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**Washington University in Saint Louis**

PhD in Comparative Literature

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***Representations of the Cuban Revolution in the American Gaze:***

***The Case of African-American Activists***

by

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

A dissertation presented to

The Graduate School

of Washington University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 2022

St. Louis, Missouri

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My mother María Lazo Martínez, first in Havana and then in exile, has been an inspiration of love, courage and *cubanía del corazón*.

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

Washington University in Saint Louis

May 2022

To my beloved daughter, Luna Isabel.

In loving memory of my brother Rolando Pulido.

To the Americans who sought freedom by traveling to Cuba.

To the Cubans who sought freedom by traveling to America.

*Vendrán aves de todas partes del mundo, embelesadas por la propaganda absurda, a visitarnos y a tirarnos migas por las rejas de las jaulas. Pensarán que estamos encerrados a gusto, por decisión propia. Es obvio que fuera de la Isla nadie conoce lo que nos está pasando aquí dentro del zoológico. O simplemente no les interesa, no les duele. Es más, muchos lo disfrutan con deleite. Se les ve en los rostros cuando nos vienen a visitar. Detrás de cada sonrisa, hay una mueca de desprecio y de burla.*

**ROLANDO PULIDO***

* **Pulido, Rolando**. *La Tiñosidad, la historia de un aura tiñosa cubana* [*La Tiñosidad, The Story of a Cuban Vulture.*] Part III. 9 June 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZgnlYT30Zg&t=163s

My translation from Spanish:

*Birds will come from all over the world, fascinated by foolish propaganda, and they'll throw crumbs at us through the bars of our cage. They think we are locked up here for fun, by choice. Obviously no one outside the Island knows what's going on with us inside the zoo. Or they simply don't care, it doesn't hurt them. What's more, many delight in this. You can see it on their faces when they come to visit us. Behind every smile, a grimace of scorn and mockery.*

# ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Representations of the Cuban Revolution in the American Gaze:

The Case of African-American Activists

by

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

Washington University in St. Louis, 2022

Professor Joseph Schraibman, Chair

Professor Matthias Goeritz, Co-Chair

For more than six decades, the Cuban Revolution has been the object of representation by foreign authors—historians, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, and also poets and writers. After the triumph of Fidel Castro on January 1, 1959, his revolution captured the imagination of U.S. intellectuals and activists. Many of them traveled to Cuba to become witnesses of the radical transformations that were taking place there. In my dissertation, I suggest that visiting Cuba was important for them to authenticate their views. Writing from Castro's Cuba lent legitimacy to their narratives, with which they hoped to influence U.S. public opinion.

My focus is on African-American citizens who sought refuge in communist Cuba. Some wrote about their experiences while still living on the Island and others after returning home. Some portrayed the Cuban Revolution as a utopian experiment. Others saw it as a dystopian system that betrayed the emancipation efforts of Cubans. I show the ways in which, in the context of the Cold

War, the revolution was understood by foreigners as an exceptional alternative to representative democracy and capitalism. I discuss how the American gaze of these travelers encompassed an effort to write from the perspective of Cubans. I also consider that, ultimately, their narratives aimed to interpret Cuban reality for the American public in service of their own political agendas.

My research has found that the same social issues—including racism—roiling the U.S. were, when displaced to Cuba, perceived in strikingly different ways by these writers than when they lived in the United States. I group these narratives in two clusters: those by travelers who adapted to the Cuban Revolution and those who resisted it. In the first group, the American gaze from the outside was adjusted over time. In the second, it undergoes an ideological inversion where the authors are alienated as revolutionary allies. My results invite new lines of multidisciplinary analysis in aspects not sufficiently explored by the fields of African American and Latin American studies.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Imagining Castro's Cuba

In 2013, shortly after leaving Cuba for the United States, I published in a New York digital magazine an audiovisual essay with the last photos I took on the Island: *Images of the Day Before*.[143] It was my definitive farewell to my country. Having read in Havana the novel *You Can't Go Home Again* by Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938), I suddenly realized that home was elsewhere—or nowhere—for me.

During my last decade in Cuba, while posting on my personal blog *Lunes de Post-Revolución*[144] (there is an English version, *Post-Revolution Mondays*),[145] chronicles that were increasingly critical of the Cuban Revolution, my gaze from the Island was more reminiscent of that of a Cuban exile. As censorship and repression expelled me from all social and cultural life in Cuba, I became a foreigner in my own homeland. A pariah in paradise, a figure who appears to be a constitutional byproduct of utopias.

A decade later, the same images now belong to the day after, not the day before anymore. I still play the online video where my voice sounds heavily accented, reading those words I once wrote in an estranged—perhaps, strangled—English:

"The image of the island has been abused in our national imagination. The island as isolation, as continental abandonment, as lyrical gentleness, as the least firm of the earth, as origin and teleology, as unsinkable (unbearable) cork, as poetic cause of the measure of all things." That is, "Cuba is, above all, illusion. An endemic disease called hope. And, more than illusion, Cuba could be pure instinct." Then, when referring to the intensity of such an instantaneous mirage, I wonder "what are the symptoms of such beauty?" And the answer prioritizes "Eros, rather than heroes," "reflections, more than rhetoric," to the point of a "revelation, rather than revolution."

For more than six decades, a myriad of foreigners—in good or bad faith—were fascinated by the Cuban Revolution of January 1, 1959, and made it their privileged object of representation. A totem of

all Third World utopias of emancipation, sovereignty, and national liberation. Accordingly, Cuba soon became a fetish nation, a geopolitical hotspot in the context of the Cold War, a historical hallmark of resistance against the market economy and representative democracy, but one that was being built in the backyard of the United States of America. As such, the Caribbean Island was the unavoidable destination for foreign travelers, who were eager to narrate and interpret the Cuban Revolution for the rest of the non-utopian world. Cultural osmosis in the Western world tends to transfer content from unstable areas of political exceptionalism to stabilized regions of non-exceptionality. That is, from the margins of the contemporary world to its hegemonic centers—Europe and the United States.

Those foreign travelers, whose imagination was captured by the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro, were both witnesses of and participants in the radical transformations that were taking place on the Island. Visiting Cuba was important for outsiders to authenticate their views on local events as part of a global scenario. Writing from Cuba lent legitimacy to their narratives, with which they hoped to radically transform public opinion abroad. Living on the Island granted them a powerful patent to speak for Cubans, with the pretense that they were Cuban enough or that, as strangers, they could understand Cuban history in the *longue durée* more deeply than Cubans.

In particular, U.S. social activists and intellectuals understood the Cuban Revolution as the ideal cause they needed to exemplify their own ideological agendas in the U.S. and beyond. In the case of African American activists from the 1960s and 1970s, most social issues roiling the U.S., including racism, when displaced to Cuba, were perceived by them in strikingly different ways than when they lived in their country. In this dissertation I will focus on the close-reading of four case studies of African American citizens that were persecuted in the United States and sought a new life in Castro's Cuba, a social system initially understood by all of them as a utopian alternative to U.S. Imperialism.

In Cuba—quoting from *Images of the Day Before*—Cubans are now looking for "maps, elementary geometry," in a "recurring itinerary like the dreams we don't dare to stop dreaming." Perhaps, those foreigners who once escaped to Cuba were also looking for a dream resurrection on an "island that rises from its own ashes." An alter-nation that represented their "magic object of the multiplicity," the altar of all alternatives to Western capitalist democracy, even if the Cuban Revolution had become another closely watched totalitarian regime.[i]

Only in such exceptional scenarios is a new beginning conceivable for the biography of the pilgrim in search of a secret truth—regardless of whether their previous lives had been boringly bourgeois or brutalized by political violence. Only in extreme experiments like communism in the time of Castro, "all the times are still possible" in modernity, and travelers to Utopia can then "lose one's face" and "be others in another place."

Utopia is always elsewhere, particularly if its mythology is materially situated on an Island as close as possible to the non-utopian mainland—in this case, in a Caribbean country called Cuba that seems historically condemned to inhabit the imagination of the United States.

---

[i] *Closely Watched Trains* (original title in Czech, *Ostre sledované vlaky*) is a 1966 film by the Czech film and theatre director Jiří Menzel (1938-2020). https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0060802/

This film was shown in Cuba and it became a popular reference for critical intellectuals. It is based on the homonymous book written by the Czech novelist Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997), which was published in Cuba under the title *Trenes rigurosamente vigilados* (La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1985) in a climate of "rectification" of the authoritarian tendencies of Cuban socialism.

## 1.2. Cuba Before Castroism

Cuba was one of the most steadily growing economies in the Latin American region, with a socially progressive constitution approved by the people in 1940, as well as a democratic tradition that began on May 20, 1902, when the Cuban Republic emerged from the devastating 1895-1898 war of independence from Spain—which ended with a military intervention of the United States on the Caribbean Island.

Cuba was the least likely territory for a Communist system to emerge in the Western hemisphere. After his triumph, Fidel Castro on many occasions—both locally and internationally—denied any communist connection of the Revolution. He was already manipulating public opinion, but in a sense he was stating a historical truth: the traditional Communist sectors in Cuba were hardly involved in the rural and urban guerrillas, and the majority of those who joined his popular revolution—from the rich and poor classes alike—were rather anti-communist and professing the Christian faith.

This untimely unlikeliness—together with the persistant idea that Cuba was doomed to remain under the influence of U.S. interests forever—can help us understand the fascination of Americans and foreigners in general regarding a radical revolution in the backyard of U.S. Imperialism.

The concept of "fellow-traveler" is fundamental to exploring the nature of travels to a society assumed to be inspired by Utopia. The British historian David Caute, in *The Fellow-Travelers*,[30] originally published in 1973, explores this figure in different geopolitical contexts. Caute traces back the term to Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), the Russian thinker known as the

"father of Russian socialism," who once wrote that "Russia has only one comrade, one fellow-traveller—the United States of America" (1).

For Caute, the Western concept of fellow-travelers, which "has acquired an increasingly pejorative connotation, a label of abuse or accusation" (2), involves basically a "commitment *at a distance* which is not only geographical but also emotional and intellectual." A sort of "remote-control radicalism" (4). This concept was born in association with the communist experience, to the point that the American theoretical physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967) defined it to a security officer in 1943 as "someone who accepted part of the public programme of the Communist Party, but who was not a member" (5).

Caute is aware that, if "nine cases out of ten" fellow-travelers "decline to join their local Party," it is not because "they are inherently anaemic and lacking the courage of their convictions." Instead, Caute proposes that the fellow-traveler may have a "disillusionment with Western society" that is "less radical, less total, less uncompromising," since they retain "a partial faith in the possibilities of progress under the parliamentary system." Also, the fellow travel may still appreciate "that the prevailing liberties, however imperfect and however distorted, are nevertheless, valuable." (5)

Therefore, for Caute, fellow-travelers are originally "neither desperate nor fanatical" (6), yet they may be cultivating "a convenient schizophrenia," since "they scorned democracy" while "they invested their dreams of positivistic experimentation and moral regeneration" at a distance, usually in a despotism worse than where they came from. The fact that fellow-travelers have frequently avoided becoming members of a communist party, could also constitute a deceptive tactic making their opinions appear "completely unprejudiced," so that "their intellectual independence appeared unimpeachable" when it comes to support communism as synonym of "a

family of related notions such as progress, social justice, scientific rationality, peace, equality, the worker's state" (7).

The fellow-traveler, according to Caute in the context of Cold War, "does not recommend world revolution," but rather "socialism in one country," for example, and usually "not his own" (4). The "primitive aspects" of faraway harsh realities is what has "captivated the imaginations of such intellectuals, but only in so far as dramatic underdevelopment provided a *tabula rasa* for planned construction and rational experimentation" (3).

In general, the authorities of the regimes visited by fellow-travelers do not expect them "to make serious contributions to the *ideological* education of the masses." And usually "they are confined, in fact, to three main avenues of useful activity: political journalism, membership of communist front organizations, and, where appropriate, the loan of their prestige, their lustre, the respect in which they are widely held" (8).

Caute concludes that the more "familiar" features of the "fellow-traveling dimension" is simply to use "bifocal lenses" with regard to the utopian places visited, through comparison with the non-utopian space from where they come. In some cases, it is simply "myopic romanticism." In others, it could be "double standards" that pursue ideological agendas. In any case, Caute emphasizes that there is a tendency for intellectuals in capitalist democracies "to undervalue their own societies and to romanticize populist or 'socialist' one-party states further afield" (16).

This inclination is best exemplified by Caute when talking about Cuba. For him, the fellow travelers to Cuba were mostly "young radicals distrustful of centralized power, of leaders, of armies, of patriotism, of censorship, and of monopolized media," who paradoxically then "managed to invest their dreams in a Cuban Revolution which concentrated supreme power in one

man, evaded elections, armed its people to the teeth, celebrated patriotism, closed down deviant newspapers, and subsumed all voices in one Voice" (16).

When referring to the youngest generations of American travelers—"young radicals, black and white, who were genuinely programmed to set their own ghettos and campuses on fire"—Caute describes them not only as "conspicuously fascinated" by Castro's Cuba, but also arriving to the Island "as activists intent on Doing Something," only to return later to the U.S. "fueled for fiercer endeavors" (16). Cuba was a catalyst of their own agendas in America and elsewhere.

In turn, according to Caute, the government of "Washington offered Castro the same service that Hitler performed for Stalin" (16). That is, an external archenemy which was despised even by its own people, as evidenced by the travelers arriving from there. The testimony that ideologized foreigners brought back to their own countries from Utopia tended to be not only politically but even poetically biased, the bucolic or belligerent version of an unreliable witnesses. In any case, the large amounts of fellow-travelers in each historical context have contributed to making invisible the violence of certain States against their own citizens.

In this sense, Caute writes that in Utopian egalitarian societies, "the victim found himself totally isolated in a wilderness of arbitrary violence and pervasive fears," "meanwhile the 'engineers of sould'[ii] in the West lauded his tormentors and spat on his grave—then denied his

[ii] By using "engineers of sould," David Caute is making a reference to the phrase "engineers of the soul," popularized by Joseph Stalin's propaganda. The word "sould" is a combination of "soul" and "sold," in reference to those who sold their soul to a certain social system.

The original phrase was coined by the Soviet novelist Yury Olesha (1899-1960), during a visit to writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) in October 1932, in order to organize the First Soviet Writers' Congress, which finally took place in August 1934. Stalin was also present and he immediately appropriated this expression, that applies a scientific technical term to the role of socialist intellectuals in the development of the new society: писатели—инженеры человеческих душ ("writers—engineers of human souls").

The whole sentence by Stalin was: "As comrade Olesha aptly expressed himself, writers are engineers of human souls. The production of souls is more important than the production of tanks, and therefore I raise my glass to you, writers, the engineers of the human soul."

death" (14). The nature of such isolation under totalitarian utopias in the contemporary world poses if not a legal responsibility, at least a moral dilemma, to those foreigners responsible for simulating the giving of voice to those without a voice.

To stress the importance of the impact of these traveling narratives, Caute quotes from the speech of one of the early leaders of the Communist International (Comintern), Karl Radek (1885-1939), who was praising the role of the "fellow-travelers of the revolution" at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in August 1934. As a tragic note, Radek was soon to be a victim of the 1937 Stalinist anti-Trotskyite purge known as the Trial of the Seventeen: he was sentenced to ten years of penal labor for treason and in May 1939 he was killed in a forced labor camp. I will quote Radek in extenso from his original speech:[iii]

> Between proletarian literature, i.e., literature which looks at the world from the standpoint of the militant proletariat and which tries to help in the transformation of this world, and the literature of the 'fellow-travelers,' there is a process of emulation, of struggle going on, a process of reciprocal influence and of mutual enrichment. […]
>
> We are grateful to them, and we regard their actions as proof of the fact that the truth about the great socialist revolution, accomplished by the Soviet proletariat, is piercing its way through all the fog of bourgeois lies. Their actions are of enormous political significance, and that not only as a symptom of the state of feeling among the 'intermediate strata' in capitalist countries. Their actions are of enormous positive significance because

---

In *Engineers of the Soul* (*Ingenieurs van de ziel*, translated from the Dutch by Sam Garrett and published in London by Harvill Secker in 2010), the Dutch journalist Frank Westerman explores in detail the interactions of power and intellectuals under the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union.

[iii] *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977. pp. 73-182.

**Radek, Karl**. *Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art*. In: *Soviet Writers' Congress, August 1934*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek/1934/sovietwritercongress.htm

> they are hindering world imperialism in its efforts to engineer a new and supreme crime—namely, an attack upon the U.S.S.R., which would be the signal for the outbreak of a new world war.

The Cuban Revolution was also grateful to its fellow travelers—as long as their actions and words did not contradict the dogmas and practices of the Cuban Revolution. They were welcome on the Island as more or less spontaneous spokespersons whose narratives could help delegitimize any attempt by Cuban exiles and the U.S. government to attack Castro's revolution. Whether these foreigners were aware of it or not, their writings do reveal an interest in witnessing the collapse of the Cuban Republic and the rise of something radically new. As their morbid curiosity longed for a utopian future of egalitarianism, they tended to evoke the evils of the recent past to justify the violence imposed on the present by the Cuban Revolution, thus making invisible—as if they were unavoidable—its victims.

## 1.3 Castroism After Castro

*Don't you know you better run,*

*run, run, run, run, run, run, run,*

*run, run, run, run, run, run…?*

**TALKIN BOUT A REVOLUTION,** TRACEY CHAPMAN.

In his 1997 book *Peronism Without Perón*,[126] James McGuire studies Argentinean politics in the twentieth century. McGuire enumerates the characteristics of Peronism, the political movement founded in the early 1940s by Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974), whose enduring influence in Argentina continues to this day. His analysis can be useful to address the phenomenon of Castroism in Cuba after the Revolution of January 1, 1959.

In the first place, in order to understand Cuba, it is essential to carefully consider the presence of "a personalistic leader" around whom the movement "revolved since its inception" (vii). In this case, the figure of Fidel Castro (1926-2016) and his charismatic personality, which shaped not only the style of the Cuban Revolution but also the new Cuban society in his image and likeness.

Second, by fostering a strong sense of "collective identity," Fidel Castro, like Perón, often claimed to be more "committed to real democracy" than "formal democracy," since the "basic goal" of a revolutionary is to stay in power to "enact policies" which are "pursuant to social justice, economic independence, and national sovereignty" (1). To achieve the last three objectives, Perón and the Peronists in Argentine have justified the reason why they "embraced a bewildering range of policies" (54) that may seem contradictory. Similarly, throughout the six decades of the Cuban Revolution, many of its national and international policies have contradicted each other in an

irreconcilable way, but with the consistent outcome of keeping power in perpetuity, in order to be in a position to implement new policies that, in turn, would favor social justice and national sovereignty—regardless of the actual results of these cycles.

In 2022, over five years after the death of commander-in-chief Fidel Castro, it is evident that the historical generation has managed to appoint the new figures who will continue the saga of Castroism, but without Castros. That is, under the narrative of the Revolution and, beyond all traces of its original ideology, the Cuban government insists on surviving by abolishing political plurality on the Island, while perpetuating its centralized control over each institution and individual.

The official rationale to validate this non-democratic style is that only a socialist society, as conceived and executed by Fidel Castro in his constant adaptation to remain in power, can meet the historical need to "defend" and "save" the "conquests" or "achievements" of the Revolution—i.e., the massive government programs for public health and education. Many of Castro's speeches after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe communism insisted on preserving these programs at all costs. According to him, without them Cuba would find itself in a worst situation as a nation than before 1959.

In September 1990, at the Karl Marx Theater in Havana,[21] Castro said in a speech published that same year by Editora Política,[22] under the title *Saving the Homeland, the Revolution and Socialism*:

> We made this Revolution on our own. No one made it for us, no one defended it for us, no one saved it for us. We made it, we defended it, we saved it, and we will continue to do so. We will continue to defend it and we will continue to save it, as many times as necessary. […] We must be willing to do it, because we cannot behave with sentimentality

or emotions in this, when the fundamental issue is to save the country, to save the Revolution. […] To save the Revolution in Cuba! To save socialism in Cuba! And this will be the greatest internationalist service that our people can render to humanity. […] We have to save our homeland, we have to save the Revolution, we have to save Socialism: that is the task to which we invite the seven and a half million members of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution today!

The current Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel (born in 1960) has repeatedly stated that the monolithic legitimacy of his government—where all dissent is discredited and all opposition is criminalized—is summarized by the slogan "we are *continuidad*" of the Revolution.[123] That is, as long as the ruling elite behaves as a "continuation" of the founding legacy of the brothers Fidel and Raúl Castro—the latter is now retired—the Cuban government is entitled to exercise power without risking its exclusive role in democratic elections.

Some relevant differences of Castro's Revolution, when compared to Peronism in Argentina, include the fact that, according to James McGuire, "Perón's relationship to party organization was always tenuous" and, "from the outset, he saw the political party as a 'circumstantial' and 'obsolete' organization that was destined to wither away—unlike the union, which he viewed 'as an organization which, like the family, springs almost from natural law'" (59).

In Castro's Cuba, on the contrary, shortly after January 1959 the labor union movement was completely coopted by the revolutionary authorities and later by the Cuban Communist Party (PCC). This organization was officially founded in October 1965 without any legal opposition. The PCC was indeed the only political organization recognized by the 1976 Constitution and its three reforms of July 1992, June 2002 and April 2019.[iv]

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[iv] *Cuban Constitution*, 2019. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Cuba_2019.pdf?lang=en

Castroism without Castro—with its mixture of out-of-date Marxism and pragmatic improvisation—still provokes passionate defenses from partisan foreigners committed to leftist causes around the world. However, today almost none of them would be willing to visit Cuba for prolonged periods of time and, much less—as in previous decades—to reside permanently on the Island.

In the early years of the Cuban Revolution, a wave of solidarity and poignant propaganda had brought to Cuba countless activists, intellectuals, artists, journalists, academics, writers, philosophers, religious leaders, refugees, and many other travelers from both nearby and remote regions of the planet, most of them inspired by the revolutionary temptation.

In many cases, this pilgrimage implied a moral sense of duty beyond the pilgrimage as such, as well as a critical conversion associated with the process of travel writing as such. Those foreigners who had the privilege of living in a closed society like Cuba, somehow felt that they had the sacred task of spreading their revealed truth to educate the rest of the non-utopian world.

At some point along this process of observation as well as participation, the witnessing outsiders become an insider translator, an interpreter that at times—knowingly or unknowingly—was ultimately usurping the voice of those represented by them. In the case of Castro's Cuba, the majority of their hermeneutic narratives were published only abroad, since the communist censorship considered these testimonies too problematic for the captive audience on the Island. Or perhaps too counterproductive in their proselytizing, so that ordinary people in Cuba

---

"Article 5: The Communist Party of Cuba, unique, Martiano, Fidelista, and Marxist-Leninist, the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, sustained in its democratic character as well as its permanent linkage to the people, is the superior driving force of the society and the State. It organizes and directs the communal forces towards the construction of socialism and its progress toward a communist society. It works to preserve and to fortify the patriotic unity of the Cuban people and to develop ethic, moral, and civic values."

might defy or even mock such over-enthusiasm professed by a non-national—a person who certainly will never suffer from the same scarcities and lack of rights as nationals.

The tension between fact and fanaticism is not always easy to detect and disentangle in all these travel books, where a detailed description of the Cuban Revolution seen as Utopia is carried out usually as an autobiographical narrative, without much attempt to elaborate on such concepts as Revolution and Utopia.

Therefore, these books can also be read today as documents of a personal presence in Cuba, in order to authenticate the author's political statement. After acknowledging their limitations as non-Cubans, many of these authors insist in the behaving as the model Cuban revolutionary would expect them to behave once they leave the Island. The ideas and ideology of the model Cuban revolutionary will depend, in turn, on the perspectives of the visitor more or less fascinated by the quasi-biblical vision of the popular masses supporting the Revolution.

To guarantee the viability of Utopia then—also of the *continuidad* of the Revolution today—it was vital to prove the exceptional legitimacy of Castro for the Cubans on the Island. The geographical proximity of the United States of America made this poetic purpose an urgent imperative for most travelers' tales. Many of them agreed that communist Cuba was on the brink of the Imperialist military intervention that ultimately never took place. As such, for all foreign sympathizers, Cuban communism deserved at least a narrative shield as protection against such a calamitous conflict. And only they could provide one, thanks to their responsible representations of the Cuban Revolution. That is, only a humanizing account of the revolutionary violence in Cuba could save the Caribbean social experiment of an insular Utopia.

Today, in the twenty-first century, the Cuban Revolution has outlived its historical leaders, decades after leaving behind the heroic era of warrior glory and suicidal sacrifice. Although the

Cuban Revolution has permanently prevailed for many, it may never convince many others.[v] This dissertation is a first step towards a critical re-reading of the Cuban revolutionary timeline through the imported prism of those foreigners who wrote it as residents on the Island.

These utopian and anti-utopian writings may have become more obsolete than the Cuban Revolution itself. But some insights in them could be curiously updated again, more than half a century after the narrated events. Still, others travel writings may reveal critical contradictions of the Cuban Revolution that were initially not so visible, since the ideologized international readership was not focusing then on microscopic details, blinded by the epic of the Eden of Utopia versus the Evils of Imperialism.

[v] Some historians have questioned the authenticity of the quote by the Spanish intellectual Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), when in 1936 he realized the barbaric nature of the Civil War that had been unleashed in Spain: "Venceréis, pero no convenceréis" (You can prevail, but not convince). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miguel_de_Unamuno

# REVOLUTIONS, UTOPIAS

# AND OTHER TRAVEL WRITINGS

## 2.1 What We Talk About When We Talk About the Revolution

*Books on revolutions are written by foreigners,*

*those who can hardly remember them,*

*nor do they want to.*[vi]

**THE BAD MEMORY**, HEBERTO PADILLA.

What is a Revolution?

The term is so commonly used that common sense is no longer useful to an initial attempt to define it. In some cases, as in Castro's and post-Castro Cuba, the abuse of this word might be reminiscent of some features of empty[vii] and floating[viii] signifiers. That is—following the Oxford Reference website of Oxford University Press's Dictionaries, Companions and Encyclopedias—the term *revolution* on the Island could have turned into "a signifier with a vague, highly variable, unspecifiable, or non-existent signified" and "may stand for many or even any signifieds," thus meaning "whatever their interpreters want them to mean."

In practice, in communist Cuba, Revolution means instead whatever the revolutionaries in power want it to mean. The usage of the term exemplifies well the "radical disconnection between signifier and signified," to the point that *revolution* "absorbs rather than emits meaning." In fact,

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[vi] **Padilla, Heberto**. *La mala memoria*. Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1989.
Original in Spanish: "Los libros sobre las revoluciones los escriben los extranjeros, los que apenas pueden recordarlas, ni lo quieren."

[vii] **Oxford Reference**. *Empty Signifier*.
https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095750424

[viii] **Oxford Reference**. *Floating Signifier*.
https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095824238

it is “susceptible to multiple and even contradictory interpretations, suggesting that it does not have a specific meaning itself.”

Although *revolution* may function “primarily as a vehicle for absorbing meanings that viewers want to impose upon it,” including foreign viewers, it is important to emphasize that in Cuba those in power have had the semantic privilege of imposing the hegemonic meanings of *revolution* in each context.

That is, the Cuban Revolution, like “beauty” in the ubiquitous quote of uncertain origin,[ix] may also be in the eyes of the Beholder—particularly, for those coming from abroad—but what is included and excluded from the revolutionary canon and archive has always depended on the gaze and grip of those who held or still hold a centralized control of the Revolution.

Empty and floating signifiers have been studied to examine how they “are formulated” to serve “as key tools for discourses in mobilizing consent and achieving hegemony,” as recently summarized by Eleanor MacKillop.[117] She explains the distinction between “how empty signifiers lose credibility or appeal and drift into floating signifiers” (188). For her, “empty signifiers are demands ‘emptied’ of meaning to symbolize a multiplicity of contradictory demands,” while “floating signifiers are signifiers which continue to see their meaning shift across context and perspectives:” i.e., “different demands fighting over their definition (190-191).

The experience and eventually the expertise of Cuban leaders who use the label “Revolution” as a synonym for Party, Government, Institutionality, State and Nation number

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[ix] “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” This saying has been tracked down in Ancient Greek as early as in the third century before Christ. Analogous ideas can be found in English dramatists John Lyly’s *Euphues and His England* (1580) and William Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1598), and later in Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1741) and David Hume’s *Essays, Moral and Political* (1758). But the author credited with coining the phrase in its contemporary form is the Irish novelist Margaret Wolfe Hungerford, née Hamilton, aka The Duchess, in her 1878 novel *Molly Bawn*, where the character of Marcia Amherst pronounces it in a dialogue.
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22214/22214-h/22214-h.htm

among the causes for the lack of transparency and the diffuse nature of the contour and the limits of this term.

From its beginning, the nature of "Revolution" in Cuba was obscured on purpose in the public sphere by oratory, propaganda, mass media, education books and solidarity conclaves, so that the concept became transcendental. It also became a sort of ultimate test of faith for all nationals and foreigners in Cuba. MacKillop could perhaps refer to this effect as "the necessary grip of the discourse's fantasmatic narrative, or story," devised for "covering over the contradictions between particular demands" (204).

Such a process of mythification and mystification of the Revolution led not only to utopianism for intellectual consumption at the international level, but also to a new hermeneutics of heresies, where the new heretics to be punished or expelled from paradise were the Cuban counterrevolutionary subjects, whether on the Island or in Exile.

Following the criteria of previous researchers, MacKillop explains that for these speech figures to be effective in a community, all "credible empty signifiers" must "resonate with the historicity and tradition of 'the basic principles informing the organization of a group.'" However, the influence and impact of charismatic "actors" or "agents" also needs to be considered: namely, "strategically-placed individuals constantly rearticulating empty signifiers in order to continuously and tendentially empty these, or, alternatively, 'letting go' of a signifier and moving on."

Furthermore, this communicative function becomes quite contagious when it "addresses the emotional question" in which many believe or are forced to believe that they are involved. This enthusiasm, together with "concepts of fantasy, subject position and grip," tends to maximize the "appeal to individuals" and the proliferation of certain narratives over their corresponding counternarratives (188-89).

In the case of Cuba, Fidel Castro himself embodied the Maximum Leader not only of the Rebel Army—later the Revolutionary Armed Forces (in Spanish, FAR)—but also in both popular and official speech, in either case a language weaponized to dominate all public opinion, in fact, to destroy or eliminate independent public opinion as the fourth power of a society.[x]

The Cuban Revolution was born and evolved largely in the image and likeness of Fidel Castro. By exercising what MacKillop calls the "emptying of particular signifier of specific meaning," through the accumulation of complementary or contraposing meanings—both sequentially and simultaneously—the leader of the Cuban Revolution managed to mutate and mutilate the concept to make it "become 'everything,'" so that it could "represent numerous demands" in order "to organize/stabilize a field of discourse and thus hegemonize it." According to MacKillop, it is precisely by this process of "partially fixating meaning" that "empty signifiers are able to link together a vast array of demands, reducing differences and thus limiting possibilities for contestation" (190).

This emptying of signifiers for this purpose applies to the Cuban Revolution. For example, immediately after Fidel Castro's death, announced by his brother and successor Raúl Castro late

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[x] The notions of "Fourth State" and "fourth power" arise from the medieval European vision of three states of the realm or orders of social hierarchy in Christendom: the clergy (First State), the nobility (Second State), and the commoners: peasants and bourgeoisie (Third State). In his book *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841), the British philosopher Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) popularized the modern use of "fourth power" applied to the press, as coined earlier by the Irish statesman Edmund Burke (1729-1797). The commentary of Carlyle is worth quoting:

"Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all. […] Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. Writing brings Printing; brings universal every-day extempore Printing, as we see at present. Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority. It matters not what rank he has, what revenues or garnitures: the requisite thing is, that he has a tongue which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite. The nation is governed by all that has tongue in the nation: Democracy is virtually there" (139).

**Carlyle, Thomas**. *On Heroes and Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (Edited by David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser.) New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013.

https://quotebanq.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Thomas-Carlyle-On-Heroes-Hero-Worship-and-the-Heroic-in-History.pdf

at night on November 25, 2016—ironically, Black Friday in the capitalist world—the following all-encompassing definition of "revolution," enunciated by Fidel Castro on May 1, 2000, was enthroned both as his legacy and political testament, in order to secure the "continuidad" of Castroism with Castro:

> Revolution means to have a sense of history; it is changing everything that must be changed; it is full equality and freedom; it is being treated and treating others like human beings; it is achieving emancipation by ourselves and through our own efforts; it is challenging powerful dominant forces from within and without the social and national milieu; it is defending the values in which we believe at the cost of any sacrifice; it is modesty, selflessness, altruism, solidarity and heroism; it is fighting with courage, intelligence and realism; it is never lying or violating ethical principles; it is a profound conviction that there is no power in the world that can crush the power of truth and ideas. Revolution means unity; it is independence, it is fighting for our dreams of justice for Cuba and for the world, which is the foundation of our patriotism, our socialism and our internationalism.[23]

Only a term as versatile as "revolution" could embody such semantic transvestism. It would have been an absolute absurdity to approach any other political regime or social contract elsewhere in the ways that Fidel Castro defined his own in Cuba.

One might analogously ask, didn't slavery mean also "to have a sense of history," even if it was a flawed one according to modern conceptions of universal human rights? Didn't Christianity claim, at least in its sacred books, that it is a sin not "being treated and treating others like human beings"? Weren't anarchists also "challenging powerful dominant forces from within and without the social and national milieu," in the hope of diffusing all hegemonic power structures? Didn't

fascism also propagandistically preach “unity,” “independence,” “patriotism,” “internationalism” and specifically “socialism”?

Furthermore, hasn’t the U.S. Marine Corps also been “fighting with courage, intelligence and realism,” for the expansion of interests? Isn’t religious fanaticism as well “a profound conviction that there is no power in the world that can crush the power of truth and ideas,” in order to prevail over the misconceptions of the infidels? Aren’t suicide sects also “achieving emancipation by ourselves and through our own efforts,” in their tragic travel towards paradise?

In fact, aren’t terrorists “defending the values in which we believe at the cost of any sacrifice,” and particularly any life, including their own? And isn’t democracy, despite its recurrent crises and perhaps its current decadence, the most ambitious attempt to attain “full equality and freedom” for all citizens?

Last, but not least, the questions that Fidel Castro omitted from his definition is who is entitled to decide when and how and what to change over the course of the Cuban Revolution, and, of course, in this public address, he simply fails to consider the limits to “changing everything that must be changed”? For example, is an ever-changing revolution itself changeable for a less changing system? Or is this a secret conservative characteristic that a revolution must incorporate in order to remain a revolution in perpetuity? How to contain changes from erasing the revolutionary nature of a society? Can a society be revolutionary without periods of stagnation or even regression?

Perhaps for Fidel Castro, as much as for the discourse theorists quoted by MacKillop, “reality—be it beliefs, identities, norms or objects—is not ‘real’ but is instead the product of discourse, understood as the articulation of meaning, or more specifically of demands into chains

of equivalences, creating relationships between distinct elements" (189), whether interconnected or irreconcilable.

In a "relationship as knots in a fishing net," our "reality is never fixed," even for those generalizations that "might appear set in stone," like "localism, democracy or fairness"—in this case, Revolution. In practice, all "powerful, or hegemonic, discourses," while they "always remain contested," according to MacKillop their goal still is "to fixate meaning, or at least maintain the illusion of this fixity" (189).

For MacKillop, under such despotic discourses "the individual," in turn, "is understood as lacking," with "his/her identity always remaining dislocated and in search of a 'fuller'—i.e. happier—self." In the end, these "subject positions" are accommodated into "'ready-made' identities articulated by discourses" too. In order to "mobilize their consent or 'grip' individuals," the most effective linguistic scheme for a discourse seems to be to "appeal to individuals' fears and desires via ideological constructions articulating together disparate individual fears […] and desires," usually "around a selected few demands, which is where empty signifiers come in" (190).

In popular argot, these empty signifiers would thus behave like wildcards in a poker game, whose purpose is simply to arbitrarily preserve power over the people in any circumstances. Under this light, the Revolution—with its saga of guillotines, firing squads, political police and political prisoners, massive deportations, ethnic cleansings, and even genocides—constitutes a rhetorical reality, beyond any documented fact and rigorous statistics.

In this sense, Fidel Castro was on the side of most supreme rulers in the history of humanity. The Cuban Revolution was then personally implemented as his inverted tale of the "emperor's new clothes."[xi] A narrative safely structured to disguise tyranny as utopia, with the

[xi] *The Emperor's New Clothes* (*Kejserens nye klæder*, translated from Danish by Jean Hersholt) is a classic folktale by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), first published in 1837.

consequent fascination and recruitment of an overwhelming avalanche of foreign "fellow travelers," while, at the same time, at the national level the new revolutionary regime seized the citizen sovereignty that Cubans had formally enjoyed since the proclamation of the Republic in May 20, 1902, four years after the independence from Spain.

MacKillop recapitulates the "five conditions for the emergence of empty signifiers" which have been proposed in earlier studies: 1) a particular element of meaning must be "available"; 2) it must also be "credible;" 3) it depends on "strategically placed individuals able to construct and articulate an empty signifier within their political project;" 4) it needs "an unequal division of power […] for empty signifiers to accommodate multiple demands, this resulting from past hegemonic struggles;" and 5) the existence of "a historical and empirical documentation of why and how a particular empty signifier emerged is necessary" (190).

MacKillop recalls that "the openness and particularity of those empty signifiers must constantly be attended to," because "too much openness [is] leading to mistrust rather than appeal,

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https://andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheEmperorsNewClothes_e.html

In this story, an emperor ends up naked before his own people, after being convinced by two foreign "swindlers" that the brand new clothes they sold to him "had a wonderful way of becoming invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office, or who was unusually stupid."

In the case of Fidel Castro's Cuba, they were foreigners those who opted to repeat the official claim that the Revolution was "very pretty," "beautiful," "enchanting," "magnificent," "excellent," "unsurpassed," and, of course, "it has my highest approval." Most witnesses from abroad, in order not to appear as ideologically "stupid" in the Western World, as well as to avoid being delegitimized as "unfit" for recognizing Utopia on the Island, decided to support the notion of a promised nation to be built for the future, and they avoided a kind of criticism that would have been considered reactionary. To the typical political pilgrim, like in Andersen's tale, "nothing could make him say that he couldn't see anything". They had already seen, even before traveling or landing in Cuba, the marvels of a Utopian territory in the making.

Among those enthusiasts indeed, "nobody would confess that he couldn't see anything, for that would prove him either unfit for his position, or a fool." In summary, "no costume the Emperor had worn before was ever such a complete success" as perceived from abroad. That is, since the beginning, the 1959 Revolution was granted the privilege of making repression invisible, just like Terror in Utopia has been justified using the category of historical necessity or it is simply disregarded as a counterrevolutionary narrative.

In Andersen's story, it has to be a "little child" who dares to say with his "innocent prattle": "But he hasn't got anything on," when he sees the Emperor exposed in public. Only then, after a second of pondering or perhaps panicking, the people finally wake up and "the whole town cried out at last" the same transformative truth that, in the Cuban case, it would take decades to become somehow a consensus: the Revolution functioned as a "wonderful way" of not only blaming the victims but also reducing their role to irrelevance.

whilst too much particularity hinders the grip potentially exercised by such signifiers." That is, in the second case, "empty signifiers lose credibility and move into a state of overdetermination and contestation of their meaning" and ultimately "they become floating signifiers" (204).

In 1971, the book *On Revolution*,[114] edited by William Lutz and Harry Brent, attempted "to gather some current writings on a much used and abused word—revolution" (vii). From Karl Marx to Ernesto Ché Guevara, this volume focuses on both revolutionary theories and practices, with examples of historical violent revolts—with large numbers of victims and a regime change—as well as other rather peaceful events—like students protesting for civil rights in American universities.

In any case, according to the sources compiled by Lutz and Brent, a modern revolution seems to be contrary to either the early and the "last stage of capitalism," as much as against all forms of imperialism—which, in the twentieth century, it means mostly U.S. imperialism.

Of course, the revolution also comprises the emancipation of women and all oppressed minorities in more or less democratic societies, both in developed and underdeveloped countries. The ideology for liberation in *On Revolution* is certainly socialism, if we follow the evolutionary line described by each source in history. The specter of communism that used to haunt Europe in the 19$^{th}$ century—from the very first line of *The Communist Manifesto*[124]—over a century later is still haunting Asia and America alike.

Lutz and Brent include in their book the essay *Toward a Theory of Revolution*[38] by the American sociologist James C. Davies (1918-2012), who adopted the term "J-curve" applied to the rise of political revolutions in time. In any other field, from economy to sociology to medical science, J-curves are literally J-shaped diagrams where the curve measuring a specific parameter initially falls, only to then steeply rise above the starting point, thus describing a letter J.

The approach of Davies to revolutions combines “the main Marxian notion that revolutions occur after progressive degradation and the de Tocqueville notion that they occur when conditions are improving.” In any case, Davies is convinced of “the utter improbability of a revolution occurring in a society where there is the continued, unimpeded opportunity to satisfy new needs, new hopes, new expectations” (81).

Correspondingly, Davis proposes that “revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal.” For him, “the actual state of socio-economic development is less significant than the expectation that past progress, now blocked, can and must continue in the future.” This perception leads to “a mental state of anxiety and frustration” in the people, which reaches a climax “when manifest reality breaks away from the anticipated reality” that they thought would follow their “continued ability to satisfy needs” (69).

Both objective and subjective factors are taken into consideration by Davis. For him, this explains something that he believes that “Marx seems to have overlooked.” That is, “when it is a choice between losing their chains or their lives, people will mostly choose to keep their chains,” because “far from making people into revolutionaries, enduring poverty makes for concern with one’s solitary self or solitary family at best and resignation or mute despair at worst” (70).

In fact, for Davis “it is when the chains have been loosened somewhat, so that they can be cast off without a high probability of losing life, that people are put in a condition of proto-rebelliousness.” And here he stresses the importance of “a revolutionary state of mind” that “requires the continued, even habitual but dynamic expectation of greater opportunity to satisfy basic needs.” In his analysis, these needs “may range from merely physical (food, clothing, shelter,

health, and safety from bodily harm) to social (the affectional ties of family and friends) to the need for equal dignity and justice" (70-71).

But, for a revolution to actually start and succeed, Davis insists that "the necessary additional ingredient is a persistent, unrelenting threat to the satisfaction of these needs" and "not a threat which actually returns people to a state of sheer survival." That is, people need to be in a "mood" (82) or "mental state where they believe they will not be able to satisfy one or more basic needs." The "crucial factor" for Davis is that people feel "the vague or specific fear that ground gained over a long period of time will be quickly lost" (71).

As I will discuss in the introductory section dedicated to Utopia, in the fifties Cuban society had better statistical indicators than most countries in the Caribbean and Central American region. But the intellectual elite, the political classes, and the mass media—by then Cuba had many newspapers, magazines, and radio and even TV stations—were all claiming that democracy had been irreversibly damaged by the coup d'état of general Fulgencio Batista on March 10, 1952.

In fact, it was the Cuban Republic as such, as founded by the 1902 Constitution—after the independence from Spain and the U.S military intervention in the Spanish-American war—and refounded by the 1940 Constitution, that public opinion was convinced that had been lost forever in the hands of the corrupt military and, to an extent, also to foreign economic interests—i.e., American investments on the Island.

As a conclusion to his essay, Davis admits that "we therefore are still not at the point of being able to predict revolution." Yet, he thinks that "the closer we can get to data indicating by inference the prevailing mood in society, the closer we will be to understanding the change from gratification to frustration in people's mind" (83).

As a tragicomic curiosity in this respect, Davis comments on the famous misperception of the Russian revolutionary Vladimir Ilich Lenin (1870-1924), who in January 1917, while he was still residing in Switzerland, namely, whether "old people" like him—only forty-six by then—would "live to see the decisive battles of the coming revolution" in Czarist Russia.[19] A couple of weeks later a revolution triumphed in Russia, only to trigger the much more radical Bolshevik revolution later that year, which Lenin himself led in person, since by then he had already returned from exile.

Davis is much interested in that apparently unpredictable transition, part of an "anatomy" in society and history "in which wars and revolutions always start" (83). He is quoting from the classic volume *Anatomy of Revolution*,[13] where the American historian Crane Brinton (1898-1968) postulated a number of "tentative uniformities" after he studied in detail the Puritan, American, French, and Russian revolutions. Some of these regularities—enumerated by Davis—are "an economically advancing society, class antagonism, desertion of intellectuals, inefficient government, a ruling class that has lost self-confidence, financial failure of government, and the inept use of force against rebels" (83).

In his book, Brinton is aware of the role of war conflicts in revolutionary situations, where usually the "moderates" never have "a chance at peaceful administration," because they simply cannot "succeed in war" given, perhaps, their "commitment" to "protect the liberties of the individual." For example, revolutionary terror, at least in the French and Russian revolutions, for Brinton "are in part explicable as the concentration of power in a government of national defense made necessary by the fact of war." As such, "the necessity for a strong centralized government to run the war is one of the reasons why the moderates failed." Namely, "they simply could not provide the discipline, the enthusiasm, the unpondered loyalty necessary to fight a war" (175).

The war can either be of "foreign" or "civil" nature. In both cases, "like the private soldier in war, the ordinary revolutionist is inarticulate and nameless" (117), given the multiplicity of its types in history. Also, Brinton believes that in any case "war necessities help explain the rapid centralization of the government," the "hostility to dissenters within the group—they now seem deserters—" and the "widespread excitement" known as "war psychosis" (238).

In general, as "the war itself increases the stresses," it "accustoms people to violence and suspense." For Brinton, "war makes for economic scarcity" and then "economic scarcity sharpens the class struggle," in "cumulative" cycles where "each definite break with the past at once invites others and increases the strain upon everybody, or nearly everybody, in the social system" (242-43).

In her book *On Revolution*,[2] the German-born American political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) also compares wars and revolutions. For her, war and revolution "have outlived all their ideological justifications," beyond "the threat of total annihilation through war" and "the hope for the emancipation of all mankind through revolution." Arendt believes that nowadays "no cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics, the cause of freedom versus tyranny" (11).

This distinction is key for her analysis. On one side, there is a "close interrelatedness" in which "revolutions and wars are not even conceivable outside the domain of violence," which for her "is enough to set them both apart from all other political phenomena." To explain "why wars have turned so easily into revolutions and why revolutions have shown this ominous inclination to unleash wars," Arendt accepts "that violence is a kind of common denominator for both" (18). Consequently, they "both occur outside the political realm, strictly speaking, in spite of their enormous role in recorded history" (19). In this "interrelationship of war and revolution," in "their

reciprocation and mutual dependence," the emphasis has, however, been "shifted more and more from war to revolution" (17).

On the other side, Arendt insists that, "in contrast to revolution, the aim of war was only in rare cases bound up with the notion of freedom" (12). Quoting the French philosopher Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794), Arendt agrees that "the word 'revolutionary' can be applied only to revolutions whose aim is freedom" (29), not another tyrannical system. And, while it seems to be something repetitively old in wars, whether they are just or unjust wars, "the modern concept of revolution" is "inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, a story never known or told before, is about to unfold" (28).

In sum, given that, according to Arendt, "violence is no more adequate to describe the phenomenon of revolution than change," she specifies that "only where change occurs in the sense of a new beginning, where violence is used to constitute an altogether different form of government, to bring about the formation of a new body politic, where the liberation from oppression aims at least at the constitution of freedom can we speak of revolution" (35). That is, "the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide" in order to understand "revolutions in the modern age" (29).

Arendt is also aware that in the twentieth century, war and revolution display a curious convergence: "the fury of war" behaves as "merely the prelude, a preparatory stage to the violence unleashed by revolution" or, in other cases, "war appears like the consequences of revolution." In any case, "it has become almost a matter of course that the end of war is revolution, and that the only cause which possibly could justify it is the revolutionary cause of freedom" (17).

In a way, war and revolution have established a synergic relationship where the latter legitimizes the former, while both of them justify the most brutal violence with the rationale of

preventing further violence in the future. This perverse logic was made explicitly clear by all of the most successful revolutionaries of the twentieth century.

In his selected writings *On Revolution*,[33] Ho Chi Minh (Nguyễn Sinh Cung, 1890-1969), the revolutionary leader of Viet Nam always insists that their "long Resistance War is the national revolution at a high level" (180). In order "to ensure the victory of the revolution," for him "a question of decisive significance is the further heightening of the capacity for struggle of our whole Party and the promotion of the leading role of the Party in all fields of work" (350). In general, "the proletarian class still has to prepare for armed struggle" (299). In this connection, the war was meant "to preserve and develop the achievements secured" by the revolution. And, being a revolutionary war, it can only seek high goals like the restoring of "peace, national unity, independence, and democracy to our country and people" (274-75). For Ho Chi Minh, it is only through "the basis of Marxist-Leninist principles" that "a just and complete theory of anti-imperialist national revolution" (330) has been elaborated in history.

The Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong (1893-1976), in his *On Revolution and War*[179] compiled by Mostafa Rejai in 1969, maintains that "the central task and the highest form of revolution" is the "seizure of power by armed force" and "the settlement of the issue by war." According to Mao, "this Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries" (54).

The need of war is justified by Mao, in Orwellian terms, because for him there is only one way to "eliminate" war, a "monster of mutual slaughter among men." For him, that way "is to oppose war with war, to oppose counterrevolutionary war with revolutionary war, to oppose national counterrevolutionary war with national revolutionary war, and to oppose counterrevolutionary class war with revolutionary class war" (60-61).

Mao seems to be proving Hannah Arendt right, when she concludes in *On Revolution* that an "understanding of revolution can be neither countered nor replaced with an expertness in counter-revolution," because "counter-revolution—the word having been coined by Condorcet in the course of the French Revolution—has always remained bound to revolution as reaction is bound to action" (18).

Both, "movement and counter-movement," "inevitably provoked each other" so that they "neither balanced nor checked or arrested each other, but in a mysterious way seemed to add up to one stream of 'progressing violence,' flowing in the same direction with an ever-increasing rapidity" (49). And here Arendt quotes the speech given by the French lawyer revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) on November 17, 1793 at the National Convention:[xii] "The crimes of tyranny accelerated the progress of freedom, and the progress of freedom multiplied the crimes of tyranny," in "a continual reaction whose progressive violence has effected in a few years the work of several centuries."

For Mao the revolution is a "just" and "sacred" war, because "it is progressive and its aim is peace" (63). Mao also explains his rules[xiii] for building Utopia on Earth. That is, to reach "the era of perpetual peace for mankind," where "classes and states are eliminated," and "there will be no more wars, counterrevolutionary or revolutionary," first "the biggest and most ruthless of all wars" needs to be fought "by the great majority of mankind" in order "to eliminate all wars" through "the laws of revolutionary war" (61).

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[xii] Original in French: "Les crimes de la tyrannie accélérèrent les progrès de la liberté, et les progrès de la liberté multiplièrent les crimes de la tyrannie [...]. Une réaction continuelle dont la violence progressive a opéré en peu d'années l'ouvrage de plusieurs siècles." **Maximilien Robespierre**. *Œuvres*, Vol. III, 1840. p. 446.

[xiii] Mao affirms that: "The theory of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin is universally applicable. We should regard it not as a dogma, but as a guide to action. Studying it is not merely a matter of learning terms and phrases but of learning Marxism-Leninism as the science of revolution" (259).

The Chinese leader was aware that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" and he was inviting his people to join him in "our principle" that reads: "The Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party." Again, "in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun" (185).

Mao is convinced that "the present war is near to perpetual peace" (62). In the dystopian novel *1984*[141] by the English writer George Orwell (Eric Arthur Blair, 1903-1950), the first of "the three slogans of the Party" is precisely "War is Peace." The other two are "Freedom is Slavery" and "Ignorance is Strength" (6).

In her book *On Violence*,[3] Hannah Arendt focuses more on differentiating between violence and power. For her, "violence is by nature instrumental" and, "like all means, it always stands in need of guidance and justification through the end it pursues (51). However, "power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities," but "what it does need is legitimacy." And, while "power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert," still "it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow" (52).

On one side, legitimacy "bases itself on an appeal to the past." On the other side, justification "relates to an end that lies in the future." In this sense, Arendt see that "violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate," since "its justification loses in plausibility the farther its intended end recedes into the future" (52).

Although "violence, being instrumental by nature, is rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end that must justify it," Arendt clarifies that "violence can remain rational only if it pursues short-term goals," given that "when we act we never know with any certainty the eventual consequences of what we are doing" (79) in the long term.

Along the same line of thought, “violence does not promote causes, neither history nor revolution, neither progress nor reaction.” Rather “it can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention.” To the point that—quoting the Irish agrarian and nationalist agitator William O’Brien (1852-1928)—sometimes “violence is the only way of ensuring a hearing for moderation.” That is, “to ask the impossible in order to obtain the possible is not always counterproductive” and “indeed, violence, contrary to what its prophets try to tell us, is more the weapon of reform than of revolution” (79).

For Arendt, “the danger of violence” is one that “will always be that the means overwhelm the end,” particularly “if goals are not achieved rapidly.” In this case, the result is usually “not merely defeat but the introduction of the practice of violence into the whole body politic.” And then, “the most probable change is to a more violent world” (80).

Understanding the nature of power and violence could certainly help us to understand the interrelation of war and revolution. Arendt highlights how “violence can always destroy power” because violence “does not depend on numbers or opinions, but on implements” and “men’s artifacts, whose inhumanity and destructive effectiveness increase in proportion to the distance separating the opponents.” In this Arendt may coincide with Chairman Mao in stating that “out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience,” but at the same time Arendt warns us that actually “what never can grow out of it is power” (53). Namely, while “violence can destroy power,” “it is utterly incapable of creating it” (56).

It’s only after “power has disintegrated” that real “revolutions are possible,” although this doesn’t mean that they are a historical necessity even in such cases (49). In fact, the result of radical changes can simply be “Terror,” which is “the form of government that comes into being when

violence, having destroyed all power, does not abdicate but, on the contrary, remains in full control," depending "almost entirely on the degree of social atomization." This "totalitarian domination"—which "turns not only against its enemies but against its friends and supporters as well," until "yesterday's executioner becomes today's victim"—is "based on terror," while "tyrannies and dictatorships" are "established by violence" (55).

Arendt proposes that "power and violence are opposites," so that "where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent." As expected, "violence appears where power is in jeopardy" but, paradoxically enough, when "left to its own course," violence eventually "ends in power's disappearance." In more than one sense, "it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as nonviolence," just as "to speak of nonviolent power is actually redundant" (67).

There are also subjective factors to consider, a number of which are effectively exploited by those attempting to capitalize on power or violence during wars and revolutions. For example, both "in military as well as revolutionary action 'individualism is the first [value] to disappear'" and, "in its stead, we find a kind of group coherence which is more intensely felt and proves to be a much stronger, though less lasting, bond than all the varieties of friendship, civil or private" (67). This would explain "the strong fraternal sentiments collective violence engenders" which "have misled many good people into the hope that a new community together with a 'new man' will arise out of it." Arendt is quite skeptical in this point, dismissing such hope as "an illusion for the simple reason that no human relationship is more transitory than this kind of brotherhood, which can be actualized only under conditions of immediate danger to life and limb" (69).

Also included in the 1971 compilation *On Revolution* by Lutz and Brent, in *The limits of Revolution*, the sociologist Martin Oppenheimer discusses the "worship of action for the sake of action" and the "support of feeling"—plus the "denigration of rational thought"—as historical

causes of "violence as a therapeutic force" (86-87). Oppenheimer connects this notion of violence with totalitarian societies. He seems much more worried about fascism than communism, since he discusses some conceptualizations of the former but omits further analysis of the latter. Oppenheimer quotes from *The Political Doctrine of Fascism*, published in 1926 by the Italian politician and jurist Alfredo Rocco (1975-1935): "Fascism is, above all, action and sentiment and that it must continue to be… Only because it is feeling and sentiment, only because it is the unconscious reawakening of our profound racial instinct, has it the force to stir the soul of a people" (87).

Oppenheimer also warns about the "negative consequences of violence for the health of the personality," and he believes that "violence, therefore, is of questionable value in creating a liberating personality." In fact, when it comes to the "revolutionary personality," he quotes the Russian communist and nihilist Sergey Nechayev (1847–1882), who in *The Revolutionary Catechism*[xiv] thought that "the revolutionist is a doomed man," because "he has no personal interests, no affairs, sentiments, attachments, property, and not even a name of his own. Everything in him is absorbed by one exclusive interest, one thought, one passion—the revolution" (88-90).

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[xiv] *The Catechism of a Revolutionary* (1869) is a manifesto for the formation of secret societies to live and work with total devotion for the revolution. The Russian socialist and anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) probably had some influence in the making of this document. Some other characteristics of the revolutionary, according to Nechayev, are the following:
1) The revolutionary "hates the existing social morality in all its manifestations," "despises public opinion," and "refuses to accept the mundane sciences." He "has broken all the bonds which tie him to the social order and the civilized world." Therefore, "he knows only one science: the science of destruction" and "for him, morality is everything which contributes to the triumph of the revolution."
2) The revolutionary is "merciless toward the State and toward the educated classes." That is, "tyrannical toward himself, he must be tyrannical toward others," having "only one pleasure, one consolation, one reward, one satisfaction—the success of the revolution." For this, he "excludes all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation," except "revolutionary passion, practiced at every moment of the day until it becomes a habit."
3) The revolution should not be "an orderly revolt according to the classic western model," "which always stops short of attacking the rights of property and the traditional social systems of so-called civilization and morality." Instead, the revolution should destroy "the entire State to the roots" and "all the state traditions, institutions, and classes."
https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm

Quoting the Polish-American sociologist Feliks Gross[79] (1906-2006) with regard to the revolutionary struggle, Oppenheimer is aware of what "is sometimes termed 'the principle of the transfer of total opposition.'" This could explain the recurrence of radicalization not as a side-effect of revolutions, but as a desired outcome in order to topple power first and then retain it by all means. The mechanism works in two stages as follows:

1) Given that, "before the revolution any opposition to a totalitarian or authoritarian regime [...] is considered by the regime to be subversive by definition," therefore "any opposition must be total opposition, prepared for prison, exile, and, hopefully, ultimately revolution." That is, much in the extremist style of Sergey Nechayev's pamphlet in the 19th century, to fight against "a police state leads to the disappearance of all middle-of-the-roaders" and "compromisers are therefore perceived as betrayers" (90).
2) In consequence, after the revolution, the former "moderates are dealt with," since, "objectively, they had sided with the enemy." Their "revolutionary legitimacy" allows the new class in power to become "the only possible rulers" and, as such, "those who did not participate, those who are not with the rulers, are excluded" (90).

Curiously enough, the principle of the transfer of total opposition, forces any new dissent to the revolution to become radically counterrevolutionary and they are "left with no alternative than to make another revolution" if possible, "to take arms against the state it had helped to create" before (91).

In my opinion, this violent alternative against the institutionalized violence of the New Regime often justifies scenarios similar to a civil war. In such scenarios—where propaganda and paranoia permeate the whole structure of society, dismantling any last trace of a civil sphere—the revolutionary state violates all individual rights of citizens. This includes the use of military force

against the internal enemies of the Revolution, who are typically accused of being reactionary accomplices of its external enemies.

Following this logic, rather than the regeneration of a cycle of revolutions, as Oppenheimer seems to propose above, a radical revolution—once stabilized in power—behaves like the end of all radical revolutions for a certain historical context. In the case of Cuba, it is obvious that, after half a century of convulsive revolts during the Republic in a representative democracy (1902-1958), the Revolution of January 1959 had somehow stopped the revolutionary tradition of the Cuban people, which is now the only nation in the Americas where popular protests are practically nonexistent.[xv]

It is curious that, perhaps with the exception of Leon Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, in their compilation *On Revolution*, Lutz and Brent could not find more sources about how to make a revolution confront a previous revolution. Obviously, the prevalent notion is that, at least in 1971 when this book was published, any revolution should be essentially aimed against the capitalist system, and somehow based in the scientific laws of society and history, as discovered or postulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the nineteenth century.

One can read "How to commit revolution in corporate America" by the American sociologist George William Domhoff, "Can American workers make a socialist revolution," by

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[xv] Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, there have only been two massive spontaneous protests in Cuba.
The first one took place only in the capital of the Island, on Friday August 5, 1994. It is known as the "Maleconazo" because it took place next to Havana's Malecón—the emblematic seawall and esplanade that stretches north for five miles along the waterfront of the largest Cuban city. This event, in the middle of the worst economic crisis in the history of Cuba, eventually led to a migratory boatlift known as the "balsero" or "rafter" crisis, when more than 35,000 Cubans illegally left for the United States.
The second one took place very recently, on Sunday July 11, 2021. In this case, the use of internet allowed the mobilization of thousands of citizens in some fifty cities and towns throughout the Island.
In both events, the repression of the Cuban government was brutal, including the use of elite troops to beat and arrest hundreds of peaceful citizens—not only during the protests, but also during the following weeks—most of which were then summarily tried and sentenced to long prison terms for non-political crimes, like vandalism, sabotage, assault, contempt or sedition.

the American Marxist theoretician and activist George Novack (1905-1992), or "How to make a revolution in the United States" by the Venezuelan-American socialist activist Peter Camejo (1939-2008), as well as "We want revolution" by the American counterculture icon Mark Rudd, and "Marxism and revolution: the modern revolutionary framework" by the back then radical David Horowitz, who nowadays is a very conservative author. But, even in the last section of their book, *After the Revolution*, Lutz and Brent include only discussions on how to perfect a revolution—including "Notes on man and socialism in Cuba" by Ernesto Che Guevara, but certainly not on how to break free from its rule. In a way, the revolution can be inferred here as the end of the political evolution in the history of a given society.

Finally, like previous theorists and revolutionists mentioned before, Oppenheimer again explicitly associates the notions of war and revolution. For his analysis, "revolution is war" and "a revolutionary organization must therefore be military in nature." This means that, "endangered constantly by spies and provocateurs," it "must be able to make decisions quickly and have them carried out without question," without "lengthy discussions and debates." For Oppenheimer, even when the public speech of a certain revolutionary cause claims to be fighting to establish or reestablish democracy, in practice "such an organization is the very antithesis of democracy." Furthermore, its members "cannot, no matter how ardently they try, create a humanistic society" (91).

Beyond the achievements of non-violent movements, Oppenheimer is rather skeptical about avoiding the "Thermidorean reaction" that "has always set in" after a "violent revolution or uprising." As a result, the survivors of a revolution, once perpetuated in power, could always "end up standing in the ruble asking, 'Is this what we did it for?' and 'Was it worth it?'" His conclusion is that "history cannot unmake revolutions, and such questions can never be answered" (93).

In his 2019 book *Writing Revolution in Latin America*,[40] Juan de Castro studied the depiction of revolution in Latin American fiction, emphasizing novels written after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. De Castro believes that his literary approach also "provides a diachronic view of the political evolution of Latin America from the 1960s to the present." That is, from "intense revolutionary enthusiasm" into a progressively "generalized, though far from unanimous, belief in the free market as the solution for Latin America's social problems" (1).

De Castro starts by noticing "the loose sense the word *revolution* often holds nowadays," and he finds that "it may be necessary to specify that in this study it means a radical reordering of society." In particular, he seems to be following the claims of the Peruvian intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930), who wrote in 1928 that "in this America of small revolutions, the same word Revolution frequently lends itself to misunderstanding," and, as such, "we have to reclaim it rigorously and intransigently" in order "to restore its strict and exact meaning." Mariátegui, a Marxist, believed in "the need to reserve the contemporary use of the word for socialist movements" (2-3).

In *Writing Revolution in Latin America*, De Castro explores and in a way establishes "the centrality of Cuba for the radical imagination of the Latin American 1960s" (4). He explicitly mentions that "the year 1959, when the Cuban Revolution came to power, must be placed next to the magical digits 1789 in any revision of Latin America history." That is, if the French Revolution "represents the beginning of the belief in revolution for overcoming obsolete social structures throughout the Western World—and for some, even the birth of modernity itself," then, after 1959, according to De Castro, the same "utopian hopes seemed, for the first time since the heady days of the struggle for independence at the beginning of the nineteenth century, to be fully applicable to the region" (11) of Latin American countries. For him, this "impact of the Cuban Revolution on

the region's intelligentsia, its major writers, and its reading public was not, however, only due to the surprising success of the Cuban revolutionaries against overwhelming odds, its generational appeal, or the attraction of utopian ideas during the decade" (5).

Besides all that, "there were structural social and economic reasons why the status quo was completely unacceptable," while in the same historical context, Castro's Cuba, "for at least a decade, seemed to many to truly be 'the first free territory of America'" (5).

De Castro refers here to the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa—winner of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature—who in his 1967 essay "Literature Is Fire" appeared to justify the socialist revolutionary impulse. In fact, this was originally an acceptance speech of the prestigious Rómulo Gallegos international novel prize. In that text Vargas Llosa—soon to become a life-long critic of the authoritarianism of the Cuban Revolution—expressed the following:[181]

> The reality of the Americas, of course, offers the writer a true banquet of reasons to insubordinate and be discontent. With societies where injustice is the norm, a paradise of ignorance, exploitation, blinding inequalities of misery, of economic, cultural and moral condemnation, our tumultuous lands provide us with sumptuous, exemplary material to show in fiction, directly or indirectly, through facts, dreams, testimonies, allegories, nightmares or visions, that reality is badly done, that life must change.[xvi]

[xvi] Original in Spanish: "La realidad americana, claro está, ofrece al escritor un verdadero festín de razones para ser un insumiso y vivir descontento. Sociedades donde la injusticia es ley, paraíso de ignorancia, de explotación, de desigualdades cegadoras de miseria, de condenación económica cultural y moral, nuestras tierras tumultuosas nos suministran materiales suntuosos, ejemplares, para mostrar en ficciones, de manera directa o indirecta, a través de hechos, sueños, testimonios, alegorías, pesadillas o visiones, que la realidad está mal hecha, que la vida debe cambiar. Pero dentro de diez, veinte o cincuenta años habrá llegado, a todos nuestros países como ahora a Cuba la hora de la justicia social y América Latina entera se habrá emancipado del imperio que la saquea, de las castas que la explotan, de las fuerzas que hoy la ofenden y reprimen. Yo quiero que esa hora llegue cuanto antes y que América Latina ingrese de una vez por todas en la dignidad y en la vida moderna, que el socialismo nos libere de nuestro anacronismo y nuestro horror."

For Vargas Llosa in the late sixties, the Cuban Revolution was a unique role model for the unavoidable changes to come to the Western hemisphere: "Within ten, twenty or fifty years, the hour of social justice will have arrived in all our countries, as now in Cuba, and the whole of Latin America will be self-emancipated from the empire that plunders it, from the caste that exploits it, from the forces that today offend and repress it." Definitely, his plea was for "that time to arrive as soon as possible, and for Latin America to be introduced to dignity and modern life once and for all, so that socialism could free us from our anachronism and our horror."

As an editorial curiosity—perhaps with involuntary symbolism—the term "Cuba" is cited only twice in the *Index* of the 1965 edition of Arendt's book (339), but in the pages 141 and 218 that appear on the index—or anywhere else in this volume—is impossible to locate it: "Cuba" has literally disappeared from *On Revolution*. In other editions, however, the entry "Cuba" has been already removed from the *Index*, where in 1965 it stood between "Cromwell" and "Danton." It is likely that Arendt had mentioned the Cuban Revolution in her original manuscript and, later, probably just before publication, she or her editors decided that the two mentions were irrelevant or not convenient to illustrate whatever her point was.

The reader can now only speculate about why Arendt finally decided to remove Cuba as an example, while forgetting to eliminate the trace of this absence in the thematic index of *On Revolution*. In any case, it is thought-provoking to envision the Cuban revolution in the light of what Arendt calls a "futile" process of "rebellion" and "liberation," when it is devoid of "freedom" and "constitutional government." That is, to frame the Cuban Revolution as a deviation of the lawful principles that inspired the American revolution in the 18th century, while following the worst perversions of the French, Russian and Chinese revolutions.

A personal anecdote might explain this omission by Hannah Arendt. In 1959, on Monday April 20, as part of his first official trip to the United States, Fidel Castro visited Princeton University to give a lecture, thanks to the Woodrow Wilson School, which through its Program in American Civilization was by then organizing a seminar on *The United States and the Revolutionary Spirit*.[129]

Hannah Arendt, a fifty-two-year-old professor at Princeton University—that year she was the first woman to be appointed as full professor there—was also a speaker that night. Her lecture was indeed the starting point for *On Revolution*. Arendt probably saw the Cuban commander-in-chief the way Spencer Michels described in his obituary six decades later: "dressed in army boots, fatigues, his army jacket and his famous beard." A thirty-three-year-old Latin American caudillo who, "like a vote-seeking politician," had first "chatted with his admirers" before "he joked, while stroking his whiskers, that one of the hotbeds of resistance to his new government were the barbershops."

Maybe Hannah Arendt had the intuition that Fidel Castro perhaps was being serious about his plans to nationalize all forms of private property in Cuba, including barbershops. In fact, in less than a decade, all of those "hotbeds of resistance" in Cuba were to belong the revolutionary State.[xvii] In any case, this unique encounter between the man of action and the theorist woman,

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[xvii] In 1968, an official campaign called the Revolutionary Offensive was launched by the Cuban government to nationalize all remaining private small businesses, which at the time were still around 58,000 in the whole island. In a speech delivered at Havana University on March 13th that year, as it was usual for him, Fidel Castro in person coined the term in the public sphere, which immediately became a national practice for the rest of the year:

"All this without being discouraged, without allowing anyone to come to demoralize the revolutionaries, without ceasing to riposte, without ceasing to respond and without ceasing to act. It's your duty and the duty of all of us, the revolutionary militants and their mass organizations. Each thing must teach us, each fact must strengthen the Revolution, like each experience. And we understand that this moment is a time to fully undertake a powerful revolutionary offensive." http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1968/esp/f130368e.html

See also: **Farber, Samuel**. *Cuba in 1968*. In: *Jacobin*. (https://jacobinmag.com/2018/04/cuba-1968-fidel-castro-revolution-repression) and **Mesa-Lago, C**. *The Revolutionary Offensive*. In: *Trans-action* 6, 1969. pp.22–29.

both personally interested in revolutions, might have influenced Arendt's resolution not to mention Castro's Cuba in her book.

At Princeton, Castro's speech had basically launched the thesis that the Cuban Revolution was "made without hate of classes," for the sake of "social justice," both "for the poor people and, of course, too, for the middle class." Accordingly, Castro also challenged the American and international press for its "many conventional lies," and he concluded that Cuba had "proved three new things in the world". Namely, that a "revolution is possible when people were not starving"—a statement that soon the pro-Castro propaganda was to reverse by depicting a Cuban past of injustice and starvation—that a "revolution was possible against the army," and all also possible "against modern weapons."[34]

In his approach to totalitarianism,[176] the Bulgarian literary critic Tzvetan Todorov (1939-2017) does not use Cuba as a case-study to develop his theories, another absence that prove revealing. In *The Totalitarian Experience*, he mentions Cuba without highlighting Castro's revolution, but just comparing it to the "peculiar" and "composite" regimes in North Korea and China, which in the twenty-first century Todorov believes are only the "anachronistic remnants" of themselves, "still claiming to follow Communist ideology but having renounced its totalizing ambitions" (46).

It seems that for Todorov the Cuban Revolution had already run out of its ideological exceptionalism and utopian impunity, two features that Fidel Castro exploited to infringe on individual rights and fundamental freedoms for the sake of a supposed social justice for the popular masses.

Todorov's notion of revolution is certainly skeptical after all the genocidal experiences of the twentieth century. He affirms "that the totalitarian project rests on the anthropological,

historical hypothesis that war reveals true human nature" and "for this reason it legitimizes violent means," including "terror" in order "to seize power and to keep it." He recalls the "merely scientistic" nature of the totalitarian State, disguised as "scientific" and capable of knowing "the direction of history and the ultimate ends of humanity," while, "at the same time, it promotes a secular messianism or utopianism" by "the promise of providing paradise on earth and salvation for all."

To achieve this apparently altruistic objective, according to Todorov, there have been many "legitimizations" of the "repressive apparatus" of modern totalitarian societies. In the end, totalitarianism is a way of life "founded on the unification and non-differentiation of society, demanding both the suppression of the distinction between public and private," as well as "the subjection of all forms of social life, most particularly the economic, to the power of the State" (19-20).

For him, at some point of its historical evolution, after its most violent periods, "revolutionary messianism" also "aimed to constrain and educate recalcitrant peoples that were reluctant to embrace its credo, but not exterminate them" as they initially do, using "the practices of exterminating entire strata of the population." In this respect, despite becoming irreconcilable enemies in the twentieth century, Todorov compares "Communist utopianism" and "Nazism," because in both the criminal activity of the State, actively aiming to "the disappearance of adversaries," was "easier to imagine within the framework of a civil war than in a war between nations" (23).

In this respect, the American intellectual Susan Sontag (1933-2004) insisted in equating the temptation of both antidemocratic alternatives:[xviii] "Communism is in itself a variant, the most successful variant, of Fascism. Fascism with a human face."

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[xviii] **The New York Times editorial**. *Susan Sontag Provokes Debate on Communism*. 27 February 1982. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/03/12/specials/sontag-communism.html

Todorov acknowledges that the spirit of revolution "is no doubt a trait common to the entire human species, and there can be no question of eliminating it," given the renewing needs of "an ideal in the name of which one attempts to transform reality." That is, he understands the importance "of a transcendence that enables one to criticize the existing world in order to improve it." But he believes that "what characterizes messianisms more specifically is the way in which they interpret that trait." That is, totalitarian revolutions "act upon all aspects of the life of a people" and "they are not content simply to change institutions but aspire to transform human beings themselves." As such, they rationalize and normalize the use of violence to reach their "proposed ideal," through strategies of "complete control of society and the elimination of entire categories of the population" (24).

The rationale, as Ernesto Che Guevara once proposed, is that without a New Man, the New Society can't be successfully implemented. In his essay *Man and Socialism in Cuba*,[81] he maintains that, after taking total control of a society, the new generation "is particularly important because it is the malleable clay with which the new man, without any of the previous defects, can be formed" (40).

Todorov concludes that totalitarianism "came to fill that void" left after the "removal of religion," which was the result of "earlier secular messianisms," like "the proselytism of the Enlightenment." In consequence, as liberal "society was tending to lose the connection with any sort of absolute," the new messianic materialism "in turn incarnated the absolute—with the added advantage that it also announced its imminent advent!" (24-25).

Thus, any Utopian model, in its search for absolute happiness for humanity, implies the practice of absolutism to make concrete their founding abstractions. Their leaders are visionaries

and, as such, their atrocities are assumed as the lesser evil to leave behind a present of oppression into a future of emancipation. During the process, variants of genocide—in larger or limited scales—are usually justified to secure the vital space for Utopia to survive.

Beyond Utopian texts, paradise seems impossible in historical practice without radically displacing or disappearing the human person. All Utopias stem from a foundational urge toward accelerated progress of humanity into a superior stage. In consequence, each Utopia is faced with the question of how high a price in human terms it is willing to pay.

## 2.2 Utopia is Elsewhere

Where is Utopia?

Nowhere, in no place, as suggested by the term "Utopia" coined by the English lawyer, statesman and philosopher Sir Thomas More in his 1516 book.[132] Or, perhaps, potentially everywhere at all times, which is another form of deterritorialization. Somewhere in this tension between here and elsewhere, Utopia stands still.

The word *utopia* comes from the Greek particles *οὐ* and *τόπος*, literally a *non-place*. However, in his original book written in Latin, Thomas More used the term *Nusquama*—from Latin, *nowhere*—and *Utopia* as such was a later intervention, a fortunate invention attributed by some to the Dutch philosopher and Christian scholar and translator Erasmus (Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, 1466-1536).

Yet, More was not unaware of the similarity of *utopia* and *eutopia*, the latter meaning in Greek—*εὖ* and *τόπος*—a *good place*. In any case, the term is not an autochthonous geographical denomination, but derived from the name of Utopus, the military leader who occupied the fictional island of Abraxa, which is the native name of the territories then renamed Utopia after its conqueror.

From its very foundational text, utopia and war were not antipodes but allies. In fact, Utopus had "subdued" the "rude and uncivilised inhabitants" of that literary place, so that they could be "brought […] into such a good government, and to that measure of politeness, that they now far excel all the rest of mankind" (51).

Before the centuries of appropriation and re-semantization to come, Utopia first included an act of forced colonization in order to civilize it. Even the existence of the Island itself was

nothing but an authoritarian action taken by Utopus, as well as an ecological aggression: the conquered Abraxans, in order to become and remain Utopians forever, had to be isolated from the rest of the world. And, "to accomplish this," Utopus personally "ordered a deep channel to be dug, fifteen miles long," despotically "designed to separate them from the continent, and to bring the sea quite round them" (51-52).

In general, it seems that isolation is one of the consistent characteristics for any Utopia to survive: ideal societies tend to succumb when contaminated by the practicalities of non-ideal societies. Just as at times certain social systems in history fall or are forced to fall under the literary mirages of Utopia.

Such an artificial—*contra naturam*—island was built using forced labor. But, given that representation prevails over reality when it comes to utopian affairs, Utopus was wise enough as to mobilize "also his own soldiers," so "that the natives might not think he treated them like slaves." No wonder that the "neighbours" of former Abraxa, now Utopia, even when they "at first laughed at the folly of the undertaking," in the end "were struck with admiration and terror" when they "saw it brought to perfection" (52).

In the early sixteenth century, from a Eurocentric perspective, only the creative gesture of colonization could constitute a Genesis, particularly if it were conceived as an unparalleled paradise for the progress of humanity. However, it could be revealing to reread here some characteristics of the closed society in More's textual experiment that are seldom summarized in the following light:

a) A Utopian government—perfect and personalistic—is entitled to persist in power in perpetuity: "The Prince is for life, unless he is removed upon suspicion of some design to enslave the people" (59).

b) Death penalty and slavery are organic elements of the Utopian criminal law, with no tolerance towards conscientious objectors: "servitude is more for the interest of the commonwealth than killing them" since "the sight of their misery is a more lasting terror to other men than that which would be given by their death" (107). Any attempt of free citizens to help a slave to escape Utopia is punishable with slavery (29).

c) Utopian happiness is based on collectivization: an "equitable or just distribution of things" can only be achieved if "property is taken away" (47).

d) Freedom of movement is illusory in Utopia: a certified "leave" or "licence" must be granted before travelling, as well as "a passport of the Prince" which "limits the time of their return." A violator will be "severely treated," "punished as a fugitive," "sent home disgracefully," and, "if he falls again into the like fault, is condemned to slavery" (75).

e) In Utopia, work is obligatory: "there are no idle persons among them, nor pretences of excusing any from labour," (76) with biennial exchanges of urban and rural Utopians, so that all citizens are able to learn and teach both country and city works (52-53).

f) Utopians need little to no privacy, since "every man may freely enter into any house whatsoever" and "at every ten years' end they shift their houses by lots" (57).

g) Freedom of religion is peacefully limited in Utopia, where "every man might be of what religion he pleased, and might endeavour to draw others to it by the force of argument and by amicable and modest ways, but without bitterness against those of other opinions," (129) as long as their "mad opinions" don't "degenerate from the dignity of human nature," as in the case of those "scarce fit to be counted men" because they think "that our souls died with our bodies, or that the world was governed by chance, without a wise overruling Providence" (130-31).

h) War seems to be a mere continuation of Utopia by other means,[xix] so that all citizens alike are "trained up" and "accustom themselves daily to military exercises and the discipline of war" (114). These wars seem to follow a Utopian manifest destiny: "to obtain that by force which, if it had been granted them in time, would have prevented the war" and also "to take so severe a revenge on those that have injured them that they may be terrified from doing the like for the time to come." To achieve this, Utopians offer "indemnity" to all foreign foes willing to "act against their countrymen," as well as "rewards" which are "immeasurably great," like "a vast deal of gold" and "great revenues in lands, that lie among other nations that are their friends." Such mercenary missions include the murder of foreign leaders: to "kill the prince" and to "kill any other persons who are those on whom, next to the prince himself, they cast the chief balance of the war" (116-18).

A number of these features coincide with the depictions written by foreigners who traveled and resided in Cuba along the different stages of the Revolution, whether they were referring to practices already being implemented by the new revolutionary regime or to perspectives for the long-term future of a Utopian society on the Caribbean Island.

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[xix] In reference to the well-known quote from the 1832 posthumous book *On War* by Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831): "War is a mere continuation of policy by other means" (**87**). https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/EWS%20On%20War%20Reading%20Book%201%20Ch%201%20Ch%202.pdf

## 2.3 Travel Writing and Writing Travels

During the last decade, American critic and experimental poet Kenneth Goldsmith has been conceptualizing the idea that "displacement is the new translation."[76] He compares these two creative attitudes towards the text—displacement versus translation—in order to postulate a provocative contrast in particular for the artistic field, an area that he emphatically extends to what he calls "uncreative writing."

In general, Goldsmith's personal viewpoints can shed some theoretical light on Travel Writing as a genre. Also, on travelers who experienced the Cuban Revolution not as a violent change of government, but as the construction of a new social system for the country: socialism as the first stage of communism.

After some early point of its development, the Cuban Revolution was not meant to be only a massive material transformation but also a spiritual reshaping of the human being, which included the eugenic enthusiasm of Ernesto "Ché" Guevara for the conception of a New Man.[82] Furthermore, this Utopia-in-progress aspired to apply a model of Marxism that was expected to leave behind the Stalinist stereotype of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies, while distancing itself from the market economy of democratic societies in the Western world.[xx]

Goldsmith affirms that "displacement revels in disjunction, imposing its meaning, agenda, and mores on whatever situation it encounters." It is a contemporary gesture: "not wishing to

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[xx] In her 1970 book *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt proposed that "the Third World is not a reality but an ideology." In particular, quoting from the book *The Year of the Young Rebels* (1969) by Stephen Spender, she agrees that the students from the First World, "caught between the two superpowers and equally disillusioned by East and West," had to "inevitably pursue some third ideology, from Mao's China or Castro's Cuba." Arendt compares "their calls for Mao, Castro, Che Guevara, and Ho Chi Minh" to "pseudo-religious incantations for saviors from another world" (21).

placate, it is uncompromising, knowing full well that through stubborn insistence, it will ultimately prevail." It's therefore a process that appears to exert a sort of violence.

Indeed, according to Goldsmith, displacement behaves "beyond morals, self-appointed, and taking possession because it must," like a "brutal fact," and therefore it "eschews messy questions of morality, ethics and nuance." It is *per se* "concretely demonstrative" and, as such, it "never explains itself, never apologizes," but it "acts simply—and simply acts:" positioning itself "neither left nor right, progressive nor reactionary, but swirling and sideways."

All these features of text displacement by comparison to the traditional translation, might resonate with some of the Nietzschean notions of the "untimely."[137] Goldsmith behaves as if the author were "attempting to look afresh at something of which our time is rightly proud," but "as being injurious to it, a defect and deficiency in it." In fact, Goldsmith has declared to be "against expression" and "against translation," given the "obsolescence" of those textual protocols. And, somehow following Nietzsche's untimely meditations, Goldsmith seems to be "acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time [...] for the benefit of a time to come" (60), as if his "home is not in this age but elsewhere" (198). This is certainly an aspiration of most Utopias and Utopian authors.

In sum, displacement can be seen as a radical revolutionary impulse, to the point of being beyond all political agendas. An absolute movement of the same meaning, displaced from source to target, without attempting any mechanism of adaptation or adoption between each cultural field in question, displacement is an operation of text trafficking between different contexts, an intervention without any need of reconciliation.

This vision might be useful as an unorthodox approach to Travel Literature, since it involves both spatial and scriptural connotations. Or, rather, coordinates. Here it could be worth

recalling what Soviet exile Joseph Brodsky wrote in one of his essays,[14] "Any movement along a plane surface which is not dictated by physical necessity is a spatial form of self-assertion, be it empire-building or tourism" (398). And self-assertion is not only a negotiation with the others—in the process of translating them—but also a negation of the others in a process of displacing them.

To travel is, of course, to perform a physical displacement. But to travel in order to write about travel is a double or, at times, a multiple displacement. Through the use of borrowing or brutalizing—or through a spectrum of different degrees of both attitudes—from target to source and then back from source to target again, witnesses and their writings are physically and metaphorically transferred.

Along the process of de-territorialization and re-territorialization during the trip—even if it lasts years, it is still a trip—the outcome can always be compared in Deleuzian terms to Goldsmith's binary pair. That is, it occurs either as a mechanical transcription—a displacement-like disruptive event—or as machinic translation, where interpretation includes the conversion of the witness during the travel cycle.

In the case of Cuba as a utopian destiny, whether the foreign traveler constructs or deconstructs the aura and the narrative of the Revolution, distinguishing and then discussing between such displacement and translation strategies offer useful insight.

On one side of Goldsmith's spectrum, displacement is a gesture derived from the modernist performances of "appropriation" and "annexing," which in art include but are not limited to "montage, psychogeography, and the *objet trouvé*." In our globalized era, displacement equates to text transfer, a transportation which finds and delivers the object in its gross weight: the outcome is the same intact text without further elaboration.

On the other side, Goldsmith defines the gesture of translation as a "bourgeois luxury" or "faux-nostalgia" which is always related to a sort of "boutique pursuit from a lost world." Still, translation represents for him "the ultimate humanist gesture:" "borrowing," "neighborly," "polite" and "reasonable." The contrary of all savage displacements. Yet Goldsmith understands the role of translation as "an overly cautious bridge builder" that, "in the end, it always fails," because unavoidably "translation is an approximation of discourse—and, in approximating, it produces a new discourse." In consequence, it seems that for Goldsmith displacement is always present when it comes to the travel of texts. For him, in the end displacement has always prevailed, either in direct or disguised manners.

Without the need to accept in every detail Goldsmith's theoretical metaphors, it is worth mentioning his insistence on asserting that "globalization engenders displacement" of "people," "objects," and "language." In this sense, the travelogue has become the norm nowadays: it is the new standardized pattern for all texts.

This scenario is supposed to function even if, given the limitations of "time" and "enough energy"—which in turn may lead to "a blinkered lack of understanding, ultimately yielding to resignation"—the contemporary readership is unaware of its causes and consequences, given that, according to Goldsmith, the majority of the population has been commodified so that "nobody seems to notice anymore" how "odd things appear."

In this respect, Goldsmith invokes the notion of "retained foreign objects," which are those capable of "bypassing the local for the unseen, the unknown, the elsewhere." With this final cultural image, Goldsmith alludes to the well-known widespread intrusion of "displaced industrial items which have become lodged inside of living bodies," curiously "coexisting with organs and flesh for years," sometimes "without incident or detection," so that "unnoticed, life goes on." A

behavior that could result analogous to the book of travel writing that—for geographical or geopolitical reasons—first inserts itself into an inaccessible cultural niche for its natural audience, in order to then displace or translate contents back into its own referential environment.

The Cuban Revolution functioned as a privileged target for a large number of foreign authors who can now be seen as part of a more or less conscious international operation of travel writing, travel translation, travel displacement, as well as the protagonists of a unidirectional occupation of the Utopian narrative that could only be credibly created precisely by them. Having long lived in the realities of the world, the witnesses from outside seem to be paradoxically better suited to appreciating Utopia when they get access to the other side.

Regarding this aspect, the foreign traveler to Cuba can be approached as the model Utopian reader of a Revolution that, from inside—where non-revolutionary subjects and their narratives were being disciplined and punished much as in a perfect prison[68]—meant not only an extreme egalitarian experiment, but also the excruciating experience of totalitarianism.

In the field of literary criticism, the Argentinean novelist Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017) has proposed another logic of strict binaries that may be useful for addressing Travel Literature. In his essay *Reading Fiction*[148] he asserts that "ultimately there are only books of travel or detective stories. You narrate a trip or you narrate a crime. Is there anything else to narrate?" (10).

Under certain claustrophobic circumstances—in closed societies like Cuba, for example—travel and crime are somehow interconnected. Several connecting archetypes can be conceived in this respect, not limited only to trips and writings related to the Cuban Revolution, but to a number of contemporary Utopian spaces of socialization:

1) The crime is committed in origin A and this triggers the travel towards destination B: the fugitive who escapes from justice or the hermit in search for anonymity, both searching for a new biography in B and a different social role than in A.
2) The crime is committed after destination B is reached and this triggers the impossibility of the return to origin A: the traveler who becomes a hostage, with or without the subsequent development of some sort of Stockholm syndrome, favoring its captors in B and blaming its compatriots in A.
3) The travel per se is equivalent to committing a crime: either in origin A or in destination B, traveling between these two segregated territories is legally penalized and/or a source of social stigma, which in turn may lead to attitudes of countercultural resistance.

Piglia's dichotomy may partially reveal how in certain historical contexts of opposition against the established power, interdictions indeed constituted an incentive. Many intellectuals from abroad were led to the 1959 Cuban Revolution by a personal or collective spirit of rebellion, where every ban added an additional bonus to undertaking the adventure of living and writing not *about*, but *from* the promised island where Utopia was anti-imperialist Realpolitik.

Curiosity thus became a very contestatory gesture. A civic statement and an emancipatory manifesto all in one, condensed in the multiple airplane tickets needed to reach Cuba from abroad. The trip of foreigners to Cuba usually had to involve a third country other than their own, in order to avoid their being detected by the authorities of their respective countries, before or after the travel.

Thus, the traveller had to adopt a kind of detective mentality in advance, in order to circumvent the unpredictable difficulties associated with their prolonged presence in communist

Cuba. But the feeling of being resilient in the face of the so-called establishment, or even of being recruited as part of a clandestine mission for the cause of building a better society elsewhere, could only reinforce their joy in the journey, beyond the immanent Marxist magnetism of the social experiment that Fidel Castro claimed the Cuban Revolution was.

In his book on the "history of curiosity" as part of Travel Theory, the Austrian sociologist Justin Stagl[168] remarks that "no primitive society is immobile and self-sufficient," so that, whether they were "nomads" or "sedentary," travel has always been a constant need. For Stagl, a rational creature dwells not only in its own vital niche, but also in what Friedrich Ratzel[153] on the verge of the twentieth century defined as the "spiritual space" that is "known to it from reports of travelers." Such reports are not only generated by *hommes de lettres*, but by all kinds of "fugitives and exiles, captives, hostages, women who marry foreigners, children who live for some time in foreign groups in order to learn the language, itinerant merchants and craftsmen, messengers, envoys and spies" (11).

Yet, Stagl admits that a "formal doctrine of travel" was only established as late as in sixteenth-century Europe, when Theodor Zwinger, Hieronymus Turler, Hilarius Pyrckmair and Hugo Blotius "brought together various literary traditions and tendencies of their times and integrated them," in part using Petrus Ramus's teachings or "Ramist methodology." At that time, the most successful designations chosen by the founders of this doctrine were *ars apodemica* or *prudentia peregrinandi*. In English, "art of travel." In French, "*art de voyager*." In German, "*Reisekunst*" or "*Reiseklugheit*." According to Stagl, the new discipline consisted of a mixture of "German didacticism, Italian realism and French methodology," and its topics included first the preparation and then "the actual realisation of the journey," as well as "the subsequent composition of travel reports or arrangement of collections" (70-71).

As soon as it triumphed, with the military takeover of Fidel Castro and his Rebel Army on January 1, 1959—when former dictator Fulgencio Batista fled, all the executive, legislative and judicial powers were *de facto* dissolved—the Cuban Revolution became in effect a sanctuary to advance the cause of the Latin American Left and many progressive movements in the Western hemisphere.

The left invested in the largest island in the Antilles as the altar of all alternatives to worldwide capitalism and representative democracies based on market economy. Castro's Cuba had the day-to-day revolutionary narrative that seemed to be lacking in much more developed societies elsewhere, in which an integral identification with national destiny is eschewed as reactionary, among other disintegrative social tendencies that, in turn, the Revolution—as well as the charisma of Fidel Castro himself—could organically incorporate into an apparently progressive force within Cuba.

The instant enthusiasm for Cuba was perhaps related to the fact that its Revolution took place exactly where and when Utopia was least expected on the continent. The Island in the late fifties—despite the existence of an anticonstitutional dictatorship that committed political crimes—was no less than the cradle of consumerism to the south of the United States. Back then, Cuba showed remarkable indicators of development in the Americas with regard to the unemployment rate (the lowest), the literacy rate (fourth place), life expectancy (third place), the number of doctors per capita (eleventh in the whole world), per capita income (fifth place), ownership of automobiles and telephones (second place), the number of television sets per inhabitant (first), among others promising parameters.[xxi] Therefore, the Cuban Revolution was

[xxi] *Pre-Castro Cuba.* PBS. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/comandante-pre-castro-cuba https://www.contactomagazine.com/cubacifras.htm#.X3EPXGhKjHo

living proof that capitalism could be rejected not only for economic inequalities, but for considerations of social justice and perhaps also moral issues.

These statistics may help to explain the curious rush of *hommes de lettres* and professional politicians to Castro's Cuba, as well as the pilgrimage of members of the aforementioned enumeration by Justin Stag, from fugitives to spies. More than the *ars apodemica* or *prudentia peregrinandi* conceptualized centuries ago for Europeans, curiosity about Cuba was closer to an *ars ideologica* or *politica peregrinandi*, where the missionaries of class struggle had the unique opportunity to participate in real time in the making of Utopia in the backyard of Imperialism.

In a way, the Cuban Revolution occurred in a corner of the First World that was conquered by a contemporary commander in chief Utopus—Fidel Castro—but with the surplus of all the condescending enchantments of underdevelopment and Third-Worldism.[xxii] Certainly, such a social spectacle that could help to redefine the borders between solidarity and profits in the Western hemisphere and soon in the rest of world, was more than worth chronicling by foreign travelers, mobilized en masse by the fireworks of a new Utopia on an Island somehow equivalent to the mythical Fountain of Youth,[xxiii] given the very young age of the main leaders of the Cuban Revolution.

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[xxii] The term Third World (in French, *Tiers Monde*) was originally coined by the French anthropologist Alfred Sauvy (1898-1990) in his article *Three Worlds, One Planet* published in 14 August 1952: *Trois mondes, une planète*. In: *L'Observateur*, no. 118, p.14. With this nomenclature, Sauvy attempted to categorize those countries that were not aligned with either NATO or the Warsaw Pact, the two principal poles of planetary power during the Cold War era.
http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/demo/sauvy/3mondes.html

[xxiii] The Fountain of Youth is a myth about a source of water that preserves or even restores the youth of those who drink or bath in it. Along history, similar tales have been recounted since Ancient times, from Herodotus (approx. 484-425 BC), to the early Crusades in the 11th and 12th centuries, to the times of discovery, exploration and colonization of the Americas by European expeditions. In general, eternal youth has always been sought by mortals and is one of the virtues of Paradise for the Abrahamic monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

**Anne Luke**, in her book *Youth and the Cuban Revolution. Youth Culture and Politics in 1960s Cuba* (London: Lexington Books, 2018) has explored how the Cuban Revolution was eminently a social process carried out by very young people, in the context of "the global 'youthquake' of the sixties" (2). This phenomenon might have contributed to its Utopian character.

The Revolution was an entertaining awakening. Such a spectacle of sovereignty with traces of travel and crime—decades before Ricardo Piglia's dichotomy—deserved to be communicated as soon as possible, from the Caribbean Tropic of Cancer to the rest of world. Furthermore—in anticipation of Kenneth Goldsmith's pair—it also deserved to be disseminated, exported wherever its violent displacement could be productive in terms of political subversion. Thus, in Cuba many saw the occasion to witness their own chance encounter on the operating table of one Utopia in the making, a socially surrealist scenario that soon would run out of both umbrellas and sewing machines,[xxiv] as well as of any other product imported from the United States.

Tim Youngs, in his monumental *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*[190] from 2013, speculates that travel writing "is the most socially important of all literary genres" for a number of reasons. First of all, "travel narratives, both oral and written, have been around for millennia," with or without the awareness of a genre. Second, travel writing "records our temporal and spatial progress. It throws light on how we define ourselves and on how we identify others" so that "its construction of our sense of 'me' and 'you,' 'us' and 'them,' operates on individual and national levels and in the realms of psychology, society and economics." And, finally, "the processes of affiliation and differentiation at play within it can work to forge alliances, precipitate crises and provoke wars" (1).

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Like many manifestations of a perfect life, utopias can also contain a certain dose of ageism. Curiously enough, in Thomas More's foundational text that seems not to be the case: "The oldest man of every family, as has been already said, is its governor; wives serve their husbands, and children their parents, and always the younger serves the elder" (69); "The gravity of the old people, and the reverence that is due to them, might restrain the younger from all indecent words and gestures" (73); "Old men are honoured with a particular respect, yet all the rest fare as well as they" (73).

[xxiv] It is well known the following quote by Uruguayan-born French poet Comte de Lautréamont (born Isidore-Lucien Ducasse, 1846-1870), which later was to be adopted by André Breton and the Surrealists as one of their main mottos: "As beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table" (novel *Les Chants de Maldoror*, 1868-1869).

Original in French: "Il est beau [...] comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!" https://www.poetes.com/textes/lau_mal.pdf

Travel writing is then a key factor for the legitimation of certain aspects in the changing life of any society, as well as for discarding other social narratives in each specific historical context. As soon as Fidel Castro's irregular Rebel Army conquered Havana in January 1959, and even before the Cuban Revolution managed to overthrow the dictatorship that general Fulgencio Batista (1901-1973) had imposed with a coup d'état on March 10, 1952, the impact of the emancipation narrative that emanated from the Caribbean island enticed the imagination of many in the neighboring nations and worldwide. In this process, the rhetorical role played by those foreign travelers who spread the voice of the rebirth of the Cuban Republic became very important, even when it was obvious that the radical transformations were more about the death of the Cuban Republic at the popular hands of Castro's Revolution.

Youngs corroborates the views of other authors in noticing the difficulties in determining the common characteristics of Travel Writing as a literary genre. For example, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan[91] declare it "notoriously refractory to definition" (x-xi) and Michael Kowaleski[104] refers to its "dauntingly heterogeneous character," since it "borrows freely from the memoir, journalism, letters, guidebooks, confessional narrative, and, most important, fiction" (7). According to Charles Forsdick,[67] "the generic indeterminacy of the travelogue" is related to the observation that it is "a literary form situated somewhere between scientific observation and fiction, while simultaneously problematizing any clear-cut distinction of those two poles" (58).

According to Youngs, only during recent decades, with "postcolonial theory's recognition of the connections between travel, empire, capitalism and racial ideologies," has the field of Travel Studies enjoyed "an important impetus" as an academic discipline, which in turn "broke the illusion that travel texts are ideologically neutral and objective." But Youngs also admits that, in

practice, this has brought “the unfortunate effect of making travel writing seem essentially a conservative genre, complicit with the forces of patriarchy and imperialism” (9).

For Youngs, “whatever the politics of travel texts, scholars’ reading of them have led to the realization that ‘The truth claims of travel writing are increasingly being exposed as rhetorical strategy.’” There is a growing distrust in the specialized readership nowadays, but this was generally not the case during the fundamental first decades of the Cuban Revolution, when the tales of a traveler were in some way consecrated as closer to the truth going on elsewhere, given the personal effort of the witness to be involved from the inside. The travel itself was somehow supposed to turn the traveller into an author.

Thus, Youngs considers that “the ‘other’ produced by Travel Writing is increasingly being seen as a textual construction, an interpretation and not a reflection of reality.’” Still, for him such “a dynamic genre” that has been “often employed for radical aims,” conserves its potential to “also be oppositional, interrogative and subversive,” as long as scholars are able to “view travel narratives internally, intertextually and contextually” (12-14).

Yet, according to the notions of the degrees of residual liberty[50] that allow the option of openness in any text,[51] both concepts developed by the Italian semiotician and novelist Umberto Eco (1932-2016), the readership should never be portrayed as hopelessly passive, even in closed contexts where the authority of consensus apparently becomes, more than majoritarian, authoritarian.

Youngs is also aware that any “travel also entails cultural and linguistic translation.” “Like travel itself, translation can produce violence or cooperation, conflict or exchange” during the process of pouring the source into its target. These terms are certainly reminiscent of Goldsmith’s cultural metaphors. In this sense, depending on the protocols displayed by each translator, for

Youngs, a translation "also leads to the creation of an intermediate ground on which newly formed meanings find their own space." And, in this respect, both "translators and travelers may be seen as liminal figures moving between cultures, not quite or wholly belonging to any one exclusively" (10).

Just as there exists what is "now commonly referred to as the hybridity of travel writing," Young also notices that "there is what seems to be a hybridity of approaches to the reading of it." These approaches are in turn "open to diverse interpretations," according to the "range of disciplines," expanding "from the micro-level to the macro." He in fact assumes this to be "true of any literary work that is subject to the gaze of critical theory," but when "applied to travel writing it has the effect of keeping texts on the move" even more, so that according to Youngs "they cannot be pinned down or fixed" (173-74).

In *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*,[173] edited in 2016 by Carl Thompson, a taxonomy of styles, modes and themes of travel writers is dissected in different chapters: discoverers and explorers,[164] tourists and travelers as such,[99] guide book authors[106] and travel bloggers,[18] among others.

Every category is worth discussing in the case of the Cuban Revolution. Yet, when it comes to the writing by travelers having to do with a social phenomenon understood as Utopia on Earth, the notion of the pilgrim[136] is a fundamental one.

Even when Laura Nenzi dedicates her chapter to the specific subcategory of the religious pilgrim, a number of these features can be extended to political pilgrims, a concept developed in depth by Paul Hollander.[93] They can be applied—whether they define themselves as such or not—to those who travel moved by a utopian faith, to the point that, once located in the privileged landscape they mean to describe, these travelers suffer a kind of conversion during the witnessing of the very events and people about which they were supposed to report. In a way, the pilgrim then

feels the urge to do more for them than just reporting, and they may even attempt—or at least aspire—to become one of them.

In this regard, Nenzi accepts that the term "pilgrimage has thus come to indicate any journey that brings spiritual enrichment, contemplation, and self-reflexivity, irrespective of the presence of a deity," while "the destination and goals of such metaphorical pilgrims may be wholly personal, or they may be chosen to signal membership of a specific sub-culture or social group" (225). A Revolution can tentatively take the place of religion, particularly when Utopia and its maximum leader displace the traditional role of god.

For Nenzi, all "these secular appropriations of the pilgrim persona reflect a somewhat romanticized characterization of pilgrimage as a special space and time, set apart from one's normal life." Regarding this utopian drive, she suggests that "it may also be time to deromanticize," so that we "pay more attention to the actions and thoughts of those who have experienced and written about actual pilgrimages," but also critically scrutinize how "they account for all their identities, interests and idiosyncrasies in narratives whose dialogic, holistic and even metaphorical character we cannot afford to ignore" (225).

In her 2003 book on the public impact of war photography, Susan Sontag[166] mentions how images may "haunt us" but "they are not much help if the task is to understand," given that for her only "narratives can make us understand" (89). For Sontag, although many press agencies follow strict norms to secure an "ethically weighted mission for photojournalists" so that they "chronicle their own time […] as fair-minded witnesses free of chauvinistic prejudices" (35), this ethics of neutrality is virtually unattainable. She insists that the reporters usually perform a subjective protocol of "uglifying." That is, "showing something at its worst," since this better "invites an active response" from the audience: otherwise, their supposedly objective testimonies would not

be “didactic” or capable to “shock” and “to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct” (81). In this regard, it seems that the more dramatically realistic an image is for the public, the more it was conceived—more than captured—as an artifact to elicit affections in its consumer. The portrayals of Utopia by outsiders may follow this conception too: the witnesses physically move in order to guarantee that their travel writings can emotionally move.

However, in the case of Utopia, this tendency to “objectify” the others would rather follow the subjective protocol of what Sontag calls “beautifying.” That is, a representation in which “often something looks, or is felt to look, ‘better’” than the reality being represented. Paradoxically, in Utopian scenarios—by comparison to wars and natural disasters—this does not “bleach out a moral response to what is shown” (81). On the contrary, the spectators may engage more with the beautified contents of Utopia, a narrative which in fact becomes morally memorable, and it may even lead to an active self-transformation of the audience, quite similar to the mechanism through which shocking images provoke indignation.

In any case, Utopian images lack everything that satisfies our “appetite for sights of degradation and pain and mutilation.”[xxv] The tales of Utopia somehow heal what Sontag calls our “love of mischief” or “love of cruelty,” which she sees “as natural to human beings as is sympathy” (98), given our “innate tropism toward the gruesome” (97).

In practice, Utopian narratives may not need to “acknowledge the existence of the incorrigible” in order to make its readership “obsessed” with the nature—“at the same time ecstatic and intolerable” (98)—of the pain of the others. Instead, the “transfiguration” of the receptor,

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[xxv] Susan Sontag quotes, among other references, the Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729 - 1797), who in his 1757 book *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* wrote: “I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others.”

which for Sontag is always "rooted in religious thinking, which links pain to sacrifice, sacrifice to exaltation," is associated with the pleasurable vision of the paradise of the others.

Sontag also comments on how "modern sensibility" indeed "regards suffering as something that is a mistake or an accident or a crime. Something to be fixed. Something to be refused. Something that makes one feel powerless" (99). Perhaps the chronicles of Utopia also help us avoid a certain sense of "helplessness" in the present time, whether we have become "indifferent" or "afraid" of our "steady diet of images of violence" (100). In fact, narratively, Utopia is best described as the place where violence has no place, not because there is no violence but because it has become invisible—but not hidden at all—by the speech register, despite its excruciating existence in the Utopian story as such. Violence is the outright otherness of Utopia: its own ubiquitous presence confirms its absolute absence.

Utopian tales, following Sontag's notions of "faraway suffering" and "voyeuristic lure," perhaps offer a unique opportunity to people who "are often unable to take in the sufferings of those close to them." Sontag argues that "wherever people feel safe," eventually "they will be indifferent," and this may also help understand the long-distance attraction of Utopias, understood as a search for security, reason, and stable or even transcendent meaning for the personal and social life of the searcher.

Furthermore, Sontag believes that "so far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering," because "our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence" (103). This may partially justify the importance of the identification with Utopian territories and communities, first literary and then literal. The Utopian spectators and later participants become themselves better than what they were until their particular Utopian encounter. By its call to action—in texts or travels or travel texts—otherness obliterates emptiness.

In sum, the trip becomes a pilgrimage when it includes the almost mystic engagement of the writing witness, whose commitment to Utopia—revolutionary, ecological—will turn the ephemeral trip into a life-long lasting cause. The old civil sentence by English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (1561-1626) on travel might come to mind here:[6] "When a traveller returneth home, let him not leave the countries, where he hath travelled, altogether behind him, [...] and let his travel appear rather in his discourse, than his apparel or gesture" (100). That is, Bacon expected a trip abroad to have cultural and probably political consequences for the originary society of the traveler.

It seems unavoidable that witnesses will eventually speak instead of their represented subjects—in many cases seen as subaltern figures[167]—even if the pilgrims are aware and attempt to renounce their hegemonic position in this dynamics of distant representations. In particular, when a revelation occurs at some point during the journey—or before or after the travel experience—then the chroniclers may feel the mandate of translating their newly revealed exceptionalism, so that the rest of the non-utopian world may understand it the same way they did.

The readership of a travelling witness is expected to be moved by such utopian narratives, in both emotional and physical terms—namely, the readers are invited to travel by themselves, to become engaged in the specific cause, to be recruited or converted by Utopia and, last but not least, to amplify these cycles by writing in turn about their own travel experiences and ideological discoveries. Contrary to purely literary genres, proselytism is perfectly integrated into the speech register of travels to Utopia. In partial agreement with Ricardo Piglia's binary, without this touristic propensity it is difficult to imagine how travel writing would function effectively.

Therefore, for a reader of contemporary travel writing, the identification with literary characters cannot compete with the impulse to get involved in real-time with real-life personalities,

separated from the audience only by a trip to the other side. The expression "true life is elsewhere" by the French poet Arthur Rimbaud[xxvi] has never ceased to influence the Utopian temptation to believe in a better world somewhere else.

Given the victory of communism over fascism in World War II—after the rupture of their mutual military alliance[xxvii]—in the second half of the twentieth century the utopian paradigm of most political pilgrims became almost exclusively located behind the Iron Curtain of communist systems: that is, in closed societies with centralized control that were in the antipodes of the free-market-economy representative democracies of the Western world. As in Thomas More's foundational text, if Utopia was to be true, according to the majoritarian perspective of outsiders, it had to exist if not on an Island, at least in isolation.

Susan Sontag, referring to "morally alert photographers and ideologues of photography" who work as foreign correspondents in conflict areas, mentions how they "have become increasingly concerned with the issues of exploitation of sentiment (pity, compassion,

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[xxvi] *A Season in Hell* by Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) was first published in 1873 by Alliance Typographique in Brussels. It is worth quoting in extenso the origin of this popularized phrase, in turn quoted by Rimbaud as "the confession of a companion from hell."

Original in French: *Je suis veuve... J'étais veuve... Mais oui, j'ai été bien sérieuse jadis, et je ne suis pas née pour devenir squelette !... Lui était presque un enfant... Ses délicatesses mystérieuses m'avaient séduite. J'ai oublié tout mon devoir humain pour le suivre. Quelle vie !* ***La vraie vie est absente.*** *Nous ne sommes pas au monde. Je vais où il va, il le faut. Et souvent il s'emporte contre moi, moi, la pauvre âme. Le Démon ! C'est un démon, vous savez, ce n'est pas un homme.* My English translation: *I'm a widow... I was a widow... Once, yes, I used to be very serious, but I was not born to become a skeleton! He was just a kid... His mysterious delicacies seduced me. I forgot all my human duties to follow him. What a life!* ***True life is elsewhere.*** *We're not in this world. I go where he goes, I must. And he's often angry with me, me, poor soul. The Demon! He's a Demon, you know, he's not a man.*

It is noticeable that the poet ascribes both angelic and demonic attributes to the compulsion to follow somebody, since that person—and by extension, that utopian cause—may bring relief from our widow and perhaps also our orphan existential condition in the face of death.

[xxvii] The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact or the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Nazi Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, was signed in Moscow, 23 August 1939. It was somehow the extension of a number of more or less secret agreements between German and Russian top leaders along history, like the 1926 Treaty of Berlin or German-Soviet Neutrality and Nonaggression Pact, the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, all the way to the Tsarist Russian Empire and the Reinsurance Treaty from 1887 to 1890, during the last years in power of the German "Iron Chancellor" Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898).

indignation)," as well as "of rote ways of provoking feeling." She argues that, as "photographer-witnesses," these professionals of communication tend to "think it more correct morally to make the spectacular not spectacular." But then Sontag reminds them that "the spectacular is very much part of the religious narratives by which suffering, throughout most of Western history, has been understood." In fact, for Sontag this is much more than just a personal "sentimental projection" (80), since in many cases the violent events would not have been carried out at all "had they not been available to witness it" (59).

As in the Uncertainty or Indeterminacy Principle in Quantum Mechanics, enunciated in 1927 by the German physicist Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976),[xxviii] certain parameters "cannot both be measured exactly, at the same time, even in theory," so that the very concept of simultaneous exactitude is rendered meaningless in nature. In our field of interest, it could be presumed that the presence of cameras and microphones leads to a distortion of the objective outcome that was supposed to be recorded in the first place.

The target audience for Utopian travel narratives usually resides in the highly developed nations of the capitalist world. Curiously enough, in the case of Castro's Cuba—where the centralized State aspires to control allies and adversaries alike—most of the favorable interpretations of the Revolution, written by foreigners travelling or residing on the Island, have never been published in the country, perhaps to prevent the captive audience from being contaminated by a higher degree of freedom of expression and thought than what is traditionally tolerated by Communist institutions in Cuba and anywhere else.

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[xxviii] **Uncertainty principle. Physics**. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/science/uncertainty-principle

The ethical risk of such passionate pilgrimages is, of course, proselytism, which could make invisible just those conflicted areas that need more exposure from an external perspective. Without visibility from abroad, international solidarity seldom reaches the local victims who might suffer not only lack of civil rights but also arbitrary incarceration and even systematic torture and extrajudicial killings.

When traveling foreigners fail to focus on the evils of fundamentalism or when their writing in fact fosters fundamentalist regimes, then the pilgrims could be held morally responsible for their role as cultural accomplices from ignorance to interference.

Nenzi recalls some characteristics which may help justify such religious-like pilgrimages, when the travelers separate their travel experience from the "mundane." Once "situated outside or on the margins of the everyday," then even "hardship and discomfort" can be seen as "akin to a rite of passage into adulthood." That is, they undergo an existential experience for "building character" through "suffering often being willingly embraced by the pilgrim as a means of shriving his or her sins" (217).

In the case of political pilgrims traveling from the United States, for example, their "original sin" was not being "authentically revolutionary"—to use the label with which Ernesto Guevara described and indeed discredited the figure of the critical intellectual.[xxix] Their pilgrimage could be understood as the expiation of a guilt derived from their social class origin, economic status, hegemonic education, imperial nationality, among other factors. In a way, this phenomenon

[xxix] In his essay *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, Ernesto Guevara writes about the model role that the Revolution requires from intellectuals: "The fault of many of our intellectuals and artists is to be found in their 'original sin:' they are not authentically revolutionary. We can attempt to graft elm trees so that they bear pears, but at the same time we must plant pear trees. The new generations will arrive free of 'original sin.' [...] Our job is to keep the present generation, maladjusted by its conflicts, from becoming perverted and perverting the new generations" (39-40).
http://www.bannedthought.net/Cuba-Che/Guevara/Che-1965-ManAndSocialismInCuba-CubanEd.pdf

could be considered a peculiar variant of the tradition of anti-intellectualism in the United States,[90] only that the target would now be the self as an intellectual entity.

Conversion pilgrimage, according to Nenzi, "also engenders a sense of camaraderie (*communitas*) among its participants, who are thus frequently inspired to envision and create 'alternative social arrangements'" outside their "secular" day-to-day realities. Displacement into utopian spaces is also a sort of time travel—so that the pilgrim can enjoy access to the "sacred" that "entails 'another order of things'" (217). Thus the witness envisions a world that still has an opportunity not to fail and be corrupted by social realities, much as the memories of one's own childhood tend to be idealized sooner or later in life. In this sense, the lost paradise resides as much in the past as in the future.

If *a better world is possible*—as the slogans of the anti-capitalist propaganda repeat around the globe, particularly after the publication of a homonymous book[138] by Bruce Nixon—then, in order to reach such a utopia of "a sustainable, fairer and non-violent world," many travelers to the Cuban Revolution opted for behaving as evangelists of the alternative society revealed to them.

Beyond the notion that the persistence of travel writing "is undoubtedly related to human curiosity"—as Justin Stagl affirms—as much as "to a travel writer's desire to mediate between things foreign and things familiar" in order "to help us understand that world which is other to us," Casey Blanton[9] proposes that "curiosity alone does not account for the persistence of this genre" (2).

In partial coincidence with Ricardo Piglia's formula, Blanton accepts that "the journey pattern is one of the most persistent forms of all narratives—both fiction and nonfiction." And, according to her, the "narrative power" of traveling is "both literal and symbolic," thus making travel writing "a compelling and seductive form of story-telling" about "the traveler's encounter with the

other." Consequently, the "reader is swept along on the surface of the text by the pure forward motion of the journey while being initiated into strange and often dangerous new territory" (2).

Blanton observes in reference to what she describes as "object-bound journey accounts" that "people and places of the outer world are described in what is taken by the narrator to be a factual, disinterested way." While "the narrator's thoughts and reactions are all but hidden," this fact doesn't necessarily imply "that the narrator's purpose is hidden as well." What Blanton is highlighting here is that "even while reporting in an ostensibly factual way, most early explorers and travelers undoubtedly had political and religious agendas concerning the places they were describing" (3).

Certainly, the impact of personal and partisan agendas deserves a closer examination in contemporary travel writing, especially if it deals with a geopolitically relevant social transformation, like the 1959 Cuban Revolution. This was a momentous national and international event. Once Fidel Castro inserted his country into the balance and counterbalance of powers in the Cold War era, the Caribbean Island re-established its role in the entire world.

Much as in Rokovoko, the literary "island far away to the West and South" in Herman Melville's classic American novel *Moby Dick*,[128] the more the Cuban Revolution was represented by foreigners worldwide since 1959, the more it was "not down on any map," because "true places never are." A myriad of more or less literary metaphors allowed a mythic narrative which, in turn, ended up concealing the violence of the new regime.

In a 2010 essay anthology about travel and story-telling in Latin America, compiled by Mónica Marinone and Gabriela Tineo,[119] Beatriz Colombi reminds us of the decalogue of travel portraits included by Tzvetan Todorov in his book on human diversity *Nous et les autres*.[177] In her

essay,[37] Colombi summarizes the categories that Todorov originally established in 1989 as "portraits" (301):

- the assimilator (one who intends to modify the others so that they resemble him),
- the profiteer (one who wants to use the others for his own purposes),
- the tourist (one who prefers monuments to human beings),
- the impressionist (the narcissist who above all prioritizes being the subject of every action),
- the assimilated (one who intends to resemble the others in order to be accepted),
- the exote (one who privileges alternativeness),
- the exile (one who avoids assimilation),
- the allegorist (one who speaks of another people to discuss his or her own culture),
- the disenchanted (one who praises the native land and condemns departures from it),
- the philosopher (one who learns from diversity).

Colombi explains how "the characters that Todorov designs are abstractions that respond to modes of interaction with the other." They correspond to "an ethic of otherness" which is "oscillating between submitting, taking advantage of, allowing oneself to invade, or respect the boundaries between me and the other" (301).

Colombi also discusses the recurrent perspective that "the travel story can only be taken as a Eurocentric and colonial discourse, as an exercise of knowledge and power upon what is being represented," and she questions this assertion for being "too conclusive, since it leaves no room for peripheral enunciations." Yet, Colombi admits that we "cannot fail to notice the effects" of such a statement, "even in those circumstances in which the traveler's situation is far from that of the colonizer" (302).

In this respect, regarding many of the Western travelers writing from inside the Cuban Revolution, it could be interesting to attempt to classify them using the archetypes of Todorov's gallery or, in certain cases, to generate new portraits for some of them, at least as an exercise in creative critique. For example,

- the decolonization colonist (one who in the urge to decolonize its subjects ends up by exerting a sort of resistance recolonization, artificially insufflating foreign ideas not naturally assimilated but imposed on the nationals),
- the invisibility agent (one who only gives voice to those already allowed to speak, ignoring any event and counternarrative that in principle could be inconvenient—or, more difficult to accept, incoherent—within the idyllic iconography of a revolutionary wonderland seen through the looking glass of Utopia.

The concept of "contact zone" postulated by Mary Louis Pratt[150] as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (4), here could be applied to post-1959 Cuba in quite different terms. Given that they do not traditionally "refer to the space of colonial encounters," Utopian niches could then be conventionally called from outside *decolonization encounters* or *emancipation zones*. Yet, the rhetoric of such revolutionary transculturation will still be "involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6).

Whether they admit it or not, foreigners in Cuba tend to behave as much freer subjects than local citizens—to travel and write about it is just one proof of the privileges of not being Cuban. Nationals, in turn, realize themselves as the passive protagonists of a kind of Cuban exceptionalism, which sacrifices their individualities for the sake of the collective. Thus it is no

surprise that many nationals on the Island will implement survival strategies of simulation, in order to elude the inquisitorial gaze of the Cuba State as well as to play along with the witnesses coming from abroad. Testimonies coming from tyrannies should be subject not only to a careful close reading, but to a reading between the lines as well.

In every communist Utopia, this is how the inhabitants of Utopia can successfully—and, more important for them, safely—represent their own script as emancipated citizens who have finally achieved happiness in their historical context. The mission of the foreign missionary is accomplished before the fact: he must now make the rest of the world believe in the miracle represented.

Perhaps, all these renegotiations of narrative hegemony can also be addressed by the concepts of "anti-conquest" and "autoethnography," both developed by Pratt as well. By "anti-conquest," she means all "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony." And by "autoethnography," she refers to "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms," whether "in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations," always involving a "partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror" (7).

In other words, the repertoire of oral and textual statements from insiders may be biased by force, in order to align the local perspective with those theoretical expectations of the typical traveler to Utopia. Pratt could also have coined her notion of the "seeing-man" to describe these chroniclers of commitment, namely, the stereotype of the stranger who, whether in complicity or credulity or a mixture of both, with their "imperial eyes passively look out and possess" (7) anyway.

# Cuba Under the American Gaze

## 3.1 Why Cuba Matters (for Americans)?

In this chapter I will briefly compile some literary exercises written by American citizens who traveled to Cuba in different historical contexts. Other cases can be consulted in the recent book *The Cuban Post-Socialist Exotic* by Maria Diana Fulger.[72] She refers to the notion of Eric Leed[109] that travel can be interpreted as a "search for purity" that often takes place, "in post-colonial terms, with moving from the center to the periphery," since the colonial vision conceives "the colonized as being closer to nature and thus closer to a state of purity."

In turn, Fulger seems to agree with Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan[92] in their idea of a nostalgic travel writing in the globalized world, where the search for purity is expressed as a search for "a so-called cultural authenticity, and the wish to protect the idea of cultural diversity" (89). She believes that travel narratives are a mechanism of authentication that "makes the story appear truer to reality, an absolute reality." In particular, when referring to the post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe, Fulger concludes that "it is indeed easier to idealize disappearing cultures, when they no longer pose any threat." However, she acknowledges the theoretical difficulties posed by the Cuban Revolution, and she postulates the existence of a "literary microcosm" between Cuba and the United States in particular, where "these narratives function as spaces of entanglements, where tropicalization, racialized erotics, and post-socialist nostalgia overlap in a dense and complex web of representations supported by old and new metaphors" (96).

In his memoir *Listen, Yankee! Why Cuba Matters?*,[88] based in part on conversations with the Cuban politician Ricardo Alarcón—Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1992 to 1993 and President of the National Assembly of People's Power from 1993 to 2013—the American author and activist Tom Hayden (1939-2016) attempts "to understand the long history of the sixties

generation through the prism of the Cuban Revolution and the American response," since "the same turbulent times gave birth to social movements in both countries." In Cuba, a "third world revolution was disrupting the comfortable status quo of American-backed dictators," while in America "a civil rights revolution was breaking up the segregationist order." In this parallel history envisioned by Hayden, "the bearded ones in the Sierra Maestra [Oriente province, Cuba] touched our bearded ones in the Haight-Ashbury [San Francisco, California]" (xi).

For Hayden, "the triumphs, traumas, and tribulations between our two nations" (xii) have continued since then in the 21st century. Apparently, January 1, 1959, the historic hallmark of the Cuban Revolution—when the previous regime of Fulgencio Batista collapsed—marks as well the existence of Cuban history as such, understood by Americans as an alternative autonomous narrative, and no longer represented as a passive appendix of American interests in Western hemisphere.

Hayden uses the date of December 17, 2014, when official diplomatic relationships were reestablished between Cuba and the United States—the U.S. had severed them on January 3, 1961—as an entry point to a new era in the relationship between these two neighboring nations. For Hayden, the Obama administration somehow recovered American sovereignty on this issue of foreign policy. He, as other experts in Washington D.C. have been claiming for decades, agrees that the "monopoly over Cuban policy" have remained for too long in the hands of a "small bloc of right-wing Cuban Americans in Congress and their vociferous lobby." As legislated by the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act[xxx]—aka the Helms-Burton Act—the "onerous

[xxx] *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996*. Public Law 104–114, 104th Congress. 12 Mar 1996. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ114/pdf/PLAW-104publ114.pdf

In Section 205, this Act establishes several "requirements and factors for determining a transition government" in Cuba, such as to legalize "all political activity," to release "all political prisoners," to dissolve "the present Department of State Security in the Cuban Ministry of the Interior," and to organize "free and fair elections for a new government" in a "timely manner," with the "participation of multiple independent political parties" and "under the supervision of internationally recognized observers."

conditions" that those Cuban exiles vociferated were nothing but "the establishment of a market economy and multiparty political system on the island" (xv).

Thus, it is their call for democracy on the Island what Hayden can't accept from Cubans forced to live outside Cuba. His ideological views seem to reject the notion that the United States is entitled to foster an American-like democracy beyond its own borders. At least not when it comes to the Cuban Revolution, seen in itself as a legitimate source of social rights and national sovereignty, which has survived always under the pressure of American expansionism and, in this case, its extraterritorial jurisdiction.

For Hayden, reestablishing diplomatic relations with Communist Cuba was less a feat of the foreign policy of president Barack Obama—"the United States was isolated diplomatically on the Cuban question at the United Nations where Cuba enjoyed almost unanimous backing" (xvi)—and more of "a victory for the Cuban Revolution." For him, "the upgrading of the Interest Section building in Havana to an American embassy" was a symbol to "help normalize" a "new reality," where "American demands for free elections and human rights were no longer stumbling blocks to improved diplomatic relations" (xv).

Despite all the "diatribes" from Cubans or Americans in the U.S., Hayden prefers to focus his approach on "the fact that, despite its serious problems, Cuba is regularly ranked in the upper

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The Act additionally requires, among other conditions, "establishing an independent judiciary," "respecting internationally recognized human rights and basic freedoms," "allowing the establishment of independent trade unions," and "independent social, economic, and political associations."

Regarding American refugees on the Island, this Act establishes that, for a Cuban transition government to receive credits and recognition from the U.S., the new non-dictatorial government should have first "extradited or otherwise rendered to the United States all persons sought by the United States Department of Justice for crimes committed in the United States." This would include not only a number of African Americans activists still living on the Island, like Assata Shakur (JoAnne Chesimard), but also, among others, Puerto Rican activists like Guillermo Morales (William "No Hands" Morales), member of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) and Víctor Manuel Gerena, member of the Boricua Popular Army.

tier of the United Nations Human Development Index for its education, health, and welfare programs" (xvi).

In any case, Hayden's Cuba can accommodate without critical contradiction both "Western tourists," who "come to relax, buy rum and cigars, and enjoy the beaches in winter, not to demonstrate on behalf of capitalism," and his confidence that, "like most governments in Latin America, the Cubans believe in a leading role for the state in economic development and social programs." This "new Latin America, including Cuba," now "considers itself much more than a sweatshop haven or a storehouse of raw materials for American corporations" (xviii).

Hayden assumes that even in Cuba democratic dissidents are "maligned" on the Island, mainly because of their "alignment with the interests of the United (xviii) States and funding by US agencies or foundations." He concludes that "most of them are seen, correctly, as recipients of US support for regime change and the chaos that would follow." However, as "a much larger space is opening up for dissent and debate among mainstream Cubans," while "US hostility recedes," (xix) again Hayden hopes that this new scenario will lead to a sort of autochthonous dissidence, somehow authenticated by him, as long as those dissidents declare that they are independent from the United States.

Thus, Hayden's gaze is in part characterized by the will of making invisible its own American gaze, so that Cubans can be preserved in a sort of ideological innocence with regard to America. To spare them the harsh realities of global marketization and representative democracy, with all of its tempting benefits, social evils, and ecological debacle. This infantilization of the other constitutes a typical utopic trait of travelers to the Cuban Revolution, a social process considered historical while at the same time it is conceived as if it were positioned outside history. At least, as if there could be no history beyond it—or even before it.

On the other hand, Hayden, like many pilgrims to their privileged utopic niche, implicitly assumes the role of the cultural translator of his "discovered" world. The travel writer is the public figure whose consensual task is to disclose brave new worlds to his fellow citizens, who will rely on his narrative first found abroad in its original source, and then published—usually readjusted to the target context—once the witness is safe back home.

Hayden believes his American interpretation of the Cuban Revolution should be seen as not so American, since it has been sanctified by his personal presence on the Island—by his feeling for the Cuban people and by his exhaustive documentation, not available in Cuba—as well as by his interviews with Cuban revolutionaries.

Noticeably, the testimonies of the displaced sectors, the voice of the Cuban counterrevolutionaries, seem to count less for Hayden's account. Besides ideological and political biases, we could consider that for him they matter less because these Cuban voices are conveniently represented in alignment with American interests—whether they fully are or not is another matter. As such, their interpretation of the Cuban Revolution should be seen as not so Cuban, since they would be the living proof of the lack of any Cuban exceptionalism.

In a way, these Cuban subjects would make mundane the Cuban Utopia, by narrating it as the nth Latin American dictatorship. In order to protect his utopian worldview of the utmost alternative to America, the American traveler then makes these Cuban voices invisible in return. Or he references them only through external sources which should now be preferably based in mainstream America, as long as they portray those inconvenient Cuban voices on the wrong side of the American political spectrum—whether accurately or not is another matter.

Accordingly, these subjects can only be on the wrong side of Cuban history and their claims can be discarded as a side-effect of social progress. Any sympathy regarding the pain of the other

does not apply to them, because they are technically no longer the other, but just Americans in America.

Thus, the same way that many Cubans were the beneficiaries of the paternalist programs of the Revolution, unavoidably many other Cubans had to be displaced and punished on the Island. When forced into exile in America, for example, they are decubanized by the imperatives of Tom Hayden and the subtleties of a certain type of American gaze. Similarly, not all Yankees are welcome to listen in his book *Listen, Yankee. Why Cuban matters?* Instead, in this book, as in many others, Cuba seems to matter in America for American reasons that are presented as the reasons of Cubans on the Island, through a simplification of the contradictory complexities of the country.

What would simply be unjustifiable in America, tends to find a rational justification within the Cuban Revolution. In his Caribbean utopian scenario, whether "it is true that nine of the fifteen-member Politburo are military veterans in their seventies and eighties," still for Hayden "according to a recent analysis by Mark Frank,[69] many young members started filling the ranks of the National Assembly and Council of State in recent years" (227).

Similarly, Hayden enumerates a number of recent "measures of diversity" which for him indicate that the "regime, however authoritarian," still "can be flexible and elastic in response to serious grievances." One example would be that, "while tightly holding ultimate power, the regime often launches nationwide 'consultations' involving millions of Cubans in sometimes-heated discussion of proposed policy changes" (227).

For Hayden, although "Cuba nevertheless remains a one-party state with significant racial stratification, and a long history of exclusion and persecution of political dissidents and minorities like its LGBT community," yet "in recent years, some of those negative indicators have declined"

(227). And Hayden even complains that "the rigid US view about one-party 'totalitarianism' doesn't account, for example, for the evolution of Cuba's policies toward its LGBT community, led by the daughter of Raúl Castro and Vilma Espín" (228).

Finally, regarding the democratization of Cuban society, Hayden concludes that "it is a serious contradiction to insist on foreign intervention to impose a two-party or multiparty system in Cuba as a pre-condition to democracy." He is convinced that "any such 'new' parties would be portrayed as merely the stalking horses for casino-era capitalism or tropical neoliberalism" (228-9).

Again, America is to blame first. Despite the intention of the author, this blaming still implies a sense of ownership. What goes wrong in Cuba can only be a product of failed American policies. In this respect, Hayden invokes the classic work by Robert Scheer and Maurice Zeitlin in the early sixties,[157] accepting the belief that "the United States continues to be publicly committed to the overthrow of the revolution, dissent and criticism in Cuba assume counterrevolutionary implications" (229).

The rationale seems to be here that any resistance to the Revolution will never be recognized as legitimate by Americans, in this case, unless the American government recognizes the Revolution as legitimate in the first place. As long as the U.S. keeps its "double standards," no standard should be applied to Cuba. Hayden summarizes how the United States "exhibits a high tolerance for our own inbred dynasties, the embedded discrimination against women and ethnic minorities, suppression of whistleblowers, and tolerance of torture when practiced by strategic allies." In general, in 2015 Hayden still sees that "US officials also are frozen in the Cold War belief that reform is possible within our own allied one-party states but apparently never within our one-party opponents." Particularly, "this Cold War formulation, articulated by Reagan's UN

representative Jeane Kirkpatrick, fell apart when the Soviet bloc collapsed largely due to Gorbachev's domestic reforms, but the dogma continued to apply toward Cuba" (228).

At most, Hayden concedes that "the defensiveness of Cuban society contributes to the tendency to deny admission of flaws deemed to undermine the country's united front and serve the propaganda purposes of the counterrevolution." And he also admits that "most of these undemocratic features of the Cuban state can be traced to a one-party system with a rigid ideology which insists on the preeminence of class analysis, as if autonomous movements for Afro-Cuban rights, a competitive free press, independent art, or gay liberation would be threatening or diversionary" (227-28).

In the end, the survival of the sovereignty of the Cuban nation after January 1959—historically represented as threatened by political pressure from the United States—seems to depend on the restriction of the sovereignty of Cuban citizens, who are then seen as hostages of a foreign power, instead of subjects of a regime whose nature is repressive per se. In the case of the Cuban Revolution, the search for a paradisiacal purity on the periphery of U.S. Imperialism can justify the status quo of a society not because it is closer to nature, but because it is distant from Western democracies.

## 3.2 Hundreds of Americans Dozing Midday[xxxi]

Thirty years later, in his memoir in verse *Cuban Journal*,[163] the American poet Joe Sloman was to remember the distant days when the Venceremos Brigade took him to discover the Cuban Revolution, much in the style of an epic of magic realism.

On February 12, 1970, after traveling on eight buses from Boston, a twenty-six-year-old Sloman and around three hundred young Americans boarded in Saint John (New Brunswick, Canada) the Cuban ship Luis Arcos Bergnes—a cattle freighter—of the Mambisas Line. At least two hundred more were expected to join them there, flying from Mexico.

The organization of all the trips was surrounded by an aura of mystery and spy fiction, since the U.S. government had in place very strict prohibitions against travel to Cuba. They were supposed to go skiing to Canada, according to *The New York Times*,[63] which reported at the time that, although "no ski equipment was evident," indeed an "organization identified only as 'Ski Masters'" was supposed to pay for the transportation fares to Greyhound—"the total estimated cost was about $25,000."

Like most poetic journals, Sloman attempts to combine a lyric approach to express the intricacies of his time on the Island with the conventions of journal writing, including the use of quotes from real-life dialogues, detailed descriptions of landscapes, opinions and reflections. This is a book, as he mentions in the preface, written in 1970 simultaneously with a "conventional prose diary" (1).

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[xxxi] "February 24, 2:30 PM. Hot heat / numb thumb / orange tents / canvas-colored tents / hundreds of Americans / dozing midday / the smell of pollen from somewhere / in this ravaged countryside." (**Sloman, Joel**. *Cuban Journal: A Poet in the Venceremos Brigade, 1970*. Cambridge, MA: Zoland Books, 2000. p.31).

Sloman was not only tracking his daily life in Cuba, but he was also memorializing in real time an extraordinary experience, both in personal and political terms. He explains that his book was "initially intended to be shared only with other members of the brigade." But, decades later, he reconsidered that "no experience is so special it can't give pleasure and meaning to a wider audience" (1).

In Cuba, the national press—controlled by the Communist Party—covered this new trip of the international solidarity brigade. In the magazine *Bohemia*[xxxii] there were two full pages dedicated to a reportage on the foreigners on the Island. They were certainly not skiing in Canada—as announced when the American press pressured them before leaving Boston—but volunteering to work under the tropical sun in Cuban sugarcane fields.

In a speech in Puerto Padre—then Oriente province and, since 1976, Las Tunas—on July 14, 1969, Fidel Castro in person had launched the unrealistic challenge of harvesting the record of 10 million sugar tons for the first time in the history of Cuba. It was not only about making more profits in hard currency in the international market, but also about his never-ending Stakhanovism[xxxiii] that compelled the Cuban leader to compare his small country mostly with its huge enemy, the United States:[24] "The Imperialists want us to fail. The Yankee Imperialists would give anything so that we don't achieve our goal. They've done everything possible to prevent it. […] For the Imperialists, the 10 million will doubtless be a bitter hour, since they have carried out the unspeakable crime, the shameless and disgusting policy of trying to starve this country to death."

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[xxxii] *La Brigada "Venceremos."* In: *Bohemia*, 14. 3 Apr 1970. pp.64-65. https://dloc.com/UF00029010/03394

[xxxiii] In the former Soviet Union, Stakhanovism was a movement which during decades inspired workers to exponentially increase their level of production in unbelievably short periods of time. The name is after Aleksei Stakhanov (1906-1977), a Russian miner whose results as a jackhammer operator in 1935 made him a national hero and even an international celebrity, when he appeared that year in the cover of *Time* magazine, on December 16th.

*Bohemia* magazine portrays the members of the Venceremos brigade as showing "predominantly a picturesque garb and a look unmistakably foreign." Interviewed by foreign press correspondents at the sugarcane mill Rubén Martínez Villena, in Aguacate—forty miles southeast from Havana city—they do not hesitate to explain that, besides working the whole day, during nighttime they "hold workshops about the Third World and the different ways of fighting in the United States" (64).

One of them expresses how impressed were they about the fact that "racism, an invariable component of the American way of life, has been completely eliminated in Cuba, where everyone works together regardless of their color or race" (64). And they criticize the by then recent attacks against the Venceremos brigade by the U.S. Democratic senator James Eastland (1904-1986),[48] once called the "Voice of the White South" and the "Godfather of Mississippi Politics." For the members of the brigade on the Island, senator Eastland is simply worried that, once back in America, the members of Venceremos will tell Americans about the "great Cuban reality, without poverty, without illiteracy, without exploitation, without hatred towards other nations, including ours"[xxxiv] (65).

According to Kavitha Iyengar,[96] a student at the University of California at Berkeley, the poetic testimony of Joel Sloman offers "a broader account" of his "complicated, personal experience of the Venceremos Brigade," because "through poetry, Sloman could speak to those similarly questioning the Brigade and those completely enchanted by the Brigade, looking to read a piece multiple times, simultaneously" (259).

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[xxxiv] In his *Cuban Journal*, Sloman mentions the tense situation that from Cuba they feared it was waiting for them once back in the United States: "Senator asks that our citizenship be taken away / *Gusanos* attack returned brigade members / we're accused of bombings / in New York City / they say we get guerrilla training in Cuba / the president himself promises to get us / over nationwide TV / I plan to write a book to raise defense costs / in case we get busted […] / all the people out to get us / accusing us of all sorts of things / from bombings to being in the service of another government" (78-79).

For Iyengar, although “Sloman’s account challenges an entirely positive vision of the Venceremos Brigade by *questioning* revolutionary ideologising”—he “communicates exhaustion, semblances of disbelief in the Cuban Revolution, and challenges to his personal and political positions”—still his *Cuban Journal* “demonstrates a certain authenticity that the politically oriented accounts we have read thus far lacked” (259). That is, Iyengar is indicating her notion that an uncritical perspective on the part of its author could compromise the legitimacy of this diary; it could turn the testimony into a propagandistic pamphlet.

The criticism of Sloman is a personal rather than political skepticism. When someone calls him “cynical about some things,” he defines his attitude as “pessimism or frustration” (134). He announces that “since I’m in Cuba I must convince myself / that I’m not weary / or that it’s psychosomatic / and I must struggle with myself / but I’m too weary” (77). He feels “too tired to inquire of culture / or even wave” to “the collective falling apart / under weight of schedule / and lack of work” (129). And, despite having “weakness all week,” it is still possible for him to “enjoy the present midday pleasantness / all people tired and not moving fast” (50). But over a month later—from March 4 to April 12—he will insist in his “failing health” so that “I can’t make the effort / I must go to sleep / I’m in love / no self-discipline in the heat” (129).

Sloman seems quite obsessed with his own lethargy under the scorching spring sun of the Island: “What should I do / so tired this siesta hour?” (54) amid “hundreds of Americans / dozing midday” (31). That is, “crowds of *brigadistas* / lolling / bobbing / staring / sunning themselves” (19). He confesses to “have trouble opening my eyes / keeping them open in sunlight.” (59-60) And he wonders from the beginning if his role there is simply “to befriend / the type of personal fear confronting me now / reading Gus Hall[xxxv] on revolution?” (10).

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[xxxv] Gus Hall (born Arvo Kustaa Halberg, 1910-2000) was the General Secretary of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA), as well as its four-time U.S. presidential candidate. Being a White man whose parents were Finnish

It is possible to perceive a certain ironic tone in his verses, which could be interpreted as distant estrangement from the group he is supposed to belong to temporarily. For Sloman, the Venceremos Brigade is "so liberated / and young / and smart / and hidden / without help / without self-discipline / in a radical body experiment" (15).

They are like an invasion of Americans in solidarity with the Cuban Revolution, on the verge of the second decade of the Cuban Revolution. In general, "people studying Spanish language / elbow on knees / cheek in hand," each one with their respective "cameras / notebooks" (22). Many of them are "very emotionally caught up in the idea—i.e., the reality—of being on socialist soil" (25), "loafing around / in a revolutionary human land" (40), and with "a feeling of being within a new culture / a day after old Miami culture." Sloman sees himself welcomed in Cuba by "people there somehow expecting me" and which he depicts as "somehow part of me / both alien and intimate / like my soul" (24).

In all these "mostly moods / and chaos of sensitive impressions," the poet traveler recognizes the individual and collective "willing to create one social image or another," either "from fantasies of how one should relate / to imaginary social reality" or from an "anthropological perspective" that "implies / those within a social entity / can't accurately describe it" (28).

Indeed, they "all have fantasies / about this social entity / not quite yet in existence / even new to Cuba." A utopian place that, accordingly, it is also a non-place.[4] "It isn't Cuba / and it isn't North America / not straightforward as cane-cutting / nor familiar as bourgeois violence," It is all about "a 'culture gap' / between Cuban material exigencies / and US movement intellectual bloodletting / 'with a heart of gold'" (29).

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immigrants, Hall chose two African American leaders to run as vice presidents. In 1972 and 1976, he run with Jarvis Tyner, the current Executive Vice Chair of the CPUSA. In 1980 and 1984, he run with Angela Davis. In any case, they never reached the 0.1% of the total votes.

As such, Sloman keeps updating his diary during their daily “swimming in this dream becoming Cuba / inundated by activity after activity / and faces switching from open love / to paranoid contempt” (29), while he is “beginning to be patient / in a revolutionary sense / enjoying Cuba / and my fantasies of pulling rank when I return home” (39).

Then, the last day of February, the mutual “typical paranoia” that Sloman had been trying to not “take it seriously anymore”—just like his apprehension that Cubans might “think I’m the spy in their midst”—emerges on that Saturday, February 28 (97), after he noticed the “stigma” of some pages having been “stolen” from his diary. He asks to himself: “Am I to blame?” “Are my friends avoiding me?” (45). He does not answer to himself. In any case, he reports in one of his prose entries that he just “found out that one of new poems is missing, 6 pp. one from 2/20. Don’t know what happened yet. Am suspicious of everyone…” (44).

A few days before that same week—on Tuesday, February 24—Sloman had mentioned that writing his notes in public elicited curiosity in the Cuban personnel around the Venceremos Brigade, both civil and military: “A Cuban member of the brigade passes by / followed by a militia man / carrying two tape recorders over his shoulder” (33). Coincidentally, “he stops when he sees me writing a poem / and asks me if it’s about the brigade / and I explain this task I’ve set myself” (34) as a chronicler of the visitants.

In front of the visited, the travel writer acknowledges traveling in part to write about his trip. In a way, it is as if Sloman’s perspective as a foreigner—a witness who would soon leave exceptional Cuba to return to the non-utopian rest of the world—could constitute a rhetorical risk for the Revolution in the process of being represented by him.

We could also speculate that all subjects allowed to come to Cuba from a capitalist country―particularly, Americans―were regarded by Cuban officials with suspicion, at least until they could prove their loyalty to the ideological idyll they were observing.

Maybe this helps us explain why Sloman never published his diary in the next three decades. Also why eventually his "journal is full of blanks" as he starts "feeling dishonest with myself / if I write / and repeat / details of incomprehensible pageant of Cuban tour" (133). And why he decided to make explicit in his diary his main intention regarding his presence in Cuba, which was the "revolutionary assumption" of physically contributing to a progressive cause: "Work is work!" That is, "rushing out to the fields / for volunteer work" (39).

Faced with the routine of his fellow travelers of "discussing formal organization / or need for it," Sloman rudely rejects their "refusal to discuss reality," as much as their "immediate leap to vague abstractions" and "mystifications" (42), which make him feel "as if this were a talky movement conference" and "not the *zafra* / *de los diez millones*"[xxxvi] (29).

His spontaneous but silent "impulse is to say / Fuck it / I came here to cut cane / so I'll ignore people who annoy me / and just get down to work." He struggles to "articulate my perspective" (42), that seems to be finally expressed in the contrast between the man of action versus the man of words: "I don't have to think / because I'm acting / cutting cane" (56). However, Sloman admits that, the more "I keep telling this to myself," in the end "it somehow doesn't feel real" (42).

[xxxvi] "*Zafra de los diez millones*" is the "harvest of 10 million" metric tons of not refined sugar that were expected to be produced in Cuba 1969-1970. In practice, the total production only reached 8,537,600 metric tons, which was anyway a historic record for the Island. (**Radell, William**. *Sugar Factory Performance Before and Under the Cuban Revolution*. In: *Cuban Studies*, 20, CFLAS, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990. pp.133-56.)

Sloman even hesitates explicitly about how demanding cutting sugarcane all day long is: “What am I doing here? / this is hard work! / I don’t want to return to the fields / for four more hours of work this afternoon / but I’ll do it / somehow I know I’ll do it / I must be a coward / and can’t give up the idea / that I’m an effete dilettante” (50). “WORK! / yiiich! / typical gringo attitude” (51).

Certainly, only because he has traveled from America to Cuba—to work there and to write about it—Sloman is able to carry out such a hard effort under the challenging weather of the Island. The intense heat and solar radiation alternates with sudden tropical downpours. It seems to him that in Cuba “it rains on and off all day” (62). Sloman wonders if they actually “have to cut cane in the rain” and he bluntly declares that “this rain pisses me off” (27).

Besides, many Americans suffer from “bad backs” which get “worse from hammocks” (122). Their Cubans counterparts wake them up too early every day—at 4:45am—and in the countryside there are many annoying insects at all times. In fact, those “millions of mosquitoes / contribute to my mood” (106). The battle of the stranger against local nature seems to be lost for the outsider, who is somehow pushed back to his comfortable country of origin. Sloman registers in his diary each “mosquito attack” (52), either if it is “a singleminded mosquito” the one who “got me on my left foot” (30) or if they are massively “coming to scout my ankles and wrists,” despite the use of “this insect repellent / Union Carbide’s failure” (110).

Yet, the utopian displacement has mobilized almost magical energies in the group. The American brigade is willing and capable of doing in their target territory what they would probably not even consider in their source land. This pattern of behaviour is summarized by Sloman making use of his broken Spanish (33):

“¿Le gusta a trabajar en los Estados Unidos?”

"No me gusto"

"¿Le gusta a trabajar en Cuba?"

"Si! me gusto!"[xxxvii]

On many levels, this double standard is present throughout Sloman's diary on the Island. It applies to apparently trivial details, like the fact that this group of Americans is allowed to listen to foreign music "over the speakers" (78) at their work camp, including The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin—all of them banned from Cuban public media, because they were considered a threat particularly to the revolutionary education of youth.

From the mid-sixties and all through the seventies, the censorship by the Communist Party of both international and Cuban culture became extreme on the Island. In a 1987 essay[118] the American musicologist Peter Manuel—the editor of *Essays on Cuban Music: North American and Cuban Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991)—recounts how, for example, "in early 1973 the Cuban government did prohibit stations from transmitting any North American or British pop and folk music, alleging that such music promoted alienation." Paradoxically, "not even 'protest' songs were tolerated, for Cuban officialdom regarded North American pop culture, and especially hippie culture, as self-indulgent, drug-induced escapism (drug use appears to be minimal among Cuban youth and is harshly punished), and an aberrant degeneration of bourgeois culture" (164).

Manuel considers that "the ban appears to have been part of a general defensive crackdown in culture and ideology, encompassing a tightening of censorship, curbs on travel permits for

[xxxvii] The correct Spanish grammar should be: "¿Le gusta trabajar en los Estados Unidos?" "No me gusta" "¿Le gusta trabajar en Cuba?" "¡Sí! ¡me gusta!"

In English: "Do you like to work in the United States?" "I don't like it" "Do you like to work in Cuba?" "Yes! I like it!"

foreigners, opposition to 'imperialist' cinema, television and art and condemnation of writers like Sartre and Carlos Fuentes who had protested Cuba's harassment of the poet Padilla" (164).

By the time the Venceremos Brigade was voluntarily working in Cuba, hundreds of young men and women had been sent to forced labor camps in the countryside for their ideological rehabilitation—the infamous UMAP, Military Units to Aid Production.[171] These young Cubans were accused precisely of being under the influence of capitalist decadent culture. Religious people and homosexuals were targeted the most, the latter even being publicly shamed by Fidel Castro, who as early as in March 1963 described them as "lumpen gusanera," "sub-products," and "degenerations" of the Cuban Revolution.[25]

*Gusanera* in Spanish means a mass of worms—*gusanos*, the derogatory word with which the Revolution dehumanized all its critics, whether peaceful or violent. However, Sloman finds it proper to include in the glossary of his *Cuban Journal* the same epithet "gusanos" as equivalent to "counter-revolutionaries" (137).

"Gusanos" also appears twice in his book about this "fairly personal trip" (79) of "Cuban adventures" (116). First, Sloman refers to "worms" when he recounts how in the U.S. several "*gusanos* attack returned brigade members," since they accuse them "of bombings / in New York City" and "they say we get guerrilla training in Cuba" (78-79). And second, he mentions an armed infiltration from abroad "a day or two ago of about 35 *gusanos*, not many tracked down yet. Sabotage of sugar mills planned? What? Everyone serious" (130).

This climate perhaps justifies the presence of armed guards to protect the group of American citizens on the Island. A group of "rebellious youth" in search of "a real political act / of international scope and significance" (114), which in the United States they could not perform or, at least, their performance would lack the aura of transgression.

In the end, Sloman's skeptical spirituality seems to share in the authoritarian slogans of the charismatic Cuban Maximum Leader,[xxxviii] as when he writes, "Within the revolution / everything / EVERYTHING! / including imagination / discipline and organization / confidence obviating need / for paranoid fantasies / and competence in professional / social and natural skills" (84).

[xxxviii] In the summer of 1961, Fidel Castro said in a speech at the National Library José Martí in Havana: "Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing." It is to note the similarity with the famous sentence by Benito Mussolini (1883-1945), the founder of the Italian National Fascist Party: "Everything within the State; nothing against the State; nothing against the State."

### 3.2.1 Somewhere Between Imperialism and Communism[xxxix]

It is noticeable that, as early as in 1971, Sandra Levinson and Carol Brightman had published without any hesitation or delay a comprehensive book about the first two Venceremos brigades to Cuba.[111] In their *Introduction*, they admit that this "is more than just a book of reminiscences on a two-month stay in Cuba," but "in a very real sense, it is a book about the American movement—a strong statement on where we're at and where we have to grow in revolutionary consciousness and behaviour" (15).

It is, therefore, the chronicle of a number of U.S. citizens verifying in practice their anti-establishment theories and leftist ideologies. That is, the Cuban Revolution allowed the Venceremos Brigade the "unique opportunity" of having "a chance to come together in an 'ordinary' revolutionary situation and see if it is possible for American radicals, with all their hang-ups, to realize Che Guevara's concern that revolutionaries 'must struggle every day so that their love of living humanity is transformed into concrete deeds, into acts that will serve as an example, as a mobilizing factor'" (15-16).

The *Venceremos Brigade* by Levinson and Bright includes their own opinions and narrative about the national and international events surrounding their experience, but it also compiles many fragments of the diaries of nearly a hundred members of the brigade. Joel Sloman—the same Joe Sloman discussed above—is also a contributor.

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[xxxix] "I'm now somewhere between imperialism and Communism: I'm aboard a converted cattle cargo boat on my way to Cuba." (**Levinson, Sandra and Carol Brightman** (editors). *Venceremos Brigade. Young Americans Sharing the Life and Work of Revolutionary Cuba: Diaries, Letters, Interviews, Tapes, Essays, Poetry*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971. p.187).

For the 1971 first edition of *Venceremos Brigade*, Sloman was not shy about sharing with the editors at least five fragments of his poetic diary. The issue of racism emerges in this book in a number of entries. In particular, the "Tony and Francesca incident" (201-207) reveals that the members of the brigade on the Island were facing tensions between revolutionary loyalty to the Cuban leadership and their own cultural and political battlegrounds as Americans.

In 2013, Sarah Jane Seidman further explored this episode in her Ph.D. dissertation.[158] In short, as recounted by June Erlick in *Venceremos Brigade*, under a tropical downpour, with no electricity in the camp tents, "Tony, a black man, had poked Fran, a white woman, in the eye." The Cuban authorities immediately decided that "Tony was to be expelled from the camp and sent back to the States." And then "there was much protest" on the American side, including "many anti-Cuban remarks, especially on the part of blacks and Weathermen" (201).

What was an "administrative problem of discipline" for the Cuban Revolution, for the American travelers was a "political problem." In fact, "one that couldn't be solved in this immediate context" (201).

Eventually, Tony—who in any case doesn't seem to have a voice in this book—was not deported from the Island, since "the Cubans showed their flexibility" in the end. But the "Third World caucus" of the Venceremos brigade did state that "We condemn Tony's act as emotional and stupid," as much as they also condemned "the racism of the white people of this Brigade even more because they have not taken upon themselves to deal with their history" (202).

The caucus of the first contingent found "ironic" that "white racists have caused bad reactions from a brother, and now this brother is in big trouble, and it is the white racists who are making the decision," since "the brigades are predominantly white" and "it was the whites who

controlled the votes and sent their representatives" (202-203) to the several meetings held to handle this situation and intercede before the Cuban officials.

Again, the caucus makes clear that they "support the Cuban government" which has "some of the greatest leaders that have ever lived: Ernesto Guevara, Fidel Castro and many, many others" (202), and that they "do not question the leadership of the Cuban delegation." Furthermore, they even understand that their "revolutionary approach" to solving this incident by initially failing against Tony was "just, in terms of the Cuba rule." Yet, they add that "a lot of Third World people" and "Black people in particular" in the Venceremos Brigade definitely "felt there was discrimination here in the camp" (203).

Beyond being "paranoid" to a certain extent—since any "victim of racism for so long" is "constantly making comparisons and contrasts with the system where you come from"—the point was that the foreigners could readily notice "that all of the black people they have seen are either athletes, entertainers, in the Army, or working in the kitchen, which are very stereotyped positions for black people in the U.S." (203). In general, the consensus was that "Cubans still displayed a certain degree of insensitivity to racial problems in America" (207). The same applied to women and homosexuals.

The Cuban Revolution, self-considered as the political vanguard of its time, was quite behind in the critical conversations that were taking place in capitalist societies to guarantee individual rights. In a sense, beyond its progressive aura seen from abroad, Castro's Cuba behaved for decades, if not as a conservative reserve in the Western hemisphere, at least as a paradoxical example of the civil illiteracy displayed by a good savage who has become a good revolutionary.

## 3.4 The Museumification of the Revolution

Only one year before the publication of the poetic memoir by Joe Sloman, another poetry chronicle by an American traveler to the Island was published by Angela Ball, under the title of *The Museum of the Revolution*.[5]

Although traveling and writing were simultaneous in each case, the triggering trip and Ball's resulting book occurred both in the nineties, in a much more synchronous way than the 30-year waiting period that Joe Sloman imposed to his *Cuban Journal*—from 1970 to 2000.

The poet Ball was also part of a group that stayed "in lodgings for foreign graduate students" (10). She writes in the introductory note of her book that "we went by the name 'researchers'—one of about two ways to get clearance for travel to Cuba from the U.S.," and that some "teachers had been assigned to guide us" (9).

Yet, this American poet seems much more independent from her academic group than Sloman in 1970 from his Venceremos brigade of ideologically commited activists. In Spanish, the verb "venceremos" means "we shall overcome." But the future victory of socialism in the mid-nineties seemed to be part of a futuristic fiction.

Suddenly, Cuba was living in a radically different era, after Fidel Castro was forced to make concessions to capitalism that would have been unthinkable less than a decade before. In a sense, the twentieth century of the Revolution had ended when the Cold War ended with the collapse of communism.

The Caribbean Island was no longer a purely utopic space. The narrative of a proletarian paradise in resistance under the U.S. financial and economic embargo suffered as soon as the country was open to foreign investments, touristic commercialization, and even the dollarization

of the economy—although the Cuban government always used the euphemism "double currency" to minimize comparisons with neoliberal measures being applied in Latin America.[xl]

For Ball, all the epic events of the Cuban Revolution seem to be frozen now, mainly inside the Museum of the Revolution, which is an actual museum that exists in Havana,[xli] but also in the perception of the people—at least, as this American poet visiting Cuba perceives it, directly or through references and readings.

As it corresponds to any museum, the past permeates present times. Recurrently, the reader is transported to "before the Revolution"—when "Havana / was oceans of ads and lights," invaded by American tourists, while poor people "shined their shoes / in English" (57)—in an effort of memory to better appreciate the advantages and difficulties of life in Cuba during the economic crisis of the nineties.

The name of Fulgencio Batista, the dictatorial ruler of Cuba from March 10, 1952, until the triumph of Castro's Revolution on January 1, 1959, is directly mentioned at least five times in *The Museum of the Revolution*, as if he still had influence in Cuban society and its national imagination. This is not the case. At most, the accusation of "batistiano" or "batistiana" (followers of Batista) is sometimes used by the people to shame in public the Cuban police or the members

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[xl] In Latin America, the U.S. dollar is the official currency in Panamá (1904), Ecuador (2000) and El Salvador (2001). In Venezuela and Argentina a process of "spontaneous dollarization" has led the population to use more U.S. dollars than local currency, given the devaluation and instability of the latter.

Besides the U.S. territories, a number of small countries have also dollarized their economies. For example, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, East Timor, Marshal Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Turks and Caicos Islands, Saba, and Sint Eustatius.

[xli] The building of the Museum of the Revolution was designed by Cuban architect Rodolfo Marurí and Paul Belau from Belgium. It was officially inaugurated in January 1920 as the Presidential Palace. During the first years of Castro's Revolution, from 1959 to 1965, the building housed both the Government and the Council of Ministers. Only in 1974, the place actually became a museum dedicated to memorialize the hallmarks of the Cuban Revolution. In 2010 it was declared a National Monument.

of any other repressive body.[xlii] It's a way of equating the Revolution with what the Revolution claims to have abolished from the very beginning: a dictatorship.

This artificial overrepresentation of Batista is typical of how foreigners—Americans in particular—approach the history of Cuba when it comes to the socialist experiment of the last six decades. Somehow, besides ideological affiliations, the enthroning of Communism on the Island is justified by the wrongdoings of Batista's tyranny and American interests.

There is a personal anecdote in this respect that took place when I was living in Iceland from 2015 to 2016, thanks to a fellowship granted by the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN) to writers censored in their own country.[xliii] As soon as I met with the Icelandic poet Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl,[52] he mentioned to me his poetic performance called "Batista,"[53] which was part of a larger series of experimental readings about world dictators. Norðdahl seemed startled when I asked him—in order to update his art piece—why not to include Fidel Castro instead of a bygone political figure. Again, besides any admiration for the revolutionary leader he may have felt, it simply hadn't occurred to him that Batista could mean so little for Cubans nowadays.

Perhaps, foreigners are biased consumers of a certain type of international literature that reproduces the Batista stereotype until today. This editorial tendency includes serious research books like *Sultanistic Regimes*,[45] with a whole chapter dedicated not to Castro but to Batista—in this case, written by a Cuban exiled academic—despite the book being published in 1998, forty years after Batista fled, with Castro still ruling without tolerating any political opposition.

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[xlii] **Cubita NOW YouTube Channel**. *A gritos de "batistianos" cubanos sacan de su barrio a la policía*. (Shouting "batistianos" at them, Cubans expel the police from their neighborhood.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sqr7QYaVtu0 9 July 2021.

[xliii] *Inside/outside CUBA*. (Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo interviewed by Cathrine Helland.) 9 October 2015. https://www.icorn.org/article/insideoutside-cuba

Outside academia, many best-selling books and magazines adopt a similar narrative. For example, in a 2017 special issue of *Athlon Classics* magazine,[xliv] dedicated to "The world's most notorious dictators" of all times—from "the Ancient Rome's deranged despot" Caligula (9) to the "dangerous dictatorial dynasty" of "the three Kims of North Korea" (76)—the American editors granted two full pages to the figure of Fulgencio Batista, whose portrait appears in the back cover next to the Indonesian Suharto and the Soviet Joseph Stalin, among ten more recent tyrants.

Batista's non-democratic successor in Cuba, who by then had just died in late November 2016, after nearly five decades in power, was not featured in this issue, except in Batista's own profile: "Student intellectuals—among them a young Fidel Castro—and a handful of business leaders decided to mobilize" against Batista, who, after being defeated by "an urban and rural guerrilla uprising" also "under the command of Che Guevara," ultimately "fled with his amassed personal fortune" (47).

It is likely that Ball spent much time in Cuba than her fellow countryman Joe Sloman thirty years before. Her poems, like his, attempt to grasp realistic details of life on the Caribbean Island, from the perspective of American outsiders whose writings are a sincere effort to document and understand the destination of their travel, a society that in politics behaves so radically different and yet in cultural terms it still results so culturally close to America—and not only in its museified past.

Ball is able to detect and perhaps denounce the fact that every new "Dollar Store" in the city "features everything ordinary people can't afford." She admits that "tourists are at home there" and, furthermore, only those nationals with U.S. dollars can feel there "in heaven, filling carts with

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[xliv] *Fulgencio Batista, Making Cuba Safe for Crime and Corruption.* In: *The World's Most Notorious Dictators*. Athlon Classics 25. Nashville: Athlon Classic Communications, 2017. pp. 47-48.

indigenous delicacies: light and dark rums, coffee from the mountains" (10). At tourist shops, Ball notices how "all souvenirs bear the name 'Cuba'" (25), which has become commodified as a global best-selling brand to attract travelers to the tropical Island. In the outside world, "real souvenir shops must have a million units of everything—to magnify a triumphant popularity," but she sees "in Cuba, one shelf of souvenirs, scattered, waiting," which she describes as disappointingly "bare," "indifferent and desperate," reminding her of "a stripper who announces just before her act that she's in a terrible mood" (68).

Somehow it's all about representing the self and others in a commercial fashion, but "in the thin way dreams can look like other dreams." In the end, all "tourists buy frivolity, amusement, fun—the conviction that a whole country lives for their pleasure," and, as such, "no one wants a brooding souvenir" (68).

At the same time, Havana salutes statues of dead Cubans in the same city where "no street can be named / for anyone alive" (17); the former Soviet embassy[xlv] in Havana, "tall and still, a monument" (52); widespread rumors about local personalities from yore,[xlvi] among others, are some of the reminiscences that Ball turns into poetic commentaries on the present of Cuba, and perhaps about what to expect next—that is, what should Americans expect next to them.[xlvii]

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[xlv] The building, located in the formerly bourgeois neighborhood of Miramar, was completed in 1987—construction works started in 1978—and it still hosts the Russian embassy in Cuba today. It was designed by the Azerbaijani architect Aleksandr Grigoryevich Rochegov (1917-1998). As a way of contesting Fidel Castro's narratives about the autochthonous nature of his Revolution and Cuban communism, this building is popularly compared by Cubans to a sword or a syringe—because of its peculiar profile—with the tip vertically stuck on Cuban soil. In either case, it is a counternarrative of resistance that jokingly refers to this place as the token of a foreign power imposed on Cuba, despite the rhetoric of Fidel Castro about national independence and sovereignty.

[xlvi] Not only about Cuban president turned into dictator Fulgencio Batista, as mentioned above, but also around the American writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), who lived on the Island for many years in his internationally famous Finca Vigía: "Believe it / I'll never be completely / an outsider: someone who was never there" (61).

[xlvii] In the poem "Havana After a Few Years," Ball writes about a hypothetical future of the original Revolution that is already her own present on the Island in the nineties, where old Cuban ladies evoke "the days when wealthy young men roamed the hills wearing beards and the clothing of peasants," while "the words 'American Department Store' tiled on a vestibule where no one steps," remind her "of an American sign I haven't seen in forty years" (69). In way,

Everything before 1959 feels in this written museum like ancient history, and they are mostly anecdotes that link Cuba to American literature, history and public figures—from presidents like John F. Kennedy (66) to mafia gangsters like Meyer Lansky (58), which, in turn, in the poems all show something about the Cuban past.

Ball's cultural references tend to intervene in the landscape to be apprehended by her poems. Everything can become an "allegory of an allegory of an allegory," to the point that "the meaning doesn't need us" anymore. The Cuban Utopia can also be "a scar the ocean formed around / late, too long into the sky's memory / to be erased, too tired to disappear" (47). To describe the "elegant partly decayed houses" of Havana in the nineties, for example, she compares them to Edgar Allan Poe's "Houses of Usher, but without the energy to split themselves" (10).

Incidentally, this condition by which totally ruined mansions—particularly in the municipalities of Old Havana and Center Havana—do not completely collapse after all, has been coined by Cuban exiled writer Antonio José Ponte as "miraculous statics." It can be seen as a fictional force that manifests itself when one ruin leans towards the ruins on its sides, so that they all keep themselves standing, as if indeed they didn't have enough energy even to fall down to the ground.

Her entire referential universe, together with some amateur research carried out like in a rush—as it generally corresponds to diary writing—starts in a sort of distant empathy that at certain points may fall into disorienting errors. For example, precisely in the poem *The Museum of the Revolution* that provides the title for her book, Ball mistakes a name that most Cuban students from elementary schools would know by heart. She writes about how "the visitor learns to see"

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Cuba functions in *The Museum of the Revolution* like a time capsule. Perhaps, beyond the geographical fact of its latitude on the surface of the Earth, "close to the equator, time levels" in Cuba (21).

the martyrs of different time periods. Like "the matching shoes and dress / of Lavadi Arce, American / killed by Machado, 1933" (12).

The author is making reference to América Labadí Arce (1917-1933)—her family name has been misspelled by Cubans as Lavadí or Lavadi, as a number of schools are named after her—a teenaged girl member of the Young Communist League (Liga Juvenil Comunista), who was in fact killed by the tyrannical regime of Gerardo Machado (1869-1933) on August 1, 1933. She was Cuban, not American, and she died shot by the police during demonstrations in Santiago de Cuba city. It was only days before Machado had to leave Cuba for the Bahamas, in order to save his own life, since the revolts had turned into a revolution.

The next verses of Ball's poem then become counterproductively comic: "Her martyrdom was to enter limbo / repeatedly losing a thing / that had never existed" (12). Indeed, this "American" martyr in Cuba did never exist, except now in the archives of American poetry. Given the facilities of the highly digitalized U.S. society that make information ever more accessible to the public, now millions worldwide have access to this apocryphal martyrdom, reproducing *ad infinitum* the "American" Lavadi Arce, upon the erasure of the real Cuban citizen, América Labadí Arce.

Thus, a section of the aforementioned "scar the ocean formed around / late, too long into the sky's memory / to be erased" here it has been easily erased from Cuban memory by an American author. Her misunderstanding, misreading, mishearing or even mistyping, can also be a consequence of Ball's "allegory of an allegory of an allegory," given that in principle in her memorialist museum "meaning doesn't need us" (47). Ball finishes her poem by writing that, "after examining the garb of martyrs" at the Museum of the Revolution, "the visitor regards her own clothes / with suspicion. / We're betrayed by our skin, hair, eyes, / clothing" (12).

The American gaze seems to betray the intricate intimacy of the Island, even when this traveling author pays attention to the events, carefully compiles and metaphorically rearranges them to generate meaning out of the unknown other, and even if Ball was paying her best respect to the witnessed landscape, language,[xlviii] events, persons, and collective memory in general. For the author, "the museum won't be finished / until all earth's acquired, / and the high clouds" (12). Who will finish it? Acquired by whom? We ignore the answers in these closing verse of her poem *The Museum of the Revolution*.[xlix]

The American poet and Pulitzer Prize for Poetry winner Stephen Elliot Dunn (1939-2021) wrote on the back cover of this book: "In *Quartet* Angela Ball showed that she could create credible voices for historical personages, weaving fact and invention with seamless dexterity." In a way, even if unintentionally, she has repeated that formula in *The Museum of the Revolution*. Otherwise—perhaps as an extremely discrete literary provocation—the author could be simply mocking her own readers about their naïve trust on Cuban affairs as portrayed by American

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[xlviii] English, the native language of the author, in her book is associated not only with modern tourism to the Island, but significantly with capitalist exploitation of Cubans before the 1959 Revolution: "Before the Revolution I was a bootblack / at the airport. Tourists / preferred me: I shined their shoes / in English" (57).

In turn, although Angela Ball seems surprised that "in Spanish, to learn to read / is to be alphabetized" (15), when she copies Spanish expressions into her verses, they reveal a rather awkward witness from the outside world. For example:

"El Tiempo Especial" used instead of the official expression Período Especial or Special Period (31); "Mártires Del La Compaña Nacional De Alfabetización" used instead of Mártires *de* la C*a*mpaña Nacional de Alfabetización or Martyrs of the National Literacy Campaign (15); the famous commander Camilo Cienfuegos misspelled twice as Camil*io* Cienfuegos (52, 53); "Capitalito" used instead of "Capitolio" or Capitol (54); the name of the Havana store La Filosofía misspelled as "Filosophía" (17); the saying "sobre una tumba una rhumba" (meaning that a collective celebration may follow when someone famous dies) with the last word misspelled instead of r*u*mba (4); to translate "Of Cuba, what?" the local expression "¿Y de mi Cuba, qué?", really meaning "what's up, Cuba?" (40) and the phrase "Mi mojito en La Bodeguita," wrongly attributed by many to Ernest Hemingway, transcribed as "El Bodeguito por mi mojito" (61).

[xlix] It would be interesting to know first-hand the reactions of Angela Ball to a number of imprecisions in her whole book *The Museum of the Revolution*—not only the poetic invention of Lavadi Arce—as an American author travelling to poetically represent otherness in Cuba. Perhaps, her readers might have noticed this specific mistake and they already informed her or her editors about it. In this respect, my efforts to contact twice Angela Ball at her email Angela.Ball@usm.edu were fruitless.

authors. Dunn tried to clarify in this respect, but only to make the whole enquiry more obscure: "Now in *The Museum of the Revolution* she's created a museum that is both strange and authoritative enough to give us a Cuba which we trust *is* Cuba as well as being peculiarly hers." Ultimately, "she has made herself Cuba's impressionist."

The limits of her foreign impressionism on the Island—given her "seamless dexterity" to "create credible voices for historical personages" by "weaving fact and invention"—are worth addressing in Ball's *The Museum of the Revolution*, a book apparently objective that generates another American archive of representations and interpretations of the Island.

## 3.5 The story of revolutionary Cuba that needed to be told to Americans[l]

As early as 1961, in his book *Cuba: Hope of a Hemisphere*,[139] the American communist intellectual and editor for *The Daily Worker* Joseph North (1904-1976) dedicated a whole chapter to discussing in advance the question of "The Negro in Cuba," after his visit to the revolutionary regime that was rapidly becoming a communist dictatorship on the Island.

North was on the Island to somehow explain to the American audience that the so much publicized Communist threat was not real, or that it was a legitimate alternative carried out by the people of a sovereign nation. Furthermore, "as an American of today," being "acutely conscious of the question of race—in the United States it is a primary matter affecting the lives of every white as well as of every Negro" (59). North, who was white, also tried to document on the ground that there were not serious race issues in Cuba that his fellow countrymen—including, of course, African Americans—needed to worry about.[li]

North starts by admitting that he ignored "what many do not yet know" about Cuba in America. That is, "that half of its populace is not white" (59). This affirmation is probably an empirical observation by the author, quite convenient for his conclusions. However, according to

[l] "As of year ten of the revolution, the story of revolutionary Cuba that needed to be told to Americans of the left, right, and center alike was about those three little dams thrown together in the sierra by people who didn't know how to build dams, and the one that finally seemed to work. It was about Che's useless but shrinelike spark-plug factory built deep in the mountains, far from any city. It was about Castro's grimly realistic attempts to revive Cuba's export trade. It was about Cuba's sweaty efforts to re-create itself economically, in fact from the ground up, in hopes of re-creating itself politically. If its effort to accomplish this failed, Cuba would become somebody's sugar bowl and fun house again." (**Oglesby, Carl**. *Ravens in the Storm: A Personal History of the 1960s Antiwar Movement*. New York: Scribner, 2008. pp. 221-2)

[li] It is to notice that North has a normalized use of the term "Negro", which originally superseded "colored" as a polite word for African Americans, at a time when "Black" was considered much more offensive. However, during those years Malcolm X and other African American leaders were already objecting to this term, because of its association with slavery and segregation. Since the late 1960s, other terms have been accepted, including "Afro-American" first and more recently "African American."

the different censuses of the last two centuries, the percentages of white population in Cuba have always been above 50%, at least since 1841, when slavery was prevalent in colonial Cuba.[lii] In 2012, the official census reported 64.1% whites in Cuba (66.1% in 1981 and 65% in 2002).[liii]

In his efforts to show the advantages of the new Cuban society in the making, North makes a bold generalization that is not only historically inaccurate[172] but, in practice, is only makes more invisible all inequality and discrimination on the Island: "Among the plain people, the peasants, the workers, racism did not exist; and after chattel slavery ended, there was a free intermixture in marriage" (60).

To illustrate his point, North mentions the lieutenant general of the independence war Antonio Maceo (1845-1896) and three contemporary African Cuban military men who were holding top positions in the Revolutionary Armed Forces in the early sixties. In any case, the economic interests of the United States are to blame for any residual racism on the Island: "Racism was scarcely a reality here, although seeds of it remained among the gentry of the land before the Revolution, and more were sowed by the new Conquistadores, the lords of the Yankee dollar, whose enterprises on the island discriminated against the Negro" (60).

When referring to Fulgencio Batista—the military president toppled by Fidel Castro in January 1, 1959—North omits the fact that Batista was not considered white.[liv] His rather

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[lii] **La población de Cuba.** Centro de Estudios Demográficos. C.I.C.R.E.D. Series, World Population Year 1974. Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1976.
http://www.cicred.org/Eng/Publications/pdf/c-c11.pdf

[liii] **Informe Nacional: Censo de Población y Viviendas, Cuba 2012**. *Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información (ONEI)*. January 2014.
http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/informe_nacional_censo_0.pdf

[liv] In *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*, Hugh Thomas describes Fulgencio Batista as "apparently a mulatto with Chinese blood" (1188). https://archive.org/details/cubapursuitoffre0000unse

In his biography *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), Frank Argote-Freyre affirms that during his early years in the Cuba army, Batista "earned the nickname *mulato lindo* (the pretty mulatto) from the soldiers" (18).

reductionist viewpoint in this respect is that, while in power, Batista "deliberately wooed the poverty-stricken, jobless sons of the Black Cubans to come into his army" and "consciously he raised some of them to higher officers in his echelons." Then, as Castro's "rebels were aware of his intentions," they just "warned the people" and eventually "many heroic Negros rose to officer rank among the rebels," so that "prejudice against the Negro failed to gain roots" (60).

While increasingly opposing the U.S. government, Fidel Castro is portrayed by North as a friend to the African American community: "It was no accident that a contingent of some 72 leading American Negros were personal guests of Premier Castro and the Cuban government New Year's Day of 1960." What's more, North recalls that the heavyweight boxing champion of the world Joe Louis (Joseph Louis Barrow, 1914-1981), for example, had even "sent a message to his people in the States informing them that only in Cuba could Americans find complete equality" (60), a fact that "was not lost upon the Negro people, who feel a natural kinship with the inhabitants of the neighboring land" (61).

The main goal of Joseph North is made explicit in his introductory words to *Cuba: Hope of a Hemisphere*. He addresses Americans to inform them in support of the cause of utopia elsewhere in the world. Ultimately, North is indirectly addressing his own "governmental authorities" to "find new approaches, explore new avenues, that will lead to the end of tensions between our two nations" and, hopefully, to build "bonds of trade and friendship" (9).

This ideological agenda remains almost identical today for a large number of American citizens that favor the normalization of the Cuban political and socioeconomic system, which is perceived from abroad as a legitimate alternative to the capitalist establishment and the representative democracy of the United States.

### 3.6 From “That Infernal Little Cuban Republic” to “Listen, Yankee”

*¿QUE BOLÁ CUBA? JUST TOUCHED DOWN HERE,*
*LOOKING FORWARD TO MEETING AND HEARING*
*DIRECTLY FROM THE CUBAN PEOPLE.*

BARACK OBAMA[lv]

In September 1960, Fidel Castro visited New York as the head of the Cuban delegation to the United Nations. The relations between the United States and Cuba were rapidly deteriorating by then, after the massive nationalization of U.S. companies on the Island and the early Communist tendencies of the Revolution. Also, Castro’s government was imprisoning and shooting political opponents from the very beginning, regardless of their violent or peaceful counterrevolutionary activism.

In March 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower had authorized the CIA to militarily train Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro. Furthermore, the United States had already suspended the import of Cuban sugar and soon, in January 1961, before leaving office, the Eisenhower administration was to cut all diplomatic relations with Cuba, which were fully reestablished not until over half a century later, in December 2014, under President Barack Obama.

In that contentious context, Castro told the American press[26] at Idlewild Airport (in January 1964 renamed after the assassinated president John F. Kennedy) that “the people of the United

[lv] **President Obama**. *Twitter @POTUS44*. 20 Mar 2016. 3:22PM. https://twitter.com/POTUS44/status/711649199243177984

States *is* good people" and then he pronounced the captivating concepts that were to dominate the so-called fabulous sixties in America as much as in the rest of the Cold War world: "justice" against "colonialism," "racial discrimination" and "imperialist exploitation."

Incidentally, Castro also explained in his parting words that, because his official Cuban plane had been seized over non-payment of debts to American creditors—"the authorities robbed our planes"—he was flying back to Havana on a Russian plane "simply because the Soviets are our friends." In fact, it was during that visit to New York that Castro first met the Russian leader Nikita Khrushchev, somehow sealing the initial steps of a strategical alliance that would last even beyond the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) at the end of 1991.

Knowing that Castro was in Manhattan, Margaret Randall, back then "a young writer and soon-to-be single mother," felt that she needed "to see the hero up close, applaud his stance, express my personal appreciation." And, as such, she decided to "carefully, lovingly" cook "a platter of Spanish paella" for the bearded Cuban commander in chief (1), as she writes in a 2009 memoir about her long-lasting Cuban experience.[151]

The twenty-three-year old New York artist and activist had to rush to buy "drumsticks and wings at Mrs. Schiffer's Second Avenue butcher shop," plus some "giant langoustine shrimp in the market three blocks uptown," as well as "peas, black olives, bell peppers and imported saffron." Every time she "told the food merchants" for whom she was cooking that day, all of them always "showed their enthusiasm in one way or another." For example, "one threw in an extra half pound of sausage" and "another handed me one gorgeous sweet red pepper" (1).

Randall recalls that she was singing for joy as she cooked for Castro. Finally, "when the paella's colors shone robust and each ingredient had reached its moment of perfection," she covered the platter "with aluminum foil and carried it onto an uptown subway train" (1) on her

way to the Waldorf Astoria hotel, in order to feed the foreign guerrilla and statesman, without much need of announcing herself in advance or worrying about personal security issues for the Cuban leader.

Randall was dismayed to know that Castro had already left for the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, where Castro met with many African American leaders, including Malcolm X (1925-1965) and the poet Langston Hughes (1901-1967). And she mentions that "some said the hotel administration accused them of keeping live chickens in their rooms" (1). But it seems that Castro was only at the Waldorf Astoria during his honeymoon in 1948, back in his university years.[140]

In 1960, the Cubans were renting the Shelburne hotel,[77] from where they did leave for the Theresa hotel because in principle the "manager demanded from the Cuban delegation a deposit of 20,000 dollars as a guarantee against possible damages," since "they feared […] that the counterrevolutionary groups could affect the hotel with stones or an attack." As a consequence, Castro ordered his chancellor Raúl Roa to "tell them they are bandits" and they moved to the so-called "Waldorf of Harlem."

In any case, when Randall reached the Theresa hotel on 125th Street, she recounts, she "was immediately met by a cordon of New York's Finest" and, therefore, "no amount of pleading convinced the police officers to let me through. Nor were they willing to take my aromatic gift and see that it got to its intended recipient." Not only her memory, but her "body still remembers its disappointment as I headed back downtown with the platter untouched, its metallic covering soiled and torn, its contents beginning to sour" (1).

This anecdote of somehow attempting to feed[170] and the failure to satisfy Castro will become a recurrent theme in the incessant interactions between international intellectuals and the Cuban caudillo, in a sort of saga that could be titled *Finding Fidel*. For many, the dichotomy

between the man of action versus the man of thought was harmoniously embodied in the personality and trajectory of Fidel Castro. He had the power to turn his thoughts into actions. And his actions were powerful enough to illustrate both theory and theorists.

This tradition can be traced back, among other classics of literature, to William Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, where Horatio represents the man of intense intellect, while Fortinbras is a character prone to immediate action. The American literary critic Norman Holland once summarized it like this: "At the end of the play, the man of thought and the man of action stand facing each other, separated, divided; between them lies the man who was both, a failure precisely because he was both."

Fidel Castro, if we assume this allegory, would represent a Hamlet that didn't fail but succeeded, understood as a revolutionary of reason. In the American imagination—in part, thanks to the epic portrayals of Castro in the American press—the Cuban leader became a Robin Hood-like hero who was now in a position to implement the ideas and ideologies that Western intellectuals had popularized for years, but that they had failed to bring into social practice.

In particular, from the viewpoint of the American liberal and progressive sectors, after the historic hallmark of January 1959, the Revolution was expected to leave behind the capitalist past of the Cuban Republic, and then embark on the exciting experiment of establishing Utopia in the Tropic of Cancer, as an emancipatory alternative living next to the much criticized democracy of the United States.

Paradoxically, this alternative reality had to be somehow caused by the failures of the policy of the United States itself, not by the social and historical needs of the Cuban people.

For example, in his book *Cuba: Prophetic Island*,[70] the American novelist and historian Waldo Frank (1889-1967) recognized as early as 1960 that:

> Even earlier than the embargoes and boycotts, we set the stage for what has occurred. We so acted as to offer Cuba the alternatives: starve or do business with Russia. […] We forced Cuba to be free—or cease to exist. Cuba's was an authentic American revolution, and it still is. We forced it into relations with Russia: economic and political, with the cultural to follow. […] Above all, there is immense danger that the state of perpetual defense against possible attack, which we are forcing upon Cuba, will harden Cuba into the authoritarian and totalitarian forms that war and defense against war ineluctably require (169-70).

America was guilty before the fact, thus leaving little agency for Cuban citizens to legitimately approve or oppose their new national destiny, independent from American imperialism. Decades later, in her speech at the 1984 Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas, the American political scientist and diplomat Jeane Kirkpatrick (1926-2006)—in her youth a member of the Socialist Party of America (dissolved in 1972), only to become a Democrat in 1948 and finally a Republican in 1985—summarized this tendency as the blaming of America first.[101]

Back then Kirkpatrick maintained that, understanding "the dangers of endless self-criticism and self-denigration," "the American people know that it's dangerous to blame ourselves for terrible problems that we did not cause." Because "a civilization that feels guilty for everything it is and does will lack the energy and conviction to defend itself."

Kirkpatrick's phrase has resonated in American politics and foreign policy until today, as evidenced, among others articles, by the op-ed *The Left Still Blames America First*,[49] published in *The Wall Street Journal* by the novelist and essayist Mary Eberstadt in the summer of 2020. Eberstadt claims that the "self-flagellating impulse" of "blaming America first is also the dominant chorus in academia" nowadays, a tendency that she traces back to the eighties, when "the 'Hey

hey, ho ho, Western culture's got to go' campaign at Stanford University jettisoned certain 'dead white males' from the curriculum, thereby establishing the dictum that all cultures are equal—except for the West's, which is worse." According to her, the "target" now "is instead the U.S. at large: its history, its institutions and its place in the world," by promoting "the idea that the U.S. is uniquely, fatally flawed."

After his stay in Cuba, which started in the fall of 1959, Waldo Frank was so captivated that he returned to the political activism from which he had removed himself during the 1950s. Back in the U.S., Frank even temporarily accepted the position of chairman of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), the activist group founded in New York by Robert Taber in April 1960, and which was to be described at a 1961 United States Senate hearing "as serving to glorify the Castro government and acting as its publicity agent."

The United Press International columnist Louis Cassels (1922-1974) in 1961 described Taber as a "Castro supporter" who is "wielding sword and pen for Castro," while the FPCC was for this journalist a group "heavily infiltrated by Communists" that "plays on traditional American sympathy for the underdog," since "it depicts Fidel Castro as a misrepresented patriot who is being 'bullied' by a big neighbor."[20]

In his book *Cuba: Prophetic Island*, Waldo Frank himself sounds somehow prophetic about "the day—if it must be—of Cuba's succumbing to the antidemocratic forces," which, "within the psychology of war," for him, it "will be no victory for the United States" (171).

Again, Frank focuses on his own country, even on the pretense of shifting the focus by privileging the Cuban gaze. In such a hypothetical scenario without the alternative of Castro's Revolution to the U.S. establishment, he concludes that by then "we, too, shall have become the victims of a corrupt authoritarianism, of economic and intellectual regimentation, of all the false

simplifications of a culture of war and of preparation for war." That is, "we, too, shall have lost the flexibilities and fluencies of freedom. For we, too, will be threatened by our threat" (171).

Rafael Rojas, in his 2016 book about the engagement of the U.S. intellectual elite with the Cuban Revolution,[155] comments that the ideological identification of Waldo Frank reached the point of writing a letter to Fidel Castro where he expresses "my gratitude to you, and I sign up as a modest member of your team, for we share the same enemies and the same goal" (63).

Rojas then concludes that "for his part, Castro saw in Waldo Frank's support—as he did in the backing of other Western leftist intellectuals at that moment, such as Jean Paul Sartre or C. Wright Mills—yet another confirmation of the symbolic possibilities of the Cuban process: those possibilities could be realized not only in underdeveloped or colonial regions of Latin America, Africa, or Asia, but also in the public spheres of Europe and North America."

The best survival strategy for the little island in the Caribbean was to strike back at the heart of the Western world. Furthermore, in the closing lines of his letter, Frank seems to submit to the military leader: "May you lead this new world for many years" (63).

Rojas notices the interconnection between the idea of a new world and the new American left, as suggested by the same letter of Waldo Frank, who confessed to Castro that he was "a loyal American who has always interpreted the term 'New World' seriously, always believing that the state of an authentic new world should be made into a reality in our hemisphere" (63).

In short, for Waldo Frank "Cuba's only hope is our own hope" (171). The interdependency between Cuba and the United States is taken for granted. And Waldo Frank seems to be asking his people to rethink this alliance in more equitable terms. In fact, he had proposed the same idea regarding Latin America to at least the two previous generations of American leaders:[71] "Our aggressiveness will throw the Hispano-American nations into the hands of whatever power in

Europe or Asia or both stands ready to counterpoise us. And in two more generations the immense resources of America Hispana will have torn our hemisphere asunder" (146).

For Cuba, which "has been the victim of evil in many forms, for a long time," Waldo admits, "it is right to hate evil." But a "hate which oversimplifies and becomes hate of the perhaps unconscious evil-doer, like mere resistance to evil, cannot overcome evil." Therefore, the American prophet makes quite a modest proposal[lvi] to his prophetic Island beyond its revolutionary *Realpolitik*: "Hate must be transcended by a positive good, and the one good is love" (159).

Coincidentally, in *Man and Socialism in Cuba*, commander Ernesto Guevara, one of the most radical executors of violence to attempt to achieve Utopia on Earth—during the first months of the Revolution he was in charge of the executions at La Cabaña fortress in Havana—also insisted in an analogous need of love in the time of changes: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality. […] Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize their love for the people, for the most hallowed causes, and make it one and indivisible" (43).

At the end of his short life, the American sociologist Charles Wright Mills (1916-1962) from Columbia University was also very interested, like Waldo Frank, in translating as soon as possible the Cuban Revolution for the U.S. public, in an effort to establish a counternarrative to

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[lvi] In reference to the satire that the Irish author Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) published anonymously in 1729: *A Modest Proposal (for preventing the children of poor people in Ireland from being a burden on their parents or country and for making them beneficial to the public).*
http://www.secret-satire-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Jonathan-Swift-A-Modest-Proposal.pdf
Swift shocked his readers by ironically suggesting cannibalism to alleviate the horrible living conditions of the poor, while actually exposing the hypocrisy of the wealthy and powerful at that time:
"I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout" (7). "I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing" (12).

the anti-Communist bias of the mainstream media. Wright Mills visited Cuba in August 1960 and stayed on the Island for a time until he had enough material to write *Listen, Yankee*.[186]

This book has become increasingly controversial, since it explores the Cuban Revolution from the viewpoint of a Cuban revolutionary. Here the American witness, in order to be more convincing to his own fellow countrymen, pretends to have a totally invisible foreign gaze, although it is obvious that the author knows full well how to target and impact the American perspective, in order to generate not only understanding in the United States and perhaps even in Europe, but also to mobilize solidarity with Fidel Castro and his revolutionary regime.

Wright Mills was convinced of the need for developing "the sociological imagination," as stated in his 1959 homonymous book,[187] in order to destabilize the dubious—or rather deceitful—binaries posed by the concrete context and mentality of the Cold War era. Wright Mills cared about the nature of intellectual politics and, beyond the notion of the intellectual engagement being developed by Jean Paul Sartre in Europe, for example, in America he was proposing a sort of intellectual craftsmanship to better explain and influence the cultural concepts of his time in all their complexity, creatively avoiding the commonplaces of the period.

In his famous *Letter to the New Left* from 1960,[188] Wright Mills denounces "the uselessness of Vulgar Marxism" as much as "the uselessness of the liberal rhetoric" for being both "largely a mechanical reaction" and "not a creative response" to the recently criticized "ideology of Stalinism," which the international Left launched only after the twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, when the then newly appointed First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev denounced in his "Secret Speech"[98] the personality cult and the crimes against humanity committed during the three decades of rule of Joseph Stalin.

By exploring in depth and explaining in detail the brave new example of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, a Western country culturally closer to the United States and not related at all to Russia until then, Wright Mills tried to corroborate one of the theses of his *Letter to the New Left*: "In Cuba, a genuinely left-wing revolution begins full-scale economic reorganisation."

In *Listen, Yankee* he is more explicit about this innovative vision that soon was to be accepted by many. In agreement with Waldo Frank and later many others, for Wright Mills, America is again the one to be held first and foremost responsible for the fortunes and misfortunes of Cuba: "U.S. policies and lack of policies are very real factors in *forcing* the Government of Cuba to align itself politically with the Soviet bloc, as against assuming a genuinely neutralist and hence peaceful world orientation. […] These U.S. policies are forcing the Cuban Government to become 'harder,' to become more restrictive of freedom of expression inside Cuba. In brief, they are forcing Cubans to identify all 'minority views' with 'counterrevolution.' And they are forcing the Cuban Government to identify 'anticommunism' with 'counterrevolution'" (179-80).

Consequently, according to Wright Mills, it was not the tactic of the Communists dismantling all of Cuba's democratic institutions while denying any Communist influence[lvii] that

[lvii] In many of Fidel Castro's speeches and interviews before 1961, he emphatically assured, particularly when American reporters were present, that the fearmongering of Communist interference in the hemisphere shouldn't be used as a weapon against his Revolution, since the radical social transformations were simply the program of a national liberation movement "as green as the royal palm trees", a popular symbol not associated with politics but with the nation as a whole and its independence: a royal palm tree has been present in the official coat of arms of the Cuban Republic from 1906 until today. Coincidentally, the military fatigues of Castro's Rebel Army were also olive green. (*Fidel Castro on MTP in 1959: "I Am Not Communism."* In: *Meet the Press*. NBC News, 19 April 1959.)
https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/castro-in-1959-i-dont-hate-anybody-including-my-enemies-504767043668

Salvador Díaz-Versón Rodríguez (1905-19XX), a Cuban journalist and intelligence officer, is one of the many who were convinced that Fidel Castro was in touch with international Communism since the early forties. (**Díaz-Versón, Salvador**. *When Castro Became a Communist: The Impact on U.S.-Cuba Policy*. In: *Latin American Studies*. Institute for U.S.-Cuba Relations, 1997.) http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/diaz-verson.htm

In any case, rigorous researchers have exhaustively documented the secret maneuvers carried out by Castro with the Communists, as soon as the Revolution overtook power on January 1st 1959 and most likely before that date. (**Szulc, Tad**. *Fidel Castro's Years as a Secret Communist*. In. *The New York Times*, 19 October 1986, section 6, page 47.)
https://www.nytimes.com/1986/10/19/magazine/fidel-castro-s-years-as-a-secret-communist.html

needed to be questioned, but "the kind of ignorant and hysterical 'anticommunism' that is now the mood, the tone, and the view of many of the highest governmental officials of the United States of America," which "is of the McCarthy type." And, of course, who would not be "just as opposed to this as I am to Stalinist practice and proclamation" (180), once Stalinism was being stigmatized even in the Soviet Union in order to save the renewed spirit of Socialism worldwide?

In another curious coincidence with the conceptions that later will be published in *Man and Socialism in Cuba* by the revolutionary leader Ernesto Guevara—analogous to the aforementioned plea of Waldo Frank that love should be a positive good to transcend hate—Wright Mills introduces the early idea of "the creation by the revolution itself of new kinds of men and women" (142).

This is possible for Cubans, according to him, because given their youth they enjoy the "enormous advantage as revolutionaries" of not belonging "to the old left intelligentsia—the older men who had gone through Communism and been disillusioned with Stalinism." That is, Cubans, by comparison to Europeans and Americans, are not "wounded" by "all that terribly destructive process," and "so we are free" from "all that cynicism and futility about what we're doing, and about what we feel must be done." In sum, "we are new men" who "are so original and so spontaneous and so unafraid to do what must be done in Cuba" (43).

Being a "people without bad memories," according to Wright Mills, Cubans are meant to be the "new radicals" of "a new left in the world." For him, it had to be a society "without any of that ideological background" the one that "had the courage for revolution," and the only "able to do what must be done without the fear that all this instils in so many" (43).

By simplifying the complexity of the violent transformations in Cuba—including an armed civil conflict that lasted until the mid-sixties, in which many revolutionaries now fought against Castro considering him a traitor to the original Revolution[54]—this mystification not only makes

invisible the massive number of victims in Cuba, but, by apparently empowering a people bound to build Utopia on the Island, the illusory innocence of Wright Mills has deprived Cuban citizens of historical agency. In a way, like the stereotype of the good savage, Americans appropriate the Revolution by infantilizing its actors, much in the style in which using "racialized infantilization" (8) minorities in the United States are monolithically portrayed.[12]

In *Listen, Yankee* the American citizen Wright Mills tried to define how Americans are seen from the Cuban perspective, which he has explicitly appropriated as his own in this writing experiment. The apparently Cuban author of this book then explains that "Cuba―listen, Yankee―Cuba is your big chance. It's your chance to establish once again what the United States perhaps once did mean to the world" (151).

For him, the Cuban Revolution is but another way of restoring the founding principles of the United States, lost at some point during its establishment and expansion as a nation. Once again, the American pretending to be a Cuban that writes back to America, states that it is "what the U.S. has failed to do in connection with our revolution that has forced us, finally, to see that maybe we do *belong* in the Soviet political alliance" (152).

From Havana Wright Mills asks the White House "what choice has your Government *ever* given us about this?" And his answer mimics his own Cuban version of that one and only "one thing" that the term "'Yankee' means to us"―that is, to Cubans. For him, *Yankee* means in *Listen, Yankee* that there are "no choices given" to the others (152).

Ironically, this is quite an accurate definition in the end. His book, privileged by his Cuban experience, gives no alternative to this enactment of a Revolution in desperate need of sovereign spokespersons abroad. Wright Mills takes for granted the "insane hurtfulness" (153) that the U.S. has brought to Cuba and that the concept of *Yankee* for generic Americans―according to one of

them—is reduced to “anything financially significant” (154). As such, the main plea of *Listen, Yankee* is that, on the Caribbean Island, “what we want from your Government and your monopolies can now be put into just one word: ‘Nothing.’ Or in four words: ‘Just let us alone’” (154).

Yet, in turn, this is not quite accurate as before. On the one hand, the American author is indeed telling Americans both what they “ought” to do and stop doing, taking advantage of the unique opportunity of the Cuban Revolution to “use Cuba,” before it’s too late, “as The Case in which to establish the way you are going to act when there are revolutions in hungry countries everywhere in the world” (159).

On the other hand, the diagnosis by Wright Mills from Cuba about the United States and its imperialistic foreign policy is that “we Cubans think most of you Yankees these days are just wandering about, without aim, without knowing what’s going on in the world, and in your own country, and without caring much.” Consequently, the change of letting Cuba alone means to practice inaction. Literally, “you’ve got to act, because as we’ve told you, you are so powerful and you are so rich that for you to just do nothing, that *is* to act” (159).

Only then the meandering meaning of all this argumentation is revealed to the reader, in America and abroad: what Americans “must” do “is to act politically inside your own country to insure that your Government will not use violence, directly or indirectly, in any form, against the Cuban revolution.” A slogan summarizes this claim much better than the book as a whole: “Hands off Cuba! That, in three words, is what we want above all else from you” (163).

Paul Hollander, in his classic work *Political Pilgrims* about the travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, mentions that closed societies such as “China under Mao or Cuba under Castro,” tend to be admired by intellectual mind precisely because “these

were social systems which exuded a sense of purpose and appeared to have provided meaningful lives for their citizens" (8).

Wright Mills might be biased when he depicts his so-called Yankees as a people who wander without aim, not knowing what's going on in the world and not caring much about their country. But there is certainly a coincidence with Hollander's more objective assessment two decades later, when it comes to representing the Cuban Revolution as a utopic alternative to real-life market economy and representative democracy in the Western world.

In *Political Pilgrims*, Hollander explains how a purposeful life "comprises the achievement of or the striving for 'wholeness,'" as well as "the sense of identity and community, meaning and purpose," all of them rare existential accomplishments in open societies enduring "the process of secularization and bureaucratization" (24). Such social systems were once dissected by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who coined the term "schizocapitalism."[42]

For Hollander, a non-utopic society "can no longer either legitimate the curbing of individualistic impulses and fantasies, or offer fulfilling social myths and values which could divert attention from the growing preoccupation with the self." And that is why individuals, "behind the metaphors of wholeness, identity, and community," are simply "craving for a universe that has meaning, purpose, and direction." Hollander maintains that intellectuals, moreover, "find it less tolerable and more troublesome to live in a world of 'disenchantment' from which 'the ultimate and sublime values have retreated'—as Max Weber characterized the corrosive process of secularization" (28-29).

All this may lead to several forms of "estrangement from one's society," and, according to Hollander, this is what "invariably precedes or accompanies the projection of hope and affirmation

upon other ones." As mentioned in the fourth part of my introductory chapter, Arthur Rimbaud's nineteenth-century observation "true life is elsewhere" still continues to haunt contemporary life.

Hollander also considers how "the societies these Western intellectuals tend to idealize in turn attack Western societies—through their spokesmen and mass media—on almost exactly the same grounds as the estranged intellectuals." To all effects, such "kindred voices" appear to be aligned "across the various geographical and ideological boundaries," because they too "denounce capitalistic greed and wastefulness, excessive military expenditures, racism, poverty, unemployment, the impoverishment of human relationships, the lack of community, the vulgar noises of advertising, the crudeness of commercial transactions—practically everything that is intensely disliked by the Western intellectual." This convergence generates "some sense of affinity" among "those who seemingly share his values, his likes and dislikes" (8).

In the case of Wright Mills, the Cuban Revolution certainly "provided him for the first time with an emotional home," as recalled by the American social critic and author Harvey Swados in a personal memoir.[169] This infatuation had to do with his conviction about "the blind rapacity of the American power elite" anywhere in the world, as much as with the initial naivety of "his reaction to Castro's assurance that he and his fellows had been studying Mills during their long months in the mountains" (41-42), thus irreversibly recruiting his professional pride for the Cuban revolutionary cause.[47]

In his 2017 book about Wright Mills and the Cuban Revolution,[178] the essayist A. Javier Treviño discusses the personal impact on Wright Mills of the public declaration of Fidel Castro, in December 22, 1961.[27] In this speech Castro claimed that he was a Marxist-Leninist and that his Revolution was communist after all. His declaration challenged the legitimacy of the neutrality thesis proposed in *Listen, Yankee*.

Fidel Castro made the announcement in his typical demagogic style, but blamed the United States for his own decision: "This is why it is not the leaders, but it is the people, it is the masses those who raise our hands and say and repeat that we are and we will be Marxist-Leninists! Didn't Imperialism want socialism? Well then, we'll give them three cups of socialism!"

In his 2009 book about the intellectual legacy of Wright Mills,[74] the American historian Daniel Geary insists that Wright Mills did feel personally betrayed by Castro's later commitment to international communism. This was not so much because Castro's geopolitical choices were undermining the main thesis of *Listen, Yankee*, but because it showed that his implacable critics were not clueless.

In some of his private letters to his family,[189] Wright Mills expresses his frustrations and hopes. Early in 1961, he is still in denial about what "the gutter newspapers and TV say about my book and about Fidel. They lie. This book is the truth." For him, "these Yankee idiots are wrong" (126), referring to the U.S. government and their diplomats throughout Latin America. Around this time, a lawsuit was filed against Wright Mills and his publishers, for alleged libel and defamation of character regarding some Cuban businessmen, which claimed $25 million in damages to their reputation. Wright Mills complains that "the pressure on me because of Cuba, official and unofficial, is mounting," and that "it is very subtle and very fascinating. But also worrisome and harassing" (320). All this probably worsened his heart condition.

Months before, in October 1960 he wrote of feeling "on the edge of exhaustion" (321). "Fidel keeps cabling me to come on down and convalesce in Cuba," Wright Mills writes, where a doctor friend said to him "that just to step on the island will cure me!" (324).

At least in one letter from April 1961, less than a week after the U.S.-backed military invasion of Bay of Pigs to Cuba,[134] Wright Mills signs a letter with the Spanish words "*Con un*

*abrazo revolucionario*"—with a revolutionary embrace—for being "in the middle of fighting the criminal activities of the Kennedy administration against Cuba" (331).

It should be mentioned that indeed many Cuban exiles were then engaged in military plans not only on American soil, but in several Latin American countries. This was considered a patriotic endeavor to recover through the use of force the national sovereignty of their homeland, keeping Cuba from irreversibly becoming one of the Communist nations. Contrary to Wright Mills, Cubans were convinced that, regarding dystopia, it could happen there,[lviii] as in fact it has been happening there until today, in a Caribbean neighbor that many Americans have seen as the Island of the Utopia of the others.

Wright Mills appeals to the understanding of his mother in his defense of Castro's Revolution, "for although she has never seen Cuba I know that she has—as her image of the human being—the men and women of Mexico." For him "the Cubans are my Mexicans" (331). Thus, it seems that mother and son share the impression that the ideal human being will not live in the United States, but elsewhere. This doesn't mean that Wright Mills and his family are anti-American. The point is that, as Americans, they consider themselves humans, so that their search for humanity in others needs to take place elsewhere. This solidarity search and inclusive empathy aims towards the humanization of non-Americans, as a way to criticize and help to correct the American gaze, which has supposedly dehumanized others throughout history.

Perhaps, the focus of the Wright Mills family on Mexicans and Cubans was in the hope of humanizing the American gaze with regard to the others. Mexicans and Cubans play the role of

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[lviii] A reference to the title and topic of *It Can't Happen Here*, the 1935 dystopian novel by the American Nobel Prize in Literature winner Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951). This book fictionalizes the rise of a totalitarian dictator in the United States much in the way that Adolf Hitler had by then recently gained power in Germany.
http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301001h.html

alter-Americans. By providing Wright Mills with the living evidence of how wrong America sees—and seizes—the rest of the world, Wright Mills becomes a rebel with a cause in America, not on the Island or in Latin America. If his book had been called *Listen, Cubano*, it would have been easily dismissed by his intellectual colleagues as Americentric cultural imperialism. Ironically, the choice of *Listen, Yankee* closes the cycle of communication from Americans to Americans, using Cubans as catalyst comrades to make his viewpoints count for Americans and in America.

Wright Mills's outlook reminds us of the religious characteristics of certain kinds of pilgrimage, discussed by Nenzi in her contribution to the 2016 book *Pilgrims*. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, for her a trip is intrinsically interconnected with "spiritual enrichment, contemplation, and self-reflexivity, irrespective of the presence of a deity," because the "secular appropriations of the pilgrim persona reflect a somewhat romanticized characterization of pilgrimage as a special space and time, set apart from one's normal life" (225).

Michelle Chased has written in her review of Treviño's book,[32] that "the 'socialism with heart' Mills had hoped for proved too fragile for the Cold War" and its extremely tense climate. A. Javier Treviño himself agrees as a concluding remark that "for Mills, Cuba represented the possibility of a third way between U.S. liberalism and Soviet totalitarianism; the Revolution, in his eyes, provided for a humanistic socialism, a Marxism with heart" (125).

Such a utopian heart is appropriated by the claims of a renewed revolution that leftist-leaning caudillos recurrently apply to their own political movements, precisely to entice the social solidarity of American and European progressive thinkers and activists. By contrast, right-wing authoritarian regimes invariably deserve intellectual condemnation. In general, regardless of political stance, a humanistic capitalism would be considered a contradiction in terms. And the

conjecture that Fascism could ever have a heart, by comparison to Treviño's quote of "a Marxism with heart," would stigmatize the speaker as Fascist.

No wonder that Susan Sontag in the early eighties "provoked an outburst of discussion" in America—including "boos and shouts" for her "obfuscating" and "meaningless" betrayal—when she compared both antidemocratic temptations as related totalitarian tendencies: "Communism is Fascism—successful Fascism, if you will. What we have called Fascism is, rather, the form of tyranny that can be overthrown—that has, largely, failed. […] Communism is in itself a variant, the most successful variant, of Fascism. Fascism with a human face."

Despite heated debates, *Listen, Yankee* has nevertheless been regarded as "the most significant piece of travel writing on early Revolutionary Cuba," (204) according to professor Peter Hulme.[95] Yet, Professor Todd Tietchen considers *Listen, Yankee* a Cubalogue. That is, according to his 2010 book,[174] "an explicitly political subgenre of Beat travel narrative," which also comprises Lawrence Ferlinghetti's *Poet's Notes on Cuba*, Amiri Baraka's *Cuba Libre*, and Marc Schleifer's *Cuban Notebook*. All of these are literary reportages "driven by a profound skepticism concerning the negative portrayal of Castro's revolution within the mainstream U.S. media" (2).

These testimonies exploit the authority of firsthand knowledge in order to recreate the "early revolutionary events" in Cuba "as a politically vital set of values opposed to what their authors experienced as the rhetorical preconditions of the U.S. public sphere and its role in the production of Cold War public opinion" (3).

Beyond his own plausible disappointment, the visions of C. Wright Mills, as much as the prophecies of Waldo Frank—two American intellectuals infatuated by the idyll of Utopia in the "backyard of Imperialism," only ninety miles south to the United States—were to be borrowed in the oratory of Fidel Castro during the next half century, as the Cuban Maximum Leader justified

most of his conflicts and contradictions by invoking the threatening presence of American Imperialism only ninety miles north of the Revolution Square in Havana.

In a sort of cynical synergy between social systems established in the ideological antipodes of the Cold War world, the cruelly skeptical ending of the 1945 political satire *Animal Farm*[142] by George Orwell (1903-1950) comes to mind here: "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" (105).

We cannot ignore the continuous waves of Red Scare[lix] in the U.S. over the course of the first half of the twentieth century and its anti-Communist climax during McCarthyism.[lx] Nor can we ignore intellectual resistance to acknowledging the dangers of Communism in America and abroad.

In *The Red Decade* (1941),[115] the American journalist Eugene Lyons (1898-1985)—who had been an early fellow traveler in the Soviet Union, where he worked several years as a correspondent of United Press International,[116] before becoming very critical of Communism—describes the protocols of Western intellectuals when it comes to defending the Utopia of the others. Lyons was also initially attracted by any alternative regimes located elsewhere but in America, as long as they declared themselves to be the enemies of capitalist exploitation and imperialist expansion.

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[lix] *The Red Scare*. In: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States/The-Red-Scare

[lx] **U.S. Department of** State. *Diplomatic Security in the 1950s*. In: *McCarthysm and Cold War*. Ch. 4.
https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/176702.pdf
**Achter, Paul J.** *McCarthyism, American history*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
https://www.britannica.com/topic/McCarthyism

Besides ideological affiliations and the manipulation of audiences, as well as some cases of espionage in favor of the Utopian powers, Lyons in general agrees—decades before the revolutionary work of Deleuze and Guattari—that the schizocapitalist speculation for profits is less seductive than a rationally controlled society. Thus, tyranny becomes relativistic as much as the notion of freedom becomes unreliable.

Lyons claims of many American enthusiasts of real Communism that they "were hopelessly dazzled by the idea of 'planning'" and "achievements" (103). Consequently, according to Lyons, they were "lightly and cheerfully" eager "to dismiss every enormity of the growing terror" for the sake of "the Plan and the Revolution which they worshipped." In practice, "no rationalization was too farfetched if it helped salvage their faith" (105).

Lyons, furthermore, notes how a widespread strategy, in order to discourage debate about egalitarian societies, was to constantly compare them with the worst social injustices of the American system: "Against official terror as a principle of government and on a millionfold scale unmatched in history, they cited rough New York cops or a few miscarriages of justice in California and Massachusetts." And, again, "against concentrations camps holding literally millions of peasants and workers and intellectuals, they cited the company police of textile towns" (105).

At some point, fellow travelers went so far as to elaborate on the eugenic-like utopia of a New Man—decades before Ernesto Guevara in revolutionary Cuba—explaining it as an unavoidable step toward reaching a better future for humanity. In the sixties, the American sociologist Lewis Samuel Feuer—initially a committed Marxist who became disenchanted when the crimes of Stalinism were revealed by the Soviets during the period known as The Thaw (1953-1964)—compiled for *American Quarterly*[64] a number of exaggerations that could have been

comical, if they were not horrific in terms of the number of victims of Communism during the twentieth century, not only in the USSR.

For example, Eduard C. Lindemann,[113] professor of Social Philosophy at Columbia University's School for Social Work, in 1933 supported the thesis that there was enough "evidence in the Soviet Union that a basic change in human nature was under way" (128), in the genetic sense that "acquisitiveness" was becoming a "recessive trait" in human beings. In the dictatorship of proletariat, consumerism was doomed even in human chromosomes.

This may bring to mind the Swiftian satirical novel *Homo Sovieticus*[191] by the Russian sociologist Alexander Zinoviev (1922-2006), a title from the eighties that appropriates a term which in 1974 had been coined in that country but as a serious prediction, in the book *Советские люди* (*Soviet People*): "The Soviet Union is the fatherland of a new, more advanced type of *Homo Sapiens—Homo Sovieticus*."[lxi]

Another illustrative example mentioned by Feuer in his 1962 article on American travelers to the Soviet Union, is the prolific writer Bruce Ormsby Bliven (1889-1977), for decades the managing editor of *The New Republic* and a "champion of liberalism" who was the "intellectual godfather" of president Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, according to Bliven's obituary in *The New York Times*.[183]

Bliven, as quoted by Feuer, maintains that "private capitalism has never, in any country," come even close to matching the "social engineering" accomplished by the USSR."[10] By comparison, the birth and building of the American nation had been nothing but "an incredibly botched job." Feuer emphasizes how Bliven magnified "the significance of the Soviet experiment"

[lxi] As quoted, in turn, by Mikhail Heller in his book *Cogs in the Wheel. The Formation of Soviet Man*. New York: Knopf, 1988.

as an international hallmark, not "merely an exhibit of what could be done in developing a backward country rapidly" but "an experiment in socialized economy with universal consequences" (146). If Communism could work well in one country, "if it succeeds even 60 or 70 per cent," then, according to Bliven, "there is every reason to believe that anywhere else in the Occident it would be a grand and glorious, a shining success."

In the context of the Red Scare in America, fellow travelers to Communist utopias were key figures to providing insights about what was happening within the so-called egalitarian societies, usually imagined as alternatives to capitalism. Unfortunately, the debate around these reports, given their enthusiastic excesses and obvious omissions, also included accusations of treason on the part of their authors against the American democratic establishment, to which the fellow travelers in principle belonged.

The American polemic journalist John T. Flynn (1882-1964) in his *While You Slept* (1951),[65] applies clinical terminology to complain about how "it is not easy to uncover the real moral and intellectual disease which took possession of the minds of so many men in places of power." Although "it is easy enough to diagnose the case of those men who were outright Communists or half-convinced fellow travelers," since "they knew what they believed and what they were aiming at," for him "the trouble lies in tracing the illness which possessed the minds of men who were neither Communists nor Socialists, yet who could be afflicted with some disorder that brought them down to a point where they saw our problems almost precisely as the Reds saw them, and led them to become, in some cases the deluded, and in some cases the completely blind partners of the enemy." Flynn concludes this was "the most gigantic propaganda assault in history" (185-86). And his sentence from the early fifties resounds in the American public sphere today,

with its long tradition of conspiracy theories, particularly regarding the fear of foreign interference in national life.

Flynn refers to those American fellow travelers as "an army of foolish men—some of them instructed—who have come amongst us to teach us the great lesson of the 'Good Life.'" He describes them as people "who can be incorporated in their social armies of discontent" so that America, despite its militarist endeavors, is at risk to "remain defenseless against the enemies within the walls" (186).

In the specific case of Cuba, the context of Communist infiltration on the Island, before and after the 1959 Revolution, has been extensively documented by academic researchers and also by personal testimonies, from the early *The Fourth Floor*,[165] by the U.S. ambassador in Havana from 1957 to 1959, to the recent *The Caribbean Soviet*,[1] by the son of two university Communist leaders from the late fifties. Although conspiracy theories and Cold War paranoia are unavoidably present in portions of these counternarratives, they are also very well historically documented.

# African Americans In Search Of The Cuban Utopia

## 4.1 Cuba in the American Imagination

In *Cuba in the American Imagination*,[147] Louis A. Pérez Jr. mentions the fear in nineteenth-century America that colonial Cuba—"this Island is within sight of our shores"—could become independent from Spain, only to be ruled by "a black Government like that of Hayti," an alleged threat that the 15th U.S. president James Buchanan[16] considered "would endanger the peace and domestic security of a large and important portion of our people" (36).

Pérez Jr. quotes the Ostend Manifesto or Circular of October 1854[lxii]—a secret communication to Secretary of State William L. Marcy from three U.S. diplomats, who recommended the U.S. seizure of Cuba from Spain. Otherwise, the "American political leaders would be guilty of committing 'base treason against our posterity,' […] 'should we permit Cuba to be Africanized and become a second St. Domingo [Haiti], with all its attendant horrors to the white race, and suffer the flames to extend to our own neighboring shores, seriously to endanger or actually to consume the fair fabric of our Union" (36).

The Ostend Manifesto[lxiii] is an early precedent of how the national motivations of the Cuban population—in 1855 it was estimated to be between 498,752 and 793,484 ("white"), 179,012 and 232,493 ("free colored"), and 359,989 and 376,784 ("slave")[100]—were represented by Americans in America, ignoring the multiplicity of voices in the Cuban people.

The document claims, exclusively from the viewpoint of American interests, that there was consensus in Spanish Cuba for the political annexation of the Island to the United States: "We cannot doubt but that it is a consummation devoutly wished for by its inhabitants." This manifesto

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[lxii] **U.S. Congress, House of Representatives**, *Ostend Manifesto*, p. 131.

[lxiii] *The Ostend Manifesto.* http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/HNS/Ostend/ostend.html

estimated that “the probability is great that the government and Cortes of Spain will prove willing to sell” Cuba to the United States “with as little delay as possible,” since “this would essentially promote the highest and best interests of the Spanish people.”

The alternative given to Spain was simply the “imminent danger of losing Cuba, without remuneration,” since “it is not improbable, therefore, that Cuba may be wrested from Spain by a successful revolution” by “the inhabitants of Cuba,” who “cannot fail to stimulate and keep alive that spirit of resistance and revolution against Spain, which has, of late years, been so often manifested.”

At the time, there were indeed some Cuban annexationist movements on the Island and in exile, out of patriotic feelings in most cases. The emancipation from Spanish monarchy, together with the integration of Cuba into what many Cubans estimated was a modern democratic republic, were legitimate options for many enlightened nationals living on the Island and abroad. But many other Cuban illustrious personalities were also warning against such an irreversible option, and instead they favored the total political independence of their nation. In any case, both economic and intellectual Cuban elites felt oppressed as subjects of a European dynasty, and many were ready to become citizens with inalienable natural rights, like those recognized in the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

However, the feelings of the Cuban colonial bourgeoisie regarding the tripartite motto “liberty, equality, fraternity” of the 1789 French Revolution were not so straightforward. Half a century later, the wealthy *criollo* classes still hesitated about it, given the revolutionary terror implemented in France, the resulting rule of emperor Napoleon Bonaparte and, significantly, the radical events of the Haitian Revolution. Seen from nineteenth-century Cuba, the neighboring Caribbean island of Haiti, in particular, was indeed feared by colonists just as Americans feared a

Black government in a free Cuba. A revolutionary emancipation from slavery could be taken as a threat to "civilized" life and the Christian values of Western culture. That is, in practice, as a menace to the white race in power on the Caribbean Island.

In this issue, the Spanish rule in Cuba and the American gaze upon it, seemed to be aligned. As one example out of many, Pérez Jr. quotes the U.S. military physician Wilford Nelson, who warned that "Cuba Libre of the blacks would be a veritable hell upon earth, a blot upon Christian civilization," and he advocated that "Cuba the fair and fertile" had no option but "to take her place in the family of nations," with "law, order, and peace guaranteed by the United States" (100).

In general, when Pérez Jr. discusses the narrative patterns of nineteenth-century America, he focuses on the racial infantilization and feminization of the representations of Cuba, with respect to adult white male America. Many common metaphors of the time "were modeled on familiar norms of authority, as a function of age differential, as a matter of gender binaries, or as a facet of racial attributes—that is, as children, as women, and as blacks" (138). The little island was somehow portrayed as in need of a responsible husband.

In particular, in American newspapers and magazines of the time, "as an adult female, Cuba was usually depicted as white," but also "as a female child," who was "often represented as black." In both cases, "the exercise of power was almost always depicted as an adult male undertaking" carried out by a "representation of the United States as male, almost-invariably in the form of Uncle Sam," who had to be "summoned to rescue Cuba," the promising but victimized Island "depicted as a helpless child or a damsel in distress" (138) and, I would add, as a virginal lady at risk of being abused by the arbitrary behavior of barbarians—be they monarchical Europeans or New World savages.

In order to be saved, Cuba deserved both compassion and active measures, most likely military action. During his visit to Havana in 1899, the American artist Frederic Remington wrote, "Our indefinite feeling is one of pity for people who are not as we are and things which are not like ours." The cause of all social evils on the Caribbean Island and its lack of development, as well as foul manners and moral, was racially-conditioned according to Remington: "Too much cannot be expected at once of a people who have always lived under Spanish misrule and abuse," "debauched by thieving officials and fire and sword," and whose "people are negroes or breeds, and they were sired by Spaniards who have never had social virtues since they were overrun by the Moors"[154] (113).

Pérez Jr. explains that "the metaphor of children, as both premise and proof of the propriety by which the Americans presumed authority over Cuba, persisted through the 1940s and into the 1950s, when the 1959 revolution of Fidel Castro brought a change of paradigms." This is documented with many examples by Pérez Jr. In 1942, the Episcopalian Minister John Merle Davis affirmed that "the Cuban people are a race still in the making" and that, after four decades of national sovereignty, Cubans still "are in the adolescent period of development."[39]

Years later, the U.S. ambassador R. Henry Norweb commented that Cuban politicians more suitably fitted in a sort of "Rogue's Gallery than [on] a roster of responsible public servants," because "many of them possess the superficial charm of clever children, spoiled by nature and geography, but under the surface they combine the worst characteristics of the unfortunate admixture and interpretation of Spanish and Negro cultures—laziness, cruelty, inconstancy, irresponsibility and inbred dishonesty." In short, for the American ambassador, Cubans had "a

natural tendency to flaunt their 'independence' in small ways—much as a puppy might yelp bravely at a mastiff behind a fence"[lxiv] (239).

Many of the American metaphors about Cuba studied by Pérez Jr. were also discussed by John Patrick Leary in his 2016 book on Latin American in the U.S. imagination.[108] Leary argues "that what came to be called Latin American 'underdevelopment' is best understood as the ideological projection abroad of the United States' own internal uneven development." For him, "the Latin American condition of underdevelopment was inevitably a reflection of the United States' spatial and political inequalities." As such, when "viewed comparatively and ideologically," Leary concludes that "underdevelopment is an ideology that alleviates American fears of falling behind" (2).

In a way, for Leary, certain notions of American exceptionalism seem to have evolved in a sort of ideological battleground with Latin America. This developmental process is the one that—and Leary shares the viewpoint of Greg Grandin[78] about this—"distinguishes inter-American relations from the north-south conflict between Europe and its African and Asian colonies." That is, Latin America is not really "an epistemic 'other,'" in terms of Grandin, but rather a contender in the struggle of political narrative and praxis, in order to appropriate the alternative meanings of republicanism, democracy, and other key terms in the history of Western hemisphere. What's even more important, Grandin proposes that this process has shaped "above all the very idea of America" (69).

In this respect, Leary prefers to imagine Latin America in the American imagination as "a kind of vanity mirror, with its best features in flattering reflection," and at the same time "a place

[lxiv] *R. Henry Norweb to Secretary of State*, 14 January 1946, 837.00/1-446.
*R. Henry Norweb to Secretary of State*, 12 September 1946, 711.37/9-1246, DS/RG 59.

where U.S. writers have seen their own country staring back at them," (3) that is, Latin America as the nearest destination for American travel writers, as well as all kind of adventurers, most of the time eager to discover the hidden "treasures" of the neighbor, interpret their accurate meaning to the U.S. public, and share them back home as tales of utopia.

When it comes to the 1959 Cuban Revolution becoming Communist—after the initial promises of its democratic character made in public by Fidel Castro himself—Leary refers to how the Caribbean Island perhaps represented "a set of unrealized desires," which were connected not only to the aspiration of overcoming underdevelopment in the region, but in general to the goal of reaching the more "universal modernity that midcentury modernization theory imagined" (15).

Cuba, as seen from the American world elites, in a way deserved to be part of the international intrigues of Cold War, because this insertion represented an ascension from commonplace corrupt capitalism to become another protagonist of contemporary history. In this sense, from many sectors in the U.S., Fidel Castro could satisfactorily fit into the role not so much of the tyrant but of a thaumaturge who would modernize his own country—even by turning Cuba into an enemy of American Imperialism, since the United States are assumed to be intrinsically modern.

The implementation by Castro of "international socialism" in Cuba—one of the Latin American countries culturally closer to America, and where there was also plenty of Red Scare propaganda—had, in turn, to manipulate and appropriate certain "meanings of the hemispheric," as well as any continental counternarrative that could effectively function both "as an institutional fiction and a political desire" (15).

Only then, could a Cuban communist regime be tolerated in the American imagination as a replacement for the lifelong narrative of "singular intimacy"[127] between Cuba and the United States, enunciated by the 25th U.S. president William McKinley in 1899. In other words, the 1959

Revolution was a rupture with the traditional American gaze, only to make Cuba more visible to a renewed American gaze.

Leary summarizes how, not only in the United States, soon after the radicalization of the Cuban Revolution and all its influence and interference in other Third World countries—the concept of "export of revolution" was becoming widespread[84]—"Latin American revolutionaries are alternately represented as dangerous threats, romantic rebels, comic charlatans, and salutary heirs to U.S. revolutionary traditions" (22) one way or another.

This representational shift included ascribing to the revolutionary hero/villain attributes for his "eroticization," which, in turn, "closely dovetails with the figure of the Latin lover in U.S. cinema," not only as a market strategy to charm American audiences, but mainly as "a means of depoliticization." That is, according to Leary, "instead of making the personal political, the political becomes purely personal in these stories, and ever-more distant from the horizon of U.S. life." This eroticization also constitutes an exoticization of the neighboring nations of the Americas, just beyond the geographical limits of the United States—in particular, the southern border. Leary calls attention to this effect as a "paradox of intimacy," namely, "when Latin America is most familiar and even seductive to Anglo-Americans, it is also irretrievably foreign" (22). That is, when Americans are more engaged in Latin American affairs, their perspective may result more alienated. This is the paradoxical tragedy of outsiders in search of their own Utopia.

This "uncanny familiarity" regarding "underdevelopment" and other Latin American stereotypes, has haunted "the cultural history of the United States' relationship with Latin America." As expected, it also lingers in "one of the most cherished" of all "tautological myths," which for Leary is the assumption "that the United States was developed because it was free, and free in part because it was so developed" (22).

Leary concludes that this is how it has become less visible how "the labor of the global South has built much of the wealth of the United States" and how it still "shapes the songs U.S. Americans sing, the books they read, and the national myths they cherish." He believes that these economic and cultural resources might have been historically "one of Latin America's most undervalued exports" (22). In short, beyond any mutual alienation or engagement, the underlying historical interconnectedness between Latin American and the United States is a complex and determining factor that merits further multidisciplinary investigation in the Western hemisphere.

By contrast to the shifting representations of the revolutionary character, Leary affirms that "consistently, though, Latin American revolutions have been imagined as the result of embodied political passions that are restrained in the developed, bureaucratic politics of the United States" (22). Again, notwithstanding the positioning of American citizens in the U.S. political spectrum, the proclivity of their perspectives tends to be self-referential. In this case, the Revolution in Latin America, according to Leary, is seen not only as an emancipation from the repressive regimes of each country, but also as the unrepressed desire of "uncivilized" neighbors—which, in turn, leads to the condescension or envy of "civilized" Americans.

In the approach of Louis A. Pérez Jr. to Cuba in the American imagination, it is implicit that the American gaze corresponds largely to the male dominant views and activities of those empowered in White America, whether statesmen, businessmen, mainstream press, intellectual elite, and other social sectors. To a certain extent, the work of John Patrick Leary on Latin America in the U.S. imagination circumvents this insufficiency by discussing some of the alternative gaze of minorities in America.

When the Cuban Revolution declared itself anti-Imperialist, many African American citizens in the U.S. looked at its leader Fidel Castro as an international ally for the cause of their

own struggles in America, advocating for human dignity, with justice and freedom for all. In January 1959, the civil rights movement was expanding at the national level, raising awareness of discrimination in the U.S. by using non-violent methods in their public demonstrations, sit-ins, freedom rides, and many other ways of protests. Although many leaders of the younger generations of this movement tried to distance themselves from the Communist Party USA—in an effort to gain a broader base of support—still the Cuban Revolution—which was not originally communist—was regarded as an emancipatory triumph for the oppressed people of the Americas.

There were of course many mutual interactions between African Americans and Cubans before the Revolution.[83] But, after 1959, any interaction was inevitably going to become part of the geopolitical roulette between Havana and Washington in the context of the Cold War. In the next chapters, I will be discussing some insights derived from the books written by African American social activists who resided in Castro's Cuba for a period of time. In some cases, for the rest of their lives.

In their Introduction to the 2016 anthology *Black Power 50*,[44] Sylviane A. Diouf and Komozi Woodard insist on the impact of the activities of American freedom-fighters on the rest of the world. The concept of Black Power, for example, soon "became a global phenomenon, capturing the imagination of anticolonial and other freedom struggles" worldwide. Anywhere "from Great Britain to the Caribbean and from India to Israel, colonized or marginalized young people rallied around slogans fashioned after 'Black Power,' and organizations were modeled or named after the Black Panther Party" (ix).

That is, "globally, where youth were denied full citizenship or where governments questioned their very humanity," the tendency of the resistance and liberation movements was then to claim "the language of Black Power in the fight for their human rights." Although "few African

Americans had actively supported or even been aware of the decolonization movement in Africa in the early 1960s," the expansion of the civil rights movement facilitated "unifying various segments of the American population," so that on the verge of the seventies "the efforts by Black Power nationalists to support African liberation reflected the sentiments of millions of African Americans" (ix-xi).

In particular, the more radicalized leaders, after an initial stage where "the Black Power movement was originally fluid and open," by the late 1960s were now demanding "black self-determination based on four main political ideologies: Marxism, revolutionary nationalism, territorial nationalism, and cultural nationalism." Eventually, "as a number of groups claimed the singular title of the revolutionary vanguard," a second stage "more rigid and ideologically polarized"—with tragic consequences for their own objectives—caused that many "conversations turned into debates and at times debates turned into violent clashes" (xi-xii).

It was then that many "radicals in the Black Power movement believed that their antiwar, anticolonial, anti-imperialist, revolutionary stance made the movement a natural ally of the countries that were part of the Soviet bloc during the Cold War." This included, of course, nearby Cuba, but also nations in other continents, like "Vietnam, China, Ghana, North Korea, Algeria, Tanzania, and Guinea", as well as "the liberation movements of the Portuguese colonies of Africa," and "South-West Africa (Namibia) and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)" (x). Consequently, the Cuban Revolution became a natural destination for American anti-establishment activists of all kinds, either searching for ideological inspiration, international networking, technical training, or political refuge.

## 4.2 You hijack a plane. Castro will honor you with a medal![lxv]

Given that radical activists felt persecuted in the United States for their rather violent activism—a number of them were already serving long prison terms after being found guilty of serious crimes, like murder of police officers—the way to reach Cuba was also radically desperate for them.

In general, soon after the end of Eisenhower administration in January 1961—when diplomatic relations with Cuba were suspended[107]—American airlines were not to be allowed by the U.S. government to schedule regular flights to Communist Cuba. The resulting drama was that, for African Americans seeking political asylum on the Island, hijacking planes became an expedite option.

The number of aircraft hijacking incidents between the United States and Cuba peaked in the years 1968-1972. They were attributed to a number of crimes—such as terrorism and extortion—but also to political asylum and even mental illness.[102] Of course, most of these actions were not carried out by African Americans, but by many other American citizens, as well as by foreigners residing in America under different migratory status—Cubans included.

Given the confrontational nature of the Cuban Revolution against the American establishment, many "skyjackers earnestly believed that upon reaching Havana, their sole destination during the mid-to-late 1960s, they would be greeted as revolutionary heroes" and escape the American justice system. Some of them—"every skyjacker was an optimist at heart, supremely confident that his story would be the one to touch Castro's heart"—justified their

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[lxv] "The weapons are waitin'. All you gotta do is bring 'em back." "How?" "Through Mexico. It's already set up. The plan can't fail." "How do I get to Cuba?" "You hijack a plane. Castro will honor you with a medal!" (Bryant, Anthony. *Hijack*. Fort Lauderdale: Freedom Press International, 1984. p.61.)

destination by declaring that “Cuba was creating a true democracy, a place where everyone was equal, where violence against blacks, injustice, and racism were things of the past.” In reality, “although Fidel Castro welcomed the wayward flights in order to humiliate the United States and earn hard currency—the airlines had to pay the Cuban government an average of $7,500 to retrieve each plane—he had little but disdain for the hijackers themselves, whom he considered undesirable malcontents.”[103]

According to Brendan I. Koerner, author of *The Skies Belong to Us*, this dangerous situation was so frequent that the phrase “Take me to Cuba!” was used as a joke in certain no-way-out situations.[135] Indeed, even the British comedy troupe Monty Python included it in *Déjà Vu*, the sixteenth episode of their TV show *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*—second season—aired in 1970.[lxvi]

From 1961 to about 1969, Koerner explains that, besides the “great animosity between the US and Cuba,” there was also “kind of a news blackout.” This may have contributed to expanding “a certain segment of the population that idealizes life in Cuba” as a “mysterious potential socialist paradise, 90 miles from Florida.” Some of them were people—Koerner acknowledges—“who were deluded and thought they’d be feted by Castro.”

An op-ed published in December 1968 by *Time* magazine calls “a funny thing” the record number established that year: “1,000 Americans have visited Cuba unexpectedly,” in a total of

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[lxvi] In this episode, a “skittish hijacker” with a gun asks the pilot of a plane to fly to Luton instead of Cuba, as scheduled for that flight. After a number of funny circumstances, he accepts to fly to Cuba “and get a flight back to Luton from there.” But eventually he is thrown out of the plane and lands safely upon a pile of hay. There he catches a bus to Luton. Inside the bus, another passenger suddenly gets up, points a machine gun at the driver, and then orders him to drive “straight to Cuba.”
(See *Episode Sixteen*. http://www.ibras.dk/montypython/episode16.htm and *Hijacked Plane*. In: *FANDOM*. https://montypython.fandom.com/wiki/Hijacked_Plane)
*Monty Python’s Flying Circus - Take this Bus to Cuba!* Chris Brown YouTube Channel. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MYxAlA5wuk

seventeen U.S airplanes hijacked and diverted to Cuba. And the editors add a list of do's and don'ts with hilarious examples from real life hijackings.[lxvii]

To deal with such an "epidemic of plane hijackings," the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered pilots "to follow the orders of their captors" and "simply re-route, let off passengers at another airport, and continue onto Cuba with just the hijacker in tow." The FAA administrators also "actually considered building a fake Cuban airport in Florida," so that, "once on the ground, American law enforcement would be there to meet the plane and arrest the perpetrator," a project that could surrealistically match the humor of Monty Python, and that was discarded only because it "was deemed too expensive." As early as in July 1968, there was a U.S. Senate hearing with an FAA representative to address this crisis, but only in 1973—after some kidnappers had threatened to crash a plane into a nuclear plant in Tennessee the year before—the FAA finally enforced bag checks and metal detectors.[46]

From January 1965 to March 1976, a chronology of incidents of political violence related to Cuba in the United States, yields thirty African American citizens involved in airplane hijacks to Cuba.[lxviii] All these cases involving African Americans occurred between June 1968 and November 1972. The list does not specify to which organizations they belonged at that time.

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[lxvii] *Travel: What to Do When the Hijacker Comes*. In: *Time*, 92 (23). 6 December 1968. http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,844656,00.html

Two cases referred in the op-ed are: a hijacker who "himself bought drinks for all passengers who desired them, at a cost of $20" and another one who "passed out .32-cal. bullets as souvenirs and chatted amicably with passengers."

Once landed in Cuba, *Time* magazine explains to its readers that "the Castro regime notwithstanding, most Cubans are indeed friendly, and they will make your layover as comfortable as possible, once formalities have been concluded. These include movie and still photography of all arriving passengers and a routine interrogation: name, address, citizenship and date of last smallpox inoculation. If you are not carrying your International Certificates for Vaccination, you may be inoculated on the spot or, worse, quarantined at the airport."

[lxviii] *Chronology of Incidents, Cuban Political Violence in the United States*. In: *Cuban Information Archives*. Document 0180, Jan 1965 - Mar 1976. http://cuban-exile.com/doc_176-200/doc0180.html

Some of the hijackers were shot or killed during the attempt or in subsequent events that took place years later—for example, trying to escape from prison—either in the United States or in Cuba. Others sooner or later returned to America, were they were charged usually for aircraft piracy and they received sentences from 50 years to life imprisonment.

Despite the humorous perception of lack of danger in the public sphere, in certain cases the pilot, for example, or a mechanic, or bystanders, were indeed wounded during the event. At least in one case, as mentioned before, the hijackers threatened to crash the plane into the Oak Ridge nuclear installation, in Tennessee. The FBI had to shoot out the tires at McCoy Air Force Base, Orlando. The DC-9 plane finally landed on a foam-covered runway in Havana. Such an adventure might be exciting to watch in a Hollywood film for the passengers and the flight crew, but not in real life.

Again, it should be stressed that many African American social activists sought refuge in Cuba once traveling there by other means, might have been unlawful and legally punished in America, but not necessarily so in Castro's Cuba. Also, the climate of insurgency of a number of African American sectors against U.S. "Imperialism" and, in consequence, against American democracy and those who represented it as members of the government should not be ignored. In turn, there was also a climate of counterinsurgency in some U.S. authorities against these activists, perceived as a serious threat to national security, and who were not always treated fairly by the justice system—including cases of alleged extrajudicial killing.

In such a scenario, for the African American militants, the representations of the Cuban Revolution and the theories of Utopia were certainly much less important than the urgent need of a fight-or-flight response to save the future of their families and their own lives. In that sociopolitical context, this reaction—also known as hyper-arousal or acute stress

response—couldn't include the third option elsewhere described as "freeze,"[lxix] because by then it would be equivalent to lifelong prison or death by execution in one covert way or another—inside or outside the legal institutions, by one side or the other in this war-like conflict.

In addition to all this—without giving credit to conspiracy theories in this respect—a top-level secret deal between Cuban and U.S. intelligence agencies at that time regarding the Black Panthers and other radical activists and agitators cannot be discarded. Throughout the history of U.S.-Cuba relations, as explained in a 2010 book by William LeoGrande and Peter Kornbluh,[110] "challenging the conventional wisdom of perpetual conflict and aggression between the United States and Cuba since 1959," "a surprising, untold history of bilateral efforts toward rapprochement and reconciliation" has existed. In fact, LeoGrande and Kornbluh maintain "negotiations have been conducted by every presidential administration since Eisenhower's through secret, back-channel diplomacy," in "a fifty-year record of dialogue and negotiations, both open and furtive."

In such a historically hypothetical scenario, the U.S. government could have benefited by deporting for life to Cuba hundreds of American citizens whom they viewed as extremely dangerous to the national security of the United States. On the other side, the Cuban Revolution would have benefited from the prestige of a socialist sanctuary that dared to defy Washington by harboring anti-Imperialist warriors from America and elsewhere.

In the case of the Black Panthers exiled in Cuba, the result is that they were neutralized as active agents of change within the U.S., minimizing the need for official repression against them

[lxix] In 2010, it was postulated that a more complete cascade of "Freeze-Flight-Fight-Fright-Flag-Faint" as "a coherent sequence of six fear responses that escalate as a function of defense possibilities and proximity to danger during life-threat." (**Schauer, M., & Elbert, T**. *Dissociation Following Traumatic Stress: Etiology and Treatment*. In: *Zeitschrift für Psychologie / Journal of Psychology*, 218(2), pp.109–127. 2010. https://doi.org/10.1027/0044-3409/a000018)

in America, while reducing them to law-abiding citizens in Cuba, where they were not allowed to organize as African Americans and were denied the right to bear arms ever again—in Cuba, as in all communist countries, it is illegal to bear arms.[lxx]

In any case, around 1970, the Cold War propitiated in Cuba the narrative of David versus Goliath, where a utopian revolution on a Caribbean Island demanded the support of the progressive sectors of a bipolar world, in order to survive the reactionary pressure of the Western capitalist powers. In practice, there could have been a mutually convenient balance and counterbalance in Realpolitik, beyond the antagonist ideologies of the hegemonic forces that shaped the second half of the twentieth century, from World War II to the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

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[lxx] **Decree-Law No. 262**. In: *Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba*, 41, CVI. Ministry of Justice. La Habana, Cuba. 2 Dic 2008. p.170 https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/sites/default/files/go_x_041_2008.pdf

In its Article 3, this Decree-Law establishes "the weapons for which no license or permit is granted, and whose possession, carrying, use, transportation, maintenance, delivery, reception, import and export, are considered illegal." These include "a) pen-guns, b) baton-guns, c) rifles with a caliber greater than 5.6 millimeters, d) machine guns and submachine guns of any kind, e) handcrafted firearms, f) firearms that are the result of substantial modifications of their characteristics of manufacture or origin, g) pistols or revolvers that have an adapted buttstock or have it from the factory, h) firearms assimilated under the guise of any other object, i) short firearms of any caliber, whose firing rate is bursts, j) sawed-off shotguns, whatever their caliber, k) firearms with optical, dioptric, electronic optical, laser or other aiming systems, other than open sights, l) firearms intended only for the use of blank ammunition, m) weapons that shoot anesthetic capsules, n) pneumatic weapons with a caliber greater than 4.5 millimeters or pellets with primers, o) all bladed weapons, for regulatory use in armed institutions, p) rapier sticks, q) blowpipes, r) crossbows, bows and arrows, s) mitts, blackjacks and black jacks, t) rubber sticks, batons or the like, u) atomizers that release irritating, nerve-paralyzing, smoke-producing, asphyxiating, tear-producing or poisonous gases, as well as any device that includes mechanisms capable of projecting toxic substances, including weapons that fire ammunition with any of these substances, v) electrical weapons or defenses, w) other weapons determined by the Ministry of the Interior."

## 4.3 May I have your gun?[lxxi]

In *Hijack* (1984),**[15]** Anthony Bryant acknowledges from the first paragraph that in 1969 he was "black and bitter, armed, desperate and dangerous, at war with the United States of America," with a .38 Smith & Wesson revolver "jammed into the back waistband of my pants, pushed against my airline seat" in order to "give me the courage I needed." Bryant is aware that their "lives would shortly be in my hands," and he writes that, just before attempting the hijack of the airplane, he just "sat observing the people whose lives would shortly be in my hands and wondered if any of them had the vaguest idea that death was their co-pilot, ready to take us all down in flames" (3).

Bryant (1939-1999) was a Black Panther. In his promised land of Cuba, he couldn't imagine he was going to spend 11 years in prison, until he was released in 1980 and managed to leave the Island to return to the United States. By then, he had turned into a firm anti-Communist, praised by many anti-Castro fighters in exile, with some of whom he had shared time in prison in Cuba. In *Hijack* he recounts the brutal beatings and occasional executions there, particularly of Cuban political prisoners.

Bryant was tried again in Miami, but received only five years on parole, in part thanks to the paradoxical support of the right-wing leaders of the Cuban exile, who testified in favor of the former Black Panther, given his bravery against the repressors and torturers in Castro's prisons.

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[lxxi] "May I have your gun?" he said in impeccable English, extending his hand. "*Hasta la victoria siempre!"* I said, meaning, "To victory always," a Spanish phrase I had picked up from Che Guevara's diary. My Spanish must have sounded awkward. "Huh? What? Oh yeah—sure. Listen. May I have your gun?" (**Bryant, Anthony**. *Hijack*. Fort Lauderdale: Freedom Press International, 1984. p.11.)

The same initial question was asked in June 1969 by Cuban officers to the Black Panther member William Lee Brent, after he also hijacked a plane to Havana, as he recounts in his book *Long Time Gone*: "I'm Lieutenant Galves of the Cuban immigration service. Give me the gun." Damn, I thought, this peashooter won't do much good in a firefight against the modern automatic shit I saw them haul up here. But to just hand over my piece… The lieutenant read my mind. "It's okay," he said. "You're under our protection now. No one will harm you. Give me the gun." (**Brent, William Lee**. *Long Time Gone*. New York: Times Books, 1996. p.142.)

When in 1969 he landed on the Island, in a hijacked plane, Bryant's thoughts were that he had "come to Cuba to feel freedom at least once and carry back a war message which the racist United States would understand." For him, "Cuba was creating a true democracy, a place where everyone was equal, where violence against blacks, injustice and racism were things of the past." He writes, "I had heard a lot about Cuba and Fidel Castro. He and Che Guevara were my heroes," basically because Cuba "was the country that promised aid to revolutionaries" all over the world and "kept its word" (12).

Once free in his own country, after launching a short-lived conservative magazine for African Americans in 1989, Bryant was by then even willing to join the Commandos L, an armed anti-Castro organization in Florida, where he was the director of military operations in the early 1990s. But he soon quit his militant profile and eventually tried to run for Miami's City Commission as a law-abiding peaceful citizen.

Bryant announces a radical conclusion from the beginning of his 1984 book, listing some historical personalities in whom he no longer believed after his Cuban experience: "In the end I realized it was I who had been hijacked, deceived by those I most admired; Karl Marx, Angela

Davis,[lxxii] Jesse Jackson,[lxxiii] Fidel Castro, Gus Hall, Jane Fonda,[lxxiv] Che Guevara and a whole planeload of others" (v).

On March 6, 1969, Bryant hijacked the National Airlines Flight 97 to Cuba without physically hurting anybody, but he did threaten to kill someone in several occasions during the flight. He also took the money from most passengers—"I robbed them" was his choice of verb—allowing only "the blacks and those who had little money to keep it," because for him "a true revolutionary only robs from the rich" (8).

From the beginning of the interrogations by Cuban State Security, Bryant realized the discrepancy in concepts between revolutionaries outside and inside the Cuban Revolution. The Black Panther activist hopes that "a revolutionary government" like Castro's "is willing to help

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[lxxii] In his book, Bryant includes in lieu of dedication a poem written by him from a Cuban prison in 1976, where he directly addresses Angela Davis, who had visited Cuba in 1969—as a member of a Communist Party delegation—and again in 1972, after being acquitted by an all-white U.S. jury from the charges of criminal conspiracy, aggravated kidnapping and first degree murder:

"Angela, you lied! / You never mentioned / Heads gushing blood... split! / Flashing machetes. Slimy / Mucus filled sockets... smashed eyeballs / Hanging... / And / The hunger! The gnawing ache / Day after day, after month, after / year... / You never protested! / You never said a word about the / Terror! / Angela, / Is there anywhere, / In the world, / Where all hands / Are always raised in consent? / They are / In Cuba. / Angela you lied" (x).

[lxxiii] Bryant challenges Reverend Jesse Jackson—who in the eighties would get involved in the release of several Cuban political prisoners, as well as American citizens incarcerated on the Island—about his silence regarding human rights violations in Cuba:

"Where were you Jesse Jackson, when under the cover of darkness and muffled by the cannons' roar at nine o'clock at the back of the Cabana, black and white bodies perforated by hot lead, slumped and bowed before the always-ready firing squad? Where were you? Who protested the beatings and murders I witnessed? Who protested when Fidel Castro shipped his dogs of war to Africa to help subdue black people, enslave them and turn them over to the white Russian masters?" (128).

[lxxiv] In several passages of his book, Bryant mentions a number of his fellow citizens in order to expose their hypocrisy about Castro's Cuba, for political and ideological reasons. Given the fact that most Cuban intellectuals on the Island were silent at that time, it is evident that Americans—including the once anti-America fighter Anthony Bryant—tend to expect that the influence of American personalities has utmost importance for the rest of the world, not only in actions but also in the form of a public statement:

"No so-called U.S. revolutionary protested, defended or stood up for those people who were running from something they considered worse than death itself. No words or broadcasts from Jane Fonda, nothing from Angela Davis or Gus Hall. No so-called defenders of the proletariat voiced even a whisper of concern that something was wrong enough in Cuba to force ten thousand people in a matter of minutes to abandon their homes, their loved ones and even their own country. All in a matter of minutes—and no one protested!" (347-48).

anyone bring about revolution in their own country." But the Cuban agents are interested in knowing "what kind of revolution are you talking about?" That is, "what do you mean specifically when you say 'revolution'?" Bryant, quite "confused" by the need of such details, recalls "to me, as well as to most blacks I knew, revolution meant taking whitey's riches and spreading them among destitute blacks," but he just declared that "revolution means taking from them that's got everything and making them share equally with the poor" (17-18).

Eventually, after actively promoting violence in the U.S. by all means of resistance available to him―given the case, with weapons and resources from other revolutionary countries, including Cuba―Bryant's plan was to "create major riots where we'll give the people guns and it'll be all-out war" (19) and "then we'll build a socialist government like here in Cuba" (20).

But this vision doesn't convince any officer in Cuba. After weeks of interrogation, Bryant is told that he is suspected of being either a CIA or FBI agent: no less than "scum," another "filthy capitalist agent" (25). After taking time to evaluate his reactions, they inform him that he will be tried only for "robbery," since "the point of all this was to keep others from accusing Cuba of aiding known criminals" (27). According to Bryant, during the flight he "had given passengers back their money," which could be verified because "news reports I'd recently seen about the 1969 incident reported I'd given money back" (414).

Then, two weeks after a trial, supposed to be "a coverup," where Bryant never talked to his defense attorney and simply accepted all the accusations as part of a deal with the Cuban justice system―so that "the racist imperialists could not say I had failed to face justice"―he was then suddenly informed that in truth he "had been sentenced to twelve years in prison" (29).

In a "long letter" that Bryant tried to submit to his "old hero, Fidel Castro describing how my rights had been abused since my arrival in Cuba," he referred to his trial in the following terms,

despite new promises by the military that he "would be in prison two years" (55) and not have to serve his full time: "Had I known that mockery was going to be made of justice in your courts, I would have defended, not only myself, but those institutions as well" (47).

Bryant witnessed and suffered many brutal beatings and tortures in Cuban prisons, but also witnessed murders among inmates, as well as "stabbings, rapes and cuttings" (231). He endured a number of food poisoning and diseases. He carried out hunger strikes, was kept in solitary confinement cells,[lxxv] and participated in a number of violent riots, some of them involving other African-Americans incarcerated in Cuba.[lxxvi] He assumed all these abuses and atrocities as a way of "learning a lot about the Castro system" (84). More than once, he conspired to escape and almost got shot during a number of failed attempts. In fact, in January 1976 he did escape once, only to be soon recaptured in a Havana motel, and then be penalized with seven additional years in jail.[lxxvii]

During his years in a Cuban prison, Bryant was transferred to many different facilities, some of them with maximum security and the worst human treatment imaginable. As he wrote in his book, "I had drawn blood from the *Beast* and survived" (181). He discovered that "fear is a

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[lxxv] In his book, Bryant describes this dramatic experience in very expressive terms: "Solitary! A place crowded with memories. They all come to visit and haunt you; they all stay too long." "Solitary makes you doubt everything you once held dear and true. Held in a time lock, a vacuum of dead, irreplaceable time." "The days are long, empty and senseless. Night is an enemy that plunges you into abysms filled with nightmares. Solitary makes you think of life and wish for death! I was in solitary confinement for one year and two months" (297-98).

[lxxvi] Bryant met in Cuban prisons, among other fellow Americans, Louis Moore, Henry Jackson and Melvin Cale, the "trio" of African-Americans that, as mentioned above, "hijacked a Southern Airways flight from Memphis, Tennessee to Birmingham, Alabama" and kept it "for thirty hours," including the threat "to crash the jetliner into the nuclear reactor at Oak Ridge, Tennessee." For this reason, Bryan recalls that "news reports at the time said relatives described them as 'disturbed'" (132-33).

[lxxvii] To escape from Guanajay prison was considered an impossible mission for prisoners. But Bryant and a Cuban inmate successfully managed to do it, much like in a Hollywood film. He recreates this passage with literary passion: "Dawn was breaking. It was going to be a beautiful day. Another myth had tumbled!" (255). "The sun, a brilliant glow in the east, broke majestically over the hills splashing everything in a myriad of colors. The flowers, still fresh with morning dew, sparkled like diamonds and the birds seemed to be cheering us on as we walked, free, down a long railroad track whose rails stretched into infinity. The morning breeze carrying a touch of chill, kissed my body and I thrilled to it. I was drunk with joy" (257). But he was fully aware that, since "never had an American escaped from one of Cuba's prisons," the agents of the Ministry of Interior in charge "were going to take it very personally" (259).

necessary tool under any dictatorship," even if it is called a Revolution, even if it is socialist or communist, because "only terror can make the wishes of a few the will of the masses." After his first years in jail, "Tony el Americano"[lxxviii] or Tony the American, as the other inmates started to call Anthony Bryant, he acknowledged that only by then had he learned "how Cuba had been reduced to malignant fear" (83).

Bryant's courage didn't make him immune to that fear, which became his "closest companion" (88). He, a young man once proud of potentially being a "hit man" or "*Mr. Eliminator*" (60) for the Black Panthers in the United States, saw so many horrors first hand in Cuba that his whole "world shook" forever. He narrates a number of "debased, evil and diabolical" things. In short, he "had glimpsed the true nature of the Red psyche" with "the human being stripped of its human condition." From then on, he confesses, he "had felt Satan's presence," and "for the first time in many years" had "dropped my head and prayed" (88).

In Cuba, the realization that injustice existed also beyond the borders of America meant not only a revolutionary disenchantment for him, but perhaps the first stage for healing from the racial violence that had marked the entire existence of Anthony Bryant.

In official documents, Cubans military bureaucrats never allowed him to designate himself as "Black." They "were aghast" by this and forced him to write "mulatto" instead (90), a word that

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[lxxviii] Bryant writes in his book that, as "a stranger in a foreign land, I was adopted by the prisoners" (62), being able to enjoy a number of small privileges, such as, for example, double portion of breakfast. He was even allowed to marry in 1972 a Cuban woman he had just met in an office, whom he then divorced several years later, given the fact that she was only "obsessed with leaving Cuba" (112) and Bryant suspected she was part of a plot from the authorities to obtain information from him and maybe also to infiltrate organizations in America. He considers that if, at first, "people had treated me with deference for simply being an American, afterwards it was an honor to be seen with me and counted as one of my friends" (181). According to him, "the inmates seemed to sense that here with them was a man who would someday take the awesome truth of 'The Cuban Experience' to the *Outside World*." As such, "they never missed a chance to explain to me what they thought I should know" (82).

Therefore, the African-American pilgrim to Utopia was now trusted by anti-Castro Cubans. Bryant still had the hope of returning to America at some point, and from there tell his and their story abroad. The foreigner was a credible witness of the counternarrative of the locals who were displaced and, in many cases, destroyed by a Revolution, which in turn was ideologically represented from abroad as an idyllic alternative to the United States.

Cuban white officials considered fitted him better. In the Revolution, not only racism but race itself had been abolished by decree, since racial conflicts could only distract and delay the main battle against capitalist exploiters and international imperialism. This could also hint why the term African-Cubans was almost never used during the first decades of Castroism. Later, the notion Afro-Cubanity was tolerated as part of the cultural tradition, basically limited to folklore and popular religious beliefs.

Bryant had been struck by a sequence of dire events that started when he was "a child working with my dad cleaning up bars in San Bernardino, California," and he noticed his father trying to block a door in order "to wash off the word 'nigger' without me seeing it." These terrible circumstances continued when he was only "thirteen years old and running away from a brutal father and home, tired of being beaten with heavy, leather straps." Only to suffer sexual assault in a San Francisco park by a man with a "chalky white face" (7), which left him traumatized with "a strong aversion to homosexuals" (23).

Anthony Bryant did not live in the Cuban society as such, but in its prison system. For more than a decade—from 1969 to 1982—he was therefore an exceptional witness to the repressive realities of the Cuban Revolution that many Cuban revolutionaries ignored[lxxix] or simply couldn't imagine how devastatingly cruel they were.

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[lxxix] In his book, Bryant exposes the racial bias in the Cuban prison system while, in the rest of the society, official propaganda was declaring that racism was only a legacy of the capitalist past, which was abolished forever or about to be abolished in Communism: "It's mostly blacks in prison. It's mostly blacks who have the worst jobs. It's mostly blacks who get the worst beatings. Here it's called Social Orientation or some other crap. But when it occurs in the United States, the Communists call it racism. It's all the same thing" (94).

Bryant also comments about the official propaganda in State-owned mass media on the Island, which are the only ones legal and, in fact, the only ones existing in Cuba by then: "About every six months the Cuban Communists published in their government-controlled newspaper, *Granma*, old pictures of American blacks being attacked by policemen with fierce killer dogs. It was always the same picture. They never missed a chance to point out and underline the sad reality of white on black repression in the United States" (94).

Despite all the discriminatory practices that Bryant perceives in Cuba, he insists about the little possibilities for resistance under totalitarianism, by comparison with the United States: "Black people aren't supposed to do anything except kowtow to these people because the revolution was supposed to have done so much for them" (109). "While home wasn't perfect, I was beginning to reminisce about a country that respected the *human condition*" (94). "I felt

Therefore, Bryant's insights into Utopia are affected by the trauma of his own experience,[lxxx] which ultimately led to his political conversion and then spiritual transformation later in his life. His book is nevertheless an invaluable source of information not only about his personal via crucis, but about the dystopic side of the Cuban paradise—in many ways, the sadist side of socialism, exerted against those common citizens that the State labeled as enemies of the people—mostly the same farmers, workers and students that the regime claimed to defend.

Bryant is aware of his demystifying effort to question the land that "Fidel Castro declared as *The First Free Territory of America*" (81), a myth that, Bryant assures his readers, "began to crumble" (82) for him once on the Caribbean Island. His book *Hijack* is a conscious counternarrative against "an enemy attempting to make the myth of its immortality and invincibility accepted as reality to all men" (172).

In the final chapters, Bryant explicitly concludes that "myths were made to be destroyed" (390) and that "someday only the shadows of memories of Communist Cuba will remain; that land where nightmares begin at dawn… where the myth was destroyed" (432). Therefore, his trip to Cuba became a mission that the missionary himself ignored in the beginning. First, the foreigner had to "see" in order to "record and tell the people of America what had been spawned on the earth." The anti-establishment activist returned to his homeland commited to "never pass up the

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extremely uncomfortable. I sensed the need to defend the U.S. and yet I still blamed whites for much of what happened to me" (95). "If I knew that the electric chair was waiting for me tomorrow in America, I would still want to go back today" (109). "The most important lesson is that this is the greatest country in the world, that it deserves defending, that it deserves that we fight for it. […] It does matter if we allow Communist infiltration or allow division, if we allow breakdown in the moral fiber of the United States of America" (429).

All the quotes above show the radical transformation that Castroism caused in the same radical man who used to think, before hijacking a plane to the Island, that "I'd rather be a prisoner in Cuba than a free black in the United States!" (94).

[lxxx] "What do you think I think about Cuba? All I've seen are prisons. To me, Cuba is a cement cell with bars. Do you expect me to feel any differently?" (106).

opportunity to talk about the *monster* that I saw so clearly," a society "on the edge of spiritual, intellectual and physical slavery" (291-92).

According to him, his message was a "warning to my people—the American people, all my people, white and black." In order to "unmask Communism's plague to the U.S. citizenry," the original "Tony Bryant, the ex-Panther, hijacker, dope addict, armed robber" claims that he had "changed greatly" (223). Particularly, he had "risen above the color barrier." Having met so many "friends who were white and enemies who were black," Bryant realized that "there was an enemy greater than any one ethnic group". That is, "an enemy who enslaved and mutilated both body and soul. I had come face to face with Satan and learned that evil comes in all colors" (368).

Bryant wanted to accomplish this as an expression of his "compassion for the Cuban people," whom he describes in general as "generous, fun loving and caring," a "tough people" (203). He especially respects the political prisoners, in active resistance against Castroism despite having been sentenced to many years in jail, sometimes in solitary confinement and seldom with family visits. For Bryant, it was "amazing" how "these men who had suffered incredible abuses, who had been starved, beaten, deprived of the right to visit their families for years at a stretch, these men whom the revolution wanted to destroy, were so plainly different from common prisoners that they seemed to be from another world. They were clean and the expression on their faces was one of personal contentment, of victory not defeat. When they smiled, they lit up" (305).

Furthermore, Bryant appropriates the concept of the "New Man" to affirm that Castro's Communism had certainly created it, but in the figure of "the political prisoner, starved, abused, ground into the revolution's dust," from where a moral human being "had emerged whole and transfigured." For him, the unexpected consequence of totalitarian repression is the existence of this "man to be emulated" in Cuba (315).

Once back in the U.S., however, Bryant realized what was prophesized to him by a Cuban inmate: "When somebody escapes and tries to tell the world about the abuse and terror, the people who influence or control the news media in the free world brand you as a CIA agent or a liar. Or, even worse, they won't even print what you say!" (151). Bryant insisted until the end of his life to try to see to it that "the American people understood the nature of the filth sitting only ninety miles from their doorstep." He was convinced that "if they knew how deadly Communism is and how it threatens their existence, no president would be elected unless he was an anti-Communist" (320).

He, the radical militant who "had once been willing to die for the revolution," after his experience under the Realpolitik of the Cuban Revolution, now "was ready to live for it." Of course, "not the false revolution of death and destruction, but rather for the only revolution that is real." Namely, "the individual revolution of concepts and values. At last I was ready to help others seeking to find the right path" (396).

All this together with "another factor in my change" that was "the most influential factor of all," that is, "the fact that I found God in Cuba. It was necessary for me to see the devil to believe that there is a God." In this case, Bryant attributes Evil to Castro's Cuba. For him, the communist Utopia was, not only a dystopian mistake, but the systematic consequence of "a diabolical society trying with all of its efforts to subjugate humanity and enslave it" (429).

The gun that was seized from the American Black Panther as soon as he landed in Havana, continued to point at Anthony Bryant during his long years incarcerated in Cuba, convicted of the same crime for which other African American activists were soon released—hijacking a plane to reach the Island of Freedom. The authorities of the United States and Cuba, represented in the international arena as irreconcilable enemies to this day, behaved similarly in this case. Beyond the racist discrimination they suffered in the U.S. democratic system, and the instant emancipation

expected in Castro's Revolution, the association of African Americans and firearms worried the White majorities in power, both in Imperialist America and in Utopian Cuba—particularly when the individual behaved independently of their respective States.

These tragically transformative events in the life of Anthony Bryant happened less than a decade after the publication in 1962 of *Negroes with Guns*,[185] by the African American civil rights leader Robert Franklin Williams (1925-1996). In his book, Williams was still convinced "that Afro-Cubans were part of the Cuban revolution on a basis of complete equality." And he presents as a fact that "a Negro, for example, was head of the Cuban armed forces and no one could hide that fact from us here in America" (69).

In 1962, Williams's enthusiasm for "Free Cuba" and its Revolution as an alternative to racism in the United States, made him feel, in his many visits and stays on the Island, "that I was a member of the human race for the first time in my life." Consequently, he was grateful for having been allowed to visit the Utopian alternative to the U.S., and more than willing to defend "Fidel Castro and Free Cuba" for "granting persons of African descent entrance into the human race" (70).

Anthony Bryant was probably familiar with the cause of Robert F. Williams, which in *Negros with Guns* he defined as "the same as Cuba against the white supremacist imperialist" (72). In his book, Williams states that "I could think of no other place in the Western Hemisphere than Cuba where a Negro would be treated as a human being; where the race problem would be understood; and where people would not look upon me as a criminal, but as a victim of a trumped-up charge" (104).

In fact, Williams openly favored the Cuban government welcoming and training African American activists on the Island, because he believed that only "when I become a part of the mainstream of American life, based on universal justice, then and then only can I see a possible

mutual cause for unity against outside interference" (72). However, in the opposite direction, the interference of the U.S. government in Cuba's internal affairs was widely criticized, with calls for American administrations and legislators to keep their "hands off Cuba."

In turn, Anthony Bryant returned to the United States with a diametrically different message, as evidenced in this open letter that—shortly before his release and deportation in 1980—was smuggled out of his Cuban prison by an American white visitor. The document addresses the "Gentlemen Of The U.S. Congressional Black Caucus" and is dated June 20, 1980. It is worth quoting in extenso here: (405-406)

> The letter that you are about to read has been sent clandestinely with a great amount of danger for the persons involved in its writing as well as for those who have made its arrival to you possible.
>
> Only a dire necessity could have impulsed us to take such extreme measures. We hope that you will take into consideration not only the fact that we—the letters authors—are black North Americans who have suffered brutally during the eight to twelve years of our imprisonment, we wish for you to consider not only the hapless situation in which we find ourselves, but perhaps above all, we hope to impress upon you the terrible fact of our existence in a living hell where the 'Human Condition' is nothing more than a play of words whose context is lost in the misery of the reality in which we are forced to live.
>
> No other prisoners have been subjected to that which has been the black North American's plight. No others have been so savagely tortured, starved, beaten and abused as we have; in the vain effort to divest us of our dignity and break our spirits, but we have maintained an attitude which history will record as 'admirable.'

We received the news that you, the members of the Black Caucus are planning to visit Cuba within a short time. This notice has been received by us with great joy and the hope that during that visit you will ask the Cuban Government to accord you an interview with us.

Only then, when you witness with your own eyes, the abject conditions in which we live, when you can look and see for yourselves the scars that mark our bodies and souls, only when we can talk to you face to face and let the truth be known, only then do we believe that you will make an adamant demand for our expulsion. According to universal precepts, any country may ask for its citizen's expulsion when it is apparent that his trial was a mockery or when mistreatment and/or abuse can be proven.

We know that if you accord us an interview, you will leave here convinced that all that we would have time to tell you; although superficial, would leave you horror stricken and duty bound, as fellow Americans and as human beings, to struggle for us and our freedom from this, one of the most racist and cruel dictatorships that history has known. We beg of you to attend us and to seek by any and all measures to obtain a visit with us. We doubt highly that they will allow you to see us. We don't believe that they have the valor to allow us to speak to you and unmask them as the sub-beings that they are.

We will anxiously await your arrival to this country and consequently your visit to the prison 'Combinado Del Este.'

Thanking you beforehand,

We Remain,

Anthony Garnet Bryant, Lewis Douglas Moore.

The extreme experience of Antony Bryant's trip and stay in Cuba was strikingly different from the adaptation mechanisms of other African American visitors and residents on the Island. As if he had fallen into a Kafkaesque claustrophobic nightmare, he doesn't seem to fully understand why the Cuban authorities distrusted him so much. Perhaps, because—despite his worshipping from abroad of the leaders of the Revolution—Bryant actually never submitted to their arbitrary accusations and much less accepted any guilt beforehand. Thus, it is likely that as an American citizen, he was considered not loyal enough—that is, manageable by the authorities—to allow him to be incorporated into Cuban society. A prophylaxis that pushed Bryant into exactly what the Cuban government feared most: an individual who does not believe in them and is no longer afraid of them. Since 1959, the freest men and women in opposition to Castro in Cuba have ended up in prison, forced into exile, or sentenced to death by firing squads.

Utopias are social experiments where dissent tends to compromise even the sanity of the dissenter. The unattainable perfection of the expected system constantly denies any legitimate criticism of the society under construction, by displacing it towards a future that will never be reached and that it is not convenient to reach. For the purpose of this process is to closely control the mind of every citizen of Utopia—native or pilgrim. In practice, consensus is compulsory within any closed society.

## 4.4 To erase the racial problem by erasing the black race[lxxxi]

Like Anthony Bryant, many African-American activists went to Cuba—in dozens of cases, using violent means—desperately looking not only to save their lives, but to get training and military supplies to carry out their war back home against the American establishment.

In practice, once they landed on the Island, most of them could never handle again a personal gun for self-defense, since all fire weapons were strictly controlled, except for the professional members of the Ministry of Armed Forces (MINFAR) and the Ministry of Interior (MININT). They couldn't organize anymore as African-Americans and, much less, they couldn't claim any kind of ethnical identity.[lxxxii]

In a way, African Americans on the Island had to peacefully accept that in Cuba they will simply cease to exist as such, made invisible under the label of revolutionary subjects from abroad. The racial war had to take place in racist America, not in the egalitarian Cuban Revolution. The rationale was that in Cuba the main priority was to keep a homogenizing unity upon the people, in order for the country to defend itself from the always aggressive plans of the United States. The punishment for ignoring this official condition, and trying to independently organize minorities, for example, was immediate detention, deportation, or both.

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[lxxxi] "I told myself that I could fit into that simple pattern of communistic life, that I could become a loyal, faithful Communist. All I had to do was to forget the rest of the world, forget that the Communists in Cuba were trying to erase the racial problem by erasing the black race, and most of all forget that blacks must stop identifying with black while whites didn't stop identifying with white." (**Clytus, John**. *Black Man in Red Cuba*. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970. p.127.)

[lxxxii] John Clytus explores the problematic issues of blackness under Castro´s communist system. A number of quotes can illustrate his viewpoints: "Anyone identifying with his blackness was considered a divisionist, a counterrevolutionary" (97); "There were neither black people nor white people in Cuba" (88); "It always amused us the way the Cuban revolutionaries were constantly mouthing their support for black people all over the world, while in Cuba black people were hindered from any identification with blackness" (44).
(**Clytus, John**. *Black Man in Red Cuba*. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970.)

In many cases, foreigners could be expelled from the Revolution because they had established contact with certain sectors of Cuban society, such as young intellectuals who complained about the lack of freedom of expression. This was the case of the American poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997),[75] who was taken by Castro's State Security from his hotel room in Havana and was forced to board the first available flight to Europe.

As all organizations and institutions in Castro's Cuba basically belong to the Communist Party, local and foreign citizens are welcome to be part of them as long as they do not claim any other loyalty to race, gender, identity, or nationality. The Revolution was supposed to have enough space for every revolutionary subject worldwide, but first they had to prove that they were willing to renounce those divisive traits and just focus on the triumph of the Revolution wherever it was most needed. Some of the African-American refugees on the Island eventually obtained certain civil status and still reside in Cuba, but they seem to have accepted that the Utopian State has solved all social conflicts and inequalities by decree. Or at least, that the Revolution has established a special social pact, where it is not beneficial to anybody to pressure public opinion and authorities to obtain certain rights. The public expression of social dissent and political opposition, which would be considered normal in open democratic systems, in a closed Utopian society could be interpreted as subversive destabilization—most likely in complicity with foreign enemy States.

In 1970, the book *Black Man in Red Cuba*[35] was published by John Clytus in collaboration with Jane Rieker. Clytus was one of the African-American activists who, instead of hijacking a plane, had traveled in a more regular fashion to Cuba—in this case, on a ship from Mexico, i.e., not directly from the United States but from a third country. For some reason, the editors of the Spanish translation of his book[36] chose another title that does not highlight that the author was African American: *Mi vida en Cuba roja* (*My Life in Red Cuba*).

From 1964 to 1967, Clytus resided on the Island and was allowed to have a job as an English professor at the Ministry of Foreign Commerce (MINCEX), and later as English translator for the Cuban governmental press. He worked briefly in the countryside, cutting sugar cane in Pinar del Río, the westernmost province of Cuba, during "sixty days of *sangre y fuego* (blood and fire)" (41), as Clytus describes these weeks of "*muy duro* (very hard)" manual labor (34).

Centralized control was already being implemented on the Island, but it was still less totalitarian than in the years to come. In any case, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX) eventually denied his request for asylum on the Island, because they concluded that Clytus "was not fleeing political persecution." And, as soon as his tourist visa expired, they notified Clytus that he "would have to be sent out of the country" (22), which didn't happen until years later.

As soon as he "stepped off the boat in Havana," Clytus—like Anthony Bryant years later, and like almost all Americans arriving without previous arrangements with the Cuban government—was also "arrested and jailed for investigation." But, after he was "asked to write an autobiographical sketch and to explain why" he was on the Island, he was released "after two days" without further harassment (10).

For the Cuban authorities, it seemed by then that John Clytus was just another foreigner visiting the Island. The officials even gave him "a release slip from immigration" and they assured him it "would identify me in case the police should stop me for some reason" while in Cuba. However, Clytus did notice that "in addition to me its guests included a number of Haitians and a Dominican" and that "they were all black, and waiting to be deported" (10).

Given the negative outcome of his Cuban experience, he writes in his book that he "should have become suspicious then" (10) about race discrimination in a revolution whose top leaders

were overwhelmingly white. Six decades later, they still are white,[lxxxiii] despite the much-disputed racial composition of Cuban population, where African Cubans are likely to be a majority by now, although the state statistics seem to refute—or perhaps fear—this fact.[lxxxiv]

In the beginning, Clytus was able to meet and talk to many common citizens in different neighborhoods of Havana. He learned directly from them, later transcribing in his book these findings, some of which were in contradiction with his own viewpoints as a foreigner and, even more, challenged his personal ideology as an African American who was willing to fight for the emancipation of his race everywhere in the world. Clytus believed, given that racism was structural in America—where "whites, the overwhelming majority in the United States 'democratic society,' were in favor of discrimination against the black" (123)—that his destined "place was in Africa, the motherland of all black people" (124). For him, "in Africa blacks were fighting against white racists with guns, and that was where I wanted to be" (22).

In fact, once in Cuba, Clytus contacted the Ghanaian Embassy to apply for a visa to Africa,[lxxxv] and he also explained his transcontinental vision to other African American

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[lxxxiii] In recent years, there has been a manifest effort by historical leaders to increase the diversity of the revolutionary government. For example, out of 21 members of the Cuban Council of State, 13 are Blacks/Mestizos. Still, only 3 out of 34 members of the Council of Ministers and 3 out of 17 members of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party are Blacks/Mestizos. In the Cuban military, most high-rank officers with political clout have traditionally been Whites.
Consejo de Ministros de Cuba. https://www.presidencia.gob.cu/es/gobierno/
Consejo de Estado de Cuba. http://www.parlamentocubano.gob.cu/index.php/consejo-de-estado/
The Military Elite of Cuba. https://cubanstudiesinstitute.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Military-Elite-of-Cuba-Graphic-Page-Version-Web.pdf

[lxxxiv] According to Cuban official data, in 2012 there were 1,034,044 (9,3%) Blacks and 2,972,882 (26,6%) Mestizos. The apparent whitening or mestizification of the local population can be seen by comparison with previous censuses: 725,311 (12,4%) Blacks and 843,105 (14,5%) Mestizos in 1953; 1,168,695 (12%) Blacks and 2,125,418 (21,9%) Mestizos in 1981; and 1,126,894 (10,1%) Blacks and 2,778,923 (24,9%) Mestizos in 2002. (*El color de la piel según el Censo de Población y Viviendas de 2012*. Centro de Estudios de Población y Desarrollo. La Habana, Cuba. February 2016.)
http://www.onei.gob.cu/sites/default/files/publicacion_completa_color_de_la_piel__0.pdf

[lxxxv] At the Embassy of Ghana in Havana, Clytus was asked to write "an autobiographical sketch explaining why I wanted to go to Africa" (43) and, since he "didn't have any college degree and first-class references," he was told "that there were enough blacks in Africa to handle the racists." Clytus remarks, "on an island where 'blood and guts'

"expatriates" who were reorganizing their plans while safely residing on the Island, including Robert Franklyn Williams (1925-1996), the civil rights leader who was in Cuba since 1961—via Canada and Mexico—and was regularly broadcasting his speeches on Radio Free Dixie to reach the south of the United States.[180] This radio station transmitted from 1962 to 1965 with the full approval and resources of the Cuban government,[lxxxvi] in the broad context of the information warfare between Havana and Washington.[lxxxvii]

According to Clytus, some of the African Americans in Cuba "couldn't understand why we were in a Communist paradise such as Cuba and were still speaking of black people and white people." For them, once capitalism was substituted by socialism, people "should look at people without regard to race or color." However, other African Americans were rather "angry about racial prejudice in Communist Cuba," since they "had not found it to be the Utopia its propaganda proclaimed it to be" (19).

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revolutionaries were assembling from all over the world to throw off the 'imperialist oppressors' and 'the decadent middle class,'" were that the "views" from the Ghanaian diplomats "smelled of pure bourgeois formalism" (22-23).

[lxxxvi] Regarding the initial privileges of Robert F. Williams in Castro's Cuba, where he had become "a folk hero," to the point that "he seemed to be the most popular person next to Castro," Tyson quotes from an interview of Williams with Thomas Mosby in 1970: "They gave us an apartment and they gave us two guards, they assigned us a Cadillac, had the chauffeur drive us all over the countryside, wherever I wanted to go" (291-92). (**Tyson, Timothy B**. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.)

[lxxxvii] Eventually, according to Tyson, not only the "CIA jamming" but also "Cuban censorship eventually hobbled Radio Free Dixie" (288). In the case of Cuba, the reason was that Williams proved to be too much of an independent thinker for a Communist utopia. In 1960, Williams had published in his piece *Why I Am Going to Cuba* in *The Crusader* that "I want to see Cuba for myself because I cannot accept the reports of the respectable American press which has proven itself a galvanized conductor of lies here when reporting incidents involving Negroes," so that "it is hard to believe that Cuba is worse than Mississippi" (224).

However, after the first months of enthusiasm of his new life in Cuba, Williams "quickly got into political trouble in Cuba" and he longed "to return to the South despite the kidnapping charges against him." Tyson quotes from another FBI informant who wrote to Hoover that Williams "has stubbed his toes with the Communist Party of Cuba," given his "criticism of [the] Communist Party for barring Negroes from leadership." In fact, his wife Mabel R. Williams (1931-2014) much later declared in an interview with Stephanie Banchero that the point was that "Rob never stopped being Rob." For example, once when they were touring the Cuban Foreign Ministry in Havana and saw that the diplomatic staff seemed to be exclusively white, Ms. Williams recalls that "Rob told them that 'it looks like Mississippi in here,'" and she adds that "I thought they would shoot him for sure" (292). (**Tyson, Timothy B**. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.)

Clytus shared the viewpoints of the latter. In the two classes he was teaching at the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MINCEX), for example, he mentions that only “two of the thirty-five” and “four of the thirty-five students were black.” In the streets of Havana, Clytus reports that “for every black face I saw, there were at least fifty white faces.” He estimated that by then “thirty-five percent of the Cuban population was black,” and he wonders why, “if there was no longer racial discrimination in employment in Cuba,” then “why weren’t there more black people working in the offices in the ministry” (23).

Similar to the complain of Robert F. Williams about the white bias that only he in Cuba seemed to notice at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX)—“it looks like Mississippi in here”—Clytus says that at MINCEX “it was not a common sight to see a black face in the offices, and I was not surprised to learn that not only were the minister and the vice-minister of the ministry white, but so were all of the supervisors in all of the offices.” Indeed, “it didn’t take much longer to find that out of the seventeen or more ministries in the country, the top two jobs in each were held by whites.” Furthermore, Clytus found that “none of the hotels or stores or restaurants had a black in a supervisory capacity” and, in general, “blacks were conspicuously absent from these places in any capacity” (24).

The same applied to the printed press, according to Clytus: “I looked at magazine covers and saw whites; I looked at newspapers and books and saw whites” (24). It made him feel “tense.” In fact, “the whole power structure in Communist Cuba flashed before my eyes” each time that Clytus “picked up the newspaper and saw a picture of Fidel, always surrounded by white faces” (41).

Images similar to the “old pictures of American blacks being attacked by policemen with fierce killer dogs” that Anthony Bryant saw in the seventies while in jail were also seen by Clytus in the sixties, where “newspaper headlines screamed about the racial unrest in the States” and “in

every article, the 'Negroes' in the States were portrayed as being at the mercy of the Ku Klux Klan, the police, and police dogs, or as poverty-stricken, illiterate souls begging to be fed, employed, and educated by whites" (24).

At some point, a Cuban colleague told Clytus regarding a racial revolution in America that he thought that "the American Negro is afraid to fight." Clytus writes that he managed to keep his "composure and didn't even argue with him," because "what else could he or any other Cuban believe about the blacks in the United States?" (55) given the monopoly of the official press.

Clytus describes the caricaturized propaganda with which the communists misrepresented the complexities of a capitalist society, including the systemic inequalities and discriminations against the African American people, whose cause Cuba publicly claimed to support: "Almost every week, the paper carried news and pictures" of an African American "preacher leading black men, women, and children into a howling mob of racists, to sing and pray on their knees while getting clubbed over the head and kicked in the behind" (55).

As Clytus was learning more about day-to-day life in Cuba, he concludes that average "Cubans had a negative view of black people who lived in a country where, according to Cuba's only newspaper, all was negative" (56). His assessment of the local and international Cuban press is very negative, despite the fact that he kept collaborating with it[lxxxviii] not only to earn some money, but also to have temporary legal status on the Island.

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[lxxxviii] For example, Clytus writes about his "sour days with *Granma*" (69) that "every article a Cuban read about the United States told him that labor strikes by starving people were bringing the capitalist industrialists to their knees and ending the capitalist society, that all the businessmen and politicians were gangsters, that maniacs roamed the streets shooting down entire families, and that the Cuban refugees could only mop floors, wash dishes, and sell dope. The readers of *Granma* were told that the gangsters who ran the United States government did nothing but persecute the thousands of lawyers, doctors, teachers, and students who protested the war in Vietnam" (56).

In short, in the mid-sixties, Clytus assessment as a foreign reader is that "*Granma* had two subjects that dominated its news—the war in Vietnam and the racial unrest in the United States. The news on these two subjects was always presented so similarly that eventually it seemed as if, every week, I were translating the same articles" (54).

Like any national worker, Clytus was paid a very modest salary in Cuban pesos, the national currency which by then was already worthless anywhere else in the world.[lxxxix] As time went by, he affirms, "I began to wish that I had stayed in Mexico" (58), but Clytus remained conveniently silent, because he believed that in Cuba "to complain or to criticize, of course, was to run the risk of being denounced as a counterrevolutionary" (47). And, after this point, he seems to understand that his alternatives would be prison or deportation.

Although, "accredited foreigners in Cuba did not have to stand in colas to buy food or clothing" (48), the privilege of not wasting time while standing in these never-ending *colas* or lines did not fully apply to him. Clytus found discriminatory that, while "Cubans seemed to have resigned themselves to these colas" (47), most foreigners with a certain status on the Island could simply enter "a special food store, with the best food," as well as visit "a special clothing store, with the best clothing, catered to their desires." Obviously, Clytus—like most nationals, including revolutionaries—knew that all these stores and products "were off-limits to Cubans." Instead of popular protests—instead, there prevailed a culture of simulation—the only consequence that Clytus comments about this issue is the existence of a widespread "black-marketing in Communist

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[lxxxix] On Friday August 4, 1961, the Cuban government temporarily shut the national borders and launched a mandatory change of local currency by surprise, as established by Law 963, which was made public that day. New bank notes were already printed in secrecy by the State, in order to replace all the previously-circulating paper money, but no individual was allowed to exchange more than 200 Cuban pesos. The currency in circulation dropped from 1,045 million Cuban pesos in 1960 to 478 million pesos in 1961, but since then international banks do not accept Cuban pesos as currency anymore. (**Lago, Armando M. and José Alonso**. *A First Approximation Model of Money, Prices and Exchange Rates in Revolutionary Cuba*. In: *ASCE, The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy*. 30 November 1995.
https://www.ascecuba.org/asce_proceedings/a-first-approximation-model-of-money-prices-and-exchange-rates-in-revolutionary-cuba/)

In a radio interview five days later, Fidel Castro justified this action by saying that "this step, by its nature, had to be taken within the most strict secrecy since if it had been otherwise, a measure of this sort could not have been effective, since the objectives which are sought in defense of our currency and our economy, could have been defeated by those elements which were in possession of great sums of national currency."
(*Radio Interview of Fidel Castro on Currency Reform*. In: *LANIC, Latin American Network Information Center*. 9 August 1961. http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610809.html)

Cuba," as well as the widespread practice of "robbing and stealing—out of necessity" (48) from the otherwise powerful State.

Before getting in trouble with the Cuban authorities, Clytus had time to observe first-hand "how in Communist societies, men and women were forced to attend official holiday celebrations, welcome visiting dignitaries, and demonstrate in support of some governmental law or proclamation" (53-54). His vision of utopia is not idyllic at all, and his anti-racism ideas and anti-imperialist ideology seem not to interfere with his pragmatism as a U.S. citizen who believes in individual rights and fundamental freedoms. Besides, as an American on the Island, he behaves as if he were much more aware than Cubans about the situations in which his liberties as a person were violated in obvious or disguised ways.

Clytus, an "extranjero" or "americano" on the Island—as Cubans called him "at the ministry, the university, the newspaper; in the streets, the restaurants, the hotels—wherever I had gone"—recalls that he "had seen the hatred, warped with envy, of me," just for being a foreigner "who was performing a service for the Communist regime." That is, he was an American in Cuba "who had come willingly to an island that one could no longer leave at will," including foreign residents on the Island. He felt that Cubans also resented him because he was a foreigner "who dared run his mouth about something that concerned only Cubans" (81).

Most likely, Cubans might have felt humiliated by an American courageous enough to expose social issues that Cubans wouldn't dare to complain about—out of fear of repression or simply because of their military-style partisan discipline. In turn, Clytus couldn't stand anymore what he calls "ridiculous sights." For example, "little black girls with white dolls in their arms" everywhere he went in Havana. And he longs to be back even in racist America, since at least in

his own country “I never had to read a white man’s newspapers, books, or magazines,” because “in the States, the black publishers could satisfy my demands for literature” (138).

Also, Clytus is tired of listening “to the Communist propagandists” at workplaces and in the streets, in apparently spontaneous meetings that he feels are organized by the State, since, according to him, they just repeated the same “rail and rant against the bad, bad capitalists in the United States and praise the noble, virtuous Russians.” These “ranters” always “boasted about the courage of the Russians and all Communist revolutionaries and described the capitalists as cowards” (140-41).

Clytus confesses that it “made my guts groan, not ever to hear a voice in disagreement, and especially not to be able to dissent myself, but I knew that the moment I was recognized to be a foreigner—especially from Stateside—they would not miss the opportunity to accuse me of being an ‘imperialist’ spy.” Accordingly, he decides “to keep quiet and listen while poor, uneducated, untravelled men—women were never present—were duped by professional Communist liars” (141).

The breaking point with the Cuban authorities occurred when Clytus decided he definitely wanted to leave the Island. Another African American living on the Island had recently warned Clytus to “better get right down to the embassy and get your papers,” because soon “they’re not letting any more Americans out of Cuba.” The partially paranoid reason was the life-long match that Fidel Castro had decided to fight against the White House. According to Clytus’ fellow citizen, “if anything happens between the United States and Cuba, he wants us for hostages” (86).

Clytus told the same ICAP[xc] bureaucrats that helped him settle in Cuba that he “was accomplishing nothing in Cuba and that my identification was with black people,” and “that since

[xc] ICAP, in Spanish: Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples). http://www.icap.cu/

there were neither black people nor white people in Cuba, I wanted his organization to help me get back to the States" (88).

Then, he had to endure a number of pressures against him, which escalated as Clytus decided to publicly protest against what he considered was an arbitrary suppression of his freedom of movement. His residence permit finally expired and he couldn't work with it anymore. Therefore, as a foreigner, Clytus was now willing to be deported. Surprisingly, he was initially denied that possibility,[xci] and the only mechanism offered to him was to "write Fidel" a letter (88), in order to personally request the Cuban commander-in-chief to authorized him to leave the Island.

After a couple of weeks without receiving any official reply, Clytus decided to escape from Cuban territory to the U.S. naval base in Caimanera, Guantánamo province, an action that constitutes a serious crime according to Cuban law. He was arrested on the highway by Cuban troops, even before attempting to cross the heavily militarized border. In consequence, from then on and until he was finally deported to the U.S., Clytus was not trusted anymore by the Cuban authorities. After two and a half years living in a sort of civil limbo on the Island, now he was suspicious of being a trouble-maker foreigner who could only damage the international image of the Revolution.

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[xci] Clytus writes that his "two and a half years in Cuba had taught me" that "the power structure wasn't interested in a lone black from the United States unless he could be used for propaganda." As such, in his case, the Cuban Revolution seemed to be waiting for the most convenient historical circumstance to use him on way or another to its favor.

In a Kafkaesque dialogue, the ICAP bureaucrat "Comrade Rodriguez" admits he was not authorized to give Clytus any more information regarding his status in Cuba. This is reminiscent of the sentence "Could be a long time before you leave" (91) found in one of Kafka's classic novels (**Kafka, Franz**. *The Castle*. Translated by Anthea Bell. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

https://libcom.org/files/Franz%20Kafka-The%20Castle%20(Oxford%20World's%20Classics)%20(2009).pdf

Clytus partially transcribes one his meetings with Comrade Rodriguez at the ICAP headquarters in Havana:

"We don't deport anybody," he said.

"A foreigner can be deported from any country in the world," I argued, "Why keep me here if I don't want to stay?"

"We're different," he said (88-89).

He was detained and interrogated in several facilities of the G-2—the secret political police of the Ministry of Interior. Clytus didn't suffer the same torture that Anthony Bryant would suffer in the years to come in Cuba. The fact that he was African American seemed to be more important than being an American citizen. He was questioned as to why he insisted on calling "Afro-Cubans" (97) the Black people in Cuba. And he was harshly criticized as "racist" when he expressed his desire to return to the United States in order to join "an all-black group," as well as when he explained his disbelief in "assimilation," which Clytus thought was only causing the black man "to disappear in Cuba," since "miscegenation's going to wipe him out" (98).

Once back in the streets, without having been formally charged, Clytus decided to escalate public pressure on Cuban authorities. He made "a sign that read, translated: 'ON HUNGER STRIKE UNTIL THEY DEPORT ME FROM THIS COUNTRY.'" Then, he tells how "I hung the sign on my neck and went to a park in old Havana and sat down." Of course, "in a country that tolerated no protest demonstrations, this was equivalent to an uprising." As expected, Clytus got arrested by the police, and he writes that they immediately "turned me over to the G-2 again" (137).

Weeks later, Clytus conceived another plan to clandestinely escape from communist Cuba. Late at night, he quietly dived into Havana Bay and managed to board the *Tina*, a foreign ship "tied to the pier" (143). Clytus "crept along the deck" until he "reached the galley," and he hid in "one of the lifeboats, squeezed into the narrow space between its seats" (147).

For twelve days, he remained there, waiting for the night, "when I could hear no movement about the ship," in order to "slip from the boat and creep into the galley to steal scraps of food and to fill my belly with water" (147). Then he "was discovered by a member of the crew" and Clytus agreed to leave the ship—"helped by the crew members to get ashore without detection by the guard" (148)—as long as they didn't denounce him to the police.

Finally, Clytus "made a 'BLACK POWER' sign, hung it on my neck, and walked down the street to G-2 headquarters" (149). In Cuba he had now become a caricature of a Black Power member. He was representing somebody he was not anymore in the hope that some political publicity about a Black Panther protesting inside Cuba could help him to get deported back to his country, in a time where active Black Panthers members were being not only persecuted and prosecuted, but killed in violent incidents.

And again, after another couple of weeks of waiting without being charged or notified about his deportation, Clytus made a sign that read in Spanish: "THE ENTIRE WESTERN WORLD IS A CESSPOOL OF RACISM. AND IF ALL AFRO-AMERICAN PEOPLE DO NOT IDENTIFY WITH THEIR BLACKNESS, THEY WILL BE SWALLOWED UP IN THE GLORIFICATION OF WHITENESS" (150). With this message, he walked the streets of Old Havana near Central Park, next to Havana Capitol. And again he got arrested by the police and interrogated by the State Security.

Clytus still had to protest one more time, in the immigration office that had been handling his case. He was finally taken to the same "small jail where I had been kept overnight when I had arrived in Cuba." Clytus claims to have seen there mainly Haitians and Dominicans, who had been kept for months or years, "and nothing was being done to get them out of the country" (155). Then, "again I was put into one of the cells and was 'incommunicado'" (153), just as he was treated when he landed on the Island.

This time Cuban authorities truly deported John Clytus—"unshaven, unbathed, and without a cent in my pocket"—through the airport of Varadero, in Matanzas province, forcing him to join a "line of Cuban refugees" (156) who were leaving their country for the United States most likely not to ever return.

Perhaps, sending the former Black Panther to Miami together with the Cuban people who were being expelled from Utopia, was the metaphoric farewell that the Cuban Revolution had reserved for him: for the Castro regime, an African American and the mostly white families that were eager to flee communism, belonged together in the line of those considered traitors to the Cuban Utopia.

In this respect, Clytus had commented earlier in his book that he "wished that I had become some kind of two-bit 'leader' before I had arrived in Cuba, so that I would have had propaganda value for Communist use against the States." If that would have been the case, according to him, "then I would not only have been received in Cuba with open arms, but would have been able to enter and leave the country at will, as other two-bit 'leaders' had" (129).

Before living in Castro's Cuba, Clytus's vision of Communism was skeptically theoretical. He expected it "to be a system that will end the exploitation of man by his fellowman" by violently "ending the class society of the capitalist system and by creating a classless society." After his years in Cuba, his opinion was that what Communism "actually does is reverse the direction of the exploitation—and this only when it is convenient" (157). That is, "Communism, championing equal treatment for all, would end the exploitation of just the poor and exploit all, rich or poor, who did not dance to the dictatorial tune of its ruling hierarchy" (158).

John Clytus came to Cuba from America—via Mexico[xcii]—with the conviction "that blacks and whites represented two different races, that they had a different history, that their physical and psychological makeup were different" (71). The Cuban Revolution was for him a unique

[xcii] Regarding racism in Mexico, where he had resided for several months, Clytus writes that "I knew that, as a black man, had I stayed in Mexico, I would have had no more identity there than I had in Cuba" (59), in this case, also because "of its shortage of blacks" (58) by comparison to Cuba and the United States. For example, in Mexico City, he mentions that "every time I was introduced to someone, we had not been in conversation for five minutes before he was asking me whether I was a boxer or a baseball player or a singer" (123), the stereotypical roles ascribed to a black man in that country by then.

opportunity—"before saying adieu to the Western world" and leaving for any African nation to join the decolonization struggle—"to see if blacks and whites in Cuba had, under communism, truly become one big, happy family" (62).

In the end, although he had some friends and he seemed to have fallen in love at least twice during his stay on the Island, the overall experience was disappointing for him both from a personal and sociological perspective. In this respect, the final message in the Epilogue chapter of *Black Man in Red Cuba* is worth quoting *in extenso* (158):

> Cuba taught me that a black under communism in a white-oriented society—any society where whites hold or have held power—would find himself in a white society that would persecute him for even intimating that he had a love for black. Periodicals, books, television, and other media of communication would no longer be permitted to carry his voice of dissent against injustice.
>
> Communism, with its benevolent method of ending the racial problem by condensing all races into one-big-happy-humane-race, would ring down the final curtain on black consciousness. Nor would 'Negroes,' in spite of their love for integration with whites, find themselves in their expected paradise. The 'Negroes' that constitute the 'bourgeoisie of color' in white-oriented societies would suddenly find such capitalist 'luxuries' as their homes and businesses, paid for with sweat and hard-earned money, taken from them for the 'convenience' of the State.
>
> Their protest marches, used so loosely by 'Negroes' to publicize their problems in order for whites to solve them, would become their death marches. The only people who 'overcome' in protest marches in Communist societies are those in the tanks and with the machine guns.

> After three years in Communist Cuba, I am convinced that a ‘Negro’ Communist is an absurdity and a black Communist is an impossibility.

In any case, the extreme experience of traveling and being part of exceptional experiments such as the Cuban Revolution seems to have increased the radicalization of foreign travelers for or against their original cause of travel. The closer they were to the object of representation, the less objectivity they achieved, since their testimonies were to be born already biased between the irreversible ratification of their own ideology or its drastic denial.

## 4.5 Why didn't you go to an African country?[xciii]

Faced with "the pain of rejection by my former comrades," with the "fear of being gunned down in the streets by a vengeful cop," and with the certainty that, if he was "fool enough to go to court," he would be "spending the rest of my natural life in the darkest corner of some maximum security prison or nuthouse" in the United States, the African-American William Lee Brent (1931-2006) "brought up the idea of skyjacking a plane to Cuba alone." As he recounts in his book *Long Time Gone*,**[11]** in June 1969, he thought that "one well-dressed black man would be less likely to draw suspicion than two or three" (133).

The former member of the Black Panther Party—who didn't speak Spanish at the time—admits that he "knew nothing about Cuba or what living under a socialist government would be like," but at that point in his life he only cared about the fact that "U.S. laws had no force in Cuba," so that he "would be free to start a new life" and "live and work with revolutionary, socialist-minded people who wouldn't hold my past or my race against me." Therefore, once expelled from the Black Panthers, Brent "began to plan how I would go about ripping off my transportation to freedom" (134).

Brent admits that, given the historical context as well as his personal circumstances, he "was extremely paranoid" back then, convinced "that either the Panthers or the police were waiting to gun me down" in the streets or even in a prison of his own country (128). In fact, Brent details how by then he "had been unjustly accused by the Party of being a police agent," to the point that

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[xciii] "Why didn't you go to some other country?" "What other country you got in mind, Lieutenant, the Soviet Union? China? Vietnam? Korea? Hell, I'm going to have enough trouble learning Spanish." "What about Africa? Why didn't you go to an African country?" "I thought about it, Lieutenant, but Cuba is a lot closer and I was in a hurry." (**Brent, William Lee**. *Long Time Gone: A Black Panther's True-Life Story of his Skyjacking and Twenty-Five Years in Cuba*. New York: Times Books, 1996. p.151.)

he “had also been made to question my own sanity and ability to judge right from wrong” (235). As such, he thought he had little time left to make a radical decision and save his life.

Armed with “an old, beat-up .38” revolver and dressing “more like a hip Baptist minister than a fugitive ex-Black Panther” (135), Brent recounts how he successfully hijacked a Boeing 707 plane with seventy-six passengers—Flight 154 of Trans World Airlines, originally flying from Oakland to New York city. Fortunately, there was no violence involved in this case, and even the American pilot announced to him that the Cuban authorities were “pretty touchy about U.S. planes in their territory” (140).

Once immediately disarmed (see Reference 135) and interrogated in Havana airport, Brent justified his decision not only “because the police in my country want to kill me,” but also “because I want to learn socialism.” As in many cases of foreign refugees in Cuba—in particular, American citizens arriving without previous notice—his political alliance to the social system on the Island didn’t prevent him from going to jail. The Cuban Revolution implied an acceleration of many radical transformations in society, but Brent was asked to consider that “you are not in the United States now and everything is different here.” So, the best advice the guards could give him upon his arrival in Havana and his subsequent detention was: “Don’ be in a hurry, because everything takes time” (143).

The conditions of the Cuban prison, as usual, were very harsh. Brent reports that “the stink of urine was thick in the air.” The toilet was “a small hole in the floor,” and it also “stank terribly no matter how long I let the water run.” Besides, he describes the shower as “a rusty piece of piping” and the mattress “lumpy and hard as a rock” with “a damp, moldy smell to it.” Thus, Brent “couldn’t help but wonder whether the doors we passed led to jail cells or torture chambers.” And

he writes that “in all the years I’d spent in prison in the States, I’d never experienced anything like this” (144-45).

In sum, during his first hours in a Cuban jail, he kept wondering if “was it possible my coming to Cuba instead of standing trial had been a mistake?” (144). Although he “had been hoping to become part of the beauty of the Cuban revolution” (145), Brent initially felt that the Cuban military might simply send him “straight back to take my chances in a U.S. courtroom.” His days became full of “tension and fatigue,” which in turn opened “the door to nightmares”[xciv] (146).

Still, the mere existence of a mattress and a shower reveals that Brent was not subject to the worst possible conditions endured by thousands of local prisoners. In particular, political prisoners. Furthermore, he was not subjected to physical punishment, otherwise a very common practice in Cuban jails until today. And he was even allowed to smoke some Cuban cigarettes.

William Lee Brent spent twenty-two months at the immigration facilities in Castro’s Cuba. But, after that not welcoming period, he was still happy to stay on the Island and live the rest of his life as an American exile who never actually obtained Cuban citizenship. In the Acknowledgements of his 2006 biography, published shortly before his death, he expresses—in

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[xciv] These are some examples of Brent’s nightmares in a Cuban jail, narrated with remarkable literary skill:

“I saw myself running down a long, dimly lit alley. Faceless shadow-people leaned out of holes in the walls yelling and pointing toward the sky. I tried to stop, to raise my head and look up, but my legs kept moving and my head wouldn’t turn. Suddenly the din became the wail of sirens and the pointing fingers began shooting at me. I grabbed at one of the fingers; it came off in my hand. My screams drowned out the sirens, and I woke up soaked with sweat, wondering where the hell I was” (146).

“This time I saw myself hurrying along a dark street crowded with faceless people. I knew I had to make the nearest bus stop as quickly as possible. Looking back over my shoulder every few steps, I rushed along a busy street not knowing where I was going or what to expect. Suddenly the crowds disappeared and I was surrounded by screaming police cars. Uniformed men ran toward me pointing their guns. I snatched at the automatic in my waistband but it stuck to my skin. I turned to run but some force glued me to the spot. Again I woke up soaked in sweat, a scream locked in my throat” (148-49).

“I was in a semidark room on the top floor of some kind of warehouse. I could hear voices in the distance but couldn't make out what they were saying. I knew I shouldn't be there and silently tried to sneak out. I couldn't find a door, so I made my way to a small, partially open window, got down on all fours, and began squirming through headfirst. Halfway through, I got stuck. The voices were getting louder. I tried to break the glass but my arms wouldn't work and I couldn't turn around. Suddenly a door opened and I could hear footsteps running toward me. I made a last effort to wrench myself free. The window broke and I was falling into darkness, a scream trapped in my throat (156-57).

sharp contrast to his fellow citizens Anthony Bryant and John Clytus—"especially my infinite gratitude to the Cuban government for granting me political asylum and giving me the opportunity to discover a new, more rewarding lifestyle" (viii).

During his interrogations on the Island, Lee Brent defends himself by establishing parallels between the violence of the Cuban Revolution against the previous dictatorship on the Island, and the armed resistance of certain African American groups against the U.S. establishment. He claimed that "the police in my country had declared all-out war on the political group I belonged to." Therefore, "we were fighting against our government the same way you people fought against Batista's." In his opinion, as in the case of many other of his comrades, this included the need to shoot "the police in self-defense." Besides, Brent pleads that, if allowed to live in Cuba, he will cease all revolutionary actions and simply "get a job," then "go to school and learn Spanish, and then I want to learn about Marxism and Leninism" (151). Castro's Cuba, the cradle of the Third World Revolution, in this case, also represented for him a safe space to cease his own revolutionary activities.

Therefore, the anti-racist fighter Brent came to Utopia in search of a common life, a very different purpose from the original plan assigned to his fellow citizen Anthony Bryant, who hoped to obtain in Cuba military equipment and perhaps some guerrilla training, to then use them effectively once smuggled back into the United States.

Still, Brent was always aware of racial tensions remaining in Castro's Cuba, as well as the official denial of any conflicts regarding race by the revolutionary government. The question of racism was considered a remnant of the capitalist past. Racism was supposed to have been abolished—in law and practice—as of January 1959, given the anti-discrimination stance of the new socialist society on the Island. To claim otherwise, particularly in the case of Black Cubans,

was considered not only racist but a counterrevolutionary attitude, which could easily turn the critical comrade into another enemy of the people.[xcv]

In the case of foreigners, the fellow traveller could then be deported from Cuba after being accused of treason against the revolutionary cause. In the case of American citizens, like Brent, they could be charged without proof of being a spy for the U.S. government, the archenemy of the Cuban Revolution. In fact, while Brent was still in prison, this happened to the U.S. anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1970-1914), who suffered an alleged heart attack in Havana when he "was summoned on June 25, 1970, to appear before Dr. Raul Roa, Cuba's Foreign Minister" and he "was formally notified that Project Cuba had been suspended."[125] Part of his research documentation was confiscated and Lewis died in December of that year, when he suffered a heart attack in New York. According to *The New York Times*, quoting the book *The Taming of Fidel Castro* by Maurice Halperin, "two years later Raul Castro Ruz, Minister of the Armed Forces and Fidel's brother, portrayed Mr. Lewis as having been an American secret agent."[xcvi]

In such a paranoid political climate, as a foreigner seeking to be "long time gone" from the real word into a little utopian island—as the title of his testimony suggests—Brent kept a prudent distance from problematic topics. Of course, he could perceive very well "the island's complete

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[xcv] Despite their leftist affiliation, even renown African-Cuban intellectuals and artists, like Walterio Carbonell (1920-2008) and Nicolás Guillén Landrián (1938-2003), have been ostracized or repressed for claiming a Black identity, since this could potentially weaken the monolithic unity sought by the Communist Party.

**Schmidt, Jalane D**. *Locked Together: The Culture and Politics of "Blackness" in Cuba*. In: *Transforming Anthropology*. 16(2), pp.160-64. 2008
https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1548-7466.2008.00023.x

**Benson, Devyn Spence**. *A New Generation of Afro-Cubans Confronts the Paradoxical Coexistence of Racism, Antiracism, and Discourses of "Racelessness" within the Cuban Revolution*. In: *NACLA Report on the Americas*. 49(1), pp.48-55. 2017.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10714839.2017.1298245?journalCode=rnac20

[xcvi] The U.S. anthropologist Ruth M. Lewis (1916-2008), widow of Oscar Lewis, declared at the time that "I wouldn't go so far as to say that Fidel Castro caused my husband's death." However, she considered that Fidel Castro had indeed "doublecrossed" her husband and that "the whole incident in Cuba affected my husband very deeply," since "he took it personally and was brokenhearted, and I don't believe he was ever the same again."

dependence on the Soviet Union for its development," but this could fit within the logic of blame-America-first, since Cuba "was a small, underdeveloped agricultural society whose people were struggling like hell to survive without having to bow down to the U.S. government" (233).

Brent notes that other African Americans temporarily residing on the Island also thought that "the government was racist." As such, "so many of the brothers had such difficulty adjusting to the Cuban way of life" (234).

In any case, although he had "run into several racist Cubans," Brent believed that "the wide racial mixing showed that the problem was more a lack of racial sensitivity than out-and-out racism." As an example, he mentions how in Cuba "people referred to each other affectionately as chino, negro, blanco, without any overt racial overtones." Again, given that "racism had existed before the revolution" during decades of capitalism and centuries of colonialism, Brent simply "didn't think fourteen years was enough time to wipe it out completely" (235). During decades, the official ideology insisted—sometimes by manipulating popular culture—that the issue of Blackness had no importance in an egalitarian society, since the main goal was to educate everybody as revolutionary subjects.

Brent was somehow retiring from the warfront against capitalism and racism in America, in order to restart a rather normal life under different principles and values. In Cuba by then, these were per force concepts of Marxist-Leninist inspiration. But only those concepts which were taught by Soviet manuals, in general elaborated by State bureaucrats from the Soviet Union,[xcvii] and not by Western Marxist thinkers. In fact, many of the main Marxists theorists of the capitalist

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[xcvii] Some of the books that circulated translated into Spanish in communist Cuba were: *Fundamentals of Marxist Philosophy* by **Fyodor Konstantinov**; *Fundamentals of Philosophical Knowledge* by **Viktor Afanasyev**; *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism* by **Otto Kuusinen**; *Fundamentals of Political Economy* (1963) by **Peter Nikitin**; *Categories and Laws of the Political Economy of Communism* by **Alexei Rumyantsev**; *Marxist Philosophy Course* by **A. Spirkin** and **O. Yajot**; and the much popular as well as mandatory *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (1967) by **Mark Rosenthal** and **Pavel Yudin**.

world were under suspicion in orthodox Cuba, and sometimes dismissed as revisionists of the original dogmas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin.[xcviii]

In "late April 1971, twenty-two months since I'd come to revolutionary Cuba seeking refuge" (170), and after countless interrogations in a sort of "sadistic head game" (163), Brent was finally released from prison. Since he doesn't mention it in his book *Long Time Gone*, it is very likely that he was never formally charged with any crime. Brent had simply lost two years of his life, but he now felt like a "long sigh of relief", "like crying and laughing at the same time," as he was free in Cuba and flooded by "waves of happiness" (170).

Coincidentally, in late April 1971 the Padilla Affair[159] was taking place in Havana. The Cuban writer Heberto Padilla had been sequestered for several weeks by the State Security—again, without formal charges against him—and on April 27, 1971, he was forced to deliver a humiliating *mea culpa* at the headquarter of the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC, in Spanish) where Padilla incriminated himself and accused many of his colleagues of having counterrevolutionary attitudes in their personal life, as well as in their published and unpublished writings.

This event led to the loss of the solidarity of many international intellectuals, if not with the Cuban Revolution, at least with its maximum leader. A number of open letters protesting the repression against Padilla were sent from abroad to Fidel Castro, signed by dozens of public personalities, most of them outspoken supporters of a socialist system on the Island until then.

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[xcviii] According to the Cuban-Russian biochemist and lawyer Dmitri Prieto Samsonov, from the mid-sixties until the late eighties the official orthodoxy on the Island, beyond its innate ideological intolerance, also tended to reject any Marxist-derived theory which questioned the *statu-quo* in the Soviet Union and its allies. As such, not only Leo Trotsky and Mao Zedong were not welcome, but in different degrees, in Cuba it was difficult to find the works of Antonio Gramsci, György Lukács, Herbert Marcuse, Roger Garaudy, Adam Shaff, among others canonical thinkers of the international Left (personal communication, 23 April 2021).

The Padilla Affair happened at the same time as the First Congress of Education and Culture,[xcix] which took place between April 23-27 that year. In his closing speech, Fidel Castro warned both local and international intellectuals about the tightening cultural politics of the Revolution, as a question of self-defense and survival against "cultural imperialism" (165).

Castro then announced that the only priority of his government was to publish "books for education" and that, "as a matter of principle, there are certain books of which not a single copy, not a chapter, not a page, not a letter should be published!" (164). In reference to Padilla, without mentioning him, Castro stated that no one could claim "rights" in order "to continue sowing poison, deceit and intrigue in the revolution" (166).

In any case, as for Castro "these issues are too inconsequential, too much rubbish to deserve the attention of our workers and the pages of our newspapers," this international scandal was not covered by the Cuban official press—the only one legal in the country. Yet, there were to come many calamitous consequences for the cultural climate of the Island, just when William Lee Brent was released, after being arbitrarily incarcerated for two years.

Castro mandated that the Cuban public space be restricted "without any kind of contemplation, or hesitation," so that "only the revolutionaries will have a place" (167) in the Revolution. For the rest, those labeled as "bourgeois intellectuals and libelers," the national mass media had to ignore their names and works "indefinitely and infinitely." The logic behind this State censorship was that, "regardless of more or less technical level, more or less imagination to write, as revolutionaries we value cultural works according to the values that they entail for the people" (168).

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[xcix] *Primer Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura*. In: *Referencias*, 2(3), Havana University. 1971. https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00068205/00049

In any case, Brent was just eager to enjoy his freedom and meet new people in Havana. He portrays himself as quite obsessed with experiencing "how fine Cuban women can be," described by another American to him as "fine little mommas" (176). And, as "they didn't beat me or torture me," in an April 1971 letter to his family—as soon as he was released from prison—he concludes that after all "the Cubans have treated me decently" (186).

The revolutionary government then sent him to the "Hijack House," together with many other foreign refugees, including several Americans. At that place, according to Brent, most of them seemed to agree that Castro's Cuba was not so interested in answering their request "to train us in guerrilla warfare and help sneak us back into our respective countries." In fact, many were "flatly refused," arguing—against historical evidence—that "the Cuban government didn't believe in exporting revolution" (178).

Some African Americans even told Brent that "the Panthers had fucked me over" by favoring his escape to Cuba, since "according to their account," even the well-known Eldridge Cleaver (1935-1988), who had come to Cuba from Canada, was now in some trouble on the Island, after first being received and treated like a hero, with plenty of privileges unthinkable for the average Cuban citizen: Cleaver officially received "a house and a car" and he could "shop in special stores," with "access to the best restaurants, bars, and nightclubs in Havana." Cleaver's adversities began, paradoxically, "when he started organizing a Panther chapter in Havana." Eventually, the communist regime sent Cleaver from Cuba to Algeria,[c] where "he was welcomed as a great black American revolutionary and given diplomatic status" (174) so that the African

[c] Brent was to learn later in Cuba from Virginia Miller, an American white woman who was "an outspoken supporter of Huey Newton" and was "highly trusted" by the Black Panther leadership (181) that, with respect to the tensions between fractions of this organization, "Eldridge had apparently badmouthed me to the Cubans and convinced them I was an agent." For Brent, it seems that "this was the principal reason the Cubans had kept insisting I was lying to them and had kept me locked up for so long" (183).

American could safely organize there the international branch of the Black Panther Party, a mission which anti-imperialistic Cuba was unwilling to host.

Shockingly for Brent, "most of the American blacks living at Hijack House strongly believed racism was alive and well in Cuba. 'They only got one token black leader who fought with Fidel in the mountains, […] and you can count the blacks in important leadership positions on one hand and still have some fingers left over.'" In fact, Brent notices that "in 1971, black Americans sporting Afros were an oddity on the streets of Havana" (178). But, contrary to other "brothers in the house" who "refused to learn Spanish," because "they regarded Spanish as just another colonial slave language that would make it easier for the Cubans to brainwash them," Brent "thought Spanish was a beautiful language" and he "was eager to learn to communicate in it" (179) in order to start his new life on the Island. English had been to him the vehicle of oppression and hatred. And now, hopefully, Spanish could become for him the redemption tongue of his newly found utopia in the Caribbean.[ci]

When Brent volunteered as a *machetero*—cutting sugar cane in the countryside—he met there, in a camp where "a three-strand barbed-wire fence surrounded the barracks style buildings in the compound as well as the barren spaces between them" (191), many other foreigners from different areas of the world. They all supported the Cuban Revolution and, according to his

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[ci] Every new world deserves a new language and linguistic. Emancipation is also about stylistics. For example, Thomas More described his Utopian language as one that "comes nearer the Persian" with a certain degree of "Greek derivation" (98). In any case, "both a copious and pleasant language […] in which a man can fully express his mind" (83).

**Thomas More**. *Utopia*. Planet Book. https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/utopia.pdf

As curiosity, in the addendum *Wherfore not Utopie, but rather rightely my name is Eutopie, a place of felicitie*, Thomas More, together with the Belgian humanist Peter Giles (1486-1533), developed their own Utopian alphabet, with 22 letters based on the shape of circles, squares and triangles. In August 2020, this language was included as one of the over 200 constructed languages, as compiled by Rebecca G. Bettencourt for The ConLang Code Registry (CLCR), a project which assigns a specific ISO-639-3 code to each of these linguistic constructions. The short and long codes of Utopian are *qto* and *art-x-utopian*, respectively. https://www.kreativekorp.com/clcr/

account, “no one ever had a good word for the government of the United States—nor a bad one for Cuba.” In fact, Brent notices that “most people revered Fidel Castro as a modern-day Simon Bolivar” while “they considered the U.S. government to be the natural enemy of all of Latin America” (197-98).

Furthermore, in general, for “Cubans, as well as foreigners,” according to Brent, “their maximum leader wasn’t Mr. President or Mr. Minister. He was Fidel,” and they “quoted him religiously” (225). Beyond the obvious lack of objectivity of such an observation—just when the Cuban government had thousands of political prisoners serving long sentences,[182] including a number of Americans and African Americans—the sincere effort of Brent to understand the legitimacy of the Cuban Revolution as an alternative to Imperialism, also inadvertently reveals the widespread cult of personality on the Island.

But this citizen submission under a personalistic State tended to be seen by foreigners as a sign of consensus, not oppression, as part of the monolithic unity needed in Cuba in order to survive against the aggressions of the capitalist world abroad. In Castro’s Utopia, unity, as much as unanimity, were in a way represented by outsiders as the mechanism to maintain and develop the new system. The construction of socialism and eventually communism had to undergo a number of stages, where direct democracy of the masses prevailed over individual rights.

In practice, after the first months of public denial even by Fidel Castro, the preferred term in the official rhetoric was the claim that Cuba was a dictatorship of proletariat. This Marxist concept implies that the majority of the people must displace a minority of former exploiters and other social scourges or *lacras sociales*—a term mentioned by Allen Ginsberg in his Cuban diary. The New Man shall overcome the Old Regime as soon as possible, to avoid any chance of restoring the past of the nation to the point it was before its reprogramming in the name of the Revolution.

Six decades after 1959, those minorities not only haven't disappeared, but they have kept reproducing themselves within Cuban society, in principle permanently threatening the stability of socialism on the Island. In fact, they constitute, in mercenary alliance with the exiles—according to the local propaganda—a very convenient justification for the Cuban authorities to justify their refusal to accept a representative democracy with political plurality.

In this respect, it is as if the Cuban Revolution, like most Utopias in history and literature, were structurally artificial from its very conception so that it couldn't naturally cope with the nature of Cubans as human beings. The humanism of Utopia appears to be designed for a humanity that does not exist yet, but that is on the verge of being spontaneously generated by Utopia itself, through a sort of soft—certainly sore—submission.

Brent admits that, in general, their own "ideas about revolution were vague, naive, and romantic" (203). This vague, naive and romantic vision—from the perspective of the outsider allowed to contribute from within a utopian space called the Cuban revolution—was the reason why, "after their tours ended, many of the *brigadistas* wanted to stay and work." Although "only a few ever made it" (223). Brent concludes that they had simply traveled to Cuba under the influence of incendiary international propaganda, "with stars in their eyes," assuming that, without further questioning, the Cuban military "would train them in guerrilla warfare, arm them, and sneak them back into the States to engage in armed struggle, or help them get to Africa." It was never the case, and many became "pretty pissed off about it" (235), as most of them didn't expect to stay on the Island for long periods of time, as Brent did stay in the end.

In this respect, Cuban authorities were exceedingly cautious about letting the foreign witness become part of the witnessed phenomenon. Perhaps, the zeal of the revolutionary regime aimed to preserve unchallenged their life-long governance of a Cuban closed society. This, in turn,

has generated no little claustrophobia in those who have had no choice but to remain for life in the communist country or, at least, not until reaching an opportunity to escape, which has become a sort of national pastime: an irreversible trip with the inverse trajectory of the travels of political pilgrims. Such state strategies of centralized control and power in perpetuity—with variations along the decades, according to the global geopolitical context—continues to be successfully implemented on the Island until today.

Therefore, it didn't matter much that, for those Americans on the Island, who aspired to join the collectivist experience of the Cuban people, America and its American symbols—including the national flag—represented nothing but "oppression, racism, injustice, invasion of other countries, murder of innocent people, genocide, and just about every other evil you can think of." According to Brent, this was true not only for those privileged enough to reach Cuba, but also "in the minds of millions of people the world over" (223). Still, not everyone escaping America was welcome in Cuba, a country that claimed to be under the permanent pressure of the Cold War. As such, the rationale was that Cubans couldn't risk encouraging an internal climate of distension, opening, multiplicity, and the like, since this might compromise the indispensable national unity, desperately needed for survival in the backyard of the United States, and much less so, if such claims for inclusion by well-meaning foreigners arose from vagueness, naiveté and romanticism.

In a way, the communist authorities have always assumed that the initial mythification made by outsiders could eventually vanish, when they had to face the harshness of daily life in Cuba. Then, as seen with John Clytus, for example, dealing accordingly with a foreigner on the Island posed a dilemma different from to simply repressing local citizens. Yet, as seem before with

Anthony Bryant, impunity also prevailed with foreigners, if it was believed that they could pose a certain threat, present or putative.

Brent seems to accepts the governmentally-imposed notion of working without compensation. He describes so-called voluntary work—that “consisted of everything from sweeping and cleaning up your block on Sunday morning” to “picking coffee in the countryside on weekends” or “straightening nails and moving construction materials from one place to another at Havana’s Talla Piedra electric plant at night” (222).

Still, Brent is aware that, as an American citizen, he will always have a different status. In different occasions and contexts, Cubans confront him by recalling that “you don’t belong here, because you don’t understand what the revolution is all about’” (226). Brent himself explain how a designation like “foreign technician” immediately leads to privileges out of reach for most locals, including access to special stores, as well as the anti-egalitarian benefit of being able to “receive extra rations of canned goods, meat, and gasoline” (225), among other selected services and scarce goods on the Island.

Many of his colleagues at work and his fellow students, when he was accepted to Havana University, showed “curiosity” about his case, since they “thought our studying in Cuba rather than in our own countries was strange” (229), a strangeness that Brent himself started to feel, since “as I later realized, years of cultural, economic, social, and spiritual abuse had conditioned me to believe I didn’t really belong there” (230).

On specific occasions, Brent was targeted by the Cuban State just for being an American on the Island with a potential for violent action, given his past as a Black Panther in the U.S., including prophylactic arrests without any evidence or charges against him. Usually these arbitrary detentions were carried out by immigration officials who came to his apartment to notify him, for

example, “that a bus would come by the next morning to pick me up,” adding that he “wasn’t under arrest or charged with anything, but if I didn’t catch the bus, I would be picked up and put in jail” (237).

Brent many times “felt more hurt and disillusioned than angry.” His wife, the travel writer Jane McManus,[cii] at some point “was furious” but, even when the African American family tried to call by phone “everyone we knew” that the fact was that “there was nothing anyone could do” (237).

Of course, Brent was not the only foreigner being targeted. In fact, he recalls that “the Ministry of the Interior was rounding up everyone they thought might cause trouble and holding them in a safe place until the activities at Revolution Square were over” (237).

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[cii] Later in her life, Jane McManus (1920-2005) would eventually publish a number of rather touristic books for world travelers interested in Cuba: **McManus, Jane**. *Getting to Know Cuba: A Travel Guide*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989; **McManus, Jane**. *Cuba’s Island of Dreams: Voices from the Isle of Pines and Youth*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000; **McManus, Jane**. *Cuba: Caribbean Enigma*. Singapore: Times Editions, 2002.

In 2001, Jane McManus, who had originally moved to Cuba to work as an English translator for the *TriContinental* propagandistic magazine—mainly for readers abroad who would support and participate in revolutionary projects worldwide—declared that somehow social apathy has taken the place of ideological activism on the Island: “That kind of enthusiasm no longer exists. In the late 60s, people would do anything for their government, not anymore. You can’t sustain it. Revolution is a moment.”

MacManus confesses that she began to lose faith in Castro as early as in the seventies, even when she was the president of the Union of North American Residents—she met her husband William Lee Brent in one of those meetings—and by 2001 she was already openly criticizing the official policies of the “military dictatorship.” MacManus insists that she “was never so blindly partial,” like other American refugees in Cuba back then: “Most Americans are quite uncritical. They are a lot more starry-eyed than I am. I could easily see there was nothing being done to develop the country. As long as the paternalistic relationship continued with the socialist block there was no need to produce. And now we are living the consequences of that.”

MacManus also recalls how, when “Cuba began its policy of trying to reestablish diplomatic relations with other countries,” then “it became very inconvenient to have all these outspoken crazy exiles” on the Island, since most of them “did not believe in their own governments.” Therefore, the Revolution suddenly considered them as “sort of troublemakers” and “by the late 1970s the Cuban government disbanded all unions” of foreigners in its national territory.

Still, MacManus, already in her eighties, expresses that she had no need and “no desire to go back” to America—she could legally visit the United States every year—because “I have no house there.” Besides, she had “good medical care here and a very nice house” in Miramar, a district of Havana built by the Cuban bourgeoisie before communism. MacManus admits that “foreigners don’t have to scramble around to find where their next meal is coming from, or stand in line eternally or go to hospitals that are filthy and don’t have medicine.” For her, the point is that, although foreigners “get to do things that Cubans do,” they simply “have more money to do them with.”

**Rodríguez, Olga R**. *Revolution is a Moment*. In: *Cubans 2001: Hustling, Breaking Rules, Making Waves*. https://projects.journalism.berkeley.edu/cubans2001/story-revolution.html

Foreign residents couldn't be fully trusted by the Revolution during massive public events, when many other foreigners—journalists, activists, diplomats, politicians—would be present to witness and document the realities of the Cuban utopia. In Castro's closed society, the image of the system to be send abroad was carefully controlled and indeed constructed. For the revolutionary regime, in a sense, representation mattered more than reality.

The goal of the Cuban communist press—the only one legal on the Island—was to stabilize and legitimize the social model imposed and its founding leaders, based on the supposedly unanimous approval of the people. Consequently, all alternative viewpoints and worldviews—particularly on the part of Cuban citizens—were discouraged, made invisible, and ultimately destroyed by defamation, censorship, and repression, including threats, harassment, beatings, jail, torture, exile, or death.

As a result, any criticism of Cuban Revolution through the years has been was carefully considered and, if possible, avoided to the very last minute, by both nationals and international actors, since voicing such criticism would mark an irreversible and life-changing decision for anyone. This might help us to understand why some of the foreigners who had been violent activists in America "from Hijack House" now "were silently crying," apparently out of either humiliation or horror. They were not under arrest and yet they were kept in a clubhouse "surrounded by armed guards" and "quite a few" locals, "dressed in their militia uniforms or white doctor's or nurse's smocks" (238).

Brent explains that Cuban military authorities told African Americans that situations like these stemmed from "a necessary security measure that in no way implied we were considered dangerous or threatening to the revolution." In fact, Cuban officials hoped in return "that the government could continue to count on our support and cooperation." And this included the

condition that the African American refugees on the Island had to "express our views of solidarity with the Cuban revolution" (238). That is, the narration of the outsiders was being actively sought and somehow shaped by the ideological interests of the insiders. Still, most American citizens living and working in Cuba, according to Brent, did not disagree with the historical leaders of the Revolution. In fact, "the one thing we all had in common was our respect and unbridled admiration for Fidel Castro" (219).

In any case, Brent eventually "graduated from the University of Havana in November 1981 with a bachelor's degree in Hispanic languages." He didn't suffer serious political problems in Cuba—besides the recurrent "hassling" of immigration officials—but he was very aware that "stateside lifestyles […] didn't meet the approval of the CDR in their zone, and trouble developed," every time "the neighborhood watchdogs complained about the Americans' long hair and loud music, and, above all, about the number of young Cubans hanging out at their house" (239). After having fought against the discrimination and racism of the most conservative American sectors, the Black Panthers were suddenly surrounded in communist Cuba by an unexpected proletarian puritanism.

Brent recounts how some of "the brothers fought back by writing a long letter that detailed what they considered unjust treatment." When this letter was published in a U.S. newspaper, "Cuban officials took it as a criticism of the revolution" and "before long, the authorities began transferring the hijackers to shoddy rooms in several cheap Havana hotels." In particular, women who had young children to care for, decided to denounce this retaliation—and also that "the living conditions in those hotels were degrading and the food was less than adequate, especially for the kids—and, as such, they brought "their plight to the attention of the American union" (239). The same country from which these activists fled to save their lives or preserve their freedom remained

the only one with an open public sphere where they could make their voices heard, even when they no longer lived in the U.S. anymore.

Brent taught English in different schools in Havana. He remarks that his Cuban supervisors "always emphasized" that teaching a foreign language "should contribute to the political, scientific, patriotic, and moral education of the students." More than instruction, this indoctrination was supposed to help in "the reaffirmation of their ideas of socialism and proletarian internationalism" (243).

As a high school teacher, Brent had to mandatorily join "the School-Goes-to-the-Countryside program" for several weeks during each course. He criticizes the "hard work" and "miserable living conditions" in the agricultural camps, but he also recalls that his "students appeared to be more relaxed and natural in the countryside than in city classrooms […]: they were friendlier, more tolerant, eager to help one another" (252).

When Brent "had to chastise kids for not working hard enough, or write out a report on one of them," he confesses that his emotional memories were triggered and he "felt like an overseer working slaves on a plantation […] because I remembered all the horror stories my relatives had told me about working for pennies on white folks' farms in the South" (250).

When Brent joined Radio Havana Cuba in 1986, again he noticed that his local supervisors had one "main function," which was not related to the timing and technicalities of the live or recorded transmissions. They were at this international radio station only "to make sure the English programs that went on the air had the correct political content reflecting Cuba's socialist character" (258). The target audience was not local, as "all English-language broadcasts were directed primarily toward the Americas, especially the United States and its Cuba supporters" (260).

This scenario was typical of Fidel Castro's governing style of launching constant propaganda and mobilization campaigns at the national and international level, as part of what he called in the late nineties the "battle of ideas." Since then, the term has been studied in detail by Mauricio Font[66] and other scholars, and it still has widespread repercussions in the foreign press and leftist activists worldwide, who have extended it to other revolutionary leaders such as Ernesto Che Guevara.[184]

In any case, in practical terms, the battle of ideas—as summarized by Font—was a "political counteroffensive to the imperialist ideological drive and the pro-capitalist values it promotes" (46), aiming at "the end of the Helms-Burton Law, Torricelli Act, and other forms of the U.S. blockade," and, in principle, also "the end of the world economic crisis that threatens humanity and particularly the Third World" (45).

In a 2004 speech,[28] Fidel Castro himself tried to conceptualize the main goals of his "battle of ideas," using a superimposition of meanings analogous to the ones he used to define the Revolution. The result can be understood as an empty signifier.

For example: "The Battle of Ideas is—as I once said—the battle of humanism against dehumanization, the battle of brotherhood and sisterhood against the most blatant form of selfishness, […] the battle of justice against the most brutal form of injustice, the battle for our people and the battle for other peoples."

Again, besides several national programs of social development in Cuba, the battle of ideas was also meant to have an impact on international public opinion, particularly in the United States of America "through an intense national and international political battle of public opinion," in which Cubans, according to Castro, "must use solid arguments to talk to members and non-members, to speak to those who may be confused or even to discuss and debate with those holding

positions contrary to those of the Revolution, or who are influenced by imperialist ideology in this great battle of ideas."

Cuba seems to need this counternarrative "in order to carry out the heroic deed of resisting against the most politically, militarily, economically, technologically and culturally powerful empire that has ever existed." As all "these ideas stem from the conviction that, mathematically speaking, the world has no other way out that imperialism is unsustainable," the hope is that sooner than later "the masses, still partially deceived by the hail of lies and invectives coming from the powerful imperialist media, will believe us more and more, as they begin to awaken to what is in store for them and to understand the huge difference between our system and the one advocated by the empire."

Coming from a country where freedom of expression is one of the foundational values, William Lee Brent was always very aware that in Cuba he had become part of the official propaganda apparatus. When he made a radio reportage about prisons, for example, he simply "did not reflect my true feelings, because I knew my bosses would have me rewrite any negative references and they would put me on their unreliable list." Therefore, he decided to practice the same culture of simulation and self-censorship that is so common among Cuban citizens. And he admits that his program "reported only the positive aspects: Prisoners were being treated humanely, and the correctional system in Cuba was undergoing profound, constructive changes." Brent justifies himself by writing that "it wasn't a lie but it left a hell of a lot to be said" (265). This is the kind of statement that tends to be acceptable for foreigners living on the Island, but that, if applied by someone else to criticize Brent's own struggle against discrimination in the U.S., it would have been totally inacceptable for him.

In any case, Brent realizes that common Cubans, beyond ideological indoctrination, "have assimilated the American dream, faults and all, and made it their own." That is, to Cubans, "America represents all the good things in life: room to grow and develop, hope for a brighter future, and something to look up to and admire" (265). He assures that none of his friends and colleagues—from different centers of study and work—ever "showed the same affinity for other foreigners as they did for Americans" (266).

At the level of the common people, the fascination between these two Cold War political archenemies seemed to be mutual. In fact, many U.S. citizens were eager to experience Cuban exceptionalism, understood as an alternative to the American establishment. All the while many Cubans were idealizing the United States—not only capitalism, but even consumerism—as the promised land forbidden to them on the socialist Island.

When in 1989-1991 Soviet communism collapsed, Brent acknowledges Cuba instantly suffered "profound economic and social changes" that "would affect our lives and shake our political convictions to their foundations" (271). Shortly, "the government told everyone to tighten their belts, work harder, and sacrifice more." And "the slogan now became: 'Save the Revolution, Socialism, and Fidel.'" Foreign investors were eventually welcome to save the Cuban economy, but this "emphasis on tourism," Brent felt, "soon began to cause strong resentment among the people" (272).

The aspirations of living in an egalitarian paradise were suddenly turning into a "dollar ghetto" where, although "free health care, free education, and guaranteed basic necessities were still on the lips of all the leaders," in practice "the economy was falling apart and there seemed no way to stop it." In addition to "the shortages of food and the special privileges for foreigners," the "black market seemed to have more merchandise than the government." Also, there were "four-

eight- and even twelve-hour scheduled power blackouts," "crime was on the rise," and "prostitution in Havana was widespread." His family cars "were stolen twice" and "the apartment was broken into on three separate occasions" (273-74). It is to be noted that only privileged individuals in Cuba can enjoy two cars in a household.

Brent became "confused and frustrated." He writes, "I had believed in the revolution and considered myself part of it," when "the system was working fairly well" and "the basic necessities were provided." In the nineties, he laments that "now there didn't seem to be any guarantees at all," so that his "faith was badly shaken." Like many of his friends, in order to "come to grips with the new reality of my surroundings, restore my declining political convictions, and strengthen my self-esteem and discipline," Brent "began to acquaint myself with Santeria," the African religion of Cuba (274).

For the first time in his life, the African American expatriate confesses that he "pondered what was going to happen." In particular: "would the United States and Cuba normalize relations, or would they continue to bump heads?" His "only certainty was that the world was in chaos" and Brent, "like many other people, was worried" about what to do "if the Cuban government changed its policies or was overthrown? (274).

But, in spite of his great "disappointment at the course the Cuban revolution has taken over the many years I have lived on the island," Brent concludes that "I have not lost my resolve or my dedication to the struggle of my people and the cause of justice and equality for all" (275).

## 4.6 Their reality is so different[ciii]

Assata Olugbala Shakur, an African American member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA) who was born JoAnne Deborah Byron—her married name was JoAnne Chesimard—published her autobiography in 1987,[160] while she was residing in Cuba. Shakur is now seventy-four years old and she is still living on the Island.

In November 1979, she had escaped from the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in Union Township, New Jersey—now the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women in Clinton—where she was serving a life sentence.

In 1984, Shakur surfaced in Cuba, where she had been granted political asylum. She had been convicted in 1977 of first-degree murder of State Trooper Werner Foerster (1938-1973), and also of other felonies related to a shootout that took place in 1973: assault and battery of a police officer, assault with a dangerous weapon, assault with intent to kill, illegal possession of a weapon, and armed robbery.

Shakur is the first woman to be added to the FBI list of most wanted fugitives,[civ] with a $1 million reward being offered for her apprehension, since she is considered to be guilty of crimes in the following FBI categories: "act of terrorism," "domestic terrorism," "unlawful flight to avoid confinement," and "murder."

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[ciii] "Even though they know about racism and the ku klux klan, about unemployment, such things are unreal to them. Cuba is a country of hope. Their reality is so different. I'm amazed at how much Cubans have accomplished in so short a time since the Revolution." (**Shakur, Assata**. *Assata, an Autobiography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987. p.268)

[civ] **FBI Most Wanted.** https://www.fbi.gov/wanted/wanted_terrorists/joanne-deborah-chesimard

In her book *Assata*, Assata Shakur does not mention much about her life in Cuba, despite the fact that the book was written on the Island, and it was sent from there to be published in the United States. Again, in a way it is a book about America written by an American, and Cuba is not only the perfect paradise from where to launch it, but also an exceptional example to expose all of the imperfections of the United States.[43]

For Shakur, "too many people in the u.s. support death and destruction without being aware of it. They indirectly support the killing of people without ever having to look at the corpses. But in Cuba i could see the results of u.s. foreign policy: torture victims on crutches who came from other countries to Cuba for treatment, including Namibian children who had survived massacres, and evidence of the vicious aggression the u.s. government had committed against Cuba, including sabotage, and numerous assassination attempts against Fidel" (268).

Shakur is interested in the racial question in Cuba, but she tends to minimize beforehand the long history of abuses against the Black nation on the Island, because for her it was obvious that in white America it was certainly worse. "One of the first questions on the minds of Blacks from the states when they come to Cuba is whether or not racism exists. […] Cuban racism had not been as violent or as institutionalized as u.s. racism, and the tradition of the two races, Blacks and whites, fighting together for liberation—first from colonization and later from dictatorship—was much stronger in Cuba."

In any case, Shakur admits that, before the communist Revolution, Cuban capitalism allowed the possibility that "Blacks played a crucial role in Cuba's labor movement in the 1950s," including two African Cubans who "led two key unions." After the Revolution, she mentions, there were "Blacks like Juan Almeda, now Commandante of the Revolution," who "had played a significant role in the revolutionary struggle to overthrow Batista" (269). Here the family name of

commander Juan Almeida—the only Black in the close circle of power of Fidel Castro—is misspelled as "Almeda" by the author, as well as the word "Commandante" that in Spanish is written with single m.")

It is also worth noting how Shakur never capitalizes the term "U.S.", using "u.s." instead. Yet, "Revolution" is always capitalized when it refers to the Cuban Revolution. This seems to be an orthographical display of her political ideology, and also a resistance protocol against American mainstream culture.

This kind of grammar identity politics—at least in languages where capital letters exist (i.e., those that use Greek, Latin, Cyrillic and Armenian alphabets)—has a long tradition from poetry to journalism.

For example, the American poet Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962), often styled himself as "e. e. cummings" after he became an innovator in the use of punctuation and decapitalization in his verses, including the use of "i" instead of the proper noun "I," a pattern also followed by Shakur in her book—except in the beginning of a sentence, or when she or her editors seem to simply forget to make the change of "I" to "i" in a given sentence.

Another example, in this case in contemporary journalism, is the Associated Press, which has recently announced on Twitter[cv] that the agency will not capitalize the letter "W" in the word "white," despite having updated their style guide weeks before, in order to capitalize the "B" in the word "Black" when used "in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense." This agency also decided to "capitalize Indigenous in reference to original inhabitants of a place," so that these terms "align

[cv] **APStylebook Twitter Account.** 19 June 2020.
https://twitter.com/apstylebook/status/1274071020471750666

with long-standing capitalization of other racial and ethnic identifiers such as Latino, Asian American and Native American."

In her book, Shakur recalls that she was told by most Cubans that "racism is illegal in Cuba": "aquí no hay racism," that is, "there is no racism here." Initially, she "remained skeptical and suspicious," since she "couldn't believe it was possible to eliminate hundreds of years of racism just like that, in twenty-five years or so." For her, "revolutions were not magical, and no magic wand could be waved to create changes overnight" (269).

Yet, soon Shakur became convinced that "the Cuban government was completely committed to eliminating all forms of racism." She concluded that "there were no racist institutions, structures, or organizations" on the Island and she "understood how the Cuban economic system undermined rather than fed racism" (270).

Shakur records some of the cultural differences she faces in Cuba regarding racial issues:

1) "Cubans took their African heritage for granted," according to one of her Black Cuban friends, because "for hundreds of years Cubans had danced to African rhythms, performed traditional rituals, and worshipped Gods like Shango and Ogun." Even Fidel Castro, according to the same source, "in a speech,[cvi] had told the people, 'We are all Afro-Cubans, from the very lightest to the very darkest'" (270).

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[cvi] I have not been able to locate any quote equivalent to this, at least in the online collected speeches of Fidel Castro, although it was not uncommon for Castro to address race and identity questions by using an inclusive demagoguery that, although applauded by the admirers of Cuban proletarian internationalism, it would be rather problematic in the American intellectual field, in terms of cultural appropriation and speaking for others.

For example, after a speech delivered on March 30, 2005, as part of the closing ceremony of the World Conference Dialogue of Civilizations, Latin America in the 21st Century: Universality and Originality, a much older Fidel Castro—a White Hispanic born from two White Hispanic parents—still insisted to the Dominican sociologist, writer and diplomat Luisa Angélica Sherezada Vicioso that "he sido caribeño; pero soy latinoamericano también, soy africano, soy ruso, soy chino, soy japonés, soy vietnamita." (*Los discursos de Fidel Castro*. Caracas: El perro y la rana, 2017. p.144)

https://www.marxists.org/espanol/castro/discursos_de_fidel_castro.pdf

My English translation: "I have been Caribbean; but I am Latin American too, I am African, I am Russian, I am Chinese, I am Japanese, I am Vietnamese."

2) There was the emblematic anecdote of a Cuban soldier of the White race, who had been "in Angola fighting against racism," but, as he had "never thought about his own racism," he "opposed the marriage" and "caused a big scandal with his family" when "his daughter wanted to marry a Black man" in Cuba (270).
3) Shakur is surprised that "most white Cubans wouldn't even be considered white in the u.s." but "Latinos." Also, she "was shocked to learn that a lot of Cubans who looked Black to me didn't consider themselves Black." Instead, "they called themselves mulattoes, colorados, jabaos, and a whole bunch of other names. It seemed to me that anyone who wasn't jet black was considered a mulatto" (271).
4) Cubans on the Island had the tendency to call Shakur a "mulatta," a term that made her feel "so insulted that if i had been able to express myself in Spanish, we would have had a heated argument right there on the spot." For Cubans, "'mulatto' was just a color, like red, green, or blue." And many Cubans thought she "was too hung up on the race question," when Shakur explained to them that "the mulatto thing" for her "represented a historical relationship" of "slavery" and of a "privileged caste." And that this was the cause that "hindered Cubans from dealing with some of the negative ideas left over from slavery" (271).
5) Some Black Cuban friends "quickly informed" her that in general a Black Cuban "didn't think of himself as an African," but simply as a Cuban: "Yo soy Cubano. I am Cuban." And for Shakur "it was obvious he was very proud of being Cuban" (270).

In the end, Shakur confesses that soon she was to see Cuba not only as her personal place of refuge from the justice system of her country, but as a beautiful and unbeatable bastion against

the injustices of American capitalism. For her, Cuba is the culmination of the long path towards emancipation of African Americans and perhaps American citizens as a whole.

After wondering "how much we had all gone through," in "our fight" that "had started on a slave ship years before we were born," now "Venceremos" is her "favorite word in Spanish," as she poetically contemplates a little island of "ten million people" who "had stood up to the monster." Even more heroic, "ten million people only ninety miles away" from the United States (274).

The metaphor of the "monster" most probably comes from a much-quoted biblical reference by José Martí (1853-1895), the "national hero" as well as the "apostle" of Cuban liberty, where he compares himself—and by extension, the struggle for sovereignty in Cuba—to the figure of David fighting Goliath.[121]

When Shakur finally manages to reunite part of her family on Cuban soil, she insists on the inspiration that the Caribbean Island means for those oppressed in the U.S.: "we were here together in their land, my small little family, holding each other after so long. There was no doubt about it, our people would one day be free. The cowboys and bandits didn't own the world" (274).

Communist Cuba surprises the African American fugitive of U.S. justice because wealth in this sort of tropical Utopia seems to be spontaneously generated by the people and fairly distributed by the revolutionary State. "Medical care, dental care, and hospital visits are free. Schools at all educational levels are free. Rent is no more than about ten percent of salaries. There are no taxes—no income, city, federal, or state taxes. It is so strange to pay the price actually listed on products without any tax added. Movies, plays, concerts, and sports events all cost one or two pesos at the most. Museums are free" (268).

Furthermore, Shakur is "amazed to discover that such a small island has such a rich cultural life and is so lively," not so much by the quantity and quality of it, but "particularly when the u.s. press gives just the opposite picture" (268).

Shakur in Cuba introduces herself with the following phrase that "a friend of mine had taught me:" "Yo soy de los estados unidos, pero no soy yankee." [I am from the united states, but I'm not yankee.] And then she implicitly acknowledges that Cuba is a closed society with limited access to the information freely flowing in the contemporary world. For example, she writes that "I hated to tell people i was from the u.s.," and that "I would have preferred to say i was New Afrikan," but Shakur realizes that in Castro's Cuba, only ninety miles south to the United States, "hardly anyone would have understood what that meant" (268).

Over decade later, on December 24, 1997, the New Jersey State Police called a press conference to announce that they had written to Pope John Paul II in private, requesting his intervention—during his forthcoming visit to Cuba in January 1998—to have Assata Shakur extradited from Cuba to the United States.

Then, Shakur decided to write a public letter to the pope,[161] "knowing that they had probably totally distorted the facts and attempted to get the pope to do the devils work in the name of religion." In fact, she was convinced that the document was "a vicious, vulgar, publicity maneuver on the part of New Jersey State Police and as a cynical attempt to manipulate the pope." Also, having "lived in Cuba for many years," she admitted being "completely out of touch with the sensationalist, dishonest nature of the established media today" in the U.S., which was "worse today than it was 30 years ago."

Although her goal was to let the Pope know "about the reality of 'justice' for Black people in the state of New Jersey and in the United States," with regard to American mainstream media,

Shakur seemed to coincide with the most conservative sectors of her original society, particularly when the old notion of "fake news" became again widespread in the U.S., as part of the presidential campaign of Donald Trump and during his administration (2017-2021).[105]

In any case, back then Shakur still defined herself as "a 20th century escaped slave," given that, "because of government persecution, I was left with no other choice than to flee from the political repression, racism and violence that dominate the U.S. government's policy toward people of color." She insists that, "like most poor and oppressed people in the United States, I do not have a voice," just like "black people and poor people in the U.S. have no real freedom of speech, no real freedom of expression and very little freedom of the press."

When it comes to Cuba, Shakur confidently calls Cuba "one of the largest, most resistant and most courageous 'palenques' (Maroon camps) that has ever existed on the face of this planet." For her, if even the historical problems of African Americans can be resolved on the Caribbean Island, then the historical problems of Cubans should somehow have been resolved as well. America remains the measure of all things, even for those Americans who are its victims or victimizers. Meanwhile, Cuba can wait—the construction of Utopia demands from its people both the participating velocity of violence and the paralyzing patience of complicity.

# EPILOGUE:

# FROM EUROCENTRIC ENTHUSIASM TO GLOBAL SKEPTICISM

## 5.1 A Post-Revolutionary Cuba?

The Soviet-born Argentine journalist and publisher Jacobo Timerman (1923-1999), forced into exile in 1979 by the Argentinean military dictatorship, in *Cuba: A Journey* (1990)[175] wrote, "If I had to sum up my long relationship with the Cuban Revolution, I'd say that I have always supported its right to defend itself from United States aggression―diplomatic, political, and economic―while I have at the same time criticized the violation of human rights and of freedom of expression that has characterized the Castro regime" (3).

Many American citizens, from the beginning of the Cuban Revolution until today, share a similar vision of the tensions and troubles between Cuba and the U.S., perhaps exacerbated by some sense of imperial guilt, where the little Caribbean David has had the historical benefit of being the underdog of Utopia, by challenging, resisting, and even overcoming the power of a neighboring Goliath, which, in turn, is still in denial about the right to exist of the Cuban Revolution only ninety miles south to the United States.

Timerman mentions Fidel Castro's "proud refusal to submit to Cuban and U.S. sugar oligarchies" as well as how "Cuba won its independence from Spain just after the turn of this century, only to be occupied militarily, politically, and economically by the United States until January 1, 1959, when the Revolution triumphed." That is, he insists on the inaccurate narrative that "Cuba was Spain's last colony in Latin America and the most profitable U.S. colony for a half century after that" (3). A humiliating tale of an underdeveloped country that, therefore, sooner than later had to welcome the radical transformations of a revolutionary redeemer.

Still, despite declaring himself "a man of the left, a socialist" (7), Timerman questions the personalist and repressive features of the Revolution in the late eighties. For him, the

"Comandante's megalomania" has led to a generalized "collective supporting hypocrisy" that in Cuba "defines society, the power structure, cultural life, work, family relations." He concludes that, since "Cuba has been confined in this alienating hypocrisy, and within such an impenetrable glass dome," for the "survival" of the system now "the alternatives are corruption and resignation." And Timerman acknowledges that "no horrible past or promised paradise, no real or magnified threat, justifies this distortion of the elemental norms of human life" (29).

Timerman detects social paralysis, personal apathy, and what Cuban essayist Rafael Rojas would coin years later as the "art of waiting."[156] In fact, Timerman is surprisingly early in diagnosing that "waiting constitutes the inner dynamic of Cuba," for "Cubans are waiting for an outcome, a result, a finale." The foreigner is much more passive now as a witness than during the first years of active narration or narrative activism in praise of the Revolution: "Those of us who go there are waiting too, hoping to discern clearly what it is the others are waiting for" (15).

Rafael Rojas suggests that all the variations of waiting inside Cuba are more likely to be the ends rather than the means to attain anything. When Utopia loses its mythic magnetism and its materiality unfolds into misery, then waiting seems simply to become waiting for waiting's sake. Here the problematic propensity to passiveness in every paradise comes to mind, whether lingering, lost, or longed for, either in poetry or in political praxis.[cvii]

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[cvii] In his 1667 epic poem, the English poet John Milton (1608-1674) wrote (modernized version):

> If they had no free will, how could they have given sincere
> Proof of their loyalty, true faith or love,
> If they were only shown what I ordered them to do,
> And they had no choice? How could they be praised for that?
> What pleasure would I get from that sort of obedience,
> If will and reason (reason is also choice)
> Were useless, worthless, stripped of freedom,
> Made passive, doing only what they were forced to do,
> Not serving me freely.

https://kempemaenglish.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/paradiselostsimplified.pdf

At that point of evolution of Castro's Revolution, when the government was censoring even the communist publications that had been imported from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for many years,[cviii] Timerman finds that, as "someone explained to me," now "the one with all the power is El Comandante, and young idealists await his order to follow him" (16-17).

On the verge of the collapse of communism in the Western world, once again the fellow travelers to the revolutionary utopia are the best resource to explain why Cuba remains exceptional and deserves beyond any doubt to be defended from the domino effect of democratization, marketization, and the falling walls and statues of a failed system.

Timerman notices that "despite this, the bureaucracy handles the Castro line very well," although "never as effectively as Castroists going back and forth from abroad." For him, this is "logical," since "foreign Castroists have all the motivations and none of the hardships." That is, "they cling to Cuba as a way of not accepting that the socialism they grew up with has crumbled with a resounding crash and that new forms are emerging." For the pilgrims who behave as ideological propagandists, according to Timerman, "Castroism still presents themes and symbols which are getting loudly and publicly buried in Communist countries, including "the U.S. threat to a way of life; the injustices of the market economy; the degradation of the consumer society; the capacity and sacrifice of populist heroes; the word 'revolution' and its concomitant idols" (46).

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[cviii] In his book, Timerman quotes an op-ed "attributed to Castro himself" published by *Granma,* the main national newspaper which is the official press of the Communist Party of Cuba, justifying the banning on the Island of the two most popular Soviet magazines translated into Spanish, the weekly *Novedades de Moscú* and the monthly reader's digest *Sputnik*:

"For over a year the Party administration has found itself obliged on various occasions to reflect on the content of several Soviet publications circulating in this country." "One discovers in their pages an apology for bourgeois democracy as a supreme form of popular participation, as well as fascination with the North American way of life." "Those in the Soviet Union today who deny the leading role of the Party and clamor for multipartisanship, who proclaim free market action, encourage foreign investments, rediscover private property, question internationalism and solidarity aid to other countries, are presented in these publications as democratic, radical leftist defenders of the people's interests." "The subversion of values is beyond doubt. Analysis of past and present realities is one-sided. Enemies of Soviet power are nonexistent, only victims. *Novedades de Moscú* and *Sputnik* make way for those who have initiated the attack on Leninism and consistently injure Lenin's image" (114-115).

Timerman, detects that "herein lies the center of the drama being played by foreign Castroists." Namely, that they "don't have to belong to the regime's bureaucracy in order to survive." In approaching the "glorious mission which Castro, from the viewpoint of these Castroists, so totally fulfills," the sympathetic foreign witness insists concerning the Cuban Revolution that "a nation's right to self-rule is not a matter of whether or not it has reached the maturity to do so; it is simply an inviolable right." Timerman concludes not without irony that "it would take more than a Freudian or Lacanian psychoanalyst to explain why non-Cuban Castroists accept the demythification of the Communist leaders of Eastern Europe and China but remain mesmerized by EI Comandante" as "their teacher, their guide," supporting the cult of personality, with its many "ranks and titles that have played out their sinister role in Russia, for example, yet continue to signify in present-day Cuba" (47-48).

Foreigners may come and go to the Caribbean Island in order to carry on their rather literary battle of ideas, exercising their rights to practice freedom of expression and movement, but Timerman reminds us that "the problem continues to be the limitations imposed by the impenetrable glass dome on Cubans' lives, their energies, their innermost human nature" (49). As a leftist intellectual, he worries about those Cuban citizens "who must remain within the political framework of the regime in order to survive with minimal decency." For them, Timerman is convinced that "the imposition of this absolutist revolutionary line made it impossible, however deftly modulated it was by writers, to hold any enriched or nuanced dialogue" (60).

Fellow travelers are free to travel worldwide, and they can choose or break strategic alliances with whatever social system they like or dislike, respectively, but on the Island "Cubans are verbally immobilized. Frozen." This is why Timerman emphasizes that the Revolution as such

was over after taking over and consolidating its power in perpetuity in a scenario that he calls a "postrevolutionary Cuba, in existence now for almost thirty years" (64).

Timerman seems to favor avoiding the "obligation or compulsion to identify everything with the present, when in fact certain things pertained to a much vaster realm: the human condition." Therefore, particularly "intellectuals should be capable of shifting back and forth naturally between the island of Cuba and Cuba-in-exile." With regard to the never-ending tensions between communist Cuba and U.S. imperialism, Timerman recommends—with a neutralist innocence that nonetheless is incisively commited—that national and international writers should anyway be "naturally regarding the conflict as one more, just one more, of the elements constituting a nation and a culture, not as a battle in which one of the two sides had to be destroyed" (65).

The traditionally long speeches of Fidel Castro were somehow the substitute for the lack of rights in Cuba and morally compensated for the scarcity of goods, which became critical in the early nineties, in what the State euphemistically labeled as a "Special Period in time of peace," an over a decade-long situation that has been extensively studied by Elzbieta Sklodowska in her book about the Special Period as practice and metaphor.[162]

In another short essay by Rafael Rojas,[cix] the Cuban exiled essayist—whose brother Fernando Rojas is the vice minister of culture in Cuba—highlights how "He, Fidel, talks about Her, the Revolution, and the people who see and listen end up linking both personas in a single marriage." Empowered as some kind of narrative machinery, for Rojas, "Castro's body is, then,

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[cix] The title of this article also included in *El arte de la espera* is "*La toma de la palabra*," which translates as "taking the floor to speak," but it also implies the sequestering of speech.

Original in Spanish:

"Él, Fidel, habla de Ella, la Revolución, y el pueblo que ve y escucha termina por enlazar ambas personas en una unión matrimonial. El cuerpo de Castro es, entonces, la epifanía que clarifica los contenidos difusos, la encarnación que destruye y hace tangible la extrañeza semántica de la palabra. […] Por eso la Revolución empieza cuando él habla y termina cuando calla."

the epiphany that clarifies any diffuse content, the incarnation that destroys and makes tangible the semantic strangeness of the word" through his overwhelming oratory. But after so many decades practicing a combination of populist and despotic power, especially after 1989 "the Revolution begins when he speaks and ends when he is silent." That is, the rhetoric of Fidel Castro was by then the last hope to resurrect the Revolution from its own ruins, and it was going to remain like that in the twenty-first century, even when the Cuban caudillo started to faint and even fall off his feet in public.

Timerman appears to be already aware of the pervasive prevalence of Castro's speech as a measure of all things, as well as a mechanism to generate alternative aspirational realities in the people, in the hope of counterbalancing the factual failures of reality: "Castro produces several of these statements daily, and believes—and is assured by his friends—that he's creating a new kind of revolutionary conscience." But Timerman perceives that, in a rather counterproductive manner, such "rhetoric has produced a vacuum in the conscience of the Cuban people, substituting a stifling collective paranoia" that relies on a cycle of "acceptance, vacillation, informing," which, in turn, is only "at the service of repression." And he wonders if "will it be semiotics, rather than history, that definitively judges this strange hegemony of a chief of state?" (116).

The American best-seller James Albert Michener (1907-1997), winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1948, was also visiting Havana in the late eighties. In 1989, together with the British editor and photographer John Kings, he published a book about his six-day travel experience.[130] As it is rather common in this genre, it includes not only photographs but a map of the Island, a graphic subterfuge perhaps to entice the imagination of readers in search of adventures elsewhere than home.

"With a sense almost of resignation, and at best muted expectancy," he declares that they "left Miami to bring the old photographs up to date," ignoring "how would we find Cuba today, ninety years after Spain's domination, thirty years after Castro's coup, thirty years into the reported bleakness of a communist regime, thirty years into the rhetoric of hate between Cuba and the United States?" (15).

For Michener, who is confident that he is not "some starry-eyed novice," for "I've spent my life visiting strange lands and grasping for understandings" (23), "it seemed clear that by the 1950s well-to-do American businessmen and tourists were using Cuba for their own interests, the former as a source for easy profits in sugar, the latter as a kind of joyous bordello" (21). In the summer of 1988, after a successful writing career and countless travels around the world during his long life, the American citizen still seeks American traces as a kind of *causa efficiens* for understanding the other, those who he is going to represent to Americans.

Like Timerman, Michener agrees that—beyond the U.S. financial embargo and the restrictions of the "dictatorial society" (35) on the Island, and given that the two neighboring countries "exist, whether we like it or not, rubbing elbows" (51)—Cubans must have freedom to travel and "be able to ride out to the airport and catch a plane to Atlanta or New York for a six-day holiday and do what restrained shopping they could afford and fly back home" (35).

Michener reinforces his viewpoint after talking to "perhaps two hundred" local "working people" during his "six jam-packed days" in Cuba (44). He notices "the bleak and empty stores with which the people of Havana had to contend" (61), as well as the "abandoned" (41) and "mournful" mansions of Havana that "were being allowed to fall into slow but relentless ruin" (36).

On the one hand, Michener surprises himself with his "new insight" about the "kindly Cubans" around him (62), for whom he expresses and from whom he receives authentic affection,

beyond the geopolitics of the Cold War that very few could predict would abruptly end so soon. His coauthor John Kings agrees that "in the streets Cubans are friendly and talkative to Americans, whom they seem to prefer to the Russians who supplanted them" (125), as part of the many "unspoken ties between the two countries," which include "the blood of kinship links" by contraposition to "the blood of political conflict" (139). For Kings, Cubans "seem to possess a northern work ethic and drive combined with a southern joy of living that makes them unique" (131). This is quite a condensed characterization of Cuban idiosyncrasy as an underdeveloped nation, through the lens of a northern outsider visiting from the First World.

On the other hand, Michener tries to control such unexpected feelings: "Caution, Michener. For three days you've had nothing but the kindest possible reception from the Cuban people, not one of whom could have known who you were… Just an American who knew a little Spanish and who had an interest in whatever they were doing. But that isn't the whole story. Remember the reports you've read about the horrible prison camps where men have been kept in torture conditions for whole decades. Abominable. Remember the reports you've received from our government about Castro's unwavering enmity toward us and the oral reports you've heard in your various jobs in Washington. This is enemy territory. Maintain a balance" (77).

In any case, Michener keeps wondering "how can they be so kind to me when they know I'm the American enemy who keeps the goods from coming in?" But again he questions whether "Castro brought this on himself and on his nation" or whether, as in the "nagging question" of his conscious or unconscious Americentrism,[cx] he had "pressure from us in making this terribly wrong decision" (62).

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[cx] American-centrism or Americentrism—"U.S.-centrism" has been proposed as an alternative term with less Americentric connotations—is the tendency to compare foreign cultures based on U.S. standards, and to assess the rest of the world from a perspective overly focused in the principles and opinions that are prevalent in the United States of America.

For Michener, being physically present in the country of the others—a structural attribute of travel writing—is worth more than all his documentation before the trip, which had the initial purpose of familiarizing with the scenario for the work-in progress of his realistic novel *Caribbean*,[131] eventually published in 1989, including the chapter "Twins" about two Cuban refugees in the U.S. who return to the Island and manage to meet Fidel Castro.[cxi]

Michener realizes that whatever "good job in your bookish study of these matters," whatever "details right" from "all those treatises from the library," and whatever number of "years of fruitless effort to get here," the point is that "the heart of the matter you missed entirely." According to him, "writing can never reverberate with meaning if the essential images are lacking" (88).

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In his 2005 essay *From Eurocentrism to Americentrism*, published by Richard Peet in *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 37(5), it is explained that "Americentrism 'knows' the world only through myths made in the market, under the pressures of the domination of the object over the subject" (942). Consequently, "under Americentrism, everything that is important happens first in the United States" and, by extension, "global space can be described in terms of concentric circles of decreasing significance as a geography of modernity" (938).

[cxi] As a curious note, when James Michener was asked "whom would you like to meet in Havana?" he "naturally replied" that with Fidel Castro, but his spontaneous request was immediately denied without further consultation: "Impossible. Who else?" (78). His second choice was the novelist Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980), who had been dead for years without Michener being aware of it.

However, in the case of Jacobo Timerman, as he "hadn't requested an interview with Fidel Castro," then, this indifference "drew attention" from the officials guiding him in Cuba, and he was even instructed how to apply for one, "well in advance." Timerman jokingly comments that "vanity of vanities, the idea of passing through Cuba without interviewing him appealed to me," because "I'd already read countless interviews with El Comandante, and I didn't think that my questions would elicit any responses that diverged from the party line" (9).

Timerman, in fact, had simply "accepted Fidel Castro's suggestion to exclude him, and to look for a Cuba without him," in the sense that the leader had recently stated back then, in a long interview with the U.S. Democratic Representative Mervin Dymally (1926-2012), the following criticism to his own cult of personality, as if it were only a misrepresentation from abroad:

"I'm surprised that in the West, with presumably cultured societies, with thinking people, there's such a strong tendency to associate historical events with individuals and to magnify the role of individuals. I myself am aware of this: Castro's Cuba, Castro did this, Castro undid that. Almost everything in this country seems to stem from Castro, to be Castro's work, Castro's perversities. This type of generalizing mentality is, unfortunately, quite prevalent in the West. In my opinion, it's an incorrect focus on political and historical events" (10-11).

So, what Timerman claims is that he had "attempted, in this manner, to get to know and to understand Cuba. Or perhaps I should say that I traveled to Cuba in order to get a sense of living in Cuba, to observe myself alongside Cubans, together with Cubans" (11). In a way, a journalistic *tour de force* to interview Fidel Castro not in person, but through his overall impact on the Island.

The whole interview with Rep. Dymally and his foreign affairs advisor Jeffrey M. Elliot, was published in 1985 as a book that officially circulated in Cuba. Fragments of it also appeared in the edition of August 1985 of *Playboy*, a magazine that paradoxically has always been banned as pornography by the communist authorities, so that reading or distributing it could constitute a crime in Cuba.

The American writer and diplomat Maurice Halperin (1906-1995), accused of espionage for the Russians in the late forties, had briefly visited Cuba in 1935 thanks to Waldo Frank—only to get deported in less than 24 hours back then—before traveling to the Island in 1962 to be employed in the Ministry of Foreign Trade until 1968, although he was really curious to be "delving into the mysteries of the Cuban Revolution" (12), as he wrote in his 1994 book *Return to Havana*.[85]

Halperin had already published two books about his Cuban experience of enchantment and disenchantment,[86] when in November 1989 he decided to visit Castro's Cuba one last time, for a whole month. He just "felt the need to return to Cuba to get firsthand impressions of an aging and, in some respects, failing revolution" (13).

In 1962, Halperin's first impression of Havana was "that of a cosmopolitan 'first world' capital," where "the streets were lined with graceful, colorful facades, suffused with tropical light and teeming with neatly dressed, gesticulating people" that, "despite the heat," and by comparison with Moscow—since he had been living in the Soviet Union before traveling to Cuba—didn't smell bad: that is, "obviously, unlike Muscovites, Habaneros bathed and changed clothes frequently and used deodorants." Besides, according to Halperin, Havana was free from the abundance "of drunks in the streets or sprawled out in doorways, a common sight in Moscow" (20).

It turned out to be that certain benefits of capitalism—"many shops and a number of first-class hotels, comparable to the best in Miami" (20)—were still fresh in Cuba, by comparison to Russia, which in 1962 had been under socialist rule for over four decades. Halperin explains that "Cuba's infant socialism was living off the fat accumulated by Cuban capitalism" (23-24). In 1989, three long decades later, Halperin was going to regret in Cuba what he had regretted in Moscow

in the early sixties, when he confidently concluded that "in matters of consumer welfare and comforts, it was the Soviet Union, not Cuba, that was a Third World country" (21-22).

In 1962, only one year after the building of the Berlin Wall, even during the nuclear missile crisis of October that Halperin personally witnessed in Cuba, the popular mood on the Island was "defiance," with "an air of celebration" that "seemed almost eager to take on the Yankees," a spirit that Halperin acknowledges was "irrational, to be sure, but nonetheless infectious" (22).

In 1989, however, the climate on the Caribbean Island was much like Halperin's previous descriptions of the "unattractive" capital city of communism, where "people seemed to reflect the city's grayness" and the masses "wore stained and ill-fitting clothes and rarely smiled" (19-20). In this respect, he quotes another fellow traveler to Russia, the writer and member of the American Communist Party Albert Maltz (1908-1985), who, in an archetypical Americentric comparison, joked about "bleak Moscow" (24) by saying that it "reminds me of Scranton, Pennsylvania" (20).

The Berlin Wall was forced open in November 1989, bringing together communist and capitalist Germany with its forthcoming dismantling. Coincidentally, Maurice Halperin was in Havana much as he was there in October 1962, again having the opportunity of chronicling first-hand another historical hallmark: the beginning of the end of the Cold War era, from a somehow Cuban perspective filtered through his American gaze.

## 5.2 That Little, Insignificant, Crazy Island[cxii]

In the last chapter of this dissertation I will address one of the most important European intellectuals of the twentieth century in his connection with the Cuban Revolution throughout the years: the German author, translator, cultural critic and publisher Hans Magnus Enzensberger, born in 1929 in Kaufbeuren (Bavaria) and still quite active in the literary world today. The weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* called him a "cheerful skeptic and realistic utopian," on his 90th birthday, as quoted by *DW Akademie*.[133]

In his book *Tumult*,[55] Enzensberger mentions that, while he was living in the United States, and because his wife Masha Enzensberger was "a displaced person" who "didn't like it in USA," in January 1968 they decided to respond positively to a "letter with a Cuban stamp" that was sent to them "from a ministry in Havana" (148).

The letter was for him one more "invitation to a cultural congress," in this case to be held in the capital of Cuba. Enzensberger jokes that its "topic was so banal that I immediately forgot it," because he "knew from experience that, as a guest at a festival or as a member of a delegation, you understood next to nothing" (149). However, that official document turned out to be more than Enzensberger thought when he opened the envelope, to the point that many years later he would confess that he was still dreaming of Cuba, "that little, insignificant, crazy island" (270).

Political and personal reasons intervened in their sudden resolution to visit revolutionary Cuba. Enzensberger admits that he "liked the idea of disappearing without leaving a forwarding

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[cxii] "Did you sometimes dream of Cuba?" "Of course. I just can't say why I've found it so difficult to free myself of that little, insignificant, crazy island." "That's all you have to tell me?" "Yes, 1968—by now that's nothing more than an imaginary date, a teeming mass of reminiscences, delusions, generalizations and projections that has taken the place of the things that had happened during these few years." (**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *Tumult*. London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016. p.270)

address. To go off like an embezzler with his creditors and the bailiffs after him." For him every "journey around the world was nothing but an escape" (158). As the couple suffered from a "new round of our quarrels" (148), they were determined to move to a new environment. The Cuban Revolution, set on a tropical Island far from the Stalinist societies of Eastern Europe, in a Latin nation where American culture was familiar, seemed like the perfect place to explore.

Like most Western intellectuals, as well as many in the Soviet-style communist nations of Europe—as well as in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR—Enzensberger hoped that the Caribbean utopia would be a radically independent social experiment, very different from the despotic egalitarianism imposed *manu militari* in other parts of the world during the twentieth century. But Enzensberger was also aware that Cuba was run by the military and that, without militarizing broad sectors of the Cuban people, the survival of the Revolution was not guaranteed. In fact, in the 1960s there was a widespread civil and armed resistance on the Island, as many nationals were unwilling to be governed by a non-democratic regime.

Enzensberger somehow expected the Castro regime to be exceptionally original, since it had the unique historical opportunity of not being aligned with any of the superpowers of the bipolar Cold War world. He also seemed to subscribed to the general belief that "without the stupidity and greed of the Americans, this revolution would have sunk without trace, like a dozen others in Latin America, survived by the sweet Coca Cola girl telling all those who dream of revolution, 'Have a break'" (153).

The recurring paradox here is that any agency, empowerment and spontaneity is denied to the Cuban people whose sovereignty the foreign traveler seeks to defend. The Cuban Revolution was born Americanized, particularly because it soon positioned itself to the detriment of American interests. The more independent of the U.S. establishment, the more it needed to be explained to

Americans and understood by them as an alternative to the American way of life. The role that intellectuals were playing at the time perhaps led Enzensberger to believe that he could expand their mission to democratic Europe: he was in a good position to culturally translate the Cuban Revolution into the capitalist world. In those years of decolonization of the Third World, Eurocentrism included the urgency of deconstructing Eurocentrism through raising awareness about the emancipation efforts of the former colonies.

The European gaze of Enzensberger, who prided himself on his anti-Americanism while residing in America, still shared the Americentric perception that the Cuban Revolution was a byproduct of the pressures exerted against it by U.S. Imperialism. As such, for him, the Cuban revolutionaries had no choice but to seek the help of the U.S.S.R. empire, if they really wanted to remain in power and build Utopia on the Island. Despite his desire to understand Cuba as a strictly non-aligned country, Enzensberger nevertheless frames the Cuban Revolution as positioned between the aggression of Washington and the protection of Moscow.

Regardless of how much he may have appreciated Fidel Castro as a charismatic leader, a populist caudillo, or a genuine genius, Enzensberger was perhaps unaware of how much power the young rebel dreamed of accumulating very early in his life, when as a university student Castro had already decided to conquer all "fame" and "glory" in Cuba.[cxiii]

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[cxiii] A witnesses of Fidel Castro's early drive for celebrity was Alfredo Esquivel Rodón (1926-2005), known as "El Chino" (The Chinaman). He declared in a 1996 video interview with American filmmaker Estela Bravo that, since the mid-1940s, there had been few leaders as "exceptional" as Castro and his "supernatural gift" for "recruiting people." Esquivel Rodón met Castro at Havana University in 1945, and they became lifelong friends. He left Cuba for the United States in 1964, not to visit his country again until 1992, but he never denied his personal admiration for his friend. For Esquivel Rodón, the young Castro "had something inside like if he knew what he was going to do." One night in the 1940s, after studying Law together, Esquivel Rodón affirms that Castro confessed to a group of friends: "I want to be famous: to conquer fame, glory."
http://digitaltamiment.hosting.nyu.edu/s/bravo/item/6157

Searching for an alternative to “the cold-blooded, calculated superiority of the Americans, whose approach to nature is that of technological masters” (54), as soon as Enzensberger landed in Havana, he felt an “atmospheric pressure quite different from that in Moscow, East Berlin or Warsaw.” This initial inspiration “was very attractive” to him, because “the Cuban revolution hadn’t been imported on Soviet tanks.” In fact, “it had been achieved independently of the Russians.” Therefore, Enzensberger had “the impression that the majority of the people in the streets didn’t just accept it,” but “they were happy about it” (149).

Whatever the importance of the congress—for the Cultural Congress of Havana, held from January 4 to 11, 1968, “Castro had invited no fewer than 500 authors, scientists and artists”—the German intellectual soon realized that the “people in Havana had other things to occupy them.” The fundamental freedoms of their bodies could not be fully captured by politics, since men and women of all ages and races “danced to the rumba beat on the Rampa or headed off to a baseball match.” In short, “everyone was celebrating a political carnival” (150).

Enzensberger’s conceptions of paradise or “the Garden of Eden” implied the need for establishing prohibitions for the benefit of all, since, “with the ban, the inhabitants were also given freedom and time.” The existence of an “emergency exit” or “trapdoor” could be the equivalent of the “forbidden fruit” of being able to leave and return to Utopia. Without this freedom of movement, instead of an ideological idyll, “the place would have been a prison.” Many Cubans did feel their insular condition was similar to a claustrophobic cage. In turn, Enzensberger believed that “physical love and intelligence” were the key to being able to “leave it when you’ve had enough.” something that is not only a theoretical speculation, but “also true of political paradises such as the one promised by communism” (305).

The issue that “neither of us knew the island” was in fact an incentive for the Enzensberger family to get to know the Island. Curiosity can be the cause of travel, writing and travel writing. Years later, the Russian exiled intellectual Joseph Brodsky (1940-1996) was to describe an analogous feeling in his book of essays *Less Than One*: “Any movement along a plane surface which is not dictated by physical necessity is a spatial form of self-assertion, be it empire-building or tourism” (398).

In fact, in a 2015 video-interview for the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art,[cxiv] Enzensberger recalls his passion as a child for reading “atlases” and “railway timetables,” because “through them you could travel without actually travelling,” fully enjoying what he calls “imaginary trips.” For him, it was a “distraction from all the atrocities” of the thirties and forties in twentieth-century Europe, including those events in his own biography. Without being a fanatical follower, Enzensberger in his teens briefly joined the Hitler Youth of Germany Nazi Party, only to be expelled soon “for his bad attitude.” Later, he was to be “drafted at the end of the war into an anti-aircraft unit, from which he deserted.”[8]

In any case, Enzensberger confesses in *Tumult* that, as a couple in distress after scarcely one year of marriage, Cuba meant a unique chance to visit a “virgin territory” with “no distractions from the past,” “no family complications,” and “no language that only one of us could speak,” since “both of us spoke reasonably good Spanish.” So, the couple “saw this invitation as an opportunity for the two of us, perhaps, our last.” Besides, Enzensberger explains that “the Cubans maintained that people such as us were urgently needed as *técnicos extranjeros*—foreign

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[cxiv] **Louisiana Channel YouTube**. *Hans Magnus Enzensberger Interview: A Closer Look*. 15 Sep 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lu9hZnTueM&feature=youtu.be

technicians" (154) to help overcome underdevelopment on the Island, which was assumed to be the evil legacy of capitalism in Cuba, before the revolutionary takeover of January 1, 1959.

Conveniently for him, "one of the olive-green *comandantes* asked me whether we would like to stay for some time in Cuba", although "he couldn't say what the technical matters were in our case" (154). Most likely, those matters were the growing political capital of Hans Magnus Enzensberger, which would greatly benefit the poetic narrative of the Revolution, if he could be turned into an agent of influence, in order to favorably tilt public opinion about Castroism, once he had returned to live and write in any open society of the Western world.

It was around this point that Enzensberger decided to sever all ties with American academia, once he was back on campus in the United States, and then travel back as soon as possible to such a welcoming tropical utopia. In any case, "universities were never my territory," he claims then: "I had no business there" and "I thought I should leave it to the professors, lecturers and students to haggle over their staffing pyramids, tripartite parities and intermediate examinations" (229).

Pondering with ironic skepticism about those tumultuous years of ideological enthusiasm, Enzensberger poses to himself the question "didn't they treat you well in New England?," where they were living for a semester before the invitation to Cuba. Wesleyan University, a private liberal arts college in Middletown, Connecticut, had offered him "refuge for a whole year, a fellowship, a pile of money, a much too big house and an air-conditioned office with a secretary who had nothing to do." Enzensberger admits to himself that, while "others would have considered themselves fortunate," they "two were ungrateful" in their "golden cage." And, after much complaining "about a war on the other side of the world," they simply "snubbed" their American "benefactors and set off a public scandal that even made it to the front page of the *New York Times*" (154-55).

Enzensberger is referring to his letter of resignation addressed to Mr. Edwin D. Etherington, President of Wesleyan University. Although "originally that wasn't an open letter," it seems that "a busybody professor, who assumed he was on my side, leaked the letter to the press," triggering an intense intellectual affair in the American public sphere. Enzensberger claims that he was only hoping that "Mr Etherington would silently note what I'd written and let us go" to Castro's Cuba (155). A journey that was *per se* a very complicated endeavor, since "there were no flights from New York to Cuba" anymore, after "the USA government had imposed a trade embargo" (149) in 1961—a policy that reacted to the wave of nationalizations carried out by the revolutionary government on the Island, which seized most of the private properties of Cuban and foreign investors.

Enzensberger in his chapter *Memories of a Tumult (1967-1970)* jokes about the "unintentionally comic side of our Cuban adventure" (155) that most of his colleagues, critics and compatriots "failed to see." In particular, he recalls the overreaction of his fellow citizen Uwe Johnson (1934-1984), who, in his novel *Anniversaries*,[97] exposes the Cuba-over-America choice of "Herr Enzensberger." In this book, Johnson ridicules Enzensberger's comfortable stay in the United States, an imperialist nation despite the fact that "Passenger Enzensberger" seemed to be "unaware of this fact three months ago." For Johnson, Enzensberger was simply taking advantage of his "three peaceful months" to "learn more ('joy') from the Cuban people than he could ever teach the students of Wesleyan University about political attitudes." Even more, Johnson affirms that Enzensberger wanted "to be of use to an entire population" by becoming "an asset of the Cuban people, live on stage, step right up. No tricks, no double curtains, no veils!" (697).

In turn, Enzensberger gradually discovered that, once established in Cuba in November 1968, he "could have left the island as soon as it became clear no one needed" him there. Yet, he insisted on

staying in the Caribbean archipelago: "Now we really wanted to stay," because "I wanted to know what was going on behind the façade" (181).

Their solidarity pilgrimage was certainly resembling a "holiday on the island," as the Cuban authorities "kept putting us off" and "there was no 'organ' to take on the two unemployed foreigners." Not because "there was any lack of organizations in Cuba! Quite the contrary" (185). Even Enzensberger's contacts in Cuban ministries gave him nothing but promises: "All he said was, *mañana* [tomorrow], and obviously didn't dream of keeping his promise" (174).

Enzensberger depicts how the Castroite bureaucracy was already an impenetrable "jungle of abbreviations from MINSAP to ICAIC, from ANAP to OFICODA, that makes it clear to everyone that all areas of social life are covered." In practice, "anyone who doesn't have a ready answer to the question of their *organism* is given to understand that they're a kind of astral body that has no business there." That is, in a *dictatorship of the proletariat*—a Marxist concept that Enzensberger only uses twice, to quote a heated argument with Hebert Marcuse and to comment the speech by Nikita Khrushchev where the Soviet leader declared obsolete this concept—"anyone who cannot claim the patronage of an abbreviation is not regarded as a responsible adult" (186). This observation is one of the keys to understanding the paternalistic role that the Cuban State was imposing, forcing the population to behave as infantilized citizens.

Cuban officials postponed *ad infinitum* the philanthropic goal which had brought Enzensberger back to Cuba, committed to live and work there for as many months or years as were necessary to advance the cause of anti-capitalism. His hope was to educate "the young diplomats Castro dispatched to London, Berlin or Stockholm," who "were totally out of their depth" (155), having little "idea how things were in capitalism." For Enzensberger, those Cubans who had "a

better idea" of the outside world were "the old hands of the diplomatic service" before Castroism, and most of them "had escaped to Miami in time" before the consolidation of communism in Cuba.

Enzensberger arrived in Cuba trusting that, to achieve this task, "a little six-month seminar to teach the young mulattos from the Sierra the basics" of diplomacy was enough to refine the manners of the New Man—the quasi-eugenic notion proposed by Ernesto "Ché" Guevara[cxv]—with "a little history, minimal knowledge of the basic law or the constitution, of parties, unions, parliaments and law courts." This way Enzensberger wanted to teach to the new Cuban diplomats "that you have to know whom you're dealing with: ministers and the media, lobbyists and civil servants, from regional authorities all the way to Brussels" (156). Paradoxically, Enzensberger was eager to teach civility to the young rebels of the *new class*[cxvi] in power, so they could cope better with Western world politicians, but not so that they could apply these civic principles in Cuba. For him, the space of Utopia was exceptional only as long as it remained uncontaminated by the rest of the world.

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[cxv] "Revolutionaries will come to sing the song of the new man with the authentic voice of the people. It is a process that requires time. In our society, the youth and the Party play a big role. The former is particularly important because it is the malleable clay with which the new man, without any of the previous defects, can be formed" (40). "The road is long and in part unknown; we are aware of our limitations. We will make the 21st century man; we ourselves. We will be tempered in daily actions, creating a new human being with a new technology" (48). In: **Guevara, Ernesto**. *Man and Socialism in Cuba*. Havana: Book Institute, 1967.

[cxvi] In reference to the book *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957) by Yugoslav intellectual and politician Milovan Đilas (1911-1995), where he maintains that "in contrast to earlier revolutions, the Communist revolution, conducted in the name of doing away with classes, has resulted in the most complete authority of any single new class. Everything else is sham and an illusion." For him, this new class "did not come to power to complete a new economic order but to establish its own and, in so doing, to establish its power over society." That is, "the monopoly which the new class establishes in the name of the working class over the whole of society is, primarily, a monopoly over the working class itself. This monopoly is first intellectual, over the so-called avant-garde proletariat, and then over the whole proletariat."
https://archive.org/stream/816ilasMilovanTheNewClassAnAnalysisOfTheCommunistSystemThamesAndHudson1957/816_%C4%90ilas%2C%20Milovan%2C%20The%20New%20Class%20-%20An%20Analysis%20of%20the%20Communist%20System%2C%20Thames%20and%20Hudson%2C%201957_djvu.txt

German rationality seems to be challenged by the improvisations of the Cuban system. Enzensberger is surprised to discover that by 1968 in Cuba "a politburo only existed on paper; the Central Committee never met; and the cast-iron party discipline Lenin had drummed into the Russians didn't exist," because "the place of Soviet power was taken by one single person, who was called Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz." He worries that "such *ad hoc* decisions" could prove to be "inadequate to meet the demands made by socialism on an island." And he considers that it would be advisable to rely less on his caudillo charisma, and to count more with the new institutions created, because "sooner or later improvisation would have to give way to a system and that was what he lacked" (192).

In the end, his paranoid style of totalitarian control never allowed Fidel Castro to trust his own ministers and institutions, including the Communist Party that he presided over almost until his death, decades later. Institutionality in Cuba was not part of the personalistic style of government of Castro and his commanders. Instead, in order to be fascinating for foreigners, the "good revolutionary" had to inherit some of the traits of the "good savage."[152]

Imbued with the anti-establishment spirit of the 1960s, with a Marxist rhetoric of anti-imperialism and anti-neocolonialism—including the justification of revolutionary violence against capitalist exploitation—Enzensberger couldn't quit his generous fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University to go to Castro's Cuba, without turning his decision into a political statement. Even if his original intention was not to publish his letter, the wide circulation of "On Leaving America" certainly brought him all the public focus that any public figure expects.

His resignation letter addressed to the President of Wesleyan University—Mr. Edwin D. Etherington—appeared in the February 29 issue of *The New York Reviews of Books*,[56] following

his first visit to Cuba, once Enzensberger decided to move to Havana and enjoy permanent status there. Although in his case it might be unlikely—he was a convinced leftist—his departure from the U.S. establishment could have been a request from the Cuban authorities, before accepting Enzensberger on the Island. For foreigners to gain access to the day-to-day complexities of a closed society, they usually had to demonstrate their ideological commitment before the trip. Instead of relying on reporters, the Cuban Revolution was actively recruiting Western intellectuals who could legitimize it with their testimony.

In Cuba—even today—civil and individual rights are understood by the socialist State in a diametrically opposed way to developed democracies. Even the term "human rights" is under suspicion and has undergone resemantization in communist Cuba, as it is associated with local dissidents and opposition leaders—all of whom are criminalized by the government for their peaceful activism that criticizes the egalitarian system.

Enzensberger was a European citizen traveling from Castro's archenemy, the United States of America. He embodied the international intellectual whose opinion would have an impact on the Western world. Consequently, the leaders of the Cuban Revolution may have wanted to ensure that they could count on him as an ally, as in the case of the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and his wife Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), whose visit to the Island in 1960 was a hallmark for the acceptance of the Cuban exceptionalism. That is, a non-democratic Revolution understood as the historical stage necessary to achieve social justice for all Cubans—at least for those who accepted that the non-democratic Revolution—was the historical stage necessary to achieve that utopian goal.

"On Leaving America" criticizes those in power, "the United States of America, and the government which implements its policies," whom Enzensberger describes as "the most dangerous

body of men on earth," in a system that constitutes a "threat to anybody who is not part of it." According to Enzensberger, its goal was "to establish its political, economic, and military predominance over every other power in the world." Consequently, only a "revolutionary change" could be the "mortal enemy" of such a concentration of power. Given the resolution he was taking to go to Cuba, such a revolutionary change was expected not only from the revolts of the American people, but also with the support of professional revolutionaries in other countries.

For Enzensberger, "nobody can feel safe and secure any more, not in Europe, and not even in the United States itself." He acknowledges that the style of his farewell letter can be questioned as the "old-fashioned, boring, and rhetorical […] outgrowth of a paranoid imagination or simply communist propaganda," but nevertheless compares the "bank presidents, generals, and military industrialists" in the United States—"well-mannered, nice gentlemen, possibly lovers of chamber music with a philanthropic bent of mind"—and the "kind people" in power "in the Germany of the Thirties," whose "moral insanity does not derive from their individual character, but from their social function."

The "state of your Union" reminds him of his "own country's state in the middle Thirties," with the difference that "not only do our present masters wield a destructive power of which the Nazis could never dream," but that "they have also reached a degree of subtlety and sophistication unheard of in the crude old days." Contrary to the title *It Can't Happen Here* of the 1935 dystopian novel by Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951),[112] for Enzensberger in his American exile, it was in fact already happening here. All the while he was enjoying "the precarious and deceptive freedom which we are now enjoying," which for him has only "created new alibis, pitfalls, and dilemmas for those who oppose the system."

That is why he is convinced that the "glance" of the rest of humanity on the United States is "a blend of distrust and resentment, fear and envy, contempt and outright hate." Enzensberger thinks that he does not belong there. As such, he quits his privileged status on an American campus after careful consideration: "It took me three months to discover that the advantages which you gave me would end up by disarming me; that in accepting your invitation and your grant, I had lost my credibility; and that the mere fact of my being here on these terms would devalue whatever I might have to say." In the free world, money seems to function for Enzensberger as a synonym for mercenary. Except, of course, in Utopia, where money is somehow destigmatized from the guilt of producing personal profit.

Enzensberger does not discuss any financial details in his letter, nor does he mention the ethical issue of reimbursing the university for his fellowship. He seems ready to move to Cuba without delay, perhaps thanks to the American money he had saved.

In his civic poem *A Song for Those Who*,[57] Enzensberger writes ironically of those who claim that "something must be done right away / that much we know / but of course it's too soon to act / but of course it's too late in the day / oh we know" (83). This irony resonates in *The Sinking of the Titanic*[58] regarding his Cuban experience: "Excuse me, I, for example, / am here to say, once for all, / that he was just a fraud, / that he had never been to Havana, / and besides, there are no icebergs in Cuba. / The whole thing is a hoax, / cribbed from old Sunday papers" (92). The political pilgrim, according to the politicized poet, must take exemplary action or risk facing the ridicule of its own revolutionary rhetoric. In 1968, Enzensberger was ready to join the Revolution on a small island that was fast becoming a fundamental factor in the balance of power in the Cold War.

Beyond the "the agents of the CIA in the airport of Mexico City taking pictures of every passenger leaving for Havana," "the silhouettes of American warships off the Cuban coast" and

"the traces of the American invasion at the Bay of Pigs," for Enzensberger, the "heritage of an imperialist economy and the scars it left on the body and on the mind of a small country" are reasons "to go to Cuba and to work there for a substantial period of time."

Curiously, the text of his letter does announce its public character from its conception. Despite Enzensberger's denial in the self-interview included in *Tumult*, it seems that it was conceived as an open letter, since the document ends with the following statement: "I realize, of course, that my case is, by itself, of no importance or interest to the outside world. However, the questions which it raises do not concern me alone. Let me therefore try to answer them, as best I can, in public."

In *Tumult* and in his documentary play *The Havana Inquiry*,[59] Enzensberger problematizes Cuban reality from two different perspectives. In the first, he deconstructs the viewpoint of his letter of farewell to America. In the second—a transcript of the trials held in Havana against the exiled Cubans who carried out the military invasion of the Bay of Pigs in April 1961—his comments align with his public position when he left America.

Enzensberger had mentioned in his letter a quote from Régis Debray—the French intellectual who in 1967 published *Revolution in the Revolution?*[41] before he was arrested in Bolivia for joining the guerrillas of Ernesto "Ché" Guevara—: "To judge an intellectual it is not enough to examine his ideas: it is the relation between his ideas and his acts which counts." This quote, with an air of anti-intellectualism, reflects the tension between the man of action and the man of ideas that prevailed in those years.

In *Political Pilgrims*, the Hungarian sociologist Paul Hollander (1932-2019)—exiled in the US after the Soviet repression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution—recounts how "intellectual revolutionaries, or revolutionary intellectuals" were supposed to "readily shed their critical-

subversive roles and impulses in the realm of ideas as in that of political action, and become the secular priests of the new social order." That is, they were to become not only "the upholders of official dogma," but also "the suppressors of critical tendencies" (42) which contradicted their radical worldview.

Hollander selects a passage from Jean Paul Sartre in 1971 explicitly defending the notion that "today it is sheer bad faith, hence counter-revolutionary, for the intellectual to dwell on his own problems instead of realizing that he is an intellectual because of the masses and through them" (61). This could explain Sartre's initial admiration of "Castro's authenticity, the unity between word and action, theory and practice that he personified" (237), as well as illustrates why "Cuba, at least in the beginning, made it easy for these susceptibilities to merge." Word and action became an indistinguishable duo that ended up disguising despotism. First, because "the Cuban Revolution and its leaders were young, appeared flexible, experimental, independent, free of the dead hand of the past." And, second, because "they were not part of the Old Left and its errors, no inheritors of its dogmatism" (243-44).

According to Hollander, the model of intellectual promoted by the Cuban State considered that "intellectuals were men of action," to the point that "some actually fought as guerillas" while "others became revolutionary deans of universities, revolutionary officials in ministries of education, culture, or propaganda, revolutionary writers, film-makers, academics," in a kind of Stakhanovist climate where "most of them shared, from time to time, the manly burden of manual labor with the masses" to become "fully integrated into society" (264).

The 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana, to which Enzensberger was invited by Castro's officials, helped expand the role of intellectuals in the Western hemisphere. In 2018, the Argentinean scholar Leonardo Martín Candiano[17] published an essay about this congress and how,

from both its general and final statements, it was clear that "the concept of intellectual especially includes the revolutionary politician," because "revolutionary political leaders are revolutionary intellectuals" (132). It was also agreed then that "the revolutionary status of the writer is shown, in its highest and most noble form, by his willingness to share, when circumstances demand so, the combative tasks of students, workers and farmers." Thus it was established that "the permanent linkage between intellectuals and the rest of the popular forces, their mutual learning, is one of the bases for cultural progress" (132-33).

Enzensberger was willing to subscribe to these concepts in his life and career. His travels and writings suggest that he distrusted the "capitalist context" mentioned in the Congress statements, where "the intellectual is acquiring a certain shameful reputation as passive witness, a static entity." This view applied not only to developed democracies, but also to the Latin American underdeveloped region, where there was a tradition of "the contempt towards the intellectual figure by a ruling class for which culture is not the focus of interest" (120).

The general[cxvii] and final[cxviii] declarations of the 1968 Cultural Congress of Havana that Enzensberger attended would soon reverberate in his farewell later "On Leaving America," published once he temporarily returned to the U.S., only to later return to Cuba to match his intellectual role with the social demands of the Revolution.

In *The Havana Inquiry*, Enzensberger had the opportunity to criticize U.S. policies and politicians on the battlefield, not from the safe zone of academia where he could "study imperialism in comfort," as he stated in "On Leaving America." Regarding U.S. imperialism, he

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[cxvii] **Declaración General, 1967-68** (General Statement). *Congreso Cultural de La Habana*. Ruedo Ibérico, No 16, December-January, pp. 43-49. París, Francia.

[cxviii] **Declaración Final Comisión V, 1967-68** (Final Statement). *Congreso Cultural de La Habana*. Ruedo Ibérico, No 16, December-January. pp. 29-31. París, Francia.

now seems ready "to confront it where it shows a less benevolent face." That is, in communist Cuba, where the most powerful empire in history was trying to sabotage the implantation of socialism in a neighboring nation.

In his introduction to *The Havana Inquiry*, "A Self-Portrait of the Counter-Revolution," Enzensberger tacitly accepts the label of "mercenary troops" with which the Cuban government delegitimized the effort of Cuban exiles—with the support of the U.S. government—to prevent the destruction of the Cuban Republic established in May 1902, and its replacement by a communist regime. This surprising transformation was not among the public goals of the popular-democratic revolution of January 1, 1959, as can be seen from historical documents, including interviews and speeches made by Fidel Castro in 1959.[29]

Enzensberger's understanding of the complexities of the struggle in Cuba is limited, despite his research on this topic. Like many foreigners fascinated by the opportunities that the Revolution opened for humble people, the narrative of Enzensberger in *The Havana Inquiry* is quite reductionist between two poles: the new leadership on the Island with support from the popular masses versus the elite warmongers in Washington, D.C., which aligned itself with "the most reactionary wing of the counter-Revolution, invariably Batista's supporters" (9). Enzensberger is referring here to general Fulgencio Batista (1901-1973), initially a popular military officer who was democratically elected as President between 1940 and 1944, after legalizing the Communist Party. Batista belonged to a humble family of mestizos, but his popularity waned when in March 1953 he staged a *coup d'état* and ruled undemocratically until he was overthrown by urban armed resistance and Castro's rural guerrillas.

Enzensberger's equation can be misleading in historical terms: "CIA" plus "extreme Right" equals "pistol-packing heroes of the counter-Revolution" (9, 25). For him, the expected positioning of

every person with dignity should be obvious in such a simplistic scenario: to blame America first—as decades later, referring to other topics, summarized the American Democrat ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, in her renowned speech at the 1984 Republican Convention.

For Enzensberger, this "predilection of the CIA for Batista's cutthroats went deeper than simply the ideological similarities of the two partners." For him, the point was that "Batista's supporters after all were ideal confederates" to "effectively control them," since "the more criminal an agent's background, the easier it was to blackmail him" (9). Enzensberger questions the military disembark of anti-communist Cubans at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961, but avoids comparing it to Fidel Castro's maritime expedition in December 1956, when he sailed from Mexico to Cuba with eighty-two armed men. It is implicit that the latter meant an act of emancipation for him, while the former was "an invasion supported by America's satellites," including all "the Central American dictators, organized, equipped and financed by the United States" (12).

On the one hand, the "ad hoc mercenaries," "hired lackeys" and "former members of Batista's Gestapo"—the ghost of Nazism continues to haunt Enzensberger—whose "manufactured provocation with the character of a *coup d'état*" installed a "puppet regime into this 'liberated territory.'" They represent the "ruling class" for Enzensberger. In this case, the "Cuban bourgeoisie," with the complicity of the "lumpen-proletariat," that "can only be brought to speech as a defeated counter-Revolutionary force." On the other hand, Enzensberger explains how "the interrogators confront the invaders with an unheard-of generosity and patience," from which it follows that "the moral circumspection of the Revolution is obvious." Consequently, he concludes that "political divisions were reconciled by the counter-Revolution at the time of the Bay of Pigs," because, in this Manichean confrontation between the "Cuban people" and "American imperialism," (10, 14-16, 19-20) there was no legitimacy for those Cubans who wanted to preserve the previous

constitutional order of the Republic. As Batista had already interrupted the constitutional order by seizing power in March 1953—this order was never restored by Castro after his takeover in January 1959—some historians believe that Batista's usurpation ultimately favored Castro's radicalization and authoritarianism.

Years later, the partisan perspectives of *The Havana Inquiry* were to be questioned by Enzensberger himself. In his 1982 collection of *Critical Essays*,[60] he claims to be convinced that "no one who returns from a sojourn in socialism is a genuine part of the process he tries to describe." After his own experience and the ideological distance of two decades, Enzensberger admits that "no matter what attitude or position one takes toward these countries—and they run the gamut from blind identification to vitriolic dislike—the verdicts are invariably reached from the outside." And he concludes that "neither voluntary commitment nor the degree of solidarity with which one behaves, no propaganda action, no walk through the cane fields and schools, factories and mines, not to mention a few moments at the lectern or a quick handshake with the leader of the revolution, can deceive about the fact" (159).

In a way, he realizes that he was an outsider to the Revolution, trying to interpret it through a personalized prism, instead of welcoming all the interpretations that Cubans themselves were making of the Revolution, from seeing it as an idyllic utopia to a brutal via crucis. In the chapter "Tourists of the Revolution," Enzensberger accepts part of his guilt as a political pilgrim by quoting *in extenso* the poem "The Travelers," written by the censored Cuban author Heberto Padilla (1932-2000)—once a revolutionary, then persecuted after 1971, and finally forced into lifelong exile in 1979.

In "The Travelers," Padilla ridicules the solidarity of foreigners on the Island: "these fourteen-day heroes," who "provided with systems, with methods," "they come in the clothes of

the affluent society," only to be "obviously frustrated" by "the unfortunate puritanism of the revolution." Still, the travelers try to "define that state of affairs / with honest melancholy / as the abyss between theory and practice," before returning to their own societies. There, "at home they look at slides / that show the family hero / surrounded by natives, fraternally embraced" (160-61).

After analyzing a number of case-studies in communist countries, Enzensberger concludes "that the great majority of 'radical tourists' assiduously ignore the true situation of the working class in the socialistically governed countries." He finds that this "striking disinterest is only barely concealed by means of declamatory slogans." And, in practical terms, according to Enzensberger, foreign travelers "cannot and are not set up to break through the social segregation of the guests, whose contact is limited to designated individuals from the functionary class and to foreigners who live in the same hotels" (180).

In short, Enzensberger acknowledges that there is an asymmetrical cultural exchange between foreigners from free countries and the local citizens who behave like hostages, which could be reminiscent of the master-serf dialectic of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), exemplified in his 1807 treatise *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[89]

Regarding the limitations to revolutionary tourists, Enzensberger confesses that "this umbrella is so effective that most of the political tourists don't have the slightest idea of the working conditions even after weeks or months in the host country." And he invokes his Cuban experience with what could be understood as an intellectual *mea culpa*: "In Havana I kept meeting Communists in the hotels for foreigners who had no idea that the energy and water supply in the working quarters had broken down during the afternoon, that bread was rationed, and that the population had to stand two hours in line for a slice of pizza." All this while "the tourists in their hotel rooms were arguing about Lukács" (180).

The scholar Victoria Harms, in a 2015 lecture[87] at the University of Pittsburgh, agrees that, as Charlotte Melin and Cecile C. Zorach suggested in 1986,[31] "Enzensberger was only one of many German writers who 'often assimilate traditional literary images of a tropical paradise into their own search for a modern political paradigm'" only to "end by affirming the paradoxical reality of the island." This paradox emerged, according to them, from "the incongruous mingling of the traditional and the radical, the decaying and the fecund, the primitive and the progressive." In a certain sense, the Revolution is once again seen as a remix of contradictory notions that could end up emptying its meaning, arbitrarily adapting it to the contingencies of each context. This tendency to behave like an empty or floating signifier is what makes difficult—if not impossible—any external contestation to the Revolution, because the Revolution aspires to synthesize from within every potential pair of contraries, erasing difference for the sake of ideology. That is, justifying despotism against all dissent in order to advance the cause of Utopia.

Harms traces an evolutionary timeline of Enzensberger's revolutionary impetus from his original radicalism to the point where "his conciliatory essays showed no trace of the formerly angry rebel against U.S. imperialism and West German pettiness." According to her, "he seemed to care little about critics that now considered him conservative, at times even reactionary." In any case, "ideologically and geographically, Enzensberger's *volte-face* was complete," as shown in a 1989 interview—before the fall of the Berlin Wall—included by Harms in her conference paper: "I spent a lot of time in Latin America. Not speaking Chinese, I couldn't hope to understand much about what was going on there, but for people like me Latin America provided a point of contact. But I won't mince words. I feel defeated. The more I tried to be involved politically with Third World problems, the more I felt frustrated".[122]

In his book *Dreamers of the Absolute*,[61] Enzensberger affirms that “socialists and socialist regimes which multiply the frustration of the masses by declaring their needs to be false, become the accomplices of the system they have undertaken to fight” (38). A good example for him is “the well-known tendency of the Cuban revolution to voluntarism […] together with a rhetoric of affirmation.” In this way Enzensberger tries to expose “the tendency to answer the irrational fears of the imperialist oppressor with equally irrational hopes” from the oppressed. And, much likely, from the foreigners reporting about the oppressed” (270). The political pilgrim that he was in the 1960s had by then become the controversial intellectual who now problematized the political pilgrimage as such. The poet Enzensberger was always a multidimensional man, with contradictory but consistent opinions in each historical context of his long life and career.

In a 2007 interview with the scholar Irena Grudzińska Gross,[80] Enzensberger wonders “why should I keep away from such an enormous experiment as 1968?” And he says that “it was something worthwhile and I got enmeshed in it,” despite the fact that “there is always a lot of nonsense in all big social movements,” as much as “also an element of lunatic fringe” (71). Perhaps, the vitalistic violence of such untimely events were for him a symptom of youth: the Nietzschean untimely or *Unzeitgemässe*, which presumes “the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically,” both “necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people, and of a culture” (63).

Enzensberger’s position in the interview with Grudzińska Gross leaves no doubt about his disenchantment with the Cuban Revolution, beyond his rather inaccurate perception that “Cuba was different, it was a place where, roughly speaking, three quarters of the people wanted a revolution, where there were no Russian tanks, there was no outside pressure, they did it themselves.” He essentially “came to the same conclusion” that in “almost all the communist

countries" where he travelled: "it does not work there, either." Not because, as in "the Cuban line—'It's all the fault of the Americans,'" but because "there is something inherent in the system." That is, the "reality principle" for Enzensberger indicates that "a society is always more intelligent than one man" and "a one man show" (71-72). In fact, in 1970 he published this "portrait" of the Cuban Communist Party under the centralized control of Fidel Castro:[62]

> The political power in Cuba lies exclusively in the hands of a very small number of individuals who cluster around Fidel and for whom the criterion is not party discipline, but simply and solely personal loyalty toward the Commandante-en-jefe. [...] Fidel needs the party, but cannot stand it. It is a nuisance to him. He hardly ever attends its meetings. He cannot do without its apparatus and fears it as a millstone around his neck. With great persistence he runs away from the very vanguard whom he keeps on calling. It will never catch up with him. He wants it and wants it not. Fidel's dilemma is thus the dilemma of the PCC, an institution which for many years has been constructed and destroyed simultaneously.

In this regard, the Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), who won the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature and was a lifelong personal friend of Fidel Castro—insisted from very early in his left-leaning career on the loneliness associated with this type of caudillo:[73] "To express the loneliness of power, there is no better archetype than the Latin American dictator who is the great mythological monster of our history" (44). García Márquez also believed that "the solitude of power is a lot like the solitude of a writer."[7] This comparison reminds us of the notions of "State fiction" versus "Author fiction", proposed by the Argentinean novelist Ricardo Piglia years later at a lecture he delivered in Havana.[149]

Still, Enzensberger has never stopped questioning capitalism and democracy in the Western world, as befits an intellectual who is convinced of his role in sustaining a critical consciousness of society. But his conclusions are now less dismissive of the United States of America, for example, while his incisive sense of humor relativizes any trace of rage and radicalism.

The Cuban revolution was initially idolized as the international icon of a new world. It would be interesting for future studies to assess how the evolution of intellectuals like Hans Magnus Enzensberger involved not only rational analysis but also emotional reactions. In 2014, the German historian Henning Marmulla[120] explored how this impact may have led Enzensberger to practice self-censorship when he finally left Cuba for Europe.

Marmulla quotes an early letter than Enzensberger sent to his publisher in Berlin, where he confirmed that "for the first time in my life I have seen a revolution that is not dead, a revolution not devouring but feeding its children, a revolution without this gray, oppressive aura we are so familiar with from the East, a revolution that has understood that suppressing intellectual work is an act of counterrevolution"[cxix] (23).

In 1968, the previous statement certainly was quite disconnected from the expanding Stalinist side of Cuban reality. Ten years later, despite all his skepticism, Enzensberger was still convinced that even when "writers don't generate any grand social movements," if they happen to "encounter one, they must take a position" (125) on it. Under certain circumstances, participation was preferably to poetry. Or, perhaps, participating was the best poetic action of those intellectuals in search of a Revolution that they considered to be in search of Utopia.

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[cxix] The original text in German (*Berliner Gemeinplätze*) was published by Enzensberger in the journal that he was then editing: *Kursbuch* (11/1968, pp.151–69).

In 2012, Jennifer Hosek published a book about the representations of the Cuban Revolution in the German imaginary,[94] where she proposes that in general "Germans employed Cuba as utopian articulations of domestic desires that in turn recast domestic logics." These "revolutionary fantasies" at times "supported the peaceful coexistence of the Cold War on Soviet and U.S. terms" and, in other instances, they "had the potential to destabilize nationalist and imperialist tendencies in the North to the benefit of the South," undermining both "domestic pruderies and international policies," while helping "Germans to rethink themselves and their place in the world" (6).

Hosek believes, in other words, that, at least in the 1960s, "Cuba seemed to embody leftist ideals not found domestically" in communist East Germany. According to her, "for critical citizens on both sides of the Wall," the Cuban Revolution was an example that "made socialist projects on the national and the global scale palatable and even noble." Moreover, "the Cuban revolution sometimes came to be imagined as an alternative to their situation at home" (180).

Hosek highlights how even in the 1990s, in the worst systemic crisis of the Revolution that caused the material and moral collapse of Cuban communism—with a peak in malnutrition, contagious diseases, economic corruption, violent repression, common crimes, drugs, prostitution, and migratory waves—for many Germans, traveling to Cuba still represented "a multifaceted travel site that elides sex tourism through articulation of tourisms of solidarity and nostalgia" (184).

Consequently, for Hosek the "post-peaceful coexistence does not herald the End of Utopia or History" at all. On the contrary, she concludes that "a U.S.-centric empire seems to be birthing an oppositional phoenix of pragmatic utopianism in which entities such as the 'enormous' island nation figure more strongly." Cuba, "a puny Caribbean nation that drills for oil in Goliath's backyard and

makes alliances with the rising left in mainland Latin America," again, "may be all the more endearing" from a "transnational" perspective in the first decades of the twenty-first century (184-85).

Under certain circumstances, participating was the best poetic action of those intellectuals in search of a Revolution that they considered to be in search of Utopia.

# CONCLUSIONS

The triumph of the Revolution led by Fidel Castro in Cuba, on January 1, 1959, brought an avalanche of foreigners to the Caribbean Island. In the whole world there was a renewed interest in the events rapidly developing in Cuba, from politics to culture. In particular, many activists and intellectuals managed to travel and reside in Cuba for extended periods of time. They hoped to experience from inside the radical nature of the social transformations taking place there, understood as a Utopian experiment that could become an alternative to contemporary capitalism, representative democracy and, to a certain extent, also to the Soviet model of socialism.

In particular, U.S. social activists and intellectuals seemed fascinated to witness as much as participate in the Cuba Revolution. Eventually, many of them aspired to narrate the historical hallmarks of the Revolution from the Island, or once they were back in the United States. A few actually never returned from Cuba—in a way, achieving the tempting goal of those who assume they are giving voice to the others: to become the others themselves.

Whether political pilgrims or privileged interpreters, those U.S. citizens were in the position of culturally translating the utopia of the Cuban Revolution for the American people, and, by extension, for the rest of the non-utopian world. The fact that they were writing from Castro's Cuba lent a layer of authentication and legitimacy to their narratives, with which they hoped not only to influence U.S. public opinion and foreign policy, but also to shield the Cuban Revolution from its national and international enemies in the context of the Cold War—that is, to justify it in the face of ideological criticism and to defend it from potential military threats.

Some of these American travelers to Cuba became immediately or gradually disappointed with the concrete implementation of the Revolution, whether or not they kept supporting its socialist/communist

principles—that is, the extreme egalitarian agenda that in the beginning Fidel Castro denied in public, only to confess it months later, but then blaming for it the belligerence of U.S. Imperialism against the Cuban Revolution for it. In general, the Americans who were disappointed by the dystopic elements of the Caribbean Utopia returned sooner rather than later to the United States or were abruptly expelled from the Island by the revolutionary authorities—usually with arbitrary accusations that ranged from collaboration with counterrevolutionary Cuban exiles to espionage for the U.S. government.

In the case of African-American activists who sought refuge in Cuba and wrote about their experiences on the Island—while still living there or afterwards—their initial political agendas were irreversibly modified in Cuba, whether they acknowledge this or not in their autobiographical testimonies. The same social issues—including racism—roiling the U.S. were, when displaced to Cuba, perceived by them in strikingly different ways than when they lived in their own country. Some of them adapted to the Revolution, while others openly resisted it.

In this dissertation, I have studied in detail four books written by African American activists who lived in revolutionary Cuba, spanning a time period from the 1960s to the present: Anthony Bryant, John Clytus, William Lee Brent and Assata Shakur. Bryant and Clytus were disappointed in Cuban reality and were eager to be deported back to the United States, while Brent and Shakur adjusted to their country of refuge and stayed on the Island for life.

The critical issue of race was paramount for all of them, as they traveled to Cuba fleeing American racial discrimination and seeking protection in an egalitarian system where—in theory—racism belonged to the capitalist past.

Bryant was deported from his Cuban prison convinced that the Revolution was one of the most racist dictatorships in history. Clytus was also deported, fearing that communism in Cuba was

erasing the Black race by condensing all races into a single one, in order to abolish Black consciousness.

However, Brent felt that the residual racism in Cuba was rather a lack of racial sensitivity, but without overt racial overtones. And Shakur believed that Cuban racism had not been as violent or institutionalized as in the United States, so that the Revolution on the Island should be considered one of the most important safe spaces for the Black race in history.

Most aspects of the Cuban Revolution were initially approached by them from a utopian perspective—even if it could turn into a dystopian scenario—and also as an alternative to the ideological conceptions and social practices of the United States. Despite any effort to insert themselves into a new reality, their chronicles of the Cuban Revolution can still be considered an American conversation, where meaning—including a sense of purpose and belonging—emerges through comparison and contrast with America.

In the end, the perspective of the Cuban Revolution as Utopia tends to normalize notions that are intolerable in the non-utopic world, including a personalistic government entitled to power in perpetuity, lack of individual rights, collectivization of all private property, severe punishment for those who oppose the idyllic narrative that makes violence invisible, and the need for a citizen-soldier permanently prepared for war. The intellectual support of foreign travelers to the Island of Utopia is not enough to ensure governability in Cuba. It only disguises the fact that the State has always reduced Cubans by the use of force, as in any non-utopian power.

It would be interesting to study the testimony of other African American activists who have lived in Cuba for long or short periods of time, as well as to extend the comparison to all sectors of U.S. society, including those fascinated with Fidel Castro's Revolution but unable or unwilling to travel and live in Cuba.

# CREATIVE WRITING PROJECT

As part of the Ph.D. in Comparative Literature for International Writers, I wrote in Spanish and published in 2022 a fictionalized biographical book of creative writing: *Diario de Saint Orlando Louis* (in English, *Diary of Saint Orlando Louis*).[146]

*Diario de Saint Orlando Louis* is a 250-page volume of stories that happened to me either in my physical or psychic reality, during my 6-year stay while completing a Ph.D. at WashU in Saint Louis, Missouri, from August 2016 to the present. It includes 59 fictionalized biographical chronicles and a single poem—a coda cyclically derived from the first narrative piece of the book. As such, although most of my texts are not poems, the project is subtitled *59 poemas de desamor y una canción esperanzada* (in English, *Fifty-Nine Heartbreak Poems and a Hopeful Song*), which is a rewriting of the title *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Hopelessness* by the Chilean communist poet Pablo Neruda (1904-1973). The number 59 is a reference to the year 1959, when the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro took political power on the Island to this day.

In my book, I explore factual and fake events from my experience as a graduate student in the United States of America, and also from my memories as a post-national intellectual. In a way, this is the sedentary diary of a once-in-a lifetime travel of a Cuban writer who was censored in his own country and ultimately forced into exile, only to end up lost in translation while witnessing the American Way of Life Online—from dating app ghosting to social media outrage, if such a distinction is possible in literary terms.

Heading in the opposite direction from the American citizens that I study in my academic writing, here a biofictional character named Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo approaches and appropriates America under the gaze of a survivor of the Cuban Utopia.

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https://ia800307.us.archive.org/22/items/OnRevolution/ArendtOn-revolution.pdf

[3]**Arendt, Hannah**. *On Violence*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970.

[4]**Augé, Marc**. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. (*Non-lieux: Introduction a une anthropologie de la surmodernite*. Translated by John Howe). London and New York: Verso, 1995. https://monoskop.org/images/3/3c/Auge_Marc_Non-Places_Introduction_to_an_Anthropology_of_Supermodernity.pdf


In the early nineties, the French anthropologist Marc Augé coined the term "non-place" to refer to anthropological spaces of transience—constant transition and temporality—that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places" in the anthropological sciences. In a non-place, all human relations, as well as history and identity, can be seen as erased, so that the human being becomes a rather anonymous and lonely entity. Furthermore, a non-place is not a meeting space either and it does not create common references to any human group, since they are not *stricto sensu* inhabited by them.

Here it could be relevant to mention the anthropological notion of "liminality," as developed in the early twentieth century by the Dutch-German-French ethnologist and folklorist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957) and later by the British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1920-1983). "Liminality" would refer to the ambiguity or disorientation that occurs during the middle stages of a rite of passage, when the subjects no longer hold their previous status but have not yet begun the transition to their final status: they are simply standing at a threshold.

Finally, the ideas of place and placelessness studied by Edward Relph are also important in this respect (**Relph, Edward**. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion, 1976).

[5]**Ball, Angela**. *The Museum of the Revolution*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 1999.

[6]**Bacon, Francis**. *Of Travel*. In: *The Essayes, or Counsels Civill and Morall*. London: John Haviland for Hanna Barret, 1625. http://people.duke.edu/~dainotto/Texts/bacon_travel.pdf

[7]**Bell-Villada, Gene H**. *Journey Back to the Source: An Interview with Gabriel García* Márquez. In: *El Manifiesto. Quincenario Socialista*. Bogotá, 29 Sep 1977.
http://www.vqronline.org/web-exclusive/journey-back-source-interview-gabriel-garc%C3%ADa-m%C3%A1rquez

[8]**Blackbourn, David**. *In the Opposite Direction*. In: *London Review of Books*. 32(6), pp. 15-18. 25 Mar 2010.
https://www.lrb.co.uk/v32/n06/david-blackbourn/in-the-opposite-direction

[9]**Blanton, Casey**. *Travel Writing: The Self and the World*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

[10]**Bliven, Bruce**. *Circular Ticket*, In: *The New Republic*. LXIX. 1932. p.340.

[11]**Brent, William Lee**. *Long Time Gone: A Black Panther's True-Life Story of his Skyjacking and Twenty-Five Years in Cuba*. New York: Times Books, 1996.

[12]**Breslow, Jacob**. *Adolescent Citizenship, or Temporality and the Negation of Black Childhood in Two Eras*. In: *American Quarterly*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Volume 71, Number 2, June 2019, pp. 473-494.
https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/160483781.pdf


Breslow proposes, beyond the classic concept of "infantile citizenship" or "persons that, paradoxically, cannot act yet as citizens," the new notion of "adolescent citizenship," in order to better describe "subjects who can act as citizens, but whose acts of citizenship are derided and negated for being out of temporal sync with a fantasy of the nation's

present." For Breslow, while "infantile citizenship produces mixed and ambivalent relations of paternalism and care," adolescent citizenship in turn "negates the demand of recognition or justice by demarcating the subject as immature (and thus unworthy of the right), and by figuring the demand itself as out of sync (and thus precocious, if not alternatively anachronistic)" (25).

[13]**Brinton, Crane**. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1938.

[14]**Brodsky, Joseph**. "Flight from Byzantium." In: *Less Than One. Selected Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986.

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[16]**Buchanan, James**. *James Buchanan to William L. Marcy*, November 1, 1853. In: *Works of James Buchanan*, 9:84.

[17]**Candiano, Leonardo Martín**. *El congreso cultural de la Habana de 1968. La subversión de la noción de intelectual*. (*Cultural Congress of Havana of 1968. The Subversion of the Notion of Intellectual*.) In: *Raíz Diversa*, Vol 5, No 10, pp 113-140, July-December, 2018.
https://www.academia.edu/37775875/El_congreso_cultural_de_La_Habana_de_1968._La_subversi%C3%B3n_de_la_noci%C3%B3n_de_intelectual

All translations are mine. Original in Spanish:

"El concepto de intelectual incluye de manera especialmente destacada al político revolucionario. Los dirigentes políticos revolucionarios son intelectuales revolucionarios" (132). "La medida revolucionaria del escritor nos la da, en su forma más alta y noble, su disposición para compartir, cuando las circunstancias lo exijan, las tareas combativas de los estudiantes, obreros y campesinos. La vinculación permanente entre los intelectuales y el resto de las fuerzas populares, el aprendizaje mutuo, es una base del progreso cultural" (132-133).

[18]**Cardell, Kylie and Kate Douglas**. *Travel Blogs*. In: **Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. pp. 298-307.

[19]**Carr, Edward Hallet**. *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*. Vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1950. p.69.

[20]**Cassels, Louis**. *Fair Play for Cuba Committee Activated*. In: *Lodi News Sentinel*. 17 Jun 1961. p.17.

[21]**Castro, Fidel**. *Speech by Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, in the Central Act for the 30th Anniversary of the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, held at the Carlos Marx Theatre on September 28, 1990, "Year 32 of the Revolution."*

http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1990/esp/f280990e.html

Original in Spanish:

"Esta Revolución la hicimos por nuestra cuenta, no nos la hizo nadie, no nos la defendió nadie, no nos la salvó nadie, la hicimos nosotros, la defendimos nosotros, la salvamos nosotros, y continuaremos haciéndola, continuaremos defendiéndola y continuaremos salvándola cuantas veces sea necesario." "Debemos estar dispuestos a hacerlo, porque no podemos andar con sentimentalismo o con emociones en esto, cuando lo fundamental es salvar el país, salvar la Revolución." "¡Salvar la Revolución en Cuba!, ¡salvar el socialismo en Cuba!, y ese será el más grande servicio internacionalista que pueda prestar nuestro pueblo a la humanidad." "¡Hay que salvar la patria, hay que salvar la Revolución, hay que salvar el socialismo: esa es la tarea a la cual invitamos hoy a los 7 millones y medio de cederistas!"

[22]**Castro, Fidel**. *Salvar la patria, la revolución y el socialismo*. La Habana: Editora Política, 1990.
http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/libros/salvar-la-patria-la-revolucion-y-el-socialismo

[23]**Castro, Fidel**. *Speech at the Open Tribune of Youth, Students and Workers,* Revolution Square, Havana, 1 May 2000. http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/node/572

Original in Spanish:

"Revolución es sentido del momento histórico; es cambiar todo lo que debe ser cambiado; es igualdad y libertad plenas; es ser tratado y tratar a los demás como seres humanos; es emanciparnos por nosotros mismos y con nuestros propios esfuerzos; es desafiar poderosas fuerzas dominantes dentro y fuera del ámbito social y nacional; es defender

valores en los que se cree al precio de cualquier sacrificio; es modestia, desinterés, altruismo, solidaridad y heroísmo; es luchar con audacia, inteligencia y realismo; es no mentir jamás ni violar principios éticos; es convicción profunda de que no existe fuerza en el mundo capaz de aplastar la fuerza de la verdad y las ideas. Revolución es unidad, es independencia, es luchar por nuestros sueños de justicia para Cuba y el mundo, que es la base de nuestro patriotismo, nuestro socialismo y nuestro internacionalismo."
http://www.fidelcastro.cu/es/discursos/discurso-pronunciado-por-el-dia-internacional-de-los-trabajadores-plaza-de-la-revolucion

[24]**Castro, Fidel.** *Speech at the Sugarcane Mill "Antonio Maceo,"* Puerto Padre, Cuba. 14 July 1969.
http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1969/esp/f140769e.html
Original in Spanish: "Y será para los imperialistas una hora amarga esta de los 10 millones —¡sin duda!—, porque han cometido el crimen incalificable, han llevado a cabo la desvergonzada y repugnante política de tratar de matar por hambre a este país."

[25]**Castro, Fidel**. *Speech at Havana University*, Havana, 13 March 1963.
http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1963/esp/f130363e.html
"Many of those lazy tramps, sons of the bourgeoisie, that roam around with pants that are too tight (LAUGHTER); some of them with a guitar in an Elvis Presley air, that have gone too far on their licentiousness as to go to public places with the intention of free-lance organizing their femoid shows. Let them not mistake the serenity of the Revolution and the equanimity of the Revolution for weaknesses of the Revolution. Because our society cannot allow these degenerations (APPLAUSE)."
Original in Spanish: "Muchos de esos pepillos vagos, hijos de burgueses, andan por ahí con unos pantaloncitos demasiado estrechos (RISAS); algunos de ellos con una guitarrita en actitudes "elvispreslianas", y que han llevado su libertinaje a extremos de querer ir a algunos sitios de concurrencia pública a organizar sus shows feminoides por la libre. Que no confundan la serenidad de la Revolución y la ecuanimidad de la Revolución con debilidades de la Revolución. Porque nuestra sociedad no puede darles cabida a esas degeneraciones (APLAUSOS)."

[26]**Castro, Fidel**. *Fidel Castro in the US, 1960*. In: *Picilone_7 YouTube channel*. Uploaded 7 Mar 2015.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzejjUiOrgc

[27]**Castro Ruz, Fidel**. *Speech at Plaza de la Revolución José Martí*. Havana. 22 December 1961.
http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f221261e.html
Original in Spanish:
"¡Y por eso no son los dirigentes, es el pueblo, son las masas las que levantamos la mano y decimos y repetimos que somos y seremos marxista-leninistas! ¿No quiere socialismo el imperialismo? ¡Pues bien, le daremos tres tazas de socialismo!"

[28]**Castro Ruz, Fidel**. *Speech at the Closing Session of the Young Communists League 8th Congress, Havana Convention Center*. Havana. 5 December 2004.
http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/2004/ing/f051204i.html

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[30]**Caute, David**. *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988.

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https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/09/c-wright-mills-listen-yankee-cuban-revolution-trevino-review

[33]**Chi Mihn, Ho**. *On Revolution. Selected Writings, 1920-66*. New York, Washington, London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967.

[34]**Cleeton, Christa**. *Fidel Castro visits Princeton University*. In: *Mudd Manuscript Library Blog*. 5 October 2012. https://blogs.princeton.edu/mudd/2012/10/fidel-castro-visits-princeton-university/

[35]**Clytus, John and Jane Rieker**. *Black Man in Red Cuba*. Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970.

[36]**Clytus, John and Jane Rieker**. *Mi vida en Cuba roja*. México: Diana, 1971.

[37]**Colombi, Beatriz**. *El viaje, de la práctica al género*. In: *Viaje y relato en Latinoamérica*. (Marinone, Mónica and Gabriela Tineo, editors.) Buenos Aires: Ediciones Katatay, 2010. pp. 287-308.

[38]**Davis, James C**. *Toward a Theory of Revolution*. In: *On Revolution*. (William Lutz and Harry Brent, editors). Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1971. p.68-84.

[39]**Davis, John Merle**. *The Cuban Church in a Sugar Economy; A Study of the Economic and Social Basis of the Evangelical Church in Cuba*. New York, London: Department of Social and Economic Research and Counsel, International Missionary Council, 1942. p. 36.

[40]**De Castro, Juan E**. *Writing Revolution in Latin America: From Martí to García Márquez to Bolaño*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2019.

[41]**Debray, Régis**. *Revolution in the Revolution? Armed Struggle and Political Struggle in Latin America*. (Translated by Bobbye Ortiz.) New York and London: MR Press, 1967.

[42]**Deleuze, Gilles** and **Félix Guattari**. *Capitalisme et schizophrénie. L'anti-Œdipe*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972.

The English translation from the French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, published in Minneapolis by the University of Minnesota Press in 2000, is available online:
https://antilogicalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/capitalism-and-schizophrenia.pdf

In the *Introduction* of the book, the writer and translator Mark Seem mentions that the approach of "schizoanalysis" by Deleuze and Guattari is opposed by them "on every count to psychoanalysis," since "where the latter measures everything against neurosis and castration, schizoanalysis begins with the schizo, his breakdowns and his breakthroughs."

That is, "against the Oedipal and oedipalized territorialities (Family, Church, School, Nation, Party), and especially the territoriality of the individual, *Anti-Oedipus* seeks to discover the 'deterritorialized' flows of desire, the flows that have not been reduced to the Oedipal codes and the neuroticized territorialities, the *desiring-machines* that escape such codes as *lines of escape* leading elsewhere."

For Mark Seem, the approach of Deleuze and Guattari, "rather than view the creations and productions of desire—all of desiring-production—from the point of view of the norm and the normal, they force their analysis into the sphere of extremes. From paranoia to schizophrenia, from fascism to revolution, from breakdowns to breakthroughs, what is investigated is the process of life flows as they oscillate from one extreme to the other, on a scale of intensity that goes from 0 ('I never asked to be born… leave me in peace'), *the body without organs*, to the nth power ('I am all that exists, all the names in history'), *the schizophrenic process of desire*" (xvii).

[43]**Desnoes, Edmundo**. *Memorias del subdesarrollo*. México: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1980.
http://esystems.mx/BPC/llyfrgell/0203.pdf

The Cuban exiled novelist Edmundo Desnoes, in his 1965 novel *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of underdevelopment*), later published in English as *Inconsolable memories* (New York: New American Library, 1967), expresses a similar idea of Cuba being a refuge for Americans to first safely create their works there and then conquer the world with those works.

During a visit to the house of Ernest Hemingway in Finca Vigía, outside the capital of the Island, the protagonist of the novel says about the American writer: "Cuba no le interesó nunca ni un carajo a Papa Hemingway. Botas para cazar en África, muebles norteamericanos, fotos españolas, revistas y libros en inglés, carteles de toros. En toda la casa no había nada cubano, ni un objeto de santería o un cuadro. Nada. Cuba, para Hemingway, era un lugar para refugiarse, vivir tranquilamente con su mujer, recibir a sus amigos, escribir en inglés, pescar en la Corriente del Golfo" (62).

My English translation: "Papa Hemingway never gave a damn about Cuba. Hunting boots for Africa, North American furniture, photos from Spain, English books and magazines, bullfight posters. In the whole house there was

nothing Cuban, not a Santeria object or a painting. Nothing. Cuba, for Hemingway, was a place to take refuge, live peacefully with his wife, welcome his friends, write in English, fish in the Gulf Stream."

[44]**Diouf, Sylviane A**. and **Komozi Woodard** (editors). *Black Power 50*. New York and London: The New Press, 2016.

[45]**Domínguez, Jorge I**. *The Batista Regime in Cuba*. In: *Sultanistic Regimes* (edited by E. Houchang and Juan J. Linz). Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. pp.113-131.

Domínguez has a very peculiar understanding of "Batista's sultanistic tendencies," which implies a certain sense of chaos in power—by comparison to the control exerted by Castro after him?—given that Batista's regime was "personalistic, arbitrary, centralized, nonideological, distrustful, corrupt, and unprofessional" (114). Domínguez considers that some traits of Batista's personality contributed to this sultanistic trend: "his purge of professional officers, his distrust of his own appointees, his insistence on being his own field commander (despite his total absence of field command experience), the lack of loyalties within the structures he had created, the absence of commitment to fundamental ideas, and the low morale among the troops induced by overwhelming evidence of corruption" (131).

Besides, although for Domínguez there is "no clear relation between Cuba's crisis of sovereignty and sultanistic tendencies," still he insists that "there is no doubt that U.S. intervention in Cuba during the first third of the twentieth century contributed powerfully to creating clientelist relations and to weakening the links between state, political society, and civil society" (119).

[46]**Dowd, Katie**. *"Oh No, Not Again": Remembering the Epidemic of Plane Hijackings from SFO to Cuba*. In: *SFGATE*. 19 January 2020.

https://www.sfgate.com/travel/article/sfo-hijacking-havana-cuba-san-francisco-14981405.php#photo-18896548

[47]**Dubois, Jules**. *Report on Latin America*. In: *Chicago Sunday Tribune*. 20 November 1960. p.16

The origin of the reading anecdote comes from the Latin America correspondent for *The Chicago Tribune*, Jules Dubois (1910-1966), who in his 1960 *Report on Latin America* affirmed that Fidel Castro had indeed read the book *The Power Elite* by C. Wright Mills, while he was the commander-in-chief of his guerilla in Sierra Maestra mountains. Dubois refers that Castro jokingly remarked: "If the American consul should visit me here I hide this book under the bed, no?" In any case, Dubois thought that many of the opinions of C. Wright Mills in that book "have been used, without attribution, by Castro time and again in his speeches and in his controlled press."

[48]**Eastland, James O.** *The Venceremos Brigade—Agrarians or Anarchists?* In: *U.S. Congressional Record*, S 3758 – S 3762. 16 March 1970.

"We intend to light the shadows that surround this vicious operation—to drive from those shadows the missiles—in human form—which have been fashioned on that Communist island and fired at America. We want our people to be aware of the direct chain which reaches from Cuba into our cities, our campuses, our conventions, our lives—and which threatens the life of this Republic."

[49]**Eberstadt, Mary**. *The Left Still Blames America First*. In: *The Wall Street Journal*. 19 Aug 2020.

https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-left-still-blames-america-first-11597854057

[50]**Eco, Umberto**. *La estrategia de la ilusión.* (*Semiologia cotidiana*. Translated by Edgardo Oviedo.) Barcelona: Lumen, 1999. [All the English translations from Spanish in this note are mine.]

http://www.ignaciodarnaude.com/textos_diversos/Eco,Umberto,La%20estrategia%20de%20la%20ilusion.pdf

Eco discusses how "the person who receives the message seems to have a residual freedom," and whether or not they can choose to "read it differently" than expected by the whole "chain of communication," which in turn includes "a source that, through a transmitter, emits a signal through a channel" directed to "the recipient through a receiver." Eco insists that, while all readings are "different," none is "wrong." So that "it is not true that action on the form and content of the message can modify the recipient," and, by extension, "it is not true that *the medium is the message*," (78) as it had been earlier coined by the Canadian thinker Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) in his influential book *Understanding Media, The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

This concept of "residual freedom" somehow derives from Eco's own notion on the contemporary predominance of "aberrant decoding" in mass media, as postulated by him in the essay "Towards A Semiotic Inquiry into the Television Message" (translated by Paola Splendore), which was published in 1972 by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and Birmingham University Press, as part of the series *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 3(1):103-121.

[51]**Eco, Umberto**. *The Open Work*. (*Opera aperta*. Translated by Anna Cancogni.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. https://monoskop.org/images/6/6b/Eco_Umberto_The_Open_Work.pdf

In the Introduction, David Robey praises "the enduring historical usefulness of its concept of 'openness,'" because "it anticipates two of the major themes of contemporary literary theory from the mid-sixties onward: the insistence on the element of multiplicity, plurality, or polysemy in art, and the emphasis on the role of the reader, on literary interpretation and response as an interactive process between reader and text" (viii).

Like most of Eco's concepts, "openness" is also a complex one. He associates "openness" with "the terminology of quantum physics: indeterminacy and discontinuity," although "at the same time they also exemplify a number of situations in Einsteinian physics" (18). For Eco, even "knowledge is at once a process and an 'openness'" (74). But, in order to "avoid a possible misunderstanding," he insists that, for example, "life in its immediacy is not 'openness' but chance." And only when we attempt "to turn this chance into a cluster of possibilities," then "it is first necessary to provide it with some organization." Namely, as creators we first need to "choose the elements of a constellation among which we will then—and only then—draw a network of connections" (116).

Eco distinguishes between the "explicit", "extreme" (39) and "intentional 'openness' advocated by contemporary art movements," from the more natural openness "which we consider typical of all works of art" (24). The former is a sort of displacement, to use Goldsmith's terminology, and the latter would imply that the text per se endures anyway a sort of translation, if communication is to occur. Eco labels the former as "openness of the second degree," where the "aesthetic pleasure" focuses "less in the final recognition of a form than in the apprehension of the continuously open process that allows one to discover ever-changing profiles and possibilities in a single form" (74). Then, Eco labels the latter as "openness of the first degree" (74), in the sense that "every work of art can be said to be 'open,'" since "this openness manifests itself structurally" (24), where the "aesthetic pleasure" now "depends on the same mechanisms of integration characteristic of all cognitive processes" (74). That is, since "the openness of a work of art is the very condition of aesthetic pleasure, then each form whose aesthetic value is capable of producing such pleasure is, by definition, open—even though its author may have aimed at a univocal, unambiguous communication" (39).

[52]**Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl**. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eir%C3%ADkur_%C3%96rn_Nor%C3%B0dahl

[53]**Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl YouTube Channel**. *Batista by Eiríkur Örn Norðdahl*. (Read at Stanza, Inkonst, Malmö, Sweden, 26 March 2009.) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4-LSNe9HCk

[54]**Encinosa, Enrique**. *Unvanquished: Cuba's Resistance to Fidel Castro*. San Francisco: Pureplay Press, 2004.
**Brown, Jonathan**. *The Bandido Counterrevolution in Cuba, 1959-1965*. In: *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*.
http://journals.openedition.org/nuevomundo/71412

[55]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *Tumult*. (Translated by Mike Mitchell.) London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2016.

[56]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *On Leaving America*. In: *The New York Reviews of Books*. 10(4) 29 Feb 1968.
https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1968/02/29/on-leaving-america/

[57]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. "A Song for Those Who." In: *Selected poems*. (Translated by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Michael Hamburger and Rita Dove & Fred Viebahn.) Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: Sheep Meadow Press; Hanover, NH: Distributed by University Press of New England, 1999.

[58]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. "Thirty-First Canto." In: *The Sinking of the Titanic*. (Translated by Hans Magnus Enzensberger.) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.

[59]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *The Havana Inquiry*. (Translated by Peter Mayer. Introduction by Martin Duberman.) New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974.

[60]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *Tourists of the Revolution*. In: *Critical Essays*. (Edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong.) New York: Continuum, 1982.
https://monoskop.org/images/f/fe/Enzensberger_Hans_Magnus_Critical_Essays.pdf

[61]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *Dreamers of the Absolute. Essays of Politics, Crime and Culture*. (Translation by Michael Roloff, Stuart Hood, Richard Woolley and the author.) London: Radius, 1988.

[62]**Enzensberger, Hans Magnus**. *Portrait of a Party*. In: *International Socialism*, 44, London, July/August 1970. pp.11-19. https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/isj/1970/no044/enzensberger.htm

[63]**Fenton, John H.** *300 Leave Boston to Help Cuba Harvest Sugar*. In: *The New York Times*. 12 Feb 1970. p.2 https://www.nytimes.com/1970/02/12/archives/300-leave-boston-to-help-cuba-harvest-sugar.html

[64]**Feuer, Lewis S**. *American Travelers to the Soviet Union 1917-32: The Formation of a Component of New Deal Ideology*. In: *American Quarterly*. Vol. 14, No. 2, Part 1. Summer, 1962. pp. 119-149.

[65]**Flynn, John T**. *While You Slept. Our Tragedy in Asia and Who Made It*. New York: Devin-Adair, 1951. https://fee.org/media/28624/flynn-johnt-whileyouslept.pdf

[66]**Font, Mauricio A**. *Cuba and Castro: Beyond the "Battle of Ideas."* In: *A Changing Cuba in a Changing World*. New York: Bildner Publication, 2008. pp. 43-72. https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Centers/Bildner%20Center%20for%20Western%20Hemisphere%20Studies/CubaBOOK2008-frombackup.pdf

[67]**Forsdick, Charles**. *French Representations of Niagara: From Hennepin to Butor*. In: *American Travel and Empire*. (Susan Castillo and David Seed, editors.) Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009.

[68]**Foucault, Michel**. *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*. (Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan.) New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

In this book, Foucault discusses the "complex ensemble that constitutes the 'carceral system'" (271), as the expression of "a certain political utopia" (174) or as "the utopia of the perfectly governed city" (198), where "the perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly" (173). For Foucault, most utopias are "perfectly closed in upon themselves" (205) and, in the case of punitive disciplinary systems, he postulates an "element of utopian duplication" present in "the repetition of a 'reform' that is isomorphic, despite its 'idealism,' with the disciplinary functioning of the prison" itself (271).

In the Cuban case, we could consider that the Revolution, while it was being represented as an idyll because of ideological biases, at the same time it was implementing practices which were altogether indistinguishable from any repressive regime in the non-utopian world. Despite the reluctance to recognize it as such, if the Cuban Revolution was to survive, it had to be somehow related to "the utopia of a universally and publicly punitive society in which ceaselessly active penal mechanisms would function without delay, mediation or uncertainty" (273). In theory, the punishing nature of such a disciplinary Utopia had to remain in place until, at least, the achievement of the panacea of living in a proletarian's paradise—after the due period of the dictatorship of the proletariat—as it was universally promised by Karl Marx and locally repeated by Fidel Castro.

From the beginning, the Cuban Revolution was bound to become just another one of those "invincible utopias" (271) whose legality was considered to be "doubly ideal," not only because it was planned to be "perfect in its calculations," but also because it was intended to be "engraven on the minds of each citizen" so that this "would stop, at their very origin, all practices of illegality" (273). Thus, in the end, Counterrevolution in Castro's Cuba was condemned to dialectically disappear even from the catalogue of crimes.

Utopia seems to be ultimately closer to Foucault's "Panopticon," since its "disciplinary programme" is not "reduced, in the final analysis, like the evil that it combats, to a simple dualism of life and death: that which moves brings death, and one kills that which moves," as it is the case in Foucault's "plague-stricken town," when "against an extraordinary evil, power is mobilized" (205).

On the contrary, Utopia seems to aspire to implement a sort of prophylactic perfection: it "must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men," as well as "the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form," since "its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle" and freed from any "resistance or friction," finally becomes "a figure of political technology" that "is polyvalent in its applications." That is, "it serves to reform prisoners, but also to treat patients, to instruct schoolchildren, to confine the insane, to supervise workers, to put beggars and idlers to work." Utopia is, in summary, also "a type of location of bodies in space, of distribution of individuals in relation to one another, of hierarchical

organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power, of definition of the instruments and modes of intervention of power" (205) for the sake of irreversible harnessing humans to harmony.
https://monoskop.org/images/4/43/Foucault_Michel_Discipline_and_Punish_The_Birth_of_the_Prison_1977_1995.pdf

[69]**Frank, Mark**. *Cuban Revelations: Behind the Scenes in Havana*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013.
Hayden quotes the social criticism made by Frank in his book (207): "Discontent runs deep in Cuba, where no one has made a living wage for two decades." But their shared diagnostics is that "most Cubans are seeking change through reform and evolution of the system, not in open alliance with Washington and Miami's political establishment which seeks regime change."
And for the Cuban communist system to allow reform and evolution, both authors appear to agree that the Washington and Miami's political establishment should change first if they expect to attain any progress regarding the Cuban Revolution.

[70]**Frank, Waldo**. *Cuba: Prophetic Island*. New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1961.

[71]**Frank, Waldo**. *South American Journey*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943.

[72]**Fulger, Maria Diana**. *The Cuban Post-Socialist Exotic: Contemporary U.S. American Travel Narratives about Cuba*. Tempe (Arizona): Bilingual Press, 2019.

[73]**García Márquez, Gabriel and Mario Vargas Llosa**. *La novela en América Latina. Diálogo entre M. Vargas Llosa y G. García Márquez*. Lima: Ediciones Copé, 2013.

[74]**Geary, Daniel**. *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.

[75]**Ginsberg, Allen**. *Iron Curtain Journals: January-May 1965*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018.
In 1965, while visiting Cuba, Allen Ginsberg was disappointed to see that there was no body-spirit emancipation in the Cuban Revolution, particularly regarding drugs and sex. He declared in public that he found the heroes of the Revolution very "cute" and that he wouldn't mind making love to them. In his diaries, he even fantasizes about this sexual encounters:
"The women all love Castro as son or lover & the men too dig him tho they joke that all others are paled or castrated or silenced or look sick in his presence in a room," but "all the Cuban women have sex fantasies about Castro for sure" (66). "In dark with shorts off lay in bed masturbating fantasy after fantasy beginning with Castro, but really got hot & began moving around when young Che Guevara's fine face come to mind's eye" (68).
Although in the beginning of his visit to the Island, Ginsberg found "Cuba so far enchanting like Marx Brothers Duck Soup revolution" (18), soon he was to denounce in his private diary the functionaries that he considered "stupid & full of Authoritative Bullshit" (61). For him, it was obvious that "the newspapers here stink, are mediocre and don't criticize and have no independence, which was my experience" (111). In the end, Ginsberg acknowledges it was "difficult to control my temper," given that he found in Communist Cuba "the same piggish bourgeois cowardice & stupidity & rationalizations as New York or Saigon or Benares—The same stereotyped arguments 1927 Russia 1945 U S McCarthy the same journalistic evasion Time magazine Pravda Revolucion New York Times 1965" (53).
In May 1994, during a TV interview on the talk-show *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, Ginsberg still insisted that "the secret police behind the Iron Curtain and the secret police in America have a kind of understanding. It's one international mucous membrane network" and "they understand each other's needs. Or they did in those days, in any case." https://allenginsberg.org/2015/06/allen-ginsberg-on-the-conan-obrien-tv-show/

[76]**Goldsmith, Kenneth**. *Displacement Is the New Translation*. In: *Rhizome*. 9 June 2014.
https://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/jun/09/displacement-new-translation/

[77]**Gómez, Sergio Alejandro**. *The Day Fidel Stayed in Harlem with the Poor Black People of New York*. 23 Sep 2018.
https://medium.com/dominio-cuba/the-day-fidel-stayed-in-harlem-with-the-poor-black-people-of-new-york-668a90dc6389

[78]**Grandin, Greg**. *The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism*. In: *American Historical Review* 117 (1), 2012. pp. 68-91.

[79]**Gross, Feliks**. *The Seizure of Political Power in a Century of Revolutions*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1958.

[80]**Grudzińska Gross, Irena**. *Hans Magnus Enzensberger, The Poet Is an Omnivore*. Boston University. 17 April 2007. https://www.bu.edu/european/files/2014/12/Chapter6_Layout-1.pdf

[81]**Guevara, Ernesto**. *Man and Socialism in Cuba*. Havana: Book Institute, 1967. (Translated by Margarita Zimmermann.)
http://www.bannedthought.net/Cuba-Che/Guevara/Che-1965-ManAndSocialismInCuba-CubanEd.pdf

[82]**Guevara, Ernesto**. *Man and Socialism in Cuba*. Havana: Guairas, Book Institute, 1967.
In this long article, originally published in the Uruguayan magazine *Marcha* (March 12, 1965), under the title *Desde Argel, para* Marcha*: la Revolución Cubana hoy* (*From Algiers, for* Marcha: *The Cuban Revolution Today*), Guevara explains the need of creating a New Man for the New Society to be irreversibly successful. In a way, this text is a script for the birth of the Utopians who were to inhabit Utopia. According to him, this "is a process that requires time" and, therefore, youth "is particularly important because it is the malleable clay with which the new man, without any of the previous defects, can be formed" (40).
Thus, the Cuban Revolution becomes the culmination of all past revolutions as well as the impediment for all future revolutions in Cuba, since the leaders "are seeking something new that will allow a perfect identification between the government and the community as a whole, adapted to the special conditions of the building of socialism and avoiding to the utmost the commonplaces of bourgeois democracy transplanted to the society in formation" (28). Step by step and stage after stage, "the new attitude that is praised tends to become habit; the mass gradually takes it over and exerts pressure on those who have still not become educated" (24-25).
http://www.bannedthought.net/Cuba-Che/Guevara/Che-1965-ManAndSocialismInCuba-CubanEd.pdf

[83]**Guridy, Frank Andre**. *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
**Brock, Lisa** and **Digna Castaneda Fuertes**, eds. *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

[84]**Halliday, Fred**. *Internationalism in Practice: Export of Revolution*. In: *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
**Randall, Margaret**. *Exporting Revolution: Cuba's Global Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

[85]**Halperin, Maurice**. *Return to Havana. The Decline of Cuban Society under Castro*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994.

[86]**Halperin, Maurice**. *The Rise and Decline of Fidel Castro. An Essay in Contemporary History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
**Halperin, Maurice**. *The Taming of Fidel Castro*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
**Halperin, Maurice**. *Fidel's Power to Disrupt*. In: *Caudillos: Dictators in Spanish America*. (Edited by Hugh M. Hamill.) Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992. pp.316-324.

[87]**Harms, Victoria**. *The Re-Education of a Revolutionary: Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Cuba, and the 1960s Protest Movements*. In graduate conference: *Beyond Borders: The Practice of Atlantic, Transnational, and World History*. University of Pittsburgh. April 10-11, 2015.
https://victoriaeharms.wordpress.com/conference-presentations-public-talks/harms_the-re-education-of-a-revolutionary_conference-paper

[88]**Hayden, Tom**. *Listen, Yankee! Why Cuba Matters?* New York, Oakland: Seven Stories Press, 2015.

[89]**Hegel, G.W.F**. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (Translated by A.V. Miller.) Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1977.

http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Marxist_Philosophy/Hegel_and_Feuerbach_files/Hegel-Phenomenology-of-Spirit.pdf

In a chapter dedicated to self-consciousness and self-certainty, Hegel considers the dependence-independence of these notions using a dynamic of "lordship" and "bondage" (in German, *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft*). He establishes two moments of recognition: a first one of "merely *immediate* consciousness" or "pure self-consciousness" and a second one of "consciousness in the form of *thinghood*" or "consciousness which is not purely for itself but for another." For him, "both moments are essential," "unequal and opposed," where "one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself," while "the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another." Hegel calls the former *Herr* ("lord") and the latter *Knecht* ("bondsman") (115).

Although the lord "is the pure, essential action in this relationship" and "the action of the bondsman is impure and unessential," in practice "that what the lord does to the other he also does to himself, and what the bondsman does to himself he should also do to the other," in a process of "recognition that is one-sided and unequal" (116), with one of the extremes "being only recognized" and "the other only recognizing" (112-113).

[90]**Hofstadter, Richard**. *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963.
https://ia800200.us.archive.org/19/items/antiintellectual000187mbp/antiintellectual000187mbp.pdf

After acknowledging that American anti-intellectualism "is commonly used to describe a variety of unwelcome phenomena" and, as such, "its very vagueness makes it more serviceable in controversy as an epithet," Hofstadter attempts anyway a "general formulation" of it "as close as I find it useful to venture toward definition." For him, it is "a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life." Furthermore, "as an idea, it is not a single proposition but a complex of related propositions. As an attitude, it is not usually found in a pure form but in ambivalence—a pure and unalloyed dislike of intellect or intellectuals is uncommon. And as a historical subject, if it can be called that, it is not a constant thread but a force fluctuating in strength from time to time and drawing its motive power from varying sources" (6-7).

[91]**Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan**. *Tourists with Typewriters: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Travel Writing*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998.

[92]**Holland, Patrick and Graham Huggan**. *Varieties of Nostalgia in Contemporary Travel Writing*. In: *Perspectives on Travel Writing* (edited by Glenn Hooper and Tim Youngs). Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. pp.139-151.

[93]**Hollander, Paul**. *Political Pilgrims. Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, 1928-1978*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

[94]**Hosek, Jennifer Ruth**. *Sun, Sex, and Socialism: Cuba in the German Imaginary*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

[95]**Hulme, Peter**. *Seeing for Themselves: U.S. Travel Writers in Early Revolutionary Cuba*. In: *Politics, Identity, and Mobility in Travel Writing*. (Edited by Miguel A. Cabañas et al.) New York: Routledge, 2016.

[96]**Iyengar, Kavitha**. *The Venceremos Brigade: North Americans in Cuba Since 1969*. In: *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 7.2., Seasons 2015, pp.236-264.
https://www.academia.edu/28989423/tHe_VencereMOS_BriGAde_nOrtH_AMericAnS_in_cuBA_Since_1969

[97]**Johnson, Uwe**. *Anniversaries: from the life of Gesine Cresspahl*. (*Jahrestage*. Translated from the German by Damion Searls.). New York: New York Review Books, 2018.

[98]**Khrushchev, Nikita**. *Khrushchev's Secret Speech, 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' Delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*. 25 February 1956. In: *History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, From the Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 84th Congress, 2nd Session*. C11, Part 7, 4 June 1956, pp. 9389-9403. https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/115995

[99]**Kinsley, Zoë**. *Travelers and Tourists*. In: **Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. pp. 237-245.

[100]**Kiple, Kenneth F**. *Blacks in Colonial Cuba: 1774–1899*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1976. pp. 4–5.

[101]**Kirkpatrick, Jean**. *1984 Jean Kirkpatrick*. In: *CNN Time All Politics*. https://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1996/conventions/san.diego/facts/GOP.speeches.past/84.kirkpatrick.shtml
**Kirkpatrick, Jeane**. *'Blame America First' - Jeane Kirkpatrick's 1984 GOP Convention Speech*. YouTube Channel *Levan Ramishvili*. Uploaded 14 February 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dv8L-cuq17s

[102]**Koerner, Brendan I**. *The Skies Belong to Us: Love and Terror in the Golden Age of Hijacking*. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2013.

[103]**Koerner, Brendan I**. *How Hijackers Commandeered Over 130 American Planes—In 5 Years*. In: *WIRED*. 18 June 2013.
"At the behest of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, the FAA formed a special anti-hijacking task force to develop possible solutions to the crisis. The group was immediately inundated with thousands of letters from concerned citizens, who recommended inventive ways to frustrate skyjackers: installing trapdoors outside cockpits, arming stewardesses with tranquilizer darts, making passengers wear boxing gloves so they couldn't grip guns, playing the Cuban national anthem before takeoff and then arresting anyone who knew the lyrics."
"To facilitate impromptu journeys to Cuba, all cockpits were equipped with charts of the Caribbean Sea, regardless of a flight's intended destination. Pilots were briefed on landing procedures for José Martí International Airport and issued phrase cards to help them communicate with Spanish-speaking hijackers. (The phrases to which a pilot could point included translations for 'I must open my flight bag for maps' and 'Aircraft has mechanical problems—can't make Cuba.') Air traffic controllers in Miami were given a dedicated phone line for reaching their Cuban counterparts, so they could pass along word of incoming flights."
https://www.wired.com/2013/06/love-and-terror-in-the-golden-age-of-hijacking/

[104]**Kowaleski, Michael**. *Introduction: The Modern Literature of Travel*. In: *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*. (Michael Kowaleski, editor.) Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

[105]**Kurtzleben, Danielle.** *With 'Fake News,' Trump Moves from Alternative Facts to Alternative Language*. In: *National Public Radio*, 17 February 2017.
https://www.npr.org/2017/02/17/515630467/with-fake-news-trump-moves-from-alternative-facts-to-alternative-language

[106]**Laderman, Scott**. *Guidebooks*. In: **Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. pp. 258-268.

[107]**Langbart, David**. *The End of the Beginning: The United States Breaks Relations with Cuba, 1961*. 7 July 2015.
https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/2015/07/07/the-end-of-the-beginning-cuba/
Amid escalating tensions—massive nationalization of American companies in Cuba, acquisition of Soviet weapons by Castro's government—on Tuesday January 3, 1961, at 1 a.m., the U.S. embassy in Havana received a telegram with an official notification from the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations, demanding that, within 48 hours, the size of the American diplomatic and consular presence had to be reduced to eleven persons. Daniel Braddock, the U.S. Charge d'Affaires on the Island, considered that this action was not acceptable and he recommended to the U.S. president to break all relations with Cuba, which Dwight D. Eisenhower immediately did.

[108]**Leary, John Patrick**. *A Cultural History of Underdevelopment. Latin America in the U.S. Imagination*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2016.

[109]**Leed, Eric. J**. *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism*. New York: Basic Books, 1991.

[110]**LeoGrande, William M. and Peter Kornbluh**. *Back Channel to Cuba: The Hidden History of Negotiations between Washington and Havana*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

[111]**Levinson, Sandra and Carol Brightman** (editors). *Venceremos Brigade. Young Americans Sharing the Life and Work of Revolutionary Cuba: Diaries, Letters, Interviews, Tapes, Essays, Poetry*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.

[112]**Lewis, Sinclair**. *It Can´t Happen Here*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1935.
https://www.fadedpage.com/link.php?file=20171242-a5.pdf

[113]**Lindemann, Eduard C.** *Is Human Nature Changing in Russia?* In: *The New Republic*, LXXIV, 1933. pp. 95-98.

[114]**Lutz, William and Harry Brent** (editors). *On Revolution*. Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1971.

[115]**Lyons, Eugene**. *The Red Decade. The Stalinist Penetration of America*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1941.

[116]**Lyons, Eugene.** *Assignment in Utopia*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937.
https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.89424/page/n13/mode/1up

[117]**MacKillop, Eleanor**. *How Do Empty Signifiers Lose Credibility? The Case of Commissioning in English Local Government*. In: *Critical Policy Studies*. Volume 12, Issue 2, pp.187-208, 2018.
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/19460171.2016.1236740

[118]**Manuel, Peter**. *Marxism, Nationalism and Popular Music in Revolutionary Cuba*. In: *Popular Music*. 6(2), May 1987, pp.161-178. https://www-jstor-org.libproxy.wustl.edu/stable/853419

[119]**Marinone, Mónica** and **Gabriela Tineo** (editors). *Viaje y relato en Latinoamérica*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Katatay, 2010.

[120]**Marmulla, Henning**. *Rethinking the Writer's Role: Enzensberger and Cuba—or A Story of Self-Censorship*. In: *A Revolution of Perception? Consequences and Echoes of 1968*. (Edited by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey.) New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2014. pp.17-34
http://wwwhomes.uni-bielefeld.de/iholtey/Buch1%20Hg%20A%20Revolution%20of%20Perception.pdf

[121]**Martí, José**. *Letter to Manuel Mercado*. In: *HistoryOfCuba.com* website.
http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/marti/mercado.htm
José Martí, having recently returned to Cuba to fight against the Spanish troops, wrote in a letter to his friend Manuel Mercado, living abroad, that "I have lived in the monster and I know its entrails, and my sling is David's."

Next day, on Sunday May 19, 1895, Martí was going to be killed in the battlefield during a brief skirmish that some consider a sort of suicide, leaving this letter unfinished. Still, this document was later regarded by Marxist historians as his political testament, because Martí is very critical here about the foreign policy of the United States of America back then, a country where he had resided and worked during most of his exile years. In fact, he organized the Cuban liberation war mainly from Manhattan, New York, traveling to other states to collect money and give patriotic speeches, as well as publishing in national and international newspapers.

In that letter, Martí even uses the term "imperialists" to refer to American expansionist interests, which he envisioned were eager of "annexing our American nations to the brutal and turbulent North which despises them." He also writes about his "duty of preventing the United States from spreading through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from overpowering with that additional strength our lands of America." In short, he reveals, after years of not so clandestine conspiracy, that "all I have done so far, and all I will do, is for this purpose. I have had to work quietly and somewhat indirectly, because to achieve certain objectives, they must be kept under cover; to proclaim them for what they are would raise such difficulties that the objectives could not be attained."

[122]**Martin Chalmers and Robert Lumley**. *Enzensberger's Europe*. In: *New Left Review* I, No 178, 1989.

[123]**Martínez Hernández, Leticia**. *Somos Continuidad*. In: *Cubahora*. 17 April 2019.
https://www.cubahora.cu/especiales/la-noble-tarea-de-gobernar-cuba/noticias/somos-continuidad

[124]**Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels**. *The Communist Manifesto*. In: *On Revolution*. (William Lutz and Harry Brent, editors). Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1971. p.3
Its first line is: "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism."

[125]**McDowell, Edwin**. *Did Castro Double-Cross Oscar Lewis? The New York Times*, Section C, Page 19. 26 Oct 1981. https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/26/books/did-castro-double-cross-oscar-lewis.html

[126]**McGuire, James William**. *Peronism Without Perón: Unions, Parties, and Democracy in Argentina*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997.

[127]**McKinley, William**. *Third Annual Message*. In: *The American Presidency Project*. 5 December 1899.
https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/third-annual-message-15
In this speech to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, president McKinley reiterates the notion of intimacy not exclusively for the case of Cuba, but for most local and foreign affairs involving other governments. For example, he refers to "the intimate relations of all parts of the country to each other," "the increasing intimacy of direct association" with Germany, "the vast and intimate intercourse" with Great Britain, and the "constant increase in the intimacy of our relations" with Mexico. Also, of course, the "ties of singular intimacy and strength" with Cuba, "if its enduring welfare is to be assured," given that the United States had already "assumed before the world a grave responsibility for the future good government of Cuba." For president McKinley, this mission only ratified the viewpoint that "the destinies of Cuba are in some rightful form and manner irrevocably linked with our own."

[128]**Melville, Herman**. *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). The Project Gutenberg EBook.
http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2701/2701-h/2701-h.htm

[129]**Michels, Spencer**. *A Ticket to Castro's Revolution–But Never Punched*. In: *PBS News Hour*. Nov 28, 2016.
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/day-fidel-castro-brought-revolution-princeton

[130]**Michener, James Albert and John Kings**. *Six Days in Havana*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989.

[131]**Michener, James A**. *Caribbean*. New York: Random House, 1989.

[132]**Thomas More**. *Utopia*. Planet Book. https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/utopia.pdf

[133]**Mund, Heike.** *German Writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Still Restless at 90.* In: *DW Akademie*. Berlin and Bonn, Germany. 11 Nov 2019.
https://www.dw.com/en/german-writer-hans-magnus-enzensberger-still-restless-at-90/a-51168353

[134]**Murgado, Amaury**. *The Bay of Pigs Invasion: A Case Study in Foreign Policy Decision-Making*. In: *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Orlando: University of Central Florida, 2009.
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5117&context=etd

[135]**Nelson, Libby**. *The US Once Had More Than 130 Hijackings in 4 Years. Here's Why They Finally Stopped*. In: *Vox*. 29 Mar 2016. https://www.vox.com/2016/3/29/11326472/hijacking-airplanes-egyptair

[136]**Nenzi, Laura**. *Pilgrims*. In: **Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. pp. 217-226.

[137]**Nietzsche, Friedrich**. *Untimely Meditations*. (*Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
https://www.academia.edu/35624730/Friedrich_Nietzsche_Untimely_Meditations_Cambridge_Texts_in_the_History_of_Philosophy_1997_

[138]**Nixon, Bruce**. *A Better World is Possible*. Alresford, UK: Changemakers Books, 2011.

[139]**North, Joseph.** *Cuba: Hope of a Hemisphere*. New York: International Publishers, 1961.

[140]**O'Grady, Jim**. *Embargo or Not, Castro Made a Habit of Visiting NY—Ask Bumpy the Bookie*. 19 Dec 2014. https://www.wnyc.org/story/embargo-or-not-castro-made-habit-visiting-ny-just-ask-bumpy-bookie

[141]**Orwell, George**. *1984*. Planet Ebook. https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/1984.pdf

In a passage of 1984, the protagonist reads a banned book that is meant to reveal to him the hidden nature of his totalitarian society: *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein (this fictional author in the ending of the novel turns out to be also a part of the repressive system). The third chapter of this book inside the book is titled *War is Peace*. And Goldstein explains the importance of a perpetual war "to keep the structure of society." In this respect, according to Goldstein in this Orwellian fiction, "a peace that was truly permanent would be the same as a permanent war" (252).

[142]**Orwell, George**. *Animal Farm*. Open Tights Library. https://www.openrightslibrary.com/animal-farm-ebook

[143]**Pardo Lazo, Orlando Luis**. *Images of the Day Before*. In: *E-misférica*, 10(2), Hemispheric Institute, New York, Summer 2013. http://archive.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-102/pardolazo

[144]**Pardo Lazo, Orlando Luis.** *Lunes de Post Revolución*. Blogspot. http://orlandoluispardolazo.blogspot.com

[145]**Pardo Lazo, Orlando Luis**. *Post-Revolution Mondays*. Wordpress. https://orlandolunes.wordpress.com

[146]**Pardo Lazo, Orlando Luis**. *Diario de Saint Louis*. Richmond, VA: Casa Vacía, 2022. https://editorialcasavacia.com/2022/03/02/95-diario-de-saint-orlando-louis

[147]**Pérez, Louis A., Jr.** *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

[148]**Piglia, Ricardo**. *La lectura de la ficción*. In: *Crítica y ficción*. Lectulandia. https://analisisycriticademediosunlp.files.wordpress.com/2016/04/critica-y-ficcion-ricardo-piglia.pdf

Original in Spanish: "En definitiva no hay más que libros de viajes o historias policiales. Se narra un viaje o se narra un crimen. ¿Qué otra cosa se puede narrar?"

[149]**Piglia, Ricardo**. *Tres propuestas para el próximo milenio (y cinco dificultades)*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001. https://piglia.pubpub.org/pub/k99hnwfn/release/1

[150]**Pratt, Mary Louise**. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London; New York: Routledge, 1992.

[151]**Randall, Margaret**. *To Change the World. My Years in Cuba*. New Brunswick (NJ) and London: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

[152]**Rangel, Carlos**. *The Latin Americans: Their Love-Hate Relationship with The United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1987.

The title of the original book in Spanish is *Del buen salvaje al buen revolucionario*. That is, *From The Good Savage to The Good Revolutionary*. Carlos Rangel (1929–1988) was a Venezuelan liberal writer, journalist and diplomat. In this nook he proposes that "to understand how the noble savage was transmuted into the good revolutionary, we have to understand the supposed relation between man before the Fall and man after redemption. These two states are not merely related: they are identical" and "the stage in between is a parenthesis, an interruption in man's natural beatitude." That is, "the first days will be like the last; the end of history will be a return to the Golden Age (15).

For Rangel, "because of this myth of the noble savage, the West today is afflicted with an absurd feeling of guilt, convinced that its civilization has corrupted the other peoples of the world, grouped as the 'Third World,' who, had they not been exposed to Western culture, would have remained happy as Adam and flawless as diamonds" (15). Out of this myth the noble savage is then turned into the good revolutionary: the "romantic adventurer, Red Robin Hood, the Don Quixote of communism, the new Garibaldi, the Marxist Saint-Just, the Cid Campeador of the wretched of the earth, the Sir Galahad of the Beggars, the secular Christ, the San Ernesto de la Higuera revered by the Bolivian peasants" (16-17).

[153]**Ratzel, Friedrich**. *Politische Geographie*. München and Leipzig: R. Oldenbourg, 1897.

[154]**Remington, Frederic**. *Under Which King?* March 10, 1899. In: *The Collected Writings of Frederic Remington*. (Edited by Peggy Samuels and Harold Samuels.) New York: Doubleday, 1979. pp. 359, 361.

[155]**Rojas, Rafael**. *Fighting over Fidel: The New York Intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016.

[156]**Rojas, Rafael**. *El arte de la espera. Notas al margen de la política cubana*. Madrid: Colibrí, 1998.

In one of the essays of his book, Rojas starts by affirming that "the gesture of waiting is a moral principle in any mysticism" (145). For him, the notions of "stillness" and "statism" imply the vision of an "everlasting garden" or "everyday paradise," where there is a "fusion between waiting and hoping." Only that this, when it comes to twentieth-century Realpolitik, Rojas doesn't hesitate to associate it with the "nazi concentration camp, the Russian *gulag* or any enclave of the Communist utopia" (146).

At some point, when "the moment of disenchantment of the bucolic" ensues, then "the image of paradise is suddenly substituted by that of hell," the "*outside* is detached from the *inside* and hoping drifts away from waiting." For Rojas, "this is also the moment of dissidence and exile, immolation and suicide" (147). At the turn of the century, it seemed "as if the State could aspire to stop time" and thus "halt history" on the Island, setting a stage where "all actors involved in the national drama are *off* and just waiting" (148).

[157]**Scheer R. and Zeitlin M.** *Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*. New York: Grove Press, 1963. (Republished as *An American Tragedy*. London: Penguin, 1964.)

[158]**Seidman, Sarah Jane**. *Venceremos Means We Shall Overcome: The African American Freedom Struggle and the Cuban Revolution, 1959-1979*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of American Studies, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. May 2013.
https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:320492/EXTRACTED_TEXT

[159]**Seligmann, Katerina**. *Singing Out of Tune: Revolutionary Dissonance in the Prelude to the Padilla Affair*. In: *Pterodáctilo*, 6. Spring 2009.
https://web.archive.org/web/20090905202948/http://pterodactilo.com/numero6/?p=683

[160]**Shakur, Assata**. *Assata, an Autobiography*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987.

[161]**Shakur, Assata.** *An Open Letter to the Media (1998).* In: *New York Amsterdam News*. 2 January 2015.
https://amsterdamnews.com/news/2015/01/02/assata-shakur-open-letter-media-1998

[162]**Sklodowska, Elzbieta**. *Invento, luego resisto: el período especial en Cuba como experiencia y metáfora (1990-2015)*. Santiago de Chile: Cuarto Propio, 2016.

[163]**Sloman, Joel**. *Cuban Journal: A Poet in the Venceremos Brigade, 1970*. Cambridge, MA: Zoland Books, 2000.

[164]**Smethurst, Paul**. *Discoverers and Explorers*. In: **Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016. pp. 227-236.

[165]**Smith, Earl E. T**. *The Fourth Floor: An Account of the Castro Communist Revolution*. Washington, D.C.: Selous Foundation Press, 1990. (The original edition by Random House is from 1962.)

[166]**Sontag, Susan**. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador, 2003.

[167]**Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty**. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. (Edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg.) Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313. **Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty**. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In: *Reflections on the History of an Idea*. (Edited by Rosalind Morris.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Spivak published her paradigmatic essay in 1988, but then she extensively modified it before its reedition in 1999. Originally, Spivak was interested in "measuring silences" in those subaltern subjects "marked" by direct or disguised

variants of "epistemic violence," including "law and education," only to conclude that "only in their death that they enter a narrative for us, they become figurable."

[168]**Stagl, Justin**. *A History of Curiosity: The Theory of Travel, 1550-1800*. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1995.

[169]**Swados, Harvey**. *C. Wright Mills: A Personal Memoir*. In: *Dissent*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 10 (1), 1963. pp. 35-42.
https://www.dissentmagazine.org/wp-content/files_mf/1410971221C_Wright_Mills_Memoir_1963.pdf

[170]**Szablowski, Witold**. *How to Feed a Dictator: Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Enver Hoxha, Fidel Castro, and Pol Pot Through the Eyes of Their Cooks*. (*Jak nakarmić dyktatora*. Translated from Polish by Antonia Lloyd-Jones.) Penguin Books, 2020.

In his book, the award-winning Polish journalist Witold Szablowski travels across four continents to find out how five different dictators used to eat in their respective countries while they held absolute power upon an impoverished people. Fidel Castro is included in the chapter *Supper. Fish in Mango Sauce: The Story of Erasmo and Flores, Fidel Castro's Chefs* (pp.155-203).

Szablowski finds a Revolution in ruins, where, according to locals, "few people still have the strength or the desire to defend socialism" (163), but where the mythic figure of Fidel Castro is still the affective subject of cult of personality. While the Cuban capital city remains under the surveillance of "plainclothes policemen" (162), at the same time it exhibits its new fancy restaurants in foreign hard currency, owned by family-business entrepreneurs popularly known as "cuentapropistas."

Szablowski quotes a witness from a well-connected Communist family in Havana—"his father personally knew Fidel and his brother Raúl, who is Cuba's president as we speak"—who concludes that "Fidel warped the ideal they believed in," so that the revolution soon "ceased to be their revolution" to become "the Fidelution instead" (171). Yet, other first-hand witnesses affirm that the Cuban historical leaders of the Revolution had little to no privileges regarding food: "Che ate the same as everyone else" (166); "Fidel ate the same things as the average Cuban" (177).

This chapter about Cuba is a trip into political paranoia as much as it revisits the epic memories of men that nowadays "often laugh" and "often cry too," because "beneath the surface coating of rum, samba, and cigars are thousands of tragedies" (161-162). [Here the author probably meant *rumba*—the rhythmic dance with Spanish and African elements, which follows a clave rhythm and originated on the Island—instead of *samba*, the Brazilian dance also of African origin, but based on a swing rather than a rhythmic pattern.] In any case, the post-Castro Communist statu quo resembles a sort of stagnated simulacrum: "As long as you merely criticize but don't try to change anything, they won't get involved" (163).

The identity of the personal pronoun *they* is only hinted in the Cuban chapter: "*They'll* come. They, meaning who? For what purpose? Why? He refuses to say" (168). But silence in Castro's Cuba is a widespread metaphor to evoke the omniscient presence of the secret agents of State Security, as consecrated in the title of an old crime novel of socialist realism: *Men with the Color of Silence*. [**Molina Rodríguez, Alberto**. *Los hombres color del silencio*. La Habana: Arte y Literatura, 1975.]

[171]**Tahbaz, Joseph**. *Demystifying las UMAP: The Politics of Sugar, Gender, and Religion in 1960s Cuba*. In: *Delaware Review of Latin American Studies*, 14(2), 31 December 2013.
https://www1.udel.edu/LAS/Vol14-2Tahbaz.html

[172]**Thomas, Hugh.** *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
https://archive.org/details/cubapursuitoffre0000unse
In this voluminous book, the English historian Hugh Thomas (1931-2017) describes a different racial scenario for pre-revolutionary Cuba: "There was obviously intermarriage between black and white, but more usually between white men and black girls. The voluptuous mulatto remained a symbol for sexual desirability; but marriage between white girls and black or mulatto men was relatively rare. The social area where the races mixed most freely was that of prostitution, habitual criminality, drug trafficking, gambling and superstition." (1184)

[173]**Thompson, Carl**. *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

[174]**Tietchen, Todd F**. *The Cubalogues: Beat Writers in Revolutionary Havana*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010.

[175]**Timerman, Jacobo**. *Cuba: A Journey*. (Translated from Spanish by Toby Talbot.) New York: A.A. Knopf, 1990.

[176]**Todorov, Tzvetan**. *The Totalitarian Experience*. (Translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan.) London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2011.

[177]**Todorov, Tzvetan**. *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*. (Translated by Catherine Porter.) Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993.

[178]**Treviño, A. Javier**. *C. Wright Mills and the Cuban Revolution. An Exercise in the Art of Sociological Imagination*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

[179]**Tse-tung, Mao**. *On Revolution and War*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969.

[180]**Tyson, Timothy B**. *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams & the Roots of Black Power*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Tyson transcribes how FBI agents reported to their director Edgar Hoover in 1963 about this issue: "On the past few consecutive Friday evenings at 11:00, an English language program emanating from the facilities of a Havana, Cuba radio station has been broadcast for a period of approximately one and one-half hours. The English language announcer introduces the program as 'Radio Free Dixie.'" The programs were "narrated by Robert F. Williams" and they exhibited "a very strong signal which undoubtedly can be heard very clearly throughout the southern states," with programs "directed to the Negroes in the southern part of the United States, calling upon the oppressed Negroes to rise and free themselves." (287)

[181]**Vargas Llosa, Mario**. *La literatura es fuego*. In: *Contra viento y marea*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1983.

[182]**Werlau, María C**. (2008) *Political Repression in Castro's Cuba: Policies, Institutions and Victims*. In: Paul Hollander (editor). *Political Violence*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. pp.143-154.
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057%2F9780230616240_9

[183]**Whitman, Alden**. *Bruce Bliven, 87, Former Editor of New Republic, Dies at Stanford*. In: *The New York Times*. 29 May 1977.
https://www.nytimes.com/1977/05/29/archives/bruce-bliven-87-former-editor-of-new-republic-dies-at-stanford.html

[184]**Whitney Jr., W.T**. *Che Guevara and Cuba's Battle of Ideas*. In: *People's World*. 7 Nov 2018.
https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/che-guevara-and-cubas-battle-of-ideas

[185]**Williams, Robert F**. *Negros with Guns*. (Edited by Marc Schleifer.) New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1962.
https://ia801205.us.archive.org/24/items/williams_negroes/williams_negroes.pdf

[186]**Wright Milles, C**. *Listen, Yankee. The Revolution in Cuba*. New York, Toronto, London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960.

[187]**Wright Milles, C**. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

[188]**Wright Milles, C**. *Letter to New Left*. In: *New Left Review*, No. 5, September-October 1960.
https://www.marxists.org/subject/humanism/mills-c-wright/letter-new-left.htm

[189]**Wright Mills, C**. *C. Wright Mills. Letters and Autobiographical Writings*. Edited by Kathryn Mills with Pamela Mills. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. 2000.

[190]**Youngs, Tim**. *The Cambridge Introduction to Travel Writing*. Nottingham Trent University. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

[191]**Zinoviev, Alexander**. *Homo Sovieticus*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1985.

As a curiosity, it is to notice that even in 1986 a book like this, when published in the United States would receive skeptical reviews about the legitimacy of the author to criticize its own society: “Zinoviev contends that full understanding of the Soviet system can only be obtained ‘from inside,’ that one has to have participated in Soviet life before being able to accurately apprehend its inner essence.” And, although, “Zinoviev offers himself as Communism’s consummate insider,” his book “*Homo Sovieticus* seems less a portrait of Soviet Man than a cynical screed venting the sorrows and perplexities of its anguished author.” (**Wasserman, Steve**. *Homo Sovieticus by Alexander Zinoviev; translated by Charles Janson*. In: *Los Angeles Times*. 25 May 1986.)

https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-05-25-bk-7069-story.html