

A R G O M E N T I

Roots and Reassessment of the Cuban «guerrilla ethos»: From the Armed Imperative to the End of *Foquismo**



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Based on original interviews and rare archival sources, the central thread of this article is the origin, rise and reassessment of the Cuban Revolution's «guerrilla ethos» that shaped the political creed of the first revolutionary generation. During the anti-Fulgencio Batista insurrection (1952-1959), the belief that only violence could lead to the ousting of the dictator steadily gained traction among the opposition as the right path to revolution. This radical approach was already voiced by a number of movements prior to the Moncada attack (July 1953), when Fidel Castro became a public national figure, and was crowned by the advent of the revolution in 1959. The revolutionary administration established an insurreccional doctrine – sometimes known as *foquismo* – that stemmed from the «lessons» of the anti-Batista fight and guided the island's external involvements throughout the sixties. However, the «guerrilla mentality» confronted major challenges in the second half of the decade (guerrilla's defeats, Soviet pressures). This article stresses an additional and often forgotten component that, nonetheless, exerted a powerful effect on Cuba's reconsideration of its previous revolutionary principles: the unfolding of the Juan Velasco Alvarado military government (1968-1975) in Peru, promptly labelled in Havana as a viable route to «revolution», which resulted in a partial revision of the «guerrilla ethos» that emerged in fifties.

Keywords: Cuban Revolution – Juan Velasco Alvarado – Armed struggle.

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable and insightful suggestions that helped me identify more precisely the main threat of the present article. My dear friend Dieter Bruneel, who died last year at the age of 26, was the first reader of this paper. This article is dedicated to his memory.

* In a remarkable book dealing with the unfolding of Cuba's revolutionary mentality in a long-term perspective, Antoni Kacpia introduces the concept of *guerrillerismo*, which refers to the willingness to «universalize the ethos of the guerrilla into all aspects of life». A. Kacpia, *Cuba: Island of Dreams*, Oxford, Berg, 2000, p. 184.

It is difficult to identify a single ideology shared by all Cuban anti-Batista insurgents. The violent struggle that ousted the dictator in 1959 was fostered by various revolutionary movements comprised of veterans of the 1933 revolution, university students, radicalized members of traditional parties – such as the Auténtico Party and the Orthodox Party of the Cuban People – and peasants rallied by the 26th of July Movement (M-26) led by Fidel Castro. Although the term «socialism» was now and then loosely employed by some of the insurreccional anti-Batista groups¹, the implementation of a Marxist-led state inspired by the Soviet model was certainly not the driving force guiding the actions of Cuban combatants. Neither was anti-imperialism, although the post-1959 revolutionary narrative has conveyed the image of a fight carried out against the White House and its interests on the island. The collective awareness that only revolutionary violence would lead to the demise of the Batista regime gained traction throughout the Fifties². The insurreccional approach embraced by the revolutionary movements (M-26; Directorio Revolucionario, Dr; José Martí Women's Civic Front, Jmwf; Montecristi, Second Front of the Escambray, Organización Auténtica, Popular Socialist Party, Psp) began to attract large sectors of civil society, as well as the moderate opposition and some military soft-liners, culminating by 1957-1958 in a mutual belief system shared by the diverse generation that would eventually rule the island.

In that vein, the Moncada attack in July 1953 has been widely seen in Cuba as a highly symbolic moment, as with this action Fidel Castro proved to the entire society that armed struggle was inevitable. This depiction somehow blurs the reality. Some determined groups, often forgotten, were already committed to a hawkish method in dethroning Batista. Prior to the 1952 coup, many Cuban activists – shaped by recent experiences of struggle and sacrifice – were prone to engage in heroic actions and risk «martyrdom»³, an inclination that often led to acts of political violence. But this facet of the pre-Moncada story has been repeatedly dismissed inside and outside the island. After Batista's departure in 1959, it was vital to elevate Castro as the father of the revolution, thus securing his grip on power, which implied a voluntary erasure of the pre-Moncada sense of self-sacrifice. This myth of Moncada depicted Castro and his cohort as the real founders of Cuba's insurgent mentality, which had powerful consequences in the post-1959 creation of the Cuban New Man, and defined a persistent «guerrilla ethos», guiding Havana's international and hemispheric policy throughout most of the Sixties. Indeed, Cuba's involvement in Latin America and Africa could be better grasped as a ramification of a strongly rooted faith in the «armed

¹ L. Guerra, *Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs in Revolutionary Cuba, 1946-1958*, New Haven, Ct, Yale University Press, 2018.

² On the evolution and gradual acceptance of the armed path to revolution, the best analysis is *Ibid.*

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 6-7.

imperative» that could hardly cope with the idea of radical transformation without some degree of revolutionary violence.

The central thread of this article is the origin, rise and ulterior reconsideration of the Cuban Revolution's «guerrilla ethos» that has so powerfully defined the political creed of the first post-1959 ruling generation. This article will first show that the shaping of the «armed path to revolution», which Castro's Cuba hoped that could be replicated in other areas, should be traced back to the first years of anti-Batista struggle, whose character provided sufficient legitimacy for the establishment of the post-1959 insurrectional approach to revolution. The conviction that only violence could lead to the ousting of Batista was already voiced by the maximalist opposition prior to the Moncada attack in July 1953, when Castro first emerged as a serious threat to the Cuban dictatorship.

Throughout the seven years of the Batista rule, the moderate opposition progressively lost impetus to the benefit of a growing, more radicalized, group of revolutionary fighters, among them, the activist network revolving around Castro's M-26. The adequacy of the latter strategy, relying on the need of violence to dethrone an illegitimate president, was confirmed by Castro's triumphal entry in Havana in January 1959. More than a common belief in communism as the desired horizon for the revolution – which initially engendered tensions –, the common foundation that coalesced the first generation of revolutionary leaders was the «guerrilla ethos» that the very nature of the pre-1959 struggle seemed to corroborate. As discussed in the second section of this article, this ideological basis acquired an official dimension after 1959. It was conceived of as an infallible recipe to ignite the flames of revolution across the continent, and it was insistently spelled out by Castro himself and enshrined in Guevara's writings, who popularized the concept of *foquismo*. But the difficulties that the Castro government faced in the late Sixties, as well as a changing international environment favorable to non-violent revolutions in Latin America, forced the Cuban authorities to reconsider their previous emphasis on insurrectional fight and gradually drop *guerrillerismo*. Guevara's death in 1967, as well as Soviet pressures, have long been stressed as key factors for this reevaluation. This article will tackle a forgotten component which exerted a strong impact on the Cuban leadership: the emergence of Juan Velasco Alvarado's military regime (1968-1975) in Peru, which was promptly labelled in Havana as a «revolutionary» process, thereby contributing to the revision of the insurgent «ethos» that emerged in the pre-revolutionary years. This is the subject of the third and final section of this article.

This article thus reexamines a number of long-held assumptions. Cuba's radical revolutionary narrative has already received a great deal of scholarly attention. However, little has been said about the roots of this approach. As it will be demonstrated, the rise of the «guerrilla ethos» does not merely stem from the leaders' intellectual innovation in the early Sixties. Rather, it was molded and later consolidated by the

complex nature of the anti-Batista fight, during which a variety of actors eventually adopted armed struggle as the appropriate and almost inevitable path to get rid of the dictator. At the same time, Cuba's partial departure from its previous radicalism has also been regarded as the unescapable result of Moscow's reluctance to keep supporting the island in its quest to export armed struggle. Without denying the effects of this powerful geopolitical constraint, this article incorporates in the analysis of the reconsideration of Cuba's «guerrilla ethos» the impact of Latin America's political transformations, specifically the unexpected rise of the Velasco Alvarado military administration in Peru, the first Latin American established rule to be publicly vindicated by post-1959 Havana as an alternative path to revolution.

The originality of this work relies largely on the collection of a wide and novel array of sources, among them, a consistent amount of rare interviews conducted in Cuba over the last two years. Among the valuable oral testimonies, many come from old revolutionaries who have been traditionally cautious to speak with foreign researchers. These interviews – together with newly published memoirs, press articles, and a range of diplomatic sources collected in the scarcely accessed Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Minrex) – allow for a reassessment of the historiography of the Cuban Revolution, as well as for a reconsideration of previous assumptions about the emergence, consolidation, and partial decline of the Cuban «guerrilla ethos».

Roots of «armed inevitability»

Batista's 1952 coup d'état launched a passionate debate regarding the right method to dismantle the newly established regime. As Jorge Mañach put in a newspaper article published in July 1952, the anti-Batista community was «disoriented», and faced constant spats between what he labelled «politicians» (*políticos*) and «insurgents». Mañach rightly pointed to the emergence of a fierce political dilemma, leading to an inevitable and urgent discussion about not just how «to rectify our democracy», but how to «save» it: «Political action today has to adapt its tactics and strategies to the problem it has in hands». Mañach ended his piece with a fervent call to «cross the dark current that is barring our road»⁴.

In the face of Batista's conspicuous unwillingness to step down or accept compromise, the deadlock gradually gave way to a growing acceptance of the insurrectional approach that would eventually prevail. The moderate opposition steadily lost ground, while the maximalist wing of the opposition was reinforced as a consequence

⁴ J. Mañach, *Dilema y tarea de la oposición*, «Bohemia», 6 July 1952, pp. 59-98. Even a young revolutionary such as Víctor Dreke (15 years old at the time of the Batista coup), who got involved in the insurgent movements that emerged from 1952 in Sagua La Grande, noticed the early divisions within the opposition: «There was a time when not everybody who opposed Batista supported armed struggle. That divided us at that time». Interview with Víctor Dreke, Havana, 19 March 2018.

of Batista's continuing repression and the overwhelming popularity of leaders such as Fidel Castro and José Antonio Echeverría. But divisions within the anti-Batista opposition never vanished completely, and many politicians continued to promote a negotiated solution to the crisis. However, the nature of the 1952-1958 struggle and repeated mistakes by Batista's «personalistic» administration led to a growing sense that armed struggle was the more efficient strategy to overthrow the regime. In the course of the Sixties, the post-1959 leadership experienced rapid radicalization, which led to the eviction and desertion of many moderate early supporters of the revolution. Revolutionary power has been overwhelmingly assumed by vocal proponents of the armed path, strengthening a state narrative that conceived of violence as a necessary component to conduct and achieve a real revolution. This belief in the inescapability of violence was – more than an attachment to the communism model – the common ideological terrain shared by the victorious post-Batista generation.

The «birth» of the Cuban «guerrilla ethos» has persistently been associated with the Moncada barracks attack on 26 July 1953⁵. Among the Cuban insurgents who planned to seize Moncada, few held a firm view of the ideological struggle that rocked the world in the aftermath of the Second World War. Raúl Castro was the only *moncadista* to have visited the Eastern Bloc before the 1953 assault, although he swiftly dropped his commitment to the Psp's youth wing to join his brother in this risky adventure. Fernando Chenard, a 34 year old photographer, had also undergone a communist phase⁶, but such cases were astonishingly rare among the 160 *fidelistas* who took part of the attack. Ramón Pez Ferro, one of the few survivors of the assault on the civilian hospital at the rear of the barracks, confessed that «the majority of our forces, including those who joined the insurreccional struggle in the Sierra Maestra, were not communists [...] because at that time communist ideas were not easily understood»⁷. Although both Fidel Castro and Abel Santamaría (respectively, numbers one and two in the burgeoning movement that would become M-26) had read the basic texts of Marxism, they were not communists and nurtured a rather

⁵ Lillian Guerra offers us revealing examples illustrating the conviction that «here [in Santiago] is where everything started in 1953», as quoted by the French observer and prominent early diffusor of the Cuban Revolution in French-speaking areas, Claude Julien. C. Julien, *La Révolution cubaine*, Paris, Julliard, 1961, p. 70. Curious about the history of her parents' country, Lillian Guerra, a Cuban-American historian, sent several letters to her relatives on the island to get a better grasp of the nature of the Cuban Revolution. «The solution started with Fidel Castro's assault on the Moncada military barracks attack in 1953», and «everything started with Moncada», she was told. L. Guerra, *Heroes, Martyrs, and Political Messiahs*, cit., p. 12. The author of this article became aware of this powerful narrative when interviewing Manuel Graña, founder of the M-26's youth brigades prior to 1959. After describing the present research project, Graña immediately interrupted and said, «if you start from there [the Moncada attack], which is the beginning of the war, then you can get the conclusions [you are looking for]». Interview with Manuel Graña, Havana, 16 March 2018.

⁶ R. Merle, *Moncada, premier combat de Fidel Castro: 26 juillet 1953*, Paris, R. Laffont, 1965, p. 154.

⁷ Interview with Ramón Pez Ferro, Havana, 28 February, 2018.

hostile view of the Ussr. The *moncadistas* Ernesto Tizol and Pedro Gutiérrez Santos embodied more precisely the dominant sensitivity within the movement. While the first refused to join a worker's association prior to July 1953 – after noticing that it was controlled by a Psp member – the latter disdained his communist colleagues and considered them political «ghosts»⁸.

The establishment of a Marxist, Soviet-oriented state was undoubtedly not the «rallying cry» bringing together the initial core of Castro's M-26. Rather, most insurgents seem to have developed apprehensions with regard to the Psp, a party often seen as opportunistic in its support for Batista's first administration (1940-1944)⁹. Instead, the unwavering condition to take part in the actions designed by Fidel Castro was the «absolute willingness to combat the regime with weapons». It has been often claimed that the attack in Santiago launched a new phase in the fight against Batista by raising an irreversible awareness that Castro's armed path was the only solution to dismantle the regime. For Mario Mencía, author of a comprehensive book on the Moncada preparations,

this event triggered a sequence of situations [...]; Fidel Castro and the «moncadistas», who now embodied the revolutionary vanguard, were catapulted at the national forefront which allowed them to build a formidable organization within and outside the country. This complex and favorable set of subjective conditions did not exist before Moncada. It was precisely the «scream of Moncada» (*grito del Moncada*) that generated such conditions.

Batista's demise in January 1959 confirmed – continues Mencía – «the movement's thesis regarding the right path and methods for armed struggle», which became etched in Cuban history «as the unbeatable truth through which the people marched toward freedom»¹⁰. Likewise, according to Armando Hart, a founding member of M-26, the «heroic meaning of Moncada» was decisive in filling an «ethical void in the political landscape of Cuban society» because a transformation «of the kind Cuba needed was only possible through the strategy advanced by Fidel Castro, who had a radical Cuban spirit»¹¹.

But the insurgent path was not a novelty introduced by M-26. Nor was Castro the first to adopt violence as the necessary ingredient to oust Batista. The resistance against the Cuban dictator was configured shortly after the 10 March 1952 coup. One of the most resolute opposition movements emerged under the leadership of the experienced agitator Rafael García Bárcena. He launched the Movimiento Nacional

⁸ M. Mencía, *El Moncada: la respuesta necesaria*, La Habana, Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 2013, pp. 347-349.

⁹ J. Domínguez, *Cuba: Order and Revolution*, Cambridge, Ma, Belknap Press, 1978, p. 101.

¹⁰ M. Mencía, *El Moncada*, cit., pp. 490-492.

¹¹ A. Hart, *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground, 1952-1958*, New York, Pathfinder, 2004, pp. 74-77.

Revolucionario (Mnr) on 20 May 1952 and publicly proclaimed his contempt for an electoral solution to the crisis, emphasizing that the only method to get rid of Batista was «revolutionary violence». Attracted by García Bárcena's radicalism, many future M-26 combatants such as Armando Hart, Julio Camacho Aguilera, Faustino Pérez, and Enrique Oltuski enrolled in the new organization. They were seduced by Bárcena's unwavering determination to seek a solution beyond the electoral challenge put forward by Batista and reluctantly accepted by the institutional opposition. In his memoirs, Oltuski remembered being approached by Faustino Pérez, who successfully persuaded him to join the Mnr under the direction of García Bárcena, «an honest man»: «The line to be followed is clear: no *politiquería*¹², only an armed revolution can give us the power without concessions»¹³, stressed Faustino Pérez.

García Bárcena's program was indeed quite radical. He announced his political agenda in several articles published in «Bohemia» magazine. In one of them, the philosopher and active participant in the 1933 Revolution proclaimed the emergence of a «new revolutionary generation» that was «brought to the foreground of public life after the 10 March catastrophe». This generation heralded encouraging prospects for the revolution, since it was not «artificially prefabricated by careless politicians for electoral (*electoreros*) goals». Coining a term that Fidel Castro would later assimilate and reinterpret to identify his first nucleus of young combatants, García Bárcena decreed the birth of the *generación del cincuentenario*¹⁴. With an article titled «A new generation and a new national revolutionary movement», García Bárcena announced publicly the inception of his organization. He first stressed that the 10 March 1952 should not be considered a «day of mourning», because Batista's coup sowed the ground for a «new movement of national revolution». To help legitimize the Mnr, the author hearkened back to examples demonstrating the identity of the Cuban people as absolute revolutionaries and the great victories against oppression that were reached through violence. «Cuba's national history has not been other than the history of permanent revolution», García Bárcena recalled. «The electoral route», which could have led to a revolutionary outcome if Batista had not disregarded the democratic process, was no longer valid¹⁵. Violence was in sight.

¹² *Politiquería* is a word used in Cuban historiography to refer to the moderate strategy that some members of the institutional opposition adopted to engage in negotiations with Batista and convince him to step down. It is sometimes used to discredit other insurgent movements, such as the Organización Auténtica funded by Prío Socarrás, that could undermine M-26's prominence.

¹³ E. Oltuski, *Gente del llano*, La Habana, Imagen Contemporánea, 2001, p. 21.

¹⁴ By *cincuentenario*, García Bárcena had in mind the year 1902, when Cuba formally gained its independence. Fidel Castro created an amendment and called the *moncadistas* the «centenary generation» (*generación del centenario*), in reference to the birth of José Martí (1853-1895). The historical references are different, but there is little doubt that M-26 drew its inspiration from the founder of the Mnr.

¹⁵ R. García Bárcena, *Una nueva generación y un nuevo movimiento nacional revolucionario*, «Bohemia», 25 May 1952, pp. 56; 96.

The Cuban revolutionary narrative has paid little attention to García Bárcena's movement. When it is mentioned, the Mnr is depicted as a valuable, albeit strategically mistaken, precursor to the fight against Batista. The Cubans' criticism is based on García Bárcena's reliance on disaffected members of the Cuban army. The Mnr's hope that its proselytism would trigger a counter-coup d'état has been perceived as naïve¹⁶, a tactical misperception that later Fidel Castro and the *moncadistas* would claim to have rebuked. In a rare statement, the Cuban historian and former combatant in Oriente Province, Jorge Ibarra, acknowledged the strong ideological impact exerted on his generation by García Bárcena: «He opened our eyes. [...] Before Moncada, Bárcena already promoted a revolutionary movement with the youth. That strongly influenced our awareness». For a young rebel like Ibarra, the unshakable determination of the Mnr to refuse political negotiations appeared as an attractive alternative to solve the crisis. «The revolution had to be achieved by a new generation, without having compromises with the past or with political parties»¹⁷.

Other revolutionary groups advocating armed struggle gradually undermined the role of the institutional opposition. Acción Libertadora and Triple A, both linked to the Auténtico Party that ruled the country until the fateful day of 10 March 1952, engaged in clandestine activities aimed at combating the dictatorship through violence. Little is known about these two organizations and Cuba's highly ideological political education system does not seem willing to vindicate them. A rare reference from a 1985 book favorably portrays Acción Libertadora: «It was more open and more *del pueblo* (linked to the people's need) than the MNR», observed a former M-26 fighter¹⁸. From June 1952, Acción Libertadora – which benefited from the collaboration of prominent future M-26 members like Frank País, José «Pepito» Tey, and Renato Guitart (who died at Moncada) – adopted insurgency as its main strategy, collecting weapons and plotting several attacks with explosives¹⁹.

Even a traditional politician such as former president Carlos Prío Socarrás funded numerous subversive actions from 1952 and collected a wide array of weapons that were distributed among revolutionary organizations (including Castro's M-26). After carefully scrutinizing the military files stocked in the archives of the History Institute in Havana, it can be noticed that from 1952 to 1957 the main perceived threat to the stability of the Batista government was not Fidel Castro, but the Organización Auténtica led by Prío Socarrás²⁰. This is not surprising as Prío Socarrás had publicly indi-

¹⁶ A. Hart, *Aldabonazo*, cit., p. 65.

¹⁷ J. Bell Lara, T. Caram, D. Kruijt, D. López (eds.), *Combatientes*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2014, p. 218.

¹⁸ J. Lupiáñez Reinlein, *El movimiento estudiantil en Santiago de Cuba, 1952-1953*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985, p. 73.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 75-79.

²⁰ A similar observation has been made by J.L. Padrón, A. Betancourt in *Batista: El Golpe*, La Habana, Ediciones Unión, 2013, p. 250.

cated his stern determination against an «electoral solution to the Cuban problems» as long as Batista remained in power²¹.

Little has been said about the José Martí Women's Civic Front (Jmwcf), an astoundingly radical association made up of an ideologically diverse group of women. Many of them were initially members of the Auténtico Party (Prc-A). One such case is Rosa Mier (born in 1927), the only founder of the Jmwcf who was still alive when this article was written. She had been elected councilor in the municipality of Guanajay, representing the Prc-A despite her vague ideological training and moderate political ambitions. She said, «I didn't know anything at that time [...] my political platform was "an ambulance for Guanajay"»²². Rosa Mier also acknowledged that «I was not a communist, I was a democrat»²³. Despite her political immaturity, Mier accepted the required condition to join Jmwcf, «to fight against Batista through armed struggle». When asked about the political criteria imposed by the organization she helped create, Mier proudly replied, «we were only interested in having people who were willing to be raped, to be imprisoned, to be killed»²⁴. One Jmwcf founding member, Martha Frayde, has been erased from the annals of the revolutionary narrative because she turned against her close friend Fidel Castro in reaction to the government's rapprochement with Moscow. Her name is not mentioned in the «official» book about the Jmwcf published on the island. However, Frayde played a key role in the formation and evolution of the Jmwcf, a movement that at its onset in November 1952 banned «active communists» from taking part in the women's organization²⁵.

Ideologically heterogeneous, the movement nonetheless spoke in a unified voice regarding the right strategy against Batista. Created months before Castro's spectacular attack on Santiago, the Jmwcf soon expanded throughout Cuban territory employing dual tactics: legal action and clandestine subversion. But both strategies were geared toward the same goal: «combatting any electoral formula in order to overthrow the dictatorship through armed insurrection»²⁶. In a 1954 letter, the Jmwcf once again ruled out elections as a potential solution to national turmoil and urged the Cuban people to accept their «moral duties». «The electoral trend, swollen by those who want to gain legitimacy with ballot boxes [...] is in a phase of decay, and it has to be like that»²⁷. This group of determined women amplified their ardent statements in the press, and distributed thousands of pamphlets quoting their main ideological predecessor, José Martí, and advocating for a radical termination of the crisis. One of these

²¹ «Bohemia», 29 June 1952, p. 79.

²² Interview with Rosa Mier, Havana, 11 March 2019.

²³ J. Bell Lara, T. Caram, D. Kruijt, D. López, *Combatientes*, cit. p. 305.

²⁴ Interview with Rosa Mier.

²⁵ M. Frayde, *Ecoute, Fidel*, Paris, Denoël, 1987, p. 41.

²⁶ J. Nuiry, *Liminar a la segunda edición*, in C. Castro Porta (ed.), *La lección del Maestro*, La Habana, Oficina de Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, 2010, p. 12.

²⁷ *Mantiene su oposición a la celebración de los comicios*, in *ibidem*, p. 286.

documents tellingly inserted Martí's following claim that «one must go to the blood to cure the sore»²⁸. Citing Martí to encourage armed struggle was an adequate ruse to pass on a radical message while avoiding censorship. Thus, «the Jmwf signed [the documents], but it was Martí who said it. We did not say it»²⁹.

Outraged by Batista's zero-ground «revolution»³⁰, even moderate politicians nurtured an increasingly belligerent discourse and made unexpected and early calls for a radical dismantling of the dictatorship. The intellectual and political commentator Jorge Mañach, linked to the Orthodox Party, witnessed one of the first acts of violent repression by Batista's forces (the Universidad del Aire incident in May 1952) and stated that General Batista had to be fought by all available means «without excluding heroism if required»³¹. Claiming the heritage of Eduardo Chibás, founder of the Orthodox Party, a Cuban observer warned against the risk of transforming the orthodoxy into «a purely electoral party as those of our old way of doing politics», and vowed to defend «a great movement of direct popular action [...] that will lead to the rescue of the law»³². The *ortodoxo* Pelayo Cuervo Navarro issued a prophetic warning: «If the usurper seeks to be re-elected from power – as Batista eventually did in 1954 – he will be unable to avoid the spilling of the Cubans' blood»³³. Cuervo Navarro's prediction turned tragically prophetic in 1957 when he was assassinated by Batista's repressive forces.

Other former *ortodoxos* went further and joined M-26. Juan Manuel Márquez is one of those forgotten «heroes» of the Revolution. After a turbulent political life, marked by his subsequent affiliation in the Auténtico Party, Orthodox Party, and Mnr, he travelled to Mexico to join the Castro brothers, and helped prepare the landing operation carried out in November and December 1956. Márquez was one of the members of the *Granma* crew to be caught by the army, which took his life shortly after his return to Cuban soil. His political philosophy was far from communist, but similar to many other revolutionary combatants, his commitment to a violent path to revolution appeared to be resolute. «We know that our fate is to win or to fall as a gladiator on

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 312.

²⁹ Interview with Rosa Mier.

³⁰ Batista's sympathizers used to refer to the coup d'état as a revolutionary attempt to rebuild a country threatened by corruption and everyday street violence. «The situation was unsustainable and the people – victim of too much harm – demanded order, peace, liberty and true democracy. Therefore, the Army, armed wing of the fatherland, obeyed the requirements of the people, and both [the people and the Army] urged General Fulgencio Batista, vindicated by his patriotism and democratic beliefs, to assume the supreme leadership of the liberation movement, ultimately obtaining the glorious triumph of the revolution», wrote the lawyer Pablo Carrera Jústiz in 1952. *La Revolución de marzo a la luz de la filosofía política*, in P. Carrera Jústiz, *Justificación del 10 de marzo*, La Habana, Úcar García, 1952, p. 28.

³¹ «Bohemia», 11 May 1952, p. supl. 13.

³² R. Lazo, *Hacia un movimiento cívico por el rescate del derecho en Cuba*, «Bohemia», 18 May 1952, p. 133.

³³ «Bohemia», 25 May 1952, p. 89.

the arena», acknowledged Márquez in a «letter-testament» addressed from Miami to his friend Luis García in May 1956. He also spelled out his disillusionment with the lack of «revolutionary sense» of most Cubans based in Florida: «I am appalled when I think that some Cubans do not understand that now is the time for great sacrifices». Márquez remained steadfastly committed to the armed path that would later take his life. He wrote, «we can clearly see what is at sight, and we are ready to join our bones to the bones of our heroes that in the past century, and in this very century, sacrificed everything to leave us a Fatherland (*Patria*)»⁵⁴.

Revolutionary violence was indeed a strategic priority for M-26 and, more generally, to virtually all the revolutionaries who later led the post-Batista government. The first periodical publication released by M-26, «Aldabonazo», provides undeniable proof. An article published in August 1956 announced the movement's route: «No elections, Revolution» (*Elecciones no, Revolución*). The piece lambasted those who opted for an institutional solution to the crisis, claiming that they didn't «understand what a revolution is»⁵⁵. Another article delved further into this reflection. While distinguishing different types of violence (foreign intervention and coups, for example, were «counter-revolutionary»), the pamphlet remarked that «it has to be considered a rule that a revolutionary movement takes power through violence», before offering a startling definition of revolution as «violence with ideas». A new phase of the struggle had been launched, described as «an insurrection accompanied by a general strike and total generalization of violence, that is, a Revolution»⁵⁶. This same issue popularized what would later become M-26's most widespread motto: «free or martyrs» (*libres o mártires*).

Carlos Franqui, one of the most prominent leaders of M-26 who fled the island in 1971 following his disagreement with the Soviet-oriented path adopted by the government, was an adamant advocate of the use of armed struggle to topple Batista. In a letter dated to September 1957 in response to Venezuelan advocates of an «electoral road», Franqui urged the revolutionaries to follow the examples of Zapata, Sandino, and Guiteras. Venezuelan society faced an astoundingly similar dictatorship than the one of Batista⁵⁷. The fight against General Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who was finally

⁵⁴ A. Márquez Rodríguez, *En cada latido del combate*, La Habana, Ediciones Abril, 2016, p. 178.

⁵⁵ *Elecciones no, Revolución*, «Aldabonazo», 25 August 1956, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *¿Qué es la revolución?*, *ibidem*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Striking similarities can be identified between the two revolutionary processes. Both Marcos Pérez Jiménez and Batista assumed total control in 1952. Both dictators were criticized for allowing a gradual process of Americanization within their respective societies, which undermined the economic position of the local élite. Corruption became in both countries a major political issue as Batista and Pérez Jiménez were justifiably accused of self-enrichment. All that contributed to widen the social basis of the opposition, including the alienation of important religious leaders who openly defied the ruling power. Under fire from all directions, and as a result of the emergence and consolidation of a solid opposition front, Pérez Jiménez was forced to step down in January 1958, a year before Batista's demise. L. Bethell (ed.), *Historia de América Latina*, Tome 16: «Colombia, Ecuador y Venezuela», Barcelona,

ousted in January 1958 thanks to the combined efforts of urban insurgents and a dissatisfied military, was often compared to the Cuban Revolution. Franqui and many others supported the Venezuelan opposition and viewed their battle as an additional expression of a continental fight for democracy. As Franqui wrote, «we need to win. Cuba and America need that, because it is the fate of the continent that is currently at stake in the heights of Sierra Maestra». That helps explain why the Cuban journalist sent a letter to his South American comrades reminding them that «never has a progressive liberation movement reached power in these [Latin American] countries through a peaceful path. [...] Can the Venezuelan people do the same than in Cuba?», wondered Franqui. He answered his own question affirmatively and continued «new generations in Venezuela, the youth, will embark on the combat and take control of the struggle, just as in Cuba». In the face of the «barbarism» of Pérez Jiménez, who «kills, tortures, and imprisons just for demanding elections», Venezuela should follow the Cuban example and «throw away the old and outdated gradual (*evolutiva*) thesis»³⁸.

The Directorio Revolucionario (Dr) was founded at the University of Havana in 1956. Its leader (today one of the «martyrs» of the revolution), José Antonio Echeverría, was a Christian and rejected the communist model exemplified by the Ussr³⁹. Elvira Díaz Vallina, who became president of the Federation of University Students (Feu), remembers communism as a minor influence at the university, and that instead most students nourished a hostile vision of the Psp. The Dr, an armed offshoot of Feu, was first and foremost engaged in an insurrectional strategy designed to brusquely interrupt the Batista dictatorship and, to that end, it needed to collect weapons no matter their provenance. Indeed, Echeverría established an agreement with *auténtico* members funded by Prío Socarrás. When asked why he accepted an alliance with representatives of discredited politicians who embodied a corrupt and violent past, Echeverría confessed, «well, Elvira, the thing is that they have the arms»⁴⁰. The armed path was followed with increasing determination when Faure Chomón took

Crítica, 1990, pp. 318-325. It is thus not surprising that many observers perceived the revolutionaries' victory in Cuba and Venezuela as a general hemispheric evolution toward democracy. Armando Hart noted in his memoirs: «I hated him [Pérez Jiménez] as much as I did Fulgencio Batista». A. Hart, *Aldabonazo*, cit. p. 227.

³⁸ C. Franqui, *El Libro de los 12*, La Habana, Instituto del Libro, 1967, pp. 220-221.

³⁹ According to Héctor Terry, Fructuoso Rodríguez, who replaced Echeverría as head of the Dr after the latter's tragic assassination in 1957, was an «anti-communist». Interview with Héctor Terry, Havana, 16 March 2018. But being anti-communist should not imply Rodríguez's adoption of a less radical strategic posture. Under his leadership, the Dr elaborated a new agenda which included opening a guerrilla front and maintain armed actions in Havana until the organization of a general strike that would be sustained by «armed support». He also decided to send a delegation abroad to buy the necessary weapons. F. Chomón, *La hombrada de José Antonio*, in E. Torres-Cuevas, E. Oltuski, H. Rodríguez (eds.). *Memorias de la Revolución*, La Habana, Imagen Contemporánea, 2007, p. 204.

⁴⁰ Interview with Elvira Díaz Vallina, La Habana, 27 February 2019.

control of the Dr in 1957 after the assassination of Fructuoso Rodríguez. Originally responsible for clandestine actions, Chomón became general secretary of the Dr and led an expedition from Miami designed to reach the Escambray mountains in the province of Las Villas and establish an independent guerrilla force. In spite of constant spats with the rival guerrilla faction led by Castro – which the official narrative tends to ignore – Chomón’s strategic views were compatible with those of M-26. As he stated in early 1958, «against Batista and those who want to replace him with deceitful formulas, we will fight until we win or we die. ¡Long life to the unified Cuban youth against crooked politicians (*politiqueros*) who intent to dampen the victory of the revolution»⁴¹.

After what came to be known in Cuba as *diálogo cívico* – an attempt led in 1956 by Don Cosme de la Torriente to resolve the political crisis – failed, the «armed imperative» gained further ground, while institutionalized parties (*politiquería*) steadily lost legitimacy. A view from Havana presented Cosme de la Torriente’s efforts to peacefully solve the conflict with Batista as a desperate ploy designed by «the ideologues of the bourgeoisie» to «prevent the unfolding of a revolutionary situation». After the failure of negotiations, the «bourgeois united front» entered a «phase of sharp decline». One lesson could be inferred, legitimizing Castro’s insurreccional stance that «revolution was an unavoidable reality; there was no more space in the Cuban political arena for compromises»⁴². With the electoral solution dismissed, any endeavor aimed at negotiating with Batista was swiftly vilified by the insurgents, with increasing support from civil society. Fidel Castro became extraordinarily popular in Cuba and abroad, thanks to his memorable fight in the Sierra Maestra and an ideologically ambivalent discourse unlikely to drive moderate sympathizers away. Politically opaque, even for highly trained Cia experts, M-26 never hid its staunch determination to use violence. By 1958, few *anti-batistianos* would deny the appropriateness of this warlike strategy.

Even the communists, initially reluctant to accept armed struggle, eventually embraced Castro’s stance. Following the 1952 coup, the Psp leadership, guided by the «Peaceful Coexistence» doctrine recently formalized by Nikita Khrushchev, prioritized non-violent mass mobilization as the fundamental method to trigger a revolution. But Steve Cushion has magnificently demonstrated that the Psp’s hesitations with regard to revolutionary violence were not as all-pervasive as typically assumed. First, the communists came to terms with Castro’s tactics and even created a revolutionary column in mid-1958 in the region of Yaguajay⁴³. The Psp officially announced in a statement published in March 1958 its support for the Sierra Maestra, and vowed

⁴¹ E. Rodríguez Loeches, *Rumbo al Escambray*, La Habana, 1960, p. 26.

⁴² J. Ibarra Guitart, *Sociedad de Amigos de la República*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2003, pp. 172-175.

⁴³ C. Massón Sena, *El Partido Socialista Popular y la Revolución Cubana*, in C. Massón Sena, *Comunismo*, cit. pp. 268-269.

to «adopt a position of active assistance in the guerrilla zone. [...] As soon as the armed action had become a guerrilla action linked to the peasants and the people, we immediately expressed our solidarity», declared the Psp⁴⁴. Secondly, the fact that the central committee of the Psp based in Havana had distanced itself from the increasingly accepted insurgent outlook does not mean that all activists ruled out armed struggle prior to 1958. Cushion identified several cases in which Psp members supported the actions of M-26 and Dr in defiance of instructions from Havana⁴⁵.

Fulgencio Batista scheduled a presidential election in November 1958. It was too late. By that time, the overwhelming majority of the opposition, aware of Batista's repeated and awkward ploys to maintain power, grew convinced that elections would not bring about the changes they wanted. The new revolutionary government established in January 1959 was made up of a heterogeneous assembly with diverse, sometimes incompatible, ideological priorities. Numerous insurgents who fought to dethrone Batista were now expected to resume the course of their earlier daily lives after months of sacrifice⁴⁶. There was no consent regarding the scope of the social reforms that were to be executed, nor a common approach on how to deal with the two superpowers (Us and Ussr). But the new leaders did share one certainty, which appeared to be strengthened by the successful attainment of the final goal: armed struggle had proved to be the right path to remove the dictator. Under these circumstances, what had initially been learned through the experience of every-day struggle could now be translated into an official revolutionary scheme.

Institutionalization of the Armed Struggle

Che Guevara was the first theorist of the new government to outline a comprehensive doctrine intended to encourage other continental insurgents to follow the Cuban outline. Published for the first time in 1960, Guevara's booklet *Guerrilla Warfare* was less an ideological manual than a series of technical measures designed to violently

⁴⁴ *Por qué nuestro partido apoya a la Sierra Maestra*, «Carta Semanal», 12 March 1958, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵ S. Cushion, *A Hidden History of the Cuban Revolution: How the Working Class Shaped the Guerrillas' Victory*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2016. Giraldo Mazola witnessed the divergences regarding «revolutionary violence» among Psp members when he was detained and imprisoned. Having strong anti-communist leanings and serious concerns regarding the Psp's reluctance to accept armed struggle, he addressed this sensitive issue with communist detainees. «We have to force the party to change», his interlocutors said. Mazola's apprehensions disappeared in prison, where he read Marxist literature provided by his new friends. Interview with Giraldo Mazola, Havana, 18 February 2019.

⁴⁶ Again, Giraldo Mazola provides a good example. The 20 years old revolutionary and member of the urban branch of M-26 was summoned by Fidel Castro, who urged him to accept a key position in post-Batista Cuba: head of the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People (Icap). «I had the idea that once Batista is out, we would all come back to our paths. It is over now, Batista is no longer around, what will I do? Study medicine», he thought. Interview with Giraldo Mazola.

oust authoritarian regimes. Che's endeavor was not guided by any sort of twisted interpretation of a Sovietized Marxism. His main inspiration was the instructions that he received in Mexico from a former Spanish Republican combatant, Alberto Bayo. He was the first to introduce the tactics of guerrilla warfare to the *fidelistas*, and soon saw in the Argentinian a special talent. «He stood out above the rest» and became the «number one among his comrades», stated Bayo⁴⁷. Guevara acknowledged the impact of Bayo's military thinking, describing General Bayo as «a modern Quixote who only fears death for it could impede him to see his liberated fatherland, I can say that he is my master»⁴⁸.

Having fought against Franco in Spain, Bayo was an ardent enemy and a resolute combatant of dictatorships throughout the world. In a book published in Cuba in 1960, the Spanish veteran denied being a communist (he even denied that Guevara was one) and pledged to combat violently all «bloody tyrannies». Bayo was a candid proponent of guerrilla warfare as the right approach to defeat a dictatorship, a strategy that the opposition should adopt no matter the geographical and historical circumstances. He even complained that the Spanish people seemed unwilling to engage in such a risky method against Franco, writing that «my policy is to achieve power with guerrillas and sabotage, but the Spanish people are politically castrated». Similar to most Cuban revolutionaries who confronted Batista, the Spanish strategist was a moderate who wished, first and foremost, for the reestablishment of democratic principles. But when it came to the necessary means to achieve that goal, his radical attachment to a warlike route was absolute: «I fought in Africa against Arabs for eleven years, witnessing firsthand their guerrilla warfare. I fell in love with their efficient method of fighting [...]. With the support of the local peasants, guerrillas are invincible»⁴⁹.

Much more than communism, the «armed inevitability» advanced by Bayo was the first theoretical ground on which the Cubans defined their strategic thinking. Guevara's thesis of *foquismo*, first sketched in 1960, greatly relied on Bayo's teaching and adequately reflected the predominant revolutionary feeling anchored in the inevitability of armed struggle to oust dictators. After outlining the three main principles extracted from the Cuban experience on which *foquismo* was based – taken together, they represented a call to engage in rural armed struggle against the ruling army – Che quoted a telling excerpt of Martí's works: «He who wages war in a country that can avoid it is a criminal; so is he who fails to wage a war that cannot be avoided»⁵⁰.

⁴⁷ A. Bayo, *Mi aporte a la Revolución Cubana*, La Habana, Impresora Ejército Rebelde, 1960, p. 76.

⁴⁸ E. Guevara, «Prólogo», in *ibidem*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ A. Bayo, *Mi aporte*, cit., pp. 15-16.

⁵⁰ E. Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Method*, Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1964, pp. 2-3; 8.

Cuba's revolutionary doctrine throughout the Sixties would be anchored in Guevara's «guerrilla ethos»⁵¹. Armed struggle would be valued as the quintessence of a revolution at risk of being fostered in alien contexts where the conditions were not ripe for violence. This faith was further institutionalized with Castro's 1962 Second Declaration of Havana, when he stated that «the duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution»⁵². The rapid emergence of Latin American guerrilla movements was not unconnected to the belief that the Cuban example of violent insurrection could be almost uncritically replicated in other areas, a conviction that even led to Guevara's death in Bolivia, a victim of his own theory. Guevara's faith, shared by many of his contemporaries, was so powerfully integrated into the post-1959 Cuban revolutionary mind-set that even members of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) complained about the Argentinian's desire to impose in Africa «his military doctrine of guerrilla warfare»⁵³.

The high degree of trust on armed insurgency led to some early strategic mistakes. The revolutionary leadership, enthused by their successful experience in the Fifties, dismissed key conditions for armed revolution while supporting guerrillas beyond the island's borders. As conclusively proved by the sociologist Jeff Goodwin, no revolutionary movement has ever been capable of seizing power in a consolidated democratic context, characterized by the regular holding of elections⁵⁴. However, Havana sent weapons (and trained guerrilla fighters) to countries such as Venezuela and Argentina, where the presidencies of Rómulo Betancourt or Arturo Illia could hardly be equated to the Batista dictatorship. Nonetheless, Che Guevara did not sufficiently consider the significance of the nature of the states in mobilizing the masses for revolutionary purposes. He labelled democratic governments as an «apologetic form for representing the dictatorship of the exploitative classes»⁵⁵, but overlooked the complex dynamic that links people's alienation to a particular type of regimes.

The second distinction between Cuba's insurrection and the unsuccessful guerrilla experiences of the Sixties was the emphasis put on the Marxist doctrine. While Fidel Castro and most of the insurgents were purposefully cautious in mentioning communism as an impetus for their movement, in order to avoid engendering concerns in

⁵¹ It is worth noting that Che's 1960 version of *Guerrilla Warfare* did not completely support the emergence of a *foco* in «democratic» countries, where chances of success were limited. However, echoing Cuba's rapid radicalization, the revised 1963 second edition utterly dismissed any attempt to achieve revolution by «peaceful means». J. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, Cambridge, Ma, Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 202.

⁵² F. Castro, *The Second Declaration of Havana*, retrieved from www.walterlippmann.com/fc-02-04-1962.html (consulted on 27 June 2019).

⁵³ Letter of Zbigniew Kowalewski to Jules G eralde-Libois and Jean Van Lierde, CEGESOMA/Archives de l' tat en Belgique, Brussels, Partial archives of Jean Van Lierde, no. 95, Poland, 27 October 1997.

⁵⁴ «Even imperfect and poorly consolidated democracies tend to diffuse revolutionary pressures», states Jeff Goodwin in an enticing book on revolutionary theory. J. Goodwin, *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 302.

⁵⁵ J. Brown, *Cuba's Revolutionary World*, cit. p. 203.

a country where Psp members had poor reputations⁵⁶, the Latin American *focos* that emerged after the Cuban Revolution emphasized Marxist ideology⁵⁷. The insistence on radical ideas had the undesirable effect of chasing away potential revolutionaries who might have been willing to support a national fight against an authoritarian regime but would not throw their weight behind a communist insurrection. By delivering a radical message that resonated more with Havana's Marxist turn in 1961 than with the nature of the anti-Batista insurrection, the Latin American guerrillas were actually shifting away from the lessons of the Cuban Revolution.

More than chastising the revolutionaries for their uncritical determination to disseminate revolution according to an alleged Cuban-oriented mould, this article seeks to underline the rootedness of Havana's reliance on violence as an infallible trigger of revolution, which was grounded on a certainty that grew increasingly in strength throughout the anti-Batista insurrection. To fully understand Cuba's political doctrine, we need to look back to the pre-revolutionary era – as done in the first section of this article – when thousands of Cubans came to the conclusion that «revolutionary violence» was indispensable to dismantle a ruling authoritarian administration.

The leadership's faith in armed struggle became a burning issue leading to the spiraling controversies of the Cuban-Soviet relationship. In spite of the alliance that the Castro regime soon established with the Ussr – a superpower that under Nikita Khrushchev appeared to be committed with an international policy based on «Peaceful Coexistence» and that had acknowledged since 1956 the possibility of a «democratic road to revolution» – Havana did not yield in its promotion of revolutionary violence, to the point of endangering its crucial association with Moscow. Cuba-Ussr tensions is a topic that has already received a great deal of attention, but it is worth referring to the secret conversation held in 1967 in Havana between the Cuban authorities and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Aleksey Kosygin. Kosygin's report on his trip to Cuba unveils the purpose of his visit: «We could not agree with its [Cuban] policy of exporting revolution to the countries of Latin America». He also painted Castro's and Guevara's efforts to spread revolution through armed means as «adventurous», to which the *líder máximo* replied: «So was the Cuban Revolution too»⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ The Spanish journalist Enrique Meneses witnessed a curious episode in the Sierra Maestra. After a letter by Raúl Castro referring to Marxism was intercepted by the police and published to harm the prestige of M-26, Fidel Castro was furious, yelling «I will shoot him! I don't care if he is my brother! I will shoot him!». E. Meneses, *Fidel Castro: Patria o muerte*, Coruña, Ediciones del Viento, 2016, p. 75.

⁵⁷ The Cuban historian based on the island, Mario Mencía, is particularly harsh when referring to the *foco* theory. In an unusual statement, he remarks: «They [Latin American guerrilla] generally did not reproduce the Cuban model, but a fake model, an uncompleted and distorted picture of the Cuban insurrectional process, which became the basis for over-generalized theorization, such as *foquismo*». M. Mencía, *El Moncada*, cit., p. 6.

⁵⁸ *Kosygin's Report on Trip to Cuba to Meeting of Communist Party First Secretaries*, Budapest, Hungary, 12 July 1967, «Cold War International History Project Bulletin 2012», 17/18, pp. 795-798.

The Cubans were once again referencing the past to justify their actions, in the light of which a «true revolutionary» should have been defined more according to their determined commitment to fight, and less to any ideological propensities. Castro made this quite clear when he distinguished between «true revolutionaries» and those who – as supporters of the electoral path who tend to disapprove armed insurgency – deserved the label of «pseudo-revolutionaries» or «accomplices of imperialism»⁵⁹. In a gesture of outright defiance, the Olas conference, held in Havana few days after Kossygin's departure, consecrated armed struggle as the «fundamental route» for revolution⁶⁰. Asked in 1967 whether the *foco* strategy should be adopted in countries with noticeably different historical and geographic conditions, such as Chile, Fidel Castro retorted, «Look, if I were in Chile I would rise up in arms», before remarking that «the *foco* thesis is valid in every country, even in West Germany»⁶¹. It is essential to indicate that these startling statements were not exclusively voiced by Cuban leadership. They expressed a deeply held conviction shared by a large percentage of the first post-revolutionary generation.

The magazine «El Caimán Barbudo» adequately conveyed predominant sensitivities among the revolutionary youth targeted by the post-Batista education, serving as a revealing source reflecting dominant features of the new Cuban collective political culture. The team behind the publication of «El Caimán Barbudo» embodied the first intellectual nucleus from which the post-revolutionary generation could express its views. Due to their tender age, the contributors were unable to directly commit themselves to the anti-Batista insurrection but, for that same reason, they were also more inclined to assimilate the principles of the revolutionary agenda fostered by the Castro government. Boosted and empowered by the effervescence of the initial stage of the revolution, this community merged activism with intellectual work and constituted the closest manifestation of what Ernesto Guevara coined as *Hombre Nuevo*⁶². Indeed, the «Caimán Barbudo» generation shared Che's notion of *foquismo*, echoing his radical view of Latin American politics as well as his critical stance with regard to the USSR.

⁵⁹ K. Devlin, *El reto castrista al comunismo*, in G. Oswald, A. Strover (eds.), *La Unión Soviética y la América Latina*, Mexico, Letras, 1972, p. 218.

⁶⁰ F. Castro, *Speech to the Olas conference*, retrieved from www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1967/08/10.htm (consulted on 27 June 2019).

⁶¹ *La guerrilla, toda América Latina, es una sola*, «Marcha», 18 August 1967, p. 25.

⁶² This notion was introduced by Ernesto Guevara in a 1965 article, in which he envisioned the emergence of a new revolutionary generation «educated for communism». But, for Guevara, the creation of the «New Man» in Cuba faced great obstacles and a complex evolution that involved «years of hard struggle against the difficulties of construction, class enemies, the maladies of the past, and imperialism». By stating the latter, Guevara justified the need to disseminate a revolutionary culture, whose responsibility would be in the hands of the revolutionary «vanguard», namely Cuban officials. E. Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, in E. Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba*, New York, Pathfinder, 1992, pp. 51-71.

The «guerrilla ethos» pervaded the magazine's publications, as in a 1966 essay by Eugenio Yáñez who issued an ardent call to the youth: «You could leave the rifle behind – and transform it into a tool – only when the communist society will not be endangered anymore and anywhere in the world»⁶⁵. A «four hands» article written by the 20 year old philosopher Óscar Zanetti and his colleague, the 21 year old Alfredo Fernández, interpreted and radicalized Che's *foco* theory. The young members of the Philosophy Department at Havana University delivered a plea for radical guerrilla warfare, the only effective means that would guarantee «the final disappearance of reactionary violence» by a definitive «seizure of power». Throughout the piece, «guerrilla war» appears as the unique course leading to revolution, while the Latin American communist parties are disdained for their lack of «military organization». The emergence of a guerrilla «proves to be a much more efficient catalyst than the electoral program of a given left-wing party», and even the «death of a guerrilla commander is susceptible to trigger people's spontaneous actions». Appropriating Guevara's concept of *Hombre Nuevo*, the two authors dismissed any peaceful strategy as ineffective. Contrary to the electoral attempts made by the communist parties, only the «guerrilla forges new human virtues»⁶⁴.

Examples of articles conveying such messages, regularly accompanied by warlike illustrations exalting the use of weapons, were numerous in the 1959-1968 period. They proved that the armed route that most revolutionaries adopted during the anti-Batista fight has transcended the Cuban insurreccional time frame (1952-1959) and was elevated to a large-scale revolutionary doctrine spurred by ruling authorities and young activists alike. However, the «Cuban 1968» entailed a partial revision of the previous insistence on violence. The advent of new revolutionary projects emerging from a distinct path than the scheme provided by the Cuban insurrection should be considered as key elements in understanding Cuba's progressive alleviation of its «guerrilla» political culture.

Velasco Alvarado's Revolution and the Partial Reassessment of *Foquismo*

The year 1968 constituted a watershed moment for the Cuban Revolution. An amalgamation of different factors prompted Havana to redefine its Latin America policy, partially dropping the *foco* strategy and underscoring a new discourse, henceforth based on a wider acceptance of other political experiences, even if the latter do not squarely suit Cuba's earlier «guerrilla ethos». It would not be accurate to reduce this general evolution to one single factor. Instead, the confluence of relevant local

⁶⁵ E. Yáñez, *El trabajo y la liberación del hombre*, «El Caimán Barbudo», 1966, 2, p. 21.

⁶⁴ A. Fernández, Ó. Zanetti, *Latinoamérica: política y guerrillas*, «El Caimán Barbudo», 1966, 66, pp. 3-4.

and global transformations helps explain why Havana, sometimes reluctantly, departed from its initial attachment to revolutionary violence and started accepting new paths for social justice and political transformation. Striking setbacks inflicted upon Latin American guerrillas, including Che's failure in Bolivia in 1967, have often been highlighted, as much as Soviet pressures designed to force the island to abandon its support for armed revolution. This article will stress here a forgotten, albeit pivotal, component that provided a strong empirical justification for Cuba's reassessment of its previous warlike doctrine: The ideological impact wielded by General Juan Velasco Alvarado's «revolutionary» government.

The «progressive» military seized power in October 1968 and soon engaged in a radical project including nationalizations, extensive agrarian reform and – probably the most appealing aspect in the Cubans' eyes – an increasingly aggressive anti-imperialist discourse⁶⁵. Although deprived of Marxist pedigree, the Velasco Alvarado administration was positively perceived by numerous Latin American leftists who saw in its program an unusual, albeit encouraging, prospect for social transformation. Permanently strained by conflicting sensitivities within the revolutionary administration and facing growing economic difficulties, the regime was ultimately overthrown in a 1975 coup led by disaffected military commanders.

Cuban observers were initially baffled by Velasco Alvarado's peculiar path to what he called a «nationalistic, independent, and humanist» revolution⁶⁶. Doubts were understandable. Velasco's political project was launched without a previous phase of massive popular mobilization, as in pre-1959 Cuba. But the ruling officials seemed determined to carry out a leftist political agenda and acted accordingly. Less than a year after the Peruvian military took office, the Cuban leaders assigned a «revolutionary character» to the Velasco Alvarado experience, which became the first Latin American administration to receive such a label since 1959⁶⁷. Cuban-Peruvian relations soon flourished. The most prominent authorities of the military regime landed in Cuba, and Lima briefly hosted Fidel Castro in 1971. In 1973, Velasco Alvarado's wife, Consuelo González, accepted an invitation to tour the island, while President Osvaldo Dorticós announced an upcoming visit to Peru⁶⁸. Several sources allow for a reconstruction of Cuba's enthusiasm with regard to this unprecedented and unexpected revolutionary path. This article uses for the first time the Cuban-Peruvian

⁶⁵ A. Lowenthal, *Peru's Ambiguous Revolution*, in A. Lowenthal (ed.), *The Peruvian Experiment. Continuity and Change under Military Rule*, Princeton, Nj, Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 5-45.

⁶⁶ G. Dorais, *Les ennemis de mes ennemis sont mes ennemis: Regards sur l'émergence de la gauche radicale péruvienne dans la foulée des réformes velasquistes (1969-1980)*, «Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies», 36, 71, 2011, p. 198.

⁶⁷ F. Castro, *Discurso de Fidel en el C. Guiteras*, «Política Internacional», Havana, 14 July 1969, pp. 250-252.

⁶⁸ «Relaciones bilaterales – Año 1973», 3 February 1974, Archivos del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba, Havana (Aminrex), fondo Perú, cajuela 1974.

diplomatic files stored in the archives of the Cuban Ministry of International Relations (Minrex), which confirm Havana's positive attitude toward Velasco Alvarado.

In order to fully comprehend the scope and significance of the burgeoning Cuba-Peru partnership, it is necessary to review – as it has been done in this article – the events of prior years, when popular revolutionary violence had been elevated as an indispensable, fundamental ingredient leading to revolution. Velasco Alvarado's coup and the unfolding of his «anti-imperialistic», «humanist», and «Third-Worldist» (*tercermundismo*) revolution became a powerful breach with the prevalent «guerrilla mentality», which, after resounding defeats all over Latin America, needed urgent reconsideration⁶⁹. It is crucial to measure the scope of this bilateral rapprochement, since it configured and reflected a new ideological pattern in Cuba's changing revolutionary narrative, which, henceforward, departed from the conviction forged in the Fifties that only armed struggle guarantees genuine revolutionary outcomes. It would eventually lead to a new perspective concerning what should be conceived of as appropriate political strategies, thereby providing a favorable basis for the further acceptance of new ideological trends (such as Salvador Allende's «non-violent path to socialism», Soviet-Cuba normalization, and the accelerated reestablishment of hemispheric diplomatic relations throughout the Seventies).

Diplomatic relations with Lima were established in 1972, but connections with Peruvian officials preceded the official exchange of ambassadors. The Cuban press repeatedly emphasized Velasco's sincere efforts to transform his country, a tone that was reinforced after Fidel Castro's 1969 statements highlighting the «revolutionary» nature of the military government. As Juan Carretero – a Cuban intelligence official in charge of building bridges with Latin American administrations and political parties – acknowledged, «we had very direct contact with Velasco long before the [establishment of] relations»⁷⁰. When, in a 1970 meeting with Castro, a Chilean journalist dared to cast doubt on the Peruvian military's revolutionary spirit, the *Comandante* reacted steadfastly, responding «it is undeniable that there is [in Peru] a group of people with very honest and very radical positions»⁷¹. Salvador Allende's first diplomatic representative in Havana, Jorge Edwards, witnessed the Cubans' early eagerness with regard to Velasco's revolution. Fidel Castro qualified the latter as a «man of the left, driven by honorable and patriotic purposes»⁷². This enthused tone regarding

⁶⁹ So was Velasco Alvarado's revolution described by the Peruvian ambassador to Cuba, Joaquín Heredia Cabieses. «Síntesis de la intervención del Embajador peruano en Cuba, Dr. Joaquín Heredia Cabieses», fondo Perú, cajuela 1974, Aminrex.

⁷⁰ Interview with Juan Carretero, Havana, 24 February 2019.

⁷¹ «Entrevista de nuestro Primer Ministro Comandante Fidel Castro con representantes de la prensa y la televisión de Chile», fondo Chile, cajuela 1974, Aminrex.

⁷² Jorge Edwards to Dirección de Relaciones Internacionales, Departamento América, 10 December 1970, Archivo Histórico del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, fondo países: Cuba 11 (1970).

a military official who constantly denied being Marxist would have been unconceivable a few years earlier, when the Cubans were utterly committed to rural armed insurgency and tended to scorn any revolutionary road diverting from the path of the *Sierra Maestra*. But, as noted, the late Sixties marked the outset of a consistently different era for the Latin American left. The death of Guevara in 1967, epitomizing the final blow against the *foquismo* thesis, as well as mounting Soviet pressure, pushed many radical leftists to embrace a flexible view on the appropriate methods to secure social transformation. The emergence of Peru's ambiguous but determined socio-political project nourished hopes for the emergence of non-insurreccional routes to revolution and offered a compelling justification to legitimize the shift in Cuba's former unbending position.

A report commissioned by the Minrex illustrated both the hopes and apprehensions nurtured by the Cubans, with the first largely overshadowing the latter. The document demonstrates that some unofficial ties had been established in foreign diplomatic offices (United Nations, Switzerland, Mexico, Japan, Czechoslovakia), where the Peruvians «have expressed the government's favorable interest toward Cuba». It listed a number of favorable elements leading to a «growing consensus to accept the Cuban position within the continent». The signatory also noted conspicuous disparities between Peru and Cuba, which might conspire against Lima's «determination». Among them, the «influence of the Catholic Church» and, most importantly, the «philosophical lack of definition» of the «Armed Forces' revolution, which placed itself beyond capitalism or communism, but holds a humanist, socialist, and Christian conception». Peru's «reiterated statements stressing that they are not imitators of external solutions», alluding on numerous occasions to the Cuban Revolution, did not impede the observer to confirm the «revolutionary» character of Velasco's political agenda⁷⁵.

This view resonates with a subsequent and more detailed report, which – in spite of noting the «ambiguities, limitations and contradictions resulting basically from the fact that a real transfer of power to the Peruvian people has not been done yet» – concluded that «there is little doubt» that the progresses achieved up to 1971 constituted an «irreversible» revolution. The 15-page document acknowledged that hostility toward communism remained in Velasco's administration and identified episodes in which Peruvian officials had openly criticized Cuba. The efforts of the leftist opposition pushing for a more radical turn is also discussed in the report. However, these limitations – which would have been a motive for outright rejection in the past – were not enough to overshadow Velasco's «undeniable revolutionary character». In this renewed international scenario, Peru's heterodox experience deserved the label «revolution». Its «substantial socio-economic transformations» and the chal-

⁷⁵ «Perú: Evaluación de las relaciones bilaterales», fondo Perú, cajuela 1971, Aminrex.

lenge it posed to the «representative democracy» sponsored by the Us's Alliance for Progress and other «lackeys of American imperialism» were perceived as a sufficient basis to earn Havana's full support⁷⁴. A diplomatic document signed in January 1972 elaborated the Peruvian process and cheerfully qualified the revolution as «nationalist, anti-oligarchic and fundamentally anti-imperialist». It also observed growing tensions within a government that «lacks ideological homogeneity». But after presenting a «positive and optimistic general assessment», it delivered an impassioned call for Cuba's backing: «We should now contribute by all means to deepen the process and try that the changes already achieved would become [...] irreversible»⁷⁵.

Surprisingly, instead of pressuring the regime to adopt a more radical orientation, the Cubans suggested moderation to avoid «imperialism's» reaction and made concrete efforts to temper the far-left opposition⁷⁶. Demands for further radicalization were frequent among Peruvian students, where ultra-leftist ideas were particularly prevalent. As stated by Geneviève Dorais, «university circles became the ideal medium of dissemination and the principal space of recruitment for Maoist groups»⁷⁷. Cuban analysts were keen to follow the diverging trends within the Peruvian left. For instance, a delegation from the University of Havana landed in Peru in 1974 and toured different university campuses, portraying an «atomized» student movement with «enormous difficulties to join the Peruvian process». In the city of Huancayo the «pseudo-left» welcomed the Cuban representatives but chanted, «down with Soviet imperialism», an expression that might have alarmed visitors at a time of full-fledged alliance with Moscow. In Cuzco, the delegates avoided any participation in mass demonstrations, remembering that nine months earlier hostile students blocked the entrance of Cuban diplomats to the university⁷⁸.

The first Cuban ambassador in Lima, Antonio Núñez Jiménez, was aware of the tense situation within the left and wanted to make a contribution to assuage critical voices⁷⁹. While visiting the San Luis Gonzaga National University in Ica, he gave a revealing speech in which he outlined parallels between the Peruvian and Cuban

⁷⁴ «Informe sobre el Perú de hoy», 15 March 1971, fondo Perú, cajuela 1971, Aminrex.

⁷⁵ «Informe sobre el Perú de hoy», 28 January 1972, fondo Perú, cajuela 1972, Aminrex.

⁷⁶ A 1972 report states that «it is the duty of every revolutionary to avoid fueling the fire», *ibidem*. In a 1970 meeting, Fidel Castro confirmed his prudent pace: «If the relations between Peru and Cuba could somehow damage Peru, we should not have as an objective the search of relations with Peru». Castro also stated: «We should be more careful than anybody when we talk [about Peru], because any statement we make is grasp by the reactionary press over there [in Peru]». «Entrevista de nuestro Primer Ministro Comandante Fidel Castro con representantes de la prensa y la televisión de Chile», fondo Chile, cajuela 1974, Aminrex.

⁷⁷ G. Dorais, *Les ennemis de mes ennemis sont mes ennemis*, cit., p. 202.

⁷⁸ «Informe del viaje realizado al Perú integrando la delegación de la Universidad de La Habana», 9 November 1974, fondo Perú, cajuela 1974, Aminrex.

⁷⁹ After months of negotiations and secret talks, Cuban and Peruvian officials established diplomatic relations in July 1972. Antonio Núñez Jiménez, a prominent leader and close collaborator of Fidel Castro, was appointed ambassador in a clear gesture of political goodwill.

revolutions. Undoubtedly, Núñez Jiménez's goal was to calm the students by showing that a non-Marxist experience could turn – as the Cuban Revolution so famously demonstrated – into a radicalized project, and that an explicit communist orientation should not always be expected from the outset of the revolution. He said, «We started making it [the revolution] submerged in the greatest political ignorance. Because it is not written in books how to make a revolution. It has to be learnt in the midst of the revolutionary life». Highlighting the local roots of the Peruvian revolution instead of his ideological beliefs allowed the Cuban to declare an additional similarity to Velasco's nationalistic government, whose narrative consecrated «the immortal figure of Tupac Amaru»⁸⁰. Addressing the students' criticism – and more generally the radical opposition to Velasco Alvarado – Núñez Jiménez pointed to the «pseudo-left» that tends to «situate itself in the conformable position of the critic». His aim was to moderate «certain groups, certain individuals, even honest ones, who lose the revolutionary compass and become critics of the revolution instead of revolutionaries». Many young spectators, reluctant to accept the idea of a non-communist revolutionary process conducted by a military junta instead of a vanguard party, must have been startled when the ambassador suggested an association between the lack of historical consciousness and potential disaffection with the Velasco revolution:

If the people would have benefited from a profound historical culture [...] it would support the revolutionary measures, as well as the revolutionary process, without distinguishing flags or party positions, without worrying about who makes the revolution: whether it is a party or the Army. What really matters is to make the revolution⁸¹.

While alluding to the necessary «knowledge of the life and history of the heroes», Núñez Jiménez was not only obliquely insinuating the students' lack of political education, but attempting to present himself as a wise and experienced observer legitimized by his active role in a victorious revolution. The final call for a revolution, no matter who conducts it or whether it is sustained by popular insurrection, eloquently reflects the extent of Havana's readjustment of its former guerrilla approach.

This speech is a highly revealing commentary that indicates both the scope of Cuban moderation and the significance of the insurreccional past to draw useful historical lessons for the present. The Cubans' permanent connection with their own revolutionary story, conceived as a beacon guiding revolutionary actions beyond the island's borders, is still apparent in Núñez Jiménez's words. However, his willing-

⁸⁰ On the highly symbolic position granted by the government to Tupac Amaru, the pinnacle of Velasco's nationalistic pantheon, see J. Puente, *Second Independence, National History and Myth-Making Heroes in the Peruvian Nationalizing State: The Government of Juan Velasco Alvarado, 1968-1975*, «Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research», 2016, 3, pp. 231-249.

⁸¹ «Palabras de Antonio Núñez Jiménez, Embajador de Cuba en el Perú, en la Universidad Nacional San Luis Gonzaga, de Ica», 14 June 1973, fondo Perú, cajuela 1973, Aminrex.

ness to back a revolutionary path led by the established armed forces, without the guidance of a guerrilla vanguard (Che's *foco* or Castro's Rebel Army) – which would have been understood as a theoretical impossibility in previous years – confirmed Cuba's major ideological revision in a context of decisive hemispheric and international transformations. Velasco Alvarado's revolution both encouraged and provided a window into Havana's renewed and mollified ethos, representing a significant breach with the radical revolutionary education of past decades.

This unexpected rapprochement with Velasco Alvarado's administration represents just one of the multiple signals indicating that by 1968 Havana was willing to break away from its previous stand. Other evolutions could have been mentioned: the rapid normalization with the Ussr, the growing cordial relationships established with the Chilean Christian Democrats from 1968 onward⁸², Castro's enthusiasm with regard to the nationalistic agenda of General Omar Torrijos in Panama⁸⁵, or the determined support for the «Chilean peaceful road to socialism» headed by Salvador Allende (1970-1973). All these developments signaled a new era in Cuba's foreign policy, henceforth less reliable on a previously unwavering guerrilla mind-set that stemmed from the era of anti-Batista struggles and was shaped by the enduring conviction that only armed struggle could lead to revolution.

This article has explored from a different angle the emergence, consolidation, and further reconsideration of the Cuban Revolution's early «guerrilla ethos». It has drawn a line between the insurrectional anti-Batista experience from the Fifties – which mobilized a growing group of moderate and radical revolutionaries around the idea of armed struggle –, the establishment of the *foquismo* doctrine formalized in the early Sixties, and the context that pushed the Castro government to reassess its faith in the guerrilla road toward revolution. Instead of stressing solely the M-26's commitment to armed revolution, it has been shown that the Castro movement was far from being the only group that defied Batista with insurgency. The embrace of armed struggle as the only means to dethrone the dictator preceded the Moncada attack and gained rapid traction among moderate and maximalist opponents.

It is this common belief in the inevitability of violence, more than a collective communist-oriented vision of the future (which remained a contentious issue in the early Sixties), that truly united the first generation of revolutionary leaders, setting the scene for the establishment of a state-supported theory based on revolutionary violence. When it comes to Havana's tempering approach implemented in the late Six-

⁸² R. Pedemonte, *Desafiando la bipolaridad: la independencia diplomática del gobierno demócratacristiano en Chile y su acercamiento con el «mundo socialista» (1964-1970)*, «Estudios Ibero-Americanos», 2018, 1, pp. 193-199.

⁸⁵ Omar Torrijos's efforts to take over the Panama Canal, owned by the United States for more than 50 years, engendered a positive impression in Cuba. Leading a coup d'état in 1968, General Torrijos preached strong nationalistic views, which matched Fidel Castro's anti-U.S. leanings.

ties, most scholars have been inclined to underscore international constraints, such as Soviet pressures and setbacks for Latin American guerrillas. This article instead suggests that a more «affirmative» factor played into this history: the appeal of the Velasco Alvarado military government, which urged the Cuban leadership to revisit their previous reliance on guerrilla struggle and start accepting non-insurrectional paths to revolution. This ultimately shows that the progression of this «revolutionary mentality» can best be approached in a holistic manner, incorporating multiple components that, taken together, provide a more nuanced and complex view on the rise and reassessment of Cuba's «guerrilla ethos».

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