

interests. Nonetheless, the early twentieth century saw the publication of pamphlets and periodicals by the anarchists who dominated the early labor movement (in Cuba, as in the rest of Latin America and Spain, early syndical leaders were often printers) to market revolutionary change to students and the middle or working classes, especially immigrants.

Unsurprisingly in Cuba, as in much of Latin America, the process was subject to breakdown. The central political challenge in nineteenth and early twentieth century Latin America, given the high stakes and low confidence in the electoral process, as political scientists Jonathan Hartlyn and Arturo Valenzuela have pointed out, was to “keep competing elites from killing each other.”¹⁹ In the case of Cuba, it was the United States (rather than the national armed forces) that stepped in to prevent the system from collapsing into anarchy. US intervention was, of course, not altruistic: US citizens with substantial investments in Cuba’s sugar industry stood to lose a fortune should rebels disrupt the harvest. The US did not take sides in Cuba’s electoral disputes, however. The second US occupation of Cuba (1906–1909) came in response to an armed revolt by Liberal leaders following the disputed election of 1906. Tomás Estrada Palma—one of Cuba’s most unabashedly pro-American presidents—abruptly resigned rather than agree to a partial recount, knowing that US troops would fill the vacuum of power. (President Theodore Roosevelt was infuriated by Estrada Palma’s refusal to compromise, fuming in a letter to a friend, “I am so angry with that infernal little Cuban republic that I would like to wipe its people off the face of the earth.”²⁰) When Liberals again took up arms in 1916, the US ignored the entreaties of their supporters and refused to intervene, insisting that it would support “established governments only.”²¹

19. Hartlyn and Valenzuela, “Democracy,” p. 8.

20. See H.W. Brands, *TR: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 569.

21. Aguilar, “Cuba, c. 1860 – c. 1930,” p. 46. US Marines also came ashore briefly in 1912 to protect US-owned sugar estates from insurrection by black rebels. Racist fears no doubt played a role in this intervention, which spurred President José Miguel Gómez to act quickly and brutally to crush the revolt in order to hasten US withdrawal.

Cuba's democracy under the First Republic, therefore, was messy and limited, much like democracy in the rest of the region. It subsisted under the threat of military intervention, though (as in other Caribbean and Central America nations) the intervening forces were likely to be external. It depended on volatile, frangible political parties that often exacerbated political conflict instead of defusing it. It transferred political power by means of elections that tended to be tarnished by fraud, igniting outbreaks of violence and instability.

But despite these flaws Cuba's First Republic provided its citizens with arenas for political debate and contestation. Newspapers vied with each other to lionize—or libel—the nation's leadership, depending on their political persuasion. Voluntary associations—ranging from Chambers of Commerce to immigrant mutual benefit societies to radical student associations to communist and anarchist parties and labor unions—emerged to protect and promote myriad special interests. Electoral campaigns mobilized the citizenry, albeit in the service of rural caudillos and urban bosses. Notwithstanding the dirty dealing of politicians, no single party or leader managed to monopolize the political process.

How does contestation and participation in Cuba during the First Republic compare with the rest of Latin America? One simple—though rough—measure is Tatu Vanhanen's "index of democratization," which he has calculated for nearly 200 countries, including 21 in the Americas. It multiplies 1) the share of the vote received by all smaller parties in national elections (calculated by subtracting the largest party's share from 100) by 2) the percentage of the total population voting.²² Vanhanen's index is based on the assumption that the percentage share of the smaller parties and independents measures the distribution of power while the share of the adult population voting in

22. Vanhanen argues that in combination the two provide a simple, objective measure of polyarchy. If 90 percent of the population votes for only one party that suggests power is not widely distributed while if only 10 percent of the population votes for multiple candidates that suggests there is little participation no matter how many parties they get to choose between. His argument and data set are available at <http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Governance/Vanhanens-index-of-democracy/Polyarchy-Dataset-Manuscript/>.

elections measures the participation of the population in the struggle for power.²³ What do the results look like for the countries of the Americas? They look about as one might expect: Canada and the United States are at the top for the first decade of the 20th century, with far higher indices of democratization than any other country in the hemisphere. There is little difference among Latin American countries, with only Uruguay and Chile scoring above an index of 1. There is also a yawning gap in participation rates between Anglo and Latin America, however. In Canada and the United States, 18 and 17 percent of the total population voted, respectively. In contrast, only about 4 percent of all Uruguayans and Chileans took part in elections and only 2 percent of Argentines.

Cuba's first two presidential elections had relatively high participation rates, by Latin American standards, with 9 percent of the total population turning out to vote. The ballots cast by Cuban voters had little significance, however, since the candidates opposing Tomás Estrada Palma dropped out, alleging fraud, before the election. The country's first relatively competitive elections occurred in 1909, when General José Miguel Gómez won 61 percent of the vote with 16 percent of the Cuban population casting ballots, a participation rate comparable to the United States and far above the rate for presidential elections in the wealthy southern cone countries of Uruguay (4.5 percent in 1911), Chile (3.8 percent in 1910) or Argentina (2.8 percent in 1910).²⁴ Succeeding Gómez was another independence war veteran, General Mario Menocal, who squeezed out a victory in 1912 with 52 percent of the votes cast by about 19 percent of the Cuban population. Menocal's determination to remain in office during the next round of presidential voting, inspired the redoubtable Gomez to lead

23. Vanhanen uses total population rather than adult population because of the difficulty of getting accurate estimates of the adult population in many countries. This raises the question of whether the index underestimates participation in countries with very young populations, many of whom would not be qualified to vote, though this should not create large disparities among Latin American countries. For more caveats regarding his index, see Mainwaring, et. al., "Classifying Political Regimes," p. 152.

24. Electoral data cited in this essay are from Vanhanen's data set, unless stated otherwise.

another revolt, known as “*La Chambelona*” after the *comparsa* sung by Liberal troops. In a replay of the 1906 elections, the opposition refused to go to the polls, handing Menocal an overwhelming, but dubious, re-election victory in 1916.

Nonetheless by the 1910s, Cuba was among the most democratic countries in Latin America, as measured by Vanhanen’s index, in addition to being one of the region’s most dynamic economies, thanks to the growth of its sugar industry. Cuba’s democracy index of 4.5 reflects both the increasing competitiveness of elections during the decade, with the opposition winning 27 percent of the vote, and the high level of participation, with 17 percent of the population casting ballots. Only Uruguay and Colombia were more competitive than Cuba and the island continued to outstrip its neighbors in participation.²⁵

The 1920s opened at the height of the commodities bubble known as the “dance of the millions” as sugar prices surged following the end of World War I. By late 1920, however, the bubble had burst, demolishing the fortunes of many newly-minted sugar magnates and with them much of the domestic banking industry. Politically, the decade saw a Liberal return to power with the narrow (52 percent) victory of Alfredo Zayas, though he did so only by abandoning his party in an opportunistic deal with his former adversary, President Menocal.²⁶ The 1920 elections were yet another replay of 1906 and 1916 with the Liberals, led again by the irrepressible José Miguel Gómez, who cried fraud, demanding that the United States intervene to supervise a clean vote. Again, the United States refused to land troops, though it did send a special envoy, Major General Enoch Crowder, who from his headquarters on a US battleship in Havana harbor issued a series of “recommendations” to Cuban government, forcing it to hold by-elections in certain disputed districts. The general remained in Cuba to

25. Competition indices (percentage of votes cast for smaller parties) for Uruguay and Colombia from 1910 to 1919 are 34 percent and 32 percent, respectively. Cuba’s index for the decade is 27.

26. See Riera Hernandez (1955): 270.

supervise the financial crisis and prevent Cuba from defaulting on its foreign debt. When Zayas's cabinet resigned in protest of US interference, Crowder oversaw the installation of new, "honest cabinet," which acted quickly to cut public spending. On the strength of these reforms, Cuba obtained new financing from J.P. Morgan. Soon after finalizing the loan, however, Zayas fired the ministers installed under US supervision, replacing them with his own supporters who quickly abandoned the fiscal reforms imposed by US financial experts.²⁷

The election of General Gerardo Machado in 1924 brought the Liberals back into the presidency with a comfortable 60 percent of the vote, the highest margin since Jose Miguel Gomez's victory in 1909. But Machado's actions to preserve his power would eventually precipitate the breakdown of Cuba's First Republic. He undertook massive public works—including completion of the Central Highway from Havana to Santiago and a new Capitol Building in Havana—to provide employment and diversify the Cuban economy as sugar prices began again to slide downward. He also engineered a constitutional reform designed to prolong his hold on the presidency. These efforts were singularly ill-timed. By 1927, Cuba's economy was imploding as rising protectionism decimated Cuban exports. Machado responded to political unrest by setting thugs known as *porras* against students and other malcontents, justifying notorious killings under the so-called "*ley de fuga*." By 1933, his support had evaporated even among the businesses classes. In August 1933, following a general strike combined with violent street protests, the Cuban military itself—despite Machado's assiduous cultivation—stepped into overthrow him.²⁸

The turmoil in Cuba during the early 1930s was hardly unique. Export-oriented Latin American economies were hit hard by declin-

27. On Crowder and Zayas see Robert F. Smith, *The United States and Cuba: Business and Diplomacy, 1917-1960* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1961), pp. 93-94. See also Harry F. Guggenheim, *Cuba and the United States: A Study in International Relations* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), pp. 225-228.

28. I discuss the run-up and aftermath of Machado's overthrow in "Let There Be Candy for Everyone: The Politics of Sugar in Cuba, 1902-1952" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 2008), pp. 250-316

ing commodity prices and closing foreign markets. As economies shrank, political unrest grew. “From 1930 to 1934, thirteen successful coups rocked Latin America,” writes historian Paul Drake. “From 1928 to 1930 and 1932 to 1934, the region switched from fourteen democracies (albeit oligarchic republics) and six dictatorships (exclusionary despotisms) to ten democracies and ten dictatorships.”²⁹ Cuba endured two military coups in 1933 alone. The August coup that ousted Machado was led by the military high command, whose aim was to restore political and economic order by installing (with the United States’ blessing) a provisional government that would prepare the country for new elections. Less than a month later, that provisional government was ousted by a more populist form of praetorianism.³⁰ On September 4th, a group of sergeants (including one named Fulgencio Batista) took over Camp Columbia in Havana in a protest aimed originally at internal issues, such as pay, benefits and promotions. Such was the disorganization and demoralization of the Cuban military in the wake of Machado’s ouster, however, that the sergeants were able to take control of key bases throughout the country with little opposition from the officer corps. Their crusade became political when radical student leaders, eager to defy US domination and promote economic reform, arrived to lend their support and thus “transformed an insubordination into a revolution.”³¹

The 1930s in Cuba—as in other Latin American countries—was a decade of both economic and democratic depression. It was also a decade of reform. Although the United States refused to recognize the government of Ramón Grau San Martín—a medical professor chosen by the students and sergeants to lead their revolutionary gov-

29. Drake, *Between Tyranny and Anarchy*, p. 165.

30. See Samuel Huntington’s classic description of how the role of the military changes with society in *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 221. Fulgencio Batista would, over the course of his political life, play the roles of both radical and reactionary. In 1933, he emerged as the leader of the sergeants who overthrew Carlos Manuel de Céspedes to install a reformist government; then in 1952 he ousted Carlos Prío, one of the student leaders behind the revolution of 1933.

31. Enrique Fernandez quoted in Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933: Prologue to Revolution* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 161.

ernment—the Roosevelt Administration not only tolerated but also encouraged reforms that would transform Cuba’s sugar industry, empowering both Cuban capital and labor.³² Grau’s ouster after four months in office did not put an end to his reformist agenda. The unelected executives who served in the shadow of Batista from 1933 to 1940 knew that the old export-led growth model, which had brought the island such wealth in the early twentieth century, was broken. To keep social peace in the 1930s, they focused on redistributing Cuba’s largely static income. As political scientist Jorge Domínguez writes of President Carlos Mendieta, the retired colonel tapped by Batista to replace Grau: “It is difficult to make a case that Mendieta’s government was revolutionary, although paradoxically, it was precisely that [...] Mendieta blessed with his conservative mantle those things that Grau and Guiteras had introduced under the banner of revolution.”³³

Like other populist military strongmen in Latin America, Batista combined reform aimed at incorporating workers and impoverished farmers into the political system with repression designed to keep them under control. He also cultivated support among Cuban business people by promulgating or strengthening regulations that protected them from competition. The flood of regulatory decrees that began under the Grau government continued under his successors. Labor legislation provided for a minimum wage, the right to organize and protections against dismissal. The university won autonomy. And, most importantly for the Cuban economy, the sugar sector was brought under state control through a series of regulations governing

32. Grau’s decrees were not particularly radical in comparison to Roosevelt’s New Deal. But US ambassador Sumner Welles regarded the new president as an unrealistic political neophyte who needed to incorporate opposition forces into a coalition government. The internal opposition to Grau was also fierce: ranging from the business community and the Communist party (which led a series of strikes and protests) and including much of the anti-Machado ABC movement and the traditional parties. One of the best analyses of US policy toward Cuba during the 1933 Revolution remains Bryce Wood, *The Making of the Good Neighbor Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

33. Jorge I. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978): 78-79. Guiteras was Minister of Interior and the most radical member of Grau’s cabinet.

how much sugar each mill owner could fabricate; how much cane they could buy, at what price and from whom; and, how many workers they could employ at what salaries. This widening web of regulations would be extended to other crops, such as tobacco and coffee, and other sectors, such as manufacturing.

The United States under Roosevelt, meanwhile, had backed away from its stated support for Latin American democracy. To quote historian Paul Drake, the United States developed a “policy of neutrality toward regime types” in Latin America—including regimes ideologically at odds with FDR’s progressive policies—as the “lesser of two evils” (the greater evil being instability).³⁴ With depression at home and war looming in Europe the last thing FDR wanted was to get sucked into Latin American disputes. When Cuban politicians appealed to the US ambassador to take sides prior to the elections of 1940, Secretary of State Cordell Hull reiterated the United States’ determination to remain aloof from internal politics. US relations with Cuba were “exactly the same” as its relations with the rest of the hemisphere, he instructed the envoy, adding that the “time had passed ... since any special relationship existed.”³⁵

THE SECOND REPUBLIC, 1934-1952

Despite Batista’s strong-arm tactics during the era of “puppet” presidents from 1934 to 1940, he set the stage for the return of democracy by permitting the convocation of a constituent assembly to rewrite the Constitution of 1901, a magna carta discredited for its association with the Platt Amendment. It was a diverse and disputatious assembly, presided over by Batista’s arch-rival, former president Grau who had returned from exile to take part. Participants ranged from Communist Party leader Blas Roca to Orestes Ferrara, an outspoken Liberal intel-

34. Drake, *Between Tyranny and Anarchy*, p. 131.

35. This statement came in response to efforts by ex-president Menocal to insert the United States into the debate over upcoming elections. To read the entire exchange see the online version of Foreign Relations of the United States 1940, vol. 5: <http://images.library.wisc.edu/FRUS/EFacs/1940v05/reference/frus.frus1940v05.i0011.pdf>

lectual and former secretary of state under Machado. Ferrera, who survived an assassination attempt during the constitutional congress, advocated a return to the pro-trade, free-market policies that had brought Cuba such wealth during the first republic. But progressive—or, in Cuban parlance, revolutionary—positions prevailed. The new constitution enshrined and expanded many reforms initiated in 1933, including provisions establishing employment as a right (Article 60); outlawing latifundia (Article 90); and regulating the planting and milling of sugar cane (Article 275); along with measures making mandatory such benefits as social insurance, accident compensation, pensions and minimum wage. As Roca proclaimed, the new constitution “closed the revolutionary cycle that began in 1933.”³⁶ Many of the provisions were beyond the Cuban government’s capacity to enforce; others would micromanage policy for example by specifying the percentage of budget to be spent on teachers’ salaries. Though never fully implemented, the Constitution of 1940 became a symbol of democracy that would be brandished by politicians from across the political spectrum.³⁷

The 1940s were a period of democratic resurgence in Latin America as economies recovered and the social turmoil fueled by the Great Depression began to recede. Constitutional governments also replaced authoritarian regimes in Peru in 1939, Uruguay in 1942, Venezuela and Brazil in 1945, and Argentina in 1946.³⁸ Cuba was at the forefront of this process with a vigorous electorate, an aggressive free press and a series of reform-minded governments. Batista’s successor in 1944 was the man he had forced out of office eleven years before: Ramón Grau San Martín. More than a third (34%) of the Cuban population turned out to vote, electing the Authentic party leader as their new president with 56 percent of the vote. Grau’s supporters greeted

36. Blas Roca, *El Pueblo y la Nueva Constitución*, cited in Hugh Thomas, *Cuba or The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 721.

37. For a history of constitutional law in Cuba and a comparative analysis of the 1940 constitution, see Jonathan Wachs, “Reviving the 1940 Cuban constitution: Arguments for Social and Economic Rights in a Post-Castro Government,” *American University International Law Review* 10, no. 1 (fall 1994): 525-569.

38. Valenzuela and Hartlyn, “Democracy,” p. 43.

his election with euphoria. While the doctor had come to power in 1933 during an economic crisis, he ascended to the presidency in 1944 riding a wave of World War II-engendered prosperity. Booming exports coupled with high commodity prices buoyed government revenues, which Grau promised to spread among the Cuban population, campaigning under the slogan “*gobernar es distribuir*” (to govern is to distribute).

Vanhanen’s index puts Cuba among the most democratic countries in the hemisphere in 1944: With an index of 15, the Cuban presidential election ranks just below Canada’s 1940 parliamentary elections (18) and the United States’ 1944 presidential vote (16). The 1944 elections in Cuba were more democratic in terms of participation and competition than the 1946 elections in Argentina when (after three years of military rule) Juan Peron won 55 percent of the vote but only 17 percent of the population cast ballots. Grau’s anointed successor in the Authentic Party, Carlos Prío, won the election of 1948 with 46 percent of the vote and an even higher participation rate of 37 percent of the population. The island’s democracy index (20) for that year surpasses the US index (17) for the hair-breadth victory of Harry Truman in 1948.

Unfortunately, democratic elections do not necessarily translate into good governance. Corruption—a constant complaint in Cuba since colonial times—did not emerge during the *Auténtico* years, but the proliferation of regulations and taxes and permits that began in the 1930s and accelerated during the 1940s had widened the scope for fraud. The scandals of the Grau administration—such as the alleged pilfering of \$174 million in pension funds deposited in the public treasury—were merely the most spectacular manifestations of a system rife with possibilities for influence peddling, and outright theft.³⁹ Another legacy of the 1930s was political violence. Neither Batista nor his successors dismantled the armed groups that had emerged to fight

39. On corruption during the Republic, see Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Jorge Pérez-López, *Corruption in Cuba: Castro and Beyond* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006): 62-75. Also see Speck, “Let There be Candy for Everyone,” Chapter 7.

Machado in the early 1930s. These so-called *grupos de acción* remained especially powerful at the University of Havana, including among their members the young Fidel Castro. Thus Cuba's state apparatus lacked a crucial component of stable governance: the monopoly of legitimate force. *Gangsterismo*, as it was known in Cuba, splattered the front pages with high profile assassinations and gun-fights, further eroding confidence in the Authentic Party government. Nor did the Auténticos ever gain full civilian control over the Cuban military, which continued to incubate political intrigue even after Batista turned power over to civilians.⁴⁰

Sadly, the Cuban government was far from unique in its failure to curb corruption or contain violence. By the late 1940s, Latin America's brief democratic renaissance was already fading. The advent of the Cold War heightened fears of communist subversion among the middle and upper classes, making them more receptive to the *mano dura* offered by authoritarian regimes. Moreover, the interventionist, pro-industrial policies implemented in much of Latin America during the 1930s and 40s was fueling inflation, sparking a wave of strikes as workers struggled to maintain their salaries. Many saw their democratically elected leaders as both weak and corrupt, perceptions that were heightened by the region's combatively partisan newspapers.

A new cycle of authoritarianism began in 1948 with coups in Peru (General Manuel Odría overthrew President Jose Bustamante), Venezuela (a military junta ousted Rómulo Gallegos), and Costa Rica (Rafael Ángel Calderón seized power only to be ousted himself by José Figueres Ferrer). In Colombia, 1948 was the year rioters rampaged through Bogota in response to *Jorge Eliécer Gaitán's assassination* and the start of the decade-long civil conflict known as *La Violencia*. In 1953, while violence raged in the countryside, Colombia suffered

40. On politics during the Auténtico years see William S. Stokes, "The Cuban Parliamentary System in Action, 1940-1947," *The Journal of Politics* 11, no. 2 (May 1949): 347. For more general studies see Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952* (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2000); and Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Press, 2001).

the country's first and only twentieth century coup by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. In Argentina and Brazil, populist governments that had originally come to power through military revolts became the victims of *golpes* or conspiracies themselves.

In contrast to the violence that accompanied many of these coups and rebellions, the ouster of President Carlos Prío by General Batista in 1952 was relatively peaceful. Before dawn on March 10, young military officers took over military installations throughout Cuba, along with major radio and TV stations. Apart from a brief firefight between soldiers and the presidential palace guard, the capital city remained calm. "The Cuban people have accepted the coup almost placidly," wrote the *New York Times*, "but have manifested no enthusiasm."⁴¹ The editors of *Cuba Económica y Financiera*, a business monthly, called for the restoration of constitutional government "with the utmost rapidity." But they also worried that Batista's illegal return to power meant that Cuba—so proud of its relative wealth and sophistication—was "predestined, along with the rest of Latin America, to lack order and guarantees under legal governments."⁴²

Why did Cuban democracy breakdown in the 1950s? Many of the elements that undermined the Cuban Republic are those enumerated in Juan Linz's classic 1978 study: corruption and violence that sapped the legitimacy of elected leaders; weak political parties; and semi- or disloyal oppositions, with access to arms, ready and able to seize power by force.⁴³ But in contrast to other Latin American countries, where government opponents agitated for military intervention before the generals themselves had made up their minds, Batista's 1952 coup seems to have taken most Cubans by surprise. It took place in the midst of a relatively peaceful presidential campaign. Although the leading candidates, Carlos Hevia for the Auténticos and Roberto Agramonte for the Ortodoxos, were both reformers, neither espoused

41. *New York Times* 12 March 1953, p. 14.

42. *Cuba Económica* 17, no. 312 (March 1952): 3.

43. Juan J. Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Equilibrium*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

radical ideas likely to threaten the elite. Polls showed that the two were running nearly neck-in-neck; Batista was a distant third. The retired general apparently joined the plot after it had been hatched by younger officers who deplored the violence of political action groups and were disgusted by corruption, especially reports of graft among senior officers.⁴⁴

Cuban politics at mid-century also bears similarities to the “zero-sum game” that Guillermo O’Donnell describes in mid-century Argentina.⁴⁵ Like Argentina, Cuba’s formerly dynamic economy never fully recovered from the ravages of the Great Depression, whose effects were sharply aggravated by the Hawley-Smoot tariff.⁴⁶ The island still depended largely on a sugar industry that had “stopped growing many years ago,” in the words of the World Bank.⁴⁷ Not until 1957 would Cubans reach the level of per capita they had enjoyed in 1920, write economic historians Marianne Ward and John Devereux.⁴⁸ The struggle over how to distribute a fixed economic pie devolved into bitter political struggles between capital and labor, between agriculture and industry, between established and emerging enterprises. This was particularly true in the sugar sector where government regulators determined the share of export revenues—which were in turn determined by the US government’s annual sugar quota—to be dis-

44. See Louis A Perez Jr., *Army Politics in Cuba, 1898-1958* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), pp. 124-127. For the last days of the Prío government, see Ameringer, *Cuban Democratic Experience*, pp. 179-190.

45. Guillermo O’Donnell, “Permanent Crisis and the Failure to Create a Democratic Regime: Argentina, 1955-66,” in *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Latin America*, ed. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 149-159.

46. Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte estimate that annual Cuban export revenues “fell by 55 percent between 1929 and 1933.” That translated into a decline of 59 percent in the real earnings of sugar producers. The real earnings of sugar workers in 1933 were only 8 percent of their level in 1929. See Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, “The Political Economy of Exporting Economic Instability: the U.S. Sugar Tariff and the Cuban Revolution of 1933,” Barnard College Working Paper #99-05 (1998): 4.

47. World Bank, *Report on Cuba: Findings and Recommendations of an Economic and Technical Mission to Cuba* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins Press, 1951), p. 7.

48. Marianne Ward and John Devereux, “The Road not taken: Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Living Standards in Comparative Perspective,” unpublished paper, p. 12. Ward and Devereux say Cuba’s per capita income in the 1950s was roughly equal to Italy’s – and probably higher than Spain’s. The paper can be accessed at

tributed among workers, growers and mill owners. Innovations—which might upset the delicate equilibrium—were discouraged. Cuba's boom and bust export economy, the World Bank wrote in 1951, had intensified "the natural 'defensive' impulses of economic groups against new methods of production which appear to offer competition."⁴⁹

Even so Cuban average incomes in the 1950s far exceeded those in most of Latin America, as did consumption and indicators of social wellbeing. Cuban per capita income was close to that in the relatively wealthy southern cone countries of Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. It was 70 percent higher than that of Mexico.⁵⁰ If consumption is the measure Cuba stands out even further. Cubans had 1½ times as many radios as the average Latin American country and more than 6½ times as many TV sets. They also had more than twice as many passenger cars per capita, many of which still drive the streets of Havana today.

Pre-1959 social indicators place Cuba among the top tier of Latin America. The infant mortality rate in Cuba in the mid-1950s (33 per 1,000 live births) was roughly equal to rates in Europe and a third of the Latin American average (105 deaths per 1,000). Life expectancy at birth in Cuba (64) was also far higher than in Latin America as a whole (50).⁵¹ James W. McGuire and Laura B. Frankel have shown that between 1900 and 1959 Cuba outperformed other Latin American countries at raising longevity and reducing infant mortality.⁵² That may reflect the strength of Cuba's health care system. The island had 10 doctors per 10,000 people (10), nearly as many as Europe (11) and the United States (13). Latin America lagged far behind with only 4 doctors per 10,000 inhabitants.⁵³

49. World Bank, *Report on Cuba*, p.66.

50. See Marianne Ward and John Devereux, "The Road not taken: Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Living Standards in Comparative Perspective," unpublished paper, p. 12. Ward and Devereux say Cuba's per capita income in the 1950s was roughly equal to Italy's – and probably higher than Spain's.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

52. See James W. McGuire and Laura B. Frankel, "Mortality Decline in Cuba, 1900–1959: Patterns, Comparisons, and Causes," *Latin American Research Review* 40, no. 2 (June 2005): 83-116.

Not all Cubans shared in this prosperity. The gap between rural and urban incomes in Cuba—as in most of Latin America—was huge. Nor did even middle-class Cubans feel that they were well-off. Their standard of comparison was not Latin America but the United States, the island’s major source of tourism and investment. Moreover, Cubans’ economic well-being depended on the sugar quota set each year by the US government, which helped fuel a sense of exploitation that would be manipulated masterfully by Fidel Castro after 1959.⁵⁴ Too many Cuban experts have followed Castro’s lead, painting Republican governments as mere appendages of the United States while dismissing as trivial the political liberties and economic advantages that Cuban leaders and entrepreneurs protected and promoted prior to 1952. Other Latin Americans and Latin Americanists have re-examined and re-valued the region’s democratic roots. It remains for Cubans and others who wish to explore the island’s history—in all of its rich complexity—to do the same.

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53. Ward and Devereux, “Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Living Standards,” p. 15.

54. Alan Dye and Richard Sicotte, “The U.S. Sugar Program and the Cuban Revolution,” *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 64 (September 2004): 673-704.

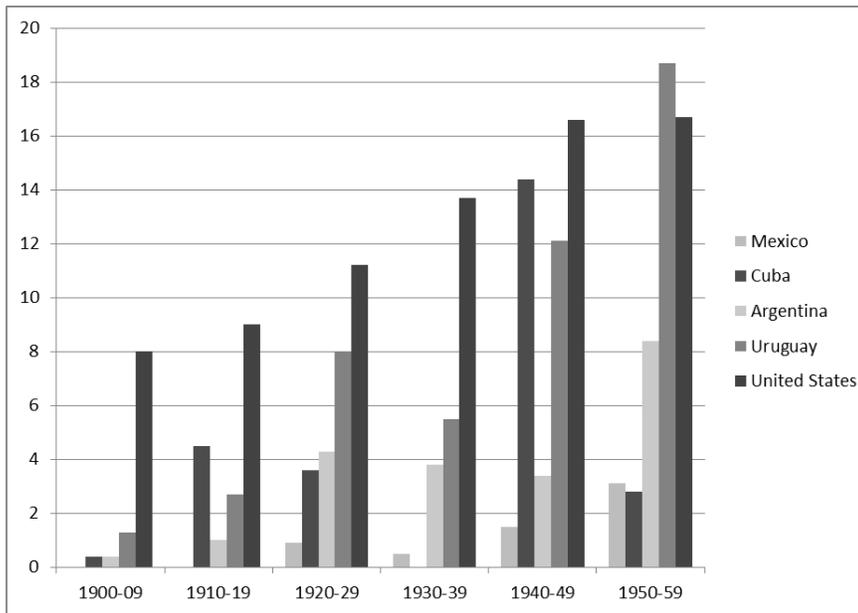
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Appendix 1. Index of Democracy in Four Latin American Countries, plus the United States, 1900-1959¹



¹ Index of democratization = degree of competition by degree of participation or the share of votes cast for losing parties times the proportion of the population that voted in each presidential or parliamentary election. Cuba data begins in 1902.

Source: Tatu Vanhanen, *Prospects of Democracy: A Study of 172 Countries* (London, 1997).

2 Cuban Corporatism: Batista's Three-Year Plan and a Nation Betrayed

Brenden Marino Carbonell

INTRODUCTION

Out of the chaos occasioned by the collapse of Gerardo Machado's dictatorship in 1933 a new, charismatic leader rose up from obscurity and seized control of Cuba.¹ Long before Fidel Castro led his followers to victory, Fulgencio Batista took the reins of a sweeping revolution, the idealism and mystique of which—though repeatedly betrayed—never loosened their grip on the Cuban psyche. His policies, ushered in amid an atmosphere of change, would have far-reaching consequences for Cuba.

Batista, a sergeant in the Cuban army at the time of his national debut, possessed both Afro-Cuban and Native-American ancestry and “was almost red in complexion,”² cutting a conspicuous figure. He

1. *See generally*, Thomas, Hugh. *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. p. 634-35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 637.

had “great personal charm” and “resembled great seducers rather than most politicians.”³ According to Hugh Thomas, author of *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*:

[Batista’s] varied experience, his knowledge of all parts of Cuba and all sections of society, would make him when he gained revolutionary power a most formidable opponent—particularly since it was clear that he was no bureaucratic officer but a self-made man of the people, who hoped to be worshipped by them.⁴

The dynamic and popular Batista, embracing his new leadership role, perceived himself as the “chief of a constructive social revolution,” and seemed eager to build a new society. He compared “real order” to a “symmetrical edifice,” which “does not require propping-up to hold it in position.”⁵ Batista’s metaphor indicated his desire to involve the state more broadly and evenly in Cuban social and economic life with the aim of unifying the island.⁶ One can perhaps regard this view of the state as a reaction to the unprecedented mobilization of the Cuban masses that had begun in the 1920s.⁷ In the late 1930s, with the goal of restructuring society, Batista introduced statist and corporatist policies⁸, including the aggressive intervention of the state in the sugar industry and the distribution of government lands to small cane farmers. These measures appear to have been motivated, among other things, by the perceived need to alter Cuba’s economic trajectory away from mono-crop, export-oriented agriculture, and to incorporate heretofore disaffected classes of Cubans into the state.⁹ As a consequence, statist and corporatist policies should have served

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. Whitney, Robert. “The Architect of the Cuban State: Fulgencio Batista and Populism in Cuba, 1937-1940.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* Vol. 32 (May, 2000). p. 440 (quoting the *Havana Post*, 23 June 1937, p. 10)

6. *See Ibid.*, p. 455 (“[Batista] reminded people that his political philosophy was to promote balance and harmony between capital and labor.”).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 435.

8. I realize that this is a controversial claim. It will be discussed throughout the paper.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 444, 459.

to quell popular discontent by tackling Cuba's greatest economic challenges.

However, Batista's statist and corporatist policies, rather than mollify public opinion, ultimately fanned the flames of popular dissatisfaction in the 1940s. While Batista's new sugar and land reforms may have been well-intentioned, they were laid over an existing system of pervasive corruption. As a result, the new statist and corporatist legislation, by linking the Cuban state more closely with the economy and society, spawned myriad new opportunities for graft in the form of bribery and embezzlement.

In addition, the corporatist policies in particular created a tradition by which the Cuban state maintained linkages between itself and interest groups in society. By the 1940s, these linkages had become liabilities as political action groups turned more violent and the state turned its political energies away from controlling these groups. The links between the state and the gang-like political groups associated the state with the brutal political warfare that rocked Cuban society during the administrations of Presidents Ramón Grau San Martín and Carlos Prío.

Ultimately, the Cuban government's corruption and link to organized violence would foster broad discontent with Cuba's political institutions. This disaffection, which would boil over into righteous anger in the 1950s, set the stage for the emergence of a radical new revolutionary movement—this time led by Fidel Castro—which would, in turn, topple Batista and the corporatist state he established.

II BATISTA'S STATIST AND CORPORATIST POLICIES CORPORATISM

This paper asserts that Batista's policies were statist and corporatist. Before examining Batista's policies in detail, the term "statist" and especially the term "corporatist" must be defined. Some of Batista's

policies were *statist* in the sense that they enlarged the role of the state in the economy.¹⁰ Statism, thus, essentially obtains when the state plays a role—usually major—in the direction of the national economy. For the purpose of this paper, statism needs no further explanation.

On the other hand, “corporatism” is a more complex notion, and requires further clarification. Certain of Batista’s measures possessed *corporatist* characteristics in the sense that they aimed at *incorporating* into the state groups that previously had lacked access to government. In other words, a state embracing corporatism seeks to represent—to embody—all interest groups that make up the social and economic *corpus* of the nation. In the end, through incorporation into the state, the corporatist government hopes to control and moderate social, political, and economic forces. Howard J. Wiarda, author of “Mexico: The Unravelling [sic] of a Corporatist Regime?”, corroborates this notion, arguing that a corporatist regime arose in Mexico in order “to control the disintegrative forces emerging out of the Revolution” and to “provide an answer to the continuing disorder that followed the Revolution in the 1920s.”¹¹ In the context of violent social upheavals, corporatism can prove beneficial by organizing interest groups and guaranteeing these groups a chance to air their grievances directly to the state. Paul Kubicek, author of the essay “Variations on a corporatist theme: Interest Associations in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia,” sheds additional light on the essential elements of corporatism, offering Philippe Schmitter’s description:

Corporatism can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organised into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognised or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls

10. See Colburn, Forrest D. “Statism, Rationality, and State Centrism.” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 20 No. 4 (Jul.1988). p. 486.

11. Wiarda, Howard J. “Mexico: The Unravelling [sic] of a Corporatist Regime?” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Vol. 30 No. 4 (Winter, 1988-1989). p. 2-3.

on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.¹²

Thus, a corporatist state seeks to establish specific, limited groups which will each take responsibility for communicating a defined scope of demands to the state. In this way, an “enlightened leadership is able to . . . alleviate social conflict and pursue the elusive common good.”¹³

In addition to ameliorating societal tensions through the shaping of interest groups, corporatism can serve the purpose of recognizing disaffected groups by bringing them into the state (a form of enfranchisement). Wiarda asserts that Mexican politics operate in this way: “[The Mexican system] is corporatist in that the PRI [*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*] incorporates within its ranks the major corporate or functional groups in Mexican society: workers, peasants, and the so-called ‘popular’ sector which is supposed to include all others.”¹⁴ In Mexico, Wiarda argues, the state

seek[s] to incorporate, under state direction, the newer social and political forces arising from modernization while excluding, and sometimes suppressing, non-cooperative groups. The system is based on assimilation and coöptation. It also requires a constantly expanding economic pie so that new ‘pieces’ can be handed out to the rising groups without the old ones being deprived . . .¹⁵

In this excerpt, Wiarda underscores the dual nature which corporatism can manifest. On the one hand, corporatism brings heretofore alienated groups into the national discussion, thereby empowering them. On the other hand, the state attempts to control these groups, or at least neutralize them, through patronage, what Wiarda colorfully describes as handing out the “pie.” Consequently, corporatism can be thought of as working on a continuum. Toward one extreme lies the

12. Kubicek, Paul. “Variations on a corporatist theme: Interest Associations in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia.” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 48, Issue 1. (Jan 1996). p. 2.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

14. Wiarda, p. 3.

15. *Ibid.*

authoritarian state which establishes corporatism as a means of controlling society. On the other end, a liberalizing state may use corporatism as a way to open up political space for previously silenced groups.

At the extreme end of authoritarian corporatism lies yet another variant: *state-corporatism*. Kubicek clarifies this further distinction as follows. State-corporatism

focuses on the heavy hand of the state, which creates, guides and structures social life. The parameters of independent activity are restricted. Bargaining is decidedly asymmetrical, and organisations are penetrated and/or co-opted by the state, often serving as little more than an appendage of the latter. Order is imposed from the top in order to prevent spontaneous explosions from below...These features, of course, could do much to undermine 'democracy.'¹⁶

A government that has adopted state-corporatism no longer views state-sanctioned interest groups as a means of empowering segments of society, but merely as an enforcement device that forces all societal actors to conform to a predetermined role. Kubicek highlights that bargaining between the government and the interest groups is asymmetrical, and indeed, many of the groups' leaders and members may hail from the government's ranks. Notably, through this mode of organization, the state achieves a ubiquitous presence in all areas of life, from politics, to business, to culture. Every individual initiative must secure government approbation before proceeding.

Even though the ubiquity of the state manifests itself most completely under a state-corporatist regime, widespread state participation in society characterizes all the corporatist forms described above. The corporatist organization of society links the government to political actions groups, the professions, to labor unions and every other grouping. In other words, under corporatism, the state enjoys a much wider interface with individual citizens and the groups to which they belong. Transactions, decisions, and disputes are channeled through

16. Kubicek, p. 3.

state agents. This grants state authorities significant leverage, should they choose to apply it. In the context of a pervasively corrupt state bureaucracy, corporatism's grant to the government of a wide interface with individuals can provide almost limitless opportunities for bribery and other forms of corruption. As will be shown later, corporatist policies, laid over Cuba's systemically corrupt government administration facilitated unprecedented corruption and fuelled popular discontent.

In sum, corporatism distinguishes itself as a way to organize society into state-sanctioned interest groups both as a means of establishing societal order, particularly during moments of political crisis, and as a mode of incorporating specific groups into public life. Various forms of corporatism exist, including the heavy-handed state-corporatism, though all have in common the pervasiveness, if not ubiquitous, presence of the state in society, and a wide interface between the government and individuals. This latter feature offers the state great leverage vis-à-vis the average citizen.

Batista's Policies

Batista adopted both statist and corporatist policies during the 1930s. Three specific measures stand out and deserve attention here: the 50 percent law, the 1937 Sugar Coordination Law, and the 1937 Bill for the Colonization, Reclamation, and Distribution of State Lands¹⁷ (hereinafter the "Land Distribution Law"). The latter two pieces of legislation made up part of Batista's general Plan Trienal, or Three-Year Plan.¹⁸ These three laws represented a massive and unprecedented intrusion on the part of the state into the economy and society generally and ushered in Cuban statism and corporatism. Through these laws, the Cuban government gained access to sugar producers, workers, and *colonos*, or small cane farmers.

17. Whitney's translation.

18. See Whitney, p. 444-45.

First, the 50 percent law merits examination. The 50 percent law mandated that a full 50 percent of the workers involved in sugar production had to be Cuban.¹⁹ In the 1930s, foreigners, including Haitians, Jamaicans and others, flocked to Cuba in the hopes of finding employment in the cane fields.²⁰ The 50 percent law sought to provide jobs for thousands of Cuban sugar workers who had suffered displacement by cheaper foreign labor.²¹ The 50 percent law involved the Cuban state in the sugar business in a direct way; indeed, the state now had a veto over sugar producers' hiring practices. Consequently, the law was statist, granting the state more power over the Cuban economy. Moreover, the law was corporatist, for it created a new, state-protected interest group: Cuban sugar workers. Cuban sugar workers now enjoyed a government guarantee with respect to employment, and additionally, the state established enforcement mechanisms, such as "Labour Exchanges" and inspectors, that inserted the state into the heretofore intimate realm of worker-producer contracting.²² With the 50 percent law, the state could shape Cuba's sugar workforce, and consequently, Cuban society. Furthermore, the passing of the law immediately drew to the state—and Batista personally—a large, defined constituency that Cuban politics had previously ignored. Cuban sugar workers had been *incorporated* into Batista's state.

Batista next announced his sweeping Three-Year Plan. According to Duvon C. Corbitt, the author of "*Mercedes and Realengos; A Survey of the Public Land System in Cuba*," an essay written during the time of the Three-Year Plan, the Plan Trienal "calls for a comprehensive program for the development of Cuba culturally, socially, and economically."²³ As Corbitt suggests, Batista intended the Three-Year Plan to transform Cuba, perhaps in an effort to fulfill expectations stemming from the euphoria of 1933. The ambitious Plan Trienal had

19. *Ibid.*, p. 442.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 442-43.

21. *See Ibid.*, p. 442

22. *Ibid.*, p. 443.

23. Corbitt, Duvon C. "*Mercedes and Realengos; A Survey of the Public Land System in Cuba.*" *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 19 No. 3 (Aug. 1939). p. 282.

as its aims the “abolition of large estates, a new national banking system, crop diversification, and co-ordination of the sugar industry through a profit-sharing mechanism among mill owners, *colonos*, and labour.”²⁴

In 1937, the “cornerstone” of the Three-Year Plan came into effect—the Sugar Coordination Law.²⁵ In short, this aggressive act “legalized state control of the total sugar acreage.”²⁶ Samuel Farber, author of *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933-1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro*, describes the Sugar Coordination Law as follows: “Under the terms of this law, representatives of sugar mill owners, sugar farmers (*colonos*), workers and government would jointly determine the rules that were to govern the state’s regulation of the industry.”²⁷ Moreover, the law protected the *colono* from losing his farm to larger sugar estates.²⁸ The law also established “a profit-sharing system among producers (both large and small), labour and the state. The state anticipated paying for the social aspects of the Plan [Trienal] with the revenue generated from its share of the profits.”²⁹ The law comported well with Batista’s belief that “what was needed . . . ‘was an efficient and rigorous intervention by the state’ in society.”³⁰

The Sugar Coordination Law represented a huge statist involvement by the Cuban state in the economy, and shocked the sugar industry which had previously enjoyed “near complete freedom.”³¹ According to Thomas, “The law organized the Cuban sugar industry to such an extent that henceforth it would be misleading to regard it as a normal part of the system of private enterprise.”³² Indeed, according to Charles D. Ameringer, author of *The Cuban Democratic*

24. Whitney, p. 444.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Farber, Samuel. *Revolution and Reaction in Cuba, 1933-1960: A Political Sociology from Machado to Castro*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1976. p. 91.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

28. Thomas, p. 708.

29. Whitney, p. 444-45.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 445.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 447.

32. Thomas, p. 708.

Experience: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952, “[T]he individual mills ceased to be competitors, each operating in a specified zone as a sanctioned monopoly.”³³ Ameringer even goes so far as to declare that the Sugar Coordination Law made the Cuban president head of the sugar industry.³⁴ The Cuban state effectively controlled the workings of the sugar industry and collected a share of the enormous sugar profits.

The Sugar Coordination Law also represented a vast corporatist measure that intimately involved the government in virtually all aspects of the island’s lifeblood industry. The law organized the various sugar agents into clearly defined interest groups with specified representatives. Mill owners, *colonos*, workers and the state each had representation and would work closely as a decision-making triumvirate to set wages, sugar prices, and other standards and rules.³⁵ Most importantly, the state’s presence could be found everywhere, and the government could exert influence within the capital-labor-state triangle, even going as far as to co-opt the process and shape the industry. Nothing could move forward without the state’s input. Stated differently, the state’s interface with individual players in the sugar industry expanded to virtually 100 percent access. State inspectors would naturally descend on the many mills and cane fields to enforce new regulations, once again clearing the way for avenues of corruption. Finally, new interest groups became *incorporated* into the Cuban state, *colonos* and mill owners.

A third new piece of legislation also deserves examination: the Land Distribution Law. This law, formally called the “Colonization, Reclamation, and Distribution of State Lands”³⁶ law formed another part of Batista’s Three-Year Plan. Whitney explains the law as follows: “According to the bill, all land belonging to the state that was unoccupied or unregistered would be turned into smallholdings and given to

33. Ameringer, Charles D. *The Cuban Democratic Experience: The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952*. Miami: University Press of Florida, 2000. p. 124.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Farber, p. 91.

36. Whitney’s translation.

agricultural labourers.”³⁷ Moreover, “[T]he state was to provide US\$1,000,000 for the purchase of seeds, livestock, and agricultural implements.”³⁸ Additionally, the government established rules governing the distribution of land, stipulating that, “Persons desiring land must apply to the department of agriculture where they are listed and classified according to *health, character*, and number and kind of dependents.”³⁹

The Land Distribution Law was statist in the sense that the government involved itself even more in the economy, as land remained the engine of the sugar industry. More notably, the law represented a corporatist attempt to incorporate and shape another interest group, the landless poor. The law brought the landless poor into the state, turning them into another Batista constituency. Furthermore, the law’s application process created an avenue for the state to exert pressure on the landless poor by classifying them by health and character. These two criteria seem a bit out of place as it is difficult to understand why this information would have interested the government. “Number and kind of dependents” may have formed the grounds for the amount of land given, but “character” seems less of this vein. Presumably, those of poor health or undesirable character would have been denied land or given unproductive tracts. This reading indicates that the state wanted to shape a fit and loyal class of new landholders, who would, in turn, support the government and Batista. This class-shaping aspect of the Land Distribution Law reveals its corporatist nature. Through this law, the state created an interface with the most basic and intimate of relationships—that of the peasant to his land. Not only did the state establish its presence vis-à-vis land relations, but went a step further and attempted to shape the newly incorporated interest group.

As with the other Batista measures discussed, the Land Distribution Law spawned new opportunities for corruption. The law made

37. Whitney, p. 445.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Corbitt, p. 283 (Emphasis added).

the Secretary of the Treasury responsible for settling land disputes arising from the new legislation, which meant that government agents would arrive first at the scene of any quarrels.⁴⁰ The involvement of government agents and inspectors, as in other contexts, raised the likelihood of bribery and other forms of graft.

The workings of the 50 percent law, Sugar Coordination Law, and Land Distribution Law indicate that Batista's Three-Year Plan represented a statist and corporatist project designed to usher in a "new phase in the relationship between the state and society in Cuba."⁴¹ According to Robert Whitney, author of "The Architect of the Cuban State: Fulgencio Batista and Populism in Cuba, 1937-1940": "For the first time in Cuban history, important segments of the *clases populares* [popular classes] were incorporated, willingly or not, into the 'public domain' organized by the state."⁴² The 50 percent law brought Cuban sugar workers, heretofore ignored in favor of cheaper immigrant labor, into the state's sphere of operation. The Sugar Coordination Law did the same for *colonos* and sugar mill owners. One more group, the landless poor, came under state supervision with the passage of the Land Distribution Law.

Each of these laws enlarged the role of the state in the economy. Also, through these laws, the state both acknowledged and redefined pre-existing interest groups. The formerly unemployed Cuban sugar worker had become a recognized legal entity, statutorily defined and furnished with rights, the protection of which had become a matter of state. The *colono* gained a right to participate in the setting of prices, and the government would henceforth defend his land from hostile acquisition. The landless poor received farms, as long as they registered and grew their crops according to the state's rules.⁴³ Moreover, the laws had increased the presence of the state in society. Indeed, by 1940, the third year of the Plan Trienal, the state was everywhere.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 283-84.

41. Whitney, p. 456.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 459.

43. Corbitt, p. 283.

The realization of Batista's "corporatist vision of the state"⁴⁴ seemed to fulfill the Cuban people's desire for change. Batista's policies appeared to replace Machado's state-instigated terrorism for the responsible and productive use of government power. Nevertheless, the Cuban state could not realistically undergo a renaissance overnight. The bureaucratic apparatus that Batista inherited could trace its tradition of corruption back to Spanish colonial administrations.⁴⁵ The ouster of Machado and its violent consequences⁴⁶ may have swept away the branches of graft, but the roots of official malfeasance remained. Over this dysfunctional system were laid Batista's reforms.

III CORPORATISM AND CORRUPTION

Despite their well-intentioned purpose, the laws of Batista's Three-Year Plan created myriad opportunities for government corruption. The Cuban bureaucracy already suffered from systemic corruption at the time Batista came to power.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the level of graft reached its zenith in the years following Batista's official term as president from 1940-1944. Thomas describes the presidency of Ramón Grau San Martín, Batista's successor in the Presidential Palace, as follows:

[Grau] embodied in 1944 the hopes . . . of Cubans who wanted . . . a serious and socially conscious government free from corruption . . . He betrayed these hopes utterly. The trust which the people of Cuba had in him was wasted in a revel of corrupt government Already a rich man . . . Grau turned his presidency into an orgy of theft He did more than any other single man to kill the hope of democratic practice in Cuba.⁴⁸

44. Whitney, p. 449.

45. Thomas, p. 738.

46. *See Ibid.*, p. 625-29 (describing acts of violence in Havana following the fall of Machado).

47. *See Ibid.*, p. 566-67 ("1923, reasonably prosperous though it was, saw the beginning of a serious movement of protest against the corrupt and seemingly incapable political system.")

48. *Ibid.*, p. 737.

One of the worst instances of the Grau administration's corruption involved a pension fund for sugar workers, one of the interest groups that Batista's Three-Year Plan had incorporated into the state. William S. Stokes, author of "The 'Cuban Revolution' and the Presidential Elections of 1948," wrote in 1951: "It was charged that monies had even been misappropriated from special funds which did not belong to the state but which were only under its care. The Sugar Retirement Fund was thought to be short about \$40,000,000."⁴⁹ Another scandal involved sugar earnings: "Dr. Carlos Manuel de la Cruz . . . president of the Compañía Azucarera Central Ofelia, S.A. accused Dr. Grau of misappropriation of \$18,000,000 of the 'sugar differential.'"⁵⁰

This unbridled malfeasance, this "graft and corruption on an almost unprecedented scale,"⁵¹ must be understood as part of a complex system of bribery, theft, and patronage that extended from the apex of political power all the way to the lowliest bureaucratic underling. Thomas describes the pervasive dysfunction as follows: "There were few public men who did not look forward to their period in power as a time when they too would be able to make their thousands of pesos . . . through control of customs houses or even through the establishment of a series of imaginary jobs."⁵² Low-level inspectors were particularly active with regard to making an illicit buck:

"Many . . . inspectors who . . . visit factories expect to be paid for not making bad reports. The factories pay them, moreover, and so they do not even make the inspections. The Government in Havana [therefore] finds it unnecessary in many cases to pay the inspectors more than token salaries."⁵³

Notably, this excerpt reveals that not only did inspectors routinely accept bribes but the central government knew about this and accommodated the corruption in its salary policy. Corruption did not hide

49. Stokes, William S. "The 'Cuban Revolution' and the Presidential Elections of 1948." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* Vol. 31 No. 1 (Feb. 1951). p. 42.

50. *Ibid.* The 'sugar differential' will be explained later.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

52. Thomas, p. 738.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 740 (quoting World Bank report of 1950, p. 190).

in the fringes, the stuff of back-room bargains, but rather played a central role in financing the Cuban government. The misconduct was ubiquitous: "It was not just the president and a few ministers who helped themselves to cash which was not theirs . . . but everyone, in any official position" ⁵⁴

Batista unleashed his statist and corporatist polices into this entrenched web of corruption. While the Three-Year Plan apparently sought the improvement of society and the curing of Cuba's economic ills, the unprecedented expansion of the interface between government agents and individual citizens which the Plan established created tempting conditions. Batista's new laws offered myriad opportunities for bribery and embezzlement. First, the 50 percent law merits attention. Unhappy with the prospect of having to lay off immigrant sugar workers and hire more expensive Cuban labor, "Some mills bribed [Labour] exchange officials, paying them to overlook the regulations." ⁵⁵ Upon passage, the new law simultaneously created a restrictive rule and commissioned swarms of government inspectors to enforce that rule. Given Thomas' description of the dysfunctional Cuban bureaucracy, it is not difficult to see that the 50 percent law tacitly provided for its own circumvention. Thus, the 50 percent law—regardless of its actual aims—most clearly succeeded in opening up a new avenue of profit for government inspectors. Consequently, Batista's high-minded employment policy directly facilitated corruption.

The Land Distribution Law also offered lucrative opportunities. This law provided that disputes arising from the distribution of the tracts would be resolved by the state, acting through the treasury secretary and his agents. ⁵⁶ Not even adjudications remained untainted:

Of course, [graft] extended to law as well as to government. . . 'Graft is . . . constantly thrust at you. . . On one occasion. . . an underling of the judge came to see me and said he could get a decision for me if I could

54. *Ibid.*

55. Whitney, p. 443.

56. Corbitt, p. 283-84.

give him \$50. Otherwise it looked as if I would lose. I told him I would make him a present of \$50 if I won. And I won . . .⁵⁷

This excerpt indicates that the outcome of land adjudications under the Land Distribution Law likely depended on the financial wherewithal of the parties involved. As a result, in disputes between mill owners and the landless poor, the mill owners could have expected to carry the day. Such results comport little with the apparent purpose of the Land Distribution Law, namely, to empower the landless and bring them under the protective mantle of the state. In effect, the law provided government arbiters with a wholly new slate of cases from which to profit.

Yet, it was the Sugar Coordination Law—the centerpiece of Batista’s Plan Trienal—that encouraged the most audacious rent-seeking behavior on the part of state officials. The statist and corporatist law not only fostered low-level graft, as did the 50 percent law and Land Distribution Law, but also opened the door for massive scams orchestrated by the upper echelons of the political hierarchy. Two aspects of the Sugar Coordination Law made this possible: the profit-sharing scheme it established, and the de facto nationalization of the sugar industry that it effectuated. The profit-sharing scheme, which redistributed sugar profits⁵⁸ from wealthy mill owners to poor sugar workers and the state, would ideally have financed myriad ambitious social projects.⁵⁹ These projects included “health and old age insurance, *new schools* and a *literacy campaign*, and the construction of urban and rural *libraries*, cultural centers for the performing arts, and sports facilities.”⁶⁰ In particular, the listed educational goals stand out. They seem designed to build Cuba’s human capital as a complement to the statutory recognition and protection of heretofore ignored interest groups. Yet, the task of realizing these educational endeavors—which

57. Thomas, p. 740-41.

58. Ameringer, p. 125.

59. Whitney, p. 444-45. *See* Thomas, p. 707 (Batista’s Three-Year Plan was “so extensive in ambition as to benicknamed ‘the 300-year plan.’”).

60. Whitney, p. 444 (Emphasis added).

the reorganized sugar industry would fund—would fall to one of the Cuban state's most corrupt ministries. Ameringer explains:

[T]he Ministry of Education had become a center of patronage and graft because the Cuban people showered it with money to make it the best. [José] Alemán [the Minister of Education] exploited this 'laudable' goal to enrich himself and build a political machine. The effects of patronage and graft permeated the entire educational system. . . [T]eachers of certain subjects had no knowledge of the subject . . .⁶¹

Moreover, much of the state money allocated for the building of new schools actually financed the construction of "show-window schools, built along the Central Highway, 'to impress the superficial.'"⁶² These excerpts reveal the extent to which Cuba's Ministry of Education prioritized personal gain over the edification of the island's youth. Into this self-serving agency flowed the sugar profits from the government's profit-sharing scheme. The case of the Ministry of Education demonstrates just one way in which the Sugar Coordination Law served to build the private fortunes of government officials.

The Sugar Coordination Law facilitated an even more audacious fraud, this time perpetrated by President Grau himself. The restructuring of the sugar industry mandated by Batista's law made Grau's deception possible. According to Ameringer:

The Sugar Coordination Law of 1937 virtually created a straightjacket for the sugar industry. . . [T]he individual mills ceased to act as competitors, each operating in a specialized zone as a sanctioned monopoly. In March 1941, the various laws for controlling sugar production were codified by law No. 21. Under this omnibus measure, the sugar industry ceased to exist as a free enterprise system. *The Cuban president . . . in effect ran the sugar industry.*⁶³

The Sugar Coordination Law thus concentrated control of the sugar industry in the hands of the Cuban president, with Grau inherit-

61. Ameringer, p. 131.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

ing this power upon his election. Exercising this near complete power over sugar, Grau in a 1946 decree introduced

the concept of the sugar differential, whereby Cuba reserved a portion of the sugar harvest to pay for commodities imported from countries other than the United States. This so-called free sugar sold for a higher price on the world market than that set for the guaranteed U.S. sale. Rather than passing along what amounted to a windfall profit to the *hacendados* [mill owners⁶⁴], the government . . . ‘captured’ the differential and made a commitment to build rural schools . . .⁶⁵

Given the state of the Ministry of Education, the last sentence of this excerpt is particularly revealing. Though some of the sugar differential money likely went toward lining the pockets of José Alemán and other bureaucrats, Grau allegedly pocketed the largest share. Indeed, as mentioned at the beginning of this section, the president of one sugar company charged Grau with having “misappropriated” “\$18,000,000 of the ‘sugar differential.’”⁶⁶ Without the Sugar Coordination Law’s reorganization of the sugar industry under the control of the Cuban president, Grau could not have decreed the establishment of the sugar differential and, consequently, could not have stolen it.

Batista’s sugar law, the key legislation of the Three-Year Plan, thus provided a steady stream of income to officials of the Ministry of Education and gave the Cuban president the power to steal on an unprecedented scale. Taken together, Batista’s statist and corporatist policies—by increasing the participation of the state in the economy and broadening the interface between state officials and individual citizens—facilitated the rampant corruption characteristic of the Cuban state of the 1940s.

IV CORPORATIST LINKAGES BECOME LIABILITIES

64. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 125-26.

66. Stokes, p. 42.

Batista's introduction of corporatist policies in the years following the 1933 revolution founded a tradition of state involvement in—and direction of—interest groups. The 50 percent law involved the state in labor relations within the sugar industry and created a state-protected interest group out of unemployed Cuban sugar workers. The Three-Year Plan's Sugar Coordination Law and Land Distribution Law corralled *colonos*, mill owners, and the landless poor into government-supervised interest groups, which the Cuban government shaped through registration provisions and production regulations. Also during the late 1930s, the government established a state-sponsored labor union, the *Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos* (CTC), or Confederation of Cuban Workers, which permitted the state “to build inroads into the mass movement.”⁶⁷ These corporatist moves allowed the Cuban government to enjoy influence over many sections of Cuban society, particularly when it came to electoral politics. Once established, the broad involvement of the state in society could not easily be abandoned, as the influence networks had crystallized.

In addition to its connections with the sugar industry and labor, by the 1940s, the Cuban state had established firm linkages with various political action groups. These latter ties would eventually prove disastrous for the state as the political action groups turned increasingly violent and corrupt. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, critics of President Grau and his successor Carlos Prío lashed out at the state's association to, and even facilitation of, political organized crime.⁶⁸

Under Grau, the government cultivated close ties with many of the ten major “political semi-gangster groups,” including the dominant *Acción Revolucionaria Guiteras* (ARG), a leader of which “had been made chief of police in Havana by Grau in return for support in the elections.”⁶⁹ Another political action group, the *Unión Insurreccional Revolucionaria* (UIR), “also had friends at court. The leader of this gang . . .

67. Whitney, p. 453.

68. See Thomas, p. 766-67 (describing how Eduardo Chibás, an eloquent and outspoken critic of President Prío, railed against the *gangsterismo* associated with the Cuban government)

69. *Ibid.*, p. 741.

became under Grau the chief of police in Marianao, by now a huge city.”⁷⁰ According to Thomas, though the UIR had an especially close relationship with President Grau, “all these groups . . . had in fact helped Grau in his election campaign . . . and after he had taken office, all of them moved in, as it were, on the government.”⁷¹

President Prío also made efforts to bring the political gangs into the state: “As for the gangs themselves, Prío arranged a so-called ‘Pact of *grupos*’ by which each action group undertook to cease activities in return for government posts and subsidies. Prío was believed to have distributed in consequence over 2,000 separate posts . . .”⁷² The government also sought to gain control of the students at the University of Havana: “All Cuban presidents knew that the students carried political weight and they tried to have a man of their own political views at their head, if only to discourage political demonstrations against the government.”⁷³ While these practices lacked the legislative mandate of Batista’s statist and corporatist policies, they proved no less effective at incorporating important constituencies into the state apparatus and simultaneously shaping the political preferences of these groups. In particular, the promise of official posts and sinecures exerted a great influence over these groups’ political orientation.

Though the corporatist tradition gave the Cuban state a great deal of influence over the political action groups, by the mid-1940s the government no longer expended the political energy to keep the groups fully under control. This lack of political will to completely co-opt the action groups reduced the state’s power over these factions, meaning that the groups would only cooperate if the government offered quid pro quo deals. Though weaker perhaps than during the late 1930s, the linkages between the political gangs and the state nevertheless remained, and, more importantly, the public made the association.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 742.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 743.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 763.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 742.

When the activities of the political groups like the UIR became more violent in the 1940s, the state suffered much discredit. The UIR had a particularly violent streak: “[The members of the UIR] had the habit of leaving the note ‘Justice is slow but sure’ beside the bodies of their victims.”⁷⁴ Under President Prío, the street violence escalated: “Despite the ‘law against *gangsterismo*’, there had been no pause in the political gang-warfare. [Rolando] Masferrer, now a senator for the Auténticos, rode round Cuba in his Cadillac like a pirate king, surrounded by bodyguards. Deaths were increasingly frequent”⁷⁵ For those who opposed the Cuban government of the mid to late 1940s, each news story chronicling the gangs’ atrocities became political ammunition. Eduardo Chibás, the most outspoken critic of President Prío, railed against the violence of the political action groups in his radio broadcasts:

Every week on Sunday night, Chibás spoke. Crowds flocked to cafés and hotels to hear him. He spoke with extraordinary passion and energy, denouncing the unbridled corruption of the regime and the *gangsterismo* associated with it. . . . [B]y his accusations, week after week, he effectively completed the discrediting of all surviving political institutions in Cuba, describing this, the last democratic government in Cuba [Prío’s administration], as ‘a scandalous bacchanalia of crimes, robberies and mismanagement.’⁷⁶

Chibás’ words found widespread support,⁷⁷ and when he fatally shot himself during his final radio address, hundreds of thousands of Cubans turned out to his funeral.⁷⁸ According to Thomas, “Chibás, given the honours of a colonel killed in the line of duty, at a tumultuous funeral, accomplished in his own death the destruction of Cuban political life. . . .”⁷⁹

74. *Ibid.*, p. 742.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 761.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 766-67.

77. *See Ibid.*, p. 767.

78. Ameringer, p. 155.

79. Thomas, p. 770.

Ultimately, the association of the Cuban state with political gangs—a link strengthened by Batista’s embrace of corporatist organization—had undermined the government’s credibility among the Cuban people, whose dissatisfaction turned to righteous anger at Chibás death. Though Fidel Castro’s revolutionary movement would not triumph for another eight years, Castro did serve as an honor guard at Chibás funeral⁸⁰, an experience which no doubt proved formative.

V CONCLUSION

Batista’s statist and corporatist policies represented a radical break from the past and seemed to promise the salvation of the Cuban economy. The statist involvement of the state in the sugar industry appeared to be a long-awaited official acknowledgement that Cuba’s mono-crop, export strategy was unsustainable and in dire need of reform. The corporatist 50 percent law incorporated unemployed Cuban sugar workers into the state and statutorily mandated their protection. The corporatist Sugar Coordination Law and the Land Distribution Law incorporated other heretofore ignored groups, such as *colonos* and the landless poor, into the public sphere. These pieces of legislation seemed to answer the hopes of Cubans for change, for the building of a socially just and economically sound nation. The promise of the revolution of 1933 had become a reality.

Yet, Batista’s statist and corporatist policies, instead of ushering in a political *Pax Cubana*, ultimately helped stoke the flames of popular discontent. First, Batista laid his Three-Year Plan upon a bureaucratic system plagued by systemic corruption. As a result, officials ranging from cabinet-level ministers to the lowliest inspectors and underlings, found in Batista’s laws myriad new opportunities for graft and embezzlement. In short order, mill owners began to bribe labor inspectors tasked with enforcing the 50 percent law. The expansive involvement

80. Ameringer, p. 155.

of the state in the sugar industry mandated by the Sugar Coordination Law provided new ways for inspectors and other officials to line their pockets.

Moreover, the allocation of state profit-sharing earnings for educational development facilitated the thievery of the Ministry of Education. The power over the sugar industry that the Sugar Coordination Law vested in the Cuban president cleared the way for Grau's colossal frauds involving the Sugar Retirement Fund and the 'sugar differential.' Finally, the provision in the Land Distribution Law making the treasury secretary and his agents responsible for resolving land disputes opened the door for more bribery. The corruption that Batista's statist and corporatist policies helped facilitate did much to disenchant the Cuban people and foment widespread dissatisfaction with Cuba's political situation.

Second, Batista's adoption of corporatism created a tradition of linkages between the Cuban government and violent political action groups. The Three-Year Plan of the late 1930s set a precedent for the expansion of the state's interface with society, and government involvement in—and shaping of—political action groups formed part of the corporatist strategy. However, by the mid-1940s, the political will to fully co-opt the gangs had disappeared, with the consequence that the action groups' conduct became increasingly wild and violent. Yet, despite the growing independence of the political gangs from the state, the government maintained its connections with these groups. As a result, the association of the state with *gangsterismo* became fixed in the public imagination. This association, repeatedly emphasized by opposition leaders like Chibás, provoked wide resentment and dissatisfaction with the Cuban political system.

In the end, Batista's statist and corporatist policies, though perhaps well-intentioned, did much to rekindle the revolutionary fervor which had gripped Cuba in 1933. In 1959, Cuba would be rocked by a new revolution, which in many respects was a continuation of 1933. Yet, to the old grievances was added a new cry: betrayal. Batista's statist

and corporatist policies had, in the final analysis, betrayed the ideals of 1933 by engendering even greater dysfunction in government.

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3 An Anarchist Crucible: International Anarchist Migrants and Their Cuban Experiences, 1900-1915

Kirwin R. Shaffer

Abstract: From the early 1890s until the 1920s, anarchists in Cuba created the most developed anarchist movement in the Caribbean Basin. This movement was based on the actions and agitation of both Cuban- and Spanish-born anarchists. As a result of this development, Cuba attracted anarchist revolutionaries from Spain but also Cuba became an important transit point for anarchists circuiting through the Caribbean and traveling from the Caribbean to the United States and back. This paper considers the migratory histories of key international anarchists who traveled to Cuba and the impact of their experiences in Cuba. As such, the paper compares the histories of Errico Malatesta (the Italian anarchist who briefly visited the island), Belén de Sárraga (an Uruguayan based female speaker and writer advocating free thought and anti-clericalism who spoke in Cuba), and Luisa Capetillo (who operated mainly in Puerto Rico but whose claim to international fame revolved around a visit to Cuba). All of these radicals were influenced by their Cuban experiences. At the same time, these anarchists impacted the shape of the movement in Cuba. These comparative biographies illustrate the importance of individuals in unlocking transnational histories and establishing regional networks. At the same time, these biographies illustrate how Cuba was a destination for leftist radicals long before the Cuban Revolution after 1959.

INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cuban- and Spanish-born anarchists developed one of Latin America's most vibrant

anarchist movements in Cuba. As Cubans launched their War for Independence in 1895, Spanish-speaking anarchists based in Spain, Cuba, New York and Florida offered support through volunteers, funds, and columns in the press. Following Spain's defeat, US foreign investment flooded onto the island. Both the rural industrial agricultural and urban economies sprang to life. Anarchists joined the ranks of workers who found employment in these industries. In the two and a half decades following independence, anarchists created nearly thirty newspapers, generated anarchist-led alternative schools, supported alternative health institutes, and forged an anarchist culture complete with theater troupes, bands, children's choirs, poetry recitals, and short stories and novels. While anarchists spread across the island and formed groups in every pocket of the island, their influence also reached beyond the island's shores. The transnational links forged during the war in the 1890s grew and expanded to create an anarchist network radiating out from Havana to connect with anarchist groups and individuals in various parts of North America, Spain and the Caribbean.¹

The international anarchist movement in the early twentieth century was composed of a series of national movements linked into regional networks. These regional networks were then linked into broader trans-regional networks where people, money and information flowed between countries, between regions and around the world. While anarchists frequently skipped across political borders, the local and national anarchist movements within those borders were the very nodes that made up the networks. Cuba occupied a central place in several overlapping regional networks. First, the island received more Spaniards after 1898 than any country other than Argentina. Between 1900 and 1930, Argentina received 48.36% of Spanish migrants while Cuba received 33.97% of the total, so that over this time, nearly 800,000 Spaniards legally migrated to Cuba

1. For works on Cuban anarchism, see Shaffer 2005, Casanovas, Sánchez Cobos, and Poyo. For works on relations between Caribbean anarchists and Cuba, see Shaffer 2009a, 2009b, 2010.

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(Iglesias García, 1988: 87; Naranjo Orovio, 1992: 770). Spanish anarchists joined this migration, crisscrossing the Atlantic regional network between Spain and Cuba and helping their Cuban comrades created the island-wide movement. Second, Cuba was the hub for the Caribbean regional anarchist network. In this role, it was a point of entry into the Caribbean for Spanish anarchists who—along with Cuban anarchists—traveled to work and agitate in the cigar factories of Florida or construction sites in the Panama Canal Zone. As the regional hub, Cuba was also the source for the majority of anarchist newspapers in the region. These newspapers launched fundraising campaigns for anarchist causes, printed communiqués and columns from throughout the Caribbean region that were then sent back to the country of origin for distribution, and became the mouthpiece for forming a unified regional anarchist identity. Third, Cuba was an important node in the anarchist network that linked Puerto Rico, Cuba, Florida and New York—essentially, an Atlantic seaboard regional network. From the days of the Cuban War for Independence to the 1920s, Cuban, Spanish, and Puerto Rican anarchists traveled this North-South route, engaging in multi-national anarchist agitation, fundraising initiatives, labor actions, political protests, and newspaper publishing.

In short, Cuba was an important crucible of anarchist agitation and identity formation for anarchists traveling across a wide and increasingly important geographical area at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Anarchists traveled to Cuba—some to stay, others to agitate briefly before moving on. Along with anarchist migrants who stayed for long periods of time in Cuba and helped to forge the local movement and maintain the regional networks, one could also find the “celebrity” radical migrant. This paper explores the Cuban episodes in the political lives of key migrant anarchists and anarchist sympathizers during the heyday of global anarchism from 1900 to 1915. These were internationally famous anarchists who visited Cuba. Their visits were important mile-markers in the history of the Cuban movement and sometimes in the lives of

the celebrities themselves. To this end, the paper examines the 1900 visit of the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta—a visit that proved a direct challenge to US control of the island; the 1912 visit of the Uruguay-based female leftist free thinker Belén de Sárraga; and, the controversial 1915 visit of Puerto Rican anarchist Luisa Capetillo—a visit in which her arrest for wearing men’s clothing in public overshadowed her writing and lectures.

These comparative mini political biographies are useful in illustrating multiple aspects of anarchism in the Americas, especially Cuba. First, they illustrate the importance of studying individuals in order to unlock transnational history and to recreate regional networks. Traditionally, biographical approaches dominated the historiography of anarchism, but then gave way to national, labor, and cultural approaches. But to understand how networks operated, we have to follow the men and women who traveled between various points on the networks and became the face of regional and trans-regional anarchism—the flesh of the movement that was as important in network maintenance as flows of money and newspapers. Thus, biographies are again important in developing our understanding of network operations. Second, biographies are central in showcasing the role of Cuba within the international anarchist movement in the early twentieth century. The fact that internationally famous anarchists traveled to and agitated in Cuba illustrates the often underestimated role of the island’s anarchists as a central point in the multiple, overlapping regional anarchist networks in the early twentieth century. Finally, these biographies illustrate Cuba’s long global role as a site of revolutionary potential in the eyes of global radicals. To this end, these biographies show how Cuba was a destination for leftist radicals long before the Cuban Revolution after 1959.

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TRANSNATIONAL ANARCHISM IN EARLY POST-COLONIAL CUBA: ERRICO MALATESTA, 1900

Following the Treaty of Paris in which the US and Spain negotiated the end of the war while Cuban revolutionaries looked on uninvited to the peace talks, anarchists found themselves in an odd position. They had given their support to the independence cause, agreeing to a social revolution upon victory against Spain. Unfortunately, Cuba's independence forces were not part of the agreement that transferred Cuba to US control and under US military occupation. Now anarchists joined with more mainstream Cuban critics of the new political reality. Luis Barcia and Adrián del Valle—long-time anarchists who had worked in Havana and New York in the 1890s, returned to Havana at the end of 1898 to found *El Nuevo Ideal*. In its pages, they and other anarchists charged that Cubans were now living in the midst of a thwarted revolution. They leveled most of their criticism against the US military running the island from 1898 to 1902. Into this political volatility emerged the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta.

It did not take long for anarchists to discover that standing up to the US and continuing to pursue an anarchist agenda under military occupation was difficult, but still could be done. On February 27, 1900, Malatesta arrived from New York via Tampa for a series of talks in Havana. At the beginning of the century, Malatesta was one of the best-known anarchist activists on both sides of the Atlantic. His radical activities had led to jail in Italy before escaping and heading eventually to London. There, he met the Spanish anarchists Pedro Esteve and Del Valle before they left for New York and Havana respectively. Malatesta was no stranger to anarchists in the Americas before arriving in New York in 1900. In the late 1880s he had lived, worked and agitated in Argentina before returning to Italy. Once in New York, he worked with Spanish- and Italian-speaking anarchists in the area before accepting invitations to travel to Tampa and Havana to give a series of talks aimed at mobilizing support for the anarchist cause in those cities.

Malatesta's old friendship with Del Valle, whom he knew from meetings in Barcelona and London, paved the way for his arrival in Cuba in early 1900—a year after Barcia and Del Valle began *El Nuevo Ideal* and launched their attacks against the US occupation and its allies in the Cuban bourgeoisie. However, the US was hesitant to allow the famous Italian anarchist to speak. The day after arriving, Malatesta attended a meeting of the *Círculo de Trabajadores*, giving an interview to the press. The next night, minutes before his scheduled talk to a packed meeting hall at the *Círculo*, the police prohibited the anarchist from taking stage under orders from the civil governor Emilio Núñez. The governor soon withdrew the prohibition if Malatesta promised not to mention “anarchism” in his talks. He agreed. He spoke about anarchism, but never uttered the word that night.²

During his talks in Havana and Regla during March, Malatesta brought his skill for sociological investigation to the audiences, being sure to place his anarchist interpretations within a larger global context that included the US, Cuba, Russia, Italy, South Africa and the Philippines. His discussion of living and working conditions for workers in the US reinforced Barcia's critiques of the US as a model republic as well as Barcia's urging Cuban resistance: “The only way to limit exploitation is to resist,” said Malatesta during his March 1 address. He suggested to his audience that “the conquest of the Philippines means a new market for American capitalists on one hand and on the other the probability of importing Filipinos to America to work at a lower price than the American worker,” or take American capital to the Philippines to the same end. He concluded his first talk by bringing the Cuban situation into this larger global discussion. He reminded the audience that to understand the current Cuban climate, one had to look at more than just the US occupation. No sooner had Cubans thrown out the Spanish government but now “Spanish capitalists are still here exploiting the Cubans, and if they are able to throw them out, nothing will prevent Cubans from continuing to be subjects

2. *La Revista Blanca* (Barcelona), December 1, 1932, p. 1. This is Adrián del Valle's thirty two-year old account of Malatesa's visit.

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of other capitalists, Cubans, Americans, or whichever nationality.” Free Cuba—as Barcia, Del Valle, and other anarchists kept telling their readers—“is not for Cubans but for the privileged who possess all of the wealth,” Malatesta concluded.³

Two nights later on March 3, Malatesta returned to the podium at the over-crowded hall of the *Círculo de Trabajadores*. In a speech centering on authoritarianism vs. freedom, he spoke even more explicitly about the state of Cuban independence. Arguing that all progress arises from the “spirit of freedom” and violating the law, he cited the War for Independence as a necessary violation of Spanish law in order to be free. “Martí and Maceo, today rightly venerated by the Cuban people, were criminals and traitors of Spanish law.” But he urged the audience to carefully consider where Cuba should go next. “Here, in Cuba, there will be no shortage of men who will seek to rise to power saying that they aspire to this position in order to help Cuba become independent and to do good for the people. These men will deceive the people,” and only work for their own interests once in power. “The work of civilization and of freedom is not the work of governments but of the people, bolstered by conscientious minorities. Governments—defenders of privileged class interests—are, on the contrary, the main obstacles that systematically are opposed to the development of civilization and freedom.”⁴

The authorities were not amused. Malatesta had remained true to his word and not mentioned “anarchism,” but the thrust of his message could not be overlooked by Núñez or US authorities. Malatesta clearly suggested the need for continued resistance against those who were taking power on the island. Two nights later, Malatesta was scheduled to speak on the origins and consequences of crime. The Civil Governor of Havana again stepped in and prohibited the talk, this time citing a colonial-era law that Malatesta had failed to obtain the right official permits to speak. To get around this ban against scheduled speeches, Malatesta attended labor meetings. During the

3. *El Nuevo Ideal*, March 9, 1900, pp. 1-2.

4. *El Nuevo Ideal*, March 29, 1900, p. 1; April 6, 1900, p. 1.

meetings' question period, he rose to speak.⁵ He also printed open letters to Cubans, including one "To the Cuban Workers" that appeared in *El Nuevo Ideal* after he left Cuba bound for New York on March 10.

The open letter was a broad attack on both the Cuban and American military governments on the island as well as the class struggle unfolding whereby the rich were reaping the spoils of war. Malatesta continued those criticisms that anarchists like Barcia and Del Valle had initiated over the previous year and would be a mainstay of anarchist critiques on Cuban politics and the US through the 1920s. Noting that the independence forces were made up primarily of working-class people, he said how "it would be sad, profoundly sad if so much heroism and sacrifice will only serve to simply produce a change of masters, as has happened in other countries" and then to discover "that their own country's tyrants are as evil as the foreigners. And this is precisely the danger threatening Cuba, if the Cuban worker does not work quickly to stop it." There were many dangers: continued American intervention, new Cuban leaders who were acting for their own class interests, the rich (foreign and domestic) who were acquiring the island's wealth, and even Cuban workers who were falling into the trap of pitting themselves against Spanish workers.

While the Americans remained, Malatesta warned about two types of Cubans of which to be wary. One was the Cuban worker throughout the island and in Florida who harbored resentment against Spanish workers because the Cubans believed they were stealing Cuban jobs. This was increasingly the line promoted by the nationalist elements within the Cuban labor movement led by the pre-war anarchist Enrique Messonier. Don't be fooled by those who try to scare you with "the ghost of the 'reconquest,'" he warned. "Guard yourselves against those Cuban workers who fall into the trap" of promoting nationality. "The Spanish worker, who due to poverty or persecution had to abandon his country of birth, has the same reason to hate the Spanish government as the most persecuted Cubans; and, today he

5. *La Revista Blanca*, December 1, 1932, pp. 400-01.

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has as much interest in putting the brakes on bourgeois exploitation as any worker born in Cuba.”

The other Cubans to avoid were those seeking political office under American oversight. “Tomorrow, the Cuban leaders will sweep aside the interests of their own children, as occurs in all “independent” countries. And, above all, the owners of land and all of the Cuban wealth will remain in place, whose defense against the pillaging workers is the fundamental mission of every government.” Malatesta foresaw the protectorate role that the US would play in Cuba over the next thirty years—a role that allowed the US to militarily intervene when Washington believed Cuba was on the brink of calamity: “Today, Cubans aspire to be liberated from the intervention of the American government—that, under the lying mantle of liberator, has come to dictate and tyrannize as in a country under conquest—and just and holy is their aspiration. But this will not be realized either by the rich class that needs American protection in order to be able to safely exploit the energetic Cuban worker, or by the merchants of patriotism who beg their share of the interventionists’ spoils.” There was only one way that Cubans could be free of this kind of dual government collaboration against their interests and thus to realize the social reforms promised to workers during the war in order to garner their support. “In order to be truly free, it is necessary to abolish not only this government or that, but the institution of government itself....”⁶

Of course, the institution of government was going nowhere, and in the Caribbean Basin, not only were national governments consolidating power but so too was the rapidly expanding governmental presence of an imperialistic United States. Still, Malatesta’s visit caused concern among both Cuban and US authorities. His known radicalism concerned them enough to restrict his activities. Despite these restrictions, Malatesta’s words and ideas reached broad segments of Havana’s working class and those sympathetic to his calls for a contin-

6. *El Nuevo Ideal*, March 22, 1900, p. 1.

ued push toward revolution. After all, the war only had been over less than two years, and certainly sentiments of resistance and freedom lingered among many of these working-class supporters who had given time, blood, and money to see a social revolution accompany independence. Malatesta's arrival, his talks and writings, and the large audiences that saw his speeches and read his words were important for anarchists in the aftermath of the war. His presence energized long-time anarchist activists while putting a global face on the anarchist movement. Here was a radical who was neither Cuban nor Spaniard working within their midst—face-to-face—in order to secure the Cuban movement's linkage with the rest of the international movement and reinforce the island's role as an important site within the regional and trans-regional anarchist networks.

FEMALE TRANSNATIONAL ANARCHISTS, FREE-THINKERS, AND GENDER IN CUBA: BELÉN DE SÁRRAGA AND LUISA CAPETILLO, 1912 AND 1915

In 1912 one of the Western world's leading female free-thinkers—Belén de Sárraga—arrived on the island. Her presence coincided with several emerging efforts within the Havana-based anarchist movement. First, her visit coincided with growing attempts by female anarchists to have a larger presence in the Cuban movement. Second, her role as a free-thought radical that was vehemently anti-Catholic Church and anti-religious education coincided with a surge in rationalist, alternative school initiatives. These schools—run by anarchists—arose in direct opposition to state-run public schools that anarchists believed promoted patriotic nationalism and religious schools that anarchists deplored as anti-modern and full of anti-scientific mumbo jumbo. One of the leaders of the educational movement by 1912 was another migrating female anarchist, Blanca de Moncaleano from Colombia. Finally, the visit would lead to the rise of the island's first free-thought newspaper that would be published in Havana by Adrián del Valle. Efforts to increase female participation and focus on gender

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issues among the island's anarchists came to a head in 1915 when the Puerto Rico-based anarchist and fellow promoter of free-thinking Luisa Capetillo arrived in Havana. Her stay and activism resulted in controversy due to her gender-bending decision to go out in public dressed as a man. Her arrest not only brought notoriety to Capetillo but also coincided with the spark in anarchy-feminism witnessed on the island at this time.

Belén de Sárraga

Belén de Sárraga was born in Puerto Rico to a Spanish colonial official but grew up in Spain. Ultimately, she became politically conscious, sympathetic to radical causes, and moved to Montevideo, Uruguay. Over time, her activism centered on “free thought”—a movement promoting free speech and especially freedom from Catholic dogma. Free-thinking anti-clericalism was attractive to many on the political left, especially anarchists who saw the church as an enemy equal to the state and industrial capitalism. In 1911 and 1912, Sárraga launched a multi-country speaking tour for the Liga Internacional del Libre pensamiento de Europa, seeking to organize a Federación del Libre pensamiento Internacional en América. From January to March 1912, she held widely covered public talks in Havana.

The weekly anarcho-communist newspaper *¡Tierra!* and the anarcho-syndicalist *El Dependiente* heralded her arrival in the city in January 1912. Both noted that her first talk at the Ateneo y Círculo de la Habana was sparsely attended. *El Dependiente* lamented how the people who most needed to hear her speak of freedom—those “people lost in the dark shadows of ignorance”—were absent. To “advertise” her speaking talents, as well as her message of freedom and liberation, *¡Tierra!* suggested that she represented how women would “be in charge of liberating humanity, making their sons through an education stripped of prejudices into honorable men capable of composing a perfect society.”⁷ Thanks to public support for her talks by liberal and progressive intellectuals like Enrique José Varona, over the coming

weeks she spoke to larger audiences on “Woman as the Element of Progress,” “The Problem of Education,” “Jesuitismo and the Future of America,” and “The Catholic Church Judged by Reason.” Yet, *El Dependiente* noted that the audiences were mostly working class, and there was a noticeable lack of Cuban women or intellectuals. Anti-religious sentiments were the common thread through all of these talks. For instance, “the venerable mother, the virtuous compañera and the loving girlfriend” were held back from being emancipated because of their preoccupations “with absurd principles of a depressing religion” to which they “submit their will, honor and tranquility of the home” to a cloudy moral authority that “imprisons and contains her between its octopus-like steel tentacles.” To overcome these tentacles of religious influences, Sárraga urged women to seek education. Yet, education was still too influenced by religion, even in the public schools of the Americas where religious ideas were still taught. Thus, she urged women to become teachers or at least teach themselves and their children in modern scientific ways for progress, freedom and human advance.⁸ Finally, as long as the Jesuits maintained influence within the American elite, the hemisphere’s people—men, women and children alike—would continue to find their progress retarded. Sárraga described the hold of Jesuit educators on the elite, teaching youth ideas and ways that, according to *El Dependiente*, resulted in its “mutilated brain, its atrophied, confused and castrated mentality.” Americans had to reject Jesuitismo’s influence in the home and schools, especially since America was to be “the continent hailed for allowing ideals to flourish”—ideals that would allow for human happiness. The editors of *¡Tierra!* emphasized this by printing what they called the “Motto of Jesuitismo” versus the “Motto of Free Thought.” The former was supposedly reflected by the Jesuit school of Belén in Havana: “War on freedom! Darkness and hypocrisy are effective weapons!” The latter was reflected in a quote from Belén de Sárraga: “We are destroying oppression of thought! Love and instruction will give to

7. *¡Tierra!*, January 27, 1912, p. 1; *El Dependiente*, January 31, 1912, p. 1.

8. *¡Tierra!*, February 3, 1912, p. 1; *El Dependiente*, February 14, 1912, pp. 2-3.

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humanity the glory of victory.”⁹ There was no doubt for anarchists which “Belén” motto marked the path of human progress.

Her emphasis on free speech and free thought attracted support from around the city—and not just from anarchists. The local mainstream press published columns and letters praising her talks, and these were then re-printed in the anarchist press, perhaps to suggest to the general public just how rational and commonsensical anarchists were. The newspapers *El Tiempo* and *La Opinión* approved of her general themes, even if they did not fully support all of her ideas. A doctor wrote to commend her talk, even comparing her speeches to the electrifying words of freedom from José Martí.¹⁰

Yet, not all anarchists were particularly pleased by everything she said. In her talk on February 11, she announced her support for Spanish republicanism and for republicanism in general. For the anarcho-syndicalists who published *El Dependiente* and represented the anarchist union of the hotel and restaurant workers in Havana, this was almost blasphemy. The editors asked, “How can one accept as a ‘panacea’ a system of government” with roots in the republican government of the 1870s that Cubans died trying to escape? In addition, they noted, republican governments had proven just how tyrannous they could be toward anarchists. Besides the Spanish republican model, anarchists merely had to look at all of the other “model republics” like Argentina, Chile, the US and even Cuba to see their long lists of abuses. The Cuban republican government, after all, “has expelled as ‘pernicious’ certain enlightened workers for the enormous crime of thinking,” wrote an unnamed columnist.¹¹ Thus, how could a proponent of free thought and free speech put such faith in a type of government that had a rather questionable track record against radicals who were practicing free thought and speech? All this pointed to the fact that Belén de Sárraga was, at root, a proponent of free thought,

9. *¡Tierra!*, February 10, 1912, p. 1; February 17, 1912, p. 1; *El Dependiente*, February 26, 1912, p. 1.

10. *¡Tierra!*, February 17, 1912, p. 2.

11. *El Dependiente*, February 26, 1912, p. 2.

not necessarily a committed anarchist—but someone nevertheless sympathetic with anarchism and anarchist goals of freedom. However, as was generally true throughout the Americas, anarchists considered themselves to be free thinkers and all free thinkers to be fellow travelers—even if they sometimes lapsed into supporting governmental solutions. Still, such associations could create tensions.

Meanwhile, Havana's religious residents were unhappy with the talks for other reasons. One priest reportedly thought that Sárraga's public talks were damaging to Cuban women's religious sensibilities and sentiments. The Cuban Church organized several elite families, especially the women, to sign a letter publicly protesting any further talks. The leading daily newspaper *Diario de la Marina* joined in denouncing her attacks against the Church. For the editors of *Diario de la Marina*, her talks threatened more than just the Church but also Cuban women. When men applauded her statements, they did so “with the same ardor as when they clap for and acclaim nudity.” In short, while she proclaimed female liberation, it was men who welcomed this with glee and sexual graving.¹²

Despite the occasional anarchist (and more fervent Catholic) critique of Belén de Sárraga, anarchists on the island took inspiration from her visit. More women were playing roles or calling for increased roles in the movement at that very moment. At the end of February 1912 while she was in Havana, the long-planned Cruces Congress opened. This was the first island-wide workers congress in Cuban history and was organized mainly by anarchists based in Havana and the sugar zone city of Cruces. Months before the congress, authorities arrested and deported Abelardo Saavedra, one of the primary organizers. Female anarchists stepped in. Saavedra's *compañera* Enriqueta and Emila Rodríguez de Lípiz (wife of another anarchist organizer) played key roles in early 1912 to see that the congress was held as scheduled (Shaffer, 2005: 54). Other anarchist women spoke to the impact of the Uruguayan freethinker. Inspired by Sárraga's visit, Ana Rodríguez de

12. *¡Tierra!*, February 3, 1912, p. 2; February 24, 1912, p. 2.

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García claimed—like Sárraga had done—that “the primary factor of progress is in the feminine sex; as long as women do not go openly united with men, fighting for emancipation of humanity, there will be no complete regeneration....”¹³ At this moment, other women rose to leadership positions in the Cuban anarchist movement. The Colombian migrant female anarchist Blanca de Moncaleano was in the process of taking over key roles in the Havana-based rationalist school movement. She and her husband Juan operated the prominent school in the Havana suburb of Cerro until her Juan left the island to join the Mexican Revolution first in the Yucatán Peninsula, then Mexico City and finally in Los Angeles. After he left Cuba in mid 1912, Blanca ran the school. Reflecting her growing presence in the Havana anarchist scene, Blanca had written in support of Sárraga while the latter was in Havana, seeing her as a kindred spirit and, like her, an “advanced women.”¹⁴

While Sárraga’s visit inspired female anarchists on the island, it also played a role in advancing the cause of free thinking. In 1915, she published her book *El clericalismo en América*. The book highlighted what she saw as the blatant and not so blatant problems resulting from the continued presence and influence of the Christianity in the Western Hemisphere. Her tour of the Americas had been not just to raise consciousness wherever she went but also to gain material for this book. Her Cuban experience armed her with one piece of her anti-clerical argument (Sárraga, 1915: 79, 111, 275, 294, 308, and 313-14). Meanwhile, the Cuban visit inspired a number of Cuban progressives and leftists to work for the Free Thought cause. They first formed the Sociedad Anónima Progreso that unsuccessfully tried to start a free thought daily newspaper and then founded the Sociedad de Librepen-sadores that launched the anti-clerical magazine *El Audaz*, which saw nearly thirty volumes go to press. Anarchists were prominent in these endeavors, especially Adrián del Valle. As a secretary of the Society and editor of the newspaper, Del Valle expressed the debt they all had

13. *¡Tierra!*, February 24, 1912, p. 3.

14. *¡Tierra!*, February 24, 1912, pp. 2- 3.

to Belén de Sárraga's visit. Noting the paper's creation was inspired by her visit earlier that year, he further illustrated how far free thought had to go in Cuba: the paper was originally to be called *El Radical*, but the government would not allow it. To be "audacious" innovators in art, science, politics, and religion would be their creed since "the audacious are the ones who push humanity along down the endless road of Progress."¹⁵

Luisa Capetillo

The anarchy-feminist Luisa Capetillo was essentially the "Red" Emma Goldman of the Caribbean. Born in Puerto Rico like Sárraga, she became politically active in the first decade of US control of the island. By 1907, Capetillo was working with the largest trade union on the island—the Federación Libre de Trabajadores (FLT). The FLT was led by a former anarchist-turned American Federation of Labor ally and socialist Santiago Iglesias Pantón. Yet, throughout the FLT locals, anarchists continued to play important leadership roles. Capetillo regularly worked at the local level as a militant for increasing workers' consciousness. One of her central activist roles was as a writer of essays and fiction. She published her first book *Ensayos Libertarios* in 1907. From 1912 to 1915, Capetillo traveled the overlapping anarchist networks in the Caribbean and the east coast of the US, working and residing in Puerto Rico, New York City, Tampa and finally Havana by 1915 (Ramos, 1992: 65-7).

In early 1915, anarchists in Cuba were under assault. During a sugar strike in January, the Federación Anarquista de Cuba circulated the "Manifiesto de Cruces" that implored readers to rebel against the island's oppressors and ally themselves with the strikers. Continuing the wave of repression against anarchists that began in late 1914, the Menocal government responded by closing *¡Tierra!* and deporting Spanish anarchists. Luisa Capetillo, in Cuba at the time, offered her

15. *El Dependiente*, May 29, 1912, p. 3; *El Audaz*, July 5, 1912 p. 1; March 15, 1913 p. 8.

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support to the anarchists. She immediately found herself under a deportation order that appears to have not been carried out for unknown reasons (Manifiesto de Cuba, 1975: 321-4; Valle Ferrer, 1990: 84-5).

In mid-1915, Capetillo was still living in Havana. On July 24, 1915, she went for a walk through the working-class and commercial district of central Havana. A police officer arrested her, not for publicly speaking in support of anarchism or feminism but because she was dressed head to toe in men's clothing. The arresting officer thought that a woman wearing a brimmed hat, pants, jacket, shirt and tie was causing a public scandal. At her trial before the Second District Corrections Court, Capetillo defended her actions, claiming that wearing pants was comfortable and hygienic. If women were increasingly to be employed throughout the workforce, then such clothes were quite appropriate for these new roles. Besides, she asserted, in her travels to Mexico and the US as well as throughout Puerto Rico, she had regularly worn pants with no problem (Valle Ferrer, 1990: 85-6). As a columnist for the daily *La Lucha* put it, the case was curious from the beginning since the officer did not take to the precinct any other women "that walk around here dressed as men." Capetillo was released, claimed the columnist, when the officer could not answer a simple question: "What is the legal precept that prohibits a woman from dressing like a man?"¹⁶

The *La Lucha* column raised an important point: was Capetillo singled out not because of her dress but because her dress drew attention to her as a well-known radical? Thus, she must have been followed and the police must have been looking for an excuse to arrest her. As her biographers have noted, this was not a casual, unimportant event in her life. This was a blatant political act that expressed Capetillo's joint beliefs in female and anarchist freedom. The event shocked bourgeois tastes—nothing new for anarchists—and was a direct challenge to patriarchal, bourgeois and thus capitalist society in Cuba. The

16. *La Lucha* (Havana), July 26, 1915, p. 2.

fact that she did this at a time when the island's anarchist movement was constrained and on the ropes illustrates her commitment to the cause by doing what she thought she could during such a time of anti-radical repression. Maybe because she was a woman she was not convicted. Whether or not that is the case, her actions as a female anarchist were in line with a wave of increased female anarchist activities that began three years earlier with Belén de Sárraga's visit to Havana.

Ultimately, Sárraga and Capetillo were outsiders in Cuba. But they offered their ideas and actions in support of anarchist initiatives on the island—whether they were promoting free speech and free thought or women's freedom. At the same time, their brief presence on the island proved significant for their overall international image and actions. For Sárraga, her Cuban experiences proved important in nuancing the book she would soon publish on Catholicism in the Americas. For Capetillo, her already bright anarchist star of fame became even brighter on the international stage. Because of her arrest and trial, the Cuban episode brought anarcha-feminist issues to the fore. But, her wearing men's clothing was nothing new. She was doing what she often did; if that was subversive, then so be it. Still, it seems that the Cuban events reflected a more conscious attempt to exploit an audience for political benefit—a ratcheting up of her activism. Her wearing of men's clothing and the notoriety that it brought in Cuba proved important for her literary creations as would be reflected a year when she published arguably her most important book, *Influencias de las ideas modernas* (Barragan, 2008: 103-4). The title play in the collection focuses on Angelina, a young, single woman sympathetic to anarchist ideas. Before the curtain falls, she turns to female audience members and calls for free unions between men and women, denounces marriage as prostitution, and transforms herself from someone who thinks about anarchist agitation to one who is a committed female anarchist activist (Capetillo, 1916: 50). While long a committed activist before this, her stint in Cuba and the very public events surrounding her arrests, awakened other women to anarcha-

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feminism and inspired her latest and most successful anarchy-feminist
literary endeavor.

CONCLUSION

The long tradition of political biography in anarchist studies fell out of favor by the 1990s when it was replaced by studies that examined anarchists within a country's labor movement or as part of a country's myriad of cultural, political and social movements pushing for change against the elite. Since the turn of the century, though, scholars have been applying transnational methodologies to study anarchists. These new approaches make perfect sense because anarchists were more than just workers or activists within workers' movements and they never saw themselves as "nationalists" but rather as "internationalists." These internationalists shared views, news and money with comrades engaged in political, labor and social struggles around the world, seeing their local and national struggles as part of the larger global struggle against capitalism, religion and politicians.

To analyze transnational anarchism, scholars have begun to follow these flows of communication and cash to trace movements of people around the networks as well as to illustrate how the anarchist press covered regional issues and distributed its message in nodes throughout these networks. An equally important source for unraveling these networks is the individual migrating anarchist who traveled the networks, agitated in place after place, and became the public face of global anarchism in local enclaves. Sometimes these anarchist migrants were well-known figures on the international stage. Errico Malatesta arrived in 1900 as Cuba embarked on its second year of neo-colonial subservience under US military rule. Throughout society, Cubans were asking what it meant to be "Cuban" in this environment of post-independence from Spain but submission to the United States. Anarchists joined this chorus, arguing for continued resistance against the US. Malatesta's notoriety as an international agitator caused US and Cuban authorities some concern. They attempted to

restrict his speech making and the content of his speeches, but his message of resistance and rejection of all government continued to reach live audiences and those reading the anarchist press. Belén de Sárraga's 1912 visit sparked leftists to initiate a Free Thought movement and magazine on the island, giving ammunition to progressives—especially anarchists—in their battles against the Catholic Church in Cuba and the role of the Church in politics, society, education and with regard to gender. Sárraga's visit occurred just as anarchist women were becoming more vocal and visible in the movement. Her visit sparked these women to take new active roles in anarchist-led educational and labor initiatives. Three years later, Luisa Capetillo—one of the best-known anarchists in the Caribbean network—moved to Havana to work and agitate. Her July arrest for wearing men's clothing in public was actually less startling for what she wore and more important as a form of street theater that pronounced women's independence and illustrated the threat that Cuban officials saw in her presence among male and female workers just at a time when the government was clamping down on anarchists, closing papers and deporting foreign radicals. The Cuban experiences of these migrating anarchists were uneven but important. For Malatesta, little would come of it; he returned to international agitation but had fulfilled a goal of helping his friend Adrián del Valle whom he had known in Europe. Sárraga would use her experiences to help write her book on the Church in the Americas. Capetillo would use her arrest to elevate the position of feminism in the public discourse and inspire her to write her most successful book.

Finally, our look at international anarchist radicals in Cuba illustrates not only the long history of leftist radicals on the island but also the view of Cuba in international radical circles as a destination. The Cuban Revolution after 1959 became a leftist Mecca. The global political left—despite reservations from anarchists who found themselves fleeing the island into exile (especially to Miami)!—not only celebrated the Cuban Revolution's triumph against dictatorship and US neocolonialism but also flocked to the island to experience the Revolution.

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Leftist celebrities like Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, US radicals on the run like Angela Davis, leftists fleeing repressive regimes in Latin America, and average men and women taking part in the Venceremos Brigades went to Cuba in the 1960s and 1970s to experience or live in the Communist Revolution.

Yet, a half century earlier, international anarchist radicals did the same. Here was an island newly liberated from Spanish tyranny and then forced to live under the pressure of US oversight and dictatorial rule. International anarchists headed to Cuba where they hoped to create counter-cultural and revolutionary organizations with Cuban anarchists. Cuba was one of any number of global sites to which anarchists headed, but Cuba was particularly important because of its location as a point within several overlapping networks. It was the “hub” of the Caribbean network that linked Cuba, Panama, Puerto Rico and South Florida. It was a central link between the Caribbean and the US East Coast. Finally, it was a major destination for anarchists arriving from Spain or heading to Spain, and thus key to the anarchist trans-Atlantic network. As such, Cuba was a crucible where international anarchist migrants entered to test their radical ideas for social change at a time when governments worked to counter and even destroy those ideas.

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4 Sugar and Revolution: 1952–2002

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“Work in progress”

In 1970, Trinidadian historian Eric Williams published his now classic *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean*. Early in the book he introduces sugar as it makes its appearance on the island of Cuba in the early 1600s and discusses the “concomitants of sugar,” that is, the economic and social ramifications that stem from the very nature of the crop; a drama repeated throughout the Caribbean as the “sweet malefactor” spread from island to island like a virus. Williams highlighted three such concomitants: First, “the tendency to amalgamate factories,” a process whereby large extensions of land came under the control of a few mill owners. Second, “the tendency to grow sugar for export and to import food,” a dangerous dependency on foreign markets and foreign sources of foodstuffs. And third, “the problem of the world market,” a reference to the intense competition among numerous islands and colonies to grab bigger portions of Europe’s expanding markets, within a transatlantic system in which the producers had little control over foreign demand, prices, tariffs, and navigation.

Before closing the section, Williams hinted at the most pernicious of sugar's concomitants. "Overshadowing all these questions," he wrote, "was the crucial problem of labour," essentially, the need for a large, renewable supply of labor forced to work under slavery or some other coercive mechanism.¹

The evil ramifications of the sugar plantation complex had been long discussed before Williams. Over a century before, Spanish scientist and politician Ramón de la Sagra referred to the sugar plantation as "*agricultura de rapiña*" (preying agriculture). The first systematic modern analysis of the ill effects of the sugar plantation was Ramiro Guerra's *Azúcar y población en las Antillas* (1927). Better known yet is Fernando Ortiz's *The Cuban Counterpoint* (1940) with its characterization of sugar as a bitter fruit deceptively wrapped in sweetness, the source of Cuba's chronic misfortunes: slavery, latifundia, social hierarchism, dependency, colonialism, neocolonialism, and dictatorship. As I have stated elsewhere, "Sugar, Ortiz concluded, was essentially un-Cuban."² It may have been un-Cuban, but as Wifredo Lam's masterpiece "La Jungla" reminds us, Cubans were trapped in the sugar plantation to the point that human limbs and cane stalks were virtually indistinguishable. "La Jungla," I believe, provides a counter text to Ortiz's coetaneous *Cuban Counterpoint*, with its playful optimism of a free, sovereign, and democratic Cuba built on tobacco fields and cigarmaking halls. Moreover, "La Jungla" is a frontal counter text to the venerated, also coetaneous, Constitution of 1940. "Interesting document," Lam appears to say with his brush strokes, "but how will democracy and social justice thrive in this plantation society." This reading of "La Jungla" actually takes us beyond the long-recognized socio-economic-political concomitants of sugar, into the cultural baggage of the plantation as manifested in values, attitudes, and behaviors forged in the cane fields, sugarhouses, barracoons, and planters' mansions.

1. Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*; W. R. Aykroyd, *The Sweet Malefactor*.
2. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, *passim*.

In contrast with the vigorous and long-standing tradition of recognizing sugar as the protagonist villain of Cuban history is the dearth of systematic approaches to Cuba's history using the paradigm of the plantation; this is particularly evident with regards to the Cuban Revolution, which, by the way, has received minimal attention from professional historians. This paper is an attempt at using the "persistent plantation," as a paradigm--a thread, if you will--to find a way through the winding passages of the labyrinth of the Cuban Revolution. My central argument is that the sugar plantation created not only the material conditions that generated the socio-economic-political concomitants outlined above but also a set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that perpetuated such concomitants. Furthermore, both the social and economic realities and accompanying culture have outlived the plantation and continue to manifest themselves.

This paper focuses specifically on the period between Fulgencio Batista's 1952 military coup and Fidel Castro's 2002 decision to cut sugar production by more than half. I have divided this essay into five chronological sections: sucrophobia, revolutionary anti-sugar intellectual and political manifestations (1952–62); sucrophilia (1963–65), a balanced return to sugar as primary economic activity; "sucropsycho-sis," the obsessive and unrealistic program aimed at producing ten million tons of sugar in 1970 (1966–70); sucrophilia II, yet another return to a moderately diversified sugar-based economy (1971–2001); and finally, sucroicide, Cuba's virtual abandonment of sugar production 2002. I wish to note that I owe the terms "sucrophobic tradition," "sucrophilia" and "sucropsycho-sis" to Cuba expert and economist Archibald R. N. Ritter who coined them in his book *The Economic Development of Revolutionary Cuba*.³

3. Ritter, *Economic Development*, 167, 183–87.

Sucrophobia

The roots of the Cuban Revolution run deep into the island's past, arguably to the socio-economic system that sugar created as far back as the early 1600s. Its immediate cause, the ascent to power of Batista through a military coup in 1952, was intimately linked to sugar, more specifically the interests of U.S. and domestic sugar producers. Batista's coup and the swift consolidation of his regime can be attributed in large measure to the influence of sugar interests concerned that the anticipated overproduction of sugar in 1953 would trigger a devastating fall in sugar prices. They rationalized that only a dictator could impose production limits on those sectors most likely to protest, namely unionized sugar workers. Batista delivered: he capped the 1953 sugar harvest at five million tons.⁴ Batista did not become the master planter; he was, rather, a hired overseer, and as such, he drew his authority from Cuba's elites and foreign interests. He served at their pleasure. Cuban filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea seems to have played with this allegory in his acclaimed *La última cena* (The Last Supper; 1976), a film about a real-life slave revolt in the late 1700s. The film's Spanish-born, absentee sugar planter, the Count, owns both the plantation and the slaves who toil on it, while the Creole, mulatto overseer, Don Manuel, is in charge of assuring productivity and social peace. Perhaps not coincidentally, actor Luis Alberto García, who played Don Manuel, uncannily resembles Batista.⁵

Opposition to Batista erupted almost immediately among students, intellectuals, workers, and segments of the urban middle class. Sucrophobic arguments were part of the ideological arsenal of the revolutionary movements. In his 1953 self-defense speech, "History Will Absolve Me," Fidel Castro painted a grim picture of an impoverished island trapped by sugar monoculture and languishing under a corrupt, brutal, and illegitimate government. He saw the hoarding of huge plots of land by a few owners and corporations as the root of most of

4. Ameringer, *Cuban Democratic Experience*, 179; Karol, *Guerrillas*, 126.

5. Gutiérrez Alea, *La última cena*.

the island's economic and social problems; tens of thousands of landless peasants and agricultural workers suffered in service to King Sugar.⁶

The successful preservation of productivity in Cuba's sugar plantations seemed to assure the survival of Batista's regime. The strategic destruction of economic targets such as sugar plantations, mines, and factories, many of them backed or owned by U.S. capital, became a primary strategy of the revolutionaries. Castro explained that it was necessary to burn the entire sugar cane crop. "It is the very importance of the cane crop," he said, "that compels us to destroy it."⁷ These words echoed the "Candela! Candela!" call of enslaved African King Bangoché, a central character in Gutiérrez-Alea's *Last Supper*.

The revolutionary leadership believed that its far-reaching goals of social transformation required a profound restructuring of the economy and the eradication of an economic base they perceived to be at the root of Cuba's persistent poverty and dependency: the production of one product, sugar, for one market, the United States. The brutalizing nature of cane-cutting labor could not continue, it seemed to the revolution's leaders, if the working classes were to be elevated and their material circumstances improved. Expressions of sucrophobia abounded. Shortly before the triumph of the revolution, Guevara stated that all Cubans were enslaved to sugarcane, "an umbilical condition that binds us to the northern market."⁸

By the second half of 1958, both domestic and U.S. economic interests and the U.S. government realized that Batista had become a dangerous liability and that he had to be replaced before the rebels ousted him. The overseer, it became obvious, was about to let the plantation go up in flames.⁹

6. Castro, *History Will Absolve Me*, 83.

7. Castro, *Revolutionary Struggle*, 367; Franqui, *Diary*, 261.

8. Guevara, *Obras*, 1:411.

9. Morley, "United States Rules Cuba," 322.

One of the revolution's most significant early programs was the Agrarian Reform of 1959. The application of the Agrarian Reform Law, including a variety of economic and social programs, fell under the purview of the National Agrarian Reform Institute (INRA). INRA not only oversaw the nationalization and distribution of land but also took responsibility for numerous rural programs, including housing, education, and infrastructure construction. Eventually, it also managed the island's sugar industry.¹⁰ Large segments of the rural population welcomed the agrarian reform, including well-to-do cane growers, known as *colonos*, who in some instances benefited from the land redistribution. Weekly *Bohemia* quoted the leader of the cane growers' association saying, "This is our law and we will defend it come what may." Even the owners of small sugar mills applauded: "Forward Cubans, with the Agrarian Reform!" remarked a leader of the small mill owners' association. By the end of summer, INRA had expropriated some 2.5 million acres of ranch land. In 1960, sugar land nationalizations reached 3.1 million acres belonging to U.S. companies and 2.2 million acres owned by Cubans.¹¹

In spite of the revolutionaries' sucrophobia, the largest land properties were not broken down but rather turned into state farms or government-controlled cooperatives; by the end of 1961, there were approximately six hundred cooperatives and five hundred state farms. The number of peasants receiving actual property titles was small, at 31,500 during 1959 and 1960. Three to four times as many peasants, nonetheless, gained access to land without formal property rights.¹²

One of the primary reasons why sugar plantations were not broken down into plots for distribution was the economy's dependence on sugar as main source of revenue. The market vacuum created by the United States' 1960 decision to cut Cuba's sugar quota and impose a

10. Dorticós Torrado, *Exposición*, 3. Also see Núñez Jiménez, *La ley de Reforma Agraria*.

11. López-Fresquet, *My Fourteen Months*, 171–72; Asociación Nacional de Hacendados de Cuba, "Un mensaje de los hombres de la zafra a los gobernantes de la Revolución," *Bohemia*, Mar. 1, 1959, 53–54; Pérez, *Cuba*, 245. Núñez Jiménez, *Informe*, 3–5.

12. Mesa-Lago, "Economic Policies," 282–83; Amaro and Mesa-Lago, "Inequality," 359.

full trade embargo in 1962 was filled by the Soviet market, and to a lesser extent, China. In February 1960, Soviet deputy premier Anastas Mikoyan visited Cuba and negotiated a trade accord, whereby the USSR agreed to purchase one million tons of Cuban sugar per year and to provide the island nation with loans and crude oil shipments at reduced prices. The agreed-upon price for sugar was the current market rate of 3 cents per pound; this was significantly less than the preferential price of 5.35 cents per pound previously paid by the United States. In May, both countries established diplomatic relations. Soon, the Soviet Union and other socialist nations fully replaced the United States as Cuba's main trading partners. Whereas in 1959 Cuba's northerly neighbor absorbed 74 percent of its exports and delivered 65 percent of its imports, only two years later socialist nations received 73 percent of Cuba's exports and shipped 70 percent of its imports.¹³

After a brief boom in agricultural productivity in the first couple of years of revolution, sugar production and agricultural productivity in general experienced a downward spiral. The 1962 sugar harvest was a disappointing 4.8 million tons. Food crop production fell as well, with output per capita dropping by 40 percent over three years. Ton-per-hectare yields dropped drastically for rice, beans, and the tuber *malanga*, all staples of the Cuban diet.¹⁴ In 1963, agricultural productivity levels reached only around a quarter of output in 1959. The 1963 sugar harvest was dismal at 3.9 million tons, the lowest since 1945.¹⁵ The revolution's initial economic strategy of shifting away from dependence on sugar toward a path of agricultural diversification and industrialization had the negative effect of reducing Cuba's export capabilities and hence producing increasingly untenable negative trade balances, which jumped from a deficit of 20 million pesos in 1960 to 78 million in 1961 and further to 238 million in 1962, reaching a paralyzing 324 million pesos in 1963.¹⁶

13. Pérez-López, "Cuba's Balance of Payments," 141; Pérez, *Cuba*, 249. Pérez-López, *Cuba's Second Economy*, 36.

14. Echevarría, "Cuba," 369; Mesa-Lago, "Economic Policies," 288–89.

15. Mesa-Lago, *Economy*, 17; Brunner, *Cuban Sugar Policy*, 33; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 142.

Sucrophilia

Between 1791 and 1804, Cuba's neighbor island, French St. Domingue, had gone through the first real revolution in the Americas. Before the revolution, St. Domingue was the world's leading sugar exporter. Slaves and free people of color rose up in arms, fighting for freedom and equal legal rights; in the process, slavery collapsed, the planter elite fled, and a new, independent nation was born. While the battlefields and cane fields were still smoldering, revolutionary leader and former slave Toussaint L'Ouverture declared himself Haiti's president-for-life and used coercion to force former slaves back to the sugar plantations. Without sugar, he and others believed, Haiti could not survive. Fearful of the spread of radical abolitionism, the United States, then an infant republic, isolated Haiti diplomatically and commercially. It has been the hemisphere's pariah nation ever since.

Some 170 years later, the winds of revolution resurfaced in Cuba, the "Repeating Island"--to borrow Benítez-Rojo's apt metaphor--then the world's largest exporter of sugar. The transformation was swift and profound, but, as in Haiti, some fundamental aspects of society remained untouched. Despite the government's original desire to reduce the economy's dependence on sugar, the crop's importance actually increased.

With the survival of the revolution at stake, Cuba's leaders reversed their original economic strategy to focus anew on sugar. State officials explained that investment in sugar was a temporary measure: larger volumes of sugar exports, they rationalized, would generate the necessary capital for a temporarily postponed industrialization. The Soviet Union's willingness to increase its sugar purchases allowed--actually spurred--the return-to-sugar strategy.

Shortly after his first visit to the Soviet Union in April 1963, Castro announced the implementation of a sugar-centered economic growth strategy. The newly created Ministry of Sugar formulated the Prospec-

16. Ritter, *Economic Development*, 157; Baklanoff, "International," 266.

tive Sugar Industry Plan with the goal of producing 47 million tons of sugar between 1965 and 1970, 23 million more than the Soviets had agreed to purchase during that period.¹⁷ Castro accepted, albeit reluctantly, that Cuba had not escaped the sugar trap that had held it captive since the early nineteenth century: “Without sugar,” he said, “everything else is superfluous; if sugar is abundant, anything else is scarce.” At a cane cutters’ mass rally in Havana, Castro underscored the renewed importance of sugar production. A massive billboard erected for the occasion draped the facade of the Ministry of Industries with the revolution’s latest slogan: “We must turn all of Cuba’s cane fields into sugar.”¹⁸ The return to sugar was not universally welcomed, however, Guevara was among those who originally opposed it as an abandonment of one of the core goals of the revolution.¹⁹

Tellingly, Castro had divided oversight of economic matters in 1962, when he appointed Carlos Rafael Rodríguez as INRA president while keeping Guevara as head of the Ministry of Industries, formerly a department under INRA; at a time when industrialization plans were being postponed Guevara assumed responsibility for industries, while Rodríguez took charge of sugar precisely when the state began shifting the focus of the economy back to that crop.

Pre-revolution sugar planters had repeated over and over that “without sugar there is no country,” and organized labor retorted, “Without workers there is no country.” Now, the ostensibly worker-led government sourly admitted that “without sugar there is no revolution.” The back-to-sugar strategy’s success hinged on a long-term partnership with the USSR and the continuation of multiyear trade agreements that locked sugar prices. The guaranteed sugar price of 6.11 cents per pound, while positive in the short term, had long-lasting detrimental effects, turning a seemingly benign subsidy into a dependency trap.

17. Mesa-Lago, “Economic Policies,” 302; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 40–41.

18. Goldenberg, *Cuban Revolution*, 281; Castro quoted in Roca, *Cuban*, 12; and Tozian, *Fidel’s Cuba*, 60.

19. Castañeda, *Compañero*, 259.

Like the United States in previous decades, the Soviets used their economic power, particularly the lure of their vast sugar market, to coerce Cuba into submission and bring it closer to the Soviet line. In 1967, they cut Cuba's sugar quota by 20 percent, reduced oil shipments, withheld further arms shipments, and suspended negotiations for the next triennial trade agreement.²⁰ Castro demonstrated his displeasure by shunning Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin during his June 1967 visit to Havana and by dispatching a second-tier government representative to the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. More significantly, Castro retaliated by purging a pro-Soviet faction of the Cuban Communist Party led by the controversial Aníbal Escalante.²¹

Sucro psychosis

Nothing shaped the course of Cuba's history during the second half of the 1960s more than the pursuit of the heralded ten-million-ton sugar harvest of 1970. Cuba's leadership cast that goal as essential to the revolution's survival and turned it into a single-focus national obsession. In Castro's own words, producing ten million tons of sugar in 1970 was "more than an economic goal," it was "a yardstick by which to judge the capability of the Revolution." On another occasion, he equated the struggle for the ten million tons with "defending the honor, the prestige, the safety and self-confidence of the country." Castro and other leaders sold the ten-million-ton goal as a crucial objective that would allow the economy to expand and would liberate Cuba financially. Sugar, Castro stated, would become Cuba's greatest benefactor. In the same vein, Rodríguez promised: "The ten-million-ton *zafra* will guarantee our country's second liberation."²² The planter

20. Domínguez, *To Make a World*, 73–74; González, "Relationship," 94.

21. Duncan, *Soviet Union*; González, "Relationship," 93; Karol, *Guerrillas*, 392.

22. Castro speech of Mar. 13, 1968, in Castro, *Fidel Castro Speaks*, 275; Fidel Castro, "Report to the People on the Progress of the Sugar Harvest," *Granma Weekly Review*, Feb. 9, 1970, quoted in Mesa-Lago, "Economic Policies," 304; Karol, *Guerrillas*, 408, 418.

and the overseer were on the same page as far as how to run the plantation that Cuba had become.

The production target was not set as a result of scientific deliberations or agroindustrial feasibility studies; it was, rather, an arbitrary decision by the revolution's Maximum Leader, who later admitted that ten million was a nice round number. It appears that most experts doubted the possibility of reaching that goal, but few dared question Castro's projection. When Communist leader Aníbal Escalante did, Raúl Castro chastised him publicly, mocking him as a conspiring "prophet."²³ The Castros and other revolutionary leaders continued to defend the feasibility of harvesting ten million tons even in light of the country's failure, year after year, to meet the set incremental quota: in 1966, production was two million pounds under the projected amount, the 1968 *zafra* was almost three million pounds short, and 1969 produced only half the targeted amount. In January of 1970, the minister of sugar told Castro that the ten-million-ton goal could not be reached. Castro privately exploded in rage, but in public he continued to assure the public that the goal would be attained. In a televised speech, Castro predicted, "We think that no one will work past July 15." Cuban workers, seemingly on track to reach the sugar production goal, deserved a rest.²⁴

During 1966–70, Cuba became a virtual sugar plantation. A considerable segment of the budget was channeled toward sugar at the expense of social services and investment in other sectors of the economy. Resources in land, labor, energy, and transportation that had previously been applied to other economic activities were now redirected toward sugar. The government invested heavily in the modernization of sugar *centrales* (mills): 40 percent of them dated to the nineteenth century, and the newest one had been built in 1927.²⁵ Much of the sugar machinery had to be imported from the Soviet Union, as was

23. "Informe de Raúl Castro (sobre la microfacción)," CX36 Radio Centenario 1250 FM, <<http://www.radio36.com.uy/entrevistas/2004/02/250204_castro.htm>>.

24. Mesa-Lago, "Economic Policies," 302; Castro, televised speech, in WGBH TV, *Yankee Years*.

25. Brundenius, "Development," 99.

the case with fuel, fertilizers, pesticides, tractors, and other vital resources.

In 1966 the government established new mechanisms to acquire small, privately held farms and deprived government plantation and farm workers of access to the small plots of land on which they produced food for their own consumption.²⁶ This type of usufruct access to small plots of land, called “provision grounds” during slavery, had been an important source of food for plantation workers. As the sugar industry’s demands for cane and slave labor intensified in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, masters cut access to provision grounds. Similarly, as the revolution embarked on the ten-million-ton project, workers lost access to small plots of land. This move increased the dependence of the peasantry on the government, made them more vulnerable to the plantation’s insatiable labor demands, and expanded the amount of land under government control.

Heavy investment in sugar production translated into further sacrifices for the Cuban masses. Food production was one of the most profoundly affected areas. Between 1962 and 1966, the production of rice, the primary staple of the Cuban diet, dropped 78 percent; bean production fell 23 percent; and *malanga* production levels plummeted, though other tubers (potatoes, *ñames*, and sweet potatoes) became more widely available. The sacrifices that Cubans were asked to make in order to reach the ten-million-ton target were in some ways contradictory to the core values of the revolution. There was something fundamentally incongruent about improving literacy, education, and health care and then handing machetes to the people to cut cane under the merciless Cuban sun. The revolution changed most of the plantations’ names--Hershey to Camilo Cienfuegos, Tánamo to Frank País, Arechabala to José Antonio Echeverría, and so on--but sugar remained King, and labor conditions on the plantations were not much different from those of the nineteenth century.

26. Domínguez, *Cuba*, 453; Mesa-Lago, “Economic Policies,” 301.

Historically, work in the cane fields was performed by coerced laborers: African slaves, Chinese contract workers, and others who had no other choice but face starvation. Anyone who could find other work did so. Following the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century throughout the Caribbean sugar islands, former slaves generally fled as far as possible from sugar plantations. This was also the case in revolutionary Cuba, where skilled sugarcane cutters abandoned the now government-owned plantations. In 1958, an estimated 370,000 individuals were categorized as professional sugarcane cutters; five years later, precisely at the time when Cuba returned to sugar, their numbers had fallen to 210,000. The flight of *macheteros* continued: only 88,000 worked the 1969 harvest.²⁷

Given the falling supply of sugarcane workers, finding alternative sources of labor became imperative. Actual volunteers and others coerced into volunteering were incorporated in large numbers. Many of them were high school and college students. Women were recruited to take over urban jobs in order to liberate men for work in the cane fields. Labor shortfalls were also supplemented by coerced labor. This included around 100,000 conscripted soldiers, forced to work under military discipline; penal labor; and those who had applied for visas to leave the island. Stories abound of physicians whose hands, after years of cane cutting, were rendered useless in the operating room, and of former administrative and clerical workers who succumbed to premature death or permanent disability as a result of forced labor in the countryside.²⁸ The government put in place numerous mechanisms to subjugate workers and force them to raise productivity levels. Government forces rounded up thousands of so-called antisocial elements and conscripted them in what came to be known as Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción (Military Units to Aid Production, UMAPs), penal labor camps created in 1965 ostensibly to reeducate social misfits for reintegration into society.²⁹ These camps were closed

27. Roca, *Cuban*, 19; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 59.

28. Portes, Clark, and Bach, "New Wave," 17; Bunck, *Fidel Castro*, 146.

29. Pérez, *Cuba*, 265–66; Casal, "Literature," 459; Eckstein, *Back from the Future*, 25.

down in 1968 as a result of growing international condemnation. Labor cards were issued to workers to record any form of misbehavior. Labor dossiers implemented in 1969 included details about individuals' work performance and political attitudes.³⁰

The hardships endured by the more than a million Cubans who worked in the 1970 *zafra* had an equalizing effect. As Jesús Díaz lyrically put it: The Medialuna cane, when wet, was treacherous; its slippery peel could deflect the mocha [*machete*], producing wounds in arms and legs. The mud covered their clothes and skin. Whites, blacks, and mulattos were all the same, the color of earth.³¹

The government had counted on the mechanization of sugar harvesting and loading to make it possible to meet the ten-million-ton goal. While the loading of cut sugar cane became highly mechanized, increasing from only 1 percent in 1963 to 82–85 percent in 1970, the mechanization of the labor-intensive harvesting phase failed. Government officials had hoped to produce or import enough harvesting machines to mechanize 30 percent of the harvest. Instead, only 1 percent of the cane was machine-harvested in 1970; the rest was cut manually using sixteenth-century technology.³²

In spite of the 1.2 million workers, the billion pesos invested, the extraordinary length of the *zafra*, and the consequent virtual paralysis of other economic activities, the 1970 harvest reached only 8.5 million tons; other estimates placed the harvest at 7.5 million tons. “One pound under 10 million tons,” Castro had said in October 1969, “would represent a moral defeat!”³³

Because the revolution's leadership had turned the ten-million-ton harvest into a matter of national honor, the country's failure to reach the goal came to represent a moral defeat and the failure of the revolution's “New Man,” the model of self-sacrifice, community spirit, and

30. Bunck, *Fidel Castro*, 149; Karol, *Guerrillas*, 582.

31. Díaz, *Initials*, 318.

32. Halperin, *Rise and Decline*, 239–40; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 63–65, 68; Roca, *Cuban*, 51–57; Brundenius, “Development and Prospects,” 107–8.

33. Roca, *Cuban*, 7; Brunner, *Cuban Sugar*, 66.

volunteerism. The extreme focus on sugar had serious long-term consequences, moreover. The revolution's second failure to create a basis for industrialization pointed to the impossibility of autonomous, self-sustained economic development. The neglect of other sectors of the economy during the sugar frenzy of 1970 further debilitated agriculture, mining, and manufacturing. Dependence on sugar production could no longer be viewed as a temporary evil: it had to be seen as the country's only feasible option.

Sucrophilia II

Back in May 1970, Castro somberly announced that production would fall short of the much-heralded goal but in a more optimistic spirit coined the slogan "We must turn the setback into victory." Victory meant forfeiting, at best indefinitely postponing, the goal of industrializing Cuba with capital accumulated from the expected sugar bonanza. The new economic strategy centered on sugar and called for increased productivity. Accordingly, 1971 was called the "Year of Productivity."

The Cuban leadership applied a variety of strategies to attract all able-bodied men, along with a higher percentage of women, to the workforce, from implementing material incentives to passing coercive antivagrancy legislation to charging for previously free or heavily subsidized goods and services. Castro repeatedly stated that the moral incentives of the late 1960s had worked poorly and that a new version of egalitarianism had to be implemented, once stating that moral incentives had become "a pretext for some to live off the work done by others."³⁴ The 1960s "New Man" had been buried in the cane fields where the battles for the ten million tons were fought and lost.

34. See, for example, Castro speeches of July 26, 1973 and Nov. 15, 1973, in Castro Speech Database, Latin American Network Information Center, University of Texas at Austin, <<<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1973/19730727.html>>>; <<<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1973/19731116.html>>>.

In addition to these carrots, the government began to wield heavy sticks to boost labor productivity. Just months after the failure of the ten-million-ton harvest, labor minister Jorge Risquet proposed legislation to force all able-bodied men to work. Passed in 1971, the so-called antivagrancy law established harsh penalties for the willingly unemployed, slackers, and those who were regularly absent from their workplace. Men who refused to work could be—and in some instances were—sentenced to forced labor camps; underproductive workers and chronic absentees faced the threat of losing their vacations and other privileges, including access to social services and the opportunity to purchase household appliances and other consumer goods.³⁵

To increase production, the government invested in the mechanization and modernization of the sugar industry. Whereas harvesting machines cut only 1 percent of cane in 1970, this figure reached 62 percent by 1985.³⁶ More challenging and more expensive was the modernization of old *centrales* and the construction of new ones. The newest *centrales* dated to 1927. In May 1980, the government built a new *central* in the municipality of Vertientes, Camagüey Province. Its construction was part of an ambitious program that included six other new *centrales* and the expansion and renovation of forty-one existing ones.³⁷

The Soviet Union continued to play a vital role in the perpetuation of Cuba's dependence on sugar exports. In 1972, the Soviets raised their subsidies for Cuban sugar from 6.11 to 11 cents per pound. The five-year-plan trade agreement for 1976–80 hiked the price of sugar to 30.4 cents; it increased again in 1985 to 52 cents, over twice the world market level.³⁸

35. Zimbalist, "Incentives," 70; Córdova, *Trabajador*, 81. Castro quoted in Bunck, *Fidel Castro*, 155; also see 158.

36. Zimbalist and Eckstein, "Patterns of Cuban Development," 17; Central Intelligence Agency, *Cuban Economy*, 3.

37. Pérez-López, *Economics*, 43; Halperin, *Return to Havana*, 103.

38. Domínguez, *To Make a World*, 82; LeoGrande, "Cuban Dependency," 20; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 140–44; Pérez-López, "Cuban-Soviet Sugar Trade," 123, 129.

Generous Soviet aid and subsidies, consistently high sugar prices, increased worker productivity, and heavy investments in the modernization and mechanization of the sugar industry led to growing sugar output and gave sugar a higher proportional importance among exports. The volume of sugar exports rose from a yearly average of 5.4 million tons in 1971–75 to 6.5 million in 1976–80 to 7.2 million in 1981–85.³⁹

The 1970s were an auspicious period for sugar-exporting nations, as prices climbed at dizzying rates, particularly during the early part of the decade: the international price for sugar grew nearly tenfold in just four years, from 3.75 U.S. cents per pound in 1970 to 29.96 cents in 1974. World prices fell thereafter, averaging 13.2 and 8.61 during the 1976–80 and 1981–85 periods, respectively.⁴⁰ Because of its favorable trade agreements with the Soviet Union, Cuba's sugar was heavily subsidized in the Soviet market and to a lesser extent in other CMEA member nations. Rather than shifting on a yearly basis, sugar subsidies remained fixed through five-year plans, which protected Cuba from the volatility and unpredictability of the world market. The flip side of the five-year price agreements was that if prices rose beyond the established rates, Soviet subsidies actually became counter-subsidies since Cuba had committed to supply a large quota of its sugar to the USSR.

Yet Cuba paid a price, too. Its trade deficits and foreign debt skyrocketed and accumulated, its economy's reliance on the export sector doubled in three decades, and its devotion to King Sugar spread: sugar made up 87 percent of Cuba's agricultural exports in 1975–79. Similarly, its dependence on one market--the USSR and the CMEA--surpassed 64 percent between 1976 and 1984.⁴¹ Though the revolution

39. Sugar-derived revenues increased at an even greater rate, from \$657 million in 1971 to \$1,032 million in 1973, and tripling to \$3,201 million in 1975. CIA, *Cuban Economy*, 29.

40. Price information from Pérez-López, *Economics*, 126, 140. Also see Domínguez, *To Make a World*, 83.

41. Domínguez, *To Make a World*, 107; Pérez-López, *Economics*, 128; Zimbalist and Eckstein, "Patterns of Cuban Development," 18; Feuer, "Performance," 79; Mesa-Lago, *Cuba in the 1970s*, 18; Mesa-Lago, "Cuba's Economic Counter-Reform," 138.

freed the island nation from its neocolonial ties to the United States, Cuba could not escape the suffocating sugar trap, and the economic reforms of the 1970s increased its dependence on the Soviet Union.

The economic collapse beginning in 1989, later dubbed the “Special Period in Times of Peace,” had a deleterious effect on productivity. Sugar output fell every year from 1988 to 1995 with the exception of 1990. By 1993 production had plummeted to only 4.3 million tons, nearly half the 1988 output. At 3.3 million tons, the 1995 sugar harvest was the smallest in half a century. Due to falling international sugar prices, sugar earnings dropped at an even sharper rate. Output of other agricultural products fell as well, registering a nearly 50 percent fall between 1990 and 1994.⁴²

Sucrocide

Sugar became a major casualty of the economic restructuring of the early 2000s. This industry had always depended on and flourished under the auspices of state subsidies, loans, and legal protections. Cuba’s first wave of sugar mill construction resulted from a 1600 royal loan to seventeen planters. That same year, planters received the *privilegio de ingenios*, which protected their land, equipment, and slaves from seizure for failing to pay debts to commercial lenders; this special protection remained until 1865⁴³. Since the end of Soviet sugar subsidies in the early 1990s, with prices continuing to fall, sugar production became an unprofitable venture that did not warrant the repair--let alone modernization--of the nearly 160 sugar mills in operation at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

In 2002, the Cuban government made a concerted effort to phase out--“restructure” was the official term--the sugar industry, as it shut

42. Mesa-Lago, *Economía*, 32; del Águila, *Cuba*, 102; Juan Tomás Sánchez, “Cuba: An Unreliable Producer of Sugar,” ASCE, *Cuba in Transition* Vol. 6 (1996), 260 in <<<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/asce/cuba6/35jtsanch.fm.pdf>>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011]; Nicolás Rivero, “More Trouble with Sugar,” *CubaNews* 2: 8 (Aug. 1994), 2; Gott, *Cuba*, 288; Sinclair and Thompson, “Going against the Grain,” 157.

43. García Rodríguez, *Entre haciendas y plantaciones*, 19.

down 85 mills and cut production in half. Production fell every year thereafter until 2007, when only 1.2 million tons were produced; that was the smallest harvest in over one hundred years.⁴⁴ Back in 2005, with only 56 mills operating, Castro wrote sugar's epitaph: "Sugar will never return to this country;" he said, "it belongs to the time of slavery." The decades' old question: will sugar destroy the country or will the country destroy sugar? was finally settled: they destroyed each other.⁴⁵

Eduardo Lamora's masterful documentary *Cuba: el arte de la espera* (2008) captures the physical and social decay that accompanied the closing of Central Guatemala (formerly Central Preston), within the municipal limits of Mayarí, Holguín province. Built by the American-owned Nipe Bay Company almost a century earlier and acquired later by the United Fruit Company, the sugar mill was one of the eighty-five closed down in 2002. Soon thereafter, many of the town's social spaces fell into ruin: the local cinema went into disrepair and had no projectionist; the bar-restaurant was still open but according to an interviewee there was nothing there; the Catholic church had burned down and the Protestant church collapsed; the mill's pier also fell apart, its pillars piercing out of the bay water like two lines of rusty, mollusk-dotted periscopes.⁴⁶

Preston became a ghost town of sorts: people of all ages loitering in the central plaza; prematurely aged housewives and divorcees hitting the streets to buy and sell black market products: coffee, fish,

44. Patricia Grogg, "Sugarcane--Source of Renewable Energy, But Not Ethanol," June 1, 2007, Inter Press Service News Agency, <<<http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=38006>>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011]; Pablo Alfonso, "Menos azúcar y más pobreza," *El Nuevo Herald*, Mar. 20, 2005; Ramonet and Castro, *Fidel Castro*, 524; Patrick Michael Rucker, "Sour Times for Cuba's Once-Thriving Sugar Industry," *Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 26, 2002; "Cuban Sugar Crop Worst in a Century; Brazilian Investors Could Take over Industry," May 8, 2010, MercoPress, South Atlantic News Agency, <<<http://en.mercoPress.com/2010/05/08/cuban-sugar-crop-worst-in-a-century-brazilian-investors-could-take-over-industry>>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011].

45. Alfonso, "Menos azúcar"; Castro quote in Patricia Grogg, "Sugar: Former Lifeblood of Cuban Economy Reduced to Mere Trickle," Jan. 11, 2006, Inter Press Service News Agency, <<http://havanajournal.com/business/entry/sugar_former_lifblood_of_cuban_economy_reduced_to_mere_trickle/>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011].

46. Lamora, *Cuba: el arte de la espera*.

rice...; men of all hues reverting to the mangroves, the ancestral hiding places of their runaway slave ancestors, where they picked clandestine crabs and fish, on clandestine boats, whose makeshift engines ran on clandestine gasoline; and twenty-first century maroons eluding grey and blue-clad *rancheadores*, hopping on precarious rafts, hoping to reach the sprawling *palenque* of Miami.

Ironically, sugarcane which had become an albatross tied around the economy's neck could have been Cuba's savior. Cuba cut down its sugar production at a time of low raw sugar prices (7.88 U.S. cents per pound in 2002), and since then, the world price for sugar more than tripled to 25.89 U.S. cents (1st quarter of 2010). Moreover, Cuba would have fared much better throughout the decade had it followed the Brazilian model of using the sweet tall grass to produce high-value ethanol instead of lower-value sugar: a single ton of sugarcane can be transformed into either 275.6 pounds of sugar or 22 gallons of ethanol (12.53 lbs. of sugar = one gal. of ethanol). Accordingly, based on 2007 prices, one gallon of ethanol was worth \$2.30, while 12.53 pounds of sugar (at 11.6 cents per pound) were worth only \$1.45.⁴⁷ Cuba did not choose the ethanol path, however. Castro was personally opposed to using crops to produce biofuels instead of food. This is a flawed rationale: sugar is not a foodstuff; it is a natural sweetener of little nutritional value. After twenty-three years at the helm of the revolution, Castro still acted as planter-in-chief, as if the island's remaining one million hectares of sugarcane land were his personal domain. He rather see the cane fields go up in flames or be overtaken by the insidious *marabú* weed than produce ethanol.⁴⁸

47. Sánchez, "Cuba y el etanol," 202; sugar price data from U.S. Department of Agriculture, <<<http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/sugar/Data/Table03.xls>>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011].

48. Grogg, "Sugarcane." Information on hectares (2004) from José Álvarez, "Evaluating the Performance of Cuba's Sugarcane Basic Units of Cooperative Production During Their First Decade," University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Services Extension, originally published in 2005, reviewed in 2009, <<<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FE/FE56200.pdf>>> [accessed on Feb. 3, 2011].

THE PERSISTENT PLANTATION

The thread of the persistent plantation is an extraordinarily useful tool to navigate in and out of the labyrinth of revolutionary Cuba. Fidel Castro, like many others before him, identified the sugar socio-economic complex as the primary reason for many of Cuba's ills: degradation of labor, land concentration, social stratification, foreign domination, dependency, and undemocratic government. As discussed earlier, after a failed attempt to rid Cuba of the sugar virus, the revolution reembraced sugar, first as a temporary generator of wealth and later as the economy's long-term strategy.

The evil concomitants of the plantation evident since the early 1600s have manifested themselves during the revolutionary era: concentration of land (sugar estates were not broken down but turned into state-controlled *latifundia*), coerced forms of labor (the use of so-called volunteers and establishment of forced labor camps), dependence on outside markets (the Soviet Union and China rather than the United States), dependence on expensive, imported technology (Hungarian buses and Chinese trains), reliance on imported food (Vietnamese rice and U.S. beans), ecological degradation, the formation of a sugar oligarchy combining economic and political power (the new revolutionary elite), and an authoritarian regime to maintain order, with the Castros as supreme planters, and a string of replaceable overseers. The persistent plantation even generated its share of runaway slaves, marooned at the margins of society or settling in the fortified *palenque* that Miami has become.

Somewhat unexpectedly, in 2002, Castro ordered the gradual dismantling of the sugar industry. Nearly a decade later, the plantation's manifold curses continue to haunt Cuba long after most of its grinding mills have gone silent and the aroma of molasses no longer permeates the air. Indeed, the echoes of cracking whips, aristocratic powdered wigs, and colonial militia rifles from a bygone era continue to inhabit history's most splendid sugar island. Ortiz was right about the insidious legacies of sugar but his liberal, democratic Tobacco-

based Cuba never materialized; neither did the reestablishment of the Constitution of 1940; like Lam's surrealist characters in "La Jungla," Cubans remain trapped in the sugarcane fields.

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5 From Fighting Batista to Defending the Revolution: 1952–1961

Albert Manke

For some time it has been argued that the revolutionary process that commenced in 1959 in Cuba was from its very beginnings a planned take-over of a communist-orientated minority group inside the Revolutionary Government and the rebel armed forces (later Revolutionary Armed Forces, FAR). The Cuban people, continues that line of argumentation, is said to have been manipulated in its opinion so that the support of the majority of the people could be used to build up an authoritarian regime controlled by a small group of veterans of the pro-Castro guerrilla forces, the urban underground and members of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). Continuing that hypothesis, that regime is said to have pushed through a leftist revolution by repressive force that (in this way) was neither desired nor supported by the majority of the Cuban people.¹

1. See Baeza Flores 1960, Weyl 1960, Kidd 1963, Urrutia-Lleó 1964, Merino 1966, and more recently Burgos 1997, Matos 2003, Franqui 2006 and Alvarez 2009.

Other studies contest this hypothesis and emphasize that the whole people supported all changes of their own free will,² and more balanced approaches observe a whole range of interactions and pressure from “above” and from “below” that shaped the revolutionary process.³ Still, the (quantitative and qualitative) question of changing popular support for the revolutionary change that started in 1959 and the government that led it remains a subject that has raised discussions ever since.⁴

In the present paper it shall not be discussed how Cuba became a socialist state and society. Nor shall it be discussed how and why an all-embracing transformation took place that centralized power in the hands of Fidel Castro. But I would like to point out different aspects concerning the very question of popular support for the revolutionary change that took place in Cuba between 1959 and 1961, as well as its immediate roots (continuative or not) that can be found in the insurrectional struggle against Batista since 1952. So this paper is dealing much more with the factor of popular mobilization than with ideological, political, economical or other factors. It should be noted, however, that these factors of course always have to be implicit in one way or another.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST BATISTA (1952–1958)

When Fulgencio Batista and his group of conspirators took over political leadership of the Cuban Republic in 1952, the majority of the Cuban people did not approve of his coup d'état. Nevertheless, for different reasons only a minority took immediate action against Batista, though participation in this process increased soon and each

2. See Huberman and Sweezy 1969, Karol 1970, Carmona-Borjas 1994, Cantón Navarro 2000, and more balanced Buch/Suárez 2002 and 2004.

3. See the progression of analysis in Domínguez 1978, Pérez-Stable 1993, De Paz-Sánchez 1997 and 2001, De la Fuente 2001, Zeuske 2004, Díaz Castañón 2004, Guerra and Maldonado 2006.

4. See Fagen 1969, Azicri 1977, Leogrande 1978, Brundenius 1981, Luke 2007, Kaptcia 2008.

day (with ups and downs in the increasing degree of participation) more persons fought what was considered a usurpation and dictatorship.⁵ Many of these persons and groups did so with violent forms of protest and urban terrorism that had become common in Cuba since the “revolution of 1933”, applying patterns of *bonchismo* and *gangsterismo*.⁶ Others followed the practice of army conspiracies,⁷ and still others based their protest on methods of (partially institutionalized) social movements with a longer tradition of protest like (in the case of the PSP) the organized labor movement.⁸

Very few of these protest groups were homogeneous in their membership roster or action forms, but floating organizational patterns and personal networks prevailed instead.⁹ As in the beginning of the 1930s, comprehensive alliances were not very common, at least in the initial formative stage of the resistance against Batista.¹⁰ It may be stated that resistance in the cities was not very effective, and in the rural areas it was not significantly higher than under the governments previous to Batista.¹¹ In addition, since the time of Machado the repressive organs of the State had been modernized following U.S. standards after World War II and had been radicalized during the war on the Korean Peninsula.¹² Both contributed to a relatively effective and extremely brutal repression that had its origins in the practice of a

5. See Furiati 2003, 153-156, Pérez Jr. 1976, 137-138, García Pérez 1998 and different accounts in Oltuski/Rodríguez/Torres-Cuevas 2008.

6. For the methods against Batista see García Pérez 2005, 69-70, for *bonchismo* and *gangsterismo* Aguiar Rodríguez 2000 and Cirules 2004.

7. I.e. the conspiracy of Bárcena, see Oltuski and Hart 2008, that of Barquín, see Fernández Alvarez 2008, and that of the Southern Navy Command in Cienfuegos in 1957, see García Martínez 2007.

8. For the student’s movement see Suchlicki 1969 and García Oliveras 2006, for the labor movement Alexander 2002, 133-168, Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba 1985, and for the connection between PSP and labor resistance in the printing business see López/Calvo/Fernández 1991.

9. See for the case of Celia Sánchez Alvarez Tabío 2003 and for the cooperation between Castro’s movement and the *Organización Auténtica* García Díaz 2008.

10. That pattern changed with the course of the resistance, see Sweig 2002.

11. For the resistance in rural areas see Regalado 1979.

12. U.S. army handbooks used in Cuba suggest that, i.e. the Field Manuals FM 31-20 (February of 1951), FM 31-21 (October 1951) and FM 32-21 *Guerilla Warfare* (March 1955); see Pérez Rivero 2003, 97-104 and 133, note 16.

group of men that had conserved it since the first authoritarian years of Batista in the 1930s. This continuity was made possible through an amnesty of their crimes granted in 1944, and in 1952 these men were in power again.

As has been studied thoroughly, the motivation for the insurrectional struggle against Batista encompassed a whole range of reasons, which centered in the struggle for social equality and social justice by addressing the restoration and application of the Cuban Constitution of 1940 and in the ending of the Batista dictatorship and its repressive outcomes.¹³ Though many were aiming at a return to the situation previous to 1952,¹⁴ the majority of the protesters interpreted this return as a construction of a renovated form of representative democracy with a deeper focusing on the needs of the people, and especially of the so-called lower strata—in short, the humble people. Many rejected a simple restoration of the political system established before Batista because they considered it as corrupt, marked by excessive patronage and clientelism, and too dependent on U.S. economic and political influence. One common marker in the image of the Cuban Republic before Batista that prevailed among many protesters can be identified in their notion of a lack of coverage of basic social needs of the population as a whole (in spite of comparatively high development indices that Cuba reached during the 1950s) and in consequence a not really representative character of the political system and the elites that led and/or supported it (Zeuske 2004).

It has to be stressed that the political concepts were floating and ideological fractions in the broad ideological panorama were common, though—seen from a standpoint of political mobilization and popular beliefs—the overall mood was markedly anti-communist. That had different reasons, but the McCarthyist socialization that came from the U.S. indeed had its impact on this kind of sociological

13. The then not very well-known Fidel Castro resumed these aims in *La historia me absolverá* (see Castro Ruz 2005); many others had similar approaches.

14. Like the *Organización Auténtica*, see Ameringer 1985 and Suárez Rivas 1964 (Suárez Rivas was a former *Auténtico* politician).

imprinting. In a general retrospective, a look on the side of the protesters against Batista and the system he represented reveals a gradually growing hegemony of social movements and their action groups that stressed the need for social revolution rather than just political changes inside the framework of established structures, though they might have been reform-orientated.¹⁵ Almost all movements and groups denominated themselves as “revolutionary,” but the meaning of this generalizing word for (predominantly violent) forms of protest had different underlying interpretations.¹⁶

Considering the social backgrounds of participants in the struggle against Batista, different social strata and sectoral bonds crystallized in different forms of action. In the labor sector (excluding better-off sectors and the non-productive industries), the political mobilization against Batista worked mainly through the PSP. The communist leaders of the PSP propagated traditional, predominantly non-violent forms of labor protests (strikes and other forms of refusal to work, the distribution of pamphlets, etc.). In any case, in this sector the mobilization capacities of the PSP had already diminished prior to Batista due to strong anti-communist action taken during the Grau and the Prío governments since 1947 (Rojas Blaquier 2006: 159-198).

Inside the PSP a different approach was being followed by the Socialist Youth (JS). The JS tended to support forms of armed action that were being applied by other organizations and that the Batista regime generally defined as communist terrorist activities, though the perpetrators in many cases had no leftist orientation.¹⁷ These forms of political mobilization prevailed in the tertiary sector, middle-class sectors and among students, causing fierce clashes between the repressive organs of public order and the army under direct command or con-

15. Social revolution was not an aim exclusive to the 26th of July Movement, a fact often forgotten by the Castro-centric historiography. See Farber 2006 and (more polemic) De la Cova 2007, Márquez-Sterling/Aranda 2009.

16. That problem existed since the desintegration of the revolutionary groups after 1933/1935. For a discussion of that problem see Aguiar Rodríguez 2000, 7, and Soto 1977, I, 124.

17. For the cooperation between JS and other resistance movements see for example the personal account of Jorge Risquet (León Rojas 2006).

nivance of Batista and his collaborators. In these sectors the 26th of July Movement (M-26-7), the Revolutionary Directorate (DR, later called 13th of March Revolutionary Directorate, DR-13-M), the *Organización Auténtica* (OA) and other urban resistance groups found their main bases and resources.¹⁸

In rural areas mobilization against Batista reached quite low levels until 1957/1958 and followed more the traditional patterns of resistance against traditional repressive state policies like displacements and different kinds of abuse by landowners and the Rural Guard (Regalado 1979, Grote 2004). The links between peasants and local members of resistance groups should nevertheless prove quite significant, especially when the fight began to focus on rural areas which were difficult to access. In the Sierra Maestra in western Oriente province one of the main peasant leaders was Crescencio Pérez who the Batista authorities considered a social bandit but who provided crucial assistance to Fidel Castro in the beginnings of the formation of his guerrilla *foco*. Another important figure in this aspect was José “Pepe” Ramírez that would link his action to the guerrilla front of Raúl Castro in eastern Oriente. “Pepe” Ramírez would play an important role in the mobilization of peasants in Oriente for the defense of the Cuban revolution between 1959 and 1961.¹⁹

The focusing on rural areas brings us to the application of rural guerrilla strategies that started in 1956 with the landing of the yacht *Granma* and the build-up of the first guerrilla *foco* by Fidel Castro in the Sierra Maestra. With that step, the pattern of resistance gradually changed, and in 1958, the resistance could be considered as predominantly characterized by rural guerrilla *focos* that sprang up in different mountain ranges of Cuba. This form of armed action also had its deep roots in Cuban history dating back to the insurreccionalism dur-

18. For the M-26-7 see Sweig 2002 and Bonachea/San Martín 1995, for the DR-13-M Hurtado Tandrón 2005, Berdayes García 2005 and García Oliveras 2006, for the OA Ameringer 1985, for other organizations like the *resistencia cívica* see Serra Almer 2008.

19. For “Pepe” Ramírez before 1959 see Martínez Incháustegui 1986, after 1959 to 1960 see Ramírez Cruz 1960.

ing colonial times, and also in the 20th century there had been both insurrectionists that were following political purposes and others who were practicing forms of social banditry.²⁰ Castro's guerrilla was not the only one, but guerrillas were formed in other regions and by other resistance groups instead, like the Second National Front of the Escambray (SFNE), a splinter group of the DR-13-M that dominated the insurreccional struggle against Batista in the Escambray mountain range, located in the central Cuban province of Las Villas (Hurtado Tandrón 2005, Orihuela 1991).

Getting back to the subject of popular mobilization for the fight against Batista, it can be stated that the guerrilla strategy had a deep impact on the success of some resistance groups and shaped their political impact on Cuban society as a whole. Though urban resistance continued to be of decisive importance for the downfall of the Batista regime, the hegemonic leadership and the power to define a successful revolutionary image definitely shifted to Fidel Castro and his inner circle in the Sierra Maestra between April and August in the year 1958.²¹ However, from a regional perspective the SFNE continued to keep an autonomous position and influence in the Escambray region and its adjacencies. In a national perspective, the process of Castro's rise in the insurreccional field became evident and known in all Cuba with the military success of the guerrillas of the M-26-7 from summer 1958 until January of the year 1959. Up to the end of 1958, the popular mobilization against Batista had increased significantly, as large sectors of the population involved themselves in that process.

20. For social banditry and insurreccionalism in colonial Cuba and the first years of the Cuban Republic see Pérez Jr. 1986, and up to 1933 see De Paz-Sánchez and others 1993-1994.

21. See Oltuski and others 2008 and for the gradual preeminence of the *Sierra* since the meeting on Altos de Mompié see Sweig 2002, 150-153, Guevara de la Serna 2001, 243-249, and the prologue of Carlos Aldana in Vecino Alegret 1992, VII-VIII. For a definition of *Sierra* and *Llano* (the urban underground) see Zeuske 2010, 27.

THE DEFENSE OF THE CUBAN REVOLUTION (1959–1961)

With Batistas' flight to the Dominican Republic on January 1st, that mobilization was increased to secure the victory of the rebel forces by a general strike during the first days of January 1959. In this very moment the leading position of Castro became clearly evident, which soon would be translated into political power in a regular office. In February 1959 Castro followed in the position of Prime Minister formerly occupied by José Miró Cardona, and in July 1959 culminated the process of Castro's formal access to the highest position of political power. At that point, President Manuel Urrutia Lleó resigned from his post after an ouster move by Castro who first resigned and finally re-entered in his position of Prime Minister with renewed and extended powers as the real head of state and appointed Osvaldo Dorticós for President. Whereas Batista had governed the country from the post of President, Castro would do so as Prime Minister. Reinaldo Suárez Suárez recently described this shift of functions precisely: "Para ello se introdujo una reforma del artículo 146 de la Constitución de 1940 y de la recién aprobada, pero n[o] publicada, Ley Fundamental de 7 de febrero, en virtud de la cual el Primer Ministro dejó de *representar la política general del Gobierno* para pasar a *dirigir la política general del Gobierno*."

No fue un mero cambio semántico, sino de contenido. El Primer Ministro pasó a presidir las reuniones del Consejo de Ministros, y asumió la responsabilidad política de su ejecutoria. En verdad, la solución fue radical en su contenido, al traspasar al Primer Ministro la autoridad material por la ejecutoria del Gobierno Revolucionario. En lo adelante, el Presidente Provisional de la República sancionaría o rechazaría los proyectos de leyes que adoptara el Consejo de Ministros, en el término que fijaba la Ley Fundamental: 10 días." (Suárez Suárez, 2009: 50, italics by Suárez Suárez).

In 1959 and 1960, the majority of the Cubans did neither really question the leadership and politics of Fidel Castro, nor the undeter-

mined postponement of elections, as surveys showed.²² For most people, the question was not: Should a revolution take place? But rather: How far should the revolutionary transformations reach and what ideological direction should they take? In short—reforms inside existing patterns or a social revolution with deep impact on all aspects of State and society? Of course there were also voices that invoked one or more third ways that meant a deep social transformation without following external models shaped by the then superpowers United States and Soviet Union. In fact that third, nationalist, position was officially propagated by the Revolutionary Government until spring/summer of 1960.²³

From the very beginning of the year 1959, political participation manifested itself in hitherto unknown levels of popular mobilization and not through traditional electoral channels. Like during the struggle against Batista, the social composition of the supporters of the revolutionary process varied constantly, but not in a linear way as it went through specific periods. A first broad consensus had been reached which consisted in the downfall of Batista. However, it cannot be stated that the consensus was the broadest one in these initial years. Although in the visual reconstruction of the moments of the Triumph of the Cuban insurrection in the first days of January 1959 it seems that the whole people of Cuba was with that process, this seems to be only superficially true. Of course the majority externalized its rejoicing about Batista's flight, but the identification with the revolutionary process more and more shaped by Castro's line and its interpretation varied considerably from one social group and class to another.

During the following two years, it should be noted that large sectors of the upper and middle classes had a completely different under-

22. In summer of 1960 about 57 % of the Cubans shared Castro's opinion that elections were not necessary in that moment, and in rural areas this percentage rose to 63 % (Buch/Suarez 2002: 273).

23. Farber dates the beginning of Castro's internal shift to a communist solution for Cuba approximately in summer 1959 (Farber 1976: 211), but until summer/autumn of 1960 a clear orientation towards the socialist bloc was not evident.

standing of “revolution” than the lower classes and the Castro government, and that the social groups who had been less implicated in the struggle against Batista like the humble peasants (these were meant with the term *campesinos*) increased significantly their participation in that process. In consequence, there cannot really be defined a homogeneous concept of “the people” or “*el pueblo*,” but rather a changing majority of the Cuban population that backed up the type of social revolution Castro was proposing and carrying out. Between 1959 and 1961, the quantitative support for that kind of revolution and for the Castro government only went down from about 90 % to about 80 %, ²⁴ but much more significant was the qualitative change. This approach could contribute to explain why large sectors of the former supporters of Castro or “the revolution” gradually got alienated from the process and often tended to describe Castro’s course as “treachery” to what they defined the “true” revolution. That is a typical example of frustrated expectations. Without speculating about the “trueness” of Castro’s line, it can be stated that the majority of the Cubans supported this process, and they did so in such an energetic manner that many of them were ready to risk even their very life for the defense of that revolution.

Let us take a closer look on the popular mobilization for the defense of the revolution under Castro, and especially focusing on the formation of non- or semi-professional defense forces, i.e. the pro-government militias. Between January and May 1959, popular mobilization as a form of supporting the Revolutionary Government and its policy increased steadily, but that did not necessarily translate into the formation of militias or even the call for arming the people. That means in that period most people did not see “the revolution” in such a danger that would necessarily entail an armed defense with additional, non-regular forces besides the rebel army (as still was called the now regular army), the police and the intelligence services.

24. In accordance with a survey published in June 1959 in *Bohemia*, more than 90 % of the Cubans approved the politics of the Castro Government (Gutiérrez Serrano 1959), a figure that fell slightly to 86 % in spring of 1960 (considering the urban population), as a survey of Princeton University showed (Free 1960).

However, this was not true for some (mostly, but not only leftist) sectors that were more politicized and pleaded for an immediate formation of militias, as they looked back to Guatemala, where in 1954, only five years earlier, the Arbenz government had been toppled by a CIA-conducted invasion and coup d'état. This vision was shared by Camilo Cienfuegos and Che Guevara who both supported the formation of worker militias and other popular militias in April 1959 and for Labor Day of that year.²⁵ Fidel Castro had been speaking several times of the need for arming the people since January of that year, including women (Córdova, 1987: 198), but in practice he still did not qualify that step as urgent and focused more on the restructuring and strengthening of the regular armed forces instead.

For the passage of the law of Agrarian Reform on May 17, 1959, there had been a large mobilization that worked in that direction, especially in the agrarian sector. Almost immediately after the enacting of that law in the beginning of June 1959, pressure against its application in its original version began to mount among Cuban landowners, Cuban cattle owners and U.S. investors that were backed up by the Department of State in Washington and its diplomatic representations in Cuba.²⁶ Proper, quick and adequate compensation was a main issue in the official discourse, though such deeper menaces and misunderstandings were underlying in these critics that some protesters (like a former ambassador to Cuba, Spruille Braden) addressed quite openly.²⁷ In the case of Braden those critics included speculations about a direct intervention by U.S. forces like in Guatemala (Immer-

25. For the mobilization of workers see "4000 metalúrgicos dispuestos a cambiar las herramientas por el rifle." *Hoy* (May 9, 1959): 7. For Guevara see "Worker Militia Planned in Cuba." *The New York Times* (April 30, 1959): 12. For Cienfuegos see Gálvez Rodríguez 1979: 508-509. Cienfuegos spoke on May 1st in Camagüey, where the provincial military commander Huber Matos shared his views regarding arming the people, see "Habla el comandante H. Matos en el desfile de Camagüey." *Revolución* (May 5, 1959): 8.

26. The overall public opinion in the U.S. towards Cuba was not far from that position; see Welch 1985.

27. For an adequate account of U.S. politics towards Cuba see Schoultz 2009. For Braden see his declarations published by the U.S. Internal Security Subcommittee of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 1960. For the protest of the PSP in name of the labor movement see the commentary by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez: "¡En Pie la Nación!" *Hoy* (June 16, 1959): 1.

man 1982: 127). Braden shared the radical rightist views of the then CIA director Allen Welsh Dulles who, referring to the containment of communist influence in the western hemisphere, stated: “Do nothing to offend the dictators, they are the only people we can depend on.” (Kirkland 2003: 2).

Popular response to those menaces was immediate and reached farther than the original mobilization for the implementation of the Agrarian Reform law. For the first time since January 1959, “the revolution” seemed to be under attack, and the increasing feeling of renewed and expanded national self-confidence contributed to qualify this type of menace as a questioning of Cuban sovereignty. In many sectors the popular call for arms to defend the revolution and the Revolutionary Government came up and—mostly in leftist labor sectors, but too in the emerging associations of humble peasants and specific organizations like the *Unidad Femenina Revolucionaria*—partly converted into the foundation of popular militias. The press organ of the PSP, *Hoy*, gave broad account of these dynamics.²⁸

That kind of popular mobilization for the defense of the revolution and especially for the defense of the Agrarian Reform had its first peak in the organized peasant and general popular support for the Revolutionary Government and its policy during the July 26 festivities, when Fidel Castro re-entered as head of the Revolutionary Government. Popular mobilization for the defense of the revolution had a new peak shortly afterwards, when the failed intent of an invasion from the Dominican Republic (that would turn out as a large conspiracy) became known by the Cuban public in the beginning of August 1959. Again, in several sectors of the population the need to get arms and military training for civilians from the Revolutionary Government was being addressed: “Cambiamos las herramientas por las armas

28. For the mobilization of workers see “800 trabajadores Piden instrucción militar y armas para defender la revolución cubana.” *Hoy* (June 19, 1959): 3 and other examples. The tobacco worker’s Federation on its VII Congress also decided to pressure the government to form militias, see “Acuerdan los tabacaleros defender la Revolución con las armas / Condenan el terrorismo los obreros tabacaleros.” *Hoy* (June 23, 1959): 3. For women in the UFR asking for military training see “UFR de Regla rinde homenaje a Mariana Grajales esta noche.” *Hoy* (June 26, 1959): 1 and 7.

cuando haga falta. [...] Lo que hay que hacer es repartir las carabinas. [...] Deben enseñarnos a manejar las armas [...].”²⁹ But still, Fidel Castro did not deem the moment to find revolutionary militias in an official way as opportune.

That constellation would be subject to change in October 1959. On the one hand, Castro had planned and prepared a model or symbol for the creation of revolutionary militias, a peasant patrol that later would be called the *malagones* (Martí 1981, Alonso Romero 1996). On the other hand—and that was far more meaningful for the popular mobilization—two incidents provoked a mayor step-up in the feeling of indignation in a significant part of the Cuban population that would see renewed demands for arms and military training by even larger sectors of the population as one of its consequences. The first incident was related to the conspiracy of Huber Matos, the then military commander of Camagüey province who on October 19th, 1959, resigned in protest against the alleged communist penetration of the Revolutionary Government. High government representatives and the government-friendly press presented that move as a threat to interior unity and security, an interpretation that was followed by the majority of the population, though not by rightist and some reformist circles that included even members of the Revolutionary Government. Matos was neither the first nor the last case of defection of former Castro allies, but he was the first (and last) one to instigate an important military garrison to challenge the central government and Castro’s leading role in the period encompassed in the present article.³⁰

The second incident followed two days later when former Cuban Air Force Commander Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz dropped leaflets and allegedly bombs or grenades during an air raid on the central districts of Havana. It cannot be conclusively determined who exactly was responsible for the victims, but in that moment Government opinion and most part of popular opinion coincided in the assumption that

29. See “Condenan los trabajadores a traidores / Piden entrenamiento militar, Debemos estar vigilantes, dicen.” *Hoy* (August 11, 1959): 7.

30. See Bonsal 1972: 100-104, Matos 2003, Escalante 2004, Buch/Suárez 2002: 100-109.

Díaz Lanz was responsible for the death of two and the wounding of about 45 persons.³¹ The popular reaction was quite intense and increased also through instigation of Fidel Castro and other representatives of the revolutionary leadership.³² It should be stated, however, that both incidents alone could not have had such a strong reaction as a consequence, but rather the feeling that the aggressions against a revolutionary political program and process were mounting.³³ Apart from non-violent forms of mobilization of the anti- or “counterrevolutionary”³⁴ forces in Cuban society, that fact had been demonstrated by a number of recent violent actions that included air incursions with small private aircraft that attacked cane fields and sugar refineries with small incendiary and other conventional bombs.³⁵ As mentioned before it is not the immediate purpose of this article to clarify the legitimacy of accusations or actions, but to describe processes of popular mobilization and their motivations instead and to reach a higher degree of transparency in that complex period.

The popular protest against the above mentioned internal and external aggressions against the course of the revolution under Castro culminated in a huge protest event in Havana on October 26, 1959, organized by the Revolutionary Government, the Confederation of Cuban Workers (CTC) and other pro-government or pro-revolutionary groups, organizations or institutions. Here we see a photo of that event. Fidel Castro spoke in the end, after sunset.

31. See Bonsal 1972: 104-110, Arrosagaray 2004: 13, Buch/Suárez 2002: 110.

32. As reflected in the pro-government press (*Revolución, Hoy, Bohemia*, and others).

33. As Castro first indicated; see “Castro Eases General Tone but Blasts Critics in U.S. in Exclusive Interview.” *The News* (October 26, 1959). <<http://www1.lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19591026-1.html>>. June 2009.

34. This controversial term is not equivalent to oppositional or dissident. But as the political opposition against Castro during these years was almost completely absorbed by the most radical groups that in the end were not propagating social revolution but fighting it instead, the term “counterrevolutionary” will be used to denominate oppositional persons and their actions that were actively fighting the Castro government and the politics it carried out.

35. During the month of October 1959 alone, there had been carried out a total of five attacks with small aircraft and bombs had been dropped on Cuban civil targets; see Arrosagaray 2004, 14.



Mass rally in front of the Presidential Palace in Havana. October 26, 1959.
Courtesy: Archivo del Instituto de Historia de Cuba (clipped).

The mobilization was not created by the political leadership, as could be assumed, but rather further instigated and channeled into action for future reforms. These reforms came on that very day, when Fidel Castro announced the re-introduction of revolutionary courts including the possibility of applying the death sentence and the foundation of revolutionary militias throughout the country to defend the revolution, the country and the government.³⁶ Whereas the reactivation of the courts meant a judicial and executive process that would be carried out by formal means, the foundation of militias was not defined by legal proceedings but only by a public acceptance made by

36. For the judicial reimplantation of the death penalty see “Ley de Reforma Constitucional de 29 de Octubre de 1959” (*Gaceta Oficial* de 2 de noviembre de 1959). In Vega Vega 1966: 56. For a direct account in the pro-government press see “La Revolución es cosa del pueblo / Mano en Alto Pide la Multitud los Tribunales Revolucionarios.” *Revolución* (October 27, 1959): 2.

Castro of a popular process that was already in the making. That explains in part why in the days and weeks following Castro's announcement militias were being formed in a very spontaneous way, as the U.S. embassy in Havana stated three months later in a retrospective evaluation written by Daniel Braddock: "Following the October 26 call of Prime Minister Fidel CASTRO [sic] for the formation of militia to defend the revolution against the growing threat of foreign aggression, militia groups mushroomed in helter-skelter fashion all over the country with no particular orientation or organization."³⁷

In the beginning of January 1960 that relatively spontaneous movement of support for the defense of the revolution and of the Castro government started to be channeled into an armed institution called National Revolutionary Militias (MNR) directed by the Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (MINFAR). Without focusing deeply on that institutionalization, it can be observed that the process of forming new militias slowly declined and that nevertheless the enlistment in existing militias continued and augmented. In 1960, popular mobilization for the defense of the revolution was getting a more polarized and polarizing character, as ideological differences in the population sharpened and the gap between "revolutionaries" and "counterrevolutionaries" widened. The popularity of Castro's government went back nearly ten percent during that year, but in the remaining supporters (still over 80 % of the whole population, see note 27) the revolutionary conscience began to grow and in a significant part of the supporters leftist ideas were not interpreted automatically as negative any more. As Sartre observed precisely from his standpoint as an external observer with sympathies for socialism, in April 1960 the majority of the Cubans were not sure about the direction the revolution would finally take, but the overall assumption was that it would probably be a leftist course (Sartre 2005). In summer and autumn of 1960 this assumption was being confirmed completely, as a major step was

37. *Foreign Service Despatch*. No. 1046. January 29, 1960. From: Amembassy Habana. To: The Department of State, Washington. Subject: "Militias Organized on National Basis." National Archives and Records Administration (Washington, USA), 737.554/1-2960. Page 1 (Enclosure No. 1), signed by: Daniel M. Braddock, Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

being taken with the nationalization of key industries and services, both Cuban and non-Cuban (most of these last ones formerly owned by U.S. investors).

In 1960, the MNR did not only play a defensive role against threats from abroad but obviously also guaranteed the defense against internal counterrevolutionary attacks. The members of these militias became defenders of the new national status quo that was amidst its very onset. So they did not only fulfill the role of defenders but also that of creators of the new order that was being formed. Since their very beginning, these revolutionary militias were being created for these three fundamental functions: 1. Defense against external attacks. 2. Defense against internal attacks (uprisings, sabotage and other). 3. Implementation of the political program of the Cuban government. That was their fundamental task, as recorded in the first official regulations for that incipient institution: “Las Milicias Revolucionarias se crean y organizan para colaborar con las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias a defender la Revolución contra cualquier intento armado de sus enemigos externos o internos, defender la soberanía nacional lograda el 1º de enero de 1959 y el territorio de nuestra Patria, defender la Reforma Agraria y demás leyes revolucionarias dictadas en bien del progreso, de la industrialización del país y del mejoramiento del nivel de vida del pueblo cubano, así como de las medidas que se dicten por el Gobierno Revolucionario para el desarrollo de la revolución cubana.”³⁸

That brought forth the trifold character of 1st a territorial defense force, 2nd a force to guarantee public order and 3rd a political police. So, these militias fulfilled indeed the role of an instrument for the defense of government policy, as any other army or police force, but they were not an instrument created by the government *against* the will of the majority of the population. And that is an important point. Though we still cannot really judge the extent of the democratic or

38. See [Cuba. MINFAR. Departamento de Instrucción] *Reglamento de las Milicias Revolucionarias*. 1960. In *Milicias Obreras Gráficas. Número Extraordinario Revista Artes Gráficas* 2 (February): [no paging].

non-democratic character of their actions, the popular support for these social actors was as huge as was the support for Castro and his government. The ideological clash was quite hard, but Jacobinism can be considered relatively low compared to other social revolutions (Zeuske 2004a), although repressive or violent action against counter-revolutionaries, defectors and the rest of the opposition has since been described in exorbitantly high proportions, what might also be due to the prepotency of the anti-Castroites in the exile media.³⁹

Getting back to the degree of popular support for the defense of the revolution reflected in the MNR, one can see that they were indeed part of the most politicized sector of the pro-revolutionary camp. The more specialized and militarized a militia unit, the more thoroughly indoctrinated it was, what meant an even stronger commitment of its members to the leftist guideline of the revolutionary course framed by governmental positions, the PSP, and ultimately by Fidel Castro. But the members of less specialized militias where not politicized in a stronger way than most other sectors inside the pro-revolutionary camp, and it would be much too shortsighted to say they were the only ones that acted in favor of the defense of the revolution. The involvement in pro-revolutionary militias was just one of many ways to contribute to national and revolutionary defense, and others took different forms to act in defense of this kind of revolutionary politics and ultimately also defended their country, their government and the social revolution they were carrying out. Examples for that kind of participation cannot only be found in the new mass organizations that were emerging (like the Association of Young Rebels, AJR, the Federation of Cuban Women, FMC, or the Committees of Defense of the Revolution, CDR), but in almost all spheres of Cuban society.

In the end of 1960, the class struggle and the ideological conflict had reached a first point of culmination on both sides, as inside the revolutionary camp and inside the counterrevolutionary camp forces

39. See note 1 and the works of Beruvides (i.e. Beruvides 2003 that includes a longer perspective).

were accumulating in radically separated positions from one another and also inside of these camps. Third ways or well-balanced positions couldn't make a point any more, not between these camps and not inside of them. But, as Martín Duarte Hurtado stated, Fidel Castro had reached a degree of unity of a huge majority of the Cuban population that no other government before him could achieve (Duarte Hurtado 1997). The opposition saw its opportunities to criticize the government with legal means diminishing each day, and many of those who were adversely affected by the measures of the Castro government and the course of the revolution opted for exile (Fagen and others 1968, Scanlan/Loescher 1983). Some of these did so in hope for a roll back that the most radical parts of the opposition would bring about by the application of force. Between August of 1960 and April of 1961, the counterrevolutionary forces indeed began to concentrate on activities of all kinds of internal and external subversion and aggression, including direct attacks (Escalante 2004, Arboleya Cervera 2002). In their action forms these proved quite similar to the resistance against Batista, but they were very strongly supported by the U.S. Governments under the Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, mostly through direct aid and action of the CIA – a fact that discredited most of the otherwise potentially more legitimate resistance against various aspects of the Castro rule.

That discreditation, the success of the course of the social revolution in the eyes of most Cubans and the growing menace against country and revolution were key ingredients for an even more unified front inside the revolutionary camp that strengthened the motivation of the majority of the population for the defense of that kind of revolution. In the polarizing process of unification, Fidel Castro was working hard to equalize the concepts of “revolution”, “*patria*” (“fatherland”) and “nation”, an effort that was yielding its fruits in the minds of most Cubans (Martínez Heredia 1998–1999). During the first huge mobilization for the defense of the country and the revolution in January 1961, one could observe the readiness not only of the militiamen and militiawomen, but of the overwhelming majority of

the Cuban population in their will to defend the revolution (Rueda Jomarrón 2009: 83-86).

At the same time, not a few (and not only on the side of the opposition) expressed certain reservations to the immediate need for defending the revolution and the country, as the invasion Castro had announced did not occur. Reservations of this type were particularly strong on the problematic base of the deep cuts in the Cuban economy that such a mobilization entailed, as did the whole military build-up in these times. Also the extensive operations against the counter-revolutionary guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains and other areas of Cuba were subject to critics in this aspect, as they bound productive potential needed urgently for other tasks in the revolutionary transformation of Cuba society. But the aspect of defense policy should prevail by large, as the very survival of the political, economical and social project called “revolution” was depending evidently on the ability to guarantee the defense of that project, and that comprised the defense of the national territory of the whole Cuban archipelago.⁴⁰

What could be observed during the mobilization in January 1961 in matters of popular support for the defense of Cuba and of the Cuban government would prove true in April 1961, when the invasion was finally carried out in the Bay of Pigs. The defeat of that invasion took place in Girón beach on April 19 and was only possible because of this backing by the majority of the population. Many had cooperated in the arrests en masse of real or suspect counterrevolutionaries after the air strikes announcing the beginning of that invasion on April 15, and even more participated actively in the defense of the country by taking strategic military positions, securing economic production and infrastructure and guaranteeing the logistic supplies for the defense, so that the troops engaged in the target area from April 17 on could act quickly (Kornbluh 1998, Rodríguez Cruz 2005). The dynamics

40. See the self-criticizing analysis of Fidel Castro during the mobilization in “Por un Cubano que / Palabras de Fidel Castro.” *Revolución* (January 14, 1961): 14-15, and of Che Guevara in “Nuestra Batalla de Todos los Días es la Producción / El peligro no ha pasado del todo.” *Revolución* (January 23, 1961): 1 and 4.

turned out to be much the same as during the mobilization in January of that year, except that the defense, security and intelligence measures taken by the government of Cuba had been tightened, that the insurrectionist uprisings of counterrevolutionary guerrillas had been crushed and that in April for the first time revolutionary militias and regular forces entered into combat during a more conventional type of conflict (Rueda Jomarrón 2009: 86-106).

Summing up, it can be stated that the popular engagement for the defense of the revolution was substantially reinforced by the notion that the revolution was predominantly seen as intrinsically patriotic. At least in the period encompassed in the present article, it could be observed that Castro succeeded in his effort to unify the pro-revolutionary forces under the shield of a leftist social revolution that the majority of the population was willing to defend. That Castro announced the socialist character of that revolution on April 16 showed his strategic sense for power politics, but the reaction of the majority of the population demonstrated also that the will to continue to defend that project even under the sign of socialism prevailed, if it was the kind of socialism that ascended from what Castro had predicted and practiced since 1959.



Fidel Castro announces the socialist character of the revolution in front of militiamen and militiawomen. April 16, 1961, Havana. Courtesy: Museo de la Revolución, Centro de Documentación, Havana.

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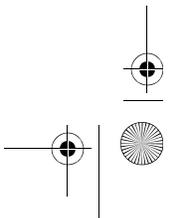
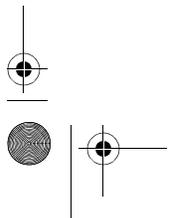
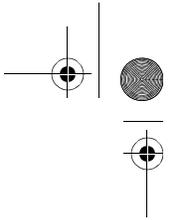
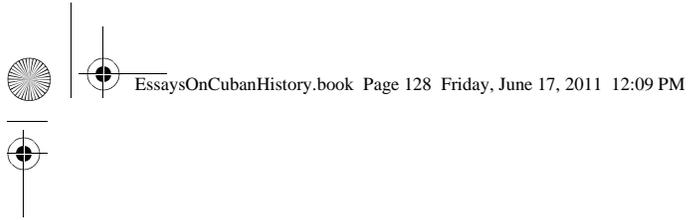
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6 El Derecho de Nacer: Legitimidad, historia y literatura en Cuba (1952- 1976)

Rafael Rojas

La Revolución Cubana, entendida como fenómeno histórico, temporalmente delimitado entre los años 50 y 70 del pasado siglo, ofrece una trama propicia para pensar el proceso de legitimación simbólica de un nuevo orden social y político y el papel de los discursos históricos y literarios en el mismo. A diferencia de otras revoluciones socialistas, como la rusa o la china, la cubana tuvo una primera fase liberal-democrática, lo suficientemente extensa –entre 1952 y 1960–, como para dividir el proceso de construcción de la nueva legitimidad en dos tiempos. El primero correspondería a la oposición pacífica o violenta a la dictadura de Fulgencio Batista y el segundo a la prolongada edificación, entre 1961 y 1976, del sistema institucional socialista.

A esta peculiaridad de ser una revolución primero liberal-democrática y, luego, marxista-leninista, la cubana agregó un nacionalismo descolonizador, del que carecieron los procesos del socialismo real en Europa del Este. La narrativa histórica y literaria involucrada en la legitimación simbólica de esa experiencia, aunque fue modu-

lando sus enunciados en el transcurso de aquellas tres décadas, actuó de manera acumulativa, superponiendo capas discursivas liberales, democráticas, marxista-leninistas y nacionalistas, en el lenguaje de los líderes, de los medios de comunicación, de las instituciones culturales y educativas, de la esfera pública y del campo intelectual y académico.

En las páginas que siguen quisiera ilustrar la forma en que el discurso histórico y literario de la Revolución transitó de la legitimidad liberal a la socialista entre los años 50 y 70 del pasado siglo. Entiendo aquí por legitimidad una estructura jurídica y a la vez simbólica de reconocimiento normativo del nuevo orden político que se afirma desde múltiples dispositivos: la Constitución, las leyes, la ideología de Estado, la política cultural y educativa, la literatura, las artes, las ciencias sociales, la prensa, la radio, la televisión, el cine... En todos esos dispositivos es posible observar la reproducción de un relato, en el que predominan ciertas imágenes del pasado, el presente y el futuro de Cuba. Me interesa describir las transformaciones de ese relato durante la transición de la legitimidad liberal (1952-60) a la socialista (1961-76).

La representación de la historia cubana como un drama, una farsa o un melodrama, en el que se reiteraban plataformas sentimentales como el sacrificio o la frustración, no sólo fue una práctica letrada de las élites. No es imposible encontrar elementos de esa representación, también, en la cultura popular, específicamente en las radio y telenovelas de la época, que marcaron la esfera pública, sobre todo, en los años 50. Durante el proceso de aquellas formaciones discursivas, letradas y populares, podría detectarse la constitución de sujetos políticos que caracterizó el periodo del estado de excepción, impuesto por la dictadura, que coincidió, a su vez, con la fase liberal-democrática de la Revolución.

La misma estrategia de lectura de discursos y subjetividades políticas podría trasladarse a la segunda fase, la marxista-leninista, que se inicia cuando la Revolución se ha convertido en poder. Si en la primera predominaba el estado de excepción y las formas narrativas del melodrama nacional, en esta segunda fase, se producirá un despla-

miento de la recuperación de la legitimidad perdida y la breve reconciliación nacional que la acompaña por el principio de la guerra civil, que determinará el proceso de construcción del socialismo durante los años 60 y 70. Intentaremos describir esa transición por medio de glosas y comentarios a diversos documentos de la alta literatura, el discurso político y la cultura popular en la Cuba de aquellas tres décadas.

ESTADO DE EXCEPCIÓN Y MELODRAMA NACIONAL

El origen de la Revolución Cubana está relacionado con las diversas reacciones que provocó el golpe de Estado de Fulgencio Batista contra el gobierno de Carlos Prío Socarrás, el 10 de marzo de 1952. Aquel golpe interrumpió la lógica constitucional establecida en 1940, por un consenso legislativo de las principales corrientes políticas de mediados de siglo en Cuba: católicos, liberales, conservadores, socialdemócratas, populistas, comunistas... Una de las primeras disposiciones de Batista fue, precisamente, suspender las garantías constitucionales de libertades públicas y reemplazar la Constitución de 1940 con los Estatutos Constitucionales del Viernes de Dolores (4 de abril de 1952), que formalizaban un estado de emergencia en el país.

Desde un punto de vista jurídico la suspensión de garantías constitucionales y la anulación de la Constitución de 1940 implicaron el establecimiento de un “estado de excepción”. Este tipo de suspensión de la norma jurídica, en el cual el soberano desconecta su fuente de autoridad de las leyes y los mecanismos del gobierno representativo, fue estudiado por el jurista austriaco Carl Schmitt -quien, a su vez, retomó la defensa de la dictadura que hiciera el conservador peninsular del siglo XIX, Juan Donoso y Cortés- y ha sido reformulado en años recientes por el filósofo italiano Giorgio Agamben.¹ En esta tradición intelectual, el estado de excepción es entendido como una ruptura con la legitimidad constitucional previa por medio de la cual el soberano remite su poder a una nueva fuente de derecho.

1. Giorgio Agamben, *Estado de excepción. Homo Sacer II*, Valencia, Pre-Textos, 2004.

En la documentación del golpe militar de Fulgencio Batista encontramos claramente expuesta la idea del estado de excepción. Batista, un líder de la Revolución de 1933 que había propiciado la Constitución del 40, se consideraba a sí mismo como uno de los padres de ésta última. En la “Declaración Preliminar” a los *Estatutos del Viernes de Dolores*, el dictador y sus asesores jurídicos argumentaban que los gobiernos de Grau San Martín y Carlos Prío Socarrás habían “desdeñado el sentido histórico” del texto constitucional y “habían prácticamente anulado” a este último “en su doble condición, como carta de derechos políticos y cuerpo de normas llamadas a conducir el proceso revolucionario hacia su etapa última y culminante”.² Batista no sólo anulaba la Constitución, en nombre de la Constitución misma, sino que postulaba la Revolución, la de 1933, como fuente de derecho:

Ante este cuadro de desolación y crisis, lleno de peligros y de sombríos augurios, fue necesario retornar al punto de partida de la Revolución como fuente de derecho, para asegurar la pacífica y democrática convivencia nacional, salvaguardar los avances sociales, defender la moral y mantener el ritmo de progreso, que es la sustancia de la Revolución.³

Es perceptible aquí la recurrencia del concepto de Revolución – con mayúscula- en la cultura política cubana, que proviene desde la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, pero también la aporía jurídica de anular una Constitución en nombre de la Constitución misma y de justificar un golpe de Estado con la idea de la Revolución como fuente de derecho. Dicha aporía descansaba sobre el argumento de que esa Revolución no era, como observaron muchos actores políticos de la época, el propio golpe de Estado del 10 de marzo de 1952 sino la Revolución de 1933, cuyo consenso político había dado lugar a la Constitución de 1940. El joven abogado y militante del Partido Ortodoxo, Fidel Castro, escribió un artículo para el periódico *Alerta* de Ramón Vasconcelos, titulado “Revolución no, zarpazo”, en el que equivocadamente atribuía el concepto de revolución al golpe mismo, cuando Batista se

2. Leonel Antonio de la Cuesta, *Constituciones cubanas. Desde 1812 hasta nuestros días*, New Yor, Ediciones Exilio, 1974, p. 330.

3. *Ibid.*

refería, en realidad, a la Revolución del 33. El artículo, como es sabido, fue rechazado por el director del periódico y apareció en la publicación *underground* *El Acusador*.

En las primeras reacciones al golpe de Estado del 10 de marzo se cifran ya las diversas modalidades de oposición al batistato que se manifestarán entre 1952 y 1958. El mismo Fidel Castro, por ejemplo, sería fundador tanto de la vía pacífica como de la violenta de oposición a la dictadura, ya que, antes de organizar el asalto al cuartel Moncada en julio de 1953, interpuso una demanda a Batista y 17 de sus cómplices ante el Tribunal Supremo de Justicia por violación de la Constitución de 1940. En esta, el artículo 281^o establecía que para decretar el “estado de emergencia” debía procederse por medio de una ley extraordinaria aprobada por el Congreso a solicitud del Consejo de Ministros.⁴ Como Batista había cerrado el Congreso y reunido los poderes ejecutivos y legislativos en el Consejo de Ministros y un Consejo Consultivo, dejando intacto el Tribunal Supremo de Justicia, Castro y otros jóvenes ortodoxos pudieron demandar la inconstitucionalidad del régimen ante este último.

Fuera pacífica o violenta, la oposición a la dictadura estableció como su primera demanda el restablecimiento de la Constitución de 1940. En todos los documentos del Movimiento 26 de Julio y del Directorio Estudiantil Revolucionario, en los pactos que estas organizaciones firmaron entre sí y con otras instituciones o líderes opositores, como los afiliados a los partidos “auténtico”, “ortodoxo” o comunista, entre 1952 y 1958, se reafirmó aquella demanda. En los propios documentos del Ejército Rebelde, entre 1957 y 1958, y en los manifiestos que firmaron los principales líderes de la Sierra y el movimiento urbano clandestino, también predominó la idea legitimista de que la dictadura de Batista era ilegal porque no se amparaba en la Constitución de 1940. Toda la etapa insurreccional de la Revolución Cubana está marcada por ese legitimismo.

4. *Ibid*, p. 309.

La idea de que la dictadura de Batista era ilegítima no sólo se difundió entre actores políticos pacíficos o violentos sino en la cultura letrada y popular de la isla. Algunos testimonios literarios de aquella época, provenientes de publicaciones como *Nuestro tiempo*, *Orígenes* y *Ciclón*, nos permitirían reconstruir la predominante visión ilegítima de la dictadura que existía en el campo intelectual. Pero más interesantes que esos testimonios son otros, menos conocidos, en los que no sólo se afirma la ilegitimidad del régimen sino las posibilidades de resistencia al mismo desde la literatura. Dichas posibilidades, muy limitadas como veremos, estaban relacionadas, a su vez, con un arraigado relato histórico en el que la dictadura de Batista era vista como el último capítulo de una frustración histórica secular.

La idea de que Cuba era un país “frustrado en su esencial político, que podía alcanzar virtudes y expresiones por otros cotos de mayor realce”, estaba muy presente en los escritores de *Orígenes* desde los años 40.⁵ El más joven de aquellos escritores, Lorenzo García Vega, llevó un diario en 1952 en el que encontramos anotaciones interesantes sobre cómo se vivió el golpe de Estado del 10 de marzo de ese año desde el campo intelectual. Para García Vega el golpe era una evidencia más de una permanente frustración histórica que debilitaba la voluntad de “ser escritor en Cuba”. Entre la nostalgia por intelectuales de la generación anterior, como Rubén Martínez Villena, que se enfrentaron a la dictadura de Gerardo Machado, y la esperanza de que pronto apareciera la novela anunciada por José Lezama Lima –“creo que si Lezama pudiera entregarnos su *Paradiso* nos entregaría también el reverso donde pudiéramos tocar lo poético nuestro”- García Vega describía el estado de emergencia como un drama reiterativo.

Es que lo que me resulta insoportable en todo lo que me rodea es su calidad de repetición inútil, de historieta sabida. Y cómo encuentro esto en todos los acontecimientos, aún en los más aparentemente novedosos y alejados de una órbita subjetiva. Como encuentro esto en los sucesos de estos días. Parece que todo lo que se hace en nuestro país, es una comedia estúpida, de la cual todos, actores y espectadores, espera-

5. Iván González Cruz, *Diccionario. Vida y obra de José Lezama Lima*, Valencia, Generalitat Valenciana, 2000, p. 85.

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mos su desenlace final. Entre nosotros el aburrimiento ha adquirido dimensión sociológica, me decía un amigo, y me parece que esto es ya nuestra única dimensión.⁶

Cuando García Vega se refería a los “sucesos de estos días” no sólo pensaba en el golpe mismo del 10 de marzo sino en las celebraciones del cincuentenario de la República, en mayo de 1952, a dos meses del ascenso de Batista al poder. En aquel ceremonial político, la dictadura se presentó como una fase histórica concluyente del periodo republicano o como un estado de excepción que se normalizaba dentro de la misma tradición política nacional. El joven García Vega, quien al igual que el joven Roberto Fernández Retamar, fue premiado por las instituciones culturales del régimen, sentía su reconocimiento y el reconocimiento a la revista *Orígenes*, a la que pertenecían ambos, como parte de esa farsa o ese drama repetitivo, que constituía la política cubana.

Otro escritor de *Orígenes*, el poeta y ensayista católico Cintio Vitier, quien también jugó un papel importante en las celebraciones del cincuentenario de la República, entendió aquella normalización del estado de emergencia como parte de una historia cíclica, reiterativa. A su entender, la experiencia postcolonial cubana era una sucesión de momentos de sacrificio y despotismo, que hacían desembocar el tiempo insular en un callejón sin salida. Desde José Martí y Julián del Casal, los dos grandes poetas modernistas de fines del siglo XIX, según Vitier, se estableció ese contrapunteo entre sacrificio y frustración —o entre civismo y nihilismo—, que poco a poco y a fuerza de naturalizar su sentido cíclico terminó por volver hegemónico el discurso de la frustración republicana:

Estamos acostumbrados a los brillantes florecimientos que no dan ningún fruto nutritivo. La fe nos dura poco y pronto nos vamos, con nuestra habitual mansedumbre, cada vez más melancólica, a nuestras ocupaciones habituales: la caza de la jutía, la preparación del casabe, el juego de batos. Fundar algo sobre esta arena movediza, en medio de esta difusa y terrible hambre de frustración que nos rodea, es en verdad

6. Lorenzo García Vega, *Rostros del reverso*, Caracas, Monte Ávila Editores, 1977, pp. 19 y 27.

improbable faena. Sólo las agitaciones espasmódicas de la política y el grosero manotazo de la tiranía logran sacar la nostalgia del sacrificio, reverso de la frustración, que late aún en la juventud exasperada. Pero esa misma situación recurrente, cíclica: tiranía-sacrificio, sacrificio tiranía, con los intermedios consabidos ¿no es también un punto inerte, un callejón sin salida de nuestra historia?⁷

Esto escribía Cintio Vitier en 1957, en las páginas finales de su gran ensayo, *Lo cubano en la poesía* (1958). Por esos mismos años, un escritor comunista, el narrador Félix Pita Rodríguez, defensor del realismo socialista, pronunciaba una conferencia en el Lyceum de La Habana, titulada “Literatura comprometida, detritus y buenos sentimientos” (1956), en la que intentaba criticar, desde el marxismo-leninismo, la literatura y el pensamiento del existencialismo francés. La conferencia, publicada en la revista *Nuestro Tiempo*, publicación auspiciada por el Partido Socialista Popular y la corriente comunista prerrevolucionaria, llegaba a conclusiones muy similares a las de Vitier. Según Pita Rodríguez, la Cuba de la dictadura de Batista, del estado de excepción, generaba una circunstancia teatral en la que la frustración se presentaba como drama tragicómico.

Dicho drama hacía de la historia y, también, de la sociedad escenarios de descomposición, que podrían ser narrados por escritores como Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Louis Ferdinand Céline, Curzio Malaparte o Alberto Moravia. Como escritor comunista y comprometido, Pita Rodríguez consideraba a estos autores representantes de la alienación burguesa, pero reconocía que la descomposición y la angustia que los mismos transmitían eran tan reales, bajo la dictadura batistiana, que la aspiración a imitarlos, sobre todo entre los jóvenes, se volvía ineludible. Aunque discrepaba del sentido de la crítica social que esos escritores proponían, Pita Rodríguez responsabilizaba a la misma frustración histórica, que señalaban Lezama, Vitier y García Vega, de esa descomposición que generaba una literatura obsesionada con el “detritus humano”:

7. Cintio Vitier, *Lo cubano en la poesía*, La Habana, Instituto del Libro, 1970, p. 578.

No podemos negar la realidad angustiadora en que nos tocó vivir, ni queremos desconocer cuando ellos existen los valores intrínsecos que como obra de creación poseen las cumbres de esa expresión de nuestro mundo. Sartre, Céline, Moravia, Camus, Malaparte, son sin duda, grandes escritores, las cimas señeras de una literatura, que, como todas, es espejo más o menos deformante del mundo que le da nacimiento. Son obras presididas por el signo de la disolución. Y hay una disolución social evidente. Eludo voluntariamente el vocablo más ríspido, el más utilizado para definir el clima de nuestros días: descomposición.⁸

El enunciado de la frustración republicana, entre los escritores cubanos, no era nuevo. Desde el periodo de la primera República (1902-1933), muchos intelectuales, como Fernando Ortiz en *Entre cubanos* (1913) y *La decadencia cubana* (1924) o Jorge Mañach en *La crisis de la alta cultura en Cuba* (1925) e *Indagación del choteo* (1928) habían recurrido al mismo. Pero Lezama, García Vega, Vitier o Pita Rodríguez agregaban a ese discurso del desaliento una mayor densidad histórica, por escribir 50 años después de fundada la República. Cuando Vitier hablaba de ciclos de tiranía y sacrificio e “intermedios consabidos” era evidente que se refería a las dictaduras de Machado y Batista, a las revoluciones que ambas desataron y al interregno democrático de 1940 a 1952, en el que tuvieron lugar tres sucesiones presidenciales pacíficas.

Medio siglo era tiempo suficiente para que aquella oscilación histórica arraigara sus propias pautas narrativas. La normalización del estado de emergencia y la subjetividad del intelectual como espectador y, a la vez, como hermeneuta de dichas pautas, remite a una teatralidad de la política que tiene resonancias en la cultura popular. El propio Jorge Mañach, autor de la más completa teorización del *choteo*, como clave conceptual de la frivolidad y el nihilismo cubanos, llegó a desarrollar la tesis de la teatralización política cubana en un extenso artículo, titulado “El drama de Cuba” (1958). Tanto aquí, como en el prólogo a la reedición de 1955 de *Indagación del choteo*, Mañach sugirió que el espectáculo de la Revolución estaba produciendo una dramatización de la

8. Félix Pita Rodríguez, ¿Literatura comprometida, detritus y buenos sentimientos?, *Revista Nuestro Tiempo*, la Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1989, p. 203.

ciudadanía, que superaba la anomia y el desentendimiento de lo público.

Mañach describía algunos hitos de la esfera pública cubana, en los 50, como el suicidio de Eduardo Chibás en medio de una alocución radial, en el verano de 1951, o el proyecto de toma del cuartel Columbia por el filósofo Rafael García Bárcena en abril de 1953 o el asalto al cuartel Moncada por Fidel Castro y sus hombres, en julio de ese mismo año, o la breve ocupación del Palacio Presidencial por el Directorio Revolucionario, en 1957, como situaciones climáticas de una teatralización de la política. La forma narrativa que predominaba en aquellas escenas era el melodrama, ya que la ciudadanía espectadora, por medio de aquellas inmoluciones, lograba persuadirse de la ilegitimidad del estado de emergencia y de la naturaleza represiva de la dictadura.

Ese melodrama, que Mañach detectaba como estructura narrativa básica de la esfera pública cubana de los 50, podría encontrarse también en discursos predominantes de la cultura popular como los boleros o las radio y telenovelas. La radionovela de mayor *rating* en aquella década fue, sin dudas, *El derecho de nacer*, del músico y escritor cubano, Félix B. Caignet, llevada a la televisión y al cine varias veces en aquellos años. El momento de mayor audiencia y, por tanto, de gravitación simbólica de ese melodrama radial coincide con los diez años que abarcan el gobierno de Carlos Prío Socarrás, el derrocamiento de éste por el golpe de Estado de Batista y la oposición violenta y pacífica contra la dictadura.

Como ha documentado el escritor Reynaldo González, estudioso de la radio cubana, *El derecho de nacer* comenzó a transmitirse por la CMQ en abril de 1948 y, en su primera entrega, llegó a tener más de 300 capítulos, por lo que se extendió hasta principios de 1950. En 1952 apareció la primera versión cinematográfica de la radionovela, producida en México por los hermanos Galindo y dirigida por el director Zacarías Gómez Urquiza. Filmada en exteriores en La Habana y en los estudios Churubusco, y protagonizada por Jorge Mis-

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tral, Gloria Marín y Lupe Suárez, la película se vio en casi todas las capitales iberoamericanas, a la vez que la radionovela de la CMQ era retrasmiteda en Venezuela, Colombia, Nicaragua, México y otros países latinoamericanos. Todavía en 1958, el último año de la dictadura, *El derecho de nacer*, luego de varias temporadas en la radio, fue adaptada por primera vez a la televisión, por la propia CMQ, dirigida por Sergio Doré y actuada por Salvador Levy, Violeta Jiménez y Gladys Zurbano.

Algunos datos reproducidos por Reynaldo González nos ayudan a ponderar la ubicación de *El derecho de nacer* como referente narrativo en la cultura cubana de los 50.⁹ Una encuesta realizada por la Asociación de Anunciantes de Cuba, otorgaba a la radionovela un *rating* que oscilaba entre 46 y 50 puntos, muy por encima de programas informativos como “Lo que pasa en el mundo”, emitido por la RHC, cómicos como “Chicharito y Sopeira”, o dramatizados como “Tamakún”, que apenas rebasaban los 20 puntos de audiencia. El melodrama no sólo era un género más popular que los noticieros políticos, las comedias y los musicales, sino que articulaba toda una red transnacional, como prueban las retransmisiones radiales o televisivas en Iberoamérica. Se trataba, como han señalado Carlos Monsiváis y Román Gubern, de una socialización transnacional del dolor y el sufrimiento.

El derecho de nacer contaba la historia de una joven cubana de clase alta que queda embarazada en una relación con un *dandy* habanero, que la abandona. El padre rechaza a la joven y a su hijo, quien nace en un cafetal, lejos de la mansión habanera. Luego del parto, el padre intenta deshacerse del niño, pero la Nana de la familia, la negra María Dolores, logra mantenerlo bajo su custodia. Separada de su hijo, la joven entra en un convento, mientras el niño crece, con apoyo de algunos amigos que conocen el secreto, y llega a estudiar en la Universidad de la Habana, graduándose de medicina. Ya ejerciendo como médico, el joven debe asistir, azarosamente, a su abuelo moribundo, quien, al reconocerlo, pierde el habla, sin poder revelar que quien lo atiende es

9. Reynaldo González, *El más humano de los autores*, La Habana, Ediciones Unión, 2009, pp. 209-227.

su nieto. Cuando el joven inicia un romance con su prima hermana, la nana negra decide revelar el secreto, propiciando el reencuentro del joven con su madre biológica.

María Dolores, la niña Elena, Isabel Cristina, Rafael del Junco –el anciano malvado que pierde el habla- y el joven Albertico Limonta se convirtieron en arquetipos de la vida pública cubana bajo el estado de excepción. El tema central de la radionovela, la legitimidad, lograba resonancias políticas bastante explícitas, ya que una buena parte de la trama transcurría durante los estudios universitarios del joven Limonta, quien, contrapuesto al magnate despiadado, Rafael del Junco, funcionaba, en buena medida, como símbolo de la generación revolucionaria cubana. Reynaldo González advierte que, al circular la novela en otros países regidos por dictaduras, como la Venezuela de Pérez Jiménez, la Colombia de Rojas Pinilla, la Nicaragua de Somoza o el Santo Domingo de Trujillo, Albertico Limonta reaparecía como ícono civil de la juventud antiautoritaria.¹⁰

El derecho de nacer reprodujo estereotipos raciales y clasistas, pero también enunciados y símbolos de movilidad social e intervención pública. Desde la ciudad letrada, no faltaron, naturalmente, las críticas al melodrama radial, que era entendido como una señal más de la decadencia de la cultura republicana. Aunque *El derecho de nacer* establecía claras sintonías con el catolicismo conservador, en lo referente a la natalidad, el aborto y los derechos de la mujer, no es menos cierto que ofrecía algunas claves de politización a su audiencia. La composición social de ese público, de esa audiencia, mayoritariamente urbana y de clase media y baja, era la misma que la del sector más identificado con la Revolución, tal y como se deriva del estudio de Marcos Winocur sobre la estructura de clases de los años 50.¹¹

El derecho de nacer rearticuló tópicos centrales de la cultura caribeña y latinoamericana, como la legitimidad, la orfandad o el incesto, que atravesaban toda la tradición literaria de la isla, desde *Cecilia Valdés* de

10. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

11. Marcos Winocur, *Las clases olvidadas en la Revolución Cubana*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Contrapunto, 1979, pp. 21-64.

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Cirilo Villaverde, la más importante ficción fundacional cubana del XIX, hasta *El siglo de las luces* de Alejo Carpentier, una novela que, aunque no referida a la misma sino a la francesa y a la haitiana, se instaló en el corpus narrativo de la Revolución Cubana. El legitimismo filial y sexual de la obra de Félix B. Caignet actuó sobre una esfera pública marcada por el estado de excepción y la ilegitimidad de la dictadura, viabilizando la constitución de sujetos políticos que trascendían el nihilismo republicano a través de nuevos discursos y prácticas revolucionarios.

El público de radioescuchas y televidentes de *El derecho de nacer* era, también, el conjunto de espectadores que se identificaba con el drama de la Revolución. Luego de 1959, ese público aparecerá como otra comunidad, en la que sujetos políticos colocados en las antípodas del nihilismo republicano intentaban la eugenesia moral del “hombre nuevo”. A partir de estudios ya clásicos de George Bataille, Michel Foucault y Jean Luc Nancy, el filósofo italiano Roberto Esposito ha propuesto entender la comunidad como una negación de la subjetividad nihilista y, a la vez, como un organismo social que requiere de cierta inmunización biopolítica para reproducirse. Entre los años 50 y 70 se produce esa transición, por la cual el viejo nihilismo del campo intelectual republicano se transforma en compromiso revolucionario y la nueva comunidad se inmuniza por medio de la guerra civil, es decir, de la localización de una parte enemiga, que la amenaza.¹²

DEL RENACIMIENTO NACIONAL A LA GUERRA CIVIL

Pensadores del derecho moderno, como Hans Kelsen y Herbert L. A. Hart, reconocidos como fuentes teóricas por liberales o marxistas, plantearon el dilema jurídico de las revoluciones como un movimiento en dos tiempos: la fractura de la legitimidad previa y la creación de la nueva legitimidad. Durante el periodo de destrucción del viejo Estado y creación del nuevo, ambos conceptos de legitimidad entran en una

12. Roberto Esposito, *Comunidad, inmunidad y biopolítica*, Madrid, Herder, 2009, pp. 59-78 y 95-108.

confrontación binaria en la que cada uno presenta al otro como ilegítimo. Luego de esta polarización, llega un momento en que la nueva Constitución se impone y “los actos que aparecen en el sentido subjetivo de producir y aplicar normas jurídicas, no son interpretados ya presuponiendo la antigua norma fundante básica, sino la nueva”.¹³

Este proceso de confrontación jurídica se manifiesta en toda revolución –la inglesa, la norteamericana, la francesa o la mexicana-, pero es más intenso y discontinuo en los casos de revoluciones que, como la rusa, la china o la cubana, resuelven el tránsito hacia la nueva legitimidad fuera del paradigma del Estado liberal moderno. En estas últimas revoluciones comunistas, la promulgación y aplicación de la nueva Constitución, que dotará de legitimidad a los nuevos actores políticos, debe apelar a formas centralizadas, plebiscitarias, carismáticas o limitadas de la representación política en las que lo legítimo queda circunscrito a lo estatal y se afirma frente a un conjunto de sujetos ilegítimos, englobados bajo rótulos como “contrarrevolución”, “enemigos del pueblo” o “traidores a la patria”.

El filósofo del Derecho Ulises Schmill ha resumido la diferencia entre los procesos de construcción de legitimidad en ambas familias de revoluciones –las liberales y las comunistas- con la idea de que en las segundas, a diferencia de las primeras, la nueva legitimidad no prescinde nunca de una paralela fabricación simbólica de la ilegitimidad opositora.¹⁴ Esta visión funcional del antagonismo, similar a la descrita por Carl Schmitt en su *Teoría del partisano* (1985), intensifica el proceso de legitimación y lo coloca bajo demandas de afirmación simbólica diferentes a las del Estado liberal o democrático. Al llevar hasta sus últimas consecuencias la premisa coactiva del derecho, el orden revolucionario genera, por decirlo así, una mayor ansiedad de legitimación, inscribiendo su entramado institucional más en el afianzamiento de la *stasis* que en la representación del *demos*.¹⁵

13. Hans Kelsen, *Teoría pura del derecho*, México D.F., UNAM, 1979, p. 219. Ver también H. L. A. Hart, *El concepto del Derecho*, Buenos Aires, Abeledo-Perrot, 1968, p. 103

14. Ulises Schmill, *Las revoluciones. Teoría jurídica y consideraciones sociológicas*, Madrid, Trotta, 2009, pp. 17-19.

15. *Ibid*, pp. 74-76.

Stasis era el concepto que utilizaban los griegos para designar la situación de guerra civil en la *polis* y aparece formulado en *La historia de la guerra del Peloponeso* de Tucídides.¹⁶ La legitimidad revolucionaria, sostiene Schmill, es una continuación simbólica de la guerra civil por medio de las instituciones del nuevo Estado. El principio de beligerancia que le sirve de fundamento demanda, como decíamos, una cobertura ideológica más elaborada e insistente que en el orden democrático. Un elemento de esa cobertura es, precisamente desde Tucídides, la historia de la comunidad, el relato sobre la fundación y el devenir de la *polis*, desde los símbolos del poder constituido.

Bastaría hacer un somero recorrido por los discursos de Fidel Castro, entre 1959 y 1960, para observar la forma en que rápidamente se pasa de una defensa de la legitimidad recuperada, en el sentido que textos como *La historia me absolverá* (1954) y otros documentos del Movimiento 26 de Julio defendían la restauración de la Constitución del 40, a la propuesta de fundación de una nueva legitimidad. Todavía la Ley Fundamental de febrero de 1958, decretada por el presidente Manuel Urrutia, el Primer Ministro, José Miró Cardona, y los demás miembros del primer gobierno revolucionario —al que no pertenecía Fidel Castro— se presentaba como un restablecimiento de la Constitución del 40, aunque en la misma se introducían modificaciones notables como la transferencia del poder legislativo al Consejo de Ministros, con lo cual quedaba prácticamente anulado el gobierno representativo.¹⁷

A pesar de este y otros elementos autoritarios, la Ley Fundamental admitía el pluripartidismo y no decretaba una suspensión de garantías fundamentales —de hecho, establecía que, en ausencia de congreso, el Consejo de Ministros en pleno debía votar el estado de emergencia.¹⁸ Sin embargo, ya desde el verano de 1959, con Fidel Castro como primer ministro y Urrutia fuera de la presidencia, la idea de la Revolución como fuente de derecho comenzó a manejarse públicamente.

16. *Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

17. Leonel Antonio de la Cuesta, *Op. Cit.*, p. 426.

18. *Ibid*, p. 410.

Este desplazamiento produjo que la Constitución del 40 perdiera muy pronto su referencialidad jurídica y que, en consecuencia, la visión histórica del pasado republicano se modificara notablemente. Si todavía en los primeros meses del 59, el antiguo régimen que debía ser negado por la Revolución era la dictadura de Batista, a partir del verano de ese año y, especialmente, de 1960, ese pasado a destruir sería, según los líderes revolucionarios, toda la experiencia republicana de la primera mitad del siglo XX.

Es entonces que la identificación entre el periodo republicano y el estatuto colonial se abre paso en el campo intelectual de la isla, convocando tanto a historiadores como a escritores. Textos de historiadores comunistas, como Sergio Aguirre, o nacionalistas, como Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, fueron entonces profusamente editados o reeditados e incorporados al naciente aparato pedagógico del Estado cubano. Las *Lecciones de historia de Cuba*, del primero, y *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos*, del segundo, fueron reeditados en 1960 y ya para 1963 llevaban más de cuatro reimpressiones. *Las lecciones* de Aguirre fueron adoptadas como un manual de historia comunista y nacionalista por las Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria, institución básica de la radicalización de la cultura política cubana, desde el poder, estudiada por Richard R. Fagen y Antonio Annino.¹⁹

Algunos números de los primeros meses del 60, de *Lunes de Revolución*, el suplemento literario del periódico *Revolución*, que dirigió Guillermo Cabrera Infante, transmiten muy bien la articulación de ese nuevo relato histórico. En el número 48, dedicado a Estados Unidos y América Latina, en el 49, sobre el atentado a La Coubre, en el 54, sobre Panamá, o en el 55, titulado “USA versus USA”, ya es legible una narrativa histórica que presentaba todo el lapso histórico de la República, de 1902 a 1958, como interregno colonial, a la vez que establecía la conexión simbólica del triunfo del 1° de enero de 1959

19. Richard R. Fagen, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 1969, pp. 5-13; Antonio Annino, *Dall'Insurrezione al Regime. Politiche di massa e strategie istituzionali a Cuba. 1953-1965*, Milán, Franco Angeli Editore, 1984, pp. 222-257.

con las gestas separatistas de 1868 y 1895. El mito de una sola revolución, siempre pospuesta por la intervención de Estados Unidos, que alcanzará su formulación más plena en un discurso de Fidel Castro, en 1968, en la celebración del centenario de la primera guerra de independencia, comenzará a escribirse y a difundirse desde aquellos años.²⁰

El papel de los intelectuales, que en su mayoría no habían participado en la insurrección, en el montaje de ese relato fue decisivo. La funcionalidad legitimante del mismo no sólo desplazaba a la Revolución del 33 y a la Constitución del 40 como hitos fundacionales sino que remitía a la nueva Revolución, como fuente de derecho, en la medida que la misma se presentaba como realización de todas las revoluciones frustradas del pasado cubano, es decir, como final feliz de un melodrama secular. La construcción de una nueva comunidad, a partir de ese momento, demandaba una desconexión con las leyes previas y, a la vez, una afirmación simbólica de la pertenencia de la ciudadanía a un proyecto común, cuya justificación política no provenía del derecho sino de la satisfacción de demandas populares y de la unidad defensiva frente al enemigo.

Entre 1959 y 1961 se produjo, pues, un rápido desplazamiento de la reconciliación nacional por la guerra civil. A proyectos colectivos como la Reforma Agraria y las Campañas de Alfabetización, que dotaban de una identidad práctica las premisas ideológicas de la Revolución, se sumó la causa común de la defensa ante el enemigo interno y externo. Es en ese desplazamiento, ya consumado en la primavera de 1961, con la invasión de Bahía de Cochinos, donde puede localizarse el restablecimiento del estado de excepción, sobre otras bases. Un estado de excepción que será mucho más real que el previo, ya que carecía de codificación jurídica propia, toda vez que no era decretado —el gobierno revolucionario, a diferencia de la dictadura de Batista, nunca decretó formalmente la suspensión de garantías constitucionales— y su justificación simbólica estaba garantizada por el respaldo popular a las medidas sociales y económicas del gobierno revolu-

20. William Luis, *Lunas de Revolución. Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana*, Madrid, Verbum, 2003, pp. 76-85.

rio y por el imperativo biopolítico de la supervivencia en la guerra civil.

El nuevo “estado de excepción”, por su naturaleza paralegal, era más ajustable a la teorización de Schmitt y Agamben, toda vez que el soberano no requería de legitimación jurídica para abandonar el marco representativo ni para subordinar el rol judicial del Estado al poder ejecutivo.²¹ La lógica partisana, que esbozó Schmitt, basada en la polaridad amigo-enemigo, tenía, además, a su favor el principio biopolítico de la defensa vital frente la amenaza interna y externa. Es en este sentido que, siguiendo una vez más a Roberto Esposito, podemos reconstruir, en la Cuba de los 60, las representaciones literarias y culturales de la guerra civil como parte de un dispositivo de subjetivación política, por el cual el nihilismo intelectual da paso al compromiso político y la comunidad se inmuniza por medio de la violencia, es decir, se presenta como nueva en la medida en que se enfrenta a una parte maldita o enferma.²²

En la poesía de Nicolás Guillén observamos, por ejemplo, una notable mutación en la imagen de la sangre, que está relacionada con la representación literaria de la guerra civil. En la poesía prerrevolucionaria de Guillén, la sangre aparecía como metáfora de la dependencia económica de Cuba, como sangría de los recursos naturales de la isla. Dentro de esa metaforización, era muy frecuente que la sangre adquiriera una connotación vegetal, como en el famoso “pregón” de *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931): “sangre de mamey sin venas,/ y yo que sin sangre estoy:/ mamey pal que quiera sangre,/ que me voy”.²³ O, más claramente, en la elegía “Mi patria es dulce por fuera” de *El son entero* (1947):

¡Ay, Cuba, si te dijera,

21. Giorgio Agamben, *Estado de excepción. Homo Sacer II*, Valencia, Tre-Textos, 2004, pp. 17-27.

22. Roberto Esposito, *Comunidad, inmunidad y biopolítica*, Madrid, Herder, 2009, pp. 109-122.

23. Nicolás Guillén, *Obra poética. 1920-1972*, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Universidad de Guadalajara, 1978, t. I, p. 117

Yo, que te conozco tanto,
Ay, Cuba, si te dijera,
Que es de sangre tu palmera,
Que es de sangre tu palmera,
Y que tu mar es de llanto!
Bajo tu risa ligera,
Yo, que te conozco tanto,
Miro la sangre y el llanto,
Bajo tu risa ligera.²⁴

La sangre, aun cuando se trate de la sangre del amo o del esclavo, en los poemas sobre la esclavitud de Guillén, casi siempre remite a una sustancia líquida, inmersa en lo vegetal. En “Sudor y látigo”, del mismo cuaderno, la sangre es una voz de los cañaverales, que dialoga con el esclavo, y que lo lleva a la rebelión, en una violenta realización de la dialéctica del amo y el esclavo, formulada por Hegel en *La fenomenología del espíritu*. Al quedar el esclavo bañado por la sangre del amo, luego de la rebelión, se impone un silencio en el cielo que podría ser interpretado como negación del discurso cristiano, que justificaba u ocultaba la institución de la esclavitud. La sangre aparece entonces como una voz vegetal o natural, que logra silenciar la metafísica y la teología:

El viento pasó gritando:

-¡Qué flor negra en cada mano!

La sangre le dijo: ¡vamos!

24. *Ibid*, p. 205.

Él dijo a la sangre: ¡vamos!

Partió en su sangre, descalzo.

El cañaveral, temblando,

Le abrió paso.

Después, el cielo callado,

Y bajo el cielo, el esclavo

Tinto en la sangre del amo

Látigo,

Sudor y látigo,

Tinto en la sangre del amo.²⁵

Es interesante releer este poema de Guillén a partir de la reinterpretación que ha hecho Susan Buck-Morss de la dialéctica del amo y el esclavo como una transferencia y, a la vez, un silenciamiento del referente histórico de la Revolución Haitiana en la estructura de lógica hegeliana.²⁶ El esclavo de Guillén, que habla con la sangre, sigue paso a paso los movimientos de la autoconciencia hegeliana, hasta llegar a su propia liberación: primero articula la sangre como metáfora natural de la dependencia, luego reconoce la sangre como costo del látigo y el sudor, es decir, de la explotación del amo, y finalmente, se baña en la sangre de este, cambia de color y se libera de la esclavitud. Luego del triunfo de la Revolución y, específicamente en el contexto de Playa Girón, Guillén propondrá una resemantización poética de la sangre:

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

26. Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel y Haití. La dialéctica amo-esclavo: una interpretación revolucionaria*, Buenos Aires, Grupo Editorial Norma, 2005, pp. 80-104.

ya no será esta una metáfora vegetal, un símbolo de la dependencia o de la dialéctica amo-esclavo, sino una realidad física, una evidencia tangible de la guerra civil.

El poema “La sangre numerosa”, dedicado al miliciano Eduardo García, será una de las composiciones emblemáticas de la literatura revolucionaria de los años 60 y 70. El miliciano, que cayó ametrallado por uno de los aviones que hostilizaron La Habana antes de la invasión de Bahía de Cochinos, había escrito con su sangre el nombre de Fidel en una pared de la ciudad. Guillén vuelve a descristianizar el sacrificio, al rechazar el “miserere” del salmo 50: “cuando con sangre escribe FIDEL,/ ese soldado que por la Patria muere,/ ni digáis miserere:/ esa sangre es símbolo de la Patria que vive”.²⁷ Más adelante, asocia la escritura con sangre del nombre del líder con el habla política de la nación: “cuando su voz en pena/ lengua para expresarse parece que no halla,/ no digáis que se calla,/ pues en la pura lengua de la Patria resuena”.²⁸ Al identificar el bando revolucionario de la guerra civil con la nación, Guillén desnacionaliza al enemigo, en una operación retórica que veremos aparecer una y otra vez en la literatura de los años 60 y 70. Dicha operación no era más que una proyección textual de la propia ideología oficial, en la cual el enemigo o el opositor eran definidos como “mercenarios” o “bandidos”. En la poesía de Guillén, por ejemplo, el enemigo es siempre un sujeto asimilable a Estados Unidos, el imperio o el “yanqui”, en una sinonimia más cerrada aún que la que comportaba el tratamiento de personajes de su poesía prerrevolucionaria, como el “soldado” o el “marine”, que aparecen en el cuaderno *Cantos para soldados y sones para turistas* (1937).²⁹ A diferencia de estos, el enemigo, el mercenario, el bandido o el contrarrevolucionario era un sujeto totalmente desnacionalizado. De ahí que la inscripción del concepto de guerra civil en esa literatura se volviera ambivalente.

27. Nicolás Guillén, *Op. Cit.*, t. II, p. 130.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, t. I, pp. 159-178.

La dialéctica hegeliana del amo y el esclavo o la tensión entre el ciudadano y el soldado de la República estaban sustentadas por una asimetría —la de la dominación y la resistencia— que en la guerra civil se deshacía, por medio de la pugna simétrica entre los bandos enfrentados. Sin embargo, esa simetría era irrepresentable para la literatura revolucionaria, ya que reconocerla implicaba conceder legitimidad nacional al opositor, rango de par al enemigo. Sin embargo, el fenómeno de la guerra civil era por otro lado ineludible, ya que el enemigo y el opositor, es decir, el contrarrevolucionario, era una presencia necesaria para la legitimación simbólica de la Revolución y para la normalización de su estado de emergencia. Es por ello que algunas aproximaciones a la subjetividad del enemigo, en las que esa simetría de la guerra civil era insinuada o expuesta, como en la pieza de teatro *Los siete contra Tebas* de Antón Arrufat o las narraciones *Los años duros* de Jesús Díaz, *Condenados de Condado* de Norberto Fuentes o *Los pasos sobre la hierba* de Eduardo Heras León, tuvieron una recepción tan adversa entre los sectores más ortodoxos de las élites insulares.

El impulso de visualización social de enemigo, en tanto demanda del proceso de construcción de la nueva legitimidad revolucionaria, es fácilmente documentable entre los años 60 y 70. El enfoque marxista-leninista agregaba al mismo un discurso clínico, desde el punto de vista psicológico y sociológico, que procedía por medio de la localización de aquellos sectores sociales proclives a desarrollar simpatías por el enemigo. Se trataba, de acuerdo con las teorías de la psicología y la sociología soviética de “partes blandas o corruptibles” de la sociedad socialista, cuyos vínculos hereditarios con el antiguo régimen permitían la creación de una quinta columna del enemigo externo dentro de la isla. A medio camino entre la parodia política y la suscripción ideológica, esa discursividad es legible en la escena de *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, la novela de Edmundo Desnoes y el film de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, en la que el narrador lee una tipología social de los mercenarios de Playa Girón, de acuerdo con la teoría marxista de la división del trabajo:

Encontraremos bajo la organización militar de las brigadas invasoras una jerarquía de funciones sociales que sintetiza y compendia la división del trabajo social y moral de la burguesía: el sacerdote, el hombre de la libre empresa, el funcionario diletante, el torturador, el filósofo y los innumerables hijos de buena familia. Cada uno de ellos ejercía una acción específica y, sin embargo, era la totalidad, el grupo quien proporcionaba el sentido a las actitudes individuales.

La finalidad última del pasaje era localizar la “verdad del grupo” en la figura del asesino y el torturador, Calviño, aplicando la tesis marxista de la ideología de clase como falsa conciencia. Hay, por supuesto, una parodia del lenguaje de la ortodoxia marxista, en ese y otros pasajes de *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, pero la representación del enemigo tampoco está ausente. Una representación, que en textos menos irónicos o de función legitimante más literal, como *La batalla de Girón. Razones de una victoria* (1983) de Quintín Pino Machado y las decenas de canciones, pinturas y poemas alegóricos que suscitó aquel episodio, llega a ser caricaturesca. No deja de ser sintomático, sin embargo, que la mejor poesía dedicada a Playa Girón, escrita por el propio Nicolás Guilén o por Fayad Jamís, Roberto Fernández Retamar o Antón Arrufat, en medio de su más o menos transparente servicio de legitimación, recurra a metáforas filiales, de familias divididas, con hermanos peleados a muerte, que son imágenes características de la representación literaria de la guerra civil.³⁰

La construcción de una nueva legitimidad por medio de la literatura y la historia, en las primeras décadas de la Cuba revolucionaria fue un proceso largo e intenso. Tan sólo habría que recordar que la nueva Constitución socialista de la isla no fue aprobada hasta 1976, es decir, diecisiete años después del triunfo revolucionario. Esa prolongación de la codificación jurídica del nuevo orden tuvo implicaciones para el campo intelectual y, específicamente, para la producción literaria e historiográfica, que no deberían ignorarse. Con la Constitución de 1976,

30. En el poema “Playa Girón”, por ejemplo, de Antón Arrufat, se lee: “con mis manos inútiles/ que no saben otra cosa que escribir,/ quisiera recoger vuestras cabezas,/ hermanos míos, compatriotas,/ las cabezas de los que murieron viendo un sol/ diferente,/ las cabezas voladas y deshechas?”. Antón Arrufat, *La huella en la arena*, La Habana, Unión, 2001, p. 361.

texto asentado en la tradición soviética, en el que la normatividad del nuevo Estado se fundamente en instituciones como el partido comunista único, la ideología marxista-leninista y el control estatal sobre la economía, la sociedad civil y los medios de comunicación, ni la guerra civil ni el estado de excepción se normalizaron plenamente.

La inmunización biopolítica de la comunidad, a partir de la representación del enemigo y del mutuo afianzamiento del estado de emergencia y la guerra civil, ha sido una práctica permanente de la vida cultural bajo el socialismo cubano. En los años anteriores a la formalización jurídica del nuevo orden esa experiencia se sumaba a una construcción simbólica de la legitimidad que dejaba muy poco margen de autonomía y neutralidad a los discursos y las prácticas culturales. Esa constitución vertiginosa de sujetos políticos no debería interpretarse, sin embargo, como un proceso que sólo gravitaba de arriba hacia abajo, de acuerdo con las demandas simbólicas del nuevo Estado. El fenómeno revolucionario hizo emerger nuevas subjetividades que, al concurrir en la esfera pública, provocaron una politización de la cultura desde abajo. Es en la intersección de esas dos gravitaciones donde habría que encontrar el legado más vivo de la cultura cubana contemporánea.

7 Young People, Youth Organisations and Mass Participation, 1952–1962

Anne Luke

“En Cuba aún los veteranos actúan en un ritmo joven”
(Benedetti, 1974: 21)

The emergence of the Cuban revolution marked the development of a strong ethos of youth. This paper will argue that a dual radicalism amongst young people—both in terms of participation and status—led to the prominence of youth in 1959. The ensuing high expectations, uncertainty, and excitement for young people will be addressed in this paper by examining the evolution of youth organisations in the first three years of the Revolution, through unity in the first instance, secondly mass participation and finally, with the creation in 1962 of the Union of Young Communists, selectivity. The story of the youth organisations reveals the reasons behind the failure to sustain a mass organisation for young people. It also reveals the levels of uncertainty to which young Cubans were exposed in the early years of the Revolution, as they dealt with their own great expectations of being and

becoming young rebels and young communists within an evolving social revolution.¹

The literature on youth in the Cuban revolution largely concerns participation and mobilisation. Fagen, in his seminal text, *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (1969), explored how, through the building of new institutions and a new leadership, and through a renewed culture and revolutionary discourse, a new form of participation was generated; and how, through this “Cuban man” could be transformed into “revolutionary man” (Fagen, 1969: 2). Fagen recognised the difference, between the Cuban understanding of youth, as an untainted ‘blank slate,’ and Western concepts of youth culture (Fagen, 1969: 145-47). He was perhaps, however, too ready to make the conclusion that the revolutionary Government bought into and successfully managed this ‘blank slate’ youth, to the detriment of exploring the uncertainties of life as a young person in the early years of the Revolution. He did not see young people as playing a part in determining revolutionary definitions of youth. As a result, although Fagen understood the influence of discourse on political culture in reference to youth more than any other commentator, the concepts of uncertainty, continuity and change in the experience of young Cubans were underemphasised in his work. The persuasive notion, that Fagen’s study leans towards, that young people were controlled by the system can be found elsewhere in the literature, but once unpacked reveals itself to be over-simplistic.² On detailed examination of the evidence, studies find more nuanced conclusions, such as Domínguez’s who argues that “important changes [by 1965] occurred *simultaneously* with structural changes and *preceded* government policies designed to change beliefs” (1978: 478; my emphasis).

1. Although such research adds to our understanding of the origins of Cuban communism, this is a path well-travelled (Farber, 1983; Enzenberger, 1976; Goldenberg, 1970); the aim here is instead to elucidate the degrees of uncertainty amongst this mythologized group.

2. Most noticeably Bunck, 1994; see also Baloyra who argues that “Cuban youth bear the brunt of a sustained and systematic effort at socialization in revolutionary values” (1989, 429); to a lesser extent Fernández 1993, although his argument points to the flexibility of the state with regards to youth.

To these interpretations of youth in the Revolution, a more complete assessment can be drawn by adding Kapcia's view that the myth of generations which was dominant in the 1950s (2000: 181-2) was renewed in revolutionary Cuba as the myth of youth (201-2). As well as 'youth' referring to young people, or a life stage, the term 'youth' was acquiring now a mythical quality. With regard to youth organisations in Cuba, that myth has been perpetuated by studies of the Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes (AJR), one of the early youth organisations of the Revolution (Rodríguez, 1989; Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986; Martín Fadrugas, 2009).³ The politics of the first three years of the Revolution show a very different story, challenging the idea in Cuban historiography that the AJR "sirvió como escuela revolucionaria donde se formaron los jóvenes en las ideas marxistas-leninistas, para consolidar así la integración de todos en una sola organización denominada comunista" (Martín Fadrugas, 2009: 46). Under scrutiny, history reveals itself to be rarely as simple, and the lives of young Cubans were much more uncertain in those effervescent early years of the Cuban Revolution. The actual story of the youth organisations indicates a greater continuity from the 1950s, largely via the *Juventud Socialista*, and uncertainties by all youth organisations over the "hows," "whats," and, most importantly, "whos" of a youth politics. The story of the development of the youth organisations, therefore, traces how and why such organisations moved from crisis to crisis and why attempting to create a type of stability in a period of such effervescence was so difficult.

Foundations of Youth Radicalism

The elevation of *los jóvenes* was in part due to the history of radical youth movements in Cuba. The Liga Juvenil Comunista (LJC), which was formed in 1928, was the first example of a radical youth organisation, formed as part of the labour union, the Confederación Nacional

3. Cuba is not alone in mythologizing the 1960s; Townsley, with reference to the USA, calls it the "Sixties Trope" the function of which is "to compress and inscribe historically developed collective understandings in a very short space" (2001:99).

Obrera de Cuba (CNOOC). The LJC was largely clandestine and was not of great importance, except in that it was structurally organised as part of the communist movement (Vizcaíno *et al*, 1987: 4-9). Despite its operations ending in 1938, it served as a model for, and a precursor to, the larger and more significant Juventud Socialista (JS), which was established in 1944 by the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP) (Martín Fadrugas, 1998: 19). The JS took over the magazine *Mella* (named after Julio Antonio Mella, co-founder of the communist party and the Federation of University Students), which was first launched in January 1942 (Martín Fadrugas, 1998:26). Both the organisation and its magazine survived in the 1950s, despite the JS being outlawed (Thomas, 1971: 846).

The youth wing of the PSP was not alone in hosting youth activism in the 1950s. A further facet of 1950s youth activism was through other organisations. The largely student-based Directorio Revolucionario (DR) was founded in 1955 under the leadership of the Federation of University Students (FEU) president José Antonio Echevarría, who was killed during the rebellion and would later become an important revolutionary martyr. It was one of several organisations that young people in the 1950s could join in order to take part in the battle against Batista. Also of significance was the 26th July Movement (M-26-7) (Guzmán, 2002; Martínez Heredia, 2003). Rather than an organisation with a structure such as the JS, the Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud argues that the M-26-7 was itself “una organización política integrada fundamentalmente por jóvenes” (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986: 68n1) thereby effectively defining the whole organisation as youth-oriented. These two organisations were those that dominated the rebellion, and the incorporation of many young people into these added to the radical tradition of young people since Mella.

Despite these radical traditions, in 1959 there was no single dominant youth organisation in Cuba in a position to capitalise on the revolutionary effervescence that characterised the early months of the Revolution. As a result, the task in the early days of the Revolution was towards *unidad* between disparate groups, and it was on this task

that the JS was particularly focused. The JS is surprisingly under-researched in Cuban historiography, with the exception of the pamphlet by Martín Fadrugas (1998). The significance of the JS in 1959 was two-fold. Firstly, it was the only organisation that had a fixed institutional structure, and secondly it had its own publication, *Mella*. The story of the youth organisations reveals the continuity of pre-revolutionary structures, and the tricky business of achieving unity across diverse groupings of young people within this sector of the population which was deemed to be of such transcendental importance.⁴

The Path to *unidad*

As early as April 1959, the JS showed itself to be a confident organisation, keen to play an active part in building the Revolution. The JS Executive Committee sent a letter to all youth organisations in Cuba, which urged the *unidad* of all youth organisations:

Nosotros, los jóvenes socialistas, estamos dispuestos a trabajar con todos ustedes por la integración de un movimiento unido revolucionario de toda la juventud por una especie de confederación revolucionaria de la juventud, en la que estén integradas las organizaciones y movimientos nacionales, las organizaciones y movimientos de sectores: obreros, campesinos y estudiantes y las instituciones de localidades y poblaciones: clubs deportivos y culturales, sociedades etc. (Comité Ejecutivo del JS, 1959: 20).

It is clear from the above that the JS was not attempting to impose a rigid structure on a new unity organisation, and the notion of confederation, which it favoured, is an entirely different structural possibility to integration. But what is also clear is that it saw its role as a broadly cultural, rather than narrowly political, one; the letter went on to say that, as well as supporting the objectives of the Revolution, the movement would serve as a “lucha diaria por las demandas y anhelos juveniles y realización diaria por nosotros mismos de todas aquellas

4. See Luke, A. (2011) for a discussion of the ways in which the notion of youth entered the revolutionary discourse.

cosas que llenan—con el trabajo y la política—la vida del joven: deportes, arte, cultura y recreo” (Comité Ejecutivo del JS, 1959: 21). This idea of an all-inclusive youth movement contrasted with the original aims of the AJR (discussed below), and showed that the JS in 1959 had a clear sense of strategy and destiny, despite the fact that Castro was yet to decree that the Revolution would be socialist in nature.

Calling for unity, however, was a long way from achieving that unity, and some of the leaders of the M-26-7 rejected the letter and the idea of a merger of youth organisations (Calcines, *Mella*, 02/05/59:12-13). It should not necessarily be inferred from this that a power struggle was taking place, but it does indicate that talk and action on unity had not yet converged. In July the JS reasserted its heroic legacy, by adding a strapline to the contents page of its magazine reading: “80 ediciones bajo la tiranía. Fundado en 1944” (*Mella*, 1959a: 3) and by summarising the activity of the Juventud Cívica Unida, the nascent unity organisation of youth.⁵

With this assertion of its authority, the JS shifted away from *unidad* in the sense of integration or confederation, replaced it by the discourse of *vanguardia*. In September 1959, the JS held a plenary meeting at Yaguajay in Sancti Spíritus province, at which it was clear that the JS was asserting itself as an organisation of vanguard youth responsible for directing other young people:

¡Luchemos por estrechar, cada vez más, las filas de toda la juventud en el combate por defender a nuestra revolución y hacerla avanzar! Los jóvenes socialistas deben ser vanguardia en aplicar estas orientaciones, en divulgarlas, y luchar por su ejecución (Editorial, *Mella*, 1959b: 25).

This was endorsed by PSP President Juan Marinello, who stated that “[l]a JS debe ser en estos momentos la vanguardia de la lucha de la acción constructiva, de la unidad indispensable” (Marinello, 1959: 15).

5. It appears that this organisation petered out as new initiatives overtook it.

A further JS Plenary was held in Santiago in November 1959. At this, another call to Cuban youth was made, which this time read:

Los Jóvenes Socialistas, junto a nuestros hermanos del “26 de Julio”, del Directorio Revolucionario, etc., alzan a la vanguardia de la juventud cubana, los principios y los hechos revolucionarios que están transformados, ya, a nuestra amada Patria. [...] La unidad es hoy más vital que nunca antes (*Mella*, 1960a: 48-49).

This indicates how the principles of *unidad* and *vanguardia* had now fused. This was the first joint declaration with other youth organisations, except for the AJR which was in its infancy at this time (see below). However, the JS made sure it asserted its identity by also promoting its logo, showing a star containing an image of Julio Antonio Mella in the centre (*Mella*, 1960b: 46).⁶ Shortly afterwards, the pages of *Mella* were opened to contributors who were not members of the JS, notably Rolando López del Amo and Alfredo Calvo, with the aim of making the magazine of, and for, all young Cubans (*Mella*, 1960c: 27). Nevertheless, the editor continued to be Isidoro Malmierca, Secretary and later President of the JS (Gómez, 2003a: 1).

In the lead-up to its 4th National Congress in April 1960, the JS was keen to place itself in a strong position. Its President, Ramón Calcines, emphasised the unique nature of the JS:

Como todos sabemos, la Juventud Socialista, es la única organización política juvenil que existe en nuestro país. El 26 de Julio y el Directorio Revolucionario, por ejemplo, son organizaciones revolucionarios con gran cantidad de jóvenes en sus filas, pero de carácter general, es decir, no específicamente juveniles. [...] Podemos decir con orgullo, que este será el Congreso de la única organización política que emergió de la clandestinidad con vida y con honor y la gloria de haber contribuido con su esfuerzo al derrocamiento del sangriento régimen batistiano (Calcines *in* Escalante, 1960: 28).

This re-assertion of the role of the JS in the history of the 1950s rebellion was part of the larger struggle for dominance by a commu-

6. This would become the emblem of the UJC.

nist movement which was suffering from the reluctance, in the early years of the rebellion, to be involved with the M-26-7.⁷ Furthermore, this was the moment at which a new youth organisation, the AJR, was gaining ground which had much more intimate links to the 1950s than the JS.⁸ The JS, as expressed in Calcines' position, was keen to assert itself as the only *political* organisation, which, at a time when Cuba's search for a new political system was under way, would raise the profile of the JS, and furthermore attract young people who were politically motivated.

The JS Congress of April 1960 itself marked an important—and perhaps extraordinary—moment in the history of youth organisations in Cuba. Participating alongside JS members and leaders were guests from the M-26-7, the DR and the AJR, as well as smaller organisations, and the opening was presided over by PSP dignitaries Aníbal Escalante (Executive Secretary) and Juan Marinello (President) (*Mella*, 1960f: 21). The key outcome of the Congress was the promise to dissolve the JS when a single youth revolutionary youth organisation could be formed (*Mella*, 1960d: 18). Given the radical history, the demands for unity and the attempts to situate itself as *the* youth organisation, on the part of the JS, this seems an astonishing declaration. Farber's explanation is that “undoubtedly the leadership of the Socialist Youth would have been extremely influential, if not the controlling force, in any such united organization” (1983: 70). The decision is celebrated in Cuban historiography: Rodríguez points out that the decision “demuestra la madurez política de esta organización y la confianza que en ella tenían los dirigentes revolucionarios” (Rodríguez, 1989: 27). Martín Fadrugas writes that “[e]sta decisión convirtió a dicho congreso en uno de los actos más trascendentales y el gesto más bello de la vida de una organización política” (Martín Fadrugas,

7. Kacpia writes that “before 1958 the party had viewed Castro's rebellion with suspicious distance, at best, and, at worst, outright hostility” (2000: 117).

8. It is important not to overstate this potential ‘threat’ - the AJR was primarily established for the specific purpose of educating or finding employment for young people who had neither; its aims could thereby be complementary to those of the JS. That said, being an organ of the Ejército Rebelde, the AJR clearly had a closer link to the *Sierra* than the JS.

1998: 80). It was not clear at this stage what form the single organisation would take, and after the Congress, the work on this began.

A subsidiary resolution of the Congress was that the JS's constituency should be persuaded to join the *Milicias Revolucionarias* created in October 1959, stipulating in its *llamamiento* to young people that “[l]a juventud tiene el deber ineludible de aprender el manejo de las armas y de formar parte masivamente, de las milicias populares” (*Mella*, 1960e: 20). The JS was encouraging its members to undertake activities which were the responsibility of the AJR, and shows the first stage of the merger which had been planned at the conference. The JS was moving away from being solely a political organisation to one with a broader remit. The JS also encouraged its members to join the *Brigadas Juveniles de Trabajo Voluntario*, an initiative of the AJR (*Mella*, 1960g: 2), describing the AJR as follows:

Esta organización que dirige el Gobierno Revolucionario está orientada a agrupar en su seno a toda la juventud sana de nuestra patria, para educarla en el trabajo tan necesario para que crecer nuestra nación y para que la revolución pueda alcanzar todos sus objetivos (*Mella*, 1960h: 27).

By expanding its scope in this way, the JS was allowing its members to develop a closer link with the evolving aims of the Revolution. This organisation of essentially politically motivated young people, was asking its membership to shift its radical activities from the narrowly political to the broadly participatory. This helped pave the way for the JS to merge with the AJR.

So, where had this AJR come from, and why was its rise so monumental? The AJR had come into existence and increased in importance in the months leading up to the JS Congress of April 1960, although it was not until the subsequent months that it gained enough prestige to give its name to the new unified youth organisation. Its creation was first proposed in a document of 30th August 1959 (Rodríguez, 1989: 8-11). This document was published by the Departamento de Instrucción del Ejército Rebelde, and the *rebelde* ethos of the new organisation, in line with the discourse of heroification of the rural/

peasant/guerrilla, was indicated in its proposed programme, which included organisation into brigades, marching exercises and sports programmes, but also exchanges between young people from the *campo* [countryside] and the *llano* [city] (Rodríguez, 1989: 8-9). The glorification of the *campo* was a part of the rebel ethos and, in line with this ethos, the first tasks in the list of those to be fulfilled by the AJR were to help with agrarian reform and *alfabetización* (Rodríguez, 1989: 8-9). The new organisation was intimately linking itself to the early aims and objectives of the Revolution. In this sense it was a more useful organisation than the JS, possessing a clearer vision of what it could do, and making it attractive to young people who wished to express their support for the Revolution.

The official public launch of the AJR took place on 28th January 1960, although it already counted 7,000 members at that date (Rodríguez, 1989: 22). This was a high profile event to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of Martí, as well as marking ten years since the first major march against Batista. During the event, Che Guevara gave a speech extolling the virtues of young *Sierra* hero Commandante Joel Iglesias, who would be placed at the helm of the new organisation.⁹ The organisation became active with the formation of the brigades, (which were named after the recently deceased hero of the *Sierra*, Camilo Cienfuegos), which Castro in a television appearance in May 1960 encouraged young people to join. In this appearance, the aims of the organisation were elaborated more clearly by Castro, who stated that the idea of the AJR was:

la de organizar, bajo los auspicios del Ejército Rebelde, todos esos muchachos de familias humildes, que no van a la escuela porque por la edad ya no tuvieron oportunidad de ir a un centro de segunda enseñanza, que no tienen trabajo, que andan mal vestidos, mal alimentados, que son un problema y preocupación para la familia (Castro, 17/05/60, reprinted in Rodríguez, 1989: 53).

9. See Luke, A. (2011) for a discussion of the elevation of Iglesias to hero figure in the evolving ethos of youth.

The constituency of the AJR, according to Castro, was the young under-educated or unemployed, and the location of training would be the Sierra Maestra. In the letter accompanying the *Solicitud de Ingreso*, dated 20th May 1960, Castro's TV appearance was cited, and the aims, terms and conditions of the brigade to which entry was being solicited were clearly expounded:

Miles de jóvenes deben ir a las sierras a trabajar en al reforestación, en la construcción de escuelas, hospitales, caminos, etc. Recibirán instrucción, adiestramiento militar, alimentación, ropas y todo lo necesario para vivir (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986: 167).

At this stage, the AJR was an organisation dominated by the ideology of the Rebel Army and the aims of the early Revolution, and it was shortly after this (in June of 1960) that the JS urged its members to join the AJR brigades. In supporting the AJR both in thought and deed, the JS was actually altering the former's support base. This was reflected in the expanding role that the AJR came to play, although even at this stage it was not certain that the AJR would become the single unity youth organisation. The early days of the AJR were dominated by the work of the brigades, with young people undergoing military style training in the Sierra Maestra.¹⁰ One of the rites of passage of entry to the brigade was that the member should climb the Pico Turquino five times over a three month period,¹¹ living the life of the guerrillas. This was seen as a "prueba de tesón, preparación física y formación revolucionaria" (Gómez, 2003b: 19). The brigades were each made up of 100 young men, and the leadership of each comprised a *jefe* (Chief) and *segundo jefe* (Second in Command), who were members of the Ejército Rebelde, and a *maestro adoctrinador* (Political Commissar). Almost all Political Commissars were members of the JS (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986: 31), which is not surprising because the JS had a long history as a youth organisation of incorporating political training, and so possessed the personnel to fulfil the

10. For young Cuban women, the Centro Clodimira, a school for underprivileged girls teaching transferable skills was established (*INRA*, 1961: 34-41).

11. More than 20,000 young Cubans underwent this challenge (Quintela, 1962: 31).

role of young teachers. The brigades demonstrated how the two organisations could work together, despite the fact that the AJR housed some anti-communist elements (Martín Fadrugas, 2009:66).

From 21st to 24th October 1960 the AJR held its first National Plenary. At this meeting the AJR became independent of the Ejército Rebelde (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986: 63) and became the main youth organisation. All youth organisations were incorporated, with the exception of the FEU. Central to membership of the AJR was compulsory participation in the Brigadas and the Milicias Revolucionarias. The JS held to its promise made in its April Congress to dissolve itself and to send its members to the AJR. JS President Malmierca made a speech at the plenary outlining and justifying this intent:

Cuando llamamos a todos los jóvenes socialistas a incorporarse a la Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes, cuando anunciamos la determinación de disolver nuestra organización, lo hacemos conscientes de que la AJR es ya, y lo será más cada día, una organización capaz de ocupar la vanguardia de la juventud en la lucha por impulsar las tareas de la revolución (Malmierca, 1960a: 15).

This is an interesting statement, because Malmierca was asserting the *vanguard* nature of young members, a position carried over from the Yaguayay meeting of October 1959, while also associating himself with the revolutionary nature of the AJR, even to the extent of incorporating the language of *lucha*. The Plenary did not set out with absolute clarity the terms of the transfer from JS to AJR, and so Malmierca afterwards wrote an open letter to Joel Iglesias urging the latter to continue publishing *Mella* (Malmierca 1960b: 33). By the following edition, *Mella* had become the *Organo de la AJR*, under the editorship of one of the AJR leaders, Fernando Ravelo, and with an expanded editorial board including Malmierca, but also including Ricardo Alarcón of the FEU (*Mella*, 1960i: 15).

The aim of *unidad* had been finally achieved with apparent ease and speed, although, as the above shows, it had in fact taken eighteen

months and the creation of a new organisation. While the above passage has examined the internal developments of the organisations in question, and in particular of the JS, one of the exogenous problems that the organisations faced concerned the broader reorganisation of politics in revolutionary Cuba, and the move to socialism and subsequently Marxism-Leninism. In 1959 it was by no means clear what role the PSP, the parent organisation of the JS, would play, and consequently the politicking between and within existing youth organisations did not take place in a vacuum. The implication of this search—or even struggle—for identity meant an uncertain environment for young people. Many young people were eager to support the Revolution but the question of how they should do this, given two organisations with very different cultures, plagued youth activism. The AJR, as the unity organisation of youth, had the task of bridging these two cultures. Thus far we have examined the politics of how this came about, but it is worth taking a step back to think about the membership—young people who had joined the AJR to work and climb the Pico Turquino—who now found themselves in an organisation with a more political function, and young members of the JS, who saw themselves as an enlightened vanguard, but who now found themselves expected to join militias and work brigades. The question of whether the unity youth organisation could be both a mass organisation promoting broad revolutionary participationism *and* a vanguard political organisation would plague the existence of the newly merged AJR.

The Triumph of *vanguardia*

The early months of the AJR as unity organisation appear as be a catalogue of successes, in terms of recruitment to the Literacy Campaign and the Militias, an increased contact with youth groups in the Communist bloc and eulogistic articles in *Mella* magazine about young people in communist countries (*Mella*, 1961a: 26-29; Soto and Casanova, 1961: 24-27; *Mella*, 1961b: 3-5), and in terms of leisure and sport. Broadly speaking, the AJR was attempting to fulfil its aim to be the

organisation of all youth; its magazine circulation in 1961 was at 100,000, rising to 150,000 and its membership had risen to 100,000 in early 1962 (Domínguez, 1978: 321).

Despite these obvious successes, there was evidence that the AJR was failing capitalize on its own success. Rodríguez described the trajectory of the AJR as follows:

Fueron las primeras experiencias que, a la luz de hoy, se nos presentan con la natural inmadurez y lógicas imperfecciones de que se hace por primera vez, pero no por ello dejan de ser valiosas (Rodríguez, 1989: 5).

One explanation for Rodríguez's tentative criticism of the AJR is that, until its October 1960 plenary, the organisational structure of the AJR had been uncertain, and only at the plenary did its remit become clear and its independence from the Ejército Rebelde become established. Nonetheless, in October 1961 it suffered serious criticism from PSP leader Blas Roca about its organisational fragility, and about problems within its membership:

El problema principal que tiene la Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes es el de organizarse en la base, el de constituir fuertes y eficientes comités municipales, el de agrupar a cada joven en alguna institución de base, de modo que se acaben los miembros sueltos, los afiliados sin organización, los que se llaman Jóvenes Rebeldes, sin estar sujetos a ningún control, a ninguna disciplina, a ninguna responsabilidad.

La situación permite que individuos aislados, muchachos sin ninguna preparación ideológica, revolucionaria ni política y elementos anarquizantes que confunda la revolución con la indisciplina y la malacrianza hagan muchas cosas inadecuadas y erróneas que comprometen el nombre de la Asociación de Jóvenes Rebeldes (Blas Roca, 1961: 24-25).

He went on to cite the youthful tendency towards *extremismo izquierdista*, and criticised the AJR for adopting the motto *Izquierda, Izquierda, siempre Izquierda* in favour of slogans that referred, for example, to *Estudio* or *Unidad* (Blas Roca, 1961: 27). The criticism by Blas Roca is directed at both those young people coming from the *rebelde* and/or non-political background, and those from the JS background. And yet

this criticism was directed at a body of young people who were central to the revolutionary initiatives at the time.

This criticism was reiterated by Castro in an important speech directed at young people in preparation for the 1962 youth congress. The *Revolución* headline on 14th March 1962, reporting this speech, read “Hay que crear en la juventud un mayor espíritu comunista” (*Revolución*, 1962b: 1). The criticism of Cuban youth in this speech was implicit except in Castro’s explicit criticism of youth leader (and *Sierra* hero) Capitán Fernando Ravelo. The latter was criticised for, in a eulogy to revolutionary martyr Echevarría, leaving out the section of the eulogy that referred to the latter’s Catholicism, leading Castro to accuse Ravelo of *sectarismo*.¹² Ravelo was held up as an example of what was wrong with the youth organisation, when Castro stated:

¿Qué juventud?, ¿Acaso una juventud que simplemente se concreta a oír y repetir? ¡No, queremos una juventud que piense, que aprenda por sí mismo a ser revolucionaria, que se convenza a sí misma, que desarrolle plenamente su pensamiento, y esta juventud tiene todas las condiciones para lograrlo! (Castro, 1962: 1).

On 20th March 1962, Blas Roca reiterated this criticism after Ravelo admitted his ‘error’ of *sectarismo*:

La denuncia que hizo Fidel del error y el reconocimiento público que hizo Ravelo de su responsabilidad, contribuirán grandemente a contrarrestar la influencia del sectarismo, del subjetivismo y del extremismo izquierdista en las filas de la juventud en general y de la AJR y del movimiento estudiantil en particular (Blas Roca, 1962: 2).

These criticisms explain the decision to make substantial changes in the organisation. These changes were announced by AJR president Joel Iglesias in a television show at the beginning of March:

[D]ijo que la AJR es la juventud de las ORI y terminó, recordando que Fidel apuntó el vínculo de los jóvenes rebeldes con las ORI, señalando

12. This speech is important in the broader context of the Revolution as it effectively marks the onset of the ‘Escalante affair’. The accusation of *sectarismo* was made towards Aníbal Escalante shortly afterwards, in a speech on 27th March (Thomas, 1971: 1379)

el papel de vanguardia que les tocará tomar a los jóvenes rebeldes para dirigir en el futuro los destinos de nuestra Patria Socialista (*Revolución*, 1962a: 6).

Clearly, in situating the AJR as the youth wing of the ORI, Iglesias was indicating a change in its orientation away from an independent youth organisation, and by incorporating the concept of the *vanguardia*, the AJR was moving away from its roots as a mass youth organisation, and closer to the JS position, showing the enduring influence of the latter in the unity organisation, given that the word *vanguardia* had not been used by the AJR prior to the merger. This position was corroborated by the invitation to members of the AJR to the April 1962 Congress, in which it was stated:

Nuestro Congreso adoptará los Estatutos que regirán la nueva vida de nuestra organización [...] con los cuales, nuestra organización por sus ideas y por su acción se convierta en la organización marxista-leninista de la juventud cubana, en la organización juvenil del futuro Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista (Centro de Estudios sobre la Juventud, 1986: 134-35).

The Congress of April 1962 was a high profile event, which received daily coverage in one form or another in the national press on the days preceding its opening (daily papers *Revolución* and *Noticias de Hoy*).¹³ It was opened by President Dorticós on 30th March and closed in a mass event in the Parque Latinoamericano Stadium in Havana presided over by Fidel Castro on 4th April. The Congress was attended by 596 AJR members from across Cuba, as well as 52 representatives of other youth organisations (*Noticias de Hoy*, 1962a: 1) from 26 countries (*Revolución*, 1962c: 12). *Mella* was produced daily during the Congress to keep the delegates informed of events and developments. Ten committees were established to discuss all aspects of the role of young people.¹⁴

13. As an example, on the 28th March *Revolución* ran a story about the lead-up to the Congress in the Oriente province on the front page, which was an identical story, with just a few words changed, to that which had been run two days previously on page 5. This may have been simple editorial error, but it certainly indicates the rising profile of AJR stories within the newspaper.

During the Congress, the criticism formerly directed at the AJR by Blas Roca and ‘confessed’ by Fernando Ravelo was effectively internalised, in a statement of *autocrítica* [*self-criticism*] by the National Committee of the AJR. This was subtly different from Blas Roca’s criticism and Ravelo’s ‘confession’, in that it accused itself of over-confidence and complacency:

ha comenzado a manifestarse en nosotros, un espíritu de conformidad con las tareas realizadas y ha comenzado a ver solamente lo positivo. Este auto-elogio, nos ha ido matando el espíritu auto-crítico y nos íbamos convirtiendo en críticos de los demás, pero no en críticos de nosotros mismos, de nuestra labor, de la labor de nuestro Organismo, de nuestra provincia, de nuestra Organización, se encontraban manifestaciones que al matar el espíritu crítico igualmente mataban el trabajo colectivo (*Revolución*, 1962d: 5).

Although most of the Congress was positive and forward-looking in terms of the role of youth in the Revolution, it is clear from the above that one function of the Congress was to deal with the deficiencies into which the AJR appeared to have fallen.

The Congress gave birth to a new organisation, the UJC, quite different in scope and character to the AJR, but to which, nevertheless, the AJR would send all its 80,000 members, (Rivero, 1962: 48) and transfer *Mella*, with a circulation of 300,000 (Rivero, 1962: 49). The AJR was renamed the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas and new statutes for the UJC were approved. The statutes stated that the UJC, while being structurally independent, would serve as the youth organisation of the successor of the ORI, the United Party of the Socialist Revolution (PURS). Most significantly, the UJC was to be a *selective* organisation. Adolfo Rivero wrote, with some contradiction that: “si la UJC es en cierto sentido una organización de masas, no es menos cierto que, al mismo tiempo, es una organización afín a la vanguardia política de la clase obrera” (Rivero, 1962: 49). Clearly only in the utopian vision of the mass of Cuban youth occupying the vanguard position in soci-

14. These were: agricultural production, industrial production, secondary students, universities, sport, work with children, culture, organisation, propaganda and revolutionary instruction (*Revolución*, 1962d: 5)

ety could the organisation be both mass and vanguard at the same time. Although the ideal portrait of youth drawn in the discourse of the Revolution implied that this *could* or should be the case, the reality, particularly bearing in mind the criticisms levelled at the AJR by the revolutionary leadership, was far from this ideal, and the new entry criteria would severely limit the numbers of members and *aspirantes*.¹⁵ The relationship between the organisation and young people evolved into one where the UJC had a crucial mobilisation role in order to make a success of the many revolutionary tasks for which it was deemed to be responsible. It was not until this moment, when the youth organisation became a firmly vanguard organisation, that there was any certainty about what the new hybrid culture of youth organisation would look like. The emergence of a vanguard role for the organisation, however, would exclude those young people neither studying nor working, towards whom the AJR had been originally directed.

The UJC statutes stipulated that anyone between the ages of 14 and 27 who demonstrated a vanguard attitude to study, work, and defence, accepted the revolutionary programme for the construction of socialism, and agreed to carry out the aims of the UJC could apply for membership. Each application had to be backed by the signatures of two existing members of the UJC or one member of PURS (Rivero, 1962: 51). The new organisation in fact had more in common with the JS than the AJR, given the reestablishment of the concept of the vanguard, and even adopting a logo adapted from the JS logo, rather than that of the AJR.¹⁶ The top level organisation of the UJC would be the biennial National Congress which would elect an executive to run the Union in the interim years (Rivero, 1962: 52).¹⁷ It is significant that the new youth organisation was given the denomination 'communist' long

15. An *aspirante* was an applicant who was going through the pre-membership preparation period at the end of which decision on full membership could be conferred.

16. In another important change at the congress, the Unión de Pioneros Rebeldes (UPR) was renamed Unión de Pioneros de Cuba (UPC) (*Revolución*, 1962c: 4) and put under the control of UJC (*Noticias de Hoy*, 1962b: 3).

17. However, the second National Congress did not happen until 1972.

before the parent party was named as such (in 1965). He expanded this point later in the speech saying that a young communist must “ser un ejemplo vivo, ser el espejo donde se miren los compañeros que no pertenezcan a las juventudes comunistas, ser el ejemplo donde puedan mirarse los hombres y mujeres de edad más avanzada que han perdido cierto entusiasmo juvenil” (Guevara, 1967: 364).

In theory, the changes should have strengthened the organisation, as its mission was now much clearer; in spite of this, the UJC did not have an easy birth. Over the next two years, the UJC expanded in scope while sharply reducing in membership numbers. From the 80,000 members at its inception, by May 1964 membership had fallen to 29,508 (Martín, 1964: 50). In its first two years, it had a difficult relationship with the ORI (later PURS) which led, in 1964, to the UJC Secretary-General bitterly complaining about the role of the PURS:

[E]l papel de dirección del Partido debe estar libre de dos tendencias. [...] En primer lugar, la tendencia al *paternalismo*, que se expresa en la subestimación del grado de madurez de los jóvenes. Esta tendencia conduce a frenar la iniciativa de la organización, a impedir su desarrollo normal, y a hacer depender toda su vida y actitud de “lo que diga el Partido”. La segunda tendencia [...] consiste en no prestarle ninguna atención ni ayuda a la UJC, en dejarla sola, en no preocuparse por sus problemas, ni ayudarla a vencer sus dificultades (Martín, 1964: 68).

Metaphorically, the UJC was an organisation in its adolescence (after all, had a fairly established “childhood” having inherited the radical tradition of the JS founded in 1944), but was being treated, by the PURS, as a child.

Concluding remarks

Hochschild wrote that “Young people in Cuba [...] are celebrated as a ‘chosen people’” (1970: 57). Being a chosen people is not easy. In the first three years of the revolution, political changes were taking place, as one Cuban (young at the time) put it, at a “velocidad vertiginosa” (Remigio Ruiz Vergara *in* Martín Fadrugas, 2009: 66). The attempt to

merge the rebel ethos with the communist ethos in the youth organisation, while at the same time garnering the power of youth popular participation, was a rocky road. Criticism from outside and self-criticism from within added to the uncertainty of a youth organisation which was working towards the forming of a new identity. With the decision to make the youth organisation highly selective (and political rather than broadly cultural), the question of which young people were counted within that “chosen people” arose. Youth as a mass movement became atomised into multiple different initiatives, and *los jóvenes* continued to exist as a united force in the discourse, rather than the organisational reality, of the Revolution.

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8 La encrucijada histórica de los años 50 en Cuba: Revolución o Reforma

Jorge Renato Ibarra Guitart

El resultado último de una etapa histórica donde prevaleció una alternativa específica no nos puede conducir a desestimar las otras posibilidades polivalentes de la realidad histórica que preceden al desenlace definitivo de un acontecimiento determinado. No podemos concebir el escenario histórico de los años 50 en Cuba con solo reproducir la gesta epopéyica de la lucha armada contra la dictadura batistiana. Es necesario analizar las otras posibilidades que dieron origen a ese resultado final. Según el analista Iván Kovalchenko: “Lo alternativo en el desarrollo sociohistórico es la lucha que se libra en la realidad por variantes sustancialmente distintas de futuro.”¹

La alternativa reformista, tanto como la alternativa revolucionaria, formó parte del conjunto variado de posibilidades políticas que se presentaron como solución a la crisis política cubana. Si bien la socie-

1. Iván Kovalchenko: “Problemas de la alternativa en el desarrollo histórico”. En: *Las revoluciones y reformas en la historia universal*. Redacción “Ciencias sociales contemporáneas” Editorial “Nauka”, Moscú, 1990, p.40.

dad que se conformó en la isla demandaba reformas pendientes de ejecutar desde los años 30, el golpe de Estado del 10 de marzo de 1952 agudizó las contradicciones al interior de esta.

LA RUPTURA

El golpe de Estado del 10 de marzo de 1952 le abrió de nuevo las puertas del poder a Fulgencio Batista. El jerarca militar confiaba en que podía enmascarar su cuartelazo bajo una cortina de humo propagandística: se trataba de una “Revolución democrática” que devolvería el orden a las instituciones republicanas aquejadas de una profunda crisis.

De esta manera Batista asumía la dirección del país presentando credenciales de “hombre fuerte”, capaz no sólo de contener la anarquía presente en los poderes públicos por la mala gestión de los gobiernos dirigidos por el Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico) sino también de enfrentar las manifestaciones de inconformismo y radicalidad de los sectores populares. A ello debemos agregar que la propuesta de los golpistas encajaba en los modelos de gobierno estimulados por los Estados Unidos en América Latina, las dictaduras estaban a la orden del día.

Sólo mediante las armas Batista y su cohorte de militares y políticos podían hacerse del poder. La escuálida agrupación política que entonces dirigía el tristemente célebre caudillo, denominada Partido Acción Unitaria (PAU), no tenía posibilidad alguna de poder triunfar en las elecciones que se habían convocado para ese año. Ahora bien, aunque el grupo social dominante, la oligarquía cubana, podía conformarse con un nuevo Presidente apoyado por el ejército, el problema de su ilegitimidad y falta de consenso público constituía una limitante importante al ejercicio del poder.

Un gobierno que rompía con las normas jurídicas que se había dado el país y que entronizaba un régimen de fuerza no podía lograr una adecuada concertación nacional.

La maniobra de Batista no pudo ser contrarrestada por los partidos tradicionales. Estos no se propusieron articular un frente amplio de resistencia activa al golpe de Estado, temían darle participación plena al pueblo en el combate político contra la dictadura. Los inútiles llamados a la reconciliación y al entendimiento de los líderes de la oposición oficial dejaron claro que a la dictadura no se le podía impresionar con simples apelaciones a la conciencia cívica.

Sin embargo, el 26 de Julio de 1953 se abrió una nueva etapa en la historia de Cuba. Ese día un grupo de valerosos jóvenes dirigidos por Fidel Castro, decidió asaltar los cuarteles Moncada y Carlos Manuel de Céspedes en la antigua provincia de Oriente. La nueva vanguardia revolucionaria se había conformado tras un proceso de maduración política, en las filas de la juventud ortodoxa combatiendo a los gobiernos auténticos y en largas jornadas conspirativas contra el régimen golpista del 10 de marzo.

Se había puesto en evidencia que se iniciaba un proceso de ruptura política entre los partidos tradicionales de oposición y las nuevas organizaciones revolucionarias emergentes. Estas últimas proponían nuevas tácticas de resistencia al régimen dictatorial y tomaban distancia de los fundamentos del sistema dependiente hacia los Estados Unidos. La división se hacía evidente no sólo en métodos de lucha y estrategias políticas, también resaltaban las diferencias generacionales. La masa de jóvenes sin destino social adecuado apostaron a la rebelión sin que los partidos tradicionales pudieran conducirla a reedificar su futuro dentro del orden social vigente, a pesar de sus esfuerzos en esa dirección.

Una Etapa de Definiciones

La etapa que transcurre entre el asalto al cuartel Moncada y el desembarco del Granma, quiero decir, entre el primer intento de insurreccionar el país y el reinicio de la gesta libertaria, es muy importante desde todo punto de vista. Durante esos años se definieron las alternativas de solución a la problemática social cubana. Por un lado,

quedó demostrada la incapacidad del régimen golpista de ejercer el gobierno de la República con el consenso de la mayor parte de los sectores, partidos e instituciones representativas de la nación. Además se profundizó la crisis política de los partidos tradicionales que quedaron desacreditados ante la opinión pública por sus continuos fracasos en la búsqueda de una solución pacífica al conflicto político cubano y por último se consolidó la alternativa revolucionaria como solución de fondo a los problemas de la sociedad neocolonial. Aunque esos fueron los resultados más generales de ese período, cabe señalar que estos cambios constituyeron parte de un proceso paulatino de reajustes institucionales, desarrollo de diversas tácticas políticas y despliegue de las fuerzas revolucionarias. Se trataba de la batalla por conquistar la hegemonía política en medio de una encarnizada lucha de ideas en ese período histórico incierto. La fuerza política que respondiera a plenitud con las demandas de la sociedad y que pudiera atraer el consenso espontáneo de los cubanos, estaría en condiciones de dictar el destino de la futura nación. Estaba el país en la batalla de un presente neblinoso por un futuro despejado.

Las fuerzas revolucionarias que se preparaban para emerger y tomar el poder político, estaban conscientes de que era necesario desartar un movimiento de masas que se convirtiese en sostén operativo de una insurrección popular. Era la única forma de detener las maniobras del régimen para legitimar el golpe de Estado y de sobreponerse a las campañas que encabezaban los líderes de los partidos tradicionales para retomar el poder.

Fidel Castro, con la mirada puesta en movilizar la conciencia de los cubanos, desde una oscura celda solitaria en el Reclusorio de Isla de Pinos, se dio a la tarea de redactar un documento trascendental, se trataba de “La Historia me Absolverá”. En carta del 17 de abril de 1954 a Melba Hernández señalaba que preparaba: “un folleto de importancia decisiva por su contenido ideológico y sus tremendas acusaciones al que quiero le prestes el mayor interés”.²

2. Mario Mencía: *La Prisión fecunda*. Ed. Política. La Habana, 1980, p.126.

Fidel comprendió que los moncadistas en presidio debían participar en la batalla por ganar un espacio en la sociedad cubana y que la propaganda revestía especial importancia. En carta de 18 de junio de 1954 señalaba: “sin propaganda no hay movimiento de masas y sin movimiento de masas no hay revolución posible”.³

Mientras, altos líderes radicales encendían la llama revolucionaria. Tras los hechos del Moncada, José Antonio Echeverría se entregó a la tarea de alcanzar la dirección de la Federación Estudiantado Universitario (FEU). Consideraba que desde esa posición podía movilizar al estudiantado y al conjunto de la sociedad cubana hacia una lucha frontal contra la dictadura batistiana.

Por otro lado los personeros del gobierno se aferraban a su empeño de disfrazar la cruenta tiranía que padecía el país convocando a elecciones espúreas el 1° de noviembre de 1954, aspirando al poder desde el poder. Hacia fines de julio de 1954 Batista se postuló Presidente por una coalición formada por los partidos Acción Progresista, Liberal, Demócrata y Unión Radical.

Los sectores revolucionarios, por su parte, hacían todo lo posible por no ser relegados en ese momento crucial. El 30 de septiembre de 1954 fue proclamado José Antonio Echeverría como Presidente de la FEU. A partir de ese momento la movilización del estudiantado contra la tiranía asumió un carácter más activo y comprometido.

Una vez consumada la farsa electoral, el 24 de Febrero de 1955, Fulgencio Batista y Rafael Guas Inclán tomaban posesión de sus cargos de Presidente y Vicepresidente de la República. En los primeros días de febrero habían recibido el visto bueno de los Estados Unidos por medio de una visita de su Vicepresidente, Richard Nixon, a Cuba.

Hacia mediados de 1955 se había conformado una nueva y particular coyuntura política, Batista había aprobado la restauración formal de la Constitución de 1940 y la amnistía de los presos políticos. Las condiciones predominantes favorecieron una nueva campaña de parte

3. *Ibidem*. P.103.

de la oposición oficial que tuvo en la Sociedad de Amigos de la República (SAR) su protagonista central. A través de la SAR se convocó a elecciones generales inmediatas.

De inmediato los partidos tradicionales conformaron un Frente Unico alrededor de la SAR, porque entendían que en las circunstancias históricas de aparente apertura, Batista podía ser forzado a concertar un arreglo con la oposición. Los factores de presión serían, en primer lugar, el peligro de que se desatase una insurrección y en segundo lugar, la necesidad en que se encontraba el régimen de legitimarse con el consenso de los partidos políticos de la oposición. Estos entendían que el régimen podía seguir cediendo posiciones hasta aceptar la fórmula de elecciones generales pues se corría el riesgo de que la desestabilización política se apoderase del país.

Por otro lado, los políticos de los partidos tradicionales partían del criterio de que una vez que Batista había liberado a todos los revolucionarios, incluidos los moncadistas, debía propiciar un clima de entendimiento con la oposición oficial. Así el régimen y los políticos tradicionales podrían garantizar la “paz ciudadana” que neutralizarse las posibles acciones radicales de los excarcelados. Pero Batista entendió que las concesiones del régimen habían concluido, se habían otorgado en un momento difícil para ganar tiempo. A los revolucionarios pretendía aplastarlos por medio de la represión.

Al salir de presidio, Fidel Castro pone en práctica una nueva estrategia política para desenmascarar al régimen y a los partidos tradicionales, deseaba demostrar que no había salida pacífica a la crisis nacional con Batista en el poder. Refiriéndose a ese momento de nuestra historia, Fidel ha señalado: “Cuando nosotros salimos de prisión, ya teníamos toda una estrategia de lucha elaborada. Pero lo más importante a nuestro juicio en aquel instante era demostrar que no había solución política, es decir solución pacífica del problema de Cuba con Batista, pero teníamos que demostrar eso ante la opinión pública, ya que si el país se veía forzado a la violencia revolucionaria no era culpa de los revolucionarios, sino culpa del régimen. Entonces

planteábamos que estábamos en disposición de aceptar una solución pacífica del problema mediante determinadas condiciones, condiciones que sabíamos no se producirían nunca”.⁴

LA SAR Y EL DIALOGO CÍVICO

De trascendental importancia fueron los manifiestos públicos de la SAR fechados el 3 de junio y el 20 de julio de 1955 donde se convocaba al país a superar la violencia por medio de unas elecciones generales inmediatas. Sin embargo, el gobierno demostró con hechos fehacientes que no tenía la intención de propiciar un clima para un sano entendimiento nacional, la represión y persecución policiacas se acentuaron por esos días.

A pesar de las difíciles circunstancias que enfrentaba la nación, atendiendo a que la ciudadanía quería evitar derramamiento de sangre, tanto Fidel Castro como José Antonio Echeverría adoptaron una postura flexible y sabia ante el dilema que tenían ante sí los cubanos. Propusieron que la única solución cívica aceptable serían unas elecciones generales inmediatas sin Batista en el poder. Sabían que los partidos tradicionales cuando se adhirieron a la fórmula de la SAR habían tomado un derrotero equivocado y que fracasarían rotundamente. Para ese momento podrían obtener el apoyo popular, emprender la lucha armada y liderar la oposición política a la dictadura golpista. Era la manera más apropiada para lograr que la salida insurreccional fuera comprendida por las grandes mayorías.

Con posterioridad Batista, en su afán por desentenderse de los reclamos de la oposición oficial, indicó que la SAR no había demostrado ser neutral ni tenía suficiente apoyo entre los partidos tradicionales. Los ejecutivos de la SAR respondieron con la convocatoria de una concentración pública para noviembre que pasaría a la historia como Acto del Muelle de Luz; precisamente para demostrar que contaban

4. Jorge R.Ibarra Guitart: “El Movimiento 26 de Julio y la Sociedad de Amigos de la República”. En: *Revista Santiago* N° 69, Junio de 1988, p.181.

con el respaldo de los partidos de oposición. En aquella oportunidad la negativa del régimen no pudo ser más rotunda: el acto fue condenado de subversivo por el Senado y Batista expresó lo siguiente: “Estamos pensando seriamente si hacemos daño al pueblo en no ser dictadores”.⁵

A partir de ese momento las vanguardias revolucionarias dirigidas por Fidel Castro y José Antonio Echeverría comprendieron que las gestiones mediacionistas debían cancelarse, puesto que el pueblo distinguía perfectamente que el momento no era político sino revolucionario.

Pero la SAR y los partidos adheridos a su gestión se mantuvieron insistiendo en sus demandas. En diciembre de 1955 ante el pujante movimiento de protestas del estudiantado y la clase obrera expresado en la huelga azucarera, el régimen castrense aceptó dialogar con la oposición para abrir un dilatado período de conversaciones que sirviera de pantalla para paliar dificultades del momento.

Después de vencer numerosos obstáculos Gobierno y Oposición dieron inicio al Diálogo Cívico en marzo de 1956. Durante las conversaciones el gobierno, a la demanda de la oposición de elecciones generales inmediatas, respondió con la convocatoria a elecciones para una Asamblea Constituyente, lo que en realidad no era más que una maniobra dilatoria y engañosa. La SAR y los partidos tradicionales de oposición no aceptaron esta propuesta, necesitaban un arreglo político lo suficientemente amplio para inducir a la juventud revolucionaria a revocar sus planes de lucha armada. De cualquier modo la fórmula del gobierno no les garantizaba acceder al poder político.

El escenario estaba listo para la confrontación abierta entre los dos polos del conflicto cubano: la dictadura, desprovista de apoyo popular alguno, y la Revolución con un programa que integraba a los sectores y clases más humildes de la sociedad. Mientras los políticos de los partidos tradicionales insistían en entenderse con el régimen, el Mov-

5. Jorge R. Ibarra Guitart: *La SAR: Dictadura, Mediación y Revolución (1952-1955)*. Colección Pinos Nuevos. Ed.Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 1994, p.73-74.

imiento 26 de Julio había preparado las condiciones para el reinicio de la lucha armada y el estudiantado, lanzado a las calles estremecía el país de un extremo a otro.

La Revolución tenía abonado el terreno para captar el consenso del pueblo, se había conformado un movimiento revolucionario de masas.

Con motivo del desembarco del Granma que condujo un total de 82 expedicionarios dirigidos por Fidel Castro, los líderes de la SAR se reunieron con el Primer Ministro del régimen, Jorge García Montes. Los dirigentes de la SAR habían argumentado que era “inaplazable detener la efusión de sangre” y que habían “replantado con toda amplitud la solución definitiva de la crisis institucional de la República”.⁶

Todo parece indicar que el régimen de Batista –en el supuesto caso de que no pudiera controlar la situación generada por el desembarco de los expedicionarios-- tenía previsto iniciar contactos con la oposición, como pantalla política que desviase la atención de la opinión pública y les permitiese arremeter con mayor fuerza contra los rebeldes. Pero no les hizo falta, los partes militares del ejército pusieron optimistas a los máximos personeros del régimen. Aparentemente se había liquidado el foco insurreccional.

LOS NUEVOS ACTORES POLÍTICOS

Los partidos políticos de la oposición a partir del fracaso del Diálogo Cívico enfrentaron un proceso de debilitamiento y división interna. Algunos abandonaron la posición abstencionista que originalmente habían mantenido y propusieron nuevas fórmulas que les permitiesen continuar actuando en el plano legal. La dictadura, que había propuesto el Plan Vento de elecciones parciales como fórmula sustitutiva de la demanda de elecciones generales, se vio favorecida por el efecto

6. Jorge R. Ibarra Guitart: “La crisis de los partidos políticos en Cuba y la Sociedad de Amigos de la República (1955-1958)”. En: *Revista Temas*, N° 22-23, julio-diciembre del 2000, p. 140.

que tuvieron esas nuevas posturas. Las propuestas en marcha a la larga facilitaron la división de los partidos tradicionales que intentaron vanamente promover maniobras políticas.

Los líderes de la SAR comprendieron que habían perdido protagonismo en la campaña por recobrar la democracia representativa. El eje de las demandas de paz pasó a lo que en la época se conoció como “Tercera Fuerza”. La “Tercera Fuerza” fue un movimiento de instituciones cívicas que representando los intereses de importantes sectores de la burguesía y la pequeña burguesía, promovió gestiones de paz y de conciliación con el gobierno. El impulsor bajo cuerda de todas las gestiones fue José Miró Cardona, quien desde la SAR ya había planeado la táctica de movilizar las instituciones cívicas para forzar al régimen a llegar a un acuerdo negociado de la crisis política. Las instituciones cívicas tenían la ventaja de que no necesitaban apelar a los partidos políticos de oposición, salvo si lograban algún arreglo con el gobierno. Tampoco se verían afectadas por la división y las pugnas intestinas de esos partidos.

Los hechos del 13 de marzo de 1957, cuando un grupo de jóvenes asaltó el Palacio Presidencial, reforzaron el clamor de las instituciones cívicas y de algunas corporaciones económicas a favor de una solución negociada al conflicto político interno. Por esa razón el régimen comenzó a estudiar nuevas tácticas para calmar los ánimos entre diversos sectores de la burguesía. Después del asalto a Palacio se anunció oficialmente la liquidación del Plan Vento de elecciones parciales y se ratificaron las elecciones generales para noviembre de 1958. El gobierno acogió una nueva propuesta de los representantes del PRC (A) electoralista en el congreso. El objetivo era poder manipular la nueva convocatoria dentro del aparato estatal del régimen castrense.

Fue así que en abril de 1957 se convocó a la Comisión Interparlamentaria del Congreso que fue el mecanismo que encontró Batista para descargar de sus hombros la creciente demanda de paz del conjunto de la sociedad civil, en particular de las instituciones cívicas y las corporaciones económicas. Pero en esas conversaciones las demandas

mínimas de la oposición para propiciar un clima de confianza política fueron rechazadas. Los sectores que mantuvieron una postura abstencionista como el PPC (Ortodoxos) y el PRC (Auténtico) se negaron a participar en esas negociaciones. El resultado final de la Comisión Interparlamentaria fue paradójico: permanecer sin acuerdos por tiempo indefinido hasta que se llegase a un consenso.

Respecto a la encrucijada que enfrentó la República neocolonial cubana en los años 50 podemos decir que cuando el mantenimiento de la administración del Estado se convierte en objetivo último de un régimen y se pierden de vista los reclamos de otros agentes sociales de los sectores hegemónicos que alertan sobre un posible colapso social, se está apostando a la crisis sin salida de todo un sistema político. En esas circunstancias, los grupos revolucionarios emergentes ganan el terreno que le ceden las clases y sectores hegemónicos en crisis. Las contradicciones interclasistas de estos los fortalecen.

BALANCE FINAL

La República neocolonial estaba atrapada en una contradicción política insoluble, expresión de que sus fundamentos económicos y sociales eran endebles. El conflicto cubano tendía a polarizarse, el fracaso de la alternativa reformista favorecía, en última instancia, la solución radical que propugnaban las organizaciones revolucionarias emergentes porque demostraba que no era posible una salida pacífica a la crisis cubana.

Por otra parte, los partidos electoralistas que continuaron actuando en el escenario político cubano, se asimilaron al proyecto electoral de la dictadura con la intención de triunfar en las urnas. Pensaban que si el ambiente electoral estaba viciado, el resultado de las elecciones no debía estarlo. Pero Batista no tuvo intenciones de utilizar a los partidos electoralistas como tablilla de salvación que propiciase una transacción política ante la posible debacle de la dictadura. La propuesta de los partidos electoralistas la catalogamos como alternativa reformista

porque al menos procuraban reinstaurar la democracia representativa burguesa en forma precaria. Sin embargo, los electoralistas se sumaron al recurso táctico bien conservador de asistir a las elecciones convocadas por la dictadura.

Debemos anotar que la SAR, los partidos tradicionales y las instituciones cívicas no lograron su propósito de evitar el desarrollo de una espiral de violencia ni tampoco pudieron neutralizar la influencia de las organizaciones revolucionarias. El fracaso de sus maniobras dio aliento y legitimidad a la insurrección. En la medida en que se fue complicando el panorama político cubano los sectores moderados fueron también víctimas de la represión que desató el régimen castrense hacia todas las direcciones; ello los condujo a buscar un acercamiento con el movimiento revolucionario que logró integrarlos en el Pacto de Caracas. Así se logró neutralizarlos e impedir que los Estados Unidos los pudiera utilizar como una tercera alternativa de poder.

Durante los años 50 la hegemonía política se fue desplazando hacia las organizaciones revolucionarias emergentes que se beneficiaron de los reveses de los elementos moderados. La mayor parte de estos últimos pasaron a colaborar con la Revolución; se estableció así una alianza coyuntural de último momento entre los sectores revolucionarios y moderados que facilitó la caída de la dictadura que era el objetivo priorizado de toda la oposición. Sin embargo, las diferencias entre estos sectores resurgirían después de enero de 1959.

Nota Aparte: Este artículo es una síntesis breve de los resultados obtenidos por el autor en sus libros:

La SAR. Historia de una Mediación (1952-1958) (INEDITO. Pendiente su publicación por la Editorial de Ciencias Sociales).

El fracaso de los moderados en Cuba. Las alternativas reformistas de 1957 a 1958. (Ed. Política, La Habana 2000)

Rescate de Honor (INEDITO).

9 ¿Sujetos olvidados? Trabajadores, historiografía y revolución en Cuba

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Desde fines de los sesenta y hasta la década del ochenta del siglo pasado, la historiografía sobre el obrero cubano fue prolija, al punto de dominar buena parte del quehacer histórico posrevolucionario; sus cultores se hallaban diseminados por los centros docentes e investigativos y también en esferas extracientíficas, como las dependencias del Partido Comunista, el sector periodístico y los sindicatos, hasta que sucediera su vertiginosa desaparición.

¿Historia mal contada? ¿Agotamiento de las posibilidades académicas y del conocimiento que ofreciera el tema? ¿Disipación de las causas que impulsaron su acreditación en el marco historiográfico, y aún político, de la nación? ¿Qué causas explican el acelerado florecimiento

1. Este artículo forma parte de una investigación mayor y ha sido posible gracias a la beca otorgada por *British Academy* en el año 2009, que me permitió visitar universidades y centros de documentación del Reino Unido y Holanda, entre ellos las universidades de Leeds, Nottingham, Cambridge, así como The British Library y el Instituto Internacional de Historia Social de Amsterdam.

y la fulminante caída de este segmento de la producción histórica en Cuba?

Cualquier intento por explicar tal declive deberá señalar los rasgos, tramas y trasfondos cognitivos, ideológicos y hasta logísticos que propiciaron el nacimiento de una historiografía alusiva al obrero en Cuba, especialmente en las décadas del setenta y ochenta que fuera su momento de esplendor.

DEL ANONIMATO A LA LEGITIMIDAD: ANTECEDENTES DE LA LITERATURA SOBRE EL TEMA OBRERO

La desidia gubernamental, el interés de clase y la tradición académica, impidieron el desarrollo de la historiografía sobre los obreros cubanos en la época colonial y durante la república; no es hasta el cambio revolucionario de 1959 que empieza a estimularse una infraestructura educativa y científica capaz de impulsar los estudios históricos, y dentro de ellos, los relativos al movimiento obrero.

En la década del sesenta se implementa una política inclinada a fomentar y extender la cultura entre los sectores populares. En el área de las ciencias sociales se trazaban también políticas encaminadas a desarrollar la disciplina histórica, tanto en su parte investigativa como docente. En 1962 y como resultado de la reforma universitaria se creó la licenciatura en Historia con sus respectivas escuelas en las universidades de La Habana y Oriente, un hecho inédito en los anales universitarios de Cuba que posibilitó la graduación de profesionales en la especialidad. La escuela de Historia de la Universidad de La Habana fue de las primeras en proyectarse hacia el análisis de la cuestión obrera en Cuba; en 1966 todos sus estudiantes debían graduarse con tesis consagradas al estudio del movimiento trabajador en años puntuales del llamado período neocolonial.²

2. La principal dificultad que presentaban estos trabajos era de corte metodológico, pues a los alumnos les exigieron indagar sobre un año en específico sin tener en cuenta el carácter de proceso que debe contemplar toda obra histórica. No obstante, dos de estos textos fueron publicados dada su calidad; véase al respecto: Olga Cabrera. 1969. *El movimiento obrero...*; Carlos del Toro González. 1969. *El movimiento obrero...*

El mismo año en que se instituyeran las escuelas de historia, nació el Instituto de Historia perteneciente a la Academia de Ciencias, así como la Comisión Nacional de Investigaciones Históricas de las Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria.³ El Instituto contó con algunas colaboraciones asociadas a la cuestión del proletariado, de hecho editó los dos tomos de la obra *Tabaco: Su historia en Cuba* de José Rivero Muñiz,⁴ y en una especie de boletín titulado *Serie Histórica*, publicó investigaciones que aportaban al estudio del tema.

Asimismo la construcción del modelo socialista abriría las puertas al marxismo que devendría razón de estado, fundamento político y herramienta epistemológica. El marxismo se entronizaba en Cuba mediante la difusión de textos clásicos, o a través de sus exegetas, fuesen de Occidente o del campo socialista.

En el escenario de los sesenta hubo a menudo enfoques sectarios, dogmáticos o simplemente incompetentes que vulgarizaron la teoría de Marx en versiones simplificadoras y saturadas de didactismo. Las diversas modalidades de asunción del materialismo dialéctico e histórico repercutirán en las formas de expresión historiográfica de las décadas siguientes, especialmente las del setenta y ochenta, cuando se consolida una literatura sobre el movimiento obrero que llegaría a tener gran peso específico en el concierto de la historiografía cubana.

Poco tiempo después, con el fracaso de la “Zafra de los 10 Millones,”⁵ quedó el escenario dispuesto para el estrechamiento de relaciones con el bloque socialista europeo, en particular con la URSS; este proceso venía desarrollándose desde el decenio anterior pero adquiriría relevancia con las dificultades originadas tras el fracaso

3. Las Escuelas de Instrucción Revolucionaria conocidas por sus siglas (EIR) fueron entidades docentes creadas a iniciativas de Fidel Castro el 2 de diciembre de 1960 para fomentar el estudio del marxismo-leninismo. La Comisión Nacional de las EIR estuvo encargada de estimular el estudio y la investigación histórica dentro de estos centros; en 1967 esta Comisión organizó un evento sobre Carlos Baliño que dio lugar al texto (Varios). 1967. *Baliño; apuntes históricos...*

4. José Rivero Muñiz. 1964. *Tabaco. Su historia...*, (tomo I); _____1965. *Tabaco. Su historia...*, (tomo II).

5. Campaña económica lanzada en 1970, mediante la cual el gobierno de la Isla pretendía producir una cifra inédita de diez millones de toneladas de azúcar.

económico del año setenta. El torrente de inversiones soviéticas supuso un incremento del intercambio en la esfera educacional, artística y científica, con toda la carga de beneficios y prejuicios que ello trajo consigo; resulta útil aclarar que la “sovietización” contribuyó, en ocasiones, a coartar la libertad de expresión de artistas e intelectuales. Esa transformación, afianzada en el Congreso de Educación y Cultura de 1971, ha recibido el nombre de “Quinquenio gris,” aunque los límites cronológicos que tal denominación designa varían según el terreno cultural de que se trate.⁶

Respecto a ciertas zonas de la producción histórica el investigador Oscar Zanetti ha sentenciado:

En la investigación científica se orientó el estudio de ciertos temas mientras otros eran desechados, en correspondencia con las concepciones teóricas prevaletentes. Pero incluso aquellos a los que se otorgaba prioridad, se vieron afectados por un enfoque empobrecedor, como sucedió con la historia obrera, abordada en términos estrictamente institucionales que dejaban de lado importantes problemas cuya dilucidación hubiera enriquecido la imagen del pasado cubano.⁷ (Zanetti. 2005, 53)

Como se ha expresado, uno de los campos donde el esquematismo se concentró fue en el relativo a la historia obrera, que tuvo su auge y decadencia entre las décadas del setenta y el ochenta del siglo pasado, la que, con razón, podemos caracterizar como predominante dada la precariedad de este tipo de historiografía en los años precedentes y subsiguientes.⁸

6. Para un estudio de las huellas del “Quinquenio gris”, (término acuñado por el ensayista Ambrosio Fornet) sobre las diversas esferas de la vida cultural cubana, véase: Centro Teórico Cultural Criterios. “La política cultural del período revolucionario...”

7. Oscar Zanetti. 2005. *Isla en la Historia...*, 53.

8. De doscientos ochenta y ocho trabajos—publicados o inéditos—que se usaron en el presente estudio y que por razones de espacio no aparecen en la bibliografía final, me refiero a monografías, biografías, testimonios, compilaciones y estudios bibliográficos; ciento setenta y siete corresponden a las décadas del setenta y ochenta para un 61,45 %, veintisiete pertenecen a los años sesenta (9,37%). En este grupo se excluyen textos cuya fecha de elaboración no aparece en la portada, la contraportada, ni en cualquier otro sitio del material historiográfico consultado.

LA ÉPOCA DORADA: CARACTERIZACIÓN DE LA HISTORIOGRAFÍA OBRERA ENTRE 1970 Y 1990

¿Historia obrera o del movimiento obrero? La simplificación del objeto de estudio

En realidad la historia obrera de Cuba, esencialmente en el período revolucionario, ha sido la historia de su movimiento obrero, de los niveles de organización de la clase proletaria y de sus luchas por lograr mejoras económicas o transformaciones de orden político. Razones de peso obligaban a esa metonimia, algunas tenían que ver con el pobre desarrollo de estos estudios en el campo histórico, mientras otras obedecían a cuestiones políticas e institucionales; lo cierto es que de la totalidad de estudios dedicados al obrerismo, pocos se desviaron de este concepto.

La historia del movimiento obrero ha mantenido su legitimidad y tradición en diversos espacios académicos, lo cuestionable era su monopolio sobre otros temas o puntos de vista relativos a esta clase social, e incluso, la parcialidad con que se asumió el asunto. Con frecuencia los historiadores del movimiento obrero en la Isla han subrayado la influencia del marxismo y de líderes obreros de filiación comunista, sin hacer énfasis en las situaciones históricas en que no se había constituido un partido y una dirigencia sindical de ideas socialistas o en el período de la insurrección contra el dictador Fulgencio Batista, cuando otras fuerzas políticas fueron protagónicas. Dentro del cúmulo de trabajos publicados a partir de mil novecientos cincuenta y nueve no se profundiza, por ejemplo, en la corriente anarquista, mucho menos en el reformismo, que tuvo adeptos desde el mismo nacimiento de la clase obrera y sus respectivos órganos de asociación. Aún en obras de carácter general, ambas corrientes aparecen diluidas o vagamente mencionadas.

La importancia del socialismo en el movimiento obrero está fuera de cuestionamiento; a través del partido o mediante las organizaciones

sindicales, los comunistas jugaron su rol en la consecución de mejoras económicas para los asalariados y estuvieron presentes en los combates políticos más importantes de su tiempo, pero ello no justifica que la historiografía dejase fuera de su agenda, o minimizara, no solo a las corrientes obreras consideradas retrógradas sino también a aquellas que propendieron al cambio. Pocos estudios ahondan en la importancia y real jerarquía que pudieron haber tenido las secciones obreras afiliadas al Movimiento 26 de julio y al Directorio Estudiantil 13 de Marzo, entidades que encabezaran la disidencia política en los años decisivos de la revolución, incluso esta historiografía no abundó lo suficiente en las contradicciones del Partido Comunista con estas fuerzas ni en el papel que tuvo la militancia de base en el lapso previo al primero de enero de 1959, al establecer alianzas más o menos espontáneas con esos destacamentos revolucionarios. Además el cariz restrictivo de esta historiografía hizo que se desdeñara el papel del poder y de sus estrategias hacia los obreros. , con razón la historiadora Mildred de la Torre, a propósito de un estudio sobre la política de las elites en relación con el proletariado razonaba:

La historiografía especializada en el movimiento obrero cubano es prolífera en hechos e interpretaciones. Sin embargo, poco se ha investigado en torno a las posiciones teóricas asumidas por la elite que ostentaba el poder económico, político e intelectual con respecto al quehacer del asociacionismo político de la clase obrera.⁹ (Torre Molina. 2006, [47])

La historiografía de la Isla tampoco ha prestado atención a la heterogeneidad de los trabajadores, ni al complejo ensamble de estos con otras capas y sectores sociales; de hecho la masa trabajadora cubana está compuesta por sectores de distinta especie, desde la aristocracia obrera—de la cual no se ha escrito nada en Cuba—hasta los inmigrantes o los llamados trabajadores temporales. Asimismo la historiografía ha destacado la cuestión de la lucha de clases entre burguesía y proletariado, pero salvo aquellos libros referidos a procesos históricos más generales, es difícil encontrar textos que aborden el vínculo de los pro-

9. Torre Molina, Mildred de la. 2006. *Conflictos y cultura política...*, [47].

letarios con otras clases subalternas, o que imbriquen la lectura de lo clasista con una mirada más integradora (donde esté contenida la cuestión de las capas, sectores y estratos sociales); de este modo resulta importante asumir también las perspectivas regionales, generacionales, de raza o de género.

El recorte del objeto de estudio por parte de la historiografía influyó en los períodos escogidos para hacer las investigaciones, las que se concentraron en el ciclo comprendido entre mil novecientos veinticinco y mil novecientos cincuenta y dos, con mayor énfasis en el lapso que abarcara desde el nacimiento del Partido Comunista en mil novecientos veinticinco hasta la caída del general Machado ocho años después, instante en el que el partido y las organizaciones obreras influenciadas por el tuvieron mayor incidencia.

Casi siempre los estudiosos de la temática afrontan de forma escueta y encomiástica los éxitos alcanzados por el movimiento obrero en la fase revolucionaria, pero además evitan cualquier referencia a las dificultades, como si en el socialismo desaparecieran los conflictos; en tal rumbo, las autoridades de la Isla han reconocido que en momentos de su historia reciente el movimiento obrero y otras zonas de la sociedad civil estuvieron debilitados,¹⁰ algo que no aparece recogido en ningún relato histórico, en su mayoría los especialistas siguen el curso de lo institucional y abordan la etapa contemporánea como vaga referencia.

En los años setenta y ochenta (especialmente en los setenta) se observa un desplazamiento gradual de la historia política por otra fundamentada en criterios económicos y socioclasistas, pero dicha transición no siempre sucedió de la mejor manera; por momentos la historiografía obrerista destacó la cuestión de la lucha de clases en torno a la formación del sistema socialista sin buscar los necesarios equilibrios con el factor endógeno, incluso se sustituyeron los libros de historia de Cuba para la enseñanza por otros que contemplaban la sucesión de las formaciones económico-sociales a escala universal, y

10. PCC. 1978. *Primer Congreso del Partido...*, 108.

que desleían la historia del movimiento obrero local en otras de diferente género. Con todo, el desenchufe entre la cuestión de clase y la nacional no fue lo único que atentó contra una mejor comprensión del pasado; a menudo el corrimiento hacia el componente clasista sucedió a expensas del mimetismo, de modo que el guión de la historiografía nacionalista, salpicado de héroes y hechos épicos, fue trasladado a la historia obrera en detrimento de un examen complejo y abarcador.

Efecto sin causas: Historia de una historia torcida

El método marxista dejó su impronta en los estudios históricos, fuese en la emergencia de nuevas especialidades o mediante la selección de otros objetos de estudio. El materialismo histórico intervino también en la concepción del desarrollo como resultado del antagonismo de clases, subrayándose el ingrediente político. Lejos de ofrecerse una caracterización interna de las clases y grupos sociales, ha prevalecido la traducción estructuralista que se remite a la interacción política de la sociedad que a veces provoca cambios tan significativos como las revoluciones; esta lectura horizontal, si bien es imperiosa, minimiza las raíces de los conflictos, los que han de explicarse en la situación económica y social desventajosa de los grupos y clases subalternas.

La bibliografía especializada expone un arsenal de publicaciones consagradas a la formulación de la lucha clasista en la prensa, el quehacer de los partidos, los actos de desobediencia civil y la insurrección armada, entre otras manifestaciones; algunas de ellas han llegado a plantearse la contradicción burguesía-proletariado a extremos inconcebibles, al punto de sugerir una suerte de antecedente de esta lucha en las condiciones de la colonización española del siglo XVI.¹¹

Al referirse a la clase trabajadora en Cuba, los historiadores han descrito la acción de las organizaciones y líderes sindicales, las huelgas, paros y mítines públicos así como el rol de los proletarios en la lucha

11. Zaldívar, Carmen. [1971]. *Lo que va de ayer a hoy...*

contra las dictaduras, no obstante, muchos indicadores que conforman “el rostro” de esta clase social no aparecen reflejados, ente ellos los niveles de vida y salud, el salario, el consumo, la capacitación, así como la relación con el medio ambiente, las migraciones, el entorno laboral, las costumbres, la cultura y la vida cotidiana.

El perjuicio de las extrapolaciones

Un segmento significativo de la historiografía cubana desarrollada a partir de 1959 (particularmente en las décadas del setenta y el ochenta) extrapoló la consolidación de las relaciones con el campo socialista a su respectivo objeto de estudio. Al margen de lo que pudo haber significado la influencia de la revolución de octubre y la conformación del socialismo como sistema, lo cierto es que en Cuba dicha ascendencia no tuvo la densidad que le acreditaran. Con la “sovietización” de la historia se trataba de amoldar la evolución de un país periférico cuya revolución estuvo liderada por fuerzas que no provenían de las organizaciones comunistas, al conjunto de “regularidades” que debían poseer los países que transitaran hacia el socialismo, la tendencia llegó al punto de sublimar aspectos que no eran determinantes para la reconstrucción del pasado cubano como pudieran ser los remotos orígenes de las relaciones cubano- soviéticas o los avatares de un mambí ruso.

La revolución bolchevique y el socialismo impactaron mas allá de las fronteras del antiguo imperio zarista y sus primeros ecos llegaron a Cuba y a numerosos países de América Latina como México, Brasil y Argentina; sin embargo esos acontecimientos no influyeron del mismo modo e intensidad en todas las fracciones sociales. La huella de aquel octubre de 1917 fue ostensible en una zona importante del movimiento obrero cubano tanto en su sector agrícola como industrial , pero no todos los segmentos de esa clase incorporaron las banderas del socialismo y de la causa soviética; además tales afinidades no siempre significaron una adhesión completa; en tal sentido estaría por investigarse el papel que jugaran los comunistas cubanos en la conse-

cución de mejoras económicas y sociales para los proletarios sin que ello comprometiese a la masa trabajadora a tomar partido, ya que en estas pudo haber incidido el miedo a la represión o la asunción del corpus ideológico al uso, con su cuota de nacionalismo y anticomunismo. Asimismo la revolución leninista y otras de similar envergadura se granjearon las simpatías de fragmentos de la pequeña burguesía y los intelectuales pero estas filiaciones no fueron absolutas ni homogéneas. Lo variable de esta incidencia puede medirse también por épocas, de hecho hubo momentos en que la ascendencia del socialismo se vio limitada, como fuera en los inicios de la “Guerra Fría”, mientras que, desde 1917 hasta la caída de Machado o en los años de creación del eje antifascista el influjo fue mayor.

Dentro de la historiografía obrera posrevolucionaria existieron esfuerzos legítimos por identificar algunas manifestaciones concretas de la influencia rusa, como fueran los trabajos sobre la creación de los *soviets* en los centrales azucareros de la región centro oriental del país, algunos de ellos panorámicos como *Los soviets obreros y campesinos en Cuba*,¹² de Ángel García y Piotr Mironchuk al que se añaden otros que complementan el tema desde el testimonio y la historia local.

Otros arrestos intelectuales tradujeron esos lazos de intimidad establecidos entre Cuba y el campo socialista. En los años setenta y ochenta hubo cierta historiografía compuesta por autores soviéticos y cubanos que alistó a José Martí como político perteneciente a la corriente demócrata revolucionaria que definiera Vladimir I. Lenin.

De todos esos textos el de mayor repercusión fue el de José Cantón Navarro, “Algunas ideas de José Martí en relación con la clase obrera y el socialismo,” en este controvertido texto, publicado en 1971 y que fuera extendido en años subsiguientes, se trataban elementos del pensamiento de José Martí hasta entonces poco explorados, como sus criterios sobre la clase obrera, las teorías socialistas y las figuras representativas de esta corriente. Si bien Cantón Navarro se cuidó de inscribir al revolucionario en esas tendencias, no es menos cierto que, en un

12. García, Ángel y Piotr Mironchuk. 1984. *Diario de un mambi...*

giro especulativo, el autor insinuó una supuesta “evolución” del líder nacionalista hacia posiciones cercanas al socialismo.¹³

La ortodoxia académica llegó a contaminar la rutina metodológica, puesto que muchos de los libros publicados por entonces no respetaban la organización alfabética de la bibliografía, sino que encabezaban las referencias con los “clásicos” del marxismo y los documentos programáticos que se emitieran tras el Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba realizado en 1975, estos últimos fueron obligados a usarse en la introducción de los trabajos de curso y de diploma que se realizaban en las universidades.

De abajo hacia arriba: historia popular e institucionalización

La corriente historiográfica dedicada al tema obrero contó en sus años de esplendor con el apoyo de entidades políticas y científicas del país; a menudo la historia de los trabajadores era reflejada en la prensa nacional y formaba parte de los cursos para estudiantes en todos los niveles; múltiples concursos escogieron dicho tema como motivo de premios y hubo editoriales empleadas en publicar las investigaciones.

Las universidades continuaron apoyando la historia del movimiento obrero cubano tal y como lo hicieron en la década anterior, por una parte se regularizaron cursos sobre el tema y se incentivó la realización de trabajos de diploma, tesis doctorales e investigaciones.

No obstante, los principales sostenes de la realización de una historiografía obrera fueron el Movimiento de Activistas de Historia y el Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y la Revolución Socialista de Cuba (IHMCRC), ambas instancias fueron creadas por iniciativa de las autoridades políticas de la Isla.

13. Las investigaciones de J. Cantón darían lugar a tres volúmenes que repetirían y enriquecerían la misma idea, ellos son: José Cantón Navarro. 1979. *Algunas ideas de José Martí en relación con la clase obrera...*; _____. 1981. *Algunas ideas de José Martí en relación con la clase obrera... (segunda edición enriquecida con notas y anexos)*; _____. 2006 *José Martí y los trabajadores...*

El “Movimiento de Activistas” tuvo su origen en el discurso que pronunciara Fidel Castro el diez de octubre de 1868 en ocasión de conmemorarse el centenario del inicio de las guerras de independencia, en esa alocución se planteó la necesidad de profundizar en el estudio de la historia a lo largo y ancho de la isla pero confiriéndole una perspectiva popular, el “activismo” estuvo compuesto por una extensa red de colaboradores, por lo general, no profesionales de la historia, que desde las filas del Partido y la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, los sindicatos, y otras organizaciones de masa, empezaron a hurgar en las raíces históricas de los centros estudiantiles y de trabajo, a rescatar, mediante entrevistas, el testimonio de muchos protagonistas locales en las luchas sindicales y revolucionarias así como a indagar en los archivos de los centros laborales, de los gremios y en los pertenecientes a los distintos municipios y provincias de la nación.

El “activismo” de historia constituyó una fórmula sin antecedentes en la historiografía nacional; por primera vez la sociedad en su conjunto sin reparar en distinciones, se daba a la tarea de informar sobre el pasado cubano, enfatizando en aquellos puntos relativos a la participación de la gente común, particularmente los trabajadores, en las luchas revolucionarias. Esta historia *desde abajo* hecha por y para el subalterno, suministró cuantiosos datos y documentos históricos a escala “micro” al tiempo que registró infinidad de fuentes orales.

En definitiva, “Los obreros hacen y escriben su historia”, tal y como enunciara la convocatoria al Primer Encuentro Nacional de Historia del Movimiento Obrero Cubano celebrado en mil novecientos setenta y dos, cuyas memorias se editaran bajo el mismo *slogan* en un libro que fuera icónico para ese movimiento. Pero quizás los textos que mejor encarnan las virtudes e insuficiencias del activismo histórico sean los que salieran por iniciativa de la Comisión de Historia del Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Construcción.

El sindicato de los constructores llegó a publicar en once años (1978–1989) más de treinta libros y folletos que daban cuenta del movimiento obrero en ese ramo, de las primeras asociaciones gremia-

les, e inclusive, se añadían recuentos sobre la evolución histórica de las técnicas y materiales constructivos. Los esfuerzos del sindicato se extendían a cada una de las antiguas seis provincias de Cuba lo que posibilitó que se recogieran datos por todo el país. Pero, salvo *Historia de los dignos hombres de los cascos blancos*,¹⁴ un texto en tres tomos lamentablemente inédito, el gran aporte en el plano informativo se vería disminuido por la presentación de un material deficientemente redactado, con predominio del enfoque descriptivo por sobre el analítico, y el empleo deficiente (cuando se hace) de las referencias documentales, orales y bibliográficas, las que tampoco se someten a crítica. Con frecuencia el nivel de elaboración de tales textos era tan elemental que podían considerarse ellos mismos como fuentes primarias. En reiteradas ocasiones estas historias “desde abajo” se convirtieron, gracias a su baja calidad, en historias “de abajo” El empleo de un ejército de colaboradores *amateurs* contribuyó a crear un ambiente ideológico favorable a la revolución a la vez que elevó el nivel cultural de mucha gente al acercarlas a la historia, pero por momentos esa suerte de populismo historiográfico trajo consigo la improvisación, la ingenuidad metodológica y la ausencia de profesionalidad.

Por su parte, el Instituto del Movimiento Comunista y de la Revolución Socialista de Cuba (IMCRSC) inició sus labores en 1974. El IMCRSC tuvo por cometido la preparación de obras científicas y de especialistas sobre temas relacionados con la historia del socialismo y la revolución cubana de ahí que se le prestara interés al estudio del movimiento obrero. Además, esta entidad tuvo por propósito conservar fuentes sobre las temáticas aludidas y para ese fin se establecieron laboratorios de conservación y restauración de documentos, microfilmes y fotografías; a esas labores se sumaba el asesoramiento al movimiento de activistas, particularmente en las temáticas relacionadas con la historia del movimiento obrero.

Los logros de esta entidad radicarón en la recepción de una copiosa cifra de documentos y bibliografía para el estudio del movimiento

14. Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Construcción. Comisión de Historia. [1984]. *Historia de los dignos hombres...*

obrero y comunista en la Isla, así como en los respectivos trabajos de organización, restauración y conservación de tal legado.

El quehacer del IMCRSC se extendió también al área de los estudios bibliográficos y las compilaciones de documentos; sin embargo, en el terreno de las investigaciones históricas y del procesamiento intelectual de la información atesorada, los esfuerzos de dicho organismo no se correspondían con la proporción de insumos y recursos humanos puestos a su disposición, en ello pudo haber influido la novedad del tema, y quizás, cierta política tendiente a limitar la realización individual de los historiadores, en especial los más jóvenes, quienes apenas si aparecían como copartícipes de los proyectos redactados por el cuerpo directivo de la institución. No obstante, el IMCRSC aportó exiguos, pero importantes textos especializados como *Historia del movimiento obrero cubano 1865–1935*, excelente sumario en dos tomos donde se mezclan, la síntesis y la lectura panorámica, para dar cuenta del nacimiento y posterior evolución de las luchas de los trabajadores entre 1865 y 1958.¹⁵

HISTORIA OBRERA: PARADIGMAS Y GÉNEROS HISTORIOGRÁFICOS

A pesar de sus limitaciones, la historiografía obrera en Cuba ha engendrado obras de consideración que merecen señalarse o retomarse, pues ellas registran aportes concretos en este campo y revelan lo que falta por investigar.

Dentro del grupo de obras “clásicas” de esta historiografía resaltan aquellas que sin desentenderse de la lógica de saber de aquellos años, profundizan en aspectos o períodos menos conocidos, dentro de estas se halla el libro *Los que viven por sus manos*, un excelente investigación sobre el movimiento obrero desde la segunda mitad del siglo XIX

15. Instituto de Historia del Movimiento Comunista y la Revolución Socialista de Cuba. 1985 *Historia del movimiento obrero cubano... (tomo I)*; _____. 1985. *Historia del movimiento obrero cubano... (tomo II)*.

hasta la fundación de la Confederación Nacional Obrera de Cuba y el Partido Comunista en 1925.¹⁶

Otro pilar importante en este interés por el anarquismo lo constituyó la investigación de Larry Morales acerca de la personalidad de Enrique Varona y su labor de dirigencia en el sector ferrocarrilero, especialmente en la provincia de Camaguey, ya que el autor se valió de múltiples testimonios para conformar el retrato de esta personalidad.¹⁷ Sin embargo, no es hasta mediados de los ochenta que aparece un estudio detallado de esta corriente ideológica y de las acciones políticas que de ella se derivaran; por lo general el anarquismo había sido trabajado dentro de un ámbito mayor o como parte del estudio de algunas individualidades. La tesis doctoral de Ricardo J. Mendoza *La corriente anarquista en el movimiento obrero cubano (1880–1925)*,¹⁸ intentó llenar ese vacío historiográfico; esa misma función de abordar otras influencias dentro del movimiento obrero la cumplió el trabajo sobre el sindicalismo oficialista de Eusebio Mujal que sirviera para la obtención del título de candidato a doctor en ciencias de Angelina Rojas;¹⁹ ambos trabajos permanecen inéditos y sus contenidos son del conocimiento de pocos especialistas.

Una contribución cardinal al estudio del movimiento obrero en Cuba fue proporcionada por John Dumoulin, etnólogo e historiador norteamericano residente en la Isla desde 1959 hasta la década del ochenta y que fuera fundador del Instituto de Historia de la Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, institución desde la cual comenzó sus estudios sobre el movimiento trabajador en la región central del país, y que diera lugar a tres obras caracterizadas por la dialéctica entre acontecimientos nacionales y locales, reconociendo sus coincidencias y desencuentros, algo fuera de lo común en el concierto de una producción historiográfica animada por la subordinación del elemento “micro” a una suerte de historia total y uniforme.²⁰

16. Olga Cabrera. 1985. *Los que viven...*

17. Larry Morales. [1981]. Enrique Varona...

18. Ricardo J. Mendoza Rodríguez. “*La corriente anarquista...*”

19. Angelina Rojas Blaquier. “*El mujalismo en el movimiento obrero...*”

Respecto a las obras generales, sirve de referencia la síntesis elaborada en dos partes que elaborara el IHMCRSC, así como la documentada monografía de Evelio Tellería en torno a los congresos obreros celebrados desde el siglo XIX hasta la actualidad.²¹

En el rubro de las compilaciones resulta insuperable la labor de la Academia de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias “Máximo Gómez” con sus volúmenes de artículos y documentos acompañados de una detallada introducción y una cronología a final de cada tomo; no obstante, en esta esfera queda muchísimo por hacer y no basta con coleccionar bibliografía o documentos si no se someten a la crítica histórica.²² Asimismo, califican como obras de excelencia, la investigación que hiciera Mariana Serra sobre los periódicos *La Aurora* y *El Productor*²³ y la monografía de Martín Duarte alrededor del combate proletario contra la máquina torcedora de tabaco.²⁴ La variedad de artículos reunidos en *Los obreros hacen y escriben su historia*,²⁵ junto al grupo de testimonios ofrecidos en *Los fundidores relatan su historia*,²⁶ parecen responder afirmativamente aquella pregunta que se hiciera Gayatri Spivak en su antológico ensayo “Can the Subaltern Speak”?

El estímulo dado por el movimiento de activistas a los relatos sobre fábricas, minas, puertos marítimos y centrales azucareros se trasladó también al escenario de los historiadores profesionales que

20. John Dumoulin. 1980. *Azúcar y lucha de clases...*; _____ . 1981. *El movimiento obrero en Cruces...*; _____ . 1974. “El primer desarrollo del movimiento obrero...”

21. Evelio Tellería Toca. 1984. *Los congresos obreros...*”

22. Véase: Academia de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias “General Máximo Gómez”. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales. 1981. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo I, Primera Parte (1865-1898); _____ . 1981. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo I, Segunda Parte (1898-1902); _____ . [s/a]. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo II, Primera Parte (1902-1925); _____ . [s/a]. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo II, Segunda Parte (1925-1935); _____ . 1983. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo III, Primera Parte, (1935-1939); _____ . 1983. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo III, Segunda Parte, (1939-1946). La Habana: Dirección Política Central de las FAR; _____ . 1984. *Selección de artículos y documentos...*, Tomo III, Tercera Parte, (1947-1953).

23. Mariana Serra García. 1978 *La Aurora ...*

24. Martín Duarte Hurtado. 1973. *La máquina torcedora...*

25. (Varios). 1975. *Los obreros hacen y escriben...*

26. Andrés D. García Suárez. 1975. *Los fundidores...*

hicieron algunos aportes de relieve en textos de poca extensión, pero importantes, dadas las fuentes y datos aportados, los puntos de vista esgrimidos y el alcance metodológico de los proyectos. Dentro de estos se hallaba “Matahambre: empresa y movimiento obrero” y *Acerca de la historia del central “Trinidad” 1893–1960*,²⁷ en ambos casos se combinaron la historia empresarial y tecnológica, con la historia local y regional pero sin pasar por alto la integración de tales elementos con el movimiento obrero.

También existieron realizaciones historiográficas, las menos, que tantearon otras gamas de la temática obrera y que por su cariz sociológico y económico merecen aparecer en cualquier recuento historiográfico; los trabajos de María Caridad Pacheco, y el libro de Ramiro Pavón sobre el empleo femenino en Cuba no solo abordan cuestiones novedosas sino que se detienen en la historia reciente, sin duda el período menos estudiado.²⁸

A veces las contribuciones a la temática de los trabajadores han provenido de historias con propósitos más amplios donde el movimiento obrero es observado dentro del agregado de acciones nacionales para reconfigurar el escenario político cubano o los que, sin profundizar en los asuntos preferidos por la historiografía alrededor de la clase obrera, ofrecen pistas o sugieren senderos inexplorados, en ese estilo se enmarca *Caminos para el Azúcar*²⁹ de Alejandro García y Oscar Zanetti por la manera de transcribir las condiciones de producción de los constructores de vías férreas en el contexto del siglo XIX.

Desde la historia socio clasista el historiador Jorge Ibarra Cuesta es uno de los pocos que decide abordar las relaciones de clase sin abandonar el estudio hacia el interior de estas últimas. En *Cuba, 1898–1958: estructuras y procesos sociales*,³⁰ Ibarra impugna los intentos por

27. Salvador Morales, Gloria García y María Sánchez. 1971. “Matahambre: empresa...”, 43-76; Hernán Venegas Delgado y Armando Armas García. 1988. *Acerca de la historia del central...*

28. María Caridad Pacheco. “*Análisis de los cambios...*”, tesis doctoral, Universidad de La Habana, 1989; _____. 1987. “Cambios en la estructura social...”, *Santiago*, 66, 141-165; Ramiro Pavón. 1977. *El empleo femenino en Cuba...*

29. Oscar Zanetti y Alejandro García Álvarez. 1987. *Caminos para...*

explicar dogmáticamente el carácter socialista de la revolución a partir de un conjunto de regularidades impuestas por cierto marxismo. Ante estas tendencias, que a veces minimizan los procesos sociales o el papel de la subjetividad y de las personalidades en la historia, el estudioso prefiere referirse al potencial económico y el trasfondo social existente en Cuba que son, a su modo de ver, los que explican el triunfo de una revolución de signo socialista en la mayor isla del Caribe.

En lo concerniente a géneros historiográficos la historia obrera tendió a la realización de monografías, como anotara el historiador Carlos del Toro.³¹ Aún sin la crítica correspondiente, la presencia de fuentes orales, a través de testimonios y entrevistas, estuvo presente en un por ciento elevadísimo de obras históricas. Con todo, los esfuerzos por rescatar la historia obrera mediante la fuente oral se basaron, con mayor o menor fortuna, en el testimonio de dirigentes sindicales de izquierda y/o del Partido Comunista que recogen las vivencias de personajes representativos del quehacer institucional y político del proletariado.³²

Por último una referencia a los clásicos de la historia obrera cubana no podrá obviar la obra en su conjunto de Carlos del Toro González quien desde 1969 hasta bien entrada a década del noventa, cuando casi nadie incursionaba en la temática, se mantuvo entregando trabajos de valía intelectual, por supuesto que *Algunos apuntes económicos, sociales y políticos del movimiento obrero cubano*³³ es un clásico en la materia por su visión integral, a ello se suma la intensa labor de Carlos del Toro como periodista dedicado a difundir numerosos acontecimientos de la historia nacional incluyendo la historia de los trabajadores.

30. Jorge Ibarra Cuesta. 1995. *Cuba. 1898–1958: estructuras y procesos...*

31. Carlos del Toro. 1997–1998. “El movimiento obrero en Cuba...” *Temas*, 12-13, 216-225.

32. Al respecto véanse los textos de Octaviano Portuondo Moret. 1979. *El soviet de Tacajó...* y el de Ursinio Rojas. 1979. *Las luchas obreras en el central...*

33. Carlos del Toro González. 1974. *Algunos aspectos económicos, sociales y políticos...*

Actualidad y perspectivas de la historiografía sobre los trabajadores en Cuba

El declive del tema obrero coincidiría con los aires de *perestroika* que soplaran desde la URSS y justo cuando se desvanecían en Europa oriental aquellos gobiernos supuestamente representativos de los obreros y campesinos. En tal sentido la política científica del estado cubano respecto a la historia sufrió importantes reestructuraciones encaminadas a centralizar los principales polos de investigación histórica que existían en el país. Bajo el nombre de Instituto de Historia de Cuba fue fundada en 1988 una entidad que fusionaba al IHM-CRSC con el Instituto de Historia de la Academia de Ciencias de Cuba, el Centro de Estudios Militares de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias y algunos investigadores/profesores que procedían de la Universidad de La Habana.

En sus inicios el Instituto de Historia de Cuba tuvo como tarea esencial la confección de una historia que abarcara desde el periodo de la colonia hasta la actualidad poniendo su acento en la cuestión nacional por sobre la clasista. Lejos de recuperar el tema obrero e incorporarlo a sus investigaciones la nueva entidad optó por segregarlo; mientras, los investigadores oriundos del antiguo IHMCRSC debieron incorporarse a los distintos grupos de investigación que—ordenados por periodos históricos—se enfrascaron en la producción de los distintos tomos de la obra general. En esta nueva “era de los extremos” no tenía cabida una historia que, quizás por adolecer de toda la calidad y objetividad suficiente, no pudo o supo ganar prestigio en los circuitos de la producción historiográfica del país, aunque sin duda, el cambio de momento histórico contribuyó muchísimo en la transformación de las agendas académicas del gobierno.

Asimismo, las nuevas epistemologías asumidas por las recientes generaciones fueron volcadas en la realización de otros temas, pues muchos de ellos sentían rechazo hacia un relato maniqueo y poco con-

vincente, remedó la mayor parte de las veces del positivismo nacionalista de otros tiempos.

Solo a partir de la segunda década del noventa comienza en Cuba a reaparecer la temática obrera, aunque de manera tímida. Algunos comienzan a acercarse a esta cuestión desde la perspectiva del asociacionismo,³⁴ otros desde el vínculo entre género y trabajo³⁵ y hay quienes ofrecen investigaciones que de forma indirecta se relacionan con el asunto, como es el caso de María del Carmen Barcia y su trabajo acerca de los sectores populares y la representatividad de estos en la sociedad civil, los estudios de Mildred de la Torre sobre la política de las elites criollas hacia el subalterno en las postrimerías del siglo XIX, el acercamiento de Áurea Verónica Rodríguez a la legislación y la seguridad social en Cuba y los tomos sobre la historia del Partido Comunista escritos por Angelina Rojas.³⁶ Por esta época comienza a celebrarse el taller internacional sobre el Primero de Mayo auspiciado por la Central de Trabajadores de Cuba y el Instituto de Historia; pero la mayoría de los trabajos presentados por los cubanos se inscriben en el modelo tradicional.³⁷

Respecto a las fuentes, se observa la paralización del trabajo que hicieran las instituciones especializadas y el movimiento del activismo histórico, aun con las deficiencias que este último trajera consigo. Desde hace casi dos décadas no aparecen trabajos bibliográficos y archivísticos a escala nacional o local que pudiesen apoyar la reanimación del tema obrero en los predios de nuestra historiografía.

En resumen, la historiografía sobre el tema obrero en Cuba ha sido efímera y ha estado trazada sobre bases esencialmente institucionales en las cuales ha predominado una visión estructuralista que imagina a

34. Yanet Alfonso Valdés. 1999. *El Asociacionismo profesiona...*

35. Raquel Vinat de la Mata. 2001. *Las cubanas en la posguerra...*

36. María del Carmen Barcia. 2003. *Capas populares...*; Mildred de la Torre Molina. 2006. *Conflictos y cultura política...*; Áurea Verónica Rodríguez. 2000. *La Seguridad y la asistencia social...*; Angelina Rojas Blaquier. 2006. *El primer Partido Comunista... 1925-1935*; _____ . 2007. *El primer Partido Comunista... 1935 - 1952*.

37. Uno de los pocos textos que sugiere una mirada alternativa es el de Carlos del Toro. "La fundación de la CTC y la reacción patronal", en (Varios). 1999. *Memoria del II Taller...*

los trabajadores como masa amorfa condenada solo a luchar por mejoras económicas y cambios políticos; a pesar de ello esta corriente hizo algunas contribuciones, aun cuando le faltó incluir a otros agentes y escenarios históricos. En tal sentido, cualquier intento por hacer regresar el tema de la clase trabajadora al mapa de los estudios especializados en la Isla, deberá incorporar puntos de vista que contribuyan a revelar, sin paternalismos, el lado humano de los trabajadores. La clase social es también, al decir de E. P. Thompson, un universo de relaciones conformada por un tejido complicadísimo de circunstancias, no solo políticas y económicas, sino además, sociológicas, ecológicas y culturales. A su vez, la clase trabajadora juega un rol activo en la construcción y metamorfosis de su propia condición.

De lo que se trata es de seguir ampliando el camino trazado, despojar el sendero de trabas académicas e institucionales e incorporarle nuevas perspectivas. Asimismo es importante asumir las cuestiones alusivas al entorno laboral y a la relación del obrero con ese espacio donde transcurre buena parte de su vida. A pesar de las contribuciones a la historia del trabajo en obras como *El Ingenio* de M. Moreno Friginals o *La Habana, clave de un imperio* de F. Pérez Guzmán, esta temática continúa siendo una asignatura pendiente dentro de la historiografía nacional;³⁸ factores tales como las condiciones laborales, el ritmo y la organización del trabajo, la influencia de la tradición en la ejecución de cierto oficios, los problemas alusivos a la eficiencia y la productividad, así como el nexo entre el trabajo con elementos tales como el ocio, la arquitectura, la accidentalidad, la salud y el medio ambiente, están por investigarse. Solo reconociendo la infinidad de variables que pueden confluir en el desenvolvimiento de un segmento social estaremos en mejores condiciones de caracterizarlo, este es el reto que se plantea a los historiadores cubanos que decidan retomar y reanimar tan trascendental problemática.

38. Ambas se destacan por su lectura abarcadora del fenómeno del trabajo y el trabajador; desde los análisis acerca de las concepciones sobre la eficiencia en los ingenios, hasta las diferencias entre las modalidades de trabajo libre y no libre, pasando por la alimentación y los gastos energéticos del trabajador en una época de nuestra historia nacional donde se mezcla la esclavitud con el paulatino desarrollo del capitalismo. Manuel Moreno Friginals. 1978. *El ingenio...*; Francisco Pérez Guzmán. 1997. *La Habana clave...*

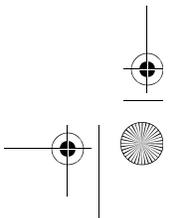
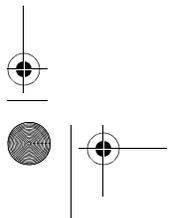
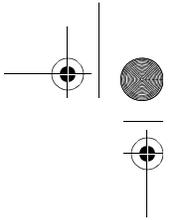
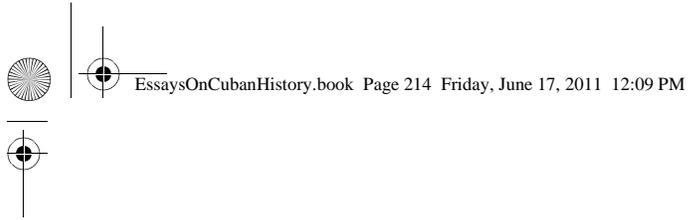
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10 Meeting the Neighbors: Fidel Castro's April 1959 Trip to the United States

Matt Jacobs

On 20 April 1959, only four months after taking power in Cuba, Fidel Castro addressed a standing room only crowd in Corwin Hall on the campus of Princeton University. Castro's speech lasted over two and a half hours and when Professor Robert Palmer motioned for him to begin a conclusion; the Cuban leader brushed the request aside and continued pontificating.¹ Following the speech, Castro and his associates were ushered to a reception at the New Jersey Governor's mansion. There, Castro was introduced to several influential Americans, including former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Castro and Acheson spoke at length; the former diplomat reported that he was deeply impressed by the Cuban leader's honesty and by the care with which he chose his words.² Overall, the Princeton visit was deemed a

1. Thomas Bogenschield, "Dr. Castro's Princeton Visit, April 20-21, 1959," Available at <http://www.princeton.edu/~plas/publications/Essays/castro.html>. Accessed 17 January 2009.

2. Douglas Brinkley, *Dean Acheson: The Cold War Years, 1953-1971* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 155.

success, except for the cigar butts left on the floor of the Governor's mansion by Castro's entourage.

This paper examines an often overlooked episode during the period immediately after Castro took power, namely, his April 1959 trip to the United States. Though Castro's September 1960 visit to New York City garners more attention in Cold War historiography, for it included a hard-line speech at the United Nations and a "bear hug" with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, the April 1959 trip offers excellent insight into the early U.S.-Castro relationship and the possibilities for cooperation that existed. The only one article length treatment of the trip, Alan McPherson's "The Limits of Populist Diplomacy: Fidel Castro's April 1959 Trip to North America," argues that the visit was "not only...a forum for the expression of a cleavage between the Eisenhower and Castro governments' views on populist diplomacy but also that, contrary to what most scholars have concluded, those views were significantly reflected among the press and public opinion."³ While examining the trip through a lens focused on Castro's attempt at a public relations coup is both informative and instructive, this essay seeks to situate the events of April 1959 in a larger Cold War context.

The April trip proved consequential both for what transpired in the United States and also for what occurred on the island of Cuba. In the U.S., policymakers seemed irritated that the Cuban leader expected formal diplomatic courtesies during his stay. After all, he had been invited by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), not the U.S. government. Assistant Secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs Richard Rubottom, who maintained "grave doubts concerning the character and motivation" of Castro, was the highest ranking U.S. official to greet the Cuban upon his arrival. President Dwight Eisenhower was noticeably absent from Washington, he spent Castro's visit golfing in Augusta, Georgia. Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter met with Castro, although somewhat reluctantly, as did the

3. Alan McPherson, "The Limits of Populist Diplomacy: Fidel Castro's April 1959 Trip to North America," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* (January, 2007), 261

Meeting the Neighbors: Fidel Castro's April 1959 Trip to the United States

Eisenhower administration's most ardent Cold Warrior, Vice President Richard Nixon.

In Havana, Raúl Castro and Ernesto 'Che' Guevara delivered stirring and blatant anti-American speeches at the same time Fidel was attempting to improve revolutionary Cuba's standing in the U.S. Also, in Fidel's absence, Raúl Castro requested high level assistance from the United States' Cold War adversary, the Soviet Union. Following some deliberation in the Kremlin, the request was granted.⁴ While the trip proved important in Havana for its implications regarding Cuba's position in international affairs, it was also quite significant for everyday Cubans. It was reported that many viewed the trip as the "first time a Cuban ruler has visited the United States representing a fully sovereign and equal nation, free from any domination or control."⁵ Cuban newspapers enthusiastically covered the trip, with *El Mundo*, *Revolucion*, *Hoy*, and *Diario de la Marina* reporting that Castro's time in the United States offered a hopeful opportunity for Cuba's goals to be communicated.⁶ As he departed Havana, Castro declared to the large crowd that "in the United States we can earn a better understanding of the Cuban situation."

While the diplomacy implemented towards Castro tells part of the story around the 1959 visit, the public reception is also revealing. Thousands attended speeches at Princeton, Columbia and Harvard Universities. Throngs of listeners gathered to listen or catch a glimpse of Cuba's new revolutionary. Castro's dress and oratory approach could not have been more different from U.S. political leaders, who operated in a much more controlled and formal manner. For young Americans, tired of the conformist 1950s, Fidel Castro was both different and exciting. As historian Van Gosse notes, "Cuba's influence

4. Timothy Naftali and Alexandr Fursenko, *One Hell of A Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964: The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 14-19

5. "Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State," 15 April 1959. State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 466. , (hereafter referred to as *FRUS* followed by appropriate year and region/country).

6. McPherson, "Limits of Populist Diplomacy," 250-251

was felt primarily among those most insulated from political discontent: middle-class youth, especially males, in their teens and twenties, for whom World War II was at most a faint memory and the Affluent Society was the overwhelming tangible reality.”⁷

In the end, following such events as the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Mariel Boat Lift, it is hard to imagine that U.S.-Cuban relations could be anything other than contentious. Perhaps Castro’s April 1959 represents what historian Lester Langley called the “last real hope for friendly relations between Washington and Havana...”⁸ This paper supports that claim and argues that by examining Castro’s April 1959 trip it is possible to gain a better understanding of the possibilities for cooperation that existed in U.S.-Cuban relations immediately after Castro took power.

On 15 April 1959 Fidel Castro and his entourage arrived in Washington, D.C. Castro’s eleven day visit included stops in the American capital along with the cities of New York, Boston, and Houston. Those accompanying Castro on his trip included Minister of the Treasury Rufo López Fresquet, Minister of the Economy Regino Boti Leon, President of the National Bank Felipe Pazos, Director of Foreign Trade Ernesto Betancourt, Financial Counselor Joaquín Meyer, and personal assistant Teresa “Tete” Casuso.

The day after his arrival in Washington Castro made his first major public appearance. He was received at a luncheon given in his honor by Acting Secretary of State Herter. It is somewhat surprising that the State Department and Herter partook in such actions. The Department had pressed the legislative branch, primarily the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, to receive Castro “because they didn’t want him.”⁹ Furthermore, upon hearing of Castro’s acceptance to visit the United States Herter complained that Castro displayed singularly “bad

7. Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of the New Left* (New York: Verso, 1993), 5.

8. Lester Langley, *The Cuban Policy of the United States: A Brief History* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1968), 173.

9. McPherson, “The Limits of Populist Diplomacy,” 24.

behavior” by accepting an invitation from the ASNE to visit the U.S. without first consulting the State Department.¹⁰

Nevertheless, on 16 April Herter dined with Castro at the Statler-Hilton Hotel. In attendance at the luncheon were several members of Castro's entourage including economic advisers Felipe Pazos and Joaquín Meyer. Representating the United States were several members of the State Department's Latin America team such as William Wieland and Roy Rubottom.¹¹ Seated close together, Fresquet and Meyer discussed the Cuban economy and American support with Assistant Secretary Rubottom. When the discussion turned to private capital versus government capital Rubottom made it clear to the Cuban economists that “we (United States) were interested in the treatment of private investors who had already established themselves in Cuba and the climate that might await future investors. He (Pazos) seemed to get the point.”¹²

While Castro's president of the National Bank (Pazos) and financial counselor (Meyer) were pursuing government funds, Rubottom asserted the interests of American business in Cuba, the same businesses that many supporters of the Cuban Revolution believed had helped fund the regime of Fulgencio Batista. Regarding Cuba's number one economic resource, sugar, Rubottom stated that there was “no chance of any better arrangement for Cuba regarding sugar than that under the 1956 legislation...”¹³ Also, during the luncheon Castro was afforded a brief private meeting with Secretary Herter. Soon after

10. Thomas Paterson, *Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 256.

11. Memorandum from the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs to the Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter,” 10 April 1959. General Records Department of State, Secretary and Undersecretary Memorandums of Conversation. Record Group 59, Box 11: February 1959 to April 1959, Lot 64D199, National Archives at College Park, MD. (Hereafter referred to as NACP).

12. “Memorandum of a Conversation, Department of State, Washington,” 16 April 1959.” *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 471-473.

13. *Ibid*, 472; *The United States Sugar Act of 1956 instituted a technical formula to determine quota shares for domestic and foreign sugar producers. Under this act Cuba's shares were decreased despite repeated pleas from Cuban government officials. The act further cemented for Cubans the reality that the United States held much power over the island's economic well-being.*

the conclusion of the luncheon Herter traveled by helicopter to Georgia to brief the President and to be announced as the Eisenhower's choice to become full-time Secretary of State.¹⁴ In discussing Castro with Eisenhower, Secretary Herter described the Cuban as "a most interesting individual, very much like a child in many ways, quite immature regarding problems of the government..."¹⁵ Herter went on to say that "in English he spoke with restraint and considerable personal appeal. In Spanish, however, he became voluble, excited, and somewhat wild."¹⁶ Herter would become one of the first administration officials who formally advocated Castro's ouster.

Castro's next private meeting took place on Capitol Hill. The Cuban leader traveled to the Hill for a meeting with Vice President Richard Nixon; their encounter took place in Nixon's private capitol building office. Nixon recorded that the two men discussed "his (Castro) political views, his attitude toward the United States, and other international issues."¹⁷ The meeting lasted more than three hours, and at its conclusion Nixon prepared a memorandum for President Eisenhower, Herter, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Allen Dulles.¹⁸ The Cuban economy was a subject that Castro and Nixon spoke about at length, with Nixon reporting that "his (Castro's) primary concern was with developing programs for economic progress."¹⁹ While Castro called for government capital, Nixon recorded later, "I told him quite bluntly that his best hope as far as the U.S. was concerned was not in getting more government capital but in attracting private capital."²⁰ Nixon's admonition to Castro highlighted the

14. "Transcript of News Conference Announcing Appointment of Herter." *New York Times*, 19 April 1959. Available at <http://0.proquest.umi.com.unccll.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=1&did=170429272&Srch-Mode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VIst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1231898458&clientId=15115>. Accessed 13 January 2009.

15. "Memorandum of a Conference between the President and the Acting Secretary of State, Augusta Georgia, 18 April 1959." *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 475.

16. *Ibid.*, 475.

17. Richard Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 201.

18. Jeffrey Safford, "The Nixon-Castro Meeting of 19 April 1959," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 4 (October 1980), 425.

administration's firm belief in private investment. The main problem was that Castro had fought a three year insurrection to oust a corrupt leader who had engaged in numerous underhanded business transactions with the private investors of whom Nixon was speaking. To bolster his case for private investment Nixon used Puerto Rico as an example. "I tried tactfully to suggest to Castro that Muñoz Marín had done a remarkable job in Puerto Rico in attracting private capital and in generally raising the standard of living of his people and that Castro might well send one of his top economic advisers to Puerto Rico to have a conference with Muñoz Marín."²¹ Castro "took a very dim view of this suggestion, pointing out that the Cuban people were 'very nationalistic' and would look with suspicion on any programs initiated in what they would consider to be a 'colony' of the United States."²²

Concerning American property in Cuba, Castro was quite forthcoming with the Vice President in explaining his planned agrarian reform. Nixon commented that "he explained his agrarian reform program in considerable detail justifying it primarily on the ground that Cuba needed more people who were able to buy the goods produced within the country and that it would make no sense to produce more in factories unless the amount of money in the hands of consumers was increased."²³ Nixon concluded his view of Cuba's new leader stating that Castro, "is either incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline—my guess is the former and I have already implied his ideas as to how to run a government or an economy are less developed than those of almost any world figure I have met in fifty countries."²⁴ While Nixon later commented that he

19. Office of the Vice President. "Conversation between Vice President Nixon and Fidel Castro," 25 April 1959. *Digital National Security Archive*. Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited, item #CU00007. Available at: <http://0-nsarchive.chadwyck.com.unc-clc.coast.uncwil.edu/cat/displayItem.do?queryType=cat&&ResultsID=120007DF7481&ItemNumber=2>. Hereafter referred to as *DNSA*.

20. *Ibid*, *DNSA*.

21. *Ibid*, *DNSA*.

22. *Ibid*, *DNSA*.

23. *Ibid*, *DNSA*.

24. *Ibid*, *DNSA*.

spoke to Castro like a “Dutch uncle,” his interpreter, Robert Stevenson reported that Nixon spoke to Castro just like a father.²⁵

Eisenhower’s decision to allow Nixon to meet with Castro was an interesting choice. By 1959 Nixon’s reputation was that of a staunch anti-communist and a man very suspicious of politicians with leftist leanings. Also, Nixon’s experience with Latin America was primarily limited to his disastrous 1958 tour of the region.²⁶ As one might expect Castro’s recollection of the meeting differed from Nixon’s. A Latin American reporter stated that Castro commented that “Vice President Nixon had reprimanded him for recent revolutionary activities against the Nicaraguans and Panamanian governments, Castro said that Nixon had devoted much of his conversation to defending the Somoza government of Nicaragua...”²⁷ *Revolución* reported that the meeting had been satisfactory for both Nixon and Castro.²⁸ Former British Ambassador to Cuba Leycaster Coltman and academic Julia Sweig contended that Nixon had patronized and humiliated Castro during the meeting, “When Nixon later gave his version of the meeting to the press, Castro’s body language was clear to those who knew him. On the surface he remained courteous and correct, but he was struggling to contain his anger and resentment.”²⁹

While in Washington Castro did not only meet with policymakers, he also addressed the United States media. His schedule included an

25. Louis Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 490.

26. In May of 1958 Vice President Richard Nixon set out on an extended tour of South America; Nixon’s visit included stops in Uruguay, Peru, and Venezuela; the trip proved disastrous. Nixon was harassed by law students in Montevideo and bombarded with rocks by students in Lima. Nixon’s trip ended in Caracas when his motorcade was attacked by several hundred Venezuelans. For more on the 1958 trip refer to Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), Chapter 1.

27. Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Mexican and Caribbean Affairs (Wieland),” 21 April 1959. *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 477.

28. “Satisfactoria entrevista de Nixon y Fidel Castro,” 20 April 1959. *Revolución*, p. 1. Microform, Serial Number 1-1573. Davis Library-University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, hereafter referred to as *Revolución*.

29. Leycaster Coltman and Julia Sweig, *The Real Fidel Castro* (New Haven, CT: Yale University press, 2005), 157.

appearance on *Meet the Press* and speeches before the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and the National Press Club (NPC). Speaking to the ASNE, Castro discussed in depth his plan for the Cuban economy. "The right of the Cuban and the way of the Cuban to improve his country...is what we want the people of the United States to understand...When somebody asked me if we were not coming for money, how could the United States help us? I answered...we want a just treatment in economical matters."³⁰ Castro also called for Americans to continue visiting the island, "if tourists want to go to Cuba, we want tourists to go to Cuba."³¹ During a question and answer session Castro was asked about issues concerning his government's ties to communism and mass executions of Batista followers. When bluntly asked about the role played by communists in the success of the revolution, Castro responded by saying that the communists had played no role, but that combination of "the middle class, the labor, the peasant, the rich people, everybody, it was a fight of all the classes, was a fight of all the people."³² On the subject of executions the Cuban leader was forthcoming in admitting that many executions had taken place, but he contended that they were justified as a response to the heinous criminal acts committed by those punished. By the time of Castro's visit, U.S. officials had estimated that 509 Cubans had been executed since Castro's seizure of power.³³ On the question of executions, American policymakers differed. It has been reported that President Eisenhower was extremely upset by the number of killings in such a brief time. CIA Director Dulles privately commented that "when you have a revolution, you kill your enemies. There were many instances of cruelty and oppression by the Cuban army, and they certainly have the goods on some of these people.

30. "Address by Dr. Castro," 17 April 1959. *American Society of Newspaper Editors* (Reston, VA), 86-87. Author received Castro's remarks via fax from the ASNE on January 15, 2009.

31. *Ibid.*, 86.

32. *Ibid.*, 93

33. "The Cuban Issue: A Chronology," 16 May 1963. *The Paterson Collection, The United States and Castro's Cuba, 1950-1970*. (Microform). Reel 2, slot 0302, U.S. Embassy-Havana Weekly Reports.

Now there probably will be a lot of injustice. It will probably go much too far, but they have to go through this.”³⁴

On 20 April Castro spoke at a NPC luncheon and declared that agrarian reform was necessary for Cuba to grow economically and socially. He contended that by expropriating land, the Cuban government would be able to create an internal market and provide employment to over 700,000 people.³⁵ Castro’s Finance Minister, Rufo López Fresquet, also stated that lands taken by the government would be paid for and organized into cooperatives. On the discussion of democracy in Cuba, Castro contended that “where there are hungry people, there is no real democracy.”³⁶ The speech at the NPC involved the first public discussion of Cuba’s need for economic assistance. Responding to a question regarding his views on attaining economic assistance from the U.S., Castro replied “We didn’t come here to get money. Many men come here to sell their souls.”³⁷ When pressed about Cuban-Soviet economic relations, which were non-existent at this time, Castro responded that “Cuba has not received any offer of economic aid from the Soviet Union or any other nation and we have not asked for it.”³⁸ On this subject, Castro was vehemently opposed to Cuba explicitly requesting the money. In fact, before the trip he told Treasury Minister Rufo López Fresquet that “I (Castro) don’t want this trip to be like that of other new Latin American leaders who always come to the U.S. to ask for money. I want this to be a good-will trip. Besides the Americans will be surprised. And when we go back to Cuba, they will offer us aid without our asking for it.”³⁹

34. Lars Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic: The United States and the Cuban Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 87.

35. Thomas Leonard, *Fidel Castro: A Biography* (New York: Greenwood Publishing, 2004), 48.

36. Dana Adams Schmidt, “Castro Stresses Land Reform Aim.” *New York Times* 20 April 1959. Available at <http://0proquest.umi.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=3&did=89183506&Srch-Mode=2&sid=1&Fmt=nst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1231959800&clientId=15115>. Accessed 14 January 2009.

37. *Ibid*, *NYT*.

38. *Ibid*, *NYT*.

At the conclusion of Castro's stay in Washington, Secretary Herter prepared a comprehensive memorandum detailing his visit. Herter contended that Castro did not have the same notion of law and legality that existed in the United States and that his position on remaining in the western camp "must be regarded...as uncertain." Herter also wrote that, "There is a probability that the land reform programs which Castro considers to be the essential key to the future well-being of the Cuban people may adversely affect certain American-owned properties in Cuba."⁴⁰ Herter's acknowledgement that Castro's agrarian reform would negatively affect U.S. business is critical; for it highlights that American policy makers knew well in advance that Castro's economic policies would injure American economic interests. Some have argued that Castro and his followers engaged in crafting a secret agrarian reform.⁴¹ While it is true that the agrarian reform later enacted by Castro was more widespread than his public declarations, it should not have greatly surprised U.S. policy makers.⁴² The British also prepared a memorandum concerning the end of Castro's visit. They reported that the United States had "had no intention of extending

39. Rufo López Fresquet, *My 14 Months with Castro* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966), 106.

40. Department of State. "Evaluation of the Unofficial Visit to Washington by Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba," 23 April 1959. *DNSA*. Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited, item #CU00006. Available at: <http://0-nsarchive.chadwyck.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/cat/displayItem.do?queryType=cat&&ResultsID=120007DF7481&ItemNumber=1>. Accessed 11 April 2009.

41. Tad Szulc argues that Castro and members of the Communist party in Cuba (PSP) held secret meetings in the fishing village of Cojimar outside of Havana. Szulc asserts that Castro was a Communist from the beginning and hid his true political affiliation so he could consolidate power. Recently declassified Soviet documents contradict Szulc's argument that Castro was closely tied to the PSP and show early in 1959 PSP members told Soviet agents that Fidel was in fact not a Communist, but that his brother Raúl was a party member; Tad Szulc, "Castro," 19 October 1986. *New York Times*. Available at <http://0-proquest.umi.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=283839002&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1232295540&clientId=15115>. Accessed 18 January 2009; Tad Szulc, *Fidel: A Critical Portrait* (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 476-478.

42. The agrarian reform was enacted on May 17, 1959. "On the Promulgation of the Agrarian Law," 17 May 1959. Castro Speech Database, Latin American Network Information Center. Available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19590517.htm>. Accessed 17 January 2009. Hereafter referred to as *LANIC*.

economic aid to Cuba or of making any official gesture of support for the regime.”⁴³

After departing Washington Castro and his contingent headed north. Following a lengthy speech at Princeton, Castro traveled to the same city he had visited in 1955 to secure funds for his revolution, New York.⁴⁴ Castro’s schedule in the “Big Apple” included a visit to the *New York Times*, a tour of the United Nations (U.N), and a speech at Columbia University. Though Castro’s visit to the U.N. was reported to be of an informal nature, he was escorted by Secretary General Daj Hammarskjöld. During the tour Castro stated, “in the United Nations, Cuba has complete independence.”⁴⁵ Castro’s welcome at Columbia was similar to the one he received at Princeton. As he embarked for Columbia large crowds formed around his motorcade with signs reading “*viva la Revolución Cubana*,” and “*viva Fidel*.” Castro remarked, “this is just the way it is in Cuba.”⁴⁶ At Columbia more than one thousand people showed up to hear Castro discuss his hopes for agrarian reform in Cuba as well as Cuba’s economic condition. Castro pronounced, “by making the estates of landowners smaller, we will make them produce three or four times as much as they have.”⁴⁷

On his final night in New York Castro delivered a speech in Central Park that attracted thousands. Americans and Latin Americans

43. “Memorandum from David Muirhead to Henry Hankey (British Foreign Officer in Charge of South American Affairs),” 23 April 1959. British Foreign Service Office Files for Cuba Part I: Revolution in Cuba, 1959-1960. Microform, Reel 1, FO 371/139396-139415. Davis Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

44. In 1955 Castro crossed into the United States at the Texas border and made his way to New York City. He held fundraisers for the 26th of July Movement. Speaking at the Palm Garden Hall he declared “in 1956 we will be free or we will be martyrs.” During Castro’s visit he was continuously followed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); Paterson, *Contesting Castro*, 18-20.

45. “Visita a las Naciones Unidas,” 23 April 1959. *Revolución*, p. 8.

46. Phillip Benjamin, “Leader Tells of Hopes for a Better Cuba.” *New York Times*, Available at <http://0-proquest.umi.com.unccl.coast.uncwil.edu/pqdweb?index=4&did=89184562&Srch-Mode=2&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1232035501&clientId=15115>. Accessed 17 January 2009.

47. *Ibid.*

hovered together to hear Cuba's new leader. The large crowd put Castro very much in his own element. In Cuba he was accustomed to drawing thousands of listeners. He declared that the Cuban Revolution had been misunderstood by the United States and that he did not come to America to hide. He told the story of his first visit to New York City when he spoke in front of one thousand people at the Palm Garden. "From this same city, in the act of Palm Garden, we said that in 1956 we would be free or would be martyrs."⁴⁸

To conclude his Ivy League and public speaking tour, Castro spoke at Harvard University on 25 April; once again large crowds gathered to welcome him. Castro was introduced by Harvard College Dean McGeorge Bundy, who would later serve as John Kennedy's National Security Advisor and advocate Castro's overthrow. Castro spoke in front of more than 8,700 people at Harvard's Dillon Field House. When introducing Castro Bundy related an interesting anecdote; apparently over lunch that day, Castro told Bundy that he had in fact applied to Harvard in 1948 but had been rejected. Bundy announced to the crowd that Harvard was ready to make up for that oversight and accept Fidel Castro into the class of 1963.⁴⁹

The differences in the treatment Castro received from the American public and the Eisenhower administration was notable. American universities graciously opened their doors whereas government institutions, such as the State Department, were almost forced to receive the new Cuban leader. While the public used its time with Castro for question and answer sessions and to hear the Cuban leader speak, American policy makers used their time to lecture and attempt to direct the revolution. As the American public became entranced by Castro, American policy makers became aggravated. For the public Castro represented the modern revolutionary. He was different than the political leaders to which Americans had become accustomed to. He did not wear a suit and tie, but opted rather for olive military

48. Fidel Castro, "Pan Sin Terror: Discurso pronunciado en el Parque Central de New York," (La Habana: Ediciones Movimiento, 1959), 11-12.

49. Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 11.

fatigues. He maintained a beard and spoke with a candor and flare that was absent in most American leaders.⁵⁰ To the Eisenhower administration Castro was a young, radical, inexperienced leader who had no concept of how politics in the Western Hemisphere were conducted. While the public was engrossed, American policy makers viewed Castro as a “dangerous nationalist” who threatened U.S. interests.⁵¹

While Castro traveled throughout the eastern seaboard of the United States, important events transpired inside Cuba. Two of the revolution’s most public figures, Raúl Castro and Che Guevara, delivered stirring speeches that caught the attention of U.S. policy makers. Raúl, who had been in Fidel’s shadow since their university days paled in comparison to his brother both stylistically and physically. While Raúl was known for being more read and knowledgeable, he lacked the charisma and *machismo* of his older brother. Furthermore, Fidel characterized Raúl as being “extraordinarily respectful” to him and observed that Raúl did not have the authority for major decisions regarding the revolution. Raúl used the opportunity of Fidel’s absence to speak about the enemies of the revolution. Speaking at the University of Havana, he accused the United States government of supporting counter-revolutionary activities. U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Bonsal noted that Raúl’s words were carefully chosen and highlighted his strong anti-Americanism.⁵² Guevara echoed Raúl’s sentiment and used the example of deposed Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz to

50. A certain segment of the American public, African Americans, were particularly enthralled with Castro and the Cuban Revolution. *Ebony*, a widely distributed African American magazine portrayed the revolution very favorably. In April 1959 they published an article that detailed the plight of Juan Almeida, a black Cuban who fought with Castro during the revolution. The article asserted that Castro’s belief in racial justice encouraged Almeida to join the revolution. The Cuban government reciprocated the warm reception Castro was given by African Americans.

By late 1959 the Castro government was openly advertising for an increase in African American tourism to Cuba. Castro enlisted the help of African American boxing champion Joe Louis who declared that Cuba was a place where African Americans could vacation and not have racial discrimination. For more on Castro and African Americans refer to: Brenda Plummer, “Castro in Harlem: A Cold War Watershed,” *Rethinking the Cold War*. Ed. Allen Hunter (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

51. Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 6.

52. “Telegram from the Embassy in Cuba to the Department of State, 21 April 1959.” *FRUS, 1958-1960, Cuba, Vol. VI*, 479-480.

crystallize his point. Guevara accused the United States of smearing Arbenz as a communist and then partaking in a “defamatory campaign against Arbenz and then paying for his ousting.” Guevara also challenged peasants, urban workers, and students to be diligent in their support and to be willing to take up arms to defend the revolution.⁵³ Guevara was well traveled in Latin America and had been present in Guatemala during the overthrow of the Arbenz government. By April 1959 he was a central figure in Cuba. Argentinean by birth, he was declared a Cuban citizen after Castro took power.

The speeches by Raúl and Che highlighted a developing division among the “big three” of the revolution. While Fidel attempted to come to an understanding with U.S. policy makers, Raúl and Che goaded administration officials. Raúl not only spoke about the revolution in Fidel’s absence, but he also directed policy. Raúl requested assistance from the Soviet Union to help in consolidating his control of the Cuban armed forces. Specifically, he wanted Spanish communists to help in training and advising. Soviet leaders were very hesitant to agree to Raúl’s request.⁵⁴ Cuba was in the American sphere of influence, and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had little knowledge of Cuba’s new leader, Fidel Castro. Khrushchev wrote “At the time that Fidel Castro led his revolution to victory and entered Havana with his troops, we had no idea what political course his regime would follow.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Soviet intelligence did not have any means of extracting information from the island. Soviet policy makers relied on newspaper and radio reports to gather information on what was happening inside Cuba.⁵⁶

It was by mere chance that the Soviet Union found out about Raúl’s political allegiance to communism. Nikolai Leonov, a Commit-

53. “Foreign Service Despatch, Statements by Ernesto “Che” Guevara,” 23 April 1959. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Cuba, U.S. Embassy. Record Group 84, 1959-1961. Box 97, Political Affairs (Cuba), *NACP*.

54. William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, 532.

55. Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, Translated by Strobe Talbott (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1970), 488.

56. *Ibid*, 489.

tee for State Security (KGB) officer, had come in contact with Raúl during their student days.⁵⁷ Leonov had struck up a friendship with Raúl in 1953 and reported that the younger Castro brother was affiliated with the Cuban Communist Party, the *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP). In his memoirs Khrushchev recalled, “we knew that Raúl Castro was a good Communist, but it appeared that he kept his true convictions hidden from his brother Fidel. Che Guevara was a Communist, too, and so were some of the others- or so we thought.”⁵⁸ The Kremlin believed that Fidel was not a communist, but rather a revolutionary who intended to “put his own stamp on a social revolution in his own country.”⁵⁹ One may question how Raúl kept his PSP membership covert for such a long period. Throughout the insurrection relations between the 26th of July Movement and the PSP were strained. The PSP only offered its unwavering support after it became obvious Castro’s forces were going to succeed.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it was not until January 1959 that Fidel Castro began meeting regularly with PSP officials and during that time the PSP criticized Castro and his cabinet for not acting in a revolutionary manner.⁶¹

The success of Castro’s revolution was a complete surprise to the Soviets. One Russian policy maker described it as “a completely unexpected miracle.”⁶² Khrushchev was certainly no revolutionary, but as historians Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko noted, “he admired those who could make a revolution.”⁶³ Perhaps Khrushchev

57. Raúl Castro and Nikolai Leonov have been described as firm friends. Leonov was a KGB foreign intelligence officer when they first met in 1953. For more refer to Carlos Alberto Montaner, *Journey to the Heart of Cuba: Life as Fidel Castro* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2001), 56-57; Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2005), 34.

58. Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 489.

59. Timothy Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 296.

60. Cole Blaiser, *The Giant’s Rival: The USSR and Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 102.

61. Samuel Farber, *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 158.

62. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 181.

became swept up with revolutionary fervor at the sight of Cuban tanks ousting a dictatorial government. As one member of the Soviet Presidium later remarked about the Cuban Revolution, "I felt as though I had returned to my childhood."⁶⁴ After much debate on whether or not to grant Raúl's request, on 23 April 1959 the Presidium approved the request. The initial contact between Castro's Cuba and the Soviet Union had taken place, but not at the behest of Fidel.⁶⁵

During Fidel's visit Raúl stayed in contact with his older brother, keeping him informed of the goings on inside Cuba. On 23 April, the same day Raúl's request to the Soviets was granted, he spoke with Fidel by telephone. Raúl questioned his brother's dedication to the revolution and informed him that many Cubans believed he was "selling out" to the Yankees. Hearing his brother's accusations, Fidel was enraged and almost came to tears. He contended that he "had not made a single unworthy or submissive speech."⁶⁶ At some point in the conversation, the brothers agreed to meet in Houston, Texas, where Fidel's plane would be refueling before flying to South America to continue his foreign tour.⁶⁷ On 27 April Raúl and six to eight escorts, all carrying diplomatic passports, departed Havana bound for Houston.⁶⁸ The Castro brothers' meeting took place in Houston's luxurious Shamrock Hilton Hotel. Fidel and Raúl argued into the night, and while no complete record exists of what was said, it most certainly

63. Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of A Gamble*, 11.

64. Naftali and Fursenko, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 296.

65. Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of A Gamble*, 11-12

66. Teresa Casuso, *Cuba and Castro* (New York: Random House, 1961), 216.

67. After departing Houston, Castro traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina and delivered a speech at an Inter-American Economic Conference. During his speech Castro appealed for the United States to supply Latin America with an economic aid package comparable to the Marshall Plan in Europe. Specifically, Castro asked for thirty billion dollars of aid dispersed over a ten year period. Ironically, Castro's plan was modified and instituted in 1961 by President John Kennedy in the form of the Alliance for Progress; "Castro Calls for Vast Economic Aid," 5 May 1959. Castro Speech Database, *Latin American Network Information Center*. Available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19590505-2.html>. Accessed 18 January 2009, *LANIC*.

68. "Telegram from Embassy in Cuba to Department of State." 26 April 1959. Department of State Dispatch. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Cuba, U.S. Embassy. 1959-1961. Record Group 84, Box 97. Political Affairs, *NACP*.

pertained to the phone conversation that took place on the 23 April. Fidel's Foreign Trade Director, Ernesto Betancourt, recalled a shouting match between the brothers that included the phrase, *hijo de puta*.⁶⁹ The next day in public the brothers denied any argument, and *Revolución* published a photograph of Fidel and Raúl smiling while they toured Houston.⁷⁰ Once in private at the Houston airport they once again argued loudly. Betancourt returned with Raúl to Cuba and recollected that it was completely silent on the plane. Betancourt believed that Raúl refused to acknowledge him because "he was convinced I had been persuading Fidel to improve relations with the Americans."⁷¹

The differences among Fidel, Raúl, and Che were a result of Fidel's openness to establishing some sort of relationship with the United States. Raúl and Che believed Soviet support, rather than American was the best option for Cuba. Fidel's indifference to the Soviet Union was evident when he took power in January and during his April visit. Shortly after he took power the Soviet Union extended recognition to the Castro government, an overture that Fidel did not reciprocate.⁷² Furthermore, during a reception at the Cuban embassy on 18 April Castro "snubbed the Soviet Ambassador..."⁷³ The differences between Fidel and Raúl and Che continued to widen after his return to Cuba in May. After returning Castro publicly denounced the ideas that Raúl and Che had touted in the previous days. Castro declared that on his trip to the United States, people sympathized with the Cuban Revolution and that he welcomed U.S. contributions to the development of Latin America. As for Che's call for a standing militia, Castro said none was necessary in a time of peace.⁷⁴

69. Brian Latell, *After Fidel: The Inside Story of Castro's Regime and Cuba's Next Leader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 13-14.

70. *Revolución*, 28 April 1959, p. 1.

71. Latell, *After Fidel*, 15.

72. Nicola Miller, *Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1959-1987* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 59.

73. Lester Langley, *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 191.

74. "Six Hour Marathon Television Appearance," 14 May 1959. Castro Speech Database. Available at <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1959/19590514.html>. Accessed 17 January 2009. LANIC

The developing rift between Fidel and Raúl did not go unnoticed by U.S. policy makers. Lars Schoultz argued that as early as February 1959 the United States began to view the Cuban Revolution as a fragile coalition of three separate groups. The first being the most radical led by Raúl Castro and Che Guevara; a second group comprised of left-leaning thinkers led by Fidel Castro and a third group described as a “more mature, moderate group.”⁷⁵ During a National Security Council meeting on 23 April, Allen Dulles stated that he was “well aware of the differences that existed among the Cuban leadership.”⁷⁶

The troubles that existed among Cuba’s “big three” came close to causing a fissure among the leaders of the revolution, but was ultimately not exploited by U.S. policy makers. Raúl momentarily contemplated dividing the 26th of July Movement to show Fidel that the PSP was needed, while Che threatened to emigrate from Cuba.⁷⁷ The threats made by Raúl and Che certainly affected Fidel’s thinking immediately after his trip to the United States. Ultimately, Fidel sided with Raúl and Che, and in doing so, sided with the more hard-line elements of the Cuban Revolution. Perhaps that was his plan all along, though more likely, his opportunistic side led him to those elements following his April visit.

In conclusion, while Castro’s first visit to the United States has long been viewed as insignificant, the opportunities the April trip presented both the United States and Cuba were immense. By examining the April trip it is possible to gain a better understanding of the possibilities for cooperation that existed in U.S.-Cuban relations immediately after Castro took power. Could the United States and Castro’s Cuba ever have agreed on a *modus vivendi*? Had President Eisenhower reached out to Castro during his April 1959 visit and welcomed him, could U.S.-Cuban relations have been sustained? Or did Castro need

75. Schoultz, *That Infernal Little Cuban Republic*, 89.

76. “Memorandum of discussion at the 403rd Meeting of the National Security,” 23 April 1959. *The Paterson Collection, The United States and Castro's Cuba, 1950-1970*. (Microform). Reel 8, slot 1691, Anti-Batista Activities 1958-1959.

77. Naftali and Fursenko, *One Hell of a Gamble*, 18.

the United States as an adversary in order to consolidate his power? Castro's frequent use of anti-American rhetoric immediately after taking power in 1959 certainly did affect the United States' opinion of Cuba's revolutionary government, but Castro's April 1959 visit provided a chance for an understanding to be reached by the United States and Cuba.

The events that occurred during Fidel Castro's visit, both in the United States and in Cuba, underscore the complexities that characterized U.S. relations with revolutionary Cuba and can offer examples for current policymakers. Rather than engage in open dialogue with Fidel Castro and exploit the rift between the Cuban leader and more hard-line members of his government, Raúl and Che specifically, U.S. policy makers such as Vice President Richard Nixon took the occasion to lecture the young revolutionary on how Cuba should be governed. Secretary Herter's initial description of his time with Castro focused more on Castro's "wild" oratorical style than his policies.

Whereas the United States exercised doctrinaire diplomacy, its rival the Soviet Union, showed flexibility. Soviet policymakers granted a request from Raúl Castro and the first high level agreements between Havana and the Kremlin were reached. In the end, Castro's visit, his first as *de facto* leader of Cuba, offered the United States opportunities to reconstitute U.S.-Cuban relations while also co-opting the more hard-line energies of the Cuban Revolution, opportunities policymakers did not seize.

As the United States and Cuba enter their fiftieth year without formal diplomatic relations, the opportunities the April trip presented loom larger than ever. For if any sort of understanding is to be reached between the island of Cuba and the United States, open dialogue and a willingness of both sides to make concessions must be apparent. The April visit offered hope in the way of an understanding between the governments in Havana and Washington. Ironically, U.S.-Cuban relations deteriorated during the visit, while Soviet-Cuban relations strengthened.

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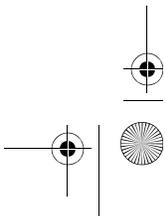
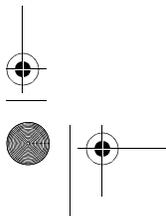
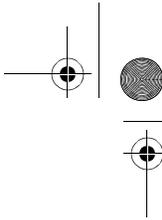
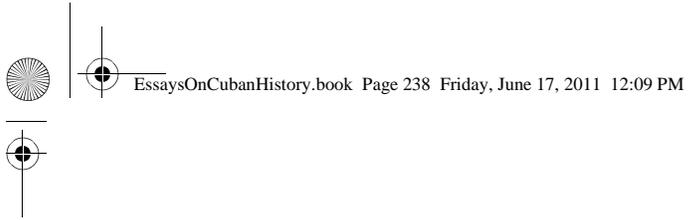
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11 Cuba's Attempts at Democracy: The Colony

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Abstract: One interesting question in Cuba's history is: Why did Cuba fail to become independent in the early part of the nineteenth century, at the same time as most countries in Latin America? Simple explanations such as slavery, economic conditions at the time, or the special relation between Cuba and Spain are not very convincing by themselves. We present a framework recently developed for the analysis of democracies and we adapt it to the circumstances prevailing at the time in the first section of the paper. Subsequent sections use this adapted framework to gain new insights on the possible role of each of the factors mentioned previously in delaying Cuban independence and on the lack of a one-to-one relation between independence and democracy. That is, we consider in separate sections the special relation with Spain, the role of slavery, and the economic conditions at the time. A brief concluding section provides perspective on the answer to this question and on the relation between independence and democracy.

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Most Latin American countries became independent from Spain at the beginning of the 19th century. This happened through declarations of independence for areas similar but not identical to current geographical arrangements or for larger territories, comprising several current countries that later separated into the countries we know today. Instances of the latter are the Federal Republic of Central America (1821) [Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua] and The Republic of Gran Colombia (1821) [Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Venezuela]. Instances of the former are Haiti (1804); Bolivia (1825); Brazil (1822); Chile (1818); Mexico (1810); Paraguay (1811); Peru (1821); Uruguay (1825).

Yet, Cuba did not manage to become independent until 1902 although its declaration of independence can be placed as early as October 10 1868. This date marks the start of the first war for independence (Ten Years War) and the event itself is associated with the abolition of slavery. On this date the liberation of his slaves by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes is one of the first acts at “La Demajagua” sugar mill upon declaring independence.

While this association between independence and the abolition of slavery may have been one reason for the difference in the timing of independence between Cuba and other Latin American countries, it is somewhat inconsistent with the events of the time as a primary or sole explanation. Most if not all of the countries that became independent in the first quarter of the 19th century did not abolish slavery until later, sometimes much later. In several the lag was short, less than ten years, e.g., Federal Republic of Central America (1824), Chile (1823), and Bolivia (1831). In others, however, the lag was much longer, e.g., for example Uruguay (1842), Colombia (1851), Venezuela (1853), and Brazil (1888). Of course, a similar long lag applies to the United States where independence from Britain takes place in 1776 and slavery is abolished in 1863.

Along the same lines, simple economic explanations for the differential timing of Cuba’s independence do not fare too well when con-

fronted with the facts if one views independence as a normal good, i.e., one for which the demand rises with income. If we consider the economic circumstances at the time of Latin American independence movements, let us say the first quarter of the 19th century, we find that Cuba was economically advanced relative to the other colonies and even to the United States. For instance, there are (Coatsworth, 1998: Table 1.1) estimates for Cuba's per capita income in 1800 of 112% relative to the US and higher than any other Latin American country. For example at that time Argentina, the next highest country in the same source, was estimated to have a per capita income of 102 % relative to the US. Incidentally, Argentina gained its independence in 1816 and abolished slavery in 1853.

A third popular explanation for Cuba's differential timing in attaining independence was the 'special relation' between Cuba and Spain. One interpretation of Cuban history put forth from a Spanish /European point of view, according to the author, and consistent with this view is "Los Cubanos" (Montaner, 2006). Here, Montaner identifies three groups of protagonists among the Cuban "criollo" class throughout the 19th century and labels them "autonomistas, anexionistas, and independentistas."

The "autonomistas" are described by him as reform minded individuals seeking greater autonomy for local decision making while pledging allegiance to the Spanish Crown. The "anexionistas" are described by him as individuals convinced that Cuba's interests were better served within the American Union. Finally, he describes the "independentistas" as individuals committed to the creation of a republic similar to the ones conceived by Bolivar for Latin America.

A broader characterization of the "autonomistas" is as individuals committed to the view that Cuba and Spain had a 'special relation' that called for a different type of arrangement than either a typical 'subjugated' colony or a 'fully' independent state. The role of these individuals between 1790 and the late 1820's in Cuba is the basis of this third explanation for the differential timing of Cuba's indepen-

dence. A narrower less complimentary characterization of the “autonomistas” during this period is as the plantation or sugar oligarchy, i.e., the “plantocracia” or the “sacarocracia” (Moreno Friginals, 1995: p.146). This narrower view provides a simple version of this third explanation: Namely, the plantation or sugar oligarchy prevented independence. Finally, a more nuanced view of the “autonomistas” (suggested by Carlos Quijano in private correspondence) notes their evolution from espousing local or provincial self-government during this period to espousing self-government for the whole island as part of the Spanish nation immediately afterwards to full independence in the 1870s.

In order to understand the “autonomistas” views as well as in assessing the role of economic considerations and slavery on independence and democracy, it is useful to be clear on what we mean by democracy. A recent paper (Betancourt, 2010) argues that it is currently conceived in terms of three dimensions: political rights, civil liberties and legitimacy and that these dimensions interact with each other. It also argues that legitimacy, in particular, is quite sensitive to context in terms of time and place. Thus, it is desirable to explore what these concepts meant at the beginning of the 19th century. For, they would have affected the interplay between these three explanations for the differential timing of Cuban independence. Moreover, they would also affect the relationship between independence and democracy. These two terms are not synonyms even now, and they were much less so at the beginning of the 19th century.

In sum we hope to enhance understanding of two issues in this brief essay. First, what were the factors that determined Cuba’s failure to become independent at the beginning of the 19th century? Second, what was the relation of these factors to the process of democratization in Cuba at the time? In order to do so we will proceed in the following manner. In the next section a framework developed for the analysis of modern democracies is adapted to the circumstances of the early 19th century. Subsequent sections use this framework to gain new

insights on the three issues potentially relevant for answering the two question identified above. In particular, we consider the 'special relation' with Spain (section 2), the role of slavery (section 3) and the economic conditions of the time (section 4). A brief conclusion provides an overall perspective on the answers to these questions.

DEMOCRACY'S DIMENSIONS IN THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY

It is common place now-a-day to conceive of democracy in terms of the dimension of political rights. The latter usually include the holding of free or fair elections, constraints on the arbitrary power of the executive, and the extent and competitiveness of participation in the political process as well as the degree of accountability and transparency of policies. Indeed, there are different indexes designed to measure this dimension of democracy e.g., the Freedom House Political Rights Index, or the Polity IV Constraints on the Executive measure.

Similarly, it is also fairly common now-a-day to view civil liberties as an integral or defining dimension of democracy. Originally, they included individual rights guaranteed in most countries constitutions, for example freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, and more generally some form of rule of law protection for individuals. Today, these liberties also encompass the protection of individuals' rights to improve their well being through their ownership of property, their mobility with respect to location, housing, education and employment as well as social freedoms, for example marrying whom you want. Just as in the case of political rights there are different indexes designed to measure this dimension, e.g., the Freedom House Civil Liberties Index, or selected aspects of this dimension, the Economic Freedom Index put out by the Fraser Institute.

Less common place is associating the notion of democracy with legitimacy. To prevent confusion, let's note that by legitimacy I mean the willingness of the governed to accept the right of those who gov-

ern them to do so. Furthermore, just as most basic institutional concepts it has two aspects: a *de jure* aspect and a *de facto* aspect. Thus, democracy is by definition legitimate from the *de jure* point of view when power is attained through an electoral process perceived as free and fair. Yet, even if this condition is satisfied it can lose its *de facto* legitimacy due to the performance of the elected officials. For instance, if elected officials engage in rampant corruption, violations of fundamental rights or failure to provide basic public goods that a society has come to expect (law and order for example), a democratic government can easily become illegitimate from the *de facto* point of view. While this may seem far fetched in stable, democratic developed countries, it is far more likely in less stable democracies in developing countries.

In projecting these concepts back to the New World at the beginning of the 19th century, we have to consider how these dimensions would have been viewed at the time by those involved. For this task it is useful to start by thinking of democracy as a process and of a regime as democratic (Tilly, 2007: p. 14) "...to the degree that political relations between the state and its citizens feature broad, equal, protected and mutually binding consultations." An additional category in describing a regime is noted by Tilly, i.e., the state's capacity to enforce its political decisions. These five categories are only partly independent. They also map into the three modern dimensions identified above. Their usefulness lies in two factors: often it is easier to relate them directly to the conditions prevailing at the beginning of the 19th century and to characterize their evolution as indicating movements toward democratization or de-democratization.

Breadth relates to the extent of citizenship rights enjoyed by households in a society. Equality refers to the differences in rights enjoyed by different groups in a society as well as within these groups. Breadth and equality correspond most closely to what we have called political rights. Protection refers to protection against arbitrary action by the state. Mutually binding consultation implies a well defined set of rights and obligations for both agents of the state and categories of

citizens. Protection and mutually binding consultation correspond most closely to what we have called civil liberties. Legitimacy includes the state's capacity to enforce its political decisions with respect to these categories but also the extent to which the degree of breadth, equality, protection and mutually binding consultation in a regime is consistent with the expectations of the population on these matters.

CUBA'S SPECIAL RELATION WITH SPAIN

Many factors affect the development of this relationship, ranging from location and geography to historical circumstances in Cuba and the rest of the world. But the main elements are not the subject of much dispute. Cuba's location at the entrance of the Caribbean and its easily accessible natural harbors had made it a critical entry and exit point for Spain's military and commercial relations with the New World. A key event in this development was the occupation of Havana by the British in 1762. For a variety of reasons after Havana's return to the Spaniards in 1763, there were a number of changes in Cuba's interactions with Spain in the commercial and military realm that were either not experienced by other colonies to the same extent or introduced later (Piqueras Arenas, 2009: pp.273-277).

For instance, island residents were encouraged to form their own local military units. Of course, they had to pay for their maintenance locally as well. In Cuba's case this led to a local army of 7,500 soldiers (Moreno Fragnals, 1995: p. 138) that could supplement and be integrated with the Spanish troops from the peninsula in maintaining the empire. In exchange Cuba could engage in free commerce with several Spanish ports as well as with the 13 colonies.

Influenced by the American revolution, English economic ideas on free commerce and similar organizations generated by the Enlightenment in Spain, the leading "autonomista" of the period, Francisco Arango y Parreño, founds the "Sociedad Económica Patriótica de Amigos del País" in 1787 (Montaner, 2006). This organization was

devoted to the promotion of ideas and knowledge that would improve agricultural and industrial production, promote trade and education of elites and masses as well as the printing press and policies that would improve efficiency of government.

While the American Revolution stress on civil liberties and the rule of law (at least for some privileged members of society) must have been attractive to “autonomistas”, since many of them belonged to the Cuban elite and were property owners, the French Revolution must have been more of a mixed bag from their point of view. Liberty, equality and fraternity might have sounded attractive intellectually to some of them in 1789, but the successful armed struggle in Haiti, culminating in independence in 1804, must have been a sobering episode. The latter had dramatic negative consequences for the welfare of the white minority population of Haiti as well as for many nonwhites that had adopted French ways.

Some of the “autonomistas” were coffee planters (Moreno Fragnals, 1995: p.146). Many coffee planters that survived Haiti’s independence struggle migrated to Cuba’s eastern provinces with their tales of horrors (Montaner, 2006: p.62). While Cuba’s black and slave population at the time was a much smaller proportion of the total than Haiti’s, which was well over 90% (Thomas, 1971: p.75), it was still substantial as we shall see below (Table 1). The Haitian example must have generated much uncertainty about what independence could bring to Cuba. Thus, it would have increased the enthusiasm for the special relation in many individuals, including some for whom independence may have seemed an attractive alternative otherwise. The special relation and continued association with Spain embedded in the “autonomistas” position would have provided a less uncertain alternative than full independence for many individuals.

An important factor in the development of this special relation after the occupation of Havana by the British was the weakness of Spain’s monarchy in terms of resources for financing the protection of the empire and its obvious vulnerability at least with respect to Cuba.

A similar situation of weakness on the part of Spain as a colonial power at the beginning of the 19th century led to the development of further links in this special relation as well as to the successful struggle for independence in many of the other colonies.

Napoleon invades Spain in 1808. The invasion creates strange bedfellows in defense of the Spanish monarchy as well as attempts to get rid of it altogether by some of the colonies. Some defenders supported the Spanish monarchy as it had been. It was the French they objected to. Others were influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution and supported a modified Spanish monarchy: Namely, one constitutionally constrained to prevent the abuses of absolutism. Others, including many in the colonies, preferred doing away with the monarchy altogether. This invasion generates a period of instability in Spain and its relation to the colonies that ends in 1824 with Spain's conclusive defeat in the New World (Montaner, 2006).

One particular episode during this period highlights the special relation between Cuba and Spain, "las Cortes de Cádiz." This was a constitutional convention in Cádiz, Spain, that began in 1810. It aimed to circumscribe the power of the monarchy and guarantee individual rights. Representatives from the colonies were invited and Cuba had three. A constitution was finally adopted in 1812. A proposal to abolish the slave trade was considered and rejected due to the opposition of the Cuban representatives. This proposal was controversial with broad participation by others for and against the Cuban position. On the positive side, for example, the highest Spanish authority in Cuba, Captain General Someruelos, wrote a letter in support of the Cuban position, highlighting Cuba's tranquility and economic contribution to Spain (Piqueras Arenas, 2009: p.280). On the negative side, for example, all other representatives from the colonies opposed the Cuban position and supported the proposal for abolition of the slave trade (Moreno Friginals, 1995: p. 161).

Not every one in Cuba was attracted to this special relationship after 1808. At least two exceptions are labeled 'stellar moments in

Cuba's history' (Martínez Paula, 2007: pp 77-78). The first one is an attempt at independence in 1809 by Román de la Luz Silvera, a wealthy member of the Havana oligarchy, who sponsored the writing of a Cuban constitution by the lawyer Joaquín Infante. This constitution was to be the basis for an independent state that accepted slavery 'as long as it was necessary'. The sponsor was condemned to ten years in prison and permanent expatriation and the lawyer escaped to Venezuela. The second one was a set of attempts by Cuba's black population toward insurrection around 1811. Initial attempts occurred at individual sugar mills but without co-ordination or well organized leadership. In this context Jose Antonio Aponte, a free black man from Havana, emerges as a leader and organizes uprisings in various places. These uprisings were suppressed mercilessly and Aponte was hung in April of 1812.

Another alternative that emerges formally at this time is annexation to the United States through purchase proposals. President Jefferson sent an emissary to Someruelos in 1809 proposing purchasing Cuba if Spain could not maintain herself there (Thomas, 1971: p.179). Nothing came of the offer.

While Spain's weakness as a colonial power is one important factor in the development of the special relationship, the economic power of the Cuban "criollo" class, which includes a much broader group than just the sugar planters, is an equally important factor. For instance, between 1815 and 1819 (after the return of absolutism to Spain in 1814) the Cuban "criollo" class obtains five measures quite favorable to their economic interests from the Spanish crown (Piqueras Arenas, 2009: p. 282). These measures are: 1) Free exploitation of forest resources and a favorable resolution of a legal claim against the Spanish Navy (1815); 2) Elimination of the tobacco monopoly by the crown (1817); 3) Free trade with other countries (1817), basically consolidating 25 years of earlier measures and informal activities; 4) The ability to hold, use and transact property previously held in common by private individuals (1819); 5) Finally, the recognition of the validity of land grants by the Crown and municipalities prior to 1729, of trans-

actions that allowed the transformation of cattle ranches into sugar mills, and of the property rights of those occupying royal lands over the previous 40 years (1819).

In sum, the special relation allowed the Cuban “criollo” class, not only the sugar planters, to protect their economic interests whether the prevailing winds in Spain were being blown by Spanish liberals in the Cortes or by the Spanish Crown during this critical period in Spanish history. Moreover, the independence movements strengthened the nature of the special relation. For, Cuba was the first landing point in the New World for Spanish troops coming from Europe to try to suppress the insurrections in the rest of Latin America. It was also the place to which they retreated after their defeats (Moreno Fragnal, 1995: p.167).

We are now in a position to view these events associated with the special relation in terms of what they may imply for democracy at the time. This period can be characterized as one of democratization in terms of civil liberties, at least for whites and free nonwhites. In particular, the five reforms illustrating the economic power of the Cuban “criollo” class, which come toward the end of this period under absolutism, all point in the direction of codifying protection and mutually binding consultation against the arbitrary power of the state. They imply a well defined set of rights and obligations for both agents of the state and a large subset of subjects of the state, especially in the economic sphere. Hence, on these dimensions one must conclude that Cuba experienced a substantial democratization process between 1790 and the 1820s despite its failure to become independent.

When we come to political rights or the breadth and equality of ‘citizenship’ rights, however, one is usually speaking of the breadth and equality of the rights of Crown subjects. There certainly were substantial inequalities in the breadth and equality of rights enjoyed by different groups. The most important one is, of course, between slaves and whites and free nonwhites. The inequalities between the political rights of slaves and the rest of society certainly increased dur-

ing this period. On paper the new slave code of 1789, the Spanish Code Noir, was more enlightened than any other slave code of the time, but it was not even promulgated in Cuba on appeal from the slave owners because it would encourage dangerous attitudes (Thomas, 1971: p. 74). Thus, the breadth and equality of political rights of the slave population decreased during this period, leading to de-democratization on this dimension. It is likely that this would not have happened if Cuba had become independent, but it is by no means certain.

While whites and free non-whites may have enjoyed more civil liberties and political rights in practice than they would have otherwise, slaves enjoyed fewer ones as a result. Slaves did not view the situation as legitimate, which is illustrated by their many revolts during this period. Furthermore, many “criollo” non-slaves (both white and non-white) did not view the situation as legitimate either. This is illustrated by the attempts at independence during this period mentioned above and the more numerous subsequent ones, for example the “Rayos y Soles de Bolívar” conspiracy that started as early as 1821 (Martínez Paula, 2007: p.83). In fact, even the more sophisticated “autonomistas” had difficulty in legitimizing a setting where slavery was an integral part of the system. This is illustrated by a convoluted argument of Arango y Parreño in opposing the abolition of the slave trade in the “Cortes de Cádiz” (Moreno Friginals, 1995: p.162).

SLAVERY

We have already discussed some aspects of slavery during this period in the previous section. There we concentrated on those aspects relevant to the special relation between Cuba and Spain. Here we will focus on the role of slavery *per se* in Cuban society during this period. We discuss first the ‘facts’ involved in terms of population numbers and subsequently the evolution and characteristics of the system.

Between 1790 and 1820 there was a substantial increase in Cuba's population as well as a dramatic change in its composition. The annual rate of growth of the total population was about 2.9%, but this was made up of a low of 2.4% for whites, a high of 3.5% for slaves and an average of 2.9%, for free nonwhites, mainly blacks and mulattoes. Hence, during this period there was a substantial decrease in the percentage of whites in the population, to about 43%, and a substantial increase in the percentage of slaves in the population, to about 36%. The percentage of free nonwhites remained about the same, around 20 to 21%. Table 1 below presents the relevant available information for the period as well as for prior and subsequent years for perspective. It is an adaptation by the author from the original source (Naranjo Orovio, 2009: pp. 31-32).

Table 1. Cuba's Population, 1775—1827, %1 /Growth Rate2

	1775	1792	1817	1827
Whites	56.2/n.a	48.8/ .018	43.4/ .024	44.2/ .026
Free Nonwhites	18.0/n.a	20.4/ .034	20.6/ .029	15.1/- .068
Slaves				
Totals3 /Growth Rate2	171.6/n.a	274.0/ .026	553.0/ .029	704.5/ .025

¹Percentage of total population; ²Annual growth rate between table years; ³Absolute numbers in 000's of persons.

The table reveals that Cuba's demographic evolution between 1790 and 1820 reflects an acceleration of a process started before 1790 and that the main elements of this process continued beyond 1820. This evolution was substantially affected by the importation of African slaves. The period 1815-1819 is the five year period with the greatest percentage increase in the importation of African slaves in Cuba's history, well over 100%. The flow of slaves went from about 30,000 in the previous five year period to over 100,000 in this one (Perez de la Riva, 1979: pp.41-44). These numbers are not surprising in light of the Spanish agreement with the British to abolish the slave trade with a three year grace period in 1817 (Thomas, 1971: p.94).

Prior to the increase in plantation agriculture in 1770, which accelerated during the period 1790 to 1820, slavery had some features that ameliorated the more inhumane aspects of the institution. It has been well documented that it was feasible and not a rare event for a slave to buy his or her freedom (de la Fuente, 2009: pp.142-143). For instance, 80% of freed slaves bought their freedom during the period 1700-1770 (the other 20% were released by their masters) and free non-whites constituted about 20% of the population during this period. 79% of the freed slaves in 1690-1694 were “criollos” (born in the island) as opposed to African. Women were able to buy their freedom in greater proportion than men, despite their inferiority in terms of numbers, and at earlier ages. For example, the average age of women at manumission was 24 years, against 37 for men, in the 17th century and it was 42 years, against 48 for men, in the 18th century.

Two important reasons for these differences in slavery prior to 1790 lie in the structure of the economy and in the evolution of the plantation system. Cuba’s main economic activities were not dominated by a plantation system until the end of the 18th century. Thus, slaves could even work on their own as long as they paid a daily fee “jornal” to the slave owner. In the cities this gave rise to their participation in a wide variety of activities in the tertiary sector, especially among females.

Even in agricultural activities such as those of cattle estates, which hardly used slaves, or those of tobacco farms, which were not operated as plantations and produced the main export product during most of the 18th century, the life of the slaves was less controlled by the masters (de la Fuente, 2009: p.144) than in a plantation system. Furthermore, in the plantation sector the use of large numbers of slaves, which requires greater control mechanisms, is a feature of the late 18th century. For example, between 1750 and 1780 the average number of slaves in a Cuban sugar mill increases by 50, from an average of about 18 at mid-century (de la Fuente, 2009: p.144).

Expansion of the large scale plantation system between 1790 and 1820 changes the nature of slavery in profound ways. It becomes far more difficult to buy freedom both because of the tighter control of the slaves' labor under the large scale plantation system and because of the increase in the economic value of slaves. For instance, the cost of a "bozal" (a slave imported from Africa) in Cuba was estimated at 200 pesos in 1792 and at 375 pesos in 1818. Despite the increase in price, demand for slaves increases substantially due to increases in the demand for sugar.

One factor that facilitates meeting this increase in demand for sugar are technological advances incorporated into sugar production industrial processes. One of them, for example, was the Jamaican train of copper cauldrons that could be heated over the same fire and at the same time and temperature. It was brought over by French planters (Bethell, 1993: p. 9). In any event the number of slaves in 1792 was estimated at 88,000 and in 1817 at 147, 000. Perhaps more importantly in our context, the number of females went from 40,000 in 1792 to 25,000 in 1817 (Thomas, 1971: p.89). The 16 hour days in the plantations and the nature of the work favored the use of males over females. It also worsened the quality of life for plantation slaves during this period (e.g., Moreno Fraginals, 2009: pp.171-180).

Both the political rights and the civil liberties of slaves worsened during the 1790 -1820 period due to their increased prevalence as the main source of plantation labor. While there was no change in the formal circumstances for buying their freedom, the possibilities of doing so in practice diminished considerably for the two reasons indicated above. One symptom of the deterioration of the slaves' situation was the decline in fertility of plantation female slaves. It was much lower than their white counterparts despite economic and sociological reasons leading to the expectation of a higher level. It even attracted the attention of foreign medical experts who were engaged to explain the disparity (Moreno Fraginals, 1995: p.175). There is no doubt about this period being one of a de-democratization process for this segment of the population. This is the case in terms of a lack of breadth

and equality of rights and a lack of protection and mutually supporting obligations between the state's agents and this segment of the population. Furthermore, the situation of the plantation slaves would not improve for several decades.

Two social groups in addition to the planters' class, however, benefitted during this period from increased political rights and civil liberties. One was free nonwhites who for a long time had been able to participate in the Army and in various occupations, including teachers. For instance, during this period a substantial number of free nonwhites participated in military activities on behalf of the Spanish Crown. They did so as units composed entirely of "pardos y morenos" (blacks and mulattos) sometimes suppressing insurrections elsewhere. Ironically, this group lost many of the privileges gained from this and prior democratizations upon the return of absolutism once the wars of independence had been settled in the mid 1820s (Moreno Friginals, 1995: pp.179-180; Casanovas Codina, 2009: pp.176-177).

An interesting illustration of their loss of protection from the state is the experience of the "coartados." The latter were slaves who had paid a portion of the agreed price to become free. Around 1840 they are said to prefer to remain slaves than to become free due to the greater personal security accruing to slaves than to free nonwhites (Moreno Friginals, 1995: p.178).

Another group with a similar experience was that of "peninsulares", Spaniards residing in the island, especially those engaged in economic activities other than sugar and coffee. The reliance on monopoly control of trade by the Spanish Crown during most of the early colonial period had limited their political rights and civil liberties. The latter began to improve after the relaxation of the actual Crown trade monopolies in the last quarter of the 18th century. During the 1790-1820 period their rights were strengthened both by measures supporting the special relation between Cuba and Spain described in the previous section and/or the desire to retain Cuba as a colony. This

aspect of democratization was the result of an attempt to diminish uncertainty about state capacity and the legitimacy of the state.

Just as in the case of free nonwhites and even the “criollo” planter class, however, once the independence issue was settled in the mid 1820s a de-democratization process ensued for this group in the subsequent period. In their case the driving force was also the return of absolutism and the latter’s uneasy alliance with the “criollo” planter class. For instance, in 1825 white “criollos” were exempted from military service and could travel freely as a result; “Peninsulares” were not exempted, which impeded their ability to travel to a considerable extent (Casanovas Codina, 2009: pp.176-177). Of course, this decree also limited the possibilities of rebellion by the “criollo” class.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Indirectly we have already considered economic conditions during this period but it is worthwhile to be more explicit about the situation. We begin by providing evidence on the extent of economic progress between 1790 and 1820 directly. Subsequently we discuss several issues of interpretation.

Sugar exports rose from an annual average of about 5,300 tons in 1760-64 to about 18,000 tons in 1790-94 to about 62,000 tons in 1820-24 (Santamaría García, 2009: p. 75). This implies a compound growth rate of 4.07% in the first 30 years and of 4.12% in the second 30 years. Coffee exports grew from less than 80 tons prior to 1792 to 12,000 tons by 1823 (Thomas, 1971: p. 129). This implies a compound growth rate of 16.7% over the 30 year period.

One reason for the dramatic increase in Cuba’s coffee exports was the economic impact of the Haitian rebellion between 1791 and 1804. It resulted in the destruction of numerous coffee plantations as well as a substantial number of sugar ones. The Spanish colonial authorities viewed this rebellion as an economic opportunity. For instance, in 1792 a royal decree granted coffee an exemption from certain taxes

“*alcabalas* and *diezmos*” for ten years, which was extended indefinitely (Thomas, 1971: p.129).

Cuban planters also viewed the Haitian process as an economic opportunity, because it destroyed the French sugar trade. The latter was Cuba’s biggest rival in the world at the time (Thomas, 1971: pp. 77 -84). Some planters in the western part of Cuba, for example, burned their tobacco fields to devote the land to sugar production. Similarly, a period of innovation in the sugar industry took place by both local planters and French immigrants from Haiti. Innovations were spurred by a sensational increase in sugar prices, relative scarcity of land and especially of slave labor. Another consequence of this opportunistic view was a far more substantial involvement of Cuban merchants in the slave trade, which had become both more profitable and less controllable by all colonial governments. Prior to this period the slave trade had been dominated by other nationalities.

One final aspect of economic conditions during the period 1790-1820 merits mention here. Cuba’s fiscal situation becomes highly unusual and unique relative to prior experience. Before this period resources often had to be assigned to Cuba from other colonies, specifically Mexico. This was due to the structure of Spanish colonial administration, which was designed to extract taxes from countries with large indigenous populations and/or mining sectors (Coatsworth, 1998). To illustrate, Cuba’s ratio of exports to tax revenues around 1800 was the highest of any of the six major countries for which these figures could be calculated at the time: Cuba, 3.33; Argentina, 2.95; Brazil, 2.85; Peru, 1.22; Chile 0.44; Mexico, 0.40 (calculated from Coatsworth 1998: Table 1.6).

Interestingly, this lower level of taxation for Cuba in the early part of the period entails a potential for a higher level later once the process of becoming an export economy is completed. Since taxes on international trade are very attractive when tax administration systems are weak, because they are easier to collect than other taxes, the greater the proportion of GDP coming from the export sector the

more attractive this sector becomes as a source of taxes. Indeed, by 1830 70% of public revenues in Cuba were being raised through custom duties (Santamaría and García, 2004: p.62).

The implications of economic conditions during this 30 year period for attaining independence are somewhat direct. It was very attractive to remain a colony for many. The Cuban “criollo” class was experiencing a low level of taxation relative to other colonies. Colonial status lowered the probability of a major re-organization of production with respect to the two main drivers of economic activity during the period (sugar and coffee), since it eliminated the need to consider the abolition of slavery. Under colonial status “peninsulares” maintained their connection with Spain and enjoyed the prosperity of the period. Free nonwhites also enjoyed this prosperity but many must have had mixed feelings about its reliance on slavery and whether or not independence would change the situation. While the slaves in plantations experienced lower welfare from the prevailing economic conditions, independence need not necessarily have implied abolition of slavery. Even in many cases when a link was made between independence and abolition, the assertion of a need for compensation muddied the waters.

From the Spanish point of view, those supporting the absolute monarchy could look at potential future revenues and at the use of the ‘ever faithful isle’ as a base of operations for continued subjugation of the other colonies. Those in favor of a constitutional monarchy or a republic would have considered those benefits, but they would have been tempered with the logical difficulty in reconciling the maintenance of slavery with limiting the absolute power of anyone human being over another. Finally, this discussion of economic conditions sheds no additional light on democracy beyond what has been identified earlier in the previous two sections.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

On the basis of the considerations in the previous three sections it is difficult to conclude that anyone of them, by itself, would have resulted in the differential timing between independence in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. If we consider that all of them were operating simultaneously, however, a case can be made that all three together played a significant role in contributing to this delay.

First, the unusual economic attractiveness of coffee and sugar production for export by Cuba between 1790 and 1820 must have led Cuban “criollos” to consider the very costly possibilities for their pocketbooks of promoting and supporting an insurrection to obtain independence. Second, one of the disruptive possibilities that would have been considered was the possible abolition of slavery or the potential repetition of the Haitian revolt that coincided with the beginning of this 30 year period. Third, the development of a particularly attractive colonial situation for many “criollos” as a result of a substantially different special relation from that of the other colonies by 1790 and its subsequent strengthening during the period must have also influenced any benefit-cost analysis of a potential insurrection.

Whatever the weights of these different factors in determining the delay, it is indirectly suggested by recent economic historiography that such delay may have increased the economic welfare of most members of Cuban society, except for plantation slaves. In a recent paper arguing that Latin America’s economic performance during the period 1820-1870 was not as dismal as implied by earlier research, Cuba’s rate of growth of GDP per capita during this 50 year period is estimated to be 0.7%. This compares favorably with the average for the eight Latin American countries considered (including Cuba), which is estimated to be 0.5% (Prados de la Escosura, 2009: Table 6).

Ironically, a window of opportunity for Cuba’s independence seems to have closed rather quickly after 1820. A brief period during 1820-1823, called “El Trienio”, led to a second “Cortes de Cádiz”

with Cuban representation. One of the Cuban deputies, Félix Varela, even advocated the abolition of slavery. This brief democratization episode came to a halt with the return of absolutism in Spain in 1823. Varela went into exile in the US, and the island experienced the beginning of an increasingly repressive dictatorship as a colony for the next several decades (Thomas, 1971: pp.103-105).

The international environment cemented this process and Cuba's status as a colony (Opatrn?, 2009: pp.239-241). For example, the US issued the Monroe doctrine in 1823; its author, John Quincy Adams, spoke of a Cuba policy in gravitational terms of eventual attraction to the US. Britain began its own special relation with the US by agreeing to the doctrine and not challenging Spain's right to its remaining colonies. Even Bolívar was willing to settle for Cuba and Puerto Rico in the hands of Spain as long as it recognized Colombia and accepted peace. Varela rejected Cuba's annexation to Colombia or Mexico from his US exile.

Finally, this 30 year period illustrates the complex relations between democracy's dimensions and independence. Periods of increased civil liberties under absolutism were sometimes accompanied by decreased political rights and sometimes not, depending on state capacity and perceptions of legitimacy. Periods of increased political rights under a constitutional monarchy were accompanied by a lowering of the political and civil liberties of a substantial segment of the population, namely plantation slaves, which in turn undermined the legitimacy of the constitutional monarchy. Unfortunately, a basic outcome of this turbulent and important historical period was that the substantial and increasing lack of legitimacy of slavery as an institution profoundly impaired Cuba's subsequent democratization.

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12 The War of 1868 and the Growth of Cuban New York

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On April 16, 1867, while the Junta de Información was still in session, a Royal Decree was issued terminating its work.¹ The Cuban and Puerto Rican commissioners left Madrid the same way Félix Varela left it in 1823 when he went there to push for reforms before the Spanish parliament: empty-handed and frustrated. In forty-four years, little had changed in the Spanish government's disposition towards Cuban and Puerto Rican demands for changes in the colonial regime. The reformist experiment was over. Also over was the annexationist movement. President James Buchanan made one last try in 1860 to buy Cuba, but could not get Congress to appropriate the money.²

As historian Gerald Poyo noted, "sectional politics in the United States with regard to slavery made the acquisition of Cuba virtually impossible."³

1. Philip S. Foner, *A History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States*, vol. 2 (New York: Intrenational Publishers, 1963), 160.

2. Foner, *A History of Cuba*, vol. 2, 120 and Rodríguez, *Estudio Histórico*, 196-210.

In Madrid, the Spanish government not only steadfastly refused to sell Cuba but also stubbornly rejected any attempts to give an iota of self-rule to the Cubans.

With annexation and reformism discredited, the movement for Cuban self-determination was inexorably headed in a popular, progressive, and nationalist direction, settling for nothing but total independence.⁴

A growing and more diverse Cuban community in New York, no longer dominated by elite planter interests, embraced that direction. But Cuban New Yorkers knew, as did all Cubans, that unlike annexation and reformism, which could have been accomplished through negotiation, independence could only be attained through violence. Resorting to violence was certainly not something new for Cuban separatists. But what erupted in 1868 was indeed something new. In its intensity and scope it was unlike anything that had been experienced before through conspiracies, expeditions, and local insurrections.

It was war. It came unexpectedly, literally out of nowhere, for it did not originate in the usual places. It was not hatched in the meeting halls nor newspaper offices of emigres in New York, nor in the sugar plantations of Matanzas, and not even in the Havana homes of impatient intellectuals or merchants. It came from the backwater that was eastern Cuba, spearheaded by long neglected and resentful landowners, most of whom were virtually unknown in Havana or Matanzas or New York. But in 1868 when those easterners decided they had had enough of Spanish rule and were willing to risk everything to end it, Cuba, and its emigre community in New York, would not be the same again.

For those who formed part of the Havana sugar elite who had gravitated to reformism, the new Madrid government represented the last hope of avoiding the “decisive schism” that loomed on the eastern horizon. On October 10, the landowners in the valley of the

3. Poyo, *With All and for the Good of All*, 10.

4. *Ibid.*, 19.

Cauto River, centered on the city of Bayamo, declared independence, freed their slaves, and formed an army and a government, and the war had started.

After that the Havana reformists had no choice but to support the armed movement started by the easterners, most of whom they did not even know personally. They feared “decisive schism,” as one of them referred to it, would soon envelop the island, and it would take many Cubans to New York.

On February 12, 1869, Governor Domingo Dulce issued two repressive edicts. One reinstated controls on political expression, especially the press. The other spelled out what would henceforth be considered treasonous acts, to be judged by military tribunals. These included rebellion, conspiracy, sedition, harboring or supporting rebels and criminals, subversive expressions of any form, political assembly or association, and alterations of the public order.⁵

In Havana and other cities, the voluntarios zealously went about applying the new repressive measures. Believing that the insurrection was being financially supported by many affluent Cubans, Governor Dulce decreed on April 1 an embargo of all the property and assets of Cubans who were rebels, deportees, or exiles, extending it later to just about any property owner whose allegiances were suspect and who were not living in their estates. The embargo made it impossible for property owners to live from assets they had in the island. A Commission was established to implement the edict and identify those Cubans who would be subject to its provisions. Eventually, nearly four thousand Cubans had their properties embargoed.

The most evident impact for New York of the events of 1868-69 was to produce an exodus of elites and professionals that dwarfed the earlier migrations of Cubans to the city. Moreover, it was a true migration, not just the comings and goings of sojourners, transnational merchants, or students. It involved entire families who were leaving the island without knowing when, and if, they would ever return again.

5. Marrero, Azúcar, ilustración y conciencia, 300-301

The schism of 1868-69 also served to heighten New York's role as the most important setting for émigré separatist activism. With a war raging in Cuba, that activism took on a greater urgency, as external support for the rebels became a critical piece in the struggle. The volume and intensity of Cuban émigré activities in New York was turned up substantially and became a more visible element in the city's landscape.

Justo Zaragoza was one Spanish colonial official who bemoaned the abuses and "lamentable indiscretions" committed against Cubans due to "zealotry or lack of intelligence on the part of lower-level officers."⁶ In his memoirs he observed that in those first few weeks of 1869 the most evident result of the terrorism of the voluntarios and the repressive measures of the Dulce administration was

the spectacle of an emigration so numerous and vertiginous that there were days in which ship tickets were violently disputed and even the cargo holds of ships leaving Havana were filled with passengers.⁷

Families from throughout the island, according to Zaragoza, arrived in Havana prepared to sail on the next ship out. He estimated that from February to September of 1869 two to three thousand families left every month.⁸

As Secretary to the colonial government, he was in a position to know: his office was responsible for issuing passports. During the last week of January 1869 he personally signed passports for 299 families.⁹ People were leaving to wherever they could book passage, but no doubt New York was the preferred destination. The developments in Cuba, especially the deportations and the embargo, had targeted elite families, many of whom had previous trade and financial connections to New York and who were likely to have visited or even lived in the city previously. Furthermore, it was in New York where many of those

6. .Zaragoza, *Las insurrecciones de Cuba*, 374.

7. .*Ibid.*

8. .*Ibid.*

9. .*Ibid.*, 774.

families had accounts with counting houses, a critical consideration if their properties in Cuba had been embargoed. Those who did not have such accounts quickly sought to establish them.

Passenger ships from Havana to New York that for years carried Americans as well Cubans were now arriving in Manhattan's piers filled to capacity with just Cuban families. The year 1869 set a record in the number of Cuban and Spanish passengers disembarking in New York from ports in the island.¹⁰

March was the busiest month. It was on the fourth of that month that the ship *Eagle* arrived from Havana carrying 171 passengers, the largest single shipload of passengers from Cuba that year. The *Eagle*, which for years made regular biweekly runs to Havana, normally carried some fifty passengers.

The transnational nature of many elites meant that they were once again traveling to New York, as they had done many times before. This time, however, they were departing the island essentially as political refugees with no idea of when, or if, they would be able to return. The list of affluent families and prominent individuals who appear on the manifests of ships leaving Cuban ports for New York during 1869 is endless.¹¹

There is no better summary of the consequences of the 1868-69 crisis than the sentence handed down by a Spanish Military Tribunal in 1870.¹² More than fifty Cubans were sentenced to be executed by public garroting for their role in the rebellion, including those who supported it from abroad. Very few of the sentences could be immediately applied, since virtually none of the condemned were living in Havana or any other city or town in Cuba where the Spanish could

10. *New York Passenger Lists, 1851-1891*, online database, Ancestry.com (Provo, Utah: MyFamily.com, Inc., 2003, accessed June 2005). Original data: *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, 1820-1897* (micropublication M237, rolls 95-580, Washington, D.C.: National Archives).

11. All references here to ships and passengers are taken from *New York Passenger Lists*, previously cited.

12. Marrero, *Azúcar, ilustración y conciencia*, 318 and Llaverías, *Consejo Administrativo de Bienes Embargados*, 34-35.

apprehend them. Most on the list were on the battlefields in the island, and it seemed that the rest were in New York. Miguel Aldama, Leonardo del Monte, José Manuel Mestre, José Morales Lemus, José María Mora, Antonio Mora, Carlos del Castillo, were just a few of the New Yorkers due to have their necks squeezed by a tourniquet if they set foot in Cuba. There were no activists or reformists left in Havana. The economic, intellectual, and academic elites that had long formed the core of the push for annexation, autonomy, or self-determination were now in New York.

The war would last until 1878 and during those years many more Cubans would seek refuge in New York, including some of the easterners who had been on the battlefield, or their widows and children. The year 1870 opened the most tumultuous decade in the history of Cuban New York, as the war in Cuba resonated in the streets of the city.

The 1870 U.S. Census captured the flight of the most prominent members of the Havana reformist elite and those who gravitated around the financial interests of western Cuba, especially sugar and railroads. Table 1 lists those prominent Cubans who were enumerated in Manhattan and Brooklyn in 1870. Virtually all of the planters, business elites, reformists, and activists found their way to New York by 1870 and were enumerated in that year's census.

The well-known Cubans listed in Table 1 brought from Cuba their prominence in political and intellectual matters and became visible in the city during the 1870's for their activism on behalf of the war in Cuba. But those prominent elites represented only a fraction of all Cubans living in New York. By the time the 1870 Census was taken, the Cuban-born population in what are now the five boroughs had surpassed 2,700 persons, more than quadrupling its size since the 1860 Census.¹³

About eighty-eight percent lived in Manhattan. Most of those nearly three thousand Cuban New Yorkers are unknown to history. They were men, women, and children who for a myriad of reasons left

Cuba and in New York concerned themselves not so much with abstract concepts of independence and sovereignty, but with shaping their lives in a city they now called home, a place that could be promising, exciting, and frightening.

No doubt the outbreak of the war in 1868 was responsible for accelerating the decades-old pattern of Cuban migration to New York. Wealthy landowners, prosperous merchants, progressive professionals, and liberal intellectuals were not the only ones caught up in the wave of abuses, violence, and lawlessness that started sweeping Cuba in 1868. It was a war in which everyone was forced to choose sides, and one did not have to be sentenced to death or have one's property embargoed to feel threatened by the scope and intensity of the forces that had been unleashed in the island.

One measure of the war's effects was the significant presence of women and children among Cubans in New York. Political upheavals that compel people to leave their countries generally result in migration flows with a fairly large number of families, compared with labor migrations, which are usually composed almost entirely of single men. In 1870, slightly more than forty percent of all Cuban-born New Yorkers was female, and children under eighteen represented more than a fourth of the population, a fairly high proportion considering it includes only Cuban-born children and not those born in New York to Cuban parents.

But the war was not solely responsible for the rapid growth of New York's Cuban population. During the 1860's the trend that had

13. . This figure was arrived at from a manual tabulation of the census schedules retrieved by a search using place of birth in U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1870 United States Federal Census, New York City*, Seventeenth Ward, Eleventh District, accessed through <http://search.ancestry.com>, February and March 2005. This figure is considerably higher than the 1,565 that the U.S. Bureau of the Census reported in its 1872 printed report as the Cuban-born population in Manhattan and Brooklyn [U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, vol. 1 of *Ninth Census, June 1, 1870* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 388]. While my figure may be slightly inflated by possible duplications produced by the 1870 recount, every attempt was made both by me and by *Ancestry.com* to eliminate those duplications which in any case would have involved only persons who changed their residence during the five months between the two counts.

started in the previous decade was in full swing: New York as a center for the manufacture of cigars made from Clear Havana leaves. The growing popularity of the Cuban leaves helped to greatly expand the city's cigar industry. In the 1860s and 1870s New York had by far the largest number of tobacco-related establishments of any city in the United States, becoming, as Burrows and Wallace, noted "the capital of the North American cigar industry."¹⁴

By 1870 New York's cigar industry was in the midst of a boom, as cigar establishments in the city multiplied.¹⁵

A detailed tobacco industry directory published in 1872 listed 1,486 cigar manufacturers (excluding dealers and importers) in Manhattan and 406 in Brooklyn. Cigars were also being produced in Astoria, Jamaica, and Long Island City.¹⁶

One estimate placed the number of cigar workers in the city at 2,800, most of them German Jewish immigrants, the group most responsible for the growth of New York's cigar industry.¹⁷ Germans, Czechs, and Hungarians had been behind the establishment of the Cigar Makers' International Union in 1864¹⁸.

The expanding industry, however, started attracting cigar makers from Cuba, especially as conditions in the island deteriorated rapidly with the advent of the war. Furthermore, Cuban cigar makers enjoyed a certain cachet as the cigars made from Clear Havana leaves became the priciest and most sought-after cigars in the city. Thomas J. Rayner, for example, the owner of the "Smoke" cigar factory at 102 Liberty Street, advertised that his cigars were "manufactured by CUBAN workmen of ALL HAVANA TOBACCO equal in quality, style, and

14. . Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 742.

15. . Dorothee Schneider, *Trade Unions and Community: The German Working Class in New York City, 1870-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 55-56.

16. . *A Directory of the Tobacco Trade of the United States, Great Britain, and Germany* (New York: Tobacco Leaf Publishing Company, 1872).

17. . Schneider, *Trade Unions and Community*, 54.

18. . Ronald Mendel, "Cigar Makers' International Union," in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth T. Jackson, 224.

fragrance” to the cigars manufactured in Havana but at more reasonable prices than the imported product.¹⁹

Cachet, of course, did not necessarily translate into good pay, especially since Cuban cigar makers in New York were, at least initially, not part of the organized labor movement started by their European colleagues. But what is certain is that more and more Cuban cigar makers were arriving in New York. Table 2 presents the occupations of the 913 Cubans in the city who declared an occupation in 1870. More than one-third reported that they were engaged in a tobacco-related occupation, most of them as cigar makers. Overall, tobacco-related occupations represented the largest occupational group among Cubans in what are now the five boroughs, and even that figure could well underestimate the importance of tobacco-related employment in that it includes only those who explicitly reported to be engaged in such an occupation. Others who simply reported “merchant” or “sales” may have also been engaged in the cigar business but were not specific in their response.

Overall, the data in Table 2 point to a dichotomously stratified community. Cigar makers, as skilled craftsmen, represented the only numerically significant middle category. It is telling that the two largest categories after the cigar makers were, at one end, professionals and merchants (tobacco and non-tobacco combined), and, at the other end, the unskilled, a category in which domestic servants predominated. In fact, there were more domestic servants than there were persons in the entire clerical and sales category. The figures in Table 2 no doubt underestimate the number of Cubans in the upper socioeconomic levels, since many of those self-employed in commerce or with substantial financial accounts were less likely to report an occupation. We saw in Table 1 that Aldama, the Angaricas, the Mora brothers, and Carlos del Castillo, to name a few, did not report an occupation and are therefore not included in Table 2.

19. . *The Universal Tobacco Dealers Directory*, n.p.

The stratified nature of the community is made clearer by looking at gender and race. Although women, as noted previously, are well represented among Cubans in New York in 1870, the same cannot be said for non-whites. Less than nine percent of the Cuban-born population of the five boroughs was classified in the census as either “black,” “mulatto,” or “colored.” Among nonwhites, there are almost as many females as males. Males and females, whites and non-whites, however, are not evenly divided among the different occupational categories, as Figure 1 shows. White males accounted almost exclusively for those in the professional, business, white collar, craftsmen (including cigar makers), and even the semi-skilled occupations. In contrast, non-white males represented eighty-five percent of all waiters and cooks while females of both races accounted for more than three-fourths of all domestic servants.

Non-white females were almost exclusively found in the low-skilled service occupations, with more than ninety-four percent of them employed as either domestic servants or laundry washers. Only two non-white Cuban-born women in New York were not in the unskilled category: a seamstress and a hairdresser. The bulk of non-white males were employed as waiters, cooks, domestic servants, white washers, coachmen, laborers, and porters. There were a few non-white male craftsmen: eight cigar makers, two coopers, a shoemaker, and a carpenter. There were also four non-white Cuban-born sailors living in the Sixth Ward, two of them in the “Colored Seamans Boarding-house.” The only white professional women were two teachers. Three white women were clerks or salespersons and eight were seamstresses.

That women and non-whites were at the bottom of Cuban New York’s occupational distribution should not be surprising, especially among migrants from a Spanish colony where, in 1870, slavery was still practiced. The community’s social structure, however, had particular implications for the settlement patterns of Cubans in the city. Domestic servants, laundry washers, coachmen, waiters, and cooks lived, of course, not only in the same areas of the city, but usually in the same homes, as the social classes they served. Given the relatively

large number of elites, merchants, and professionals among Cubans, it is not surprising that the fairly large categories at both ends of the occupational structure lived in the city's upscale areas.

In terms of the distribution of the Cuban-born population among Manhattan's wards, there was a concentration of Cubans in what at the time were the most fashionable uptown neighborhoods. The wards with the most Cubans were the fifteenth and seventeenth, where more than one-fourth of the city's Cubans lived. The former surrounds Washington Square and the latter is just east of that, from Fourth (Lafayette) Avenue to Tomkins Square. An additional thirty-five percent of all Cubans lived just north of those two wards, in the sixteenth, eighteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first, the four wards that encompass all of Manhattan between Fourteenth and Fortieth Avenues. Some Cubans also started settling in what were the new outlying elite areas north of Fortieth, especially in the nineteenth ward, along Fifth Avenue, what would become the Upper East Side.

In contrast to the settlement patterns of the elites and their servants, Cuban cigar makers tended to live where they worked, that is, somewhat further downtown, conforming to the pattern of working-class New Yorkers. As historians Burrows and Wallace point out, "the bulk of the working class — still unable to afford public transportation — had to live near their jobs."²⁰

In fact, cigar makers tended to work at home, as Burrows and Wallace also point out.²¹

Only thirty-one (less than fifteen percent) of the 209 Cuban-born cigar makers who lived in Manhattan resided north of Fourteenth Street. None at all, for example, lived in the Sixteenth Ward, where many prominent Cubans had settled. The wards with the highest concentrations of cigar makers were the Eighth, the Fourteenth, and the southern portions of the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Wards, essentially the central and western portions of Manhattan immediately surround-

20. Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*. 991.

21. *Ibid.*

ing Houston Street and south to Canal Street, areas now known as SoHo, Little Italy, NoLita, the Bowery, and the area of the Village directly south of Washington Square. It was there that many of city's tobacco-related businesses were located.²²

The 1870 Census shows that tenement employment was, at least at that time, rare among Cuban cigar makers, who tended to live either in relatively small households where they probably had a family-based factory, or in boarding houses that were mixed in terms of their occupational composition, which meant that those workers were likely to be employed in regular factories outside their dwellings.

Affluent Cubans, however, as all affluent New Yorkers, did not have to live where they worked. They could afford the cab rides and personal carriages that would take them to and from their downtown businesses to residences in the tonier neighborhoods above Fourteenth Street, where their servants, usually Irish women or black Cubans, lived with them. The Moras were the best example. While they had their mercantile offices downtown (Fausto Mora at 50 Exchange Place and José Antonio Mora at 29 Broadway), all of the Moras lived in the uptown neighborhood where they had been making real estate investments since the 1850s. Their ownership of a substantial number of properties in and around Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets, between Second and Third Avenues, led to the settlement of many members of their extended family in that area, as well as other Cubans who rented from them or who may have taken their lead and also bought property there. By 1870 the influence of the Moras in creating a sort of Cuban enclave in that neighborhood was evident. Those city blocks formed part of the Fourth and Eleventh enumeration districts of the Seventeenth Ward, precisely the two districts that in 1870 had the largest number of Cuban-born persons in the entire city. And those Cubans were at both ends of the occupational scale: merchants and other elites and their servants. The Mora households (and there were several) typified that dichotomy, since they brought

22. *A Directory of the Tobacco Trade of the United States*, 122-143.

with them the servants they had in Cuba, many of whom no doubt had been house slaves.

Antonio Máximo Mora's home at 220 E. 12th Street, between Second and Third Avenues contained, in addition to the family, two domestic servants, both "colored," and both with the same last name as the family: Victoriana Mora, 30, born in Cuba, and Julio Mora, 45, whose birth place is listed as "Africa." At 235 E. 13 Street, in a house that may have shared the backyard with Antonio Maximo's house on 12th, José Antonio Mora, his wife Josefa, and their six children were served by three Irish women and by Pancho Mora, a "colored" domestic servant, twenty-seven years old, born in Cuba. José María Mora's household at 217 E. 12th Street, just across the street from the home of his brother Antonio Máximo, had two male domestic servants in their twenties, Federico (a cook) and Felipe, both born in China. Starting in 1847 Chinese laborers started arriving in Cuba under "coolie" contracts to augment the declining African slave trade.²³

By 1870, more than 107,000 Chinese had arrived in Cuba through Havana and sold as indentured servants.²⁴ Typically, they adopted, or were given, Spanish first names and the last names of their employers.

Although the Moras' Chinese servants were employed as domestics, most Chinese in Cuba worked in agriculture in conditions not very different from the African slaves. A Royal Decree of 1860 mandated that after the expiration of their contract, Chinese laborers either had to renew it or leave the island within two months.²⁵

Given the level of ship traffic between Havana and Manhattan, many of those who chose to leave Cuba probably did so through New York. On July 5, 1870, for example, the steamship De Soto arrived in

23. . José Baltar Rodríguez, *Los chinos de Cuba: Apuntes etnográficos* (La Habana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 1997), 13.

24. . *Ibid.*, 20.

25. . *The Cuba Commission Report, A Hidden History of the Chinese in Cuba: The Original English-Language Text of 1876* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 81.

the city from Havana with twelve men in their twenties traveling in steerage who had Spanish names but who declared China as both their country of origin and their country of intended final destination.²⁶

It is impossible to know just how many Chinese from Cuba may have stayed in New York as free laborers, since they would appear in the Census as born in China, indistinguishable from other Chinese immigrants in the city. We know about Federico and Felipe Mora because they were part of José María Mora's household. It is interesting, however, that when the Mora family was enumerated again in January of 1871 in the census recount, Felipe no longer appears in the household, perhaps after having explored more attractive employment options in the city.

The results of the 1870 U.S. census draw a picture of Cuban New York at a critical moment in its development. The war in Cuba had started barely a year before, yet in that short period of time New York had seen a flow of people from the island unprecedented in the already long history of Cuban migration to the city. It was just the beginning. The war in Cuba became a protracted conflict that would last until 1878, when the insurgents and the Spanish government reached an agreement to put an end to it. During those years that the war dragged on, New York received the casualties of the conflict: veterans fresh off the battlefields, the widows and children of those who left their lives on those battlefields, those at risk of being executed or imprisoned, and many others who simply found it difficult to live in a country torn apart by war, its economy in ruins and its future uncertain. And there were also who were not so compelled to leave the island, but who simply sought to expand their horizons in a modern city. For cigar makers, employment prospects were better in downtown Manhattan than in a war-ravaged island.

It was in the mid-1870's that Cuban New York would reach its demographic apex in the nineteenth century. Those were also the

26. . *New York Passenger Lists, 1851-1891.*

years of the most intense activism on behalf of Cuban separatism. All of this occurring within the broader context of post-Civil War New York, the period that catapulted the city to the forefront of the modern era. The end of the Cuban war in 1878 made it possible for many to return to the island, especially since the agreement that ended the conflict promised amnesty. The 1880 U.S. Census shows slightly fewer Cuban-born persons in the city than the number enumerated in 1870. The 1870s was therefore the decade in which Cuban New York reached a crescendo, demographically, economically, and, especially, politically. Not even in the decade preceding independence, the 1890s, would there be in New York such a concentration of Cuba's economic, intellectual, and political elites, nor would separatist activism reach the intensity and acrimony that were evident among the émigrés during the 1868-1878 war.

13 The Hernández Family: Migration, Cubanidad, and Transnational Identities

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Abstract: Cuban migration to the United States has long been a subject of interest to scholars in part because of the close and often contentious relationship between the two countries, “ties of singular intimacy” as Louis A. Pérez has called them.¹ The bulk of the work on migration, not surprisingly, has focused on those who left Cuba for the United States after 1959. Indeed the Cuban Revolution has cast a long shadow over history writing on the nineteenth century as well, as historians search for and debate the Revolution’s origins and causes in Spanish and US colonialism, economic dependency, and evolving notions of Cuban nationalism.

The nineteenth-century Cuban migrants most often studied are those involved in some way in the anti-colonial movements for independence from Spain—the New York circle of activists such as Félix Varela, Cirilo Villaverde, and José Martí or the Florida communities of laborers in Tampa and Key West. This paper, on the other hand, focuses on the Hernández, a family of Cubans slightly to the periphery of the better-known circles of famous nineteenth-century Cubans who lived at least part of their lives in the US.

1. Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy* 3rd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003).

At the center of the story is Carlos Hernández y Aloy, son of a Spanish-born slave trader and plantation owner and a Cuban mother. Born around 1817 Carlos was educated in Cuba and Europe and he and his coterie of young male friends and relatives circulated in transatlantic currents of thought and migration as they sought to define themselves and secure their fortunes. Carlos ultimately settled in the US in the 1830s, married an American woman, started a family, and established himself as a businessman and landowner.

This paper is based on a collection of papers from the Hernández family housed in the Special Collections section of the Owen D. Young Library at Saint Lawrence University. The collection contains over 400 personal letters, business correspondence, notes and accounts. Its scope is wide in space and time with pieces from the 1830s through the early 1900s providing a rich base from which to study a Cuban family whose personal and business networks extended from Cuba to Europe and North America. My research with this collection is in the preliminary stages in part because the materials are still being processed and catalogued. I will focus here on the letters from the 1830s, the materials I have examined most closely to date. In this period Carlos and his siblings (three sisters and a brother)² were all young (most in their twenties by the mid-1830s) in the process of trying to imagine their futures in a period of great change and ferment in Cuba.

Part of that change was the fevered expansion of slave importations and sugar production over the previous forty years.³ Cuba had also been buffeted by waves of internal anti-colonial movements, as well as fallout from those in Spain's mainland colonies, and in nearby Haiti over the same time period.⁴ After most its American colonies

2. The siblings' names were Francisca, Rosa, María de las Mercedes (known as Merced), Carlos, and Rafael. At present their birth order is not entirely clear but the letters suggest that the sisters were older than the brothers and that Carlos was older than Rafael.

3. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2001) is a single volume edition of Moreno's of two volume version of *El ingenio* published in Havana in 1964 and 1974. It remains a fundamental and comprehensive source on the expansion of sugar in nineteenth-century Cuba.

had won their independence, a weakened Spain sought to preserve peace and stability in its most valuable colony. In 1825 the Crown gave the Captain-General of Cuba the extraordinary powers of martial law which allowed him to deport individuals, dismiss officials, and suspend royal orders.⁵

In May 1834 the newly appointed Captain-General of Cuba, Miguel Tacón y Rosique, arrived. Though Tacón supported liberal politics in Spain, as a colonial official in the Americas he also suffered the loss of the mainland colonies as a personal one. He arrived in Cuba with a bitter antipathy toward creole aspirations for greater autonomy that soon aroused angry denunciations among many of Carlos Hernández's male friends and relations.⁶

Their letters to one another reveal a variety of sometimes competing visions for the future deeply divided along gender lines. Carlos' brothers and their male friends lived lives of cosmopolitan privilege and excess full of transatlantic travels as they cast about for a vocation and suitable marriage partners. Additionally, the male letter writers often raged about the political repression exercised by Spaniards in 1830s Cuba. Though their letters show evidence of Cuban patriotism and even independence sympathies, the Hernández brothers ultimately eschewed politics, married, and settled abroad. Carlos' mother and sisters, on the other hand, imagined their futures in Cuba, and their identities were defined most clearly by their attachments to home and family.

Since my work on this project is just beginning I am still searching for useful conceptual frameworks through which to interpret the lives

4. On the effects of the Haitian Revolution in Cuba see María Dolores González-Ripoll, Consuelo Naranjo, Ada Ferrer, Gloria García, and Josef Opatrný, *El rumor de Haití en Cuba: temor, raza y rebeldía, 1789-1844* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004). For an introduction to anti-colonial movements among Cuban creoles up to 1840, Larry R. Jensen, *Children of Colonial Despotism* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1988).

5. Jensen, *Children*, 98.

6. For a brief biography of Tacón see Juan Pérez de la Riva, Introduction to *Correspondencia reservada del Capitán Don Miguel Tacón 1834-1836* (Havana: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, 1963), 13-18.

of the Hernández family members as revealed in their papers. Some recent scholarship on Cuban and other Caribbean families who migrated within the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century offers some potential insights. Matthew Pratt Guterl's book *American Mediterranean* examines the interconnections among white slaveholders in the US South and the Caribbean and argues for hemispheric identities and imaginaries among his subjects.⁷ Rebecca Scott's work on the Tinchant family traces the development of their transnational economic and social networks and political sensibilities. Their lives extended from "enslavement in Africa in the eighteenth century through emancipation during the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s to emigration to Louisiana, France and Belgium in the nineteenth century." Scott's tale may be the more uplifting one as we follow the free people of color in the Tinchant family in their transatlantic pursuit of social and political equality.⁸ A similarly uplifting tale is often told in the historiography of Cuban migration to the US as scholars search for the origins and exemplars of *cubanidad* and/or revolutionary struggle in lives torn apart by colonialism and exile.

I will not try to argue here that these other stories of Cuban migration are untrue, only that some of the details of the Hernández family members' lives suggest alternate meanings and narratives. The most striking characteristic of their lives for me at this early stage is the deeply gendered nature of their personal and political identities and aspirations. The identities of the Hernández brothers and many of their male friends seem best described as cosmopolitan rather than hemispheric or Atlantic though the sites of their migrations and interests shifted in both directions over their early lives. The Hernández brothers led their privileged, cosmopolitan lives bounded by three powerful forces—the repression and censorship of Spanish colonialism, the pull of the tremendous wealth-generating potential of plantation slavery and sugar production in Cuba, and the bonds of family,

7. Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean. Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation*. (Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2008).

8. Rebecca J. Scott, "Public Rights and Private Commerce. A Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Creole Itinerary," *Contemporary Anthropology* 48 no.2 (April 2007), 237-256.

particularly the emotional and financial control of their mother Francisca Aloy. As the family matriarch she gave every indication of being a shrewd businesswoman who controlled her children's behavior and prospects through her grip on the family's wealth and her stormy temper. The wealth generated by slave trading and sugar production paradoxically tied the Hernández brothers to Cuba while affording them the resources to travel widely. They may have ultimately abandoned Cuba to escape both the political and familial constraints of their homeland. But the Atlantic reach of their family's wealth and the many transnational connections and networks that sustained it allowed them to imagine a prosperous future outside of Cuba.

Establishment of the Hernández Family in Cuba

Carlos' parents both came from families that migrated to Cuba in the second half of the eighteenth century and took full advantage of the expansion of trade and agricultural production on the island following the Seven Years' War.⁹ Francisco Hernández y Linares, father of Carlos, was born in Galicia, Spain in 1763 and migrated to Cuba around the turn of the nineteenth century. He married into the Havana creole elite when he wed Francisca María Aloy y Rivera in 1802. His wife's family, the Aloys were originally from Gerona, Catalonia, migrating to Cuba sometime in the mid-eighteenth century. One of her sisters married into a French merchant family and lived in Paris. Two other sisters of Francisca Aloy married brothers of the Poey family, both of them also eighteenth-century migrants to Cuba from Oléron, France.¹⁰ The well-known Cuban scientist, Felipe Poey y Aloy, was a cousin to the Hernández.¹¹ In 1830 Francisco and Francisca's daughter, Rosa, mar-

9. Allan Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century," In *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, eds. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, 13-39 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Franklin W. Knight, "Origins of Wealth and the Sugar Revolution in Cuba, 1750-1850," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57 no.2 (1977), 231-253.

10. Francisco Xavier de Santa Cruz y Mallen, *Historia de familias cubanas*, vol. 5 (Havana, Editorial Hercules, 1944) 228-229.

ried another cousin, Juan Francisco Poey y Aloy extending the familial ties between these two families into the next generation.

In addition to these alliances through marriage, three Poey brothers and four Hernández brothers allied in business as slave traders. According to Manuel Moreno Fraginals the business partnership formed by the Poey, Hernández, and Frías families was among “the five primary consortia of slave traders in Cuba in 1820”, the last year of legal transatlantic slave importation.¹² In various partnership configurations between 1800 and 1820 these men imported at least 25,000 African slaves into Cuba.¹³

The wealth generated from slave trading in the early nineteenth century allowed this generation of recent immigrants to marry well, begin purchasing land and other properties, and secure the futures of their children. In 1833 Francisco Hernández purchased a farm in Matanzas in partnership with his son-in-law Juan Poey. This farm formed the nucleus of Juan Poey’s great nineteenth century ingenio Las Cañas.¹⁴

Francisco Hernández died shortly after purchasing the Matanzas farm in April of 1833 and several years later Juan Poey bought out the Hernández’s share.¹⁵ The proceeds of this sale likely allowed Hernández’s widow to partner with her son Carlos and another son-in-law José Manuel Carrillo de Albornoz y Arango to purchase and develop another sugar ingenio in Matanzas that they named La Paz. Two of Francisca Aloy’s daughters ultimately married into the Carrillo de Albornoz clan securing the Hernández family’s growing social status through an alliance with a much older elite family.¹⁶ By 1840 matriarch

11. The Hernández Collection contains several letters from Felipe Poey to Carlos Hernández.

12. Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio*, 219.

13. The partners were Simón, Juan Bautista, and Juan Andrés Poey y Lacasse; Gaspar, José, Francisco, and Sebastián Hernández, and Antonio and Nicolás de Frías. Moreno, *El ingenio*, 221-222.

14. For a detailed description of the purchase transactions of the 1830s for the farm that became Las Cañas of the see Laird W. Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 50-51, 353-354 ft. 12.

15. Santa Cruz y Mallen, 228 and Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society*, 51.

Francisca Aloy de Hernández owned several houses in Havana and had investments in a diversified portfolio of agricultural properties in Cuba—the sugar plantation La Paz, a coffee plantation called la Serafina, and a *potrero* San José. She also had investments in the United States.¹⁷

As Laird Bergad has shown, the expansion of sugar and coffee production transformed the Matanzas region in the early years of the nineteenth century. Outsiders from Havana pushed out local farmers and tobacco growers to establish large plantations worked by imported African slaves. Well established, Havana-based entrepreneurs along with recent immigrants from Europe (mostly Spain and France) like Francisco Hernández came to dominate Matanzas' landholding and export production by the 1830s. The Hernández's rapid rise to wealth, landownership, and status also illustrates well Franklin Knight's observation that much of the capital invested in Cuba's sugar plantations in the first half of the 1800s had come from the dynamic and fluid expansion of trade after 1775 often in the hands of recent immigrants to Cuba.¹⁸

Of Passions and Politics

The wealth amassed by the immigrant generation and their creole spouses afforded their sons a youth of cosmopolitan privilege and excess. The letters from the mid-1830s reveal a circle of young men trying to imagine themselves in an adult profession while still indulging in the romantic and political intrigues of youth. In the letters from

16. This branch of the Carrillo Alborno family was originally from Tenerife in the Canary Islands, migrating to Cuba in the seventeenth century. Various members of the family served in the Spanish navy. Juan Manuel who married Carlos' sister Francisca Hernández y Aloy in 1837, was a Lieutenant Colonel in the King's Lancers. Another of Carlos' sisters, Merced, later married Juan Manuel's brother Antonio. Santa Cruz y Malen, *Historia de las familias cubanas*, vol. 1, 98.

17. Francisca Aloy to Carlos Hernández, Havana, June 26, 1838; Francisca Aloy to Carlos Hernández, April 15, 1840, Hernández Collection, Special Collections, Owen D. Young Library, Saint Lawrence University, Canton, New York [HC].

18. Franklin W. Knight, "Origins of Wealth and Sugar Revolution in Cuba," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57, no. 2 (1977): 234-237, 243-245, 249.

the late 1830s Carlos seems to have thought about a wide range of vocations and occupations—to be a priest (very briefly), philosopher and writer, a school master, an engineer, a valet to an English lord (again, briefly), a merchant, and a plantation owner.

One of the interesting challenges of working with the Hernández papers is that there are few letters written by Carlos himself, mostly love letters written to his wife early in their marriage in 1839. The collection most likely represents the correspondence he himself saved and therefore his letters remained with the recipients. One must therefore try to deduce his actions, thoughts, and sentiments from what his correspondents say about him and his letters.

Carlos seems to have been a headstrong young man inspired by both his education in philosophy under the tutelage of Félix Varela and his romantic passions to travel abroad first to New York and then to Paris.¹⁹ By the spring of 1836 Carlos was in New York City and numerous letters to him at this time mention Carlos' attachment to and idolization of Varela. For instance, Carlos had mentioned plans to go live with Varela in letters to his friend Guillermo. The friend's response suggests a wistful envy that Carlos could even imagine such a future as Guillermo had to settle for a more practical career in pharmacy.²⁰

Another letter writer congratulated Carlos for now being a “complete philosopher” and for his good fortune in having such an able and worthy teacher. The writer exhorted Carlos to remember that though his career was supposed to be different, he now had an unusual opportunity to follow Varela's exemplary virtue. “In all states of life one can practice virtue, and in all the diligent man [el hombre aplicado] can instruct himself and come to be a wise man.” From this lofty plane the letter writer then went on to couch Carlos' studies and

19. It is not clear when Carlos first traveled to New York City or when he first met Félix Varela because Varela had been in exile in New York since December of 1823. Alex Antón and Roger E. Hernández, *Cubans in America* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2002), 29.

20. Guillermo [no last name] to Carlos Hernández, Havana, April 24, 1836, HC.

search for a profession in terms of his duty to his family and his patria. “Take advantage of your youth my friend, instruct yourself and come to give your friends and family the pleasure of seeing you, for your talents and virtues, esteemed and respected by all the world.” This writer believed that day by day Cuba offered “more vast” opportunities for young men of talent to shine.²¹

Other of Carlos’ correspondents were less sanguine about the climate in Cuba for young men who fancied themselves philosophers and dabbled in politics, the “hot-leaded lads [mozalbetes de cascós calientes]” as Domingo del Monte styled them.²² Family friend Lucio de Adaro wrote of having read some of Carlos’ literary “productions” with pleasure but cautioned him “to avoid touching on political points or in other ways referring to the authorities on this island. Your mother is very alarmed by several sentences . . . in a letter she has seen and would become more alarmed if she were to see the printed writings you have sent me.”²³

The volatile political situation in both Spain and Cuba in the second half of the 1830s provoked colonial authorities to monitor and on occasion harass, imprison, or exile some of these hot-headed young men, though historian Pérez de la Riva contended that the outrage of liberal creoles under Tacón was out of proportion to their actual suffering.²⁴

By May of 1836 Carlos had veered from a possible career in the priesthood or philosophy to a passionate attachment to an American woman that all of his friends and relations warned him against. Friend Francisco Javier de Muses wrote expressing shock and dismay that Carlos had gone from “his elevated ideas” of philosophy “to fall, and imprison [himself with] the chains of matrimony.” Carlos’ duties lay

21. Valdés (?) to Carlos Hernández, [aboard the ship] Carlota, June 2, 1835, HC.

22. Quoted in Pérez de la Riva, Introduction to *Correspondencia reservada*, 66.

23. Lucio de Adaro to Carlos, Havana, April 24, 1836, HC.

24. “En tanto a los liberales del patio, tampoco fueron molestados. . . todos continuaron su vida normal; ganando dinero, tomando chocolate y hablando mal de Tacón.” Pérez de la Riva, Introduction to *Correspondencia reservada*, 34.

elsewhere according to Mueses, “Have you so soon forgotten that we live in this century, in which we should only think of being useful to our patria? . . . I see that you have forgotten very quickly the contents of your letter and instead of giving me an example of your advice you [have] abandoned it.” A previous letter had given Mueses hope that Carlos had “left behind the foolishness that love brings” and “now remained in complete possession of [his] reason.” Instead Mueses was forced to conclude, “I see that this is not so, and I am sorry.”²⁵

Mueses ended his letter with an appeal to the duty of sons to honor their mothers, “Your mother is very grief-stricken and discomfited with such news, and only a contrary decision would please her. Remember that a mother is the first [one to whom] we should look, remembering the anxieties and unpleasantness that we have made them pass, when our reason, and judgment, did not guide us; but age makes us reflect, we should please them and sweeten the last days of their life.”²⁶

This plea to honor his family, especially his mother, is a refrain that permeates much of the correspondence to Carlos in 1836 and 1837. The fact that he was far from home and getting into risky entanglements worried all of his friends and family members. In fact his mother and siblings journeyed to New York for a visit in early June 1836 in part to intervene in Carlos’ precipitous plans to marry at such a young age. The flow of correspondence suggests that he was somehow convinced to leave New York and his lover and travel to Paris to live with cousins and continue his studies.

Letters from his sisters over the next six months are mostly chatty inquiries about his health, his studies and whether he is enjoying living among the French relatives. In a letter written in December 1836, once the rest of the family had returned to Havana, his sister Merced says she would be very happy to hear that Carlos was now happy surrounded by his amiable cousins and much loved aunt to distract him

25. Francisco Javier de Mueses to Carlos Hernández, Havana, June 1, 1836, HC.

26. Ibid.

and make him forget “those mistaken ideas” he had in New York.²⁷ Only his brother Rafael’s letters give a sense of the intriguing that may have gone on to convince Carlos to abandon his marriage plans and go to Paris.

In early December Rafael wrote Carlos a long letter defending his role in engineering Carlos’ exit from New York (though he does not offer details, unfortunately). Much of the letter is devoted to trying to convince Carlos that he should be seeking a wife among the Hernández’s French cousins the Chauviteaus, a courtship strategy well-established in several generations of the family and worth quoting at some length.²⁸

Well, dear Carlos, as much of a philosopher as you might be I can tell you that philosophers are the ones who have given the most proof of appreciating the exterior beauty of women-- . . . let’s begin with the supposition of you married to a girl virtuous and pretty, plump and delicious; with her you would receive many pleasures, the corporeal ones that are without a doubt the serious principal ones among the first that we look for, you would have the moral ones as well, in having a virtuous companion educated and amiable, finally you would have social ones that are a great help when there are no ways to enjoy the others, you do not always have to be in bed with your wife or in conversation with her, you can spend those neutral moments in entertaining your eyes with her face; what a pleasure to see some lively and hot little eyes? What a delight to see a tempting little mouth and excellent little rump? Ay, let’s leave this, I’m getting carried away.²⁹

Rafael’s letter goes on to suggest that he was not convinced of the charms of Carlos’ New York paramour or at least that he was willing to chance joking about them. He supposed that were Carlos married to a homely, though virtuous girl without education his life would be a misery:

27. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, December 24, 1836, HC.

28. The Chauviteau family seems to have been a wealthy and well-connected merchant clan with interests in Europe, Cuba, and other parts of Latin America.

29. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, December 3, 1836, HC.

[When] *tête à tête* time arrives then we are lost, she does not know how to follow a conversation, nor how to enjoy one, nor does she understand a whit of what you are talking about, especially one like you educated in sciences and the rest, what pleasure! What delight! Eh—If by misfortune you look at her face you fall horrified at seeing something so ugly, the nuptial act would make you throw up because the pleasure of seeing such a horror would upset your digestion.³⁰

By 1837 Carlos seemed intent on courting one of his cousins in Paris and various letters to him comment on how sweet she is how lucky he would be to choose her. Several months later however, his aunt Serafina rejected his suit in part because he had not yet settled on a career.

Brother Rafael's letters present a fascinating mix of family news, ribald, tongue-in-cheek commentary on young men's pursuit of love and sex, and anti-colonial sentiments. Rafael's letters go well beyond oblique references to anti-colonial writings by Carlos and others. By 1837 relations between Cuban liberals and Captain-General Tacón were sufficiently sour that each party conspired to discredit the other. The transatlantic circuits of Cubans on the island and in Europe was abuzz with rumors of a Taconian hunt for independence conspiracies and creoles' own campaign to discredit the Captain-General and force his recall.³¹

Again mixing politics with more mundane matters a May 1837 letter from Rafael to Carlos in Paris begins with a detailed description of an upcoming dance put on by the unpopular Captain-General to celebrate his repression of "the poor Cubans [that] wanted to swear to the Constitution [of 1836]." The letter then segues into a raunchy discussion of the opening of new brothels in Havana which he says is something new in the city. For one ounce of gold he notes, "you can get a good healthy virgin. Can you believe Havana is so corrupted?"³²

30. Ibid.

31. Pérez de la Riva, Introduction to *Correspondencia reservada*, 77.

Another letter from a friend in New York tells Carlos of marriages and births among his friends and then includes some anti-Tacon verses penned by someone else:

Brindemos por los Padillas
 [mostly illegible line] _ _ donados
 Y de Tacon los malvados
 De la ley a la cuchilla
 Que no contento con estropear
 Al cantante Montresor
 Galillas le esta hechando
 A los de la Isla de Cubanacan
 Cienfuegos/ Poeta/³³

Several people wrote to Carlos in mid-February 1837 discussing the trip of Nicolás Escobedo to Madrid to represent Cubans in the Spanish Cortes. Carlos' sisters mention the trip as part of their usual news about the happenings and travels of friends and family and they recommended one of Escobedo's traveling companions, Joaquín de Ayestaran to Carlos.³⁴ Rafael seemed to have had more specific hopes for Escobedo's mission noting that the old gentleman "goes as a deputy in [the] cortes for Havana, and without a doubt will do us much good, he is liberal as the Devil. . . our Tacon has heartily regretted his departure from here."³⁵

In June family friend Lucio de Adaro reported that "[h]ere nothing is new, we are enjoying peace, and the government is promoting public works. However, there is no contentment, the decree of "exception"

32. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, May 20, 1837, HC. Pérez de la Riva quotes from a letter by Domingo del Monte describing the same banquet and dance organized by Tacón on May 28, 1837 and the entire affair of Spain's 1836 constitution in Cuba see, Introduction to *Correspondencia*, 56-67, Del Monte letter, 65-66.

33. Letter in three different hands, the first part signed by A. J. Morales to Carlos Hernández, New York, February 8, 1837, HC.

34. Ayestaran was also from a wealthy plantation owning family of second-generation immigrants, see Luis Martínez-Fernández, "The sweet and the bitter. Cuban and Puerto Rican responses to the mid-nineteenth century sugar challenge." *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 67 no. 1/2 (1993), 50-51.

35. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, February 10, 1837, HC.

given by the Cortes concerning the Overseas provinces has displeased [people] and produced dissatisfaction.”³⁶

Romance, family, and patriotism come together again in a letter from Rafael in the same month. Rafael reported that their sister, Rosa, had given birth to a boy on the 18th of June and named him Carlos in honor of his uncle. He changed his earlier counsel and now advised Carlos to forget about finding a mate among his French cousins, after their aunt’s rebuff. Instead Carlos should just enjoy himself, get to know lots of women and not worry about rushing to get married. He should also wait until he got back to Havana where he would find “a million pretty Habaneras that will love you a lot. . . .enjoy and return to your patria to appreciate its daughters for there are none better in the world.”³⁷

Carlos’ sister Merced wrote him in a similar vein in early July to say she missed him terribly but would try to be patient knowing he was studying hard. She said she looked forward to the double pleasure of welcoming him back to Havana because he would come home “turned into a Parisian that no one would recognize but we [his sisters] will transform you into a real creole [criollo rellollo] so that you can honor your country and leave behind all that French nonsense that won’t lead anywhere.” She advised him to take up a career that he would enjoy and at the same time sustain the fortune that “cost Papa so much work” since it just wasn’t right for sons to forget what their parents had done for them and ignore their advice.³⁸

For Carlos’ brother and male friends life abroad was accepted as a site for furthering one’s studies and sowing some wild oats. When it came to marriage, however, the entire family including Rafael was horrified to learn that Carlos had secretly returned to New York City and wed his old flame, Margaret Harrison in October 1837. It seems that Carlos chose not to personally inform any of his family, perhaps out

36. Lucio de Adaro to Carlos Hernández, Havana, June 20, 1837, HC.

37. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, June 19, 1837, HC.

38. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, July 8, 1837, HC.

of fear of their disapproval. Instead they heard of the marriage third hand through the family's New York attorney. Rafael had hoped that when Carlos returned from Europe they would open a merchants' house together.³⁹ Merced reported that their mother was inconsolable, "the only consolation she had before you married was that you would accompany her and help her in her old age; but now the poor thing has lost everything[,] she has seen that a son so loved and on whom she pinned all her hopes had gone back on his word."⁴⁰

All his sisters wrote Carlos to say the only way to begin to heal the rift would be to travel to Cuba with his new wife and petition for his mother's forgiveness. They advised him to stay in one of his sisters' homes in Havana or in Matanzas while they tried to calm his mother down. Merced begged him not to stay in "that materialistic country [aquel país de interes] and where you don't understand enough English to settle down, come here to your sisters' side who in spite of everything will love and console you, here you will look for a way to occupy yourself and advance your fortune with advice from your whole family who only want the best for you."⁴¹

His new brother-in-law José Manuel Carrillo (husband of sister, Francisca) also wrote on November 8th to give Carlos advice. Carrillo said he would not presume to criticize Carlos for his actions, only to help smooth over the situation and reconcile him with his mother. Carrillo also counseled an immediate trip to Cuba with Margaret alone because Carlos' mother was convinced that Margaret's family was trying to weedle money from the Hernández. "What afflicts your mother most, . . . is to think of you in a Foreign Country, isolated with a needy family, [who] abusing your disinterest [about money] will force you to spend your fortune. . . and end up reducing you to indigence when you are burdened with a family." Carlos' political activities in New York also threatened to complicate a reconciliation with his mother. Because Carlos had written against Captain-General Tacón Carrillo

39. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, November 1, 1837, HC.

40. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, November 8, 1837, HC.

41. Ibid.

agreed that it would be wise to land in Matanzas and stay with Rosa and Juan Poey on their ingenio so that no one but his family would know he was in Cuba.⁴²

Carlos and his wife must have traveled to Cuba and reconciled with his family, though there are no letters in the collection for the next three months until February 1838 when Carlos' mother, Francisca Aloy wrote him several letters while he stayed in the country side. By April, Carlos and his wife Margaret had left Cuba and returned to New York where their first child, a son, was born that fall.⁴³ Out of family's reconciliation came plans to purchase an ingenio together with Carlos, his mother, and José Manuel Carrillo as partners. By June the land had been purchased and Francisca Aloy was giving Carlos and José Manuel 15 slaves each to begin work constructing buildings and planting cane.

By 1837 even Carlos' mother complained about the political situation in Cuba though her concern was mostly about the state's sale of convent and monastery land. She was afraid of losing some money but was thinking about taking advantage of good properties coming on the market.⁴⁴

The ouster of Captain-General Tacón at the end of 1837 and the arrival of his replacement, Joaquín de Ezpeleta in April 1838 did not lessen censorship or conflict between liberal creoles and Spaniards in Cuba.⁴⁵ In August 1838 Rafael wrote to Carlos in New York with news of continued repression. He described a street fight between "hijos del país" and Spaniards over remarks made in the theater and in a salon. He exulted that "in the end those from here triumphed and we were able to bring down a bit the dogs who think themselves the absolute owners of us." Two or three Cuban young men were taken prisoner and when they were released Rafael planned to attend a big dinner cel-

42. Francisca Hernández and José Manuel Carrillo, Havana, November 8, 1837, HC.

43. Receipt from Carlos Drake & Co. to Carlos Hernández for 212 pesos 4 reales for passage for Carlos, his wife and child to New York, April 18, 1838

44. Francisca Aloy to Carlos Hernández, Havana, June 26, 1838, HC.

45. Jensen, *Children*, 127.

ebrating them. “Independence of the island will be toasted and there will be at least fifteen or twenty exiles I among them perhaps—Ezpeleta lately has made an atrocious farce. . .he approved the sentence pronounced by the military commission against the sellers of libel against Tacon and Velasco. . .the sentence was eight years in Melilla[.] Publish it so that all the world is horrified by this scandalous act committed in a civilized country—Well we deserve the title of quiet and most loyal Havana[.]” In this same letter Rafael also expressed interest in leaving Cuba; his mother had suggested that he travel to Hamburg to work in an office there, perhaps to avoid his running afoul of the colonial authorities.⁴⁶

The last years of the 1830s and beginning of the 1840s seem to have been a turning point for Carlos at least in terms of his political activities. Perhaps his marriage and fatherhood forced him to focus on establishing a stable career to support a wife and children. Maintaining a low profile with the colonial authorities would be necessary to travel back and forth to Cuba to develop the new ingenio in Matanzas with his mother and brother-in-law. Sadly, in October 1838 his newborn son died and again Carlos failed to communicate such important news to his family suggesting a serious self-absorption or grief or an emotional estrangement, perhaps all three.⁴⁷ By early 1839, however, Carlos had returned to Cuba to spend time on the growing plantation, to learn the business of sugar. During this year the collection contains many letters from his mother advising him on plantation management and a packet of love letters he wrote to his wife in English professing his love and how much he missed her.

46. Rafael Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, August 30, 1838, HC.

47. Receipt from Charles F. Hernandez for twenty dollars for a grave and head stone in memory of his child in the cemetery on First Avenue belonging to St. Patrick's Cathedral, James Hart, Sexton, Oct 15, 1838.

The Politics of the Personal

Analyzing the letters from the women of the Hernández family over the same years from 1836 to early 1839 reveals some interesting contrasts with those of the male members in terms of evolving identities and aspirations. Carlos seemed to have been closest to his sister Merced in age and temperament. His two other sisters, Rosa and Francisca were both married by 1837, Rosa having several children by that time. Their letters to him were usually short and quite uniform asking after his health, communicating the activities of children or other friends and family in Cuba, expressing their love.

Merced's letters, on the other hand, offer great detail about her life and feelings as she too navigated the seas of finding a suitable mate. None of the sisters commented on the political situation in Cuba or the involvement of any of Carlos' friends or relatives in such activity, though it seems likely they must have known something about it. Instead a personal incident stands out in Merced's correspondence for the amount of ink expended on it and the comparisons that can be drawn with Carlos' peregrinations in search of love.

The Chauviteau family with whom Carlos lived in Paris for seven months in 1836 and 1837 had sent one of their sons, Tomás, to Cuba. Family matriarch Francisca seems to have fomented the match between her sister Serafina's son Tomás and her daughter Merced. Affection bloomed between the two and Merced wrote to Carlos of their budding romance and the possibility of marriage. However, in spite of the fact that Francisca had initially encouraged their relationship, when Tomás declared his intentions to marry Merced, her mother responded angrily wondering how he dared to take a daughter away from the bosom of her family forever. After some thought Tomás declared that he would remain in Cuba for three years, after which he and Merced would go to live in Paris, though he would travel back to Cuba with her whenever she wanted to go. Finally Francisca agreed to the union. Merced wrote to Carlos, "Imagine how happy I

would have been to hear such a thing. . . I started to practice French with Tomás every day and write my lessons.”⁴⁸

Shortly thereafter her mother repented of her decision to agree to the match and insisted that the lovers give up their relationship altogether. Poor Merced wrote to Carlos that, “I could do nothing but break out sobbing [,] I couldn’t contradict what mamita had said with such firmness.” Merced went on to narrate the dramatic scene when Tomás arrived to find everyone in tears, vowing that he would forsake his own family to stay with Merced in Cuba. Ultimately Merced refused to allow him to be separated from his own beloved family and gave up their courtship. “Look dear brother what cruel luck is mine that I am looking at him every day and I have to overcome my pain [vencerme] and suffer. . . . It all came down to before mamita had thoughts of leaving this country and now she is resolved to never leave here, so this is what has completely overturned all our ideas.”⁴⁹

This dramatic and sad turn of events stands in sharp contrast to Carlos’ pursuit of Margaret Harrison in the same year. Perhaps the fear of losing two of her children to foreign spouses caused Francisca to insist that Merced remain in Cuba. Her tears and recriminations were sufficient to convince Merced to break off her engagement but they were not effective in thwarting Carlos’ plans to marry in the US. His mother seems to have decided it was best to reconcile with him and his new wife rather than cut them out of her life. Instead she sought to tie them more closely to her and to Cuba by engineering the partnership in the sugar ingenio in Matanzas.

Several months later Merced wrote to Carlos still suffering from the breakup though she claimed to be trying hard to overcome her feelings, “all this I do for my mother whom I figure is now getting older and that for me it would be very painful to see myself in a Paris surrounded by satisfacions and to know that my mother would die on me here and that I would be the only daughter who would not accom-

48. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, December 24, 1836, HC.

49. Ibid.

pany her [when she left this life].⁵⁰ This sense of daughterly duty seems to have been combined with expectations gleaned from her father that “girls that are not pretty should be nice because an ugly and unpleasant woman stinks [que las muchachas que no son bonitas que deben ser muy amables, porque la mujer fea y pesada, apesta]”.⁵¹

Merced’s letters over the next several months reveal her efforts to forget her broken engagement and she notes that, unlike Carlos, traveling to forget her troubles is an unlikely option. She says she would like to take a trip to Europe to get to know her relatives, “So many times I have wished to be a man to run around all those places so I don’t have to listen to the stories of others [para que nadie me cuente nada].”⁵²

Carlos must also have written to his mother to reproach her for ending Merced and Tomás’ relationship. Merced thanked him for his concern for her happiness when she found out that, “you complained in a letter to mamita about her tyranny with her children because you think I am unhappy, and I thank you very much for that sentiment. . . but I assure you I am not so unhappy.”⁵³

There are few letters from Francisca Aloy in the Hernández collection until the late 1830s. It is not clear whether she wrote infrequently or that Carlos chose not to save her letters until they were reconciled after his marriage. The latter is entirely possible since the letters from his siblings and friends before October 1837 often mention her being angry with him for his clear desire to stay away from home and marry abroad and his profligate spending habits.

Francisca Aloy also wrangled with other men in the family—with the Poey brothers over the settlement of her late husband’s estate, with Rafael over his “impertinence.” On one occasion tempers flared so hotly with one of the Hernández relatives that Merced and others

50. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, February 15, 1837, HC

51. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, March 9, 1837, HC.

52. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, May 26, 1837, HC.

53. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, July 8, 1837, HC.

had to physically intervene, “Pepe Hernández also had a disagreement with mamita, because since mamita had put him in charge of the estates, one day mamita reprimanded him a bit about the bills and right away we see Pepe yell at her and grab both of her arms saying, I am not Rafael, you will not scold me. . .we separated him from mamita. . . and since that day mamita told him she doesn’t want to see him again and he has not taken any opportunity to see her.”⁵⁴

In a somewhat lighter vein Rosa’s husband Juan Poey wrote Carlos that “your mother is more active the older she gets likely to bury us all and more now that she has rejuvenated herself in San Diego [the baths]. . . . I’m really afraid that she has a solitary vigor and not because she misses her children but rather because it is difficult to live with her without quarreling.”⁵⁵

The letters from Francisca Aloy to Carlos after 1837, also offer interesting contrasts with the letters of his siblings. She often presented herself as his poor little mother and chided him for not writing often enough. Yet, it was she who wielded the major financial power in the family. Many letters from the period when Carlos was in Europe noted that his mother was complaining about his spending or trying to withhold money, especially when he decided to leave Paris and travel around in Britain before returning to New York. When they first became partners in the La Paz ingenio she advised him on plantation management; when she later told him to sell his portion of the ingenio in the early 1840s, he did so. Many of her letters in New York instruct him about how to handle family investments in the US through their lawyer, Mr. Russel. Since he was far away and especially after the death of his first born, she also included advice about remedies to ease Margaret’s later pregnancies and finding a suitable nursemaid.⁵⁶ She was ultimately unsuccessful in convincing Carlos and his

54. Merced Hernández to Carlos Hernández, Havana, June 20, 1837, HC.

55. Juan Francisco Poey y Aloy to Carlos Hernández, Havana, April 14, 1837, HC. On the baths of San Diego see Samuel Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil*, (Hartford: Hartford Published Co., 1871), 373.

family to return to Cuba to live permanently though she tried for years to do so.

Denouement of hot-headed lads and dutiful daughters

By the mid-1840s both of her sons were again tormenting their mother with their lusty wanderings. Rafael had left Cuba for France and Spain in 1842 supposedly to learn the merchant's trade while wooing an Italian woman of whom his mother heartily disapproved.⁵⁷ Carlos and Margaret had three children by the mid-1840s but their marriage was dissolving. Carlos took up with a younger woman named Mary, moved to New Orleans, and tried to take his children away from Margaret. The children were soon restored to their mother and in February of 1846 both Margaret and Carlos' mistress Mary were pregnant.⁵⁸

Carlos' whereabouts over the next decade are unclear though it appears he and his mistress went to live in Ireland for a time. When Carlos' mother died in 1854, she still had no idea if he and his wife had reconciled, though Margaret did bring the grandchildren to Cuba twice for a visit. By 1857 Carlos sought to reconcile with his wife contacting Margaret to see if they could meet one another in New York, "unless she hates him."⁵⁹ By 1860 census records show Carlos, his wife, and children living together again in New York, and their household also included a seventeen year old girl named Maria Rean who was born in Ireland.⁶⁰

56. Francisca Aloy to Carlos Hernández, Havana, January 20, 1844, HC. The relationship between Carlos and his mother in the 1840s has been studied in some detail by Lucy Sammis in her undergraduate honors thesis, "The Hernández Family: A Transnational Family in Nineteenth Century Cuba," Department of History, St. Lawrence University, May 2009.

57. Francisca Aloy to Carlos Hernández, Havana, January 20, 1844, HC.

58. Margaret C. Hernández to Elizabeth Porter Harrison (her mother), New York, February 8, 1846, HC.

59. Juan Poey y Aloy to Enrique Casa-mayor, Havana, August 7, 1857, HC.

60. United States Federal Census, 1860, Chas. F. Hernández, ancestry.com

What might we conclude about the identities and aspirations of the Hernández family members from this preliminary analysis of their correspondence? There was clearly a wide and gendered disparity of prospects and expectations for the creole sons and daughters of immigrants like the Hernández. The wealth generated by slave trading and export production afforded all the family members a life of privilege and luxury—homes in town with sumptuous furnishings, homes in the Cuban countryside, balls and parties, regular trips to spas. While their immigrant father seemed to have worked hard to establish himself in Cuba, their sons enjoyed lives of entitlement and excess, expecting their widowed mother to finance their travels and escapades in the US and Europe. Their identities as Cubans ran hot in their youth during the heady days of liberal constitutionalism in the 1830s but by the 1840s both sons seem to have given up active patriotism in favor of living and loving abroad as cosmopolitan gentlemen. For them leaving Cuba was a liberation, not a source of pain and dislocation.⁶¹

The women of the Hernández family imagined a more insular life and identity as Cubans. All their letters suggest a desire to hold the men of the family closer to home, to remind them of the love and support only a loving family could give them. Unless one of the daughters married a foreigner, they expected to spend their lives in Cuba. They also seemed to see themselves as the keepers of Cuban culture for their more itinerant men—Merced promising to turn her brother back into a “criollo rellollo” after his years in Paris, Francisca Aloy sending Carlos recipes for home remedies and later trying to convince Margaret to come to Cuba to live even after Carlos had deserted her and their children. Carlos and Rafael ultimately seemed to find the bounds of Cuba and bonds of family suffocating and their gender and wealth allowed them to recreate themselves as transnational cosmopolitans.

61. On the themes of destierro, exile and identity in a slightly later period see, Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *On Becoming Cuban*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2008 [1999]), 37-38.

